



Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women: A Multifaceted Approach

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Abstract

Violence against women is a pervasive and complex issue that affects millions of individuals worldwide. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse, as well as stalking. It examines the root causes, consequences, and impacts of violence on victims, families, and communities. The study also explores the role of sociocultural, economic, and community factors in perpetuating violence against women.

The study emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach, involving law enforcement, healthcare professionals, social workers, and community organizations, to prevent and respond to violence against women. It highlights the need for coordinated efforts to provide support services, including mental health care, legal assistance, and shelter, to victims of violence.

Furthermore, the study underscores the significance of addressing the barriers that hinder the accessibility of research findings and the need for effective communication strategies to connect research with practice. It emphasizes the importance of developing policies and interventions that are informed by empirical evidence and that prioritize the needs and experiences of victims.

Ultimately, the project aims to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive and effective response to violence against women, one that addresses the complex interplay of factors that contribute to this pressing social issue. By doing so, it seeks to promote a safer, more equitable, and just society for all individuals.

Key words: Sexual assault, Domestic violence, Stalking, Mental health.

Introduction

Violence against women is described as any physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological abuse or violence directed against women by intimate partners or acquaintances, including current or former husbands, cohabiting partners, boyfriends, or dates. Although this definition is both larger and narrower than those used by many practitioners, it reflects the essence of women's victimization. Regardless of how it is socially or legally defined, women's experiences with violent victimization are dominated by victimization by individuals they know (Lentzner and DeBerry, 1980; Mercy and Saltzman, 1989; Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998a). Furthermore, while the law distinguishes between sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking, research indicates that various forms of victimization frequently occur concurrently or sequentially. Furthermore, although the law distinguishes between sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking, research demonstrates that these sorts of victimization frequently take place concurrently or consecutively (Eby., 1995; Frieze, 1983; Zillman, 1984).

Since the 1970s, there has been a growing societal recognition of violence against women as a distinct and significant social concern, rather than simply viewing it as a category of criminal behavior defined by the characteristics of the victims. This evolution in perspective has resulted in a marked increase in research dedicated

to various dimensions of violence against women. Investigations have delved into the root causes and characteristics of such violence, assessed its deep-seated effects on victims, and scrutinized the essential roles of criminal justice systems, social services, and public health professionals in both preventing violence and assisting those affected.

This redefinition has also spurred the development of policies and interventions specifically designed to combat violence against women. Legal systems have adapted to offer enhanced protection and support for victims, highlighting the importance of specialized training for law enforcement and other agencies tasked with managing these cases. Public awareness initiatives seek to inform society about the seriousness and prevalence of violence against women, challenging conventional myths and stereotypes that often minimize or rationalize the issue.

Furthermore, collaborative initiatives among various sectors, including healthcare professionals, social workers, and community organizations, have been crucial in establishing comprehensive support networks for survivors. These initiatives prioritize not only immediate safety and legal options but also long-term recovery and empowerment.

In rapid assessment, this transformation has fostered a more profound understanding and recognition of violence against women as a pressing issue, promoting a more informed and coordinated strategy for prevention, intervention, and healing. It underscores the ongoing need for research, policy innovation, and societal transformation to effectively address and eliminate violence against women.

Objectives of the study

The study is designed to accomplish several significant objectives related to the comprehension and management of violence against women. Primarily, it aims to equip practitioners with essential insights derived from scientific investigations in this field, ensuring that their practices are guided by the most current and credible evidence. This strategy enables practitioners to ground their decisions and interventions in empirical data rather than in assumptions or commonly accepted yet unverified notions.

Another crucial objective is to pinpoint and address existing gaps in knowledge. In many cases, the lack of solid information may lead practitioners to depend on assumptions that could result in ineffective or potentially harmful methods. By recognizing these gaps, the project aspires to mitigate reliance on such unfounded beliefs, fostering a more informed approach to this pressing issue.

Furthermore, the initiative is intended to improve practitioners' awareness of and access to pertinent information across various professional sectors. This includes promoting the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives, which can yield more holistic and effective strategies for combating violence against women. The goal is to facilitate the seamless exchange and application of relevant knowledge among practitioners from diverse fields, including healthcare, law enforcement, social work, and mental health.

Nonetheless, effectively conveying these research findings to practitioners poses several challenges. One major difficulty lies in the need to translate complex scientific research into actionable insights without oversimplifying the information. Given that practitioners come from varied backgrounds and possess differing levels of familiarity with research methodologies, the information must be customized for diverse audiences while ensuring accuracy and relevance are preserved.

Discussion

There exists the challenge of addressing the barriers that hinder the accessibility of research findings. Frequently, valuable insights are confined within academic publications or are not conveyed in a manner that is easily digestible, complicating their integration into the daily practices of professionals. It is essential to present this information in a format that is both engaging and comprehensible to ensure its practical use.

Ultimately, the project's success depends on its capacity to develop effective communication strategies that connect research with practice, thereby promoting a more informed and comprehensive approach to preventing and addressing violence against women. By tackling these challenges, the study can offer substantial support to practitioners, equipping them with the knowledge and resources necessary to effect meaningful change within their communities.

Responses to violence against women necessitate collaboration and coordination among various sectors, including criminal justice, social services, and public health. Each sector plays a vital role in confronting this widespread issue, drawing on their distinct perspectives, skills, and methodologies that are influenced by their specific professional values and training.

Nevertheless, this sector-specific approach often leads to a disjointed response to the issue. Each group tends to concentrate primarily on its own area of expertise, which may result in overlooking the broader implications and interconnections between their work and that of other sectors.

The absence of a cohesive strategy can impede the overall effectiveness of interventions and complicate the provision of services to individuals affected by violence. Both practitioners and researchers may overlook collaborative opportunities that could yield more comprehensive and effective solutions. Emphasizing common strategies and shared objectives could promote a more coordinated approach, harnessing the strengths of various sectors to create integrated responses that are more impactful and sustainable over time.

To facilitate this, enhancing communication and collaboration across different sectors is crucial, promoting an interdisciplinary approach that appreciates diverse perspectives and expertise. By cultivating an environment conducive to the sharing of knowledge and resources, a more unified and effective response system can be established, ultimately offering better support to victims of violence and aiding in the prevention of such incidents within society.

Moreover, the dissemination of findings from social science research frequently encounters significant barriers to accessibility for practitioners in the field. This disconnect can result in a gap between innovative research and its practical implementation in real-world contexts. Practitioners, who are often deeply committed to reforming laws and practices, take pride in their achievements and remain optimistic about the effects of their reforms. Consequently, they may perceive challenges to their assumptions or evidence that points out the limitations of interventions as critiques of their hard work, rather than as opportunities for further enhancement and innovation.

To address this disparity, it is essential for researchers and practitioners to engage in collaborative efforts. This collaboration can be facilitated by converting intricate research outcomes into practical insights that are presented in user-friendly formats. Researchers should strive to convey the significance of key findings in a manner that highlights their potential to support ongoing reforms and innovations. This approach requires positioning research not as a critique of previous initiatives but as a resource for ongoing enhancement.

Moreover, creating open lines of communication between researchers and practitioners can cultivate a culture of shared learning and adaptability. Such interactions enable practitioners to more effectively incorporate empirical research into their methodologies, ultimately resulting in more impactful reforms and interventions. This joint endeavor has the potential to turn challenges into opportunities for advancement and development within the social sciences and their role in tackling societal challenges.

Defining Violence Against Women

Comprehending the various manifestations of violence and abuse is essential for effective prevention, intervention, and victim support. This discussion examines these different forms, emphasizing their critical elements and consequences like;

Physical Violence: This category includes aggressive actions aimed at a partner with the purpose of inflicting harm. Physical violence can vary from minor incidents, such as pushing or shoving, to more severe acts, including beating, choking, or the use of lethal weapons like knives and firearms. It is imperative to identify and confront these behaviors, as they have the potential to escalate over time, resulting in significant injury or even death.

Sexual Assault and Rape: The legal interpretations of rape and sexual assault differ among various jurisdictions; however, they universally emphasize the critical aspect of the absence of consent. Many states have adopted broader terminology, such as sexual assault and abuse, while typically distinguishing between the categories:

Aggravated Sexual Assault: This category includes instances where threats or actual force are employed, often resulting in significant harm or involving kidnapping.

Sexual Abuse: This involves less severe threats but pertains to sexual acts performed on individuals who are incapable of providing consent.

In this context, sexual assault encompasses any sexual activity that is forced or coerced, which includes both penetrative and non-penetrative acts. Addressing this matter necessitates not only legal measures but also the establishment of strong support systems for survivors.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse: This form of abuse seeks to exert control and dominance over a partner, frequently by undermining their autonomy and self-esteem. Emotional abuse can present itself in various ways, including:

- Verbal assaults, such as insults and mockery.
- Tactics aimed at isolation and controlling behavior.
- Financial exploitation and withholding of resources.
- Extreme jealousy, possessiveness, and unfounded accusations.
- Threats of harm or abandonment.

Although emotional abuse may be less visible, it can lead to significant psychological consequences, often necessitating extensive mental health support. Researchers are actively pursuing a more widely accepted definition to enhance intervention strategies.

Stalking: Stalking, as defined by the National Institute of Justice, involves repeated, unwanted attention and contact that instills fear in the victim. It includes behaviors such as:

- Following or monitoring a victim.
- Harassment through communication.
- Threats of violence against the victim or their family.
- Unwanted appearances at personal spaces or places of work.

Stalking often involves individuals known to the victim, with a significant majority of cases involving women targeted by acquaintances or past partners. Legal responses have been significant, with ant stalking laws enacted in most states to offer protection and recourse for victims.

The Emergence of Violence Against Women as a Social Problem

The Rise of Violence Against Women as a Societal Concern: The 1970s represented a significant turning point in the recognition of violence against women, elevating it to a widely acknowledged social concern. This transformation was primarily fueled by the dedicated efforts of advocates for victims, who worked tirelessly to highlight the struggles faced by affected women. These advocates sought to enhance transparency and understanding, shedding light on the widespread nature of such violence and its profound effects on individuals and society as a whole.

As awareness expanded, violence against women was increasingly viewed as a complex issue rather than a mere isolated incident; it emerged as a multifaceted challenge that required coordinated action across various sectors. Society began to assume greater responsibility, recognizing the urgent need for prevention strategies and interventions designed to mitigate the consequences of this violence.

Over time, this issue developed into a complex challenge that encompassed several areas such as;

Social Sphere: Communities started to acknowledge the systemic origins of violence against women, including gender inequality and societal norms that sustain such behaviors. Social campaigns and educational initiatives were launched to alter perceptions and advocate for gender equality. Support networks within communities, such as

shelters and hotlines, were created to provide immediate help to victims.

Criminal Justice System: Law enforcement and the legal framework were urged to enhance protections for victims and ensure accountability for offenders. Legislative changes were introduced to fortify protection orders, improve prosecution procedures, and impose stricter penalties on perpetrators. Specialized training programs were established for police and legal professionals to address cases of domestic violence and sexual assault with greater effectiveness and sensitivity.

Public Health Perspective: Recognizing violence against women as a critical public health concern has led to a focus on its physical and mental health repercussions. Healthcare professionals have been trained to identify indicators of abuse and provide suitable assistance and referrals. Public health initiatives have prioritized prevention and intervention, emphasizing the enduring health impacts of violence and the necessity for robust support systems.

Policy and Advocacy: Legislators have begun to formulate and enact laws that tackle both the underlying causes and the consequences of violence against women. Advocacy organizations have remained instrumental in influencing policy, ensuring that the perspectives of victims are acknowledged and integrated into the legislative framework.

This comprehensive strategy highlights the importance of collaborative efforts across various sectors to effectively combat and reduce violence against women. While notable advancements have been achieved since the 1970s, persistent challenges continue to exist, requiring sustained advocacy, research, and policy innovation. By upholding a thorough and cooperative approach, society can progress towards the elimination of violence.

Violence Against Women as a Public Health Issue

Violence against women crosses social divides and has profound consequences not only for the individuals directly affected but also for society at large. It is crucial to recognize this issue as a public health concern in order to devise effective strategies for its eradication. Although this viewpoint has been promoted since the early 1980s, its incorporation into health policy and practice has progressed gradually, influenced by three primary factors: a deeper understanding of the prevalence and consequences of partner violence, the tireless advocacy of various organizations, and the recognition of its impact on healthcare usage.

The initiative led by Surgeon General C. Everett Koop in 1985 to organize the Workshop on Violence and Public Health represented a pivotal moment in directing the attention of medical and public health professionals to this urgent matter. By the end of the 20th century, the U.S. Public Health Service highlighted the necessity of addressing violence against women in its Healthy People 2000 objectives, paving the way for systematic efforts aimed at alleviation.

Viewing violence against women through a public health framework necessitates a comprehensive approach: documenting its prevalence, analyzing variations in patterns across different populations, identifying risk factors, developing causal models, and, crucially, creating and validating preventive measures. This approach draws on the successes seen in the management of infectious and chronic diseases, although its effectiveness specifically regarding intimate partner violence has yet to be fully confirmed.

Preventive measures, particularly within community health initiatives, have predominantly taken the form of school-based programs aimed at proactively addressing potential scenarios involving abusers and victims. Research conducted by Foshee and others has concentrated on educating youth as a preventive strategy. Nevertheless, the challenge remains in translating these educational frameworks into tangible outcomes that effectively reduce instances of violence.

Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a significant public health issue, with varying estimates of its prevalence due to several factors. One of the primary reasons for these variations is the lack of a universally accepted definition of what constitutes intimate partner violence. While some researchers may include psychological and emotional abuse along with physical violence in their assessments, others may focus solely on physical or sexual violence. This inconsistency leads to a broad range of prevalence rates reported in different studies.

Additionally, data collection methodologies play a crucial role in the reported prevalence of IPV. Surveys relying on self-reported data from victims can yield different results compared to those using official incident reports from law enforcement agencies. Victims of IPV often underreport these crimes due to fear, shame, or economic dependency, leading to an underestimation of the true prevalence. Moreover, cultural and societal norms around

privacy and gender roles can further influence reporting rates.

Practitioners working with different populations also contribute to the variance in prevalence estimates. Those in contact with general populations may report lower rates of IPV compared to professionals working with at-risk groups, such as individuals in shelters or mental health clinics, where the rates of victimization are typically higher. Moreover, focusing on recent incidents rather than lifetime experiences can lead to differing prevalence rates, as some studies aim to capture the immediate scope of the problem while others seek to understand its long-term impact.

To obtain a clearer picture of the prevalence of intimate partner violence, it is essential to work towards standardized definitions and improve data collection methods. Increasing awareness, providing safe avenues for reporting, and improving support systems for victims can also enhance the accuracy of prevalence estimates and support efforts to combat this pervasive issue.

Study on Risk and Contributing Elements

The research on risk and contributing factors for partner violence, sexual assault, emotional abuse, and stalking highlights a complex interplay of social, economic, familial, and individual determinants. While there is significant overlap among these risk factors for different forms of violence, the multifaceted nature of these influences mandates a comprehensive approach for understanding and addressing the issue is Ecological Framework which categorizes risk factors at multiple levels, acknowledging their interconnected nature.

Sociocultural Risk Factors: These factors are entrenched in societal norms and values that may implicitly condone violence against women. Patriarchy, sexism, and rigid sex-role stereotyping are pivotal in this context. Historically male-dominated social structures and gender-specific socialization contribute to violence acceptance. Studies reveal that societal acceptance of violence is often linked to historically rooted gender roles, but findings are mixed on the impact of individual adherence to traditional sex roles. It contributes to the steps as given as:

Economic Status: Although violence transcends income boundaries, low socioeconomic status is a significant risk factor. Economic dependence on an abuser can trap victims in harmful situations.

Community Factors: Urban environments tend to have higher rates of intimate partner violence, potentially due to urban-associated poverty. The availability and effectiveness of intervention services also play a crucial role in either mitigating or exacerbating risk factors.

Family and Individual Risk Factors: Family dynamics, such as relationship characteristics and individual behaviors, further complicate the landscape of risk factors. These aspects often interlink with broader sociocultural and social structural factors.

Implications and Considerations: It contributes to the given indicators.

- **Service Provision:** Effective intervention is complicated by the availability and cultural sensitivity of services. Historically, victims expressed dissatisfaction with traditional support systems due to perceived inadequacies and cultural insensitivity. Although service provisions have improved since the 1970s, access remains a challenge for marginalized groups.

- **Stigma and Access:** Social stigma adversely affects victims' willingness to seek help, particularly in cases of sexual violence. Enhancing community support systems and reducing stigma are critical components for effective intervention strategies.

- **Cultural Considerations:** Tailoring services to be culturally and contextually relevant is essential in meeting the diverse needs of different racial and ethnic groups.

Family-related risk factors

The influence of family risk factors on partner violence is an area that has not been extensively studied, yet mental health professionals acknowledge that these factors probably play a crucial role. The interactions within family or couple dynamics can affect both the occurrence and intensity of partner violence, with specific relationship types presenting greater risks.

Relationship Status as a Potential Risk Factor:

Among couples, those who are separated or cohabiting face a greater risk of partner violence compared to married or dating couples. This trend persists even when controlling for variables like age and education. Research conducted by Yllo and Straus in 1981 found that violence rates among cohabiting men were nearly three times higher than those among their married counterparts. This suggests that the nature and stability of the relationship play critical roles in

the likelihood of violence occurring.

Impact of Substance Abuse and Mental Health:

Substance abuse and mental health issues can amplify these risks by exacerbating dependency and hindering a woman's capacity to prevent or escape an abusive relationship. Such challenges can result in decreased confidence and resources needed to address or leave a harmful environment.

Impact on Mental Well-Being

Physical abuse has been consistently linked to various negative mental health outcomes, including depression (Plichta, 1996; Stets and Straus, 1990), suicidal thoughts and attempts (Gelles and Straus, 1990), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Saunders, 1994), other anxiety disorders, as well as substance abuse and dependency (Miller and Downs, 1993; Plichta, 1996).

The detrimental mental health impacts of sexual assault and rape are well-documented and significantly overlap with those resulting from physical violence. Immediate emotional responses to sexual assault can include “shock, intense fear, numbness, confusion, extreme helplessness, and/or disbelief, along with self-blame” (Goodman, Koss, and Russo, 1993, p. 82). Mental health issues stemming from sexual assault encompass fear, PTSD, anxiety disorders (such as phobias and obsessive-compulsive disorder), depression, suicidal behavior, sexual dysfunction, diminished self-esteem, relationship difficulties, and substance misuse (Kilpatrick, Edmunds, and Seymour, 1992; Resick, 1993; Teets, 1997; Zweig, Barber, and Eccles, 1997). One review indicated that while symptoms tend to decrease for most victims within three months, there is minimal spontaneous recovery after one year. Consequently, a portion of victims continues to face chronic issues such as fear, anxiety, PTSD, depression, suicidal tendencies, sexual problems, and substance abuse (Resick, 1993).

Although it has not been extensively studied, emotional abuse also seems to correlate with diminished psychological well-being. Both overt and subtle forms of psychological abuse have been shown to affect various mental health and well-being outcomes, even when accounting for the impacts of physical and sexual abuse (Marshall, 1999). Many women and researchers consider psychological abuse to be more damaging.

Conclusions

Violence against women has been recognized as both a social and legal issue, prompting communities, criminal justice systems, and public health organizations to assume greater responsibility for intervention and prevention efforts. Current debates on the most effective responses to this violence reveal a range of opinions regarding the severity and immediacy of the issue, as well as the appropriate actions to take. Professionals from various fields often disagree on the underlying causes of violence, the objectives of interventions, and the likelihood of achieving meaningful change. Even within the same profession, there can be significant differences in perspectives on effective practices and strategies. Given that new intervention and prevention approaches necessitate collaboration among these diverse groups, it is crucial to acknowledge and respect these differing viewpoints, understanding that successful solutions will require bridging these gaps and establishing common ground.

Part of this divergence in perspectives arises from the fact that many practitioners encounter violence against women only as a component of their broader work. The protocols, practices, and assumptions inherent in their roles may not be fully applicable to situations involving violence against women. For instance, health professionals may view victims as patients seeking treatment for injuries, while law enforcement may categorize them based on 911 call data. Victim advocates focus on individuals in shelters and those seeking assistance, educators may engage with teenagers who are reluctant to discuss the issue, and mental health professionals work with clients experiencing distress. Probation officers are likely to come across victims as partners of men they supervise for other criminal offenses. Most practitioners draw conclusions based on their own experiences, which often reflect different segments of the victim and offender populations.

Additionally, professionals often find themselves at a crossroads between aligning their responses to violence against women with the overarching framework of their agencies and creating new approaches that may challenge the foundational beliefs of those frameworks. For instance, a confrontational criminal justice system that presumes

victims will be proactive, cooperative, and seek retribution—thus serving as effective witnesses for the prosecution—may need to be adjusted to better reflect the ambivalence many female victims feel towards their offenders. The frustration that criminal justice professionals experience with hesitant victims parallels the dissatisfaction advocates feel towards a cumbersome and often adversarial criminal process.

Moreover, practitioners frequently have differing priorities, particularly in times of limited resources. Some may view funding directed towards batterer treatment as a diversion from essential victim services or prevention efforts. These varying viewpoints not only highlight competition for limited resources but also indicate fundamental disagreements regarding the root causes of violence and the most effective methods for its reduction, cessation, or prevention. For example, strategies focused on deterring violence through arrest or punishment may seem ineffective to those who believe that mental health issues or deeply ingrained socialization patterns are the primary drivers of violence.

As practitioners and policymakers explore collaborative approaches to addressing violence against women, they must navigate these differing perspectives while enhancing their understanding of the causes, effects, and efficacy of various interventions. There is a growing consensus among practitioners and policymakers that coordinated efforts across different agencies will yield better results than conventional responses to violence. However, researchers have only just begun the complex process of assessing the outcomes of these collaborative initiatives. Increasingly, practitioners will need to discern what strategies are effective not only within their own fields but also in the domains of their colleagues.

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