

WOMEN AND VIOLENCE; A PHENOMINOLOGICAL STUDY ON INTER-ETHNIC MARRIED WOMEN IN SRINAGAR, KASHMIR.

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Abstract: This article describes the lived experiences of women in an inter-ethnic marriages and the violence they face in their everyday lives. Purposive sample of 30 low-income inter-ethnically married women in Kashmir were considered for the study. The experiences of abuse are drawn from in-depth, face-to-face interviews conducted in Srinagar, Kashmir. The qualitative analysis describes three major categories of their lived experiences: (a) types of abuse, (b) family involvement in abuse, (c) treatment of children. Domestic violence in Indian culture includes violence from the husband as well as the in-laws. Women are expected to endure violence for fear of bringing shame to their families. Social and financial support for abused woman is lacking as they are located far away from their native families and communities.

Keywords: *domestic violence, Kashmir, India, phenomenology*

Introduction.

Crimes against women are on the rise, along with crime in general (Mukherjee et al. 2001). Crimes against women have roots in male dominated socioeconomic, legal and political order (Verma 1990). Assaults on women are often visibly associated with their social status, their communal, ethnic and caste identities (Mukherjee et al. 2001). Although women may be victims of any of the general crimes such as ‘murder’, ‘robbery’, ‘cheating’, etc. only the crimes which are directed specifically against women i.e. gender specific crimes are characterised as ‘Crimes

against Women’ (NCRB 2015). According to Article 1 of United Nations Declaration, Violence against Women is to be defined as: Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (UN 1993).

Traditional Kashmir society was patriarchal and patrilocal (Shafi 2002), i.e. the couple lives with the husband’s family. Although the practices of infanticide, foeticide, and dowry deaths were not resorted to, women were generally abused, maltreated, subjugated and physically victimized right from their childhood because of the socially structured inequality (Akhtar 2013). However, the family patterns are changing significantly and so are the traditionally defined roles of women (Shafi 2002). However, the changing social structure, which exposed the Kashmiri women (belonging to all social strata) to outside world, has made them more vulnerable to all types of

sexual abuse. They are subjected to the abuses like sexual harassment, molestation, eve-teasing and even to immoral trafficking, kidnapping, abduction and rape. Especially during the conflict situation in Kashmir a striking increase in the sexual violence against women has been witnessed. While entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism,

women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex (Akhtar 2013). The state of Jammu and Kashmir is a perpetual zone of conflict between India and Pakistan. The Kashmir Valley, a Muslim dominated area of the state, has been witnessing a lot of violence in recent years; however, women bear the scars of violence deeper than men and face all kinds of injustices and crimes (Dabla 2009).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence has been defined as “all actions by the family against one of its members that threaten the life, body, psychological integrity or liberty of the member. (Anthony and Miller, cited in Adriana Gomez, 1996). Physical violence as well as explicit forms of aggression are used by the more powerful in the household as methods to ensure obedience of the less powerful and therefore related to power dynamics in a household. At every stage in the life cycle, the female body is both the objects of desire and of control (Thapan 1997). Domestic violence includes not only inter-spousal violence, but also violence perpetrated by other family members. Generally, an important part of the power relationship between spouses and their families relates to dowry and its ramifications (Karlekar, 1995). Glass defines domestic violence as “anything that is experienced as fearful, controlling and threatening when used by those with power (invariably men) against those without power (mainly women and children)” (Ravindran, 1991).

There is a wide societal tolerance for wife-abuse, which is very often even considered justifiable under certain circumstance: Disputes over dowries, a wife's sexual infidelities, her neglect of household duties, and her disobedience of her husband's dictates are all considered legitimate causes for wife-beating. It is only when the torture becomes unbearable or death appeared imminent that most women appeared willing to speak out (Karlekar, 1995).

Domestic violence includes, harassment, maltreatment, brutality or cruelty and even the threat of assault - intimidation. It includes physical injury, as well as “wilfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place a spouse in fear of injury and compelling the spouse by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse has a right to abstain”. Confining or detaining the spouse against one's will or damaging property are also considered as acts of violence (Bedi K, 1999).

Domestic Violence in the Marital Relationship:

Many studies have been conducted by researchers on domestic violence within marital relationship. (Ahuja (1998) and Visaria (1999). In identifying factors leading to wife beating, both Visaria and Ahuja, in their survey, have tested the co-relationship between wife beating and education. According to Visaria's (1999) survey in Gujarat, illiterate women face more violence than literate women. Relationship between abusive behaviour and level of education has been found to be statistically significant (Visaria 1999:12). Illiterate women and those with education up to primary level (class 4) tend to be more subjected to violence as compared to those who had

received education beyond the primary level. In contrast a study by Ahuja (1998) shows that there is no significant relationship between beating and educational level of the couple. Educated women are beaten as much by their husbands as those who are illiterate or less educated. About one-fourth of the batterers (24%) in Ahuja's study were those who were moderately educated and about one-fourth (26%) were highly educated. However, he added that men whose educational attainment is low, are more likely to beat their wife than men who are better educated. Study findings of Ahuja shows that although women of all ages are victims of wife-battering, a larger number of victims (72%) are among those with an age difference of upto 10 years between spouses. According to the survey findings of Visaria (1999), women who experience domestic violence early in their marriage, continue to be subjected to it even with increase in age. His findings point out that family structure, the presence or absence of children, and the size of the family have little co-relation with wife battering (Ibid.:157). The study also points out that family income, husband's occupation and employment of women are not co-related with wife battering. According to survey findings of Visaria (1999) joint family tends to offer women some protection or acts as a deterrent to husbands using physical force to subdue them.

The forms of violence commonly found by Ahuja (1998) were slapping, kicking, tearing hair, pushing and pulling, hitting with an object, attempting to strangle and threatening. Forms of psychological abuse were also found to exist, for instance, verbal abuse, sarcastic remarks in the presence of outsiders, imposing severe restrictions on freedom of movement, totally ignoring the wife in decision-making processes, making frequent complaints against her to her parents, friends, neighbours, and kin much to the embarrassment of the wife. Some of the reasons given by the women were financial matters, behaviour with in-laws, back-biting, talking to any male without the liking of the husband, asking for money, preventing him from drinking and husbands personality traits.

Some of the worse forms of violence has been reported by Visaria in her study (1999), for instance, beating with sticks or iron rod, knives, utensils, blades and ladles, throwing women against objects or bashing their heads against the walls, burning of breasts and vagina. In addition, sexual assaults in the form of both hitting women in the vagina by kicking or forcing her into sexual intercourse were reported by nearly 10% of the women. Some of the women who had become victim of this form of violence indicated that injury in their private parts cannot be noticed by anyone and they would be too ashamed to talk about it to others. A couple of women also hinted that men know that their wives cannot report such punishment even to their own parents or seek medical treatment due to a sense of shame. Some of the reasons given by women, in the survey done by Visaria is, meals not served properly, economic constraints, financial matters, men wasting money at tea stalls, drinking of alcohol, men feeling that women are paying less attention to the children and vis-à-vis, men feel women have a lot of free time and so on.

One of the main cause why domestic violence prevails and continues is the lack of alternatives among the victims. Women and children may be economically dependent on abusers. Elderly people and children may feel too powerless to escape. Language or cultural barriers may isolate victims from seeking help. Victims generally feel, it is better to suffer in silence than to be separated from loved ones. They keep hoping for improvement, but

it is normally observed that, without help, violence gets worse. Victims may also feel helpless, guilty or worthless. They may feel ashamed of the poor quality of the relationship. Abusers may fear the consequences of seeking help, unaware that continuing as before may be even more dangerous. Family members may be unaware of the help that is available from the local agencies. They may also be unaware of their legal rights.

In India we have no provision for protection of a complainant, not even under the Prevention of Dowry Act. A woman who has complained of harassment goes back to the very people against whom she has complained. What security can she possibly feel in such a situation, and how can she continue to act on her complaint? She obviously continues to be victimised often paying the ultimate price (Bedi K, 1999). Many complainants are faced with eviction from the family home, are cut off without maintenance, and are unable to follow the complaint precisely because they have no means to do so.

Frequent, unexplained injuries, reluctance to seek medical treatment for injuries or denial of their existence, fear in the presence of certain family member/s, social isolation, disorientation or grogginess, especially in elders indicating misuse of medication and decline in physical appearance and personal hygiene indicating increased isolation and a lack of desire to continue living are some of the indicators of violence (Aravamudan G, 1995)

Domestic Violence in India

The World Health Organization (2016) estimated that 35% of women worldwide have experienced some form of violence, with the vast majority of this violence against women being intimate partner violence. The World Health Organization reports that one third of these women (30% of women worldwide) have experienced domestic violence. The prevalence of reported among Indian states varies from 6% in Himachal Pradesh, to 59% in Bihar (Charlette, Nongkynrih, & Gupta, 2012; Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2005). Domestic violence has been defined as “any form of coercion, power, and control—physical, sexual, verbal, mental, or economic—perpetuated on a woman by her spouse, ex-spouse or extended kin, arising from the social relations that are created within the context of marriage” (Abraham, 1998, p. 221). According to the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the definition of Domestic violence also includes harassment by way of unlawful dowry demands on the woman or her relatives (Vindhya, 2000). Several studies have identified factors associated with a greater probability of domestic violence among women in India, including an inability to perform household duties and responsibilities, financial abuse and strain, hierarchical gender relationships, lower household income, illiteracy, exposure to violence during childhood, belonging to a lower caste, an inability to have a male child, a younger age at the time of marriage, employment status, insufficient dowry, and partner’s use of alcohol (Dutta, Rishi, Roy, & Umashankar, 2016; Kamat, Ferreira, Motghare, Kamat, & Pinto, 2010; Mahapatro, Gupta, & Gupta, 2012; Raj et al., 2010; Sinha et al., 2012; Visaria, 1999).

Culture plays an important role in domestic violence cases in India. Gender roles, in particular, are patriarchal and rigid (Panchanadeswaran & Koverola, 2005). Women tend to be in passive roles whereas men tend to dominate and control relationships. Marriage is considered a sacrosanct union between two families rather than between individuals. In this context, women’s primary roles are her marriage and motherhood (Sharma, Pandit, Pathak, & Sharma, 2013). According to Kalokhe et al. (2015), culture plays a role in abusive behaviors. For

instance, Indian culture emphasizes the value of childbirth after marriage and especially favors the birth of male children. Therefore, infertility or failure to give birth to a male child may increase women's risk of experiencing domestic violence (Kalokhe et al., 2015). Kalokhe and colleagues also report that cultural beliefs contribute to the perpetration of abuse by in-laws against a daughter-in-law. The husband's family has the right to evict the woman from the marital home for insufficient dowry and to then force her to return to her natal family. In some cases, women experience physical abuse by their in-laws for the same reason (Kalokhe et al., 2015). Thus, strict patriarchal norms, stringent gender roles, societal acceptance of wife beating, gender inequities, and a strong preference for male offspring, among other factors, are associated with rampant domestic violence in India (Dreze & Khera, 2000; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy, & Campbell, 2006; Martin et al., 2002)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN KASHMIR

Domestic violence against women is on the rise in Jammu and Kashmir. Even the educated and the economically independent women are at the receiving end, according to anecdotal evidence contained in police data (Sharma, 2010). The violence against women has increased both qualitatively as well as quantitatively in Jammu and Kashmir over the past more than two decade and the direct impact of the militancy and armed conflict has intensified the problem. "The practice directly or indirectly related to domestic violence against women prevails in urban as well as rural J&K in all educational, economic, social, age, cultural and other groups and classes. 15 percent of married women are physically and mentally being abused (Dabla, 2009). On the other hand, militancy and militarization has unleashed a wave of violence against women. While the misuse/partial-use of gun by pro-government and pro-freedom militants led to series of violent acts against women, the state-sponsored gun in the hands of military and Para-military forces led to all sorts of excesses against women, including abusing their chastity. The former kind of violence has no social, legal and political legitimacy, while the latter seems legitimized by draconian laws like Disturbed Areas Act and Armed Forces Special Powers Act (Dabla, 2009). It is estimated that from 10% to 50% of women in the State have suffered this kind of violence. As almost 70% of all crimes reported to the police involve women beaten by their husbands. This is mostly relating to matrimonial disputes and family squabbles and harassment for dowry (Gul and Khan, 2014).

METHODS

The study was aimed at to explore the experiences of couples in an inter-ethnic marriage to better understand the experiences of the couples and the violence they have faced in their conjugal as well as famililal contexts; qualitative methods were used in this study. Cresswell (1998) divided qualitative research into five main categories: (1) ethnography, (2) phenomenology, (3) grounded theory, (4) case study, and (5) biography. However, it is important to note that these are not the only theories that qualitative researchers use. Further, each one of them is interconnected with the other. The phenomenological approach was best suited for the purpose of this study to gain understanding about the lived experiences of respondents who have a shared experience and to describe these subjective experiences (Berg, 2001; Merriam, 2002; Schwandt, 2001). Phenomenological research is based on the belief that there is meaning in the daily lives of human beings and that it can be understood through a formal process of inquiry (Cresswell, 1998). According to Patton (1990), "a phenomenological study

[is] ... one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 71).

Universe and sampling

The universe of the present study is Srinagar city. Data were collected from four different places from the Srinagar city, namely Boatmen colony Bemina, Chattabal, Syedakadel, Rainawari. These places were chosen because from the pilot study it was observed that most of the inter-ethnic families are concentrated in these areas of the city. As many as 30 inter-ethnically married women from these four different locations were approached. The current research is interested in having more knowledge on those women who identify themselves as non – kashmiri. In case of the ethnicity of females, only those females were considered for the study who come from outside Kashmir and are married in kashmir, belonging to different ethnicities in India like Bengali, Bihari and not the females belonging to different ethnicities within Kashmir. The another criteria that was followed for selecting couples was the *number of years couple are living together in an inter-ethnic marriage*. Only those couples were taken up for the study that was living together for more than six years of their marriage. In phenomenology the sample size is not determined by the number of participants but by data saturation or when the repetition of salient points is achieved. This is the point when the data become redundant and no new information is gained from participants (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used for the study. Because participants meeting specific inclusion criteria were the focus of the study, a purposive sampling technique was appropriate. Snowball sampling allows for the selection of additional participants through referrals from those who participated in or are familiar with the study (Polit & Beck, 2004).

Data Collection

Data were obtained from 30 in-depth interviews with women over a period of 3 months. Conducting in-depth interviews with people who have direct, firsthand experience with the phenomenon of interest is believed to be the most effective way to gather such data (Patton, 2002). Interviews were conducted using a loosely structured interview guide, which served to steer but not govern the discussion. Questions were open ended to provide participants with the opportunity to fully explain their experiences. Individual interviews were conducted at the residencies of the respondents'. Interviews were tape recorded, and were transcribed verbatim. After the interviews memos and notes were written about questions, impressions, and feelings of the researcher had during the interviews. Data collection stopped at the point of “theoretical saturation,” the point in data collection at which no new themes or insights are revealed (Flick, 1998). Data collection and analysis used a thematic analysis approach to derive patterns in informants’ perceptions and experiences in recruitments (Miles & Huberman, 1984). No preliminary hypotheses were offered, and data were analyzed continuously to identify common themes.

Data Analysis

During data collection the researcher read the transcripts and field notes carefully and repeatedly, “immersing” himself in the data (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Immersion allowed the researcher to identify themes and categories emerging from the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Themes and categories were developed into

patterns that linked overarching themes and categories, a process facilitated by and Huberman's (1984) tools such as charts, matrices, event lists, causal networks, and memos. The use of such tools was interspersed with memoing, which allowed the data to be developed to conceptual levels that integrated events, processes, and outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1984), leading to the use of a nomothetic rather than ideographic language and to emergence of interpretations (Patton, 1990). Proceeding in this manner allowed various understandings of the phenomenon under study to be developed. These understandings were used to inform further data collection, through which they were tested and challenged. Based on newer data they were further developed, thereby feeding back into the analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Iteration thus formed an integral part of the research process.

RESULTS

Participants

The mean age of the participants was 31 years. The average age of the participants at the time of marriage was 23 years, with a range of 12 to 38 years old. On average, participants had been married for 12 years. The majority of respondents were Housewives ($n = 30$). The average annual family income was 60,000 rupees. Majority of the women were illiterate ($n=27$) whereas ($n=7$) were literate. Most of the respondents were from joint families.

Types of abuse

The 21 participants were exposed to many types and combinations of physical, psychological, sexual, and/or financial abuse. Forms of abuse included being hit with objects; being belittled for their looks, for not cooking properly, or for having little or no access to money. Women also talked about their husbands having an affair, getting a second wife (legal or illegal), and demanding money from the natal family as other types of harassment and abuse. Most women also experienced abuse and neglect during pregnancy. For example, partners were physically abusive and insensitive during pregnancy and/or at the time of labor, did not give his wife enough rest at the time of pregnancy and/or post-partum, and absconded when the baby was born. One participant talked about how her partner's abuse at the time of pregnancy led to her miscarriage:

Abusing is there, and about beating, he has beaten me once or twice. Due to one of the physical fights, I miscarried once. He had beaten me so much that I cried a lot—in that pressure I miscarried. It was so dangerous that there was blood flowing from the cord. (Maryam)

Abuse during pregnancy was not the only form of abuse the women experienced. Another participant shared that, when she questioned her husband's affair, she was beaten more severely. She shared,

I said [to my husband], "Why did you lie to me?" That girl [with whom husband had an affair] told me all. . . . So from that day on, he thrashes me every day; he made living difficult for me. . . . He would start fighting right in the morning and fight 'til it was time to sleep at night. He stopped any physical relation with me. (Sumaya)

Social isolation was another way the women experienced victimization. For instance, Sumaya spoke of how others lived nearby and were aware of the abuse but ignored her situation: *"He used to beat me a lot. No one used to come ever, even though there were so many people around."* A few participants discussed a change in

their partner's nature after getting married. One participant (Sumaya again) reported, *"He was nice one month before marriage, but after two months of marriage, his real behavior unmasked. He used to smoke weed a lot and beat me badly. They used to blame me for having affairs with others."* Another participant, Rihana, similarly stated, *"After getting married, his nature changed. Within four days he changed—he only wanted hard-working women. His nature was like, 'Get money from home and don't trouble me for anything.' He was good with me only for four days."* This participant went on to discuss the cycle of violence that occurred in her marriage:

I still used to think, "Let it go; I can't live with my parents after marriage." In the end, [my] in-laws' home is my home now. So, I used to cry but try to stay [in my marriage], but it was too much trouble for me. So, I would inform my parents of this, and my brother would take me back. I used to think that he would calm down and forget his anger in four days and would behave properly again. After going back, there was the same trouble after two days: always beating [me], not giving [enough] food to eat, and continuously doubting my character. (Rihana)

Family Involvement in Abuse

The intimate partners were not the only ones involved in the abuse; in most cases, the in-laws also abused the women (their daughters-in-law). Women in the current study lived with their in-laws. Differences in daily routines and in cooking and cleaning styles were common causes of conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. These differences led to several episodes of physical and verbal abuse.

In most cases, the husband was an accomplice in the conflict or a bystander who gave no support to his wife. If the conflict arose while the husband was at work, he would believe his family's version of the story instead of his wife's. The following comment by one participant shows how she was taunted for these lifestyle differences:

"My husband never takes my side even if I am right. He always support his mother to inflict violence on me."

Another respondent shared an example of a physically abusive mother-in-law. This participant's husband would abuse her on the basis of what the mother-in-law said. She reported,

Yes, mother-in-law also beats me . . . holding my hair, twisting my hand backwards, kicking and punching, hitting on the head . . . on a simple thing, my mother-in-law would tell him something, and then he would beat me up. (Ruby).

Women were taunted for several reasons, including for not cooking properly. A participant shared,

When I used to cook food, my mother-in-law would say, "Something is pungent. Use less salt on that. She would call me names and assault me. And when [my] husband had gone out, [my] brother-in-law used to come running at me to beat me. [My] mother-in-law also used to beat me. (Anna)

Most respondents also complained that their husband would not believe their version of what had occurred. Ruby shared, *"He mostly listens to my mother-in-law. He doesn't use his brain. For everything, he listens to his mother. He would do as his mother told him. My husband is like that."*

Respondents experienced a lot of social pressure to reconcile with their abusive husband, return to the in-laws' home, and stay in the marriage. Participants felt this pressure from both their natal family as well as the abuser's family. One respondent reported,

So, I thought, "Even if I go to my mother's place she would keep me for four days, [but] my brother and brother-in-law are also there. They'd also say that a woman earns respect only when she lives in her husband's house, not in her parent's house. . . . I have to go where my husband is. That is my true home." Why does this happen with women? I don't understand that. If [your] husband tortures you, where can you go? She can neither live with your husband nor go to your mother's place. What can a woman do? There are orphanages for women, but what will you do there? That is also of no help. I hear that all sorts of bad things happen there. . . . Sometimes I sit and think: "Where should I go? I can't live with my husband—he beats me—but if I go to my mother, my brother and his wife would object. So where can I go?" (Nazia)

Sometimes the pressure to reconcile with the abusive husband was for the sake of their children. In several cases, women caved to this pressure. For example, the following respondent shared how she was told that her husband could provide a house and fatherly love, which she was incapable of providing for their son:

My parents . . . said that a husband is a husband. "You're young now," [they said]. "What will you do alone? What else can you do in the future? Can you provide a house for your son, or paternal love? . . . at least he [your husband] will get a house and a secure future." So, I accepted him. (Suraya)

Treatment of Children

The respondents described the various ways in which the abuse affected their children. These effects included abuse and/or neglect of the children or the children being used by their parents as pawns. In some cases, the children were allowed to leave with their mothers and go to a safe place (in most cases with the natal family), but in some situations, they were not allowed to do so. In such cases, the children were used as tools to harass and threaten the women.

There were several cases of sheer lack of responsibility by the husband. For example, one husband would not provide for his family financially, refusing to pay either for household expenses or for food:

Rice or wheat is so expensive; pulses [food] are so expensive; then there are other expenses also. Children want to eat something. They are kids. They see something and want to have it. So how would I meet the expenses when he doesn't work? Only when you work can you meet the expenses [and] run your household. When you don't work, there is always going to be a shortage. (Nazia)

Discussion

This study had several limitations. The small purposive sample of 30 respondents was drawn from the city of Srinagar. Thus, generalizing the results to other populations without similar contextual factors (e.g., urban, low-income backgrounds) is limited.

Nevertheless, this study is an important contribution to the scant literature on low-income inter-ethnic married women experiencing domestic violence in urban India. Families arrange most marriages in the Indian society. Thus, a marriage is not simply between two individuals but between two families. For couples marrying, social status and/or class (caste in the case of Hindus, denomination in the case of other religions) is much more important than the ideal of two individuals falling in love. In the Hindu religion, when a woman gets married, it is common for the bride's family to provide dowry to the groom's family. This practice continues throughout the

couple's married life, especially at the time of major holidays (festivals). Also, after marriage, women are considered a part of the in-laws' household and are at the bottom of the familial ladder. Abuse may be perpetrated not only by husbands, but also by both male and female in-laws (Adam, 2001; Anitha, 2011; Gill, 2004; Guruge & Humphreys, 2009; Guruge, Khanlou, & Gastaldo, 2010; Mason et al., 2008; Mehrotra, 1999; Raj, Livramento, Santana, Gupta, & Silverman, 2006). The findings in our study demonstrate several situations in which family members were involved in domestic violence. Abuse by the mother-in-law in particular was in line with research reported in other studies (Rew, Gangoli, & Gill, 2013) and may be attributed, in part, to a female hierarchy centered on generation, and to the fact that she is the mother of a son. Women in this environment do not bond with one another, rather, a pecking order may become established, with the mother-in-law assuming the highest position of influence and entitlement among the women in the family, and the daughter-in-law with the least (Raj et al., 2006). Moreover, abuse perpetrated by in-laws is in line with the Indian culture's patriarchal beliefs and traditional ideologies involving female inferiority. In most cases, women (both in India and other parts of the world) gain status by giving birth to a male child.

Due to the cultural norm that the husband is the only source of security, divorce or separation is not considered a feasible option for women, who are thus pressured to reconcile with an abusive husband (Goel, 2005). In addition to the stigmatization of divorce in the culture, children play a huge role in women's marital and life decisions. In the current study, children were the driving force behind women's decisions to either stay in or leave the abusive home. The urge to protect their children was some women's impetus for either separating from or reconciling with the abusive husband. Leaving or staying in the abusive relationship for the sake of protecting the children is in line with other research on abused women conducted in the United States (Bhandari, Bullock, Anderson, Danis, & Sharps, 2011).

In Indian culture, a woman's identity is derived primarily from marriage and motherhood; therefore, a woman without a husband is treated as an incomplete person. Furthermore, a divorced woman and/or single mother is perceived as having failed in the role of wife and mother, regardless of the conduct of her partner (Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996). This cultural perception leads to multiple disadvantages for women in India. On the one hand, abandonment by her husband, separation, and/or divorce are generally seen as evidence that the woman did something wrong or is flawed in some way. On the other hand, this perception leads to the woman's disadvantage in her natal home. Because the natal home is now the home of her brother's wife and their children, she may receive direct or indirect messages that she is unwanted there, too. Moreover, a divorced woman is shunned when she participates in holy events or celebrations (particularly weddings) for fear that she may bring bad luck (Ayyub, 2000). These cultural pressures, coming from all sides, leave abused women with very little choice in their lives, and thus, their best recourse is usually to force themselves to try to reconcile with abusive husbands.

Conclusion

Domestic violence in the Indian context is unique, as it is perpetrated not only by the intimate partners, but also by the in-laws. A woman experiencing domestic violence tends to seek help from her natal family or from

community organizations to bring pressure on her husband to stop abusing her and her children. But in the present study it was found that because of the lack of support from their native kins majority of the respondents were rendered vulnerable to domestic violence. In general, women are expected to endure violence for long periods of their lives for fear of bringing shame on their families and/or because of a lack of social and financial support independent of her husband. Future research could identify culturally acceptable ways to bring independence and financial strength to victims of domestic violence.

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