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EL ROL DE LOS ESTUDIOS DE POBLACIÓN TRAS LA PANDEMIA DE COVID-19 Y
EL DESAFÍO DE LA IGUALDAD EN AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE

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El tiempo de matrimonio en la violencia de pareja
en la América Latina y el Caribe

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O tempo de casamento na violência doméstica
na América Latina e no Caribe

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Timing of Intimate Partner Violence
in Latin American and Caribbean Marriages

RESUMEN

Introducción: La violencia de pareja es un problema continuo, sin embargos, se sabe poco sobre la dinámica del tiempo en la violencia conyugal. El propósito de esta investigación fue explorar el tiempo al primer evento de violencia física o sexual contra las mujeres dentro de los matrimonios heterosexuales de América Latina y el Caribe.

Método: La población de estudio fueron mujeres casadas de las Encuestas Demográficas y Salud realizadas en Colombia, República Dominicana, Guatemala, Haití y Honduras. Se aplicó el análisis de supervivencia de Kaplan-Meier para examinar el tiempo transcurrido hasta el primer evento de violencia física (moderada, grave) o violencia sexual.

Resultados: Para todos los países, excepto el Haití, el tipo de violencia más común fue la violencia física moderada seguida con mayor frecuencia por la violencia física severa y la violencia sexual. En Haití, la tendencia por tipo de violencia más frecuente fue moderada, sexual y severa. Para los tres tipos de violencia, las probabilidades de experimentar un primer asalto por parte de una pareja aumentaron más rápidamente durante los primeros cinco años de matrimonio. Si ocurriera un primer evento violento, lo más probable es que hubiera ocurrido antes del año 10 de matrimonio para violencia sexual severa y para el año 25 para violencia moderada.

Conclusión: Las mujeres parecían estar relativamente protegidas de la violencia severa o sexual siempre que no ocurrieran desde el principio. El riesgo de un primer incidente de violencia moderada todavía estaba presente en los matrimonios más duraderos. Los primeros cinco años de matrimonio son los más críticos para la prevención primaria de una primera incidencia de violencia de pareja. La duración del matrimonio es una dinámica clave en la violencia conyugal.

RESUMO

Contexto: A violência por parceiro íntimo é um problema constante, mas pouco se sabe sobre a dinâmica do tempo na violência conjugal. O objetivo desta pesquisa foi explorar o tempo ao primeiro evento de violência física ou sexual contra mulheres em casamentos heterossexuais na América Latina e no Caribe.

Método: A população do estudo era mulheres casadas das Pesquisas Demográficas e Saúde realizadas na Colômbia, República Dominicana, Guatemala, Haiti e Honduras. A análise de sobrevivência de Kaplan-Meier foi aplicada para examinar o tempo até o primeiro evento de violência física (moderada, grave) ou violência sexual.

Resultados: Para todos os países, exceto o Haiti, o tipo de violência mais comum foi a violência física moderada, mais frequentemente seguida por violência física grave e violência sexual. No Haiti, a tendência por tipo de violência mais frequente foi moderada, sexual e grave. Para os três tipos de violência, as probabilidades de sofrer uma primeira agressão de um parceiro aumentaram mais rapidamente durante os primeiros cinco anos de casamento. Se um primeiro evento violento tivesse ocorrido, provavelmente teria ocorrido antes do ano 10 de casamento para violência severa e sexual e antes do ano 25 para violência moderada.

Conclusão: As mulheres parecem estar relativamente protegidas da violência grave ou sexual, desde que não aconteça no início do casamento. O risco de um primeiro incidente de violência moderada ainda está presente em casamentos mais duradouros. Os primeiros cinco anos de casamento são os mais críticos para a prevenção primária da primeira incidência de violência conjugal. A duração do casamento é uma dinâmica chave na violência conjugal.

ABSTRACT

Background: Intimate partner violence is an ongoing issue, yet little is known about the dynamics of time in marital violence. The purpose of this research was to explore timing to first event of physical or sexual violence against women within heterosexual Latin American and Caribbean marriages.

Method: The study population was married women from Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Haiti, and Honduras. Kaplan-Meier survival analysis was applied to examine time to first event of physical violence (moderate, severe) or sexual violence.

Results: For all countries but Haiti, the most common violence type was moderate physical violence most frequently followed by severe physical violence and sexual violence. In Haiti, the trend by most frequent violence type was moderate, sexual and severe. For all three violence types, the probabilities of experiencing a first assault by a partner increased the fastest during the first five years of marriage. If a first violent event were to occur, it would have most likely occurred by year 10 for severe and sexual violence and by year 25 for moderate violence.

Conclusion: Women appeared to be relatively protected from severe or sexual violence as long as they do not happen early on, whereas the risk of a first incident of moderate violence was still present in longer-lasting marriages. The first five years of marriage are the most critical for primary prevention of a first incidence of partner violence. Marriage duration is a key dynamic in marital violence.

INTRODUCTION

Time is a critical element in the study of marriage and family dynamics given that relationships are not static and important events occur in different periods for different groups. To name a few examples, previous research has examined temporal trends for first marriages (Cremin et al., 2009), breastfeeding practices (Agampodi et al., 2007), family breakdown (Fergusson et al., 1985), spousal risk of mortality (Smith & Zick, 1994), and divorce in families (Hartley et al., 2010). Survival analysis is an important statistical approach in social science and public health research examining the time to an event of interest as the main outcome (Lee, 1997). Although, time to event is an outcome that can be identified in intimate partner violence (IPV), there has been minimal published research applying survival analysis to the topic. A recent publication using survival methods employed Cox proportional hazards and revealed that experiencing IPV increased risk of unintended pregnancy and reduced time between pregnancies (Maxwell et al., 2018). Two studies using Kaplan-Meier life table methods provided evidence of IPV during pregnancy increasing risk of perinatal and neonatal mortality in India (Ahmed et al., 2006; Koenig et al., 2010). The majority of survival method applications in IPV research, however, have been conducted in the field of criminology studies to evaluate the effectiveness of legal interventions in reducing or preventing recidivism for offenders (Hanmer et al., 1999; Klein et al., 2005; Klein & Crowe, 2008).

METHODS

The purpose of this research was to explore timing to first event of physical and sexual violence against women within heterosexual Latin American and Caribbean marriages. The data sourced for this study were from Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) programs conducted in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region (<https://dhsprogram.com/>). The DHS program

is a retrospective, cross-sectional, nationally-representative survey that randomly selects one woman per household of reproductive age (15-49 years old). DHS domestic violence (DV) data come from an optional module of questions that not all countries receive. The module asks about violence perpetrated by the current partner for women who were married or the most recent partner for women who were divorced, separated or widowed at the time of the survey. A “partner” was a man with whom the respondent lives with or lived with as if married, whether official or not (Croft et al., 2018). The inclusion criteria were ever-partnered women who were selected and successfully interviewed for DV module. Of the 15 LAC countries with past or ongoing DHS programs, eight countries have ever conducted the DV module. Only countries who received the DV module within the last 10 years were included in this analysis. Using the most recently available data collection cycle, the list of countries included for this study were Colombia (2015), Dominican Republic (2013), Guatemala (2014-15), Haiti (2016-17), and Honduras (2011-12) (ICF, 2004-2017).

The types of a first violent event used for the study outcomes were classified as moderate physical violence, severe physical violence, and sexual violence committed against women by husbands. Moderate physical violence was defined by answering affirmatively to any of the following scenarios: (a) ever been pushed, shook or had something thrown, (b) ever been slapped, (c) ever been punched with fist or hit by something harmful, and (d) ever had arm twisted or hair pulled. Severe physical violence was composed of the following variables: (a) ever been kicked or dragged, (b) ever been strangled or burnt, and (c) ever been threatened with knife/gun or other weapon (not available for Colombia). Sexual violence referred to (a) ever been physically forced into unwanted sex and (b) ever been forced into other unwanted sexual

acts (not available for Colombia and Guatemala). If a respondent experienced violence, she was then asked the time in years it took to experience the first event from the year of marriage/union.

The aim of this study was to examine the time from marriage year to the year of the first event of violence. All statistical analyses were conducted using Stata 16.0 (Stata Corp., College Station, Texas, USA), included survey weights specific to the DV module, and took into account the complex survey design (i.e. clustering and stratification). Proportions were calculated for respondents experiencing physical violence (moderate and severe) and sexual violence perpetrated by a partner during their marriage. The Kaplan-Meier method was used to calculate and plot the survival probabilities of time to first violent event. The failure of interest was a first physically or sexually violent event; the starting point was the marriage year; and the time scale was in years (up to 40 years). Right censoring was required because not all records experienced failure during the study period; no left censoring was required because the starting point was the same for all records (although not all women were married on the same date, they all started their marriage with year zero).

RESULTS

A trend was observed where women experienced moderate violence most frequently, followed by severe physical violence and sexual violence. Colombia reported the highest prevalence of moderate physical violence (32%) and severe physical violence (13%), while the other countries reported levels at 17-20% for moderate and 7-8% for severe physical violence. Haiti was the only country with a prevalence of sexual violence (11%) higher than severe violence. The Dominican Republic and Guatemala reported the lowest prevalence of sexual violence at 5%; Honduras and Colombia were 7% and 8%, respectively.

The survival probability refers to the probability of not being assaulted for the first time for a given marriage duration length. In Figure 1, the survival curves began to demonstrate failure by the first year of marriage, indicating that women were experiencing their first assault as soon as they were married. Women who suffered severe and sexual violence had similar function curves compared to women who suffered moderate violence. The sharpest decline for all functions occurred before the fifth year of marriage, signifying that the probabilities of experiencing a first assault increased the fastest during those years. By the fifteenth year, the survival probabilities for moderate violence ranged from .67 to .81, whereas by the fifteenth year the survival probabilities for severe and sexual violence ranged from .86 to .93 and from .88 to .94, respectively. The functions were steepest in order of moderate, severe, and sexual. Haiti was an exception where the order of steepness was moderate, sexual, and severe, which aligns with the finding that Haiti was the only country with a proportion of sexual violence higher than severe physical violence.

DISCUSSION

The results from the survival functions (Figure 1) provided insight into the timing of the first incident of violence in a marriage. For all three violence types, the probabilities of experiencing a first assault by a partner increased the fastest during the first five years and if a first violent event were to occur, it would have most likely occurred by year 10 for severe and sexual violence and by year 25 for moderate violence. Women appeared to be relatively protected from severe or sexual violence as long as they do not happen early on, whereas the risk of a first incident of moderate violence was still present in longer-lasting marriages.

Experiencing IPV among married women pointed to similar trends across the five Latin American and the Caribbean countries studied in this analysis. Haiti demonstrated the highest

proportion and lowest survival probability of sexual violence, and the only country exceeding that of severe violence. Colombia stood out as having the highest overall proportions and survival probabilities of experiencing moderate physical violence and severe physical violence. Haiti and Honduras had the widest range in the odds of moderate and severe violence; Guatemala had the widest range for sexual violence. Spatial patterns at the sub-national level may still exist despite weak geographic patterns at the national level.

The findings from this study point to the first five years of marriage as the most critical for primary prevention. Given the continued risk of violence for at least the first 15 years of marriage, primary prevention strategies are still relevant for avoiding a first event of assault, particularly of moderate physical violence. Primary prevention may not make sense for older marriages; instead, secondary and tertiary prevention programs, that address the immediate concerns and enduring effects of violence (Brome et al., 2004), would be more appropriate. Similar to prevention strategies, therapy would be best initiated during the early years of marriage (O'Leary et al., 1989) when the risk period is smaller (the longer the risk period, the lower the survival probability).

The countries selected for analysis were more representative of the Caribbean region or the Northern LAC region, which means the experience of most South American women were missing. The DHS program remains a powerful tool to investigate a particularly sensitive topic through nationally-representative data as the DV module asks several questions about families and partner violence. Reproductive Health Surveys provide an alternative source of data to explore IPV in additional countries in Latin America (Bott et al., 2012).

Although women were asked about events since the start of marriage, it is possible some women might have understood the question as time since the start of the (premarital)

relationship. The respondent's interpretation of the question has implications for the interpretation of the results. If all women answered this question as "since marriage" then these results will underestimate the length of time taken for violence to appear in a marriage (since the intimate partner relationship will have started before the marriage). If the answers were all given in terms of how long since the relationship started, the analysis will provide an accurate estimate of the length of time taken since the start of the intimate partner relationship. If women were interpreting the question variably (i.e. some interpreting as time since marriage and some as time since dating started), which is the most likely scenario here, then the analysis was affected by differential misclassification to an unknown extent. Marriage year may not serve as the most appropriate start date for survival analyses for married couples in the context of dating violence and future survey questionnaires could consider asking about the year when the romantic relationship started or ensure that marriage/union year is understood as the year of coupling and not necessarily the year in which a civil registration was filed.

CONCLUSION

Violence in marriage is incredibly damaging because of the high degree of intimacy between the perpetrator and the victim. The purpose of this research was to explore the dynamics of violence through the temporal dimension of marital violence. This study was the first to analyze survival time to first event of physical and sexual violence since the start of marriage, which revealed the highest probabilities in the first years of marriage. Marriage duration is a key dynamic in marital violence. The conclusions from this study can inform research, prevention, and counseling-based interventions.

Table 1

Prevalence of Violence Perpetrated Against Women by Husbands During Marriage

	Colombia	Dominican Republic	Guatemala	Haiti	Honduras
<i>n</i>	24,862	5,799	6,509	4,322	12,469
<i>Violence Type</i>	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)	% (95% CI)
<i>Moderate Physical</i>	31.70 (30.67-32.75)	18.70 (17.17-20.34)	17.10 (15.86-18.43)	18.11 (16.39-19.96)	19.63 (18.65-20.65)
<i>Severe Physical</i>	13.28 (12.60-13.98)	7.42 (6.37-8.63)	6.51 (5.76-7.36)	7.67 (6.59-8.90)	7.54 (9.80-10.61)
<i>Sexual</i>	7.62 (7.14-8.13)	5.38 (4.57-6.33)	5.20 (4.53-5.96)	11.16 (9.80-12.70)	6.52 (5.94-7.14)

Note: Proportions accounted for complex survey design.

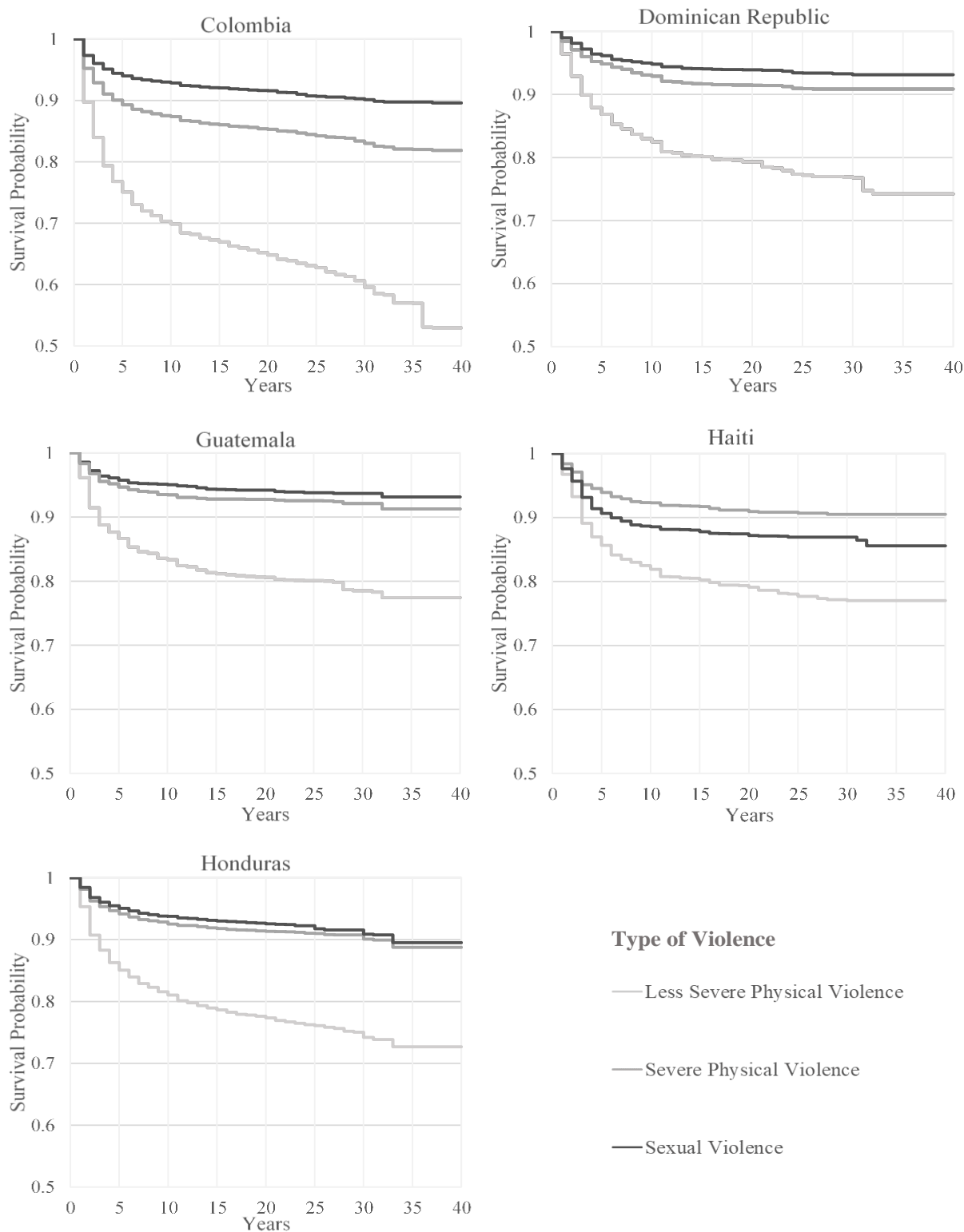


FIGURE 1. KAPLAN-MEIER SURVIVAL FUNCTIONS FOR TIME TO FIRST PHYSICALLY AND SEXUALLY VIOLENT EVENT IN YEARS OF MARRIAGE.

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