

The Relationship between Violence against Women in the Family and Common Mental Disorders in Urban Informal Settlements of Mumbai, India: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract : BACKGROUND: Intimate partner violence (IPV) can impact a woman's physical, reproductive and mental health, including common mental disorders such as anxiety and depression. However, people other than an intimate partner may also perpetrate violence against women in the family, particularly in India. This study aims to investigate the relationship between experiences of violence perpetrated by the husband and other members of the wider household and symptoms of common mental disorders in women residing in informal settlement (slum) areas of Mumbai. METHODS: Experiences of violence were assessed through a detailed cross-sectional survey of 598 women, including questions about specific acts of emotional, economic, physical and sexual violence across different time points in the woman's life and the main perpetrator of each act. Symptoms of common mental disorders were assessed using the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). The GHQ-12 scores were divided into four groups and the relationship between experiences of each type of violence in the last 12 months and GHQ-12 score group was analyzed using ordinal logistic regression, adjusted for the woman's age and clustering. RESULTS: 482 (81%) women consented to interview. On average, they were 28.5 years old, had completed 7 years of education and had been married 9 years. 88% were Muslim and 47% lived in joint and 53% in nuclear families. 44% of women had experienced at least one act of violence in their lifetime (33% emotional, 22% economic, 23% physical, 12% sexual). 7% had a high GHQ-12 score (6 or above). For violence experiences in the last 12 months, the odds of being in the highest GHQ-12 score group versus the lower groups combined were 13.1 for emotional violence, 6.5 for economic, 5.7 for physical and 6.3 for sexual ($p < 0.001$ for all outcomes). DISCUSSION: The high level of violence reported across the lifetime could be due to the detailed assessment of violent acts at multiple time points and the inclusion of perpetrators within the family other than the husband. Each type of violence was associated with greater odds of a higher GHQ-12 score and therefore more symptoms of common mental disorders. Emotional violence was far more strongly associated with symptoms of common mental disorders than physical or sexual violence. However, it is not possible to attribute causal directionality to the association. Further work to investigate the relationship between differing severity of violence experiences and women's mental health and the components of emotional violence that make it so strongly associated with symptoms of common mental disorders would be beneficial.

Keywords : common mental disorders, family violence, India, informal settlements, mental health, violence against women

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