A Deeper Wound:
Effects of Intimate Partner Violence in a Surgeon’s World

Puja Shah Berry MD MS
March 20, 2019
University of Virginia
General Surgery Grand Rounds
Department of Surgery
Charlottesville, Virginia
No disclosures

Disclaimer: I am not an expert on this topic, it is just near and dear to my heart
Outline

- Background of IPV
- How it affects our surgical practice
- Are surgeons personally affected?
- Ways to help
- What still needs to be done?
Background

- First of all... I thought it was called domestic violence

A woman is beaten every nine seconds in the U.S.

- 12 million men and women experience IPV each year

- More than 40% of all female homicides are attributed to IPV
Background

- Most cases are never reported to the police
- Men are significantly less likely to report than women
- These statistics for men and women may be WAY underreported
- 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence
- 50% of IPV perpetrators also abuse their children
Not all men break their girlfriends’ hearts.

A bad relationship can hurt more than your feelings. To get help for victims of physical abuse, call:
Healthcare Impacts
Healthcare Impacts

- Consequences are psychological, physical, short and long term

- 3-5x as likely to have depression

- Linked to diseases, later stage diagnosis of cancers

- Only 1 in 3 people seek medical care for an injury sustained during an IPV incident
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

- Warning Signs of Domestic Abuse
  - Mixture of old and new injuries
  - Multiple soft tissue injuries
  - History of prior IPV
  - Isolation by partner
  - Behavior of patient depressed, withdrawn
  - Pregnant patient with trauma to breast and abdomen
  - Family income below $10,000
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

- Trauma

- Baseline knowledge is poor

- Most common form of injury worldwide

- Some estimates: 50% of all acute injuries, 21% of all requiring urgent surgery, up to 35% of all ED visits
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

- Bariatics

  - IPV is already known to be related to obesity, both global epidemics

  - Childhood abuse leads to 36% higher risk of obesity

  - PTSD and depression linked to significantly higher obesity
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

Diagram:
- Severity of wife abuse (IPV)
- PTSD symptoms
- Obesity
- Severity of childhood abuse
- Depressive symptoms
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

- Cardiovascular Disease
  - High rate of CVD in IPV patients
  - Unclear causal mechanisms
  - Higher rate of risky behaviors
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

- Colorectal
  - Rape and forced sex leading to perineal, anorectal pathology
  - Chronic pelvic pain, IBS symptoms
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

- Surgery in general
  - Lower rate of preventative care
  - Inability to care for wounds at home
  - Increased abuse of prescription opiates
Healthcare Impacts: A Surgeon’s Practice

- What are the barriers to identifying domestic abuse patients?
  - Patient factors
  - Physician factors
  - Community Resources
Are Physician’s Personally Affected?
Physician Perpetrators

- Physician Abusers
  - James Kauffman
  - Dirk Greineder
  - Eric Shamji
  - Robert Bierenbaum
Physician Victims

- Dr. Casey Drawert
- Dr. Michelle Liggio
- Dr. Teresa Sievers
- Dr. Sherilyn Gordon-Burroughs
These are unfortunately only a few stories out of too many
Revised Statement on Intimate Partner Violence

by ACS
PUBLISHED OCTOBER 1, 2018 • PRINT-FRIENDLY

STATEMENT ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
Are Physicians Personally Affected?

- Very little is known about this topic
- 395,000/878,194 have experienced it?
- Multiple cross-sectional studies of physicians and medical students identify widely varying rates of IPV
- Many female physicians feel it is a private matter, not appropriate for publication
Are Physicians Personally Affected?

- Women of higher SEC and stature may find it harder to gain support

- Some female physicians’ husbands have altered medical documentation, leading to revoked medical licenses

- Immigrant female physicians married to American citizen physicians face highest level of hardship
Intimate Partner Abuse, A Physician Mother and Our Call To Action
Think Idyllic Charlottesville is Immune? It’s not.

- “I felt a lot of shame that I needed to ask for help.”

- “He was extremely charming so I thought no one would believe me.”

- “The hospital wouldn’t allow me to break my contract when I had the courage to leave.”

- “The way it affected me as a physician is that I pick up on it immediately when I see it in patients.”
I am a surgeon....

So give me a checklist or concrete ways to help
What Can We Do?

- For our patients:
  - Screen in a non-judgmental, distraction free environment while he/she is fully clothed
  - Document well!
  - Should take just a few minutes
  - Be supportive if she doesn’t leave, it takes an average of 7 times
What Can We Do?

- How to identify:
  - Vague, chronic illnesses
  - Hypervigilance, fearfulness
  - Delay in seeking care
  - Excessive distress about a small problem
What Can We Do?

- How to start the conversation
  - Begin the conversation with a universal statement, not specific to the patient

- We have started talking to all women about intimate partner violence because it can have such a large impact on your health

- I don’t know if this is a problem for you but many of my female patients experience abusive relationships. Some are too uncomfortable to bring it up so I’ve started asking routinely
What Can We Do?

- How to Document:
  - Photographs
  - Body map
  - Clear documentation
  - Avoid statements like “patient alleges”
  - Document her perception of safety and risk
What Can We Do?

- Our Colleagues:
  - Simply ask
  - Make sure they have a safe space to discuss it and perhaps provide safe shelter
  - Reiterate that just because a person is a physician does not mean they can not be a victim of IPV
  - We must create a system where physicians can leave their life behind for their own safety if needed
Resources

- National Resources:
  - National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233
  - https://ncadv.org/resources

- Local Resources
  - SHE (shelter for help in emergency)
  - SARA (sexual assault resource agency)
Other Ways to Help

- SHE annual 5K first Saturday every November
- Contact SHE to host an educational event here
- Become a SHE volunteer
- Dr. Lori E. Hansen Plastic Surgeon started National Domestic Violence Project
What Still Needs to be Done?

- Believe women
- Find ways to help get them out safely
- Allow them to break work contracts if for the safety of their life
- Better resources for women in higher SEC
Thank you!
Gone but not forgotten.....

Leelaba

Dr. Gordon-Burroughs

Dr. Sievers

Dr. Shamji

Dr. Liggio

Yeardley Love