Sexually Transmitted Infections and Spousal Violence: The Experienced of Married Women in India

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2018 IUSTI World & European Congress ‘The Appliance of Science – ‘27-30th June, Dublin, Ireland

Introduction

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 is regarded as a watershed in the thinking on the population–development relationship as it shifted the focus from population control policies to the need for sexual and reproductive health of individuals, emphasising individual rights and gender equality (Greer, Chau, Hinz, & Thanenthiran 2009).

Combating sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV has been recognised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as one of the core aspects of reproductive and sexual health (WHO, 2004). STIs are a major global cause of acute illness, infertility, long-term disability and death of millions of people (WHO, 2012).

Objectives

To find out the relationship between spousal violence and the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among women.

Sources of Data

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4, 2015-2016) were used. NFHS-4 is a nationally representative sample survey covering 29 states and 7 union territories of India. Whether a woman suffered from a STD or STI in the past year was determined on the basis of three questions. The woman is asked:

- (1) during the last 12 months have you had a disease which you got through sexual contact?
- (2) During the last 12 months have you had a bad smelling abnormal genital discharge?
- (3) During the last 12 months have you had a genital sore or ulcer?

Following set of questions: 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? (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?

Methodology

Cross tabulations and Pearson’s chi-square test were used to obtain a preliminary idea of the association between the dependent and independent variables.

To identify the net impact of spousal violence on women’s exposure to STI, and binary logistic regression model was applied as the dependent variable is dichotomous in nature.

The results of the regression analysis are presented in the form of odds ratios (ORs). OR presents adjusted or standardized values controlling for other factors. All the statistical analyses were done using STATA for Windows, version 14.0.

Results

Distribution of Women & their Husbands by selected background characteristics

Chart Title

Table 2: Percentage of Currently Married Women Age 15–49 Who Reported STI or an STI Symptom

Background Characteristics	% Women with STI	x2	Sig.
Women's experience of violence in last 12 months by husbands			
No	7.7	542.13	<0.0001
Only physical	13.8		
Only sexual	17.2		
Both	25.1		
Husbands having STI/STI symptom in past 12 months			
No	9.4	45.63	<0.0001
Yes	16.1		

Number of lifetime sexual partner of women			
One	9.5	55.91	<0.0001
More than one	21		
Number of lifetime sexual partner of husbands			
One	9.5	4.28	0.039
More than one	10.4		
Women's age at first marriage			
<18 years	10.3	23.92	<0.0001
18 years and above	8.6		

Current use of contraceptive method			
Not using any method	9.5		
Condom	13.1	141.99	<0.0001
Female sterilization	7.9		
Other methods	13.8		

Age of women (years)			
15–24	10.1		
25–34	10.3	21.45	<0.0001
35–49	8.6		

Experience of pregnancy wastage			
No	8.7	123.05	<0.0001
Yes	13.7		

Women's highest level of education			
No education	11.7	167.85	<0.0001
Primary	10.2		
Secondary & above	6.8		

Religion			
Hindu	9		
Muslim	15.8	168.02	<0.0001
Other	6.9		

Caste/Tribe			
SC/ST	10.3	8.47	0.004
Other	9.2		

Type of place of residence			
Urban	7.1	51.91	<0.0001
Rural	9.8		

Current work status of women			
Not working	9.9	3.01	0.083
Working	9.3		

Wealth Index			
Poorest	13.4		
Poorer	11.4		
Middle	9.8	185.17	<0.0001
Richer	7.3		
Richest	7		

Regions in India			
Northern	14.9		
Eastern	13.3	878.56	<0.0001
North-eastern	18		
Western	6.5		
Southern	3.5		

Table 3: Logistic Regression Results Showing the Likelihood of Currently Married Women

Background Characteristics	Odds Ratio (Model 1)	Odds Ratio (Model 2)	Odds Ratio (Model 3)	Odds Ratio (Model 4)
Women's experience of violence in last 12 months by husband				
No				
Only physical	1.922***	1.948***	1.903***	1.989***
Only sexual	2.486***	2.278***	1.919***	1.670***
Both	4.024***	3.755***	3.333***	3.174***

Husbands having STI/STI symptoms in past 12 months				
No				
Yes		1.569***	1.408**	1.253*
Number of lifetime sexual partner of women				
One				
More than 1		2.131***	1.687***	1.542**

Number of lifetime sexual partner of husbands				
One				
More than 1		1.009	1.067	1.105
Women's age at first marriage				
<18 years				
18 years and above		0.850***	0.928	0.962

Current use of contraceptive method				
Not using				
Condom		1.570***	1.759***	1.458***
Female sterilisation		0.827***	1.051	1.320***
Other methods		1.573***	1.498***	1.382***

Age of women (years)				
15–24				
25–34			1.035	0.979
35–49			0.912	0.844*

Experience of pregnancy wastage				
No				
Yes			1.574***	1.507***
Women's highest level of education				
No education				
Primary			0.939	1.067
Secondary & above			0.819**	0.981

Religion				
Hindu				
Muslim			1.373***	1.363***
Other			0.843*	0.843*

Caste/Tribe				
SC/ST				
Other			0.967	1.005

Type of place of residence				
Urban				
Rural			1.148*	1.093

Current work status of women				
Not working				
Working			0.92	1.023

Wealth index				
Poorest				
Poorer			0.878	0.928
Middle			0.799**	0.885
Richer			0.733***	0.794**
Richest			0.689***	0.694***

Regions in India				
Northern				
Eastern				0.805**
North-eastern				0.703***
Western				0.504***
Southern				0.321***

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of spousal violence on women’s experience of STIs. The study proves that after accounting for the risk factors affecting women’s exposure to STI and various socio-economic characteristics, spousal violence significantly increased women’s likelihood of experiencing STIs. This result is consistent with previous findings (Dude, 2007; Johnson & Hellerstedt, 2002; Kishor, 2009; Martin et al., 1999a). Existing gender norms in society which legitimise control over women’s sexuality, and violence against women force women to have unprotected sex that may cause STDs including HIV/AIDS. The unequal balance of power in favour of men needs to be challenged by empowering women through education and employment which may contribute to lessen male dominance in sexual relationships.

In this study, the husband’s infection and more than one lifetime sexual partner of the wife have been identified as risk factors of STI among women. Therefore, it is quite apparent that if the incidence of STIs among husbands is prevented, it will help in reducing women’s risk of STIs. Awareness campaigning regarding the risk of multiple sexual partners is also necessary particularly in the context of current HIV/ AIDS epidemics.

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Conclusion

The findings of this study affirm the belief that spousal violence under-mines the reproductive health of women and increases the risk of STI. Therefore, it can be argued that better marital relations and less marital violence could help to reduce STIs among women. The programmes that are intended to combat STD will not succeed if they do not consider the incidence of violence against women as a cause and correlated factor. For example, STD prevention programmes that emphasise only a reduction in the number of sexual partners and use of condoms may fail to achieve their intended goals because those programmes are not considering the special situation of the women who are victims of violence or threats of violence and are often not able to negotiate and enforce either of these solutions.