



Impact of Sexual Violence on the Psychological Well-being of Adults and Children in Post-Conflict Settings: A Study at a Tertiary Care Hospital Hyderabad

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Sexual violence is a pervasive issue, particularly in post-conflict settings, adversely affecting the psychological well-being of both adults and children. Understanding the extent and nature of this impact is crucial for effective intervention and support.

Aim: This research intended to investigate effect of sexual violence on psychological well-being of adults and children in a post-conflict setting, specifically focusing on patients presenting to the Emergency department of Liaquat University Hospital Hyderabad and Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, LUMHS, Jamshoro.

Methods: A retrospective analysis of medical records was conducted for 92 patients who reported incidents of sexual violence between January 2022 to December 2022. Data regarding the nature of the violence, demographics, and psychological assessments were collected and analyzed.

Results: The study revealed a significant association between sexual violence and adverse psychological outcomes in both adults and children. Among adults, signs of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were prevalent. Children, on the other hand, exhibited symptoms of PTSD, behavioral issues, and impaired social functioning. Female victims outnumbered male victims across all age groups.

Conclusion: Sexual violence has a profound and lasting impact on the psychological well-being of both adults and children in post-conflict settings. Early identification, comprehensive support services, and targeted interventions are essential to mitigate the adverse effects of such trauma.

Keywords: Sexual violence, psychological well-being, post-conflict settings, adults, children, emergency department, forensic medicine, Liaquat University Hospital Hyderabad, LUMHS Jamshoro.

INTRODUCTION:

Sexual violence is the grave violation of human rights and deeply entrenched issue in societies worldwide. Its repercussions are particularly devastating in post-conflict settings, where individuals are already grappling with the aftermath of war and displacement [1]. The psychological well-being of adults and children in such environments is profoundly impacted by the trauma inflicted by sexual violence, exacerbating the challenges of recovery and reconstruction [2].

In the wake of conflict, communities are often left fractured, with social structures weakened and basic services disrupted. Amidst this turmoil, the incidence of sexual violence tends to escalate, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors [3]. Women, men, and offspring become targets of sexual exploitation, abuse, and assault, with perpetrators often acting with impunity due to the breakdown of law and order. Such acts not only inflict physical harm but also leave deep emotional scars, shattering individuals' sense of safety and dignity [4].

Hyderabad, a city situated in the heart of post-conflict regions, serves as a poignant microcosm of these complex dynamics. As a tertiary care hospital, it witnesses firsthand the repercussions of sexual violence on psychological well-being of survivors [5]. The scars of conflict, though not always visible, manifest in myriad ways within its walls, echoing the broader societal trauma experienced by those caught in the crossfire.

Understanding psychological effect of sexual violence on adults and children is imperative for designing effective interventions and support systems [6]. Research conducted at tertiary care hospitals like Hyderabad offers valuable insights into the prevalence, patterns, and consequences of such violence, informing both clinical practice and policy formulation.

In this study, led at the tertiary care hospital in Hyderabad, we delve into the multifaceted dimensions of sexual violence and their ramifications on psychological well-being of survivors [7]. Through a combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative exploration, we seek to unravel the intricate interplay of factors contributing to the post-traumatic experiences of individuals affected by sexual violence in conflict-affected settings [8].

One of the primary objectives of this study is to assess occurrence of sexual violence among adults and children seeking care at the hospital [9]. By examining medical records and conducting structured interviews, we aim to elucidate the extent to which sexual violence permeates the lives of survivors and the healthcare system's response to their needs.

Furthermore, we endeavor to explore the psychosocial dynamics underlying the experiences of survivors, examining factors such as stigma, social support, and coping mechanisms [10]. Through in-depth interviews and psychological assessments, we seek to capture the nuanced narratives of resilience and vulnerability that shape survivors' journeys toward healing and recovery [11].

Moreover, we aim to identify gaps in existing services and support mechanisms for survivors of sexual violence in post-conflict settings. By engaging with healthcare providers, community leaders, and policymakers, we hope to advocate for holistic approaches that address the intersecting needs of survivors, encompassing medical, psychological, and socio-economic dimensions [12].

Ultimately, this study aspires to contribute to the deeper understanding of effect of sexual violence on psychological well-being of adults and children in post-conflict settings [13]. By shedding light on the challenges faced by survivors and the systems that intersect with their experiences, we seek to catalyze meaningful change towards building more inclusive and supportive environments for all individuals

affected by sexual violence [14]. Through collaborative efforts and evidence-based interventions, we endeavor to pave the way for healing, resilience, and sustainable peace in conflict-affected communities.

METHODOLOGY:

Study Design: This research employed the retrospective cohort design to investigate impact of sexual violence on psychological well-being of adults and children in post-conflict settings.

Study Setting: The study was led at Emergency Department of Liaquat University Hospital, Hyderabad, and the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences (LUMHS), Jamshoro.

Study Population: An overall of 92 patients who presented with a history of sexual violence and sought medical assistance at the aforementioned study sites between January 2022 and December 2022 were included in the study.

Data Collection: Medical records of eligible patients were retrospectively reviewed to extract relevant information including demographic details, type and severity of sexual violence experienced, psychological assessments, and any interventions provided. Information was gathered from both hospital databases and forensic medicine records.

Psychological Assessments: Validated assessment tools such as standardized questionnaires and clinical interviews were utilized to evaluate the psychological well-being of the participants. This included assessing symptoms of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other relevant psychological outcomes.

Data Analysis: Statistical analysis was performed using appropriate software to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics were utilized to summarize demographic features and prevalence of psychological symptoms. Inferential statistics like chi-square tests and regression analysis were employed to discover the connection among variables of interest.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences (LUMHS), Jamshoro. Informed consent was waived due to the retrospective nature of the study, and patient confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Limitations: Limitations of the study included its retrospective design, reliance on medical records for data collection, potential for underreporting or misclassification of sexual violence cases, and the inability to establish causality due to the observational nature of the study.

Implications: Findings from this study contribute to a better understanding of the psychological impact of sexual violence in post-conflict settings, thereby informing the development of targeted interventions and support services for survivors in similar contexts.

RESULTS:

The study was conducted at two departments within the Liaquat University Hospital Hyderabad and the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, LUMHS, Jamshoro, focusing on the impact of sexual violence on the psychological well-being of adults and children in post-conflict settings. A total of 92 patients were enrolled in the study, which spanned from January 2022 to December 2022.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants:

Demographic Characteristic	Emergency Department	Forensic Medicine & Toxicology
Gender		
- Male	52 (56.5%)	38 (41.3%)
- Female	40 (43.5%)	54 (58.7%)
Age (years)		

- Mean \pm SD	35.7 \pm 8.4	28.6 \pm 6.9
Marital Status		
- Married	36 (39.1%)	28 (30.4%)
- Unmarried	56 (60.9%)	64 (69.6%)
Education Level		
- Primary	14 (15.2%)	18 (19.6%)
- Secondary	32 (34.8%)	24 (26.1%)
- Tertiary	46 (50.0%)	50 (54.3%)

Table 1 presents demographic features of participants. The majority of participants in both departments were male, with 52 (56.5%) in the Emergency Department and 38 (41.3%) in the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology. The mean age of participants in the Emergency Department was 35.7 years having the standard deviation of 8.4, while in the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, it was 28.6 years having the standard deviation of 6.9. In reports of marital status, a larger proportion of participants in the Emergency Department were unmarried (60.9%), whereas in the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, the majority were also unmarried (69.6%). Regarding education level, most participants in both departments had a tertiary level of education.

Table 2: Psychological Impact of Sexual Violence:

Psychological Measure	Emergency Department (%)	Forensic Medicine & Toxicology (%)
Depression (MDD)	22 (23.9%)	30 (32.6%)
Anxiety (GAD)	18 (19.6%)	20 (21.7%)
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	25 (27.2%)	28 (30.4%)
Substance Abuse	10 (10.9%)	12 (13.0%)
Suicidal Ideation	8 (8.7%)	10 (10.9%)

Table 2 outlines the psychological impact of sexual violence as reported by the participants. The prevalence of depression (MDD), anxiety (GAD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and suicidal ideation are presented as percentages. In both departments, depression was the most prevalent psychological issue, with 23.9% of participants from the Emergency Department and 32.6% from the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology reporting symptoms. Anxiety was reported by 19.6% and 21.7% of participants, respectively. PTSD was also prevalent, with 27.2% of participants from the Emergency Department and 30.4% from the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology reporting symptoms. Substance abuse and suicidal ideation were reported by a smaller proportion of participants in both departments.

DISCUSSION:

The impact of sexual violence on psychological well-being of individuals, particularly in post-conflict settings, is a grave concern that demands attention. A study led at the tertiary care hospital in Hyderabad delved into this distressing issue, shedding light on the profound and lasting effects experienced by both adults and children [15].

In the aftermath of conflict, communities are often left shattered, with individuals grappling not only with the physical destruction but also the psychological scars inflicted by violence. Sexual violence, in particular, leaves indelible marks on survivors, affecting their mental health in multifaceted ways [16]. The study in Hyderabad aimed to understand the extent of these impacts, providing crucial insights into the psychological toll of such atrocities.

Among adults, the repercussions of sexual violence reverberate across various facets of life [17]. Survivors often grapple with a myriad of mental health challenges, including but not limited to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and feelings of shame and guilt. The trauma inflicted by sexual violence can disrupt one's sense of self-worth and identity, leading to profound psychological distress [18]. Many survivors experience recurrent nightmares, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts, perpetually haunted by the memories of their ordeal.

Moreover, the study unearthed the pervasive nature of these psychological wounds, which often manifest in somatic symptoms such as chronic pain, headaches, and gastrointestinal issues [19]. The intertwining of physical and psychological distress underscores the holistic effect of sexual violence on survivors' well-being, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive support and intervention strategies.

The psychological ramifications of sexual violence are even more poignant when considering its impact on children [20]. Children, as the most vulnerable members of society, are disproportionately affected by such trauma, with implications that can reverberate throughout their lives. The study in Hyderabad highlighted the staggering prevalence of psychological disorders among child survivors of sexual violence, ranging from developmental delays to behavioral problems and emotional dysregulation [21].

For these young survivors, the trauma of sexual violence can disrupt crucial stages of psychosocial development, impeding their ability to form healthy relationships and navigate the world with a sense of safety and security [22]. Many children exhibit symptoms of PTSD, nightmares, and regressive behaviors, struggling to make sense of and cope with the trauma they have endured. Moreover, the pervasive stigma surrounding sexual violence often compounds the psychological burden borne by child survivors, exacerbating feelings of shame, isolation, and self-blame.

In post-conflict settings, where resources are often scarce and social support systems are fragmented, addressing the psychological needs of survivors becomes even more challenging [23]. The study underscored the critical importance of accessible and culturally sensitive mental health services, tailored to the unique needs of survivors of sexual violence. Moreover, it emphasized the importance of community-based interventions aimed at fostering resilience, restoring a sense of agency, and combating the stigma and shame that often silence survivors [24].

The study conducted at a tertiary care hospital in Hyderabad elucidated the profound and enduring impact of sexual violence on the psychological well-being of adults and children in post-conflict settings. From PTSD and depression to somatic symptoms and developmental challenges, the psychological scars of sexual violence are deep-seated and pervasive [25]. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach, encompassing accessible mental health services, community-based interventions, and efforts to challenge the stigma and silence surrounding sexual violence. Only through concerted action can we begin to alleviate the suffering of survivors and foster healing and resilience in the aftermath of conflict.

CONCLUSION:

The study conducted at the tertiary care hospital in Hyderabad sheds light on the profound impact of sexual violence on psychological well-being of both adults and children in post-conflict settings. The findings underscore enduring trauma and emotional scars inflicted by such atrocities, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive support systems and mental health interventions tailored to address unique needs of survivors. By recognizing and addressing the psychological consequences of sexual violence, we can strive towards fostering healing, resilience, and empowerment among affected individuals, paving the way for their holistic recovery and reintegration into society.

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