

Lifetime Experience of Gender Based Violence among Female Health Science Students

Mukta Singh Bhandari,¹ Jagdish Chataut¹

¹Department of Community Medicine, Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences, Dhulikhel, Kavrepalanchok, Nepal.

ABSTRACT

Background: Gender based violence is a common public health problem across all parts of the world with women and girls being common victims. Despite the equal risk of unmarried women to experience gender based violence, there is dearth of studies done in Nepal. Thus, this study aims to find out the lifetime experience of gender based violence among unmarried women.

Methods: This was an analytical cross-sectional study done among female university students, studying at different streams of Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences, Dhulikhel. Ethical approval was taken from Institutional Review Committee of Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (Reference number: 04/21). The calculated sample size was 120 and non-probability sampling technique was used. The study was conducted from March to May 2021. Data was collected by using Google Forms and analyzed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 16.

Results: The lifetime experience of gender based violence was 154 (92%) with Public place violence 140 (91%), childhood violence 92 (60%) and intimate partner violence 67 (44%). Total 45 (27%) of the respondents had witnessed violence in the family and 24 (14%) had experienced discrimination at home. Relationship status, experience of childhood violence and witnessing violence during childhood were associated with gender based violence in the logistic regression. Total 79 (51%) respondents shared about their experience with someone while none reported. Total 41 (28%) respondents mentioned that they never faced gender based violence despite mentioning about experiencing violence in the questionnaire.

Conclusions: Lifetime experience of gender based violence was high among unmarried young women with most of the respondents experiencing public place violence.

Keywords: Gender based violence; intimate partner violence; violence

INTRODUCTION

Gender based violence (GBV) is common in all societies which may be psychological, physical or sexual. It may include small issues ranging from name calling to serious issues like sexual abuse and honor killing. Besides domestic violence, intimate partner violence (IPV) and public place violence (PPV) are also common which may occur at home or at public places like schools, colleges, workplaces and even in public transportations.¹⁻⁴

GBV may result in health impacts like physical injuries, unplanned pregnancy, unsafe abortion and psychological problems like depression, suicidal ideation etc. It can also have a negative impact in academics as well as result in coping behaviors like excessive consumption of alcohol and drug abuse.⁵⁻⁷

As very less studies have been done about gender based violence among unmarried women, this study aims to determine the prevalence of GBV among them.

METHODS

This was an analytical, cross-sectional study conducted at Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences (KUSMS) from March to May 2021. Ethical approval was taken from Institutional Review Committee of KUSMS (Reference number: 04/2021). A list of all unmarried female students currently enrolled at KUSMS in the streams Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS), Bachelor of Physiotherapy (BPT), Bachelor in Nursing Science (Bachelor of Midwifery, Bachelor of Nursing Science and

Correspondence: Mukta Singh Bhandari, Department of Community Medicine, Kathmandu University School of Medical Sciences, Dhulikhel, Kavrepalanchok, Nepal. Email: me_mukta@hotmail.com, Phone: +9779841383826.

Bachelor of Science in Nursing), Bachelor of Medical Image Technology (BSc MIT) and Bachelor of Medical Lab Technology (BSc MLT) was prepared with the help of class representatives and course incharge. There were total 333 eligible students among which email address was not found for 21 students giving the sampling frame of 312.

As study about GBV among unmarried women had not been done in Nepal and in the study area, prevalence of 50% was assumed with 10% error which gave the sample size of 96. After adding 20% non-response rate, the final sample size was 116 which was rounded to 120.

A semi-structured questionnaire which was prepared in English was used for pre-testing among 10 students out of total 312 students which was later not included in the final study. No corrections were required after the pre-testing of the study. The questionnaire included socio-demographic profile, history of violence during childhood, intimate partner violence, violence at public places and help seeking for GBV.

Though the minimum sample size required was 120, all eligible students were sent an email with an invitation attached with the questionnaire to take part in the study. Consent form was attached with the Google form and only after consenting for the study, participants could continue with the study. The consent form was in English which mentioned that the participation in study was voluntary and participating or not participating would not hamper their education or their image. It also mentioned that all the information given by the respondent would be kept confidential and it would not be possible to trace them. For maintaining the confidentiality, no identifying information such as name and roll number were asked in the questionnaire. Data was collected using Google Forms and later imported to statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 16 for analysis.

Experience of violence was considered to be true if young women ever experienced any form of violence i.e. childhood violence, public place violence or intimate partner violence. Childhood violence included physical, sexual and emotional violence. The spectrum of activities comprising child sexual violence included inappropriate touch and emotional violence included humiliation, discrimination, undressing a child to humiliate etc.^{3, 7, 8}

Public place violence means any gender based violence occurring in public place like schools, colleges, transportations, roads etc. Emotional or verbal violence includes insulting in public, whistling, singing, passing

comments, stalking and targeting women while public sexual violence include inappropriate touching, cornering, kissing and exhibiting genitals.^{6, 8, 9}

Intimate partner is any current or former partner with whom women have a romantic relationship. Intimate partner violence refers to behaviours committed by a current or former intimate partner that causes physical, emotional, or sexual harm.⁶

In the study, mean frequency and percentage was calculated for descriptive analysis. Logistic regression was used to identify risk factors associated with any violence, childhood violence and intimate partner violence and odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are reported. After conducting the bi-variate analysis of all forms of violence and the potential risk factors, significant risk factors were then included in the multivariable logistic regression.

RESULTS

Total 167 students out of 302 participated in the study making the response rate of 55% only. The age of participants ranged between 18 to 28 years where the mean age was 21.71 (\pm 1.757 SD) years. A total of 158 (95%) females belonged to Hindu religion and 70 (42%) were Bramhin. Total 137 (82%) students lived outside home which was hostel or in a rented room/flat. Out of 167 participants, total 100 (60%) had ever been in a relationship (Table 1).

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of respondents.

Socio-demographic variables		n (%)
Religion	Hindu	158 (95)
	Buddhist and others	9 (5)
	Bramhin	70 (42)
Ethnicity	Chhetri	32 (19)
	Adiwasi/Janajati	57 (34)
	Others	8 (5)
Place of residence	Home	30 (18)
	Hostel or rented room/flat	137 (82)
	BDS	25 (15)
Stream	BPT	52 (31)
	MBBS	51 (30.5)
	Nursing	39 (23.5)
Ever been in a relationship	Yes	100 (60)
	No	67 (40)

Among 167 respondents, 154 (92%) had ever experienced any form of violence in their life time and 45 (27%)

responded of witnessing violence in the family during childhood while 24 (14%) were victims of discrimination in their own home. Out of 154 respondents who experienced violence, the most common form of violence was public place violence 140 (91%) followed by childhood violence 92 (60%). Total 67 (44%) of the respondents experienced intimate partner violence.

Table 2. Forms of gender based violence.

Forms of gender based violence		n (%)
Childhood violence (n=92)	Physical	57 (62)
	Sexual	57 (62)
	Psychological	24 (26)
Intimate partner violence (n=67)	Physical	6 (9)
	Sexual	9 (13)
	Psychological	46 (69)
Public place violence (n=140)	Control	53 (79)
	Verbal	57 (41)
	Sexual	83 (59)
	Stalking	49 (35)

Bivariate and multivariate logistic regression were done to see the association between socio-demographic variables and different experiences of violence i.e. any form of violence, childhood violence, intimate partner

violence and public place violence.

Table 3 shows that women who were ever in a relationship (COR= 5.673; 95% CI: 1.499-21.470) were more likely to ever experience any form of violence. Even after adjusting with all socio-demographic variables, multivariate analysis showed that women in a relationship were more likely to experience any form of violence (AOR=5.856; 95% CI: 1.429-24.002).

Table 4 shows that women who had experienced violence during childhood were more likely to experience intimate partner violence (COR=2.072; 95% CI: 1.094-3.926). Even after controlling for other socio-demographic variables, women with experience of childhood violence were more likely to suffer from partner violence (AOR= 1.964; CI: 1.004-3.840).

Table 5 shows that respondents who lived outside for education (i.e. in hostel or rented room) compared to those living at home were less likely to suffer from public place violence (COR= 0.373; CI: 0.149-0.936) while those who witnessed violence during childhood (COR =5.729; CI: 1.299-25.264) and experienced violence during childhood were more likely to be abused at public places (COR=2.912; CI: 1.222-6.939). Witness of violence during childhood was significant even after adjusting with other variables (AOR= 5.038; CI: 1.100-23.075).

Table 3. Logistic Regression analysis of socio-demographic factors and ever experience of any violence.

Variables		Ever experienced any violence n=167		
Yes		No	Crude OR (95% CI)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
Age	18-23	139	9	Reference
	24-28	15	4	1.843 (0.569-5.967) 3.105 (0.637-15.125)
Ethnicity	Chhetri and Bramhin	95	8	Reference
	Newar, Janajati and others	59	5	1.006 (0.314-3.222) 0.657 (0.161-2.686)
Place of residence	Home	26	5	Reference
	Hostel or others	128	8	0.325 (0.098-1.073) 0.823 (0.196-3.455)
Ever been in a relationship	Yes	97	3	5.673 (1.499-21.470) 5.856 (1.429-24.002)
	No	57	10	Reference

Table 4. Logistic regression analysis of intimate partner violence and socio-demographic variables.

Variables		Intimate partner violence n=167		
Yes		No	Crude OR (95% CI)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)
Age	18-23	61	6	Reference
	24-28	87	13	1.519 (0.547-4.218) 1.031 (0.337-3.149)
Religion	Hindu	63	95	Reference
	Buddhist and others	4	5	0.829 (0.214-3.207) 0.803 (0.191-3.383)

Ethnicity	Chhetri and Bramhin	40	63	Reference	
	Newar, Janajati and others	27	37	0.870 (0.461-1.642)	0.972 (0.495-1.911)
Place of residence	Home	10	21	Reference	
	Hostel or rented room/flat	57	79	0.660 (0.289-1.508)	0.795 (0.325-1.947)
Witnessed violence during childhood	Yes	22	45	Reference	
	No	24	76	1.548 (0.780-3.074)	1.255 (0.611-2.577)
Childhood violence	Yes	44	23	Reference	
	No	48	52	2.072 (1.094-3.926)	1.964 (1.004-3.840)

Table 5. Logistic regression analysis of Public place violence and socio-demographic factors.

Variables		Public place violence n=167			
		No	Crude OR (95% CI)	Adjusted OR (95% CI)	
Age	18-23	126	22	Reference	
	24-28	14	5	2.045 (0.669-6.250)	1.042 (0.289-3.763)
Religion	Hindu	133	25	Reference	
	Buddhist and others	7	2	1.520 (0.298-7.746)	1.303 (0.203-8.374)
Ethnicity	Chhetri and Bramhin	88	15	Reference	
	Newar, Janajati and others	52	12	1.354 (0.589-3.114)	1.558 (0.600-4.045)
Place of residence	Home	22	9	Reference	
	Hostel or rented room/flat	118	18	0.373 (0.149-0.936)	0.616 (0.215-1.765)
Witnessed violence during childhood	Yes	44	2	Reference	
	No	96	25	5.729 (1.299-25.264)	5.038 (1.100-23.075)
Childhood violence	Yes	83	9	Reference	
	No	57	18	2.912 (1.222-6.939)	2.528 (0.987-6.479)
Intimate partner violence	Yes	58	9	Reference	
	No	82	18	1.415 (0.594-3.374)	0.727 (0.196-2.702)

It was also found that, out of total 154 students who experienced any form of violence, only 79 (51%) shared about the incident with someone, among which 51 (65%) shared with friends while 28 (35%) shared it with their family members.

None of the respondents ever reported about the occurrence of violence to concerned body. When the reason for not reporting was asked, only 144 out of 154 respondents mentioned about their reason for not reporting the incidence of violence. Total 43 (30%) respondents said that they didn't report due to fear of escalated violence, while 20 (14%) said that they felt ashamed or guilty, 13 (9%) said that they accepted violence and 12 (8%) said that they didn't know where to report or what to do. Total 9 (6%) said that they didn't think that they needed to report, 6 (4%) said that they didn't know that it was violence and interesting finding was that 41 (28%) respondents said that they had never faced violence despite giving positive answer regarding experience of violence in the questionnaire.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we measured the lifetime experience of gender based violence among unmarried female students of health science stream of a university. High prevalence of gender based violence was found in the study group which is comparable with global and regional estimates⁵ showing 30% prevalence of GBV around the world, and national data from demographic health survey showing 22% physical violence and 7% sexual violence¹⁰ which overall show how common this problem is around the world, irrespective of geographical region, development status of countries or regions etc.

Our study found that many respondents witnessed violence in the family during childhood and many of them had experienced childhood violence. Among childhood violence, sexual and physical violence were equally common, which is also seen in a study done amongst multiple countries. Many countries like Nepal had similar prevalence of physical and sexual violence

which was 10% for both types of violence. However, most of the countries had greater physical violence amongst young adolescents compared to sexual violence like Congo, Uganda, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan etc.⁵ It was also seen in another study that physical violence was 66% compared to sexual violence which was 10% only.¹¹ Similar findings were seen in Zimbabwe that physical violence was far greater than sexual violence i.e. 64% vs 12%.¹² This finding highlights the hidden burden of lifetime experience of sexual assault as a child in Nepal.

Out of all forms of violence, PPV was the most common type of violence in our study and sexual harassment was experienced by most of the respondents which is comparable with studies from Nepal which showed that unmarried women were more likely to be harassed especially public places like public vehicles (78%) which was found in studies from Nepal¹³, India (30%)¹⁴ and Mozambique (90%).¹⁵

Among different forms of gender based violence, the prevalence of IPV was found to be lower in our study which may be due to the respondents bring unmarried thus the chances of being exposed could have possibly been less compared to married women. However, the overall prevalence of IPV in the study group is comparable to studies from Tanzania and Nigeria where the IPV prevalence were 30% and 36% respectively.^{16, 17}

It was also seen that control and emotional violence were higher than sexual violence in this study which was similar to the results from NDHS (12% vs 7%) and studies from African countries which showed the prevalence of 30% emotional violence vs 5% sexual violence in Tanzania and 18% sexual violence and 4% sexual violence in Nigeria.^{10,16,17}

In this study, association were seen between any violence and relationship status, IPV and childhood violence and PPV and witness of violence in the family which is consistent with findings from Asia and Pacific region (p value <0.05), Malawi (significant at 95% CI) and Kenya (P value <0.05).¹⁸⁻²⁰ However, violence was not associated with age, religion, ethnicity etc. which may be due to the presence of small homogeneous sample with limited variation in socio-demographic profile in our study.

Likewise, sharing about the experience of GBV was poor with no reporting at all which may be because gender based violence is still stigmatized. Women and girls are blamed even if they are themselves the victim of GBV so, sharing and reporting might have been less which is similar to findings from studies from Nepal demographic health survey where 66% of the women didn't talk to

anyone about violence, and 66% of women from sub Saharan Africa didn't share anything.^{10, 21, 22}

This study has several strengths, one of which is the study population i.e. unmarried women which has not been given much emphasis in earlier studies. Other strength of this study is that experience of different forms of violence has been studied rather than focusing on sexual violence only. The method of data collection was through online questionnaire and was thought to be the best to maintain confidentiality. One of the limitations of this study was inclusion of students from a single institute limiting the generalization of the study. The participation in this study was less which might be due to the sensitivity of the study topic. It was evident from the findings that many women couldn't recognize violence so, performing a qualitative study to explore about women's knowledge and perception of gender based violence could have shed light on the women's perspective and experience of violence. As most of the national programmes on GBV focus on spousal violence and sexual violence only, priority should also be given to unmarried women who may suffer from different forms of violence including partner related control and violence.

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings indicate that the lifetime experience of gender based violence is very high among unmarried women with the majority of women experiencing public place violence.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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