Depressive Symptoms in a Group of Sri Lankan Women Exposed to Traumatic Intimate Partner Violence

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global public health concern affecting approximately one third of women globally. South Asia has the second highest prevalence (41.73%) for IPV. Evidence from Sri Lanka on IPV is fragmentary and inconclusive. It is estimated that 20-60% of Sri Lankan women experience IPV at least once in their lifetime. Previous studies suggest that exposure to IPV increases the risk for depression. The present study aimed to investigate the difference in experience of depressive symptoms exhibited by women subjected to three forms of IPV: physical violence, psychological aggression and multiple forms of IPV. The study further aimed to investigate the relationship between intensity of IPV as perceived by women and their depressive symptoms. A quasi experimental study was carried out for a duration of one month at Women in Need, a non-governmental organization committed to supporting women subjected to all forms of IPV. The study comprised of thirty (N=30) participants; fifteen (N=15) participants who had been subjected to IPV were all the women who reported to the study setting during a period of one month and who consented to take part in the study. The other fifteen (N=15) were women who had no or minimal exposure to IPV. The participants with no or minimal IPV exposure were recruited through social media such as Linkedin, Facebook, and Twitter, where they were matched with the group of participants with IPV exposure based on age, socioeconomic status and education. All participants completed a general information sheet, and the Centre for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D). Mann Whitney U test was carried out to compare the mean scores of depressive symptoms experienced by two groups of women. Women with the exposure to IPV exhibited a significantly higher level of depressive symptoms as opposed to the control group (U= 2.00, p<0.001). A bivariate logistic regression analysis was carried out to examine the effect of IPV on depressive symptoms. The logistic regression model was statistically significant X^2 (1) = 22.33 p< 0.001. The model accounts for 52.5% to 70% of the variance in predicting the presence of depressive symptoms. The model accurately predicts 90.0% of the cases with 93.3% of the cases predicting the presence of depressive symptoms accurately. Exposure to IPV is a significant predictor of the presence of depressive symptoms, where every unit of IPV reported, increases the likelihood of depressive symptoms being reported by 12.34. The relationship between perceived intensity of IPV and depressive symptoms was measured using Spearman Rank Order Correlation. There was a strong positive association between perceived intensity of IPV and depressive symptoms (r (30) =0.84, P<0.001). Exposure to IPV can lead to detrimental effects on women's mental health and increase the risk of developing depression. Depressive symptoms were more prevalent in women who perceived IPV more intensely.

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