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An exploration of clients' agency regarding their own reproductive health while living with intimate partner violence**Sumaya Joseph**

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Problem: A study conducted amongst women in Soweto, South Africa attending antenatal clinics in 2002, found that 21.8% of women seeking care experienced multiple assaults by a male partner (Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Yoshihama, Gray, McIntyre, & Harlow, 2004:238). This study aims to develop insight into how intimate partner violence influences women's decision making and ultimate reproductive health choices.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: Women were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted with an embedded feminist perspective. Describing lived experiences has been conceptualized as an overarching philosophy on which all qualitative research draws. Descriptive qualitative research recognizes an experience as being unique to an individual. Hermeneutic descriptive qualitative research concerns with creating a rich, deep account of an experience (Burns & Grove, 2011:76).

Research Setting: All women attend a primary health care facility within the Khayelitsha Eastern substructure of the Western Cape South Africa.

Results: The lack of agency challenges women's ability to make reproductive health choices. Adhering to social norms is of higher value than women's rights and become an oppressive force. Intimate partner violence coupled with, fear challenges women's agency in a society where women have a lower status than men. Women living with intimate partner violence are at risk of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV. This is mainly because of a lack of agency. Individual stories behind statistics are powerful tools to raise awareness and steer interventions to advocate for the empowerment of women's health care.

Biography

Sumaya Joseph is currently employed by the Department of Health in the Western Cape, as an Operational Manager of a Maternal Child Health Unit in Khayelitsha. She has studied at Rand Afrikaans University, University of South Africa and recently completed a Master's degree in Nursing at Stellenbosch University. She was identified as an expert in midwifery by the National Nursing Department and was invited to join the team of obstetricians from South Africa, at the RCOG to give input on post-partum contraceptive training manuals. She continues to advocate for women's reproductive rights.

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