

Behaviours, perpetrators and directions of Reproductive Coercion and Abuse: Do theoretical conceptualisations align with pregnant peoples' experiences?

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Background:

Developing a shared, evidence-based understanding of reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA) is critical to improving the consistency and quality of research, and health system responses. In 2021 a 'conceptual re-evaluation' paper argued for centering intent and the co-existence of other forms of coercion and violence in definitions of RCA (Tarzia & Hegarty 2021). This study aimed to a) identify whether this conceptualisation of RCA aligned with the experiences of RCA reported by our pregnancy-options counselling clients, and b) inform updated, client-centered RCA theory and (re)conceptualisation.

Methods:

We conducted a thematic, qualitative analysis of the case-notes of 350 pregnancy options counselling clients who had reported experiencing RCA between 2018 and 2021. The analysis used an open (inductive) pre-coding process, followed by a largely deductive thematic analysis to test the fit of the data to existing RCA theory.

Results:

The analysis identified a spectrum of experiences of RCA among pregnancy counselling clients. Themes emerged regarding intent, perpetrator types and behaviour patterns, directions of RCA (including towards continuing or ending a pregnancy) and key behaviours associated with each, intersections of RCA with other forms of Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault (DFVSA), and RCA outside of contexts of other DFVSA. While much of the client experience reflected in case notes aligned with prior definitions of RCA, considerable experiences of RCA separate to DFVSA were identified. Challenges associated with measuring intent related to RCA-related behaviours and the implications for measurement, screening and response are discussed.

Conclusion:

Centering pregnant peoples' voices and experiences in emerging definitions of RCA is critical in ensuring both theory and health service responses are as relevant and effective as possible. Understanding behaviours associated with varying types and perpetrators will improve the sensitivity of screening and understandings of the nuances and bounds of RCA.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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