

Should Mental Health Assessments Be Integral To Domestic Violence Research?

Veena A.S.

PhD Scholar, Dept of Clinical Psychology, NIMHANS

Prabha Chandra

Professor, Dept of Psychiatry, NIMHANS

Background

Domestic Violence /Intimate Partner Violence

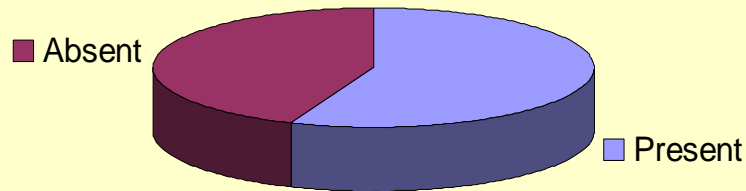
- Public health problem
- Relatively less researched in developing countries

DV in South India (ICMR study, 2006)

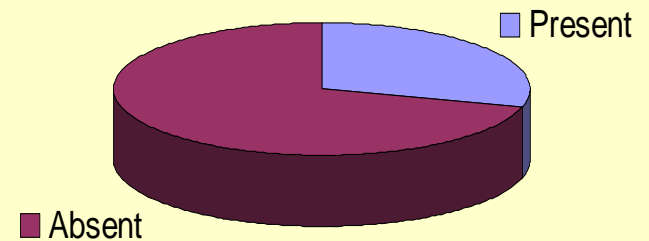
- Physical Violence- 8 to 51%
- Sexual Violence- 2 to 11%

Prevalence of DV across health settings

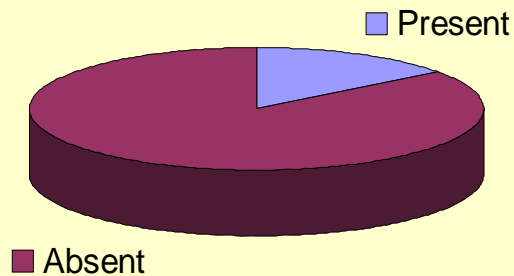
Psychiatry (N=105)



Medical (N=200)



Antenatal (N=203)



DV and Mental Health

- Significant mental health consequences

(Kumar et al, 2006)

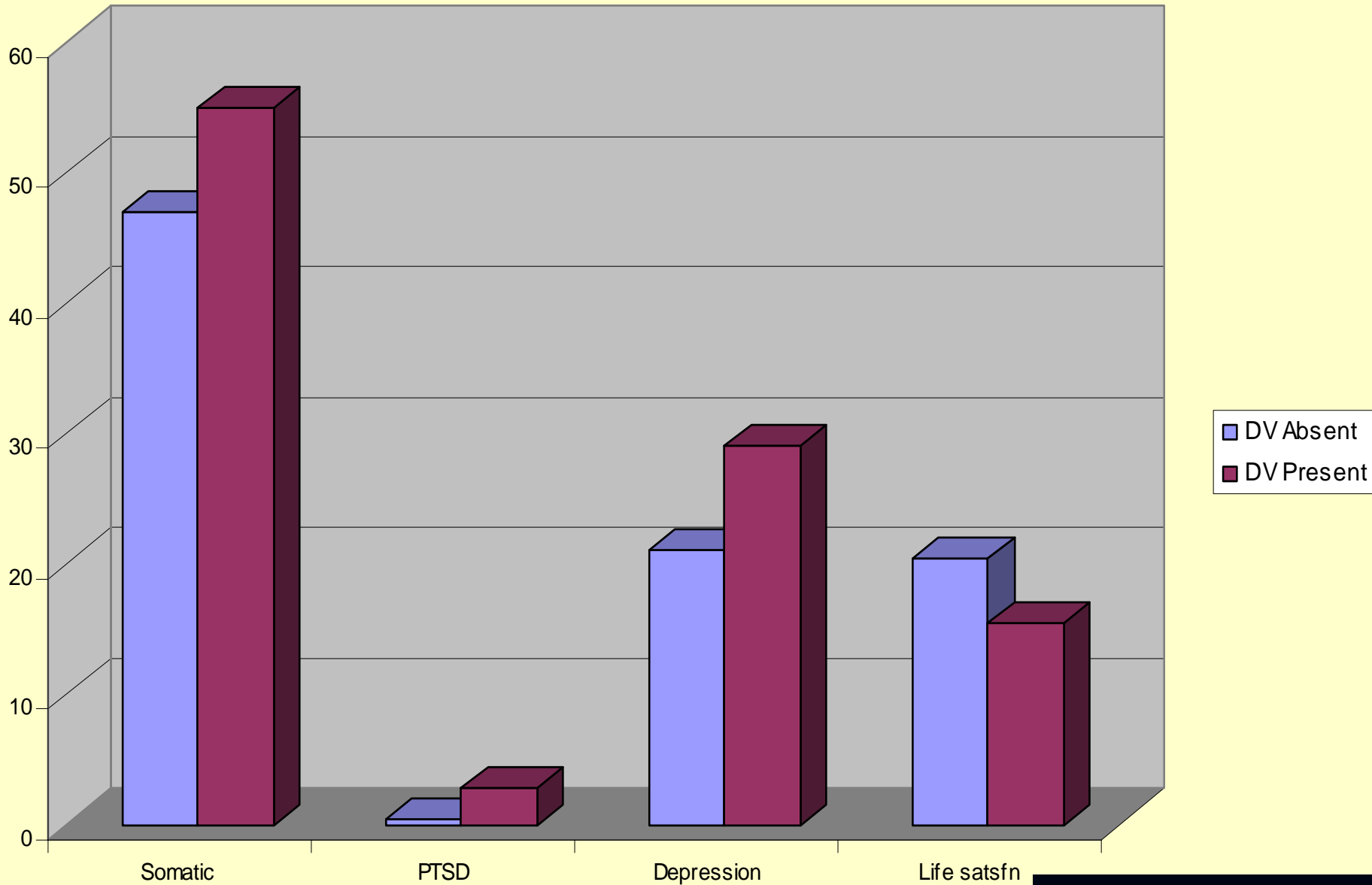
- Anxiety, Depression, PTSD most common

(Pico-Alfonso et al, 2006)

- Low self esteem and suicide

(Mc Cauley et al, 1995)

Mental health of women with and without DV



Review on Pub Med (2000 - 2007)

- Only 6 of 47 studies on DV have included at least one mental health variable!
- Findings: Women with DV had poor mental health outcomes
- Mental health assessment- Ethically imperative?
- Ethics in DV research- Generic

Sensitive issue/ Vulnerable population- Kid Gloves?!

- Dual Vulnerability
- Disclosure- inherent risks
- Distress- prior to, during or following data collection
- Choice of methods to mitigate distress
- Methodological/ethical challenges

The first disclosure...

“I thought I was over it...”

“The incidents keep coming back to me”

“I’ve been feeling very disturbed ever since I told you about it”

“He guessed that I must have told you about it and has been beating me ever since”

“I feel like ending my life”

Towards Responsible Conduct of Research...

Insights from “Child Abuse: India 2007”

- Informed consent as a process
- Refusal rates
- Risk Vs Benefit ...a realistic appraisal

(Veena & Chandra, 2007)

Harm Avoidance?

- What is harm?
- How much harm for whom in what context is acceptable?

Benefits of participation?

- Emotional
- Financial

International Research Network for Violence Against Women (WHO, 1999)

Research Team

- Selection
- Training/ Debriefing/ Ongoing Supervision
- Safety
- Recording data/ reporting/ responsible action

What is the point or value after all, of placing oneself in unpleasant situations in order to carry out research from which no (tangible) benefits are likely to be forthcoming?

(Widdowfield, 2000)

Responsibilities of the researcher towards the researched...

- Interview as an intervention
- Identification of distressed participants
- Ongoing follow up contact
- Dissemination of information/services available
- Appropriate referrals
- Short/long term support mechanisms- liaison
- Advance policy

Responsible Reporting...

- Minimize under-reporting
- Minimize sensationalizing facts/findings
- Detail ethical issues
- Adverse events
- Fulfilled responsibilities/ Plans for future
- Documenting research process- cathartic

Ethics in cross-cultural research- Collaborative not exploitative...

- Who has helped define the research problem?
- For whom is this study worthy and relevant? Who says so?
- Which cultural group will gain new knowledge from this study?
- To whom is the researcher accountable?
- Who will gain the most from this study?

(Smith, 1992)

To Conclude...

- DV significantly impacts one's mental health
- Mental health assessment; an ethical responsibility

'Health and well-being of patients must have priority over any scientific result or benefit'

*-The Helsinki Declaration
Association of World Physicians*

Thank You!