If we don't ask we don't know

Can intimate partner violence adversely affect the sexual health of Western Australian women?

Cross-sectional study: Intimate partner violence and negative sexual health outcomes

Background

- 1 in 3 Australian women have experienced violence at some stage in their life; most of this violence is perpetrated by an intimate partner[1]
- Reproductive coercion (RC) is among the many forms of violence perpetrated against women, although it has been poorly studied in Australia[3]
- There are suggestions in the literature of a link between RC and negative sexual health outcomes[4] (such as unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections)

Aim of the study

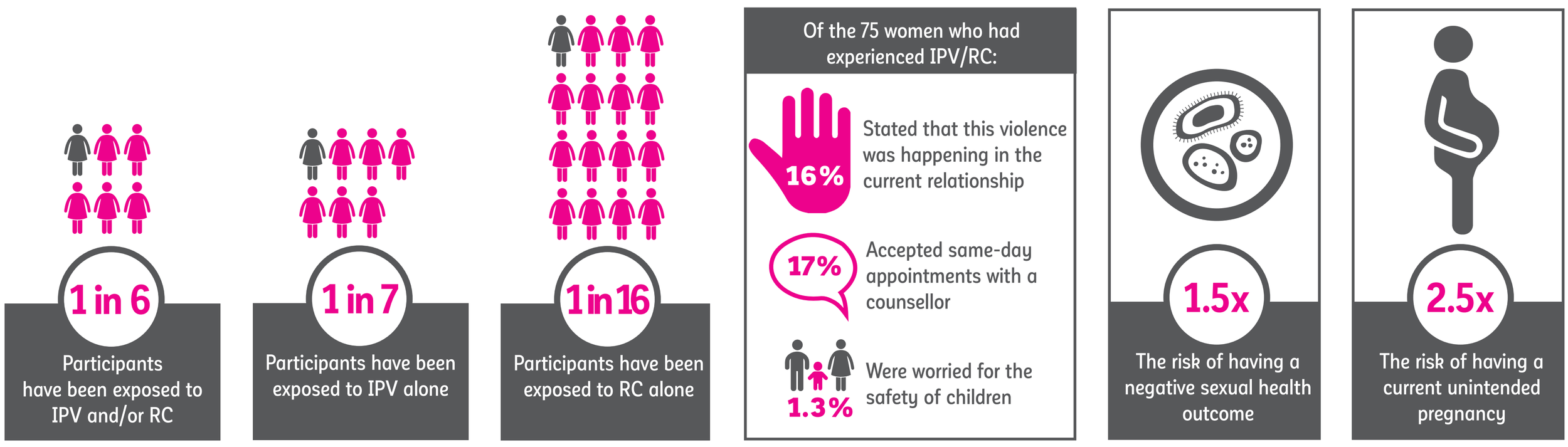
To explore whether there is a link between exposure to intimate partner violence and having a negative sexual health outcome among people identifying as female who present to Sexual Health Quarters.

Methods

- Cross-sectional study to assess the impact of IPV/RC on the risk of developing a negative sexual health outcome
- Design of an evidence-based, consumer- and clinician-reviewed screening tool for IPV and RC
- Development of management plan and referral pathways for disclosures
- Data collected for the study includes responses to the screening tool, management of disclosures, and the presence or absence of unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections for clients who identify as female
- Inclusion criteria: SHQ clients aged 16 and over who identify as female
- Data will be collected from 3000 participants

Preliminary results from first 6 weeks of data collection

- 647 clients met the inclusion criteria; 440 (68%) consented to participation in the study
- The majority of participants were of high socioeconomic background(60%), aged between 20 and 34 years old (67%) and are heterosexual (88%)
- There were no major differences between all participants and those screening positive with respect to age, socioeconomic status or sexuality



Conclusions and recommendations

- There is a high prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence and Reproductive Coercion among females presenting to SHQ
- There is significant demand for emergency counselling for women who have been exposed to IPV/RC
- Preliminary results indicate a link between IPV/RC and negative sexual health outcomes
- Routine screening for intimate partner violence can be considered in other healthcare settings to enable the provision of appropriate support to clients
- Further research is needed regarding the longer term impact of screening for IPV/RC, for example whether identification and offering assistance can effectively reduce the impact of IPV/RC on clients

References

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Authors: Douglas R, Galrao M, Smith S, Creagh A | shq.org.au | 7th August 2019