

Trauma—High Energy Fractures



A CALL TO ACTION: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE SURGEON'S ROLE

Mohit Bhandari on behalf of the Intimate Partner Violence Working Group

WHAT CONSTITUTES DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

Intimate partner violence (IPV), spousal abuse, domestic violence and domestic assault are just some of the commonly used terms that describe a complex of behaviours, where one partner abuses the other verbally, physically, sexually, emotionally or financially. Most often, IPV is committed by men against women; Using these key criteria, 42 percent of 282 women in a recent pilot screening study led by Bhandari screened positive for intimate partner violence.

IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WIDESPREAD?

\$50-billion is the annual cost associated with violence against women. Forty percent of women in North America are likely to face one or more types of violence which includes child abuse (20%); physical abuse (20%); rape (20%) and domestic violence from an intimate partner (35%). When put into perspective of other health care conditions, these numbers are quite astounding.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

Unfortunately, there is no legal mandate to report suspected cases of domestic violence in Canada. However, as an orthopedic surgeon

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by law we have an obligation to report any child we see with non-witnessed injury (i.e. fracture) to child protective services. Physician-patient confidentiality and lack of legal requirements leave us very dependent on the victims to come forth and request help. Sadly, even if a woman tells her surgeon she's being abused, there's nothing they can do legally. We can't call the Police unless she requests us to do so.

IS THE LEGAL MANDATE TO REPORT ABUSE TO THE POLICE AND/OR SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES THE ANSWER?

While it seems logical to agree with this, there is great debate about whether mandatory reporting actually helps victims. We know that women are at the greatest risk of harm during the point at which they attempt to leave an abusive partner. Mandatory reporting could create even more problems for a woman if she is not prepared to leave and has children in the home. That being said, orthopaedic surgeons need to continue to educate themselves about this issue in the hope of making a difference to the lives of these women.

HOW COMMON IS ABUSE AMONG INJURED WOMEN ATTENDING ORTHOPAEDIC CLINICS?

A team of social workers and surgeons are currently conducting a large study to identify the prevalence of partner violence among women seen in orthopedic clinics across Canada, the United States, Europe and India for injuries. The study is titled PRAISE - Prevalence of Abuse and Intimate partner Violence Surgical Evaluation. Mohit Bhandari is the Principal Investigator and the PRAISE steering committee include experts in domestic violence (Sonia Dosanjh, Clare Freeman, Dave Mathews and Diana Tikasz). The study has the collaboration of a number of expert surgeons like Paul Tornetta, Kyle Jeray, Greg Della Rocca, Brad Petrisor, and Emil

The goal of the study is to screen 3,000 injured women to determine if their injuries are the result of abuse. The team recently completed the PRAISE pilot study in Ontario with 282 women screened in two hospital sites: Hamilton General Hospital and St. Michael Hospital in Toronto. Their screening was done over 3-month periods ending June 30. Of these 282 women, 75 percent of those screened came in for fractures or dislocations—very severe injuries.



The most startling findings from the PRAISE pilot study reveal that there were 7 women, representing 2.5 percent of 282 women screened, who had fractures or dislocations directly as the result of physical abuse. This physical abuse not only left marks on the body but actually put the women in hospital and led to orthopaedic surgery to repair the broken bones. Short of being killed, this abuse ranks high on the spectrum of severity and suggests the situation has escalated to an extreme level.

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Although the majority of surgeons don't believe that abuse is occurring in their patients, PRAISE findings suggest that 2.5 percent of women coming to orthopaedic clinics with major fractures or dislocations are directly the result of abuse. If a typical orthopedic surgeon sees 1800 to 2,000 injured women yearly this represents about 46 women with a fracture directly from abuse—not to mention over 700 women with some form of abuse (emotional, physical or sexual). Bhandari published a survey last year which revealed that 87 percent of orthopaedic surgeons can't remember when they last saw a case of domestic violence in their fracture clinics. They don't remember a single case. Sadly, in reality about 40 to 50 women are coming through their clinics who are seriously physically abused. They simply don't recognize it. Orthopaedic surgeons have to create an environment that will encourage women to disclose abuse.



“If we want change, we as orthopedic surgeons have to be part of that change”
As part of the larger community of the orthopedic surgeons, this research may serve as a catalyst to create safer lives for women in this world.