



PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN POST-CONFLICT SETTINGS: A HOSPITAL-BASED STUDY IN HYDERABAD

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexual violence is a widespread problem in post-conflict areas, severely impacting the mental health of survivors, including adults. Recognizing the scope and characteristics of this effect is vital for providing appropriate help and support. **Objectives:** To explore the psychological effects of sexual violence on adults in a post-conflict context, targeting patients who presented to the Emergency Department of Liaquat University Hospital, Hyderabad. **Method:** The study reviewed the medical records of 120 patients who reported sexual violence between January 2022 and December 2023. The analysis looked at the type of violence, patient demographics, and results from psychological assessments.

Results: The study found a strong link between sexual violence and negative mental health outcomes in adults. Adults commonly experienced anxiety, depression, and PTSD, behavioral problems, and difficulties with social interactions. Females were more frequently affected than males across all age groups. **Conclusion:** Sexual violence has a deep and lasting impact on the mental health of survivors in post-conflict areas. Early detection and comprehensive support, along with specific interventions, are key to minimizing the trauma's negative effects.

Keywords: Sexual violence, psychological well-being, post-conflict settings, emergency department, Liaquat University Hospital Hyderabad.

INTRODUCTION: Sexual violence is a serious human rights violation and a deeply rooted problem globally. In areas recovering from conflict, its impact is especially severe, where people are already struggling to cope with the effects of war and displacement. [1]. The trauma of sexual violence deeply impacts the psychological well-being of adults, compounding the challenges of recovery and reconstruction in already fragile settings [2]. In the aftermath of conflict, communities are frequently fragmented, with weakened social systems and interrupted essential services. This instability often fuels an increase in sexual violence, perpetrated by both state and non-state entities. [3]. In the absence of rule of law, women and men are targeted for sexual exploitation, abuse, and assault, frequently by perpetrators who escape punishment. Such acts result in physical harm and profound emotional scars, eroding individuals' sense of security and self-worth [4]. Hyderabad, a city in a post-conflict region, provides a critical glimpse into the complex effects of sexual violence. A tertiary care hospital in the city directly witnesses the psychological impact on survivors, highlighting the need to understand these effects to develop effective support systems for adults [5]. In post-conflict areas like Hyderabad, the consequences of sexual violence can be particularly severe, with survivors often experiencing long-lasting psychological trauma. This trauma can manifest in various ways, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [6].

A study at Hyderabad's tertiary care hospital examined the various dimensions of sexual violence and its effects on survivors' psychological well-being, aiming to inform both clinical practice and policy development [7]. This study uses a mix of numerical data analysis and in-depth exploration to understand the complex factors influencing the post-traumatic experiences of individuals affected by sexual violence in conflict zones. [8]. One of the primary objectives of this study is to assess occurrence of sexual violence among adults seeking care at the hospital [9]. Through medical record analysis and structured interviews, we investigated the prevalence of sexual violence and the healthcare response. Additionally, we'll examine the psychosocial aspects of survivors' experiences, focusing on factors like stigma, social support, and coping mechanisms. [10]. Through in-depth interviews and psychological assessments detailed stories of survivors' experiences, highlighting both their resilience and vulnerability gathered as they work towards healing. We also identified gaps in current services and support for survivors of sexual violence in post-conflict areas [11,12]. By working with healthcare providers, community leaders, and policymakers, we aimed to promote comprehensive approaches that address the complex needs of survivors, including medical, psychological, and social aspects. This study seeks to enhance our understanding of how sexual violence affects the mental health of adults in these settings. [13]. By highlighting the challenges faced by survivors and the systems that impact their lives, we aim to drive positive change and create more supportive environments for those affected by sexual violence.[14]. Through collaborative efforts and informed interventions, we strive to create pathways to healing, strength, and sustainable peace in communities impacted by conflict.

METHODOLOGY:

Study Design: The study used a retrospective cohort design to examine the effects of sexual violence on the psychological well-being of adults in areas affected by conflict.

Study Setting: The study was conducted at the Emergency department of Liaquat University Hospital, Hyderabad, in collaboration with the Department of Forensic Medicine & Toxicology, Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences, Jamshoro.

Study Population: An overall of 120 patients who presented with a history of sexual violence and sought medical assistance at the aforementioned study site between January 2022 and December 2023 were included in the study.

Data Collection: A retrospective review of medical records was conducted to extract relevant data, including demographic information, details of sexual violence, psychological assessments and interventions. Data sources included hospital databases records of patients visited emergency department in Liaquat University Hospital Hyderabad. Validated assessment tools, such as

standardized questionnaires and clinical interviews were used to evaluate psychological well-being, specifically assessing symptoms of anxiety, depression, PTSD and other psychological outcomes.

Data Analysis: Statistical analysis was conducted using appropriate software. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data and symptom frequency. while inferential statistics (chi-square tests and regression analysis) were applied to investigate associations between variables.

Limitations: This study was limited by its retrospective design, reliance on existing medical records, potential biases in reporting and classification, and the inherent limitations of observational research in establishing cause-and-effect relationships.

Implications: This study's findings enhance our understanding of how sexual violence affects mental health in post-conflict areas, helping to inform the creation of specific interventions and support services for survivors.

RESULTS

The study was conducted in the Emergency Department of Liaquat University Hospital in Hyderabad, focusing on the impact of sexual violence on the psychological well-being of adults in post-conflict settings. Over a period of two years, from January 2022 to December 2023, a total of 120 patients were enrolled in the study. The demographic analysis revealed that the majority of the participants were male, constituting 57% of the sample while 43% were female. The average age of the participants was 35.7 years with a standard deviation of 8.4, indicating a relatively young adult population. In terms of marital status, 60% of the participants were unmarried suggesting that a significant proportion of the survivors were likely to be young adults or individuals without family responsibilities at the time of the incident. Furthermore, the educational background of the participants showed that 50% had attained a tertiary level of education, indicating a moderately educated group of survivors who had potentially been exposed to various forms of support and resources. These demographic characteristics provide a foundation for understanding the impact of sexual violence on the psychological well-being of survivors in this specific context.

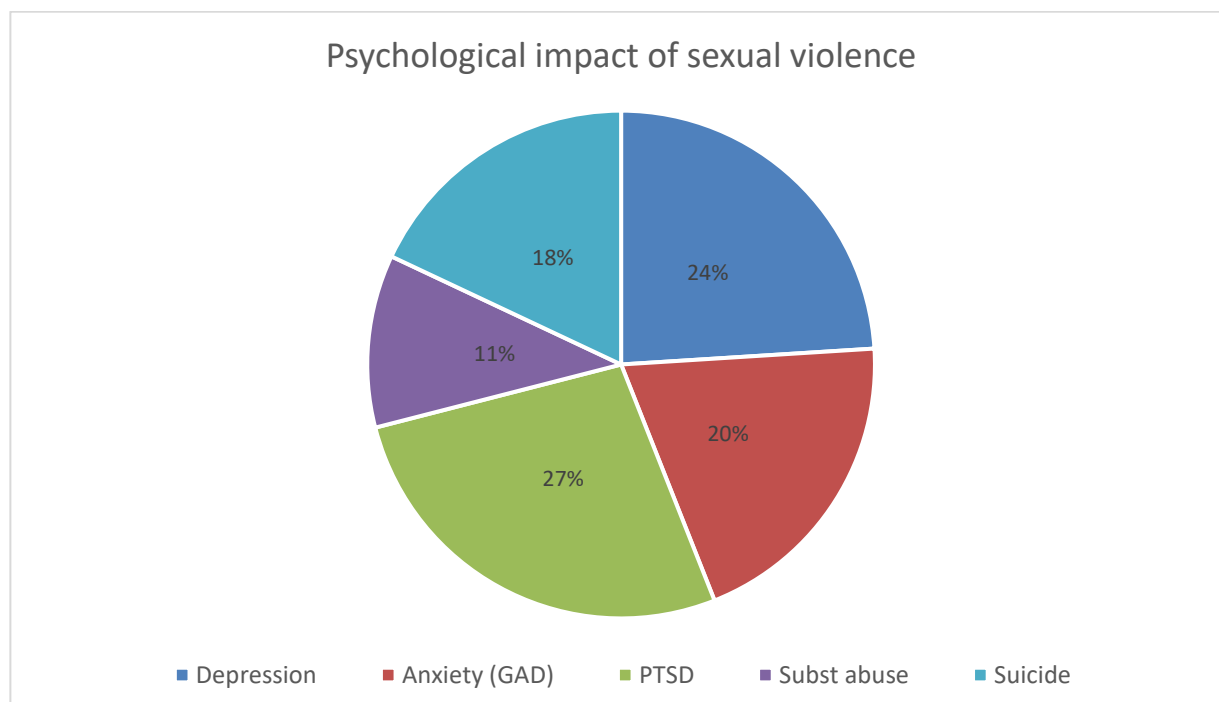
The study revealed a significant prevalence of psychological issues among participants who had experienced sexual violence. Specifically, 24% of participants were found to be suffering from depression, indicating a substantial burden of this mental health condition. Anxiety was also a common issue, affecting 20% of participants. Notably, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was the most prevalent condition, with 27% of participants reporting symptoms consistent with this diagnosis. In contrast, substance abuse and suicidal ideation were reported by a smaller proportion of participants, highlighting the varying ways in which survivors of sexual violence may experience psychological distress.

Table 1: Showed the demographic features of participants.

Demographic Characteristic	Emergency Department
MALE	68 (57%)
FEMALE	52 (43%)
Age (years)	
Mean \pm SD	35.7 \pm 8.4
Marital Status	
Married	48 (40%)
Unmarried	72 (60%)
Education Level	
Primary	18 (15%)
Secondary	42 (35%)
Tertiary	60 (50%)

Table 2: Outlines the Psychological Impact of Sexual Violence as reported by the participants.

Psychological impacts	Emergency Department (%)
Depression (MDD)	29(24%)
Anxiety (GAD)	24 (20%)
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	32 (27%)
Substance Abuse	13 (11%)
Suicidal Ideation	22(18%)

**Figure 1: Demonstrate the psychological impact of sexual violence as reported by the participants.**

DISCUSSION

Sexual violence has a devastating impact on individuals' mental health, especially in areas affected by conflict. A study conducted at a major hospital in Hyderabad explored this critical issue, revealing its severe and long-lasting effects [15]. In the wake of conflict, communities face widespread devastation, and individuals are left to deal with the dual burden of physical ruin and psychological trauma inflicted by violence. Sexual violence, especially, leaves deep and lasting scars on survivors, affecting their mental health in complex and multifaceted ways. [16]. The study in Hyderabad aimed to understand the extent of these impacts, providing crucial insights into the psychological toll of such atrocities.

For adults, the consequences of sexual violence can be far-reaching, affecting multiple aspects of their lives, including their relationships, work, and overall well-being. [17]. The experience of sexual violence can lead to various mental health struggles, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, and overwhelming feelings of shame and guilt. This trauma can fundamentally alter a person's perception of themselves, leading to deep psychological distress. [18].

Many survivors of sexual violence are plagued by recurring nightmares, flashbacks, and intrusive thoughts that bring back memories of the traumatic event. Furthermore, the study highlighted the widespread impact of these psychological wounds, which can also manifest as physical symptoms such as chronic pain, headaches, and gastrointestinal issues, underscoring the complex interplay between mental and physical health. [19]. The combination of physical and emotional pain highlights the overall impact of sexual violence on survivors' well-being, emphasizing the need for complete support and intervention. When it comes to adults, the psychological effects of sexual violence can be profoundly debilitating. [20]. As independent individuals, adults may struggle to

regain a sense of autonomy and trust, facing challenges such as anxiety, depression and PTSD, which can significantly impact their relationships and daily lives. The Hyderabad study found a significant prevalence of psychological disorders among child survivors, including developmental delays, behavioral issues, and emotional dysregulation, highlighting the urgent need for support and intervention. [21]. The trauma of sexual violence can significantly impact young survivors' development, affecting their ability to build healthy relationships and navigate the world with confidence and a sense of security. [22]. Many child survivors of sexual violence experience symptoms like PTSD, nightmares, and regressive behaviors, as they struggle to process and cope with the trauma. The stigma surrounding sexual violence can worsen their emotional distress, leading to feelings of shame, isolation, and self-blame. In post-conflict settings, where resources are scarce and support systems are fragmented, addressing the complex psychological needs of survivors becomes even more challenging, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support. [23].

The study highlighted the need for mental health services that are accessible, culturally sensitive, and tailored to the specific needs of sexual violence survivors. It also stressed the importance of community-based interventions that help survivors build resilience, regain control over their lives, and overcome the stigma and shame that can prevent them from speaking out. [24]. A study at a Hyderabad hospital showed that sexual violence has a profound and lasting impact on the mental health of adults in areas recovering from conflict. The effects can include PTSD, depression, physical symptoms, and developmental challenges, demonstrating the deep and widespread psychological harm caused by such trauma. [25]. Addressing these challenges, we need a comprehensive approach that includes accessible mental health services, community support, and efforts to break the stigma and silence surrounding the issue. By working together, we can alleviate the suffering of survivors and promote healing and resilience. The study highlights the importance of tailored mental health services for survivors in post-conflict areas.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted at the tertiary care hospital in Hyderabad sheds light on psychological toll of sexual violence on individuals in areas recovering from conflict. The profound impact of sexual violence on psychological well-being of people in post-conflict settings. The findings underscore enduring trauma and emotional scars inflicted by such atrocities, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive support systems and mental health interventions tailored to address unique needs of survivors. By recognizing and addressing the psychological consequences of sexual violence, we can strive towards fostering healing, resilience, and empowerment among affected individuals, paving the way for their holistic recovery and reintegration into society.

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