



Domestic Violence in the Dominican Republic

An assessment of an abused women's
shelter

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Domestic Violence

- Domestic violence: 'violence experienced by women at the hands of their spouse, partner or other family member.'
- Health Effects
 - Physical
 - Mental
 - Sexual
 - Social

Dominican Republic

- Domestic violence in the Dominican Republic
 - Underreported
 - Countrywide issue



Dominican Republic

- Approximately 2,000 rape cases were filed by the Santo Domingo District Attorney's office in one year.
- 13,111 domestic violence cases were reported to the government, and 11,600 domestic violence complaints were processed by the Department of Family and Children in one year.

Dominican Republic

- Between 129 and 200 women are killed each year by their boyfriend or husband
- 40% of women and children were victims of domestic violence
- 80% of women ages 15-45 that seek healthcare do so as a result of domestic violence

Background

- Law in the Dominican Republic
 - 1997 to protect women
 - Not enforced
 - Police
- Power and Control
- Machismo
- Cultural Norm



Shelter

- In 2004 Fundación Familia Sana established the ONLY known shelter for abused women, *C.A.S.A Albergue*.
 - Non-profit organization
 - Collaborate with SEM: The Dominican Secretary of State for Women



Purpose

- Descriptive Study
- This study sought to understand the women and families who utilized the shelter's services and to determine the efficacy of the shelter in terms of the women's overall health.

Objectives

1. Obtain a general understanding of domestic violence in the Dominican Republic.
2. Identify key health issues of abused women in the Dominican Republic.
3. Identify the health issues of the women and children living at the shelter and determine those that were being addressed by the shelter, and those that were not.

Participants

- Women who have stayed at *C.A.S.A Albergue*
- Staff of the Fundación Familia Sana-Dominican Republic

Data Collection

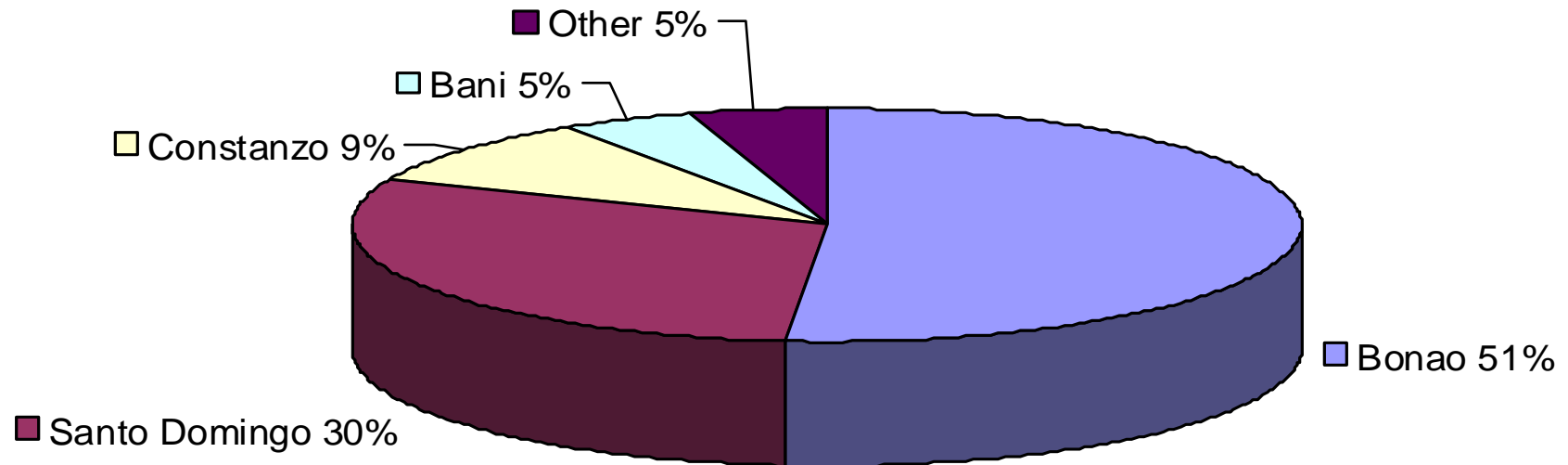
- A multi-method design
 - Quantitative and qualitative techniques
 - Open-ended interviews
 - Surveys
 - Participant observation
 - Review of written documentation



Results: Demographics

- 52 women and 104 children total.
- The majority of women are from the surrounding villages and the capital, Santo Domingo.
- The average age of the women was 30 yrs.
- The average number of children the women came to the shelter with was 2.

Location



Results: Financial Burden

- 63% of women were presently employed at the time they arrived.
 - Women working needed to take days off of work to be at the shelter.
 - Loss of income and/or loss of their job.
 - Women not working usually financially dependent on their abuser.
 - May influence their decision on whether or not to go back to their abusers.

Results: Away from home

- 25 out of the 53 women who stayed beyond seven days.
 - 7 of those women stayed more than 20 days.
- Extended time → financial burden to the women who were employed.
- One woman stayed for a total of 67 days.

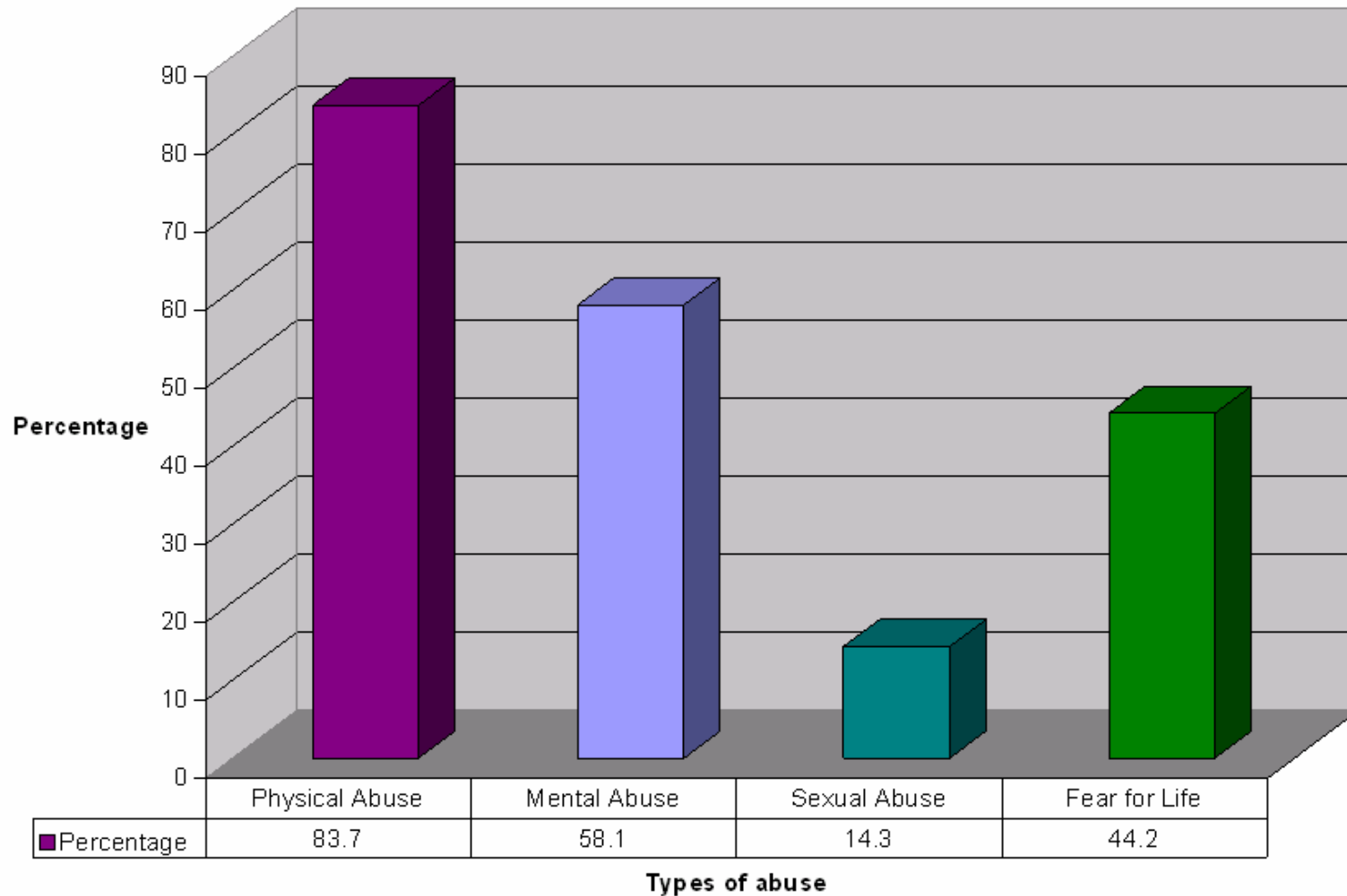


Results: Children

- Children may have been abused or witnessed mother being abused.
- Suffer from social and psychological disorders from trauma (PTSD).
- Initial contract
 - Collaborating agency was to provide social and psychological services for children.
 - Agency did not cooperate
- Cases observed in shelter



Types of Abuse



Physical Health

- 84% of the women reported physical abuse.
- Facial back and arm injuries.
- Women seen at local hospital.
- Medicine
 - Anti-inflammatory, Anti-biotic and Analgesic drugs.
 - C.A.S.A purchases and charts the prescribed drugs that are needed for the women.

Mental Health

- 58% of the women reported mental abuse.
- Arriving to shelter
 - *depressed, stressed and worried*
- The shelter lacks a qualified therapist.
 - Live-in staff is qualified to counsel the women about their abusive experiences and listen to their stories.

Mental Health

- One woman stated that it made her feel better to talk with another abused woman in the shelter. This helped both women to not feel "alone".
- Most women leave with
 - less *fear, worries* and *stress*
- Women who know that they are going back to their abusers begin to feel fear and have nearly the same worries and stress as when they came to the shelter.

Sexual/Reproductive Health

- 14% of women reported sexual abuse
- Sexually abused women arrive at the shelter
 - Transported to the local hospital for an examination
 - May be given drug prescriptions for pain and swelling
 - May be examined for STI's and given pregnancy test
- There are no qualified sexual or mental abuse counselors on site to talk with the women about their sexual abuse.

Fear

- A leading factor in why they come to shelter
- Shelter is a safe haven for the women
- After they leave the shelter, some women go to
 - Family or Friends
 - Back to abuser
 - Women have said... “What else am I going to do? I don’t have anywhere else to stay, my husband makes the money, and my children want to be with their father.”

Conclusions

- Domestic violence is a serious problem in the Dominican Republic
 - Escalated by culture, politics and economics.
 - Laws established but not enforced.
 - Physical, mental and sexual health issues that arise from violence.



Conclusions

- The shelter addresses physical and some sexual health issues.
- Shelter helped to provide immediate assistance to those women who sought refuge.
- Mental health issues from mental abuse and sexual abuse are not being addressed by certified counselors.
- No mental health services for children.
 - These services are needed in order to completely assess the women's health and assist them on the road to recovering from the trauma.

Further Research

- Children
- Women
 - In depth history of violence
 - Situation after they leave the shelter
 - Abuse
 - Health