

(844) A Cross-Sectional Study Of Domestic Violence Among 385 Pregnant Women In Lusaka

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PROBLEM

Domestic violence is a widespread but understudied in Zambia. Even more rare are studies on domestic violence during pregnancy. The prevalence of domestic violence inflicted on women in Zambia is 44%, while the percentage inflicted on pregnant women is unknown. Social factors, traditional customs and lack of education are some of the factors that conspire to keep women from reporting such cases to the authorities. Because of the consequences of domestic violence on the outcome of pregnancy, this study sought to profile domestic violence during pregnancy, find out the milieu in which it occurs and prescribe some solutions to this scourge.

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To show the face and outcome of domestic violence in pregnant women attending antenatal clinics in Lusaka.
- 2) To show the usefulness of this data in current practice and the latent, unexploited potential it holds.

METHOD

A cross-sectional descriptive study of 385 pregnant women attending antenatal clinics in Lusaka. Both structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed in the data collection. The women were purposively but randomly selected; every fifth woman was enlisted into the proforma. The study was conducted over a six-month period between June 2004 and December 2004. Data were analysed using standard EPI information systems.

RESULTS

A total of 385 randomly selected pregnant women were selected from all walks of life and backgrounds. Of these women, 169 (44,0%) had experienced violence at least once in their lifetime, while 92 (23,9%) had experienced domestic violence during the current pregnancy. The age commonly exposed to domestic violence in pregnancy were those between 21-25 years old (40,2%), 338 (87,8%) were married, 229 had a poor socio-economic status and only 10,2% (37) had received a secondary education. As for local social beliefs, 139 (36,4%) believed that it was right for a husband to beat the wife in pregnancy as a show of love and loyalty. During the current pregnancy, 33 (8,6%) women experienced domestic violence at least once, 25 (25%) two or three times, 12 (3,1%) four to five times while 22 (5,7%) had experienced domestic violence over five times. This violence in pregnancy took the form of beatings 68,6% (116), verbal abuse 32,7% (55) and non-consensual sex 10,7% (18). The main perpetrator of domestic violence in pregnancy was husbands or intimate partners in 169 (98,7%) of the reported cases and the perpetrator often abused alcohol or dagga, was less educated than his spouse and suffered from an inferiority complex. Abuses included sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, physical wounds, divorce, premature labour, miscarriages and litigations among others.

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence is common among pregnant women taking the form of beatings, verbal abuse and non-consensual sex. Some women contracted sexually transmitted infections or were divorced. This information should be distributed to policymakers, women's activist groups, law enforcement agencies and health practitioners. Already encouraging results are emerging where the Young Women Christian Association has been using such information to help abused women with shelter, legal aid and awareness raising. The Zambian Police Service has recently formed Victim Support Units where such cases can be reported. The courts of law have also been meting out stiffer and deterrent jail sentences and fines to male offenders