

"My parents said that if I got divorced, they will allow me to live with them and will give me a plot of land for housing. I also have a stable job, so I can raise my children myself. So I'm not afraid. I'm thinking of divorcing my husband, because I do not think my husband would change. After each time my husband hits me, I did have a talk with him, and he has promised me that he will change. But in fact he has not changed. Now I have still not divorced him because I fear that my children will then grow up without a father."

Families don't involve the police when a man abuses a pregnant woman

Our research found that although some families supported women against violence, for instance by welcoming their children to return back to their natal house, no family involved the police or government agencies when abuse was committed by their son-in-law. They found it to be a private matter. Also, they were afraid that their neighbors would gossip about them if they knew about their daughter's marital difficulties. One woman who was 27 years old and living with her natal family said:

"My parents did not talk to their neighbors about my story. They were afraid that their neighbors would gossip about why their daughter had got married but now come back to live at home again... This is an internal matter of my family, so my parents think it should be solved within the family."

CONCLUSIONS

Nearly half of the women in this study reported that they lacked social support during their pregnancy. The study also showed that social support is associated with lower risk of experiencing intimate partner violence during pregnancy, and that women's dependency on their husband and his family is reduced if they receive support from their natal relatives. Social support networks such as the natal family, trusted friends and neighbors as well as social organizations in the local community hold the potential to play important roles in offering advice, practical help and shelter for pregnant women who are victims of violence by their husband. These findings point to the need for further research on the role of informal social support in prevention of and responses to intimate partner violence, and for more active

involvement of women's natal relatives in interventions aiming to address partner violence.

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Workshop on: "The Impact of Violence on Reproductive Health in Tanzania and Vietnam (PAVE)"

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AGAINST PREGNANT WOMEN IN VIETNAM: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

KEY FINDINGS

1. Not all women have access to social support during pregnancy: One out of two pregnant women in this study reported that they lacked social support during their pregnancy.
2. Social support was associated with a lower risk of being exposed to intimate partner violence during pregnancy: pregnant women who reported that they lacked social support had significantly higher risk of being exposed to intimate partner violence, compared to women with access to some level of social support.
3. Social support from the natal family is essential; this includes access to advice, financial help and shelter. The support of the natal family is a particularly important factor for women who decide to leave an abusive husband.

INTRODUCTION

This research provides updated findings from the Vietnamese part of the interdisciplinary research project PAVE, The Impact of Violence on Reproductive Health in Tanzania and Vietnam.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) against women includes emotional violence, physical violence and sexual violence. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence. Pregnant women constitute a particularly vulnerable group with violence prevalence rates ranging between 2% and 57% in low and middle income countries [1]. IPV during pregnancy has serious consequences for women's health, while also affecting the health of newborns and their later development [2, 3]. Thus, there is a need to gain a better understanding of the factors that can reduce women's risk of being exposed to IPV and enhance their coping capacities.

Social support has the potential to be such a factor. Social support means having friends, family or social organizations to help in times of crisis. Research shows that social support enhances quality of life and provides protection against adverse life events [4, 5]. Social support includes:

- Emotional support (sharing of empathy, love and trust),
- Instrumental support (practical help that directly assist a person in need, such as babysitting, money and food),
- Informational support (the provision of advice, suggestions, and information) [6].

METHODOLOGY

Combining epidemiological and ethnographic approaches, data collection within this research project was conducted in Hanoi's Đông Anh district over a two-year period, from 2014 to 2016. The project included a cohort study involving 1,337 pregnant women recruited at district hospitals and commune health stations and an ethnographic study involving in-depth interviews with pregnant women who reported exposure to IPV during cohort study interviews. Each of the 1,337 women participating in the cohort study was interviewed four times: at enrollment (which took place no later than week 24

of the pregnancy); in the second trimester; at delivery; and 4-12 weeks after the delivery.

Based on a validated questionnaire, the Postpartum Social Support Questionnaire (PSSQ), and the classification of different types of social support, the research team developed seven questions on social support including emotional, instrumental and informational support. The answers were coded into five categories and the scores were calculated and coded into yes or no to social support.

MAIN RESULTS

1. Women often lack social support during pregnancy

Nearly half of the interviewed pregnant women (44.1%) said that they lacked any kind of social support. The most common form of support that women reported that they lacked were instrumental support (42%) followed by informational and emotional support (28.7% and 28.2%) (Figure 1).

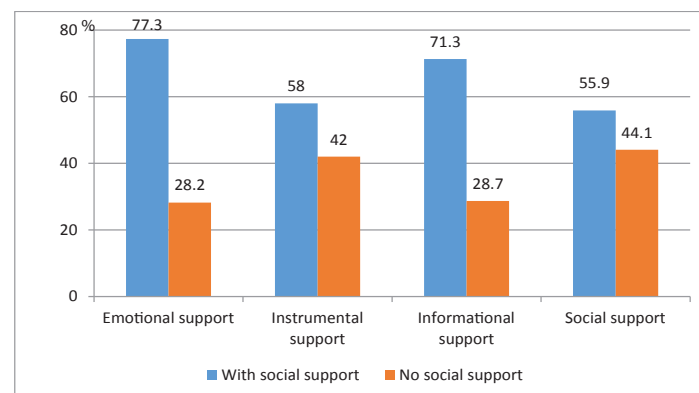


Figure 1: Forms of social support during pregnancy

2. Lacking social support is associated with higher risk of being exposed to IPV during pregnancy

Women who lacked instrumental support had 2.5 times increased risk of being exposed to IPV compared to women who did receive instrumental support. Similar results were found for emotional and informational support (Figure 2).

3. Social support by the natal family is the most important form of support

Three out of four pregnant women (76.5%) who experienced violence in their relationship said that they informed their natal family about the violence. By contrast, only one in four (23.1%) chose to tell their family-in law about the situation. Only 3.1% sought help from social organizations (Figure 3).

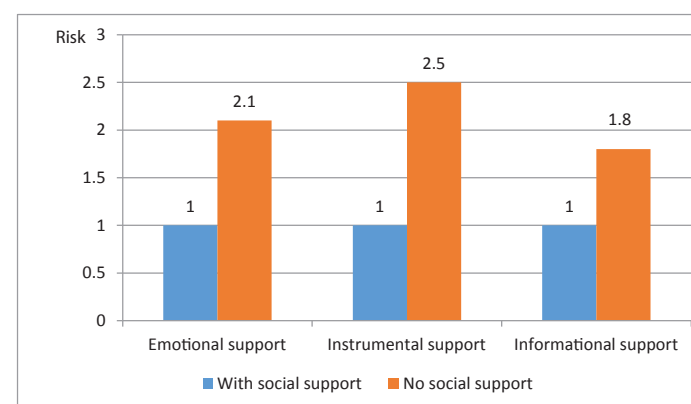


Figure 2: The risk of being exposed to IPV among women without support

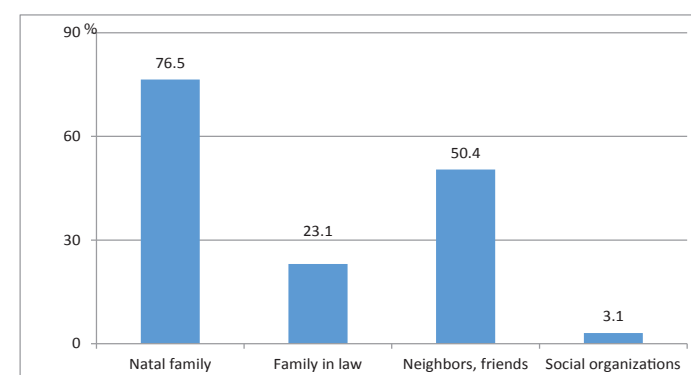


Figure 3: Percentage of pregnant women who disclosed that they were exposed to IPV

The natal family of the pregnant woman sometimes provides a shelter

In northern Vietnam, according to cultural tradition, women will leave their natal family after marriage to live with their husband and his family. PAVE project research shows that due to their dependency on their husband and his family, it can be difficult for women to protect themselves against domestic abuse. In many cases, when women were exposed to IPV, the woman's natal parents told her that they could not help her: she was married now, they said, and so she belonged to her husband and his family. They did not want to interfere in another family's affairs, and they felt that they were not in a position to offer their daughter any other help besides verbal and moral support. Therefore, they encouraged the woman to stay in her marriage and endure, for the sake of herself and her children. In a few cases, when a woman chose to disclose intimate partner violence to her natal family, her parents would come and bring their daughter home as a way to protect her from further violence. In the words of one 18-year-old woman:

The PAVE project is funded by DANIDA (the Danish International Development Agency) and conducted in collaboration between Vietnamese, Danish, and Tanzanian researchers from four universities: Hanoi Medical University, University of Copenhagen, University of Southern Denmark, and Kilimanjaro Christian Medical College. The research was approved by Research Ethics Committee.

"Even when my parents knew about the situation, they just advised me calmly, slowly, to talk with my husband. But this was difficult so my parents came to see my husband's family. Once, when my aunt came to visit me and my son, my husband hit me. Then my aunt talked with my parents, and they came to my husband's house to pick me up. I was at my parents' house from then on and until now. I'm waiting for our two families to meet and solve the matter regarding my husband and me."

The family provides financial support to pregnant women and children when they return

Within the first six months after birth, women most often stay at home and thus depend entirely on the economic help from their husband. So when their natal family takes them home to avoid further violence, it is their family who must provide for them. A 25-year-old woman, who was taken back by her family after the birth of her baby to prevent violence from her husband, explains her situation:

"During my days here, all daily activities and baby care are taken care of by my mother. My mother runs a small business which gives her enough money to help me so that I can buy milk for my baby. My husband and my parents-in-law did not care about me and my child. If it was not for my mother; I would not know what to do."

Support by natal family is an important factor when women decide to leave an abusive husband

This study demonstrates that women tend to make important decisions based on their expectation of receiving support – or not receiving support – from their natal family. In many cases, women opted to stay in abusive marriages because they felt that they had nowhere else to go. As one woman said: "It would be easy to leave this place. But it would be difficult for me to find somewhere to go." The women who did consider leaving their husbands were usually those whose natal family had offered to help them if they did so. One 25-year-old woman, for instance, had been promised a plot of land if she decided for a divorce: