Prevalence, Determinants and Other Characteristics of Violence among Pacific Countries: A Systematic Review Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Violence is a major cause of death for people aged 15 - 44 and it places a huge burden on many countries in terms of social and economic status. While there is no clear picture of this issue in the Pacific until now, this systematic review study is aimed to understand the prevalence, determinants and other characteristics of violence in Pacific countries.

Methods: This systematic review study was based on the Cochrane Library Guidelines using 5 databases and relevant keywords to achieve the relevant studies related to violence. Studies included in this study were published in English between 1st January 2000 to 1st July 2017. The search was conducted by two independent reviewers and the data extraction sheet was developed to analyse the information in the studies which met the study inclusion and exclusion criteria. A descriptive statistical analysis was applied and the results were shown in tables and graph.

Results: Overall, twenty-six studies were analyzed. More than half of the studies (53.85%) were carried out in South Pacific countries. The majority of the studies focused on adults (57.69%) and most of the studies were conducted using a quantitative method (84.62%). Four types of the determinants were identified in the studies including social, behavioral, personal and environmental. Physical violence (15 studies) was the most common type of violence in Pacific countries. For both males and females, New Zealand and PNG reported the highest prevalence of violence, while Hawai’i had the lowest prevalence of violence.

Conclusion: The results of this study highlighted violence as a serious public health issue in Pacific countries. The determinants of violence identified in this study can help health care professionals and policy makers develop prevention strategies. Developing tailored interventional studies, considering the cultural believes of Pacific people, can help to reduce the prevalence of violence.

Keywords: Violence; Pacific; Determinates; Prevalence; Systematic Review

Introduction

Nothing good ever comes of violence. We live in a world full of violence with people of different ethnicities. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is defined as “the intentional use of physical force or power; threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community which results in injury, psychological harm and even death” [1]. There are three ways in which violence is categorized; it can be a collective violence, self-directed violence and interpersonal violence, which involves violence in relationships with spouse, friends, families and individually [2]. There are many types of violence, these may include; youth violence,
sexual violence, elder abuse and many others [1]. There are also factors that may affect people to conduct violence; it can be due to social, personal, cultural and economic problems. In many countries, violent activities happen so that their family can survive, for revenge, for pleasure and many others [3].

Violence is seen as a global issue that can be controlled with motivational interventions. Around the world, violence is a major cause of death for people aged 15 - 44; and it places a huge burden on many countries in terms of social and economic status [4]. In New Zealand it cost around 1.2 to 5.3 million to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence [5]. A study conducted among university students in the United States (El Paso and Lubbock, Texas and in New Hampshire), found that partner violence was an issue that had a mean occurrence of 35.15% [6]. In 2014, 133 countries reported the prevalence of interpersonal violence, which included youth violence, sexual violence, etc [7]. Another study by [2], stated that 20% of American women undergo physical assault by their individual partners, and about 13 million people went through intimate partner violence.

Living in the Pacific is enjoyable because it is full of colors with people that portray wonderful and sensational lifestyles. However, there is a great drawback that affects Pacific islanders, violence. In Papua New Guinea, a study conducted in 2011 - 2012 stated that the mean prevalence rate of non-partner single and multiple perpetrator violence (rape) ranges from 20.25% to 20.45% [8]. People need to develop interventions of how violence can be eliminated because this problem can be disastrous if not taken into consideration. In a recent study conducted by the Asian/Pacific Islander Youth Violence Prevention Center (APIYVPC), a social ecological approach was used which assisted in the reduction of violence among the students and people of Oahu in Hawai’i [9]. This focused around using both social and environmental factors when approaching the target population.

With the rigorous increase of violence in the Pacific, it is important to note the risk that contributes to these phenomena, these are co-factors that enable violence to be disastrous, not only affecting the weak ones, but everyone. Some of the related risk factors may include: drug abuse, alcohol abuse, unemployment, peer pressure, racial discrimination and many others. It can be concluded that further research is needed in order to combat the prevalence of violence in the Pacific. Hence, this systematic review was designed to provide the determinants of violence and to find out which gender is most susceptible to suffer from violent activities.

**Methodology**

The systematic review was conducted using the Cochrane Library Guidelines. The following databases were used to obtain relevant articles: Medline, CINAHL, PsychInfo, EMBASE, Scopus, and Web of Science. The databases used were common among studies involving violence, which is why they were selected. Medical subheadings (MeSH) and keywords were used to achieve the relevant articles which included, violence*, prevalence, determinants and Pacific. To further the search for articles, AND and OR were used to combine the search parameters. The articles included in this study were from the January 1st 2000 to 1st July 2017, in the English language, peer reviewed and had the full text accessible.

To protect the study from selection bias, two independent reviewers scanned the titles of all available studies and removed the irrelevant studies. The reviewers then read the abstracts of the remaining studies, again removing the irrelevant studies. The third step conducted by the reviewers was the reading of the full texts in order to obtain the final articles. Twenty-three studies met the study inclusion criteria [10,11] (Figure 1).
Once this was done, the reviewers searched the bibliographies of the selected studies in order to find more relevant articles. Following this, three more articles were accepted bringing the total to twenty-six. The studies full texts were then printed for further analysis. Using the information from the selected studies, an extraction sheet was developed with four sections, which were: study information, population, methodology and results (Table 4). A descriptive analysis was then carried out and frequencies and percentages were recorded in tables and figures.

**Results**

The results of the study showed that interest in doing research among researchers increased after 2006, as 46.15% of the studies were conducted between 2006 to 2010. A majority of studies were conducted among both males and females (53.85%), while one-third of the studies were focused only on violence among females. Many of the studies focused on adults (57.69%), followed by children and adolescents (38.46%). Most of the studies were conducted in community settings (61.53%). School based and hospital based studies were other settings which were considered in relation to violence (26.92% and 11.53%, respectively).

More than half of the studies (53.85%) were carried out in South Pacific countries, followed by American Pacific countries (38.46%) and Asia Pacific countries (7.69%) (Table 1). Among South Pacific countries, New Zealand had the highest number of studies (7 studies), followed by Australia, Fiji, PNG, and Samoa (each one study). Among American Pacific countries, Hawai'i had the highest number of the studies (8 studies) and American Samoa had only one study. Vietnam and China were the only two countries in Asia with two studies among Pacific participants (each one).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Year of studies</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2000 - 2005</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006 - 2010</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46.15</td>
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<td>2011 - 2017</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42.31</td>
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<td><strong>Gender of participants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Both male and female</td>
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<td>53.85</td>
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<td><strong>Age of participants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Children and adolescents</td>
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<td>38.46</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Adult and older people</td>
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<td>South Pacific</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>53.85</td>
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</table>

Table 1: General characteristics of studies.

The total number of participants who were engaged in these studies was 207,076. The majority of studies were conducted using a quantitative method (84.62%); with purposive sampling being the most frequent sampling method (76.93%); and filling the questionnaire by doing an interview from the researcher (73.08%) was the most common method of collecting the data among Pacific participants (Table 2).

Table 2 shows the types of determinants extracted from the studies. Overall, four types of determinants were identified in the studies, including: social, behavioral, personal and environmental. Among social factors, unemployment and low income were the most frequent determinants (5 studies each), followed by lack of education and racial discrimination (3 studies each) and change in the culture (one study).

Drug and alcohol consumption were two main behavioral related determinants (5 studies each), followed by mood disorder (4 studies) and previous attempt of suicide (one study). Personal disorder (5 studies) and history of violence (4 studies) were the most personal related determinants of violence. Poor schooling environment was the only environmental related determinant of violence in this study (Table 3).

Table 3: Determinants of violence.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of studies reporting the types of violence. Physical violence (15 studies) was the most common type of violence in Pacific countries, followed by emotional (10 studies), domestic (9 studies) and psychological (8 studies). Cultural and lethal violence were the least type of the violence (one study each).

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Out of 26 studies, 8 studies measured the prevalence of violence, 4 studies measured the prevalence of violence among males and 4 studies measured the prevalence of violence among females. For male victims of violence, New Zealand and PNG reported the highest prevalence of violence (psychological and physical violence (88%) and domestic violence (62.9%), respectively, while Hawai‘i had the lowest prevalence of violence (emotional and physical violence, 10.6%).

For female victims of violence, New Zealand and Australia reported the highest prevalence of violence (physical violence (97.9%) and emotional violence (23%), respectively) while Hawai‘i had the lowest prevalence of violence (emotional and physical violence, 7.3%).

Discussion
The growing epidemic of violence in the Pacific is uncontrollable. Different people live in different environments and are exposed to diverse cultures and traditions. The aim of this systematic review was to find the determinants and types of violence in the Pacific.

In this study, the determinants with the highest frequency are unemployment, low income, drug consumption, alcohol consumption and personal disorder. While physical, domestic and emotional violence are the most common types of violence in the Pacific. Upon comparing the prevalence rate among males and females, females had the highest prevalence rate of physical violence (97.9%).

Prevalence among Males & Females
Looking at the results, female is the gender which has the highest prevalence rate of physical and emotional violence done against them (97.9% and 23%, respectively). These results are consistent with other studies [12], like in Bangladesh where 15% to 52% of married women suffered from physical violence by their spouses [13]. Females suffer violence because they are weak and fragile. They do not possess the type of power that males have [14]. The WHO regards physical violence as the act of hitting, slapping, kicking and beating [15]. The consequence of physical violence amongst women is that they have poor physical and mental health [16-18]. Two studies done in Auckland and Waikato stated that the prevalence rate of physical violence among women are 33% and 39% respectively, and some of the health effects are poor physical health, self-perceived poor health and poor mental health [19]. On the same note, a study conducted by Irion, found that 7% of women suffer from emotional violence at a University Hospital in Geneva [20].

Types of violence

Physical violence shows to be the top type of violence in all of the studies conducted in the Pacific. A study by [21], found that physical violence (37.6%) had the highest prevalence compared to other types they found. On the same note, a multiple-country study done by the WHO stated that the rate of physical violence among women were ranged from 19% to 55%, respectively [22]. Physical violence can result in injuries or even death if people do not seek medical advice and assistance [23,24].

Emotional violence is a type of violence that affects the conscious experience of a person. In the results, emotional violence is the second highest type of violence. A study conducted in the United States found out that the prevalence rate of emotional violence was the highest (4.6%), and this may be due to family members ill-treating older people at the age of 60 years and above [25]. Another study conducted in five Nordiac countries, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, found that 19 - 37% of women suffer from emotional violence, and it was the second highest prevalence in this study [26].

Domestic and psychological violence were the two closest violence types that had 8 and 9 studies conducted to see their prevalence in the Pacific. Domestic violence is a sign that there is a breakdown in the moral structure of families and the societies [27,28]. Women aged 16 and over were interview in a study conducted in London and roughly 23.5% suffered domestic violence for a long time, while 3% suffered it during the course of pregnancy [29]. While for psychological violence, a study done in the United States concludes that about 13.6% of women undergo psychological violence, and this mostly results in poor mental health and physical health [16]. To support that, another study done by Pico-Alfonso M, found that woman who suffer from psychological violence tend to have symptoms of depression and anxiety, along with thoughts of committing suicide [30].

Sexual, lethal and cultural violence are the last three types of violence that had a total of 6 studies. A study by Mouzos, found that about 4% of women suffered from sexual abuse from their partner; and unwanted sexual touching was the common form of sexual violence [31]. Lethal violence is a dangerous kind of violence that deals with manslaughter [32].

Determinants of violence

In conducting interventions, people need to find the root causes/determinants of the problem [33,34]. In this study, there were 4 important factors that contribute to the rising phenomena of violence. The most contributing factor is behavioral, followed by social, personal and then environmental.

Behavior is a driving factor that can also determine a persons’ personality [35]. Alcohol and drug consumption are two major determinants of violence that can change a persons’ behavior [36]. As people are exposed to these two psychoactive substances, their emotions ascend and behaviors start changing; this may result in the change in how the brain works [37,38]. On the other hand, the two disorders that contribute to violence are mood disorder and personal disorder [39]. Mood disorder is a type of cyclical illness that enables people to have depression [40,41]. It is most common between the ages of 16 - 24 and starts declining as people approach the age of 65 - 74 [42]. When people undergo this, there is a sense of loss of interest or pleasure and people start to be violent in how they behave towards people [43]. Personal disorder is a type of psychological mechanism that consists of normal and abnormal personality, and is also comprised of how people may deal with the outside environment [44]. People who suffer this type of disorder are likely to be involved in activities such as alcohol and drug consumption, which may result in people doing violent activities [36,45]. Furthermore, there is a strong association between violence and suicide. A recent study done in Ethiopia found that sexual violence was the main reason why many children committed suicide [46].

Family breakdown is likely to be at the top of the list when it comes to personal factors. Family breakdown mostly occurs in the relationship between parents, possibly due to financial insufficiency, occupational problems or a social problem [47]. This type of violence
Generally, a large proportion of the final violent acts in this study occurred to people who had a history of violence. People who were exposed to violence in their childhood and who are involved in the criminal justice system are at a higher risk of perpetrating violent acts in adulthood. Some of the other factors which may contribute to the risk of violent acts include gender, social status, and family history.

It is concluded that women are more likely to engage in violent acts than men. This may be due to the fact that women are more exposed to violence in the family and society. In addition, women may have more access to weapons and may be more likely to use them to defend themselves.

In conclusion, violence is a complex issue and requires a multi-disciplinary approach to address it. It is important to focus on reducing the risk factors and increasing the protective factors to prevent violence. Further research is needed to explore the underlying causes of violence and to develop effective interventions to prevent and reduce its occurrence.
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Citation: Masoud Mohammadnezhad., et al. "Prevalence, Determinants and Other Characteristics of Violence among Pacific Countries: A Systematic Review Study". EC Psychology and Psychiatry 5.2 (2017): 59-70.
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