

An analytical study on domestic violence among married couples

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Abstract: In this manuscript the authors have performed an analytical study on domestic violence among married couples. Domestic violence is a form of violence expressed by one partner or partners against another partner or partners in the content of an intimate relationship. Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime with the abuser usually someone known to her. The main objective of the study was to identify and examine the prevalence, trends and extent of domestic violence; its causes and consequences, with a view to determining appropriate interventions to address the vice.

Keywords: domestic violence, women, sexual harassment, married couples.

Introduction

The term 'domestic violence' includes felony or misdemeanor crimes of violence committed by a current or former spouse of the victim, by a person with whom the victim shares a child in common, by a person who is cohabitating with or has cohabitated with the victim as a spouse, by a person similarly situated to a spouse of the victim under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction receiving grant monies, or by any other person against an adult or youth victim who is protected from that person's acts under the domestic or family violence laws of the jurisdiction.

Domestic violence may include verbal, emotional, economic, physical and sexual abuse. All forms of domestic abuse have one purpose: to gain and maintain control over the victim. Abusers use many tactics to exert power over their spouse or partner: dominance, humiliation, isolation, threats, intimidation, denial and blame.

The dynamics between the couple may include:

Situational couple violence, which arises out of conflicts that escalate to arguments and then to violence, is not connected to a general pattern of control, generally infrequent, and likely the most common type of intimate partner violence. Women are as likely as men to be abusers, however, women are more likely to be physically injured, require police intervention and become fearful of their mates.

Intimate terrorism (IT), involves a pattern of ongoing control using emotional, physical and other forms of domestic violence and is what generally leads victims, who are usually women, to women's shelters. It is what was traditionally the definition of domestic violence and is generally illustrated with the "Power and Control Wheel" to illustrate the different and inter-related forms of abuse.

Violent resistance (VR), or "self-defense", is violence perpetrated by victims against their abusive partners. It is generally used infrequently because men are usually able to physically overpower women. Michael Johnson finds that "Most women who resist violently soon turn to other means of coping with their abuse."

Common couple violence, where both partners are engaged in domestic violence actions.

Mutual violent control (MVC) is a rare type of intimate partner violence that occurs when both partners act in a violent manner, battling for control.

Various Forms of Domestic Violence

Gender-based domestic violence (GBDV)

The term gender means the state of being either male or female. Gender defines and characterizes all human beings in society and is distinguished by physical/biological and sexual/ reproductive differences. The term 'gender' has however, increasingly acquired a social meaning where it defines how males and the females relate in society. The social meaning of "gender" refers to prescribed social norms and roles based on a person's sex. These norms include gender-based division of labour whereby duties are allocated on the basis of sex. For example, females are allocated domestic duties belonging to the private sector, such as cooking and washing, whereas males are prescribed duties belonging to the public sector such as decision-making and bread winning.

Thus, when one adverts to the issue of gender today, one is not merely talking about the physical difference that being biologically male/female would entail. One is also talking about social constructions of maleness and femaleness, and this often translates into power relations between men and women. Sex then is distinguished from gender by what one is born as, that is female or male, and therefore it is a biological concept. However, culturally determined patterns of behaviour such as rights, duties, obligations and status assigned to women and men in society (gender roles) are varied even within the same society.

Gender based violence (GBV) is thus violence that is directed at an individual based on her or his specific gender role in a society. While it can affect both females and males, gender-based violence affects women and girls disproportionately. It is violence that establishes or reinforces gender hierarchies and perpetuates gender inequalities. Gender-based violence attacks the fundamental human rights of adults and children alike.

Intimate partner violence (IPV)

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is violence perpetuated by current or former spouses or romantic partners.

Violence against women

The Declaration on the Elimination on Violence Against Women (DEVAW) defines violence against women as: "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether ... in public or private life"

Feminism

A way of perceiving or interpreting a social situation from perspective of women and other marginalised groups in society. It further involves taking concrete action to remedy social inequalities.

Prevalence of Violence

There is wide variation across countries in the prevalence of physical or sexual violence experienced by women and perpetrated by their current husband/partner - from 75 percent in Bangladesh to 16 percent in the Dominican Republic. The highest reported rates of physical violence were in Bangladesh (71 percent), Bolivia (52 percent), and Zambia (45 percent). The lowest reported rates were in Haiti (12 percent) and the Dominican Republic (15 percent). The highest rates of sexual violence were reported in Bangladesh (26 percent), Kenya (15 percent), and Bolivia (14 percent), whereas the lowest rates were reported in Moldova (3 percent), the Dominican Republic (5 percent), and Zambia (6 percent). Bangladesh, where men rather than women, were asked about (perpetrating) IPV stands out as having the highest rates of both physical and sexual violence.

As was expected, violence in the 12 months preceding the survey was noticeably lower than violence ever experienced in the current relationship. In Bangladesh, one-third of women experienced physical or sexual violence in the past 12 months, followed closely by Kenya (31 percent), Zimbabwe (30 percent), and Zambia (28 percent). Whereas lifetime experience of physical or sexual violence in the current relationship was substantially higher in Bangladesh than in any other country (75 percent), violence in the 12 months prior to the survey in Bangladesh, while remaining among the highest, is closer to levels in some other countries. Also of note is that women in Haiti were equally likely to report sexual violence and physical violence (both 11 percent) in the past year, and these rates do not substantially differ from lifetime reports of violence in the current relationship.

Factors Associated with Married/Cohabiting Women's Experience of Physical or Sexual Violence

Of the woman's characteristics, current age is associated with ever experiencing violence in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Haiti, Malawi, Moldova, and Rwanda. However, it is only in Rwanda that the effect of age remains significant once the characteristics of the husband/partner, the couple, and the community are introduced. Women's education is a protective factor in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Kenya, and Zimbabwe; and this effect is evident for Bolivia and Zimbabwe in other models tested. Notably, however, controlling for husbands'/partners' characteristics women's education increases the risk of IPV in Haiti.

Not working (compared with working in a nonagricultural job) is protective for women in Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, and Zimbabwe. Working in agriculture is protective for Bangladeshi women, but a risk factor for women in Malawi. Younger age at marriage is a significant risk factor in Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe, even after all other controls are introduced; and in Rwanda and Zimbabwe living in a cohabiting union, rather than marriage, is a risk factor for violence. In 5 of the 10 countries studied (Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), women who believe that wife beating is justified in at least one of five circumstances were more likely to report experiencing physical or sexual violence. Women's recall of violence between their parents was a significant predictor in all six countries where this variable was measured. That is, women who reported that their fathers beat their mothers were significantly more likely themselves to have experienced violence by their husbands/partners than women who did not recall such violence. The adjusted odds ratios range from 1.48 in Zimbabwe to 2.95 in the Dominican Republic.

Husband/partner characteristics were not consistently associated with women's experience of violence. Still, men in Bangladesh and Malawi who worked in agriculture were less likely to be violent than men who were unemployed. In contrast, in Kenya and Zimbabwe, husbands'/partners' working in agriculture was related to a higher risk of violence. Men who agreed that wife beating is justified in one or more circumstances in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe were more likely to be violent. In Rwanda, however, women's likelihood of experiencing violence is no longer significantly affected by men's attitudes towards wife beating once men's consumption of alcohol is introduced into the model.

Men's alcohol use was statistically significant for all eight countries in which this variable was measured. The odds of physical or sexual violence for women reporting alcohol use by their husbands/partners ranges from 1.64 in Bolivia and 1.67 in Zambia to 3.63 in both Kenya and Haiti. Few of the couple differences were statistically significant in multivariate models. After controlling for women's age, however, women in Zambia were less likely to report violence if their husbands/partners were older than they. This was also true in Moldova, but only marginally, in most models. In Haiti, women with less education than their husbands/partners were at increased risk for violence, while, in the Dominican Republic, Malawi, and Rwanda, women with less education than their husbands/partners were at decreased risk.

Women who make decisions about their own health care jointly with their husband/partner or someone else were significantly less likely to report experiencing violence in Bolivia, Haiti, and Malawi, compared with women who make these decisions on their own. In these three countries, women reporting that their husbands/partners alone or someone else alone has the final say about women's own health care also were less likely to report violence than women who reported that they themselves make such decisions alone. The patterns are similar for decisionmaking about large household purchases. In Bolivia, Haiti, and Kenya, women were less likely to report experiencing violence when decisions are made jointly with their husbands/partners. In addition, in Bolivia, Haiti, and Kenya, women were less likely to report violence when the husband/partner or someone else decided alone about large purchases.

Community factors were associated with violence in only a few of the countries. In Bangladesh, women who lived in communities where men had more education were less likely to experience violence. In Bolivia and Kenya, women in communities where women have more education were more likely to experience violence. In Bangladesh and Malawi, women who lived in communities where most men agreed with one or more rationales for wife beating were more likely to experience violence. Women's attitudes towards wife beating in the community did not have a significant association with women's risk of experiencing IPV.

Patterns of physical violence among Married Couples

In 42 percent of young adult couples in our study sample, one or both partners reported either perpetrating or experiencing some type of relationship violence – such as threatening, hitting, or inflicting injury – in the previous year. This finding is higher than other national estimates, 9, 15 which is likely attributable in part to the fact that reports from both partners were

used, including reports of both experiencing and perpetrating violence, and that our sample included longer-term and on-going relationships.

Most of the couples who reported more severe types of physical violence (such as violence that resulted in injury) reported less severe types of violence as well. For example, nearly all (87 percent) reported pushing, shoving, throwing something that could inflict harm, or threatening to carry out a violent act (analyses not shown).

Regardless of violence type, two-thirds of couples who reported relationship violence noted multiple occurrences of violence in the previous year; only one-third reported a single act of violence (analyses not shown).

Among couples in which one or both partners reported that the man experienced violence, only one-third (13 percent of the 39 percent) of reports came from both partners. Similarly, among couples in which one or both partners reported that the woman experienced violence, just under one-third (eight percent of the 27 percent) of reports came from both partners. In general, women were more likely to report that they had been violent toward their male partner (17 and 13 percent, for a total of 30 percent), than they were to report that their partner had been violent toward them (11 and eight percent, for a total of 19 percent).

What are the best approaches to prevent Domestic Violence?

In recent years, a number of international reviews have synthesized evidence on effective, or at least promising, approaches to preventing and responding to violence against women, including IPV (9,26–28). These reviews suggest a need for comprehensive, multi-sectoral, long-term collaboration between governments and civil society at all levels of the ecological framework.

Unfortunately, while individual-level interventions are relatively easy to assess, evaluation of comprehensive, multi-level, multi-component programmes and institution-wide reforms is more challenging, and therefore, while these approaches are almost certainly the key to long-term prevention, they are also the most under-researched (27). However, these reviews have identified a set of specific strategies that have demonstrated promise or effectiveness, including:

- reform civil and criminal legal frameworks;
- organize media and advocacy campaigns to raise awareness about existing legislation;
- strengthen women's civil rights related to divorce, property, child support and custody;
- build coalitions of government and civil society institutions;
- build the evidence base for advocacy and awareness;
- use behaviour change communication to achieve social change;
- transform whole institutions in every sector, using a gender perspective; in particular, integrate attention to violence against women into sexual and reproductive health services;
- promote social and economic empowerment of women and girls;
- build comprehensive service responses to IPV survivors in communities;
- design life-skills and school-based programmes;
- engage men and boys to promote nonviolence and gender equality; and
- provide early-intervention services to at-risk families.

Conclusions

Although nationally-representative data indicate that, as a whole, relationship violence has been declining since the early 1990s, the same data indicate that young adults are at the greatest risk for getting caught up in this destructive vortex.

The findings in this brief reveal that physical relationship violence is reported in a substantial percentage of married couples. Though not included in these analyses, many married couples may also experience psychological or sexual violence. Our findings also point to the need to identify better survey methods to assess relationship violence prevalence

and to focus future research and prevention on high-risk couples, such as cohabiting couples and couples with children. Although chronic underreporting especially among men – may limit our ability to identify couples who experience relationship violence, the findings presented in this Research Brief highlight the need for ongoing awareness and prevention strategies to address the problem.

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