

Help-Seeking Behaviour of Intimate Partner Violence according to Socio-Demographic Aspects in Central Province, Sri Lanka

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Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs between a victim and perpetrator who are current or former spouses/ partners. Prevalence of intimate partner violence is high in Sri Lanka. However, women's dependence on marriage, lack of educational, occupational and financial resources and responsibility for their children limit their ability to end violent relationships. Very few studies have been conducted in a Sri Lankan context regarding help-seeking behaviour of victims of intimate partner violence. The objective of the present study is to identify help seeking behaviour of intimate partner violence according to socio-demographic aspects in a Sri Lankan context.

Data were collected from 129 patients of IPV admitted to Teaching Hospital Peradeniya and General Hospital Kandy with informed written consent of the patients. Information was entered to a questionnaire by the authors. The data was analysed focusing on the socio-demographic factors and help seeking behaviour.

All cases of intimate partner violence in the present study were of the female sex. Majority were married couples (90%). Thirty three percent were between the ages of 31-40 years. Twenty six percent were educated up to advanced level. Most of the victims (64%) were financially dependent on the other partner. Sixty six percent did not report a family history of spouse abuse while in 25% of accused partners and 8% of victims a family history of spouse abuse existed. Seventy nine percent of victims had experienced previous assaults. Out of them, 69% had complained to the police but only 29% had undergone previous interventions. The victim's confidence in legal authorities' decreased with increasing number of lodged police complaints with the highest percentage of confidence (93%) reported with two police complaints. Considering the current episode, 43% stated that the reason for admission to hospital was for security. Regarding future plans, 60% stated they would accept the other partner while only 8% mentioned to wanting legal separation or divorce.

The results indicate that females are the vulnerable group in this context. Majority are married couples which may be due to the fact that living together is not culturally accepted in Sri Lanka as in western countries. Although previous studies have shown that the commonest age group involved is between 20-29 years age, this study reveals that it is between 31-40 years in a Sri Lankan context. Research in other countries points out that women's financial dependence limit their ability to end violent relationships. This was further highlighted in our study. In western countries with mandatory arrest policies in spouse abuse, the arrest rates and victim satisfaction with the system is high. However, in Sri Lanka, the number of previous interventions was low though the frequency of police complaints was high. The confidence in police decreased with higher number of complaints.

In conclusion, majority of victims were between 31-40 years, unemployed, financially dependent on their spouses. Only a minority had undergone previous interventions and many accept their partner.