

Intimate partner violence and abortion: Evidence from Ukraine

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Abstract:

Recent research has indentified the presence of intimate partner violence within a partnership as one reason why women who are pregnant might seek abortions (Saftlas *et. al.* 2010). Often, the presence of violence within an intimate relationship is correlated with behaviors that result in a higher number of unintended pregnancies (Moore *et. al.* 2010), which are more likely to be terminated (Finer *et. al.* 2005). Furthermore abusive partners often coerce a woman to seek an abortion once she is pregnant (Silverman *et. al.* 2010).

This study explores whether a woman's experience of physical, sexual, and emotional violence within marriage are associated with recent and lifetime abortions using data from the 2007 Ukraine Demographic and Health Survey, a nationally – representative survey of women aged 15 – 49 including information on reproductive health, pregnancy history, and demographic variables. Preliminary bivariate results indicate that emotional, physical, and sexual intimate partner violence are all significantly associated with a higher likelihood of having ever terminated a pregnancy. All three types of violence are also significantly associated with a woman terminating her most recent pregnancy.

Introduction:

A small but growing body of recent research suggests that the prevalence of intimate partner violence among women seeking elective abortions is higher than among women who continue their pregnancies (Saftlas *et. al.* 2010). Often, these higher rates of abortion result both because women experiencing abuse are less likely to take measures to prevent pregnancy (Moore *et. al.* 2010), as well as being more likely to seek an abortion once pregnancy occurs (Silverman *et. al.* 2010).

While abortion rates in Ukraine were high during the Soviet period, when abortion was the primary means of fertility control available to women, abortion rates have tapered off from a total abortion rate of 1.57 per woman to 0.4 per women in just 8 years, from 1999 to 2007 (Ukraine Center for Social Reforms *et. al.* 2008). Most younger Ukrainian women are now substituting modern methods of contraception for abortion as a primary means of fertility control (Ukraine Center for Social Reforms *et. al.* 2008). Intimate partner violence might be one factor influencing women to use abortion as a means of preventing pregnancy, rather than adopting more modern methods of contraception.

Methods:

This study uses data from the 2007 Ukraine Demographic and Health Survey, a nationally – representative survey of 6,841 women aged 15 – 49 that includes information on reproductive health and demographic characteristics (Ukraine Center for Social Reforms *et. al.* 2008). Information on a woman's lifetime and current abortions is available through the extensive pregnancy histories available for all women, including the timing and outcome of each pregnancy.

2,903 of these women were randomly selected for a module measuring emotional, physical, and sexual violence perpetrated by men against their current marital partners. The survey assessed emotional violence by asking a woman whether her husband had ever humiliated her in front of others, threatened her or someone close to her, or insulted her. Physical violence was measured by asking women whether their partners had ever pushed her, shaken her, thrown something at her, pulled her hair, slapped her, punched her with a fist or object, kicked her, dragged her, choked her, burned her, or threatened/attacked her with a knife, gun, or other weapon. Finally, the survey asked women whether their husbands had ever physically forced

them to have sexual intercourse or other unwanted sexual acts. Women who reported any type of violence were then asked how frequently these violent events had occurred in the past 12 months. Women were also asked whether they had experienced violence during any pregnancy, and the timing regarding when their marriage first became violent.

Multivariate logistic regression will be used to determine whether any or all of these types of marital intimate partner violence are associated with any terminated pregnancy, as well as whether a woman decided to terminate her most recent pregnancy, especially those that have occurred since the onset of violence within her marriage. All data analyses will be carried out in STATA Release 11.0 (StataSoft Co); data will be weighted using the included sample weights for the intimate partner violence module.

Preliminary Results:

Prevalence of lifetime marital physical intimate partner violence in this sample is 12.5%, emotional violence 21.1%, and sexual violence 4.7%. 40.5% of women have ever terminated a pregnancy, while 31.6% terminated their last pregnancy.

In bivariate analyses, lifetime physical, emotional, and sexual intimate partner violence [IPV] were all significantly associated with an increased likelihood of having ever terminated a pregnancy [physical IPV: OR = 1.912, $p < 0.001$; emotional IPV: OR = 1.56, $p < 0.001$; sexual IPV: OR = 1.81, $p = 0.014$]. All three types of IPV were also associated with a woman choosing to terminate her most recent pregnancy [physical IPV: OR = 1.92, $p < 0.001$; emotional IPV: OR = 1.66, $p < 0.001$; sexual IPV: OR = 2.20, $p = 0.003$].

References:

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