

Original Article

Ocular Injuries in Female Victims of Domestic Violence in Brazzaville (Congo)

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ABSTRACT

Objective. In the traditional African society, the social status of women remains precarious. The spouse who has "spent money to acquire" a woman often claims to have "every right over her". In some cases the woman is subjected to abuse that can lead to death. The aim of the study was to describe ocular injuries in women who were victims of domestic violence in Brazzaville.

Design. Cross-sectional study conducted at the University Hospital of Brazzaville between January 2013 and December 2014 (2 years). Data was obtained using a questionnaire sheet. The following parameters were analyzed: age and level of education of spouses (below or above university) reason of dispute, mechanism of trauma and observed lesions.

Subjects. Women admitted for an ocular injury that could jeopardize the visual and or vital prognosis (involvement of another vital organ during the same trauma) due to an incidence of domestic violence.

Results. The study included a total of 15 women (and their corresponding 15 spouses). The average age of men and women was respectively 55 ± 10 and 35 ± 13 years. 73.33% of men had higher level of education compared to 53.33% of women. The main reasons of violence were jealousy (46.67%) and finance disputes (26.67%). The main mechanism of injury was a fist punch (80.00%), meanwhile, the major lesions observed were: bursting of the eyeball (40.00%) and fracture of the orbital floor (26.67%).

Conclusion. In Brazzaville, domestic violence is responsible for ocular injuries leading to irreversible blindness.

Keywords: Women and domestic violence, bursting of the eyeball.

INTRODUCTION

In developed countries, statistics on violence against women are fairly well known, whereas in Africa, the situation is different for several reasons (see this 03/12/2016: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/06/11/violences-conjugales-118-femmes-tuees-en-2014_1327822). According to tradition, the woman's complaints as regard to various forms of abuse are generally settled between the man and his family-in-law. Few women dare to complain against their spouses [1, 2]. Besides, the notion of "rape" between husband and wife is almost absurd.

Illiteracy is essentially a female issue in Africa. The woman who can not read or write does not know her rights. It is not uncommon for a victim of domestic violence to tell a different story in order to protect the dignity of her husband and family [1, 3, 4].

The woman's social status remains precarious in most African countries. The spouse who has spent money to "acquire" a woman claims to have "every right" over her. In some cases the woman is subjected to abuse that can even lead to death. This work aims to describe severe ocular injuries observed in women who were victims of domestic violence in Brazzaville.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This was a cross-sectional study that lasted 2 years (January 2013 - December 2014). It was carried out at the ophthalmology department of the University Hospital of Brazzaville. Data was obtained using a questionnaire-oriented interview. It involved women presenting ocular injury from a domestic violence incidence. Only injuries that could jeopardize the visual and / or vital prognosis were retained. The vital prognosis was considered in jeopardy when a vital organ other than the eye was also injured during the same trauma. Only adult women (over 18 years) living in a household with or without legal

marital status were included in the study. For the collection of information, only women were interviewed. The interrogations were conducted after consent from the woman, in the absence of the husband and on the basis of anonymity. The following elements did not have to be mentioned on the survey sheet:

- Names,
- Initials of the names,
- Address,
- Date of the examination.

The following parameters were analyzed:

- Age of the spouse,
- Level of education of spouse: above or below university level
- Reason of the dispute,
- Mechanism of trauma that caused the injury,
- Observed lesions.

Data analysis was done using Microsoft Excel 2010. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were the only statistical parameters obtained.

RESULTS

Fifteen women (and corresponding 15 spouses) were interviewed. The average age of the men was 55 ± 10 years [35 - 60]. The average age of the women was 35 ± 13 years [20 - 52]. The level of education of the spouses, the reason of dispute and the mechanisms of injury are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Study on domestic violence against women from January 2013 to December 2014 at the University Hospital of Brazzaville. The level of education of the spouses, the reason of dispute and the mechanism of eye injuries

Level of education		N (%)
Men	Superior	11 (73,33)
	Inferior	4 (26,67)
Women	Superior	8 (53,33)
	Inferior	7 (46,67)
Reason of dispute	jealousy	7 (46,67)
	Finance	4 (26,67)
	Alcoholism *	2 (13,33)
	Unknown **	2 (13,33)
Mechanism of eye injuries	punch	12 (80,00)
	Beaten with belt	2 (13,33)
	Beaten with a hammer	1 (6,67)

*Alcoholism: the husband beat his wife whenever he was drunk
 **Unknown: The woman said she did not know the reason of the dispute.

Table 2 shows the various lesions observed.

Table 2: ocular injuries observed

Injury	N	%
Bursting of the eyeball	6	40
Fracture of the orbital floor	4	26,67
Lens dislocation	2	13,32
Complex fracture of the facial bones	1	6,67
Eyelid avulsion	1	6,67
Retinal detachment	1	6,67
Total	15	100

Figure 1 shows the bursting of the eyeball by punch in a female victim



Figure 1: bursting of the eyeball

Figure 2 is a CT scan of a woman victim of domestic violence with a hammer, showing multiple fracture lines of the facial bones and skull.



Figure 2: CT scan with 3D reconstruction showing multiple skull and facial fractures

Figure 3 shows a tear of the right upper eyelid with a belt in woman victim of domestic violence.



Figure 3: tear of the right upper eyelid by a belt

DISCUSSION

Domestic violence is often unreported, with the affected women often feeling ashamed and guilty. Only one in four women spontaneously talks about what she suffered. Domestic violence is now a serious social phenomenon that affects all social classes and cultures around the world (see this 12/03/2016: <http://www.stop-violences-femmes.gouv.fr>). The level of education, whether of the man or the woman does not have any correlation with the occurrence of domestic violence [4]. This finding contradicts two surveys, one Ghanaian and the other Australian, which concluded a direct link between a woman's level of education and domestic violence [1, 5]. The Ghanaian survey also links the socioeconomic status of the couple with the occurrence of domestic violence. According to the authors, women from underprivileged backgrounds are at greater risk of domestic violence. These same authors go further to establish a link between religious beliefs and domestic violence. Muslim women were more tolerant to violence from their spouses, unlike Christian women and non-believers.

The reasons of domestic disputes are the same everywhere, with jealousy and financial difficulties the most frequently identified. (see this 03/12/2016: http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/06/11/violences-conjugales-118-femmes-tuees-en-2014_1327822).

A Tunisian study places alcoholism among the top three causes of domestic dispute [6].

A punch or a slap are leading the mechanisms of injury suffered by the woman. The head and the neck are particularly exposed because of their anatomical position [7]. Extreme cases, such as using a hammer or a knife or highly caustic products, identified in our survey have also been described [1-5, 8]. The bursting of the eyeball is the main serious eye injury due to domestic violence [7]. Death is not exceptional, when not connected to the direct action of the trauma, it may be the result of suicide of the woman [2]. The woman's age plays no role in the risk of occurrence of domestic violence. It varies between 15 and 90 years according to surveys [4, 5, 7, 9].

In France, one in ten women is a victim of domestic violence and every three days a woman dies from domestic violence. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of women suffer daily from violence in their homes. At the European level, one in five women has been a victim of domestic violence at least once in her lifetime. (see this 12/03/2016:

http://www.liberation.fr/societe/2015/06/11/violences-conjugales-118-femmes-tuees-en-2014_1327822).

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence may be responsible for severe ocular injuries, causing irreversible blindness or even death in some cases. Women all over the world are victims of insults, beatings and humiliations on a daily basis. These

are widespread cases of violence that the media do little coverage on, instead paying more attention to the atrocities committed on women in conflict zones.

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