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Impact of intimate male partner violence on women's physical and mental health and the endocrine and immune systems

M. Martinez, M.I. Garcia-Linares, S. Sanchez-Lorente and C. Blasco-Ros
Department of Psychobiology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Valencia, Spain

Intimate partner violence (IPV) of the man against the woman is an epidemic problem present in most societies. In a study carried out in the Valencian Community of Spain, the impact on this type of violence on the physical and mental health as well as the endocrine and immune systems of women was assessed. Female victims of physical and psychological (n=77) or psychological violence (n=55) by their intimate male partners were compared with control women (n=52), who lived in a non-violent partner relationship. The results indicate that female victims had a poor physical health status with high incidence of diseases and physical symptoms, and a poor mental health with symptomatology of depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder and thoughts and attempts of suicide. The endocrine system was also altered with higher basal levels of cortisol and dehydroepiandrosterone in female victims. The immune system was also impaired with a low capacity of female victims to neutralize Herpes simplex virus type 1 infection. Importantly, there were no differences between women exposed to both physical and psychological violence and those only exposed to psychological violence, with the exception of the impairment in the immune system. Thus, these results indicate that IPV of men against women has a high impact on women's health and that psychological IPV is as detrimental as physical violence, and, thus, it should be considered a major type of violence which deserves main attention by researchers, clinicians, lawyers and policy makers.

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Communicating author:
Manuela Martinez, MD., PhD.
Professor of Psychobiology
Department of Psychobiology
Faculty of Psychology
University of Valencia
Avda Blasco Ibañez, 21
46010 Valencia
E-mail: Manuela.Martinez@uv.es