

Measuring domestic violence in human immunodeficiency virus-positive women

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Violence affects the lives of millions of women worldwide, in all socio-economic classes. Violence and the fear of violence are emerging as important risk factor contributing to the vulnerability to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection for women. The objective of the present cross sectional study is to compare the experiences of domestic violence between HIV-positive and HIV-negative married women seeking treatment in a tertiary care hospital.

METHOD

The study is conducted in a tertiary care hospital in Pune on a randomly selected 150 married women (75 HIV-positive and 75 HIV-negative). Informed consent was obtained from all the women and also a trained counsellor was present during the process of data collection. The data was collected by interview method by taking precautions as laid down in the World Health Organization's ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence and using modified conflict tactics scale (CTS). The definition of violence followed is as per the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993.

RESULTS

The percentage of women reporting domestic violence is 44.7% (95% confidence interval [CI]=36.84–52.68). The proportion of physical, emotional and sexual violence reported is 38% (95% CI=30.49–45.96), 24% (95% CI=17.67–31.31), and 14.7% (95% CI=9.66–21.02), respectively. The odds of reporting violence of all forms is significantly higher among HIV-positive women than among HIV-negative women ($P<0.05$). Univariate and multivariate logistic regression is carried out to examine the possible predictors of domestic violence.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest high proportion of HIV-positive women report violence then HIV-negative women which must be addressed through multi-level prevention approaches.

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Key Words: domestic violence; human immunodeficiency virus; violence against women

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence or violence against women is one of the most pervasive yet under-recognised human rights violations in the world. Domestic violence in addition to causing injury also increases women's long-term risk of a number of other health problems including chronic pain, physical disability, drug, and alcohol abuse.^{1,2} Women with a long history of physical and sexual abuse have an increasing risk of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and miscarriages.^{3–5} International events namely United Nations conferences on population and development, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women,⁶ Platform of Action for United Nations and Beijing World Conference on Women recognise violence against women as a violation of basic human rights. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also recognised violence against women as a public health issue.⁷ Internationally, one in three women have been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in their lifetime by a member of her own family⁸ and one in every four is abused during pregnancy.⁹ A review of over 50 population-based studies performed in 35 countries prior to 1999 indicated that between 10% and 52% of women around the world report that they have been physically abused by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

Violence and the fear of violence are emerging as important risk factor contributing to the vulnerability to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection for women.¹⁰ There is growing evidence linking the epidemics of HIV and violence against women.¹¹ There are different ways in which the epidemics of HIV and violence overlap in the context of women's lives. Violence may increase a woman's risk for HIV infection through forced or coercive sexual intercourse^{12–15} and by limiting her ability to negotiate HIV-preventive behaviours.^{16–19}

In light of the above stated facts, this study is intended to find out the difference in proportion of HIV-positive and HIV-negative married women reporting domestic violence. The study objectives are to determine the characteristics and pattern of domestic violence against women and to explore and identify the risk factors leading to domestic violence.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This is a cross-sectional study conducted in a tertiary care hospital. Assuming that the proportion of HIV-positive and HIV-negative women reporting domestic violence from National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS-3) data for India as 50% and

27%, respectively,^{10,20} confidence interval (CI) as 95% with error of margin of 5% on either side of the true difference, and a desired power of the study as 80%, the minimum sample size required is 69 women each in both the groups namely HIV-positive and HIV-negative. The study randomly selected 75 HIV-positive and 75 HIV-negative married women seeking treatment in a tertiary care hospital in Pune. Informed consent was obtained from all the women and also a trained counsellor was present during the process of data collection. The definition of violence followed is as per the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 which 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 occurring in public or private life’. It encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family.³ Required information on domestic violence is collected by taking precautions as laid down in the WHO’s ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence and using modified conflict tactics scale (CTS). As per CTS, the following set of questions were used to measure various forms of violence.

Physical violence: Does (did) your (last) husband ever do any of the following things to you:

- a. Slap you?
- b. Twist your arm or pull your hair?
- c. Push you, shake you, or throw something at you?
- d. Punch you with his fist or with something that could hurt you?
- e. Kick you, drag you or beat you up?
- f. Try to choke you or burn you on purpose?
- g. Threaten or attack you with a knife, gun, or any other weapon?

Sexual violence: Does (did) your (last) husband ever:

- h. Physically force you to have sexual intercourse with him even when you did not want to?
- i. Force you to perform any sexual acts you did not want to?

Emotional violence: Does (did) your (last) husband ever:

- j. Say or do something to humiliate you in front of others?
- k. Threaten to hurt or harm you or someone close to you?
- l. Insult you or make you feel bad about yourself?

If the woman responded ‘yes’ to one or many questions from (a) to (g) she is classified to be experiencing physical violence. Similarly if the woman responded ‘yes’ to any of the questions from (h) to (i) she is classified to be experiencing sexual violence and if the woman responded ‘yes’ to any of the questions from (j) to (l) she is believed to be experiencing emotional violence. For the analysis, domestic violence is categorised as dichotomous variable ‘yes’ and ‘no’. If the women has experienced any one of the different forms of violence, i.e. physical violence or sexual violence or emotional violence she is believed to be experiencing domestic violence.

Different risk and protective factors may operate in different settings. Hence, it is important to identify and then address those risk factors most strongly associated with domestic violence. These correlates considered in our study are the present age of the women, the place of residence, women’s as well as her partner’s educational status, Working status of women and her partner, number of children, alcohol consumption by husband/partner, partner’s age, and women’s HIV status. The various correlates considered in the paper are found to have bearing on domestic violence by various other authors.

RESULTS

The average age of the women respondents is 34.20 years with standard deviation (SD) of 8.9 years. The minimum age is 18 years and maximum age is 55 years. Human immunodeficiency virus-positive women had a mean age of 36.45 ± 9.59 years and HIV-negative women 31.59 ± 7.51 years.

Percentage of Women Reporting Violence

The overall proportion of women reporting domestic violence is 44.7% (95% CI=36.84–52.68). The proportion of women reporting physical, emotional, and sexual violence is 38% (95% CI=30.49–45.96), 24.0% (95% CI=17.67–31.31), and 14.7% (95% CI=9.66–21.02), respectively (Figure 1). Around 56% of HIV-positive women reported domestic violence as compared to 33.3% of HIV-negative women (odds ratio [OR]=2.55; 95% CI=1.25–5.22; $P=0.05$). Similar trend is observed for all the other forms of violence (Figure 2). The odds of reporting physical violence by HIV-positive women is 2.11 with 95% CI (1.02–4.37; $P=0.028$). Emotional violence is experienced significantly higher percentage 33.3% of HIV-positive women as compared to 14.7% by HIV-negative women (OR=2.91; 95% CI=1.23–7.01; $P=0.028$). Experience of sexual violence is significantly higher by HIV-positive women (24%) as compared

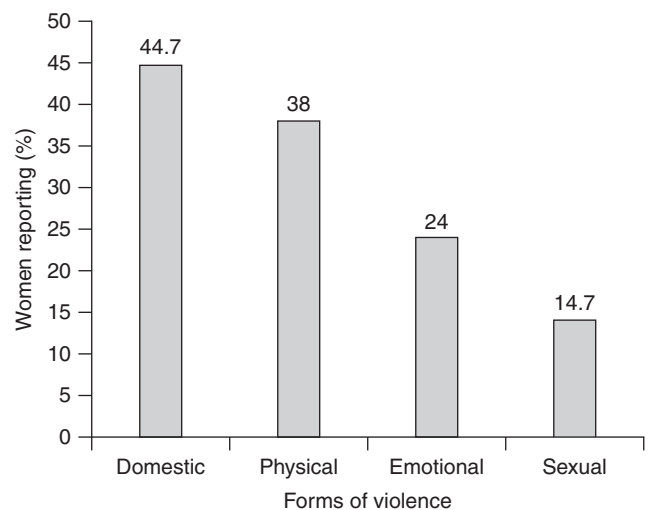


Figure 1 Percentage of women reporting various forms of violence.

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