

Disability, Gender and Intimate Partner Violence: Relationships from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

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Objectives

- Describe how data can be used to determine trends in intimate partner violence for women with disabilities
- Describe differences in intimate partner violence for women with disabilities when compared to women without disabilities and men with disabilities

Introduction

- Between 25% and 31% of American women have been physically or sexually abused by a husband or boyfriend during their lifetime^{1,2}
- Women abused by their partner are more likely to be disabled or have an illness that affects their capacity to carry out ADLs¹
- More likely to confront depression and/or anxiety¹

Introduction

- Women with disabilities have 40% greater odds of violence than women without disabilities and appear to be at particular risk for severe violence³
- One study showed that women with disabilities were not significantly more likely to experience physical assault but are four times more likely to experience sexual assault⁴

Introduction

- Studies suggest there is a significant difference in the duration of violence, with women with disabilities experiencing multiple types of violence for significantly longer periods of time than women without disabilities^{3,5}

Introduction

- Also experience disability specific forms of violence⁶
 - Removing a battery from a wheelchair
 - Demanding a kiss before assisting with a bath or transfer
 - Withholding medication

Vulnerabilities⁷

- Increased dependency on others for care
- Denial of human rights, resulting in feelings of powerlessness
- Less risk of discovery perceived by the perpetrator
- Difficulty in being believed

Vulnerabilities

- Less education in appropriate and inappropriate sexuality
- Social isolation, increased risk of manipulation
- Physical helplessness
- Values and attitudes of those within the field of disabilities toward mainstreaming without consideration of self-protection

Risk Factors⁸⁻¹²

- Cultural devaluation of women and persons with disabilities
- Overprotection by families, especially with regard to sexuality
- Denial of sexuality in women with disabilities
- Cognitive limitations with certain disabilities
- Lack of economic independence

Risk Factors

- Employment, education, race/ethnicity, age and relationship status have also been shown to influence abuse

Risk Factors

- Women with disabilities also have fewer resources to escape the violence than women without disabilities
 - Inaccessible shelters
 - Lack of alternative attendant services
 - Loss of independence and risk of institutional care
 - Inability to contact shelters

Purpose of the Study

- Examine data from the 2005 BRFSS to determine rate of sexual and physical violence experienced by women with disabilities compared to women without disabilities and men with disabilities

Hypotheses

- Women with disabilities experience physical and sexual violence at a significantly higher rate than women without disabilities and men with disabilities
- Being female and having a disability increases the likelihood that person will experience intimate partner violence

Methodology

- Study used data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System from 1995-2002.
- Publicly available dataset from the CDC.
- Shown to be reliable and valid.
- More information on www.cdc.gov

Methodology

- BRFSS is a state-wide, random-digit dialed telephone survey
- Tracks health behaviors, risk factors, and health status of non-institutionalized adults aged 18 and older in the US

Methodology

- Final weighting adjusts for the number of telephone numbers per household, number of adults per household, number of interviews per cluster.
- Post-stratification is then completed by the state population distribution according to age, race and sex.

Methodology

- Data is then weighted further with over- or under-representation of any single record addressed through post-stratification, so that the distribution of the sample data reflects the total population of the sampled area (CDC, 1998)

Methodology

- Outcome measure were types of abuse
- Sexual abuse was defined by a “yes” response to “Have you ever experienced any unwanted sex by a current or former intimate partner?”

Methodology

- Physical threat was defined as “yes” to “has an intimate partner ever threatened you with physical violence?”
- Attempted physical violence was defined as “yes” to “Has an intimate partner ever attempted physical violence against you?”

Methodology

- Physical abuse was determined by a “yes” response to “Has an intimate partner ever hit, slapped, pushed, kicked or physically hurt you in any way?”
- Independent variables included gender and disability
- Disability determined by activity limitation question

Methodology

- Confounding variables included:
 - Employment
 - Education
 - Race/ethnicity
 - Age
 - Relationship status

Methodology

- Analysis consisted of cross tabulations and chi square comparing the demographics of women with and without disabilities who had experienced the 4 types of violence
- A second analysis was completed comparing the demographics of women and men with disabilities

Methodology

- To determine the likelihood of variables increasing the odds of violence, a series of logistic regression analyses were conducted by type of violence
- The coefficients of these models are expressed as odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI) reported to indicate the precision of these estimates

Results

- When demographic characteristics were examined, in all cases, women with disabilities who experience abuse are significantly older, have less education, are more likely to be unemployed, and are less likely to be in a relationship than women without disabilities who experience abuse

Results

- When compared to men with disabilities who experience abuse, women are significantly less likely to be employed
- Other demographics of abuse victims with disabilities were similar

Relationship of Risk Factors to Interpersonal Violence

Variable	Threatened Violence		Attempted Violence		Physically Abused (Hit, Etc.)		Unwanted Sex	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95%CI	OR	95% CI
Gender Male (ref) Female	1.0 2.67	2.5-2.9	1.0 1.49	1.4-1.6	1.0 2.21	2.1-2.4	1.0 8.79	7.6-10.2
Disability Not disabled (ref) Disabled	1.0 2.04	1.9-2.2	1.0 1.88	1.7-2.0	1.0 1.99	1.9-2.1	1.0 2.3	2.1-2.6
Age 50 and above (ref) 18-49	1.0 1.46	1.4-1.6	1.0 1.52	1.4-1.6	1.0 1.44	1.4-1.5	1.0 1.23	1.1-1.4
Race/Ethnicity Other race/ethnicity (ref) Caucasian	1.0 1.16	1.1-1.2	1.0 1.06	1.0-1.1	1.0 1.18	1.1-1.3	1.0 1.12	1.0-1.2
Education Some college and above (ref) No school- high school grad	1.0 .91	.9-1.0	1.0 1.03	1.0-1.1	1.0 .90	.9-1.0	1.0 .80	.7-.9
Employment Employed (ref) Not employed	1.0 1.23	1.1-1.4	1.0 1.29	1.2-1.5	1.0 1.23	1.1-1.4	1.0 1.44	1.2-1.7
Relationship status Uncoupled (ref) Coupled	1.0 .50	.47-.53	1.0 .54	.5-.6	1.0 .49	.47-.52	1.0 .53	.5-.6

Relationship of Risk Factors to Interpersonal Violence for Women

Variable	Threatened Violence		Attempted Violence		Physically Abused (Hit, Etc.)		Unwanted Sex	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Disability Not disabled (ref) Disabled	1.0 1.99	1.8-2.2	1.0 1.89	1.7-2.1	1.0 2.05	1.9-2.2	1.0 2.38	2.1-2.7
Age 50 and above (ref) 18-49	1.0 1.39	1.3-1.5	1.0 1.43	1.3-1.6	1.0 1.34	1.2-1.4	1.0 1.22	1.1-1.3
Race/Ethnicity Other race/ethnicity (ref) Caucasian	1.0 1.25	1.2-1.3	1.0 1.09	1.0-1.2	1.0 1.22	1.1-1.3	1.0 1.25	1.1-1.4
Education Some college and above (ref) No school- high school grad	1.0 .90	.8-1.0	1.0 1.07	1.0-1.2	1.0 .94	.9-1.0	1.0 .78	.7-.9
Employment Employed (ref) Not employed	1.0 1.34	1.2-1.5	1.0 1.34	1.2-1.5	1.0 1.32	1.2-1.5	1.0 1.46	1.2-1.7
Relationship status Uncoupled (ref) Coupled	1.0 .50	.46-.53	1.0 .54	.5-.6	1.0 .49	.46-.53	1.0 .55	.5-.6

Relationship of Risk Factors to Interpersonal Violence for Persons with Disabilities

Variable	Threatened Violence		Attempted Violence		Physically Abused (Hit, Etc.)		Unwanted Sex	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Gender Male (ref) Female	1.0 2.68	2.3-3.1	1.0 1.58	1.4-1.8	1.0 2.52	2.2-2.9	1.0 12.22	8.8- 16.9
Age 50 and above (ref) 18-49	1.0 1.54	1.3-1.8	1.0 1.56	1.4-1.8	1.0 1.51	1.3-1.7	1.0 1.24	1.0-1.5
Race/Ethnicity Other race/ethnicity (ref) Caucasian	1.0 .92	.8-1.7	1.0 .97	.8-1.1	1.0 .98	.8-1.2	1.0 .98	.8-1.2
Education Some college and above (ref) No school- high school grad	1.0 .88	.8-1.0	1.0 1.06	.9-1.2	1.0 .88	.8-1.0	1.0 .82	.7-1.0
Employment Employed (ref) Not employed	1.0 1.24	1.0-1.5	1.0 1.31	1.1-1.6	1.0 1.13	.9-1.4	1.0 1.42	1.1-1.8
Relationship status Uncoupled (ref) Coupled	1.0 .54	.5-.6	1.0 .62	.5-.7	1.0 .51	.5-.6	1.0 .59	.5-.7

Discussion

- Data supported a relationship between disability and gender to intimate partner violence
- Women with disabilities are at higher risk of experiencing all forms of abuse than women without disabilities and men with disabilities, especially sexual abuse

Discussion

- Results consistent with previous studies, but unique as the data comes from a large population based dataset
- Contrary to other studies, results from this study showed that there is increased likelihood of violence for women with disabilities for all types of abuse, not just sexual abuse compared to women without disabilities

Discussion

- When populations were compared, less significant differences occurred between genders than between those with and without disabilities, showing that disability has an equalizing effect with regard to the experience of violence.
- Education and race/ethnicity do not appear to have a strong influence on the experience of violence

Discussion

- Public health officials, health care professionals and policymakers should be aware of the increased vulnerability to violence experienced by women with disabilities
- Screenings and interventions as well as protective policies need to be established

Strengths/Limitations

- Strength in the use of a large database
- Does not include information about institutionalized adults
- Violence may be underreported, especially for persons with disabilities
- Definition of disability

Future Research

- Violence by type of disability (e.g., physical or psychosocial)
- Evaluation of screenings for health care professionals
- Modification of shelters

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Thank you for your time!

Any questions?