

Pregnancy Related Interpersonal Violence Among Women who Experience Homelessness- A Qualitative Exploration

DONCY J EAPEN, PHD, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, CIZIK SCHOOL OF NURSING,

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER AT HOUSTON, TEXAS

Objectives

At the end of the presentation, participants should be able to:

- identify the research methodology used to explore pregnancy related inter-personal experience of women who experience homelessness.
- discuss women's experience of the impact of inter-personal violence on pregnancy.
- identify the women's perception of the effect of inter-personal violence on their health behaviors during pregnancy.

Disclosures

- No actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this presentation.

*“I found myself **homeless** when I turned three months **pregnant**. I ended up losing my **job** due to **COVID**. The company that I was working for was a small company, and they closed down. I ended up moving into the vacant apartment, There was running water, but no electricity. It was summertime. It was very hot. When I did reach out for help, he would tell me I'm a stupid "I hate that baby. I hate you. If something happens to y'all, I don't care." It was pretty much a lot of **hateful things** he was saying. So I stayed there until I came here two weeks before I delivered.”*

Tanika (40 year old single mother)



Research Team

Principal Investigator: Doncy Eapen PhD, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC

Co-Investigators

Diane Santa Maria DrPH, MSN, RN, PHNA-BC, FASHM, FAAN- Dean, CSON

Megan R. Gerber MD, MPH, FACP- Professor of Medicine, Albany Medical College

Cathy L Rozmus PhD, RN, FAAN- Vice Dean, Academic Affairs, CSON

Diane Wind Wardell PhD, RN, WHNP-BC, AHN-BC- Professor, CSON

Research Assistant

Riya Khoja, BSN Honor Student, CSON

Background

- 324,000 pregnant women (8%) suffer violence in the United States (Deshpande & Lewis-O'Connor, 2013)
- Violence during pregnancy is associated with detrimental health consequences for women, and the newborns (Alhusen et al., 2015; Donovan et al., 2016).
- Study focus - intimate partner violence (IPV) during pregnancy rather than on Inter-personal violence (IPRV) (Miller Graff et al., 2019)
- Research that explores homelessness and IPV has been focused mainly among non-pregnant women (Bryant, 2018)
- Critical need to explore the pregnancy related violence experienced by women who are homeless not just from their current intimate partners but also from other individuals including acquaintances, strangers, and other family members.

Purpose, Specific Aims & Research Questions

Purpose-to explore women's experiences of IPRV before and during pregnancy and their perceptions of their health behaviors during pregnancy

Specific Aim 1- Explore the women's experience of IPRV prior to and during their most recent pregnancy.

- **Research Question 1-** How do women describe their experience of IPRV during their most recent pregnancy?
- **Research Question 2-** How do women describe their experience of IPRV prior to their pregnancy?

Specific Aim 2- Explore women's perceptions of the effect of IPRV on their health behaviors during pregnancy.

- **Research Question 3-** What are women's perceptions of their health behaviors during pregnancy?
- **Research Question 4-** What are women's perceptions of how IPRV has affected their health behavior?

Methodology

Qualitative Descriptive Design

- to obtain a straight 'candid and from the heart' description of the women's experience of IPRV and its influence on health behaviors during their pregnancies

Purposive Sampling - aims at capturing and describing central phenomenon (Patton, 2002).

Inclusion Criteria

- 18 years and older
- English speaking
- Pregnant/ recent live birth within the last 12 months
- Experience of IPRV before/ during their most recent pregnancy

Methodology

Setting

Shelter in the greater Houston metropolitan area

Recruitment & Data Collection

Study Flyer

Screening by Abuse Assessment Screen

Demographic Questionnaire

Semi structured interview guide

Interview audio recorded and transcribed verbatim (HIPAA compliant transcription service)

Field notes

Methodology

Data Analysis

Inductive Content Analysis

Began after the first interview and is ongoing

Meaning Units → Codes → Categories → Overarching Themes

Atlas.ti v8- qualitative software for data organization, storage, and retrieval.

Ethical Considerations

University of Texas Health Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects approval.

Informed Consent

\$20 gift card for participation

Confidentiality

Data Security

Trustworthiness & Methodological Rigor

Lincoln & Guba(1985)

- Credibility- Member checking and debriefing sessions
- Dependability- Audit trail
- Confirmability- Audit trail
- Transferability- Detailed information on research methodology
- Authenticity- Direct quotes of participants

Results

Demographic Data (N=11)		
Characteristic		Range/ Frequency n(%)
Age		22-40 (Mean age -28)
Marital Status	Single	8 (73%)
	Separated	2 (18%)
	Divorced	1(9%)
	Married	0
Education	9 th grade	1(9%)
	11 th grade	1(9%)
	High School	5 (45%)
	Some College	3 (27%)
	Associate Degree	1(9%)

Results

Characteristic		Range/ Frequency n(%)
Ethnicity	African American	5 (45%)
	Caucasian	4(36%)
	Biracial	2(18%)
Duration of Homeless ness		1 month- 13 months
Perpetrator	Partner	8(73%)
	Family Member	2(18%)
	Both	1(9%)
Type of Abuse	Physical	8(73%)
	Emotional	2(18%)
	Sexual	3(27%)
	Use of Weapon	3(27%)

Results

Preliminary findings

- Abusive Relationship Made Pregnancy Difficult for Women
- Abuse worsened during pregnancy
- Substance abuse exacerbated the violence
- Patterns of Abuse
- Challenges with meeting basic needs during pregnancy
- Children as catalysts for leaving abusive relationship
- Abuse precipitated negative health behaviors during pregnancy
- Barriers to accessing healthcare services

Abusive Relationship Made Pregnancy Difficult for Women

“it (pregnancy) was really stressful, and I was hopeless.”

“I was trying to go back to my mom's at the beginning, but one time we were living with her, she just got mad over this little thing, and she was like, I want you out of my house, and everything, and she threw us out of her house. And she start throwing stuff to the floor.”

“I was even thinking in my mind sort of to try to have an abortion. I had a lot of thoughts of abortion, leaving him somewhere else. I don't know. I was really distressed thinking about him, and what was—what I want to do with my life, and everything. I don't know. I felt so lonely.”

Abuse worsened during pregnancy

“When I did reach out for help, he would tell me I'm a stupid "I hate that baby. I hate you. If something happens to y'all, I don't care." It was pretty much a lot of hateful things he was saying.”

“it (abuse)was worse during the pregnancy.”

“This was during my pregnancy. And I was already five months at this point. So it wasn't early on in the pregnancy; it was towards, you know, the second trimester. And so I think more or less—he broke my nose several times.”

“Because he thought that I was cheating. And I mean, it had gotten worse. The first time he ever hit me, he punched me straight in the jaw and almost broke my jaw. He would punch me right here on the side of my face where my ear is. And from there, it just got worse, worse and worse. It had—first, that started out with punching and slapping, and then it went to he would hold me down by my throat. He would choke me. He would take my hair and pull me down all the way down to the floorboard of the car while I was pregnant. And I was nine months pregnant with him when he was doing that.”

Abuse worsened during pregnancy

“he didn't want the baby, to begin with. He's afraid that I'm going to put him on child support. He already has five kids.....He didn't want another baby, you know? So basically, that's a way to punish me for following through with the pregnancy. He just tortures me with the idea that, "I could take this baby if I want to because I have a home, I have a job, I have insurance for the baby. I can get insurance for the baby, and you can't do none of that.”

“I mean, she(aunt) used to hit me in the face. Just she pulled me by my hair several times. But I know—I remember, that was specifically when I was pregnant. So then there were even times when I was holding my baby, she abused me. It wasn't until I moved out when she stopped abusing me”

Substance abuse exacerbated the violence

“this past year, he went all crazy because he was using more drugs. He was—he was drinking a lot. So we got into a fight three times that we hit each other. Well, I hit him sometimes, and I threw him stuff because I was really tired, and I didn't know where to go. I was by myself, so I just went crazy. I was pretty, pretty bad at that time.”

“...he wasn't going to stop doing drugs. His whole family uses drugs. The place where I was living at, drugs were consistently going on..”

Patterns of Abuse

“I just told him this whole relationship is a lie. And that's when he came up on me and was grabbing me and holding me real tight. And I was just, why are you—why are you using this type of force on me? Like, I didn't do nothing to you. I'm the one who should be mad. You're over here, manhandling me and pushing me up against the wall”

“I had to get away fast from him because him just threatening me with that motion of a gun.”

““My aunt actually came up to me with a knife before—a butcher knife. And my cousin actually almost hit me with a chair.”

“And I was tired of that. It just got on my nerves and everything. I was at this really bad point that I was really pissed off, and I started hitting him. I was telling him to stop because every time, the same thing, and the same thing, and I was just tired.”

Patterns of Abuse

“He was really jealous of every man that even talks to me and get near me. So everything started that with pushing, and sometimes he even slapped me, and I was like—I sometimes I meant to leave him. But he started crying, tell me that he wouldn't do it again, and the same thing happened again. Sometimes he really—really get really possessive. He didn't let me use a phone or—because he has this—every time think I'm cheating on him.”

“I met my daughter's father. It started off very slow. I didn't even notice the red flags. You know, he separated me from the family. He made sure that I was only dependent on him. Then, he made it to where I no longer had my phone bill, but I had a phone bill attached with him. So then, he started controlling the phone. Then, I wasn't allowed to have electronics. And the first abuse he did, he ended up breaking my fibula, my left fibula on my leg, so therefore, I couldn't go anywhere or work. Then, he took my identification; my Social Security card, and my ID magically disappeared. Then, I guess, it just started off slow that he would strangle me. He went to prison for this, so he was prosecuted, and he did go to prison.”

“It's very scary. And just to look at his behavior now, I'm like, dang. Those are the red flags, so many red flags, him being overly sexual and all that stuff. Like, it's just now it's creeping me out. It's heebie-jeebies. I'm needing a shower just to get the dirt off me.”

Challenges with meeting basic needs during pregnancy

“before I got to the vacant apartment, I was looking for a place to stay. And a friend of mine told me that I would have to have sex with him to continue staying in his apartment with him. So instead of doing that, I moved to the empty apartment.”

“Whatever I can beg, you know, because there was no refrigerator, no way to cook, nothing. I would probably go get a dollar and get a bag of chips and soda water or a bottle of water and an apple.”

“Well, it was very stressful, you know, because I had a lot of insecurities about where I was going to sleep, what I was going to eat. I basically had to panhandle for food. There was no electricity in the apartment. There was running water, but no electricity. It was summertime. It was very hot.”

Children as catalysts for leaving abusive relationship

“I think that it just it affected me emotionally. It didn't affect me to where I was going to harm myself. It gave me a little bit of depression. It made me feel helpless. But in terms of when it came down to it, I wasn't going to keep my child in any kind of environment that wasn't going to be healthy for him.”

“I was like, I want them to grow up with a father, but it was my worst mistake I have ever done.”

Abuse precipitated negative health behaviors during pregnancy

“I wasn't sleeping.”

“I was smoking cigarettes. That's pretty much the gist of it all. There would be days where I would go two or three days without taking a shower because I was just that depressed.”

“In a week, I might go about three or four days without eating”

“It was cocaine”, “I smoked cigarettes when I had them.”

“I would just cry. I would sleep a lot. I would withdraw. You know, I wouldn't want to—I would pull into myself. I would cry. I would sleep a lot.”

“ I did not get prenatal care”

“I was taking prenatal vitamins around when I was, I think, three months, and then I didn't eat well because I was depressed. I didn't want anything.”

“It was not able to because of where I was stuck out in the middle of the country, and he wouldn't take me to my prenatal visits.”

Barriers to accessing healthcare services

“I was going to the doctor. I didn't let them know what was going on because I was afraid that they would put protective services on me when I gave birth because I didn't have a home.”

“Maybe somebody would have asked directly to me just—I mean, she saw—she's a doctor. You know what I'm saying? She saw that I wasn't eating. She could see the rings under my eyes. I was unkept. You saw, but you didn't say nothing...”

Discussion & Conclusion

- Abuse started or worsened during pregnancy
- IPRV during pregnancy is associated with negative health behaviors
- Screening for violence should be an integral part of healthcare visits
- Women who experience IPRV require a strong support system to develop endurance and adaptability to overcome various challenges.
- Interventions should focus on creating awareness about IPRV, providing access to resources, and empowering victims of IPRV, and requires collaborative effort.

The End

“Becoming a victim is not a choice, becoming a survivor is”

“If you want to know where to find your contribution to the world, look at your wounds. When you learn how to heal them, teach others.”



References

- Alhusen, J. L., Ray, E., Sharps, P., & Bullock, L. (2015). Intimate partner violence during pregnancy: maternal and neonatal outcomes. *Journal of Women's Health, 24*, 100-106
- Bryant, K. (2018). *No Way Out: The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Homelessness and the Consequences of Poor Health Outcomes (5943)*. [Master's Thesis, University of Central Florida] Electronic Theses and Dissertations, 2004-2019.
- Deshpande, N. A., & Lewis-O'Connor, A. (2013). Screening for intimate partner violence during pregnancy. *Reviews in Obstetrics & Gynecology, 6*(3-4):141-148.
- Miller-Graff, L.E., Nuttall, A.K., & Lefever, J.E.B. (2019). Interpersonal violence during pregnancy: Enduring effects in the post-partum period and implications for the intergenerational transmission of risk. *International Journal of Behavior Development, 43*(3):195-203.
- Patton MQ. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation methods*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 2002.