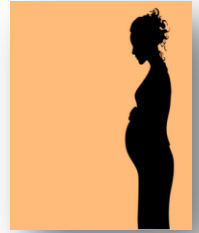


Incidents of Non-Armed Conflict Forced Pregnancy among Women of African Descent in South Africa, Jamaica, and the United States

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Background

Forced pregnancy is defined by the International Criminal Court (ICC) as a crime that is committed when captors forcefully impregnate women and hold them hostage until they cannot safely abort the unborn child. Because of the underlying emphasis on widespread, systematic attack and armed military control contained within the definition and prosecution of this crime, the ICC's recognition of forced pregnancy is most often in association with armed military conflict. However, we hypothesized that this act of injustice can occur and can have implications for women and children outside the context of armed conflict. The ICC definition of forced pregnancy completely excludes women who may experience the very same facilitating factors of the ICC's notion of forced pregnancy—rape/sexual coercion, lack of contraception control, and limited access to abortion services—but in a different context. Therefore, forced pregnancy may occur on a larger scale and may be more of a public health issue than is generally conceptualized. In this study, we focused on the countries of South Africa, Jamaica, and the United States to examine the impact of rape/sexual coercion, lack of contraception control, and limited access to abortion services on unwanted pregnancy among women of African descent in non-armed conflict territories from each sector of the African Diaspora. We discussed the forced pregnancies that transpired during the Rwandan genocide to juxtapose the issues that facilitate armed and non-armed conflict forced pregnancies. Additionally, we examined each country during the mid to late 1990's (in close proximity to the time of the Rwandan genocide which serves as an example of forced pregnancy in an armed conflict area) in order to analyze findings under the context of a similar world climate for each setting.



Purpose

Research shows that women of African descent disproportionately experience rape/sexual coercion, lack of contraception control, and limited access to abortion services even outside of armed conflict settings. This study sought to identify whether or not these risk factors can actually lead to forced pregnancy outside of armed conflict settings.

Methods

According to the definition of pregnancy unwantedness, the pregnancies that the ICC categorizes as forced may also be construed as unwanted. Hence, a cross-sectional correlational approach was used to examine the relationship between rape/sexual coercion, lack of contraception control, and unwanted pregnancy among women of African descent in South Africa, Jamaica, and the United States. Limited access to abortion services could only be assessed through the literature. Fisher's Exact Test, Chi Square Test, and Logistic Regression analysis were used to determine the level of association between the risk factors and the outcome variable of unwanted pregnancy.

Results

Findings revealed that in each country, rape/sexual coercion and/or lack of contraception control increase or have a tendency to increase the risk for unwanted pregnancy. These results indicate that armed and non-armed conflict forced pregnancy have very similar facilitating factors, occur within a different context, but have the same outcome—unwanted pregnancy that results from force.

Conclusions

This exploratory study provides evidence that non-armed conflict forced pregnancy exists and is a global health issue that warrants further research in order to determine more causal associations between non-armed conflict forced pregnancy and its facilitating factors. We intend to use this exploratory phase of research as the underpinning necessary to increase the recognizability of forced pregnancies other than those defined by the ICC and to, thereby, inform the creation, improvement, and tailoring of health services, policies, and interventions that seek to aid affected persons.

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