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A study on gender-based violence in South Africa: prevalence, correlates & coping strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the prevalence, correlates and coping strategies of women who have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa. Violence in South Africa in general, and violence against women specifically, is an important public health problem with significant consequences for women's development and HIV transmission, among other issues. GBV is not only common and widespread, but also accepted, tolerated, and seen to be normal. Using the 1998 South African Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS), a nationally representative survey of women between the ages of 15-49 years, this study maps out the magnitude of, and factors related to women's experience of violence, and their help seeking behavior. It examines women's exposure to violence and their coping strategies against their socio-economic and demographic variables. This is facilitated by using the structured questionnaire on the Mistreatment of Women. The analysis is based on a subset of women who had a lifetime experience of violence (1078 observations). Logistic regression is used to estimate the influence of identified predictors on women's experience of violence, and where they seek help after victimization. Just over nine percent (9.2%) of the respondents reported experiencing violence in the 12 months before the survey, and 23.5% sought help after victimization. Age, education, and marital status, were identified as the most important predictors of women's experience of violence. SES was not found to predict where women sought help after victimization. Low use and non-use of services was also found, bringing to question the availability and appropriateness of services provided. This study provides a reliable estimate of the prevalence of physical violence in South Africa that can be used as baseline data for further research in related studies.

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