World Health Organization (WHO) defines domestic violence as: “the range of sexually, psychologically and physically coercive acts used against young and adolescent women by current or former male intimate partners”.\textsuperscript{1} Based on 48 population-based surveys, a WHO 2002 report concluded that 10-69\% of women have been physically abused by their intimate partners.\textsuperscript{2} Studies in Pakistan have documented the prevalence of domestic violence against women; both from the perspective of men as well as women.\textsuperscript{3,4} Those studies reported verbal abuse e.g. shouting or screaming and physical abuse e.g. hitting or pushing ranging from 58\% to 100\% and 32.8\% to 56\%, respectively during as well as prior to pregnancy. While marital rape rate i.e. non-consensual sex with one’s wife, of upto 47-77\% have been documented.\textsuperscript{3,4} However, none of these or other studies in Pakistan used a standardized questionnaire to collect data so as to meaningfully compare results locally as well as internationally.

This study was conducted to determine the prevalence, and severity of domestic violence in conveniently selected pregnant women visiting public sector hospitals in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, using the Abuse Assessment Screen (AAS).\textsuperscript{5} Additional questions were added to this questionnaire to determine opinions about the role of religion in domestic violence, as well as correlates of health consequences of those experiencing this violence.

A cross-sectional survey with convenience sampling was conducted among the 20 years and older pregnant women who were married for at least one year; approached at the Obstetric and Gynaecology outpatient departments of two public sector hospitals each in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Three female graduate students, trained in data collection, individually approached potential respondents who were unaccompanied by any male. A structured, interviewer-administered, and pre-tested questionnaire was used with both open and close-ended questions on demographics, opinions and personal experiences pertaining to domestic violence. The questionnaire also contained all the elements of the AAS but the questions and answer options were revised so as to refer to the husband only rather than boyfriend, stranger or ex-husband. Respondents were explained the objective of the study as opinions and experiences about domestic violence; and after obtaining verbal consent, the questionnaire was administered and responses were recorded by the interviewers. Complete confidentiality was assured to all participants; names and addresses were not asked or recorded, while voluntary participation was emphasized in this study. Data were analyzed for frequencies and counts with STATA 9.

From July 27\textsuperscript{th} to September 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2006, 702 conveniently selected pregnant ladies were approached. Four hundred and ninety-three agreed to participate and completed the questionnaire with response rate of 70.2\%; 209 women declined to participate owing to time constraints and privacy concerns. The mean age of respondents was 27.9 years (ranging from 20-45 years); while the mean age of their spouses was 33.3 years (ranging from 21-46 years). Mean duration of marriage was 4.2 years (ranging from 1-9 years). Regarding educational attainment, 40 (8.1\%) respondents had no formal education, 117 (23.7\%) had 5-10 years, 178 (36.1\%) had 12 years, and the rest had more than 12 years of education. While their spouses’ educational attainment was 4.5\% with no formal education, 7.7\% having 5-10 years, 22.5\% with 12 years and the rest 65.3\% having more than 12 years of education. Two hundred and sixteen (43.8\%) of respondents and 488 (99\%) of their spouses were currently employed. Most respondents (346) were living in a joint family system (70.2\%).

Results of Abuse Assessment Screen (AAS) are presented in Table I. AAS inquires about and scales the most severe abuse incident during the current pregnancy. Cumulatively, 67 (13.6\%) respondents reported being physically abused during the current pregnancy. However, out of those 67 respondents, 32 (47.7\%) reported the most severe incident to be the threats of abuse, including use of weapon i.e. a non-physical abuse, 21 (31.3\%) reported slapping, pushing with no injuries/lasting pain, 3 (4.5\%) reported punching,
kicking, bruises, cuts and/or continuing pain, 5 (7.5%) reported being beaten-up and receiving severe contusions, burns or broken bones; 2 (3%) reported internal and/or permanent injury, while 4 (6%) reported the most severe incident to be the use of a weapon, or wound from weapon. One hundred and twenty-one (24.5%) respondents replied affirmatively to the question of over being physically hurt by the husband that resulted in the use of a self-prescribed medication/ointment; while an additional 42 (8.5%) respondents stated that the physical abuse necessitated consulting a physician or visit to a hospital for treatment. Twenty-four (4.9%) respondents believed that religion allowed a husband to beat his wife, even if she has been faithful to him. While 105 (21.3%) believed that religion allowed a husband to forcibly have sex with his wife even if she does not want to engage in it. One hundred sixty-four (33.3%) respondents also replied affirmatively to the question that either their father or mother had physically beaten them while they were 18 years or older.

Over half of women in this study reported ever being emotionally or physically abused by their husbands. In the past one year prior to pregnancy, 83 (16.8%) women reported being physically abused, and since pregnancy, 67 (13.6%) reported such physical abuse. The most common site of physical violence during current pregnancy was face, as reported by 37 (55.2%) of women. The mean duration of marriage and pregnancy respectively were 4.2 years and 4 months; against the backdrop of marital rape rates of over 21% augment the endemic nature of this public health problem in our culture. About half of women also reported being afraid of their husbands; and mostly chose to confide about the abusive nature of their marriages to either their mother-in-laws or sister-in-laws. Physical beatings of adult (18 years and over) children by parents, as reported by one-third of women is a disturbing finding and suggests broader acceptance of physical violence in our culture. Only 16 women reported domestic violence to their obstetricians and 2 to police; highlighting the perceived inadequacy, either real or imagined, of the role of medical and judicial systems to be responsive.

This augurs the need for health education programs, practice guidelines to be developed by the professional medical societies, and reforms in the judicial system so as to meaningfully address this form of violence. The health education campaigns would yield promising outcome for women if the role of religion is more clearly defined and misconceptions are addressed.

Results of this study need to be interpreted with caveats, as convenience based sampling was used, secondly, results would be an ‘underestimate’ of domestic violence during pregnancy, as results pertain to part of the duration of respondents’ ongoing pregnancy. Finally, this study merely provides a perspective and the need for population-based surveys to determine the prevalence and correlates of domestic violence in the country could hardly be overemphasized.

REFERENCES


Table I: Abuse assessment screen results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes (n=493)</th>
<th>Mean (range)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever been emotionally or physically abused by the husband.</td>
<td>258 (52.3%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the past one year (before pregnancy), were hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt by the husband.</td>
<td>83 (16.8%)</td>
<td>3.2 (1-11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since being pregnant, have been hit, slapped, kicked or otherwise physically hurt by the husband.</td>
<td>67 (13.6%)</td>
<td>2.5 (1-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the past year, has been forced to have sexual intercourse by the husband.</td>
<td>104 (21.1%)</td>
<td>3.5 (1-12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid of husband.</td>
<td>223 (45.2%)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percentages calculated from the total of 258 respondents who replied affirmatively to ever being emotionally or physically abused by husband.