Violence Against Women in Sierra Leone: Frequency and Correlates of Intimate Partner Violence and Forced Sexual Intercourse

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women is a significant public health problem which impacts women, men, and children. Little is known about the frequency or correlates of violence against women in Africa. In this cross-sectional study, we found that 66.7% of 144 women surveyed in a study of AIDS knowledge, attitude, and behaviours, report being beaten by an intimate male partner and 50.7% report having ever been forced to have sexual intercourse; 76.6% of women report either forced sex or intimate partner violence. Circumcised women were most likely to report intimate partner violence and forced sexual intercourse. To improve the health of women worldwide, violence against women must be addressed. (Afr J Reprod Health 1998;2(1):61–72)

RÉSUMÉ

La violence à l’encontre des femmes au Sierra Leone: Fréquences et déterminants actes de violence de la part du conjoint et des rapports sexuels forcés. La violence à l’encontre des femmes est un problème de santé publique majeur qui affecte à la fois les femmes, les hommes et les enfants. Cependant, l’on sait peu sur la fréquence et les déterminants de la violence contre les femmes en Afrique. Dans cette étude transversale, nous avons découvert que 66,7 % des 144 femmes enquêtées au cours d’une étude sur les connaissances, les attitudes et les comportements en rapport au SIDA, avaient rapporté avoir été battues par un conjoint mâle et 50,7% ont déclaré avoir été forcées à avoir des rapports sexuels. 76,6% des femmes ont déclaré avoir soit été forcées à des actes sexuels, soit avoir subi des actes de violence de la part de leurs partenaires. Les femmes excisées étaient les plus nombreuses à rapporter la violence subie de la part de leurs partenaires et les rapports sexuels forcés.
Afin d’améliorer la santé des femmes dans le monde entier, le problème de la violence à l’encontre des femmes doit être résolu. (Rev Afr Santé Reprod 1998;2(1):61–72)

KEYWORDS: Violence against women, female circumcision, rape, sexual assaults, women, Africa, intentional injury

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Implications
Violence against women, both intimate partner violence and forced sex, is common in Sierra Leone where the majority of women are circumcised. Both female circumcision and intimate partner violence can result in significant health consequences for women. Women experiencing IPV disproportionately are circumcised women.

Circumcision may be a marker or proxy for the social status of women in society. Women who are circumcised are more likely to live in households in which intimate partner violence including forced sex is condoned.

These women recognize that their choices in prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are limited and difficult. Suggesting that a spouse or partner consistently use condoms can result in further violence against the woman. Such a suggestion could be interpreted as objecting to the spouse/partner’s having multiple partners (a practice which is believed to enhance the male’s status with his peers), questioning his ability to choose uninfected partners (the belief persists that one can tell if a person has HIV/AIDS based on their appearance), or admitting that the woman herself has had other partners who may have infected her. The addition of subsequent wives, who may themselves be infected with HIV, into an existing household is not uncommon and adds an additional concern for women’s health and safety. Beyond HIV/AIDS prevention and toward better health for women, we must address violence against women. Clearly, any such measures should be culturally appropriate.

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References


