Intimate Partner Violence Among South Asian Women: Conceptualizing Culture, Building

Resilience and Increasing Cultural Competency of Counsellors

by

Maya K. Bhogal

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APPROVED BY

Maria Stella, PhD., R.C.C., Thesis Supervisor, Counsellor Education Faculty

Bruce Hardy, Ph.D., R.C.C., Faculty Reader, Counsellor Education Faculty

Division of Arts and Sciences

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Dedication

I would firstly like to dedicate this thesis to my Mother, Shelly Virdee who has epitomized resiliency and strength through her struggles of oppression, patriarchy and Intimate Partner Violence and inspired me daily to go against the grain to create a space for silenced voices. This thesis is also dedicated to the resilient South Asian women in Canada who continue fighting the struggles of Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence.

Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is an issue that impacts all nationalities, ethnicities and cultures, and is continuing to gain more acknowledgement the more IPV is openly addressed. The South Asian culture is built on collectivism and patriarchy, creating oppression among women, leading to higher rates of IPV and domestic violence. Research regarding immigrant communities and cultures is lacking and therefore, prevents professionals such as therapists to obtain appropriate education around culture and there remains a lack of cultural competency. Given the lack of cultural competency, IPV is underreported among South Asian Immigrant women (Shankar et al., 2013). The purpose of this thesis is to explore the South Asian culture and its norms, while also addressing acculturation, and the social construction of Indo-Canadians. This thesis will also provide recommendations to increase the cultural competency of professionals in supporting IPV and domestic violence among South Asian women.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Culture is the social behaviour and norms that allows a society to operate within its unique set of customs. Each group of individuals may have their own set of cultural norms, depending on their geographical location, religious background and personal values and beliefs. Canada is considered a cultural mosaic who has received "a larger share of immigrants than most other destination countries in the global north, admitting roughly 250,000 permanent residents per year since the mid-1980's" (Hiebert, 2016, p. 2). Vancouver, being a coastal city, welcomed immigrants from overseas and in the 1980's enacted a policy to invite more immigrants. By 2011, Statistics Canada estimated that 627,000 of a total of 2.3 million individuals had been born by Asia (Hiebert, 2016).

Canada has taken on a multicultural approach to diversity and was the first country to do so, where they promoted "integration while enabling minority groups to maintain their cultural practices." (Hiebert, 2016, p. 9). Furthermore, multiculturalism in Canada promotes a combinatorial culture, where acceptance of all is promoted. Despite the values of multiculturalism, issues around culture still exist in Canada. Acculturation, idealizes integration from one culture to another, while maintaining elements of an individual's originating culture (Li et al., 2013). A large population of South Asian's have immigrated from India to Canada, for further opportunities and due to the welcoming nature of Canada. The 2016 Canadian Census revealed that 1.9 million South Asian's in Canada, making up 5.7% of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2017). A huge part of an individual's identity is their cultural norms or practices, which are often embedded into one's upbringing. A challenge for many immigrants

remains the acculturation process, and navigating which cultural and societal norms to follow. A

challenge that many South Asian immigrants have faced is the shift of historically embedded

values such as patriarchy. The main challenge is navigating how to uphold values of patriarchy

without disrupting the Western and Canadian norms of being an equal society. Due to this type

of challenge, domestic violence is a dominant existence in the South Asian culture.

Typically, within the South Asian culture, it is more common that women are victimized

by domestic violence and men are the perpetrators, which parallels to the patriarchal ideals of the

culture. Acculturation is challenged, as there is a disconnect between upholding the South Asian

culture and adhering to the Western ideals and values (Li et al., 2013). While there is no

tolerance for domestic violence in North America, and places such as Canada, it still occurs,

dominantly among the South Asian population. Domestic violence oppresses women and

continues to give men control within their relationship in the case that men are the perpetrators,

and women are the victims. Furthermore, for many immigrants who come to areas such as

Canada, they are looking for a life full of better opportunity. Even more South Asian women

who move to Canada under an arranged marriage, she looks forward to opportunity in her new

home. For many women, despite the intolerance of domestic violence, this still remains a sad

reality for many since it is embedded in the culture through a code of silence, where reporting or

seeking help may involve further entrapment (Shankar, 2013).

While Canada has a numerous supports and resources for women who have experienced

domestic violence or are attempting to leave an abusive relationship, there still remains a cultural

stigma around doing so. Many South Asian women leaving abusive relationships are faced with

guilt and shame as marriage is a foundational value within the culture, and once married into a

family, leaving for any reason is not well-accepted. Furthermore, accessing help can also be a

barrier due to cultural norms, where problems should not be spoken about outside the home since image among one another is a value that is upheld within the culture. Shankar et al. (2013) suggest that there is definitely an underreporting of intimate partner violence among South Asian families, as it goes against the cultural values and would be considered inappropriate to do so. Women are married into a great deal of pressure to care for her new family, and abide by the wishes of her in-laws and quite often, her identity becomes lost among her husband's family. De-stigmatizing help and therapy for women who leave domestic violent marriages and relationships is necessary, while also creating normalcy around doing so. In doing this, culture may be challenged, however, it is most important that human rights are upheld for survivors of violence.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to continue to create research around the stigmatizing topic of domestic violence in the South Asian culture, while also aiming to give a voice to women who have been silenced through oppressive marriages and abusive relationships. Furthermore, as the South Asian culture focuses on collectivist and patriarchal views, the disconnect between that and the Western views of individualism need to be addressed and understood by individuals and professionals who support survivors of domestic violence. While there is an understanding of culture in general, a deepened understanding of this particular culture is needed in order to provide the best possible services.

This thesis will look at the research around resilience among women who have survived domestic violence and some of the strategies that can be used for support, from a cultural perspective. Furthermore, it will examine the lived experiences of women in abusive relationships, and some of the resources they used in order to leave their situations to protect

their own human rights and individuality. This paper will provide recommendations for strengthening supports for South Asian women who have experienced domestic violence and IPV, while discussing the South Asian culture. Furthermore, recommendations will be provided for professional supports, such as therapists around cultural competencies and considerations when working with the South Asian population, including various strategies that can be used to increase client empowerment and build a strong therapeutic alliance.

Personal and Theoretical Framework

This section will begin by situation the author, followed by a brief introduction of feminist theory as the basis for supporting this work. As an Indo-Canadian woman, my views stem from personal experiences through my familial upbringing and the challenges and obstacles that me and my family have faced. Growing up in what I thought was a 'Western' household, I did not identify with my South Asian culture. Acculturation was a concept that I began to understand as I matured over the years, however, it was always challenging to mix the Western ideals that I was born into with some of the traditional and cultural norms that my family attempted to instill in me. As I grew older, I started observing my parents and recognized that their relationship was rather unhealthy, from seeing verbal oppression and abuse towards my mother and hearing about physical abuse that took place in my parents' marriage. While this may have seemed normal according to my culture, personally I did not agree with it since I identified with the Western culture rather than the South Asian.

After years of witnessing abuse towards my mother and myself being verbally and emotionally abused, my mother made the decision to leave her marriage. This was a difficult decision she made, as she considered the cultural factor; the shame around leaving a marriage, and how her in-laws would react and even what her parents would think. With me and my sister

in unity, it was time to stand-up to the abuse that took place and remove ourselves from the situation. It was through my mother's resilience and her support system that she moved forward, and it was through my mother's resilience that I was able to move forward. There still remain unanswered questions in my mind around why abuse in our family was accepted and not addressed, or why there was never more done for justice. However, our new family- my mother, my sister and I, finally have a piece of mind and can rest each night knowing that we are not alone, and we are free.

Given my passion and experiences around gender and culture, this thesis has been written with a feminist theoretical framework, aiming to challenge the gender roles and patriarchy within my own culture, to create a voice for women who are oppressed. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality, where "feminist thought resists categorization…" (Sarikakis et al., 2014, p. 505) and promotes equality. Feminist theory is based on multiple perspectives and schools of thought. For the purpose of this thesis, cultural feminism, postmodern feminism and poststructural feminism will be highlighted to create a basis for this research. Cultural feminism suggests that "women should provide ways of being, thinking, and speaking that allow for openness, diversity and difference" (Statikakis et al., 2014), which acknowledges that culture is part of the intersectionality of an individual.

Postmodern feminism deems to "focus on questions of meaning and identity, contending that these categories are fluid rather than fixed, and proposing that men and women may perform characteristics of either gender, or even slide between gender identities" (Statitakis et al., 2014, p. 506). Postmodern feminism also challenges dualistic and binary thinking, focusing on 'otherness' (Statitakis et al., 2014). Minority groups have also contributed to feminist theory, as "they argue the condition of otherness enables women to stand back and criticize the norms,

values and practices that the dominant culture seeks to impose on everyone" (Statitakis et al., 2014). Using a feminist approach, this thesis works to make "inequalities visible through drawing attention to experiences of oppression and identifying…social [and cultural] inequalities" (McDowell & Fang, 2007, p. 553) and culturally competent strategies for women seeking help.

Poststructural feminism is considered a "mode of knowledge production which uses a poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change" (Gavey, 1989, p. 460). Poststructural feminist thought has placed emphasis on women's experiences which has then given a voice to women's oppression and the resistance to patriarchy (Gavey, 1989), allowing for women to address power dynamics between genders and oppressive experiences. Poststructuralist theory has allowed for dichotomous thinking to be addressed, and therefore conscious raising around the social differences between men and women, and the need for change to a more equal school of thought.

Feminist theory views intimate partner violence (IPV) in North America where "men abuse women as an extension of patriarchy in order to assert power and control" (Cannon et al., 2015, p. 669), especially among the South Asian culture. Given that this is already a common ideal in North America, it proves that in minority cultures, patriarchy is further engrained and therefore, women are oppressed by their male counterparts. Furthermore, considering the poststructuralist feminist approach for this thesis is also important as it is able to conceptualize power (Cannon et al., 2015). This thesis will explore the roots of patriarchy in the South Asian culture, and why intimate partner violence (IPV) is so dominant.

Definition of Terms

Feminism. For the purpose of this thesis, feminism includes many theoretical feminist discourses such as postructural feminism and acknowledges the historical disparities and lived experiences of women (McDowell & Fang, 2007) throughout the South Asian culture. This thesis is written with a feminist perspective, addressing oppression and challenging the patriarchal norms within the South Asian culture.

Indo-Canadian. In consideration of culture, and the process of acculturation, the term Indo-Canadian is defined as those individuals and families who have immigrated from India to Canada (Aycan, 1998). The first group of immigrants from India began arriving in Canada in 1904, which is marked as the first year of official immigrant records from India (Aycan, 1998).

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines IPV "as any behaviour of an intimate partner that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (Ahmad et al., 2013, p. 1058).

Resiliency. For the scope of this thesis, resiliency is a positive adaptation to a challenging situation (Ahmad et al., 2013), such as intimate partner violence (IPV). Resilience is considered a self-healing tool and it is necessary to conceptualize it in order to understand IPV.

South Asian. South Asian's are defined as those individuals whose origins trace back to South Asia, from areas such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2015).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this thesis is to create deepened research and awareness on stigmatized topics such as IPV and domestic violence. In considering the South Asian culture, there are cultural expectations around family dynamics and gender norms. The South Asian

culture places great value on marriages and the Western culture also does. However, with the sociological differences, where the South Asian culture relies on patriarchy and the Western culture believes in individualism, the assimilation for South Asian immigrants become challenging. Studies such as this reveal the disconnect between cultures, and the prevalence of patriarchy that still exist among South Asians. Furthermore, these patriarchal views lead to issues such as IPV and domestic violence in relationships.

IPV and domestic violence have a great impact on South Asian women, as they experience feelings of isolation and shame, and are left to choose if they would like to leave their marriage, with consequences from her family or remain in an abusive relationship (Subarimaniam et al., 2017). Due to the cultural complexities of a marriage for many South Asian women, there is also a resistance for help and resources. This study will discuss some of the barriers and challenges around help but foremost, highlight some of the proven strategies in providing help. This study will aim to focus around the cultural competencies of professionals who provide help and therapy to South Asian women who are survivors of IPV and domestic violence. These findings will help to create awareness around appropriate strategies for women seeking help, and also work towards creating a strengthen cultural approach to understanding South Asian women's issues.

Outline of Thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis will provide a definition to the South Asian culture and its components. In doing so, chapter 2 will also address South Asian women's experiences within its society, and among the family, looking deeper into traditions and norms. Furthermore, acculturation will be examined since women immigrating from India to Canada are exposed to new traditions and expectations in Canada, where change is an inevitable component to

immigrating. In addition, the history of Sikhism will also be discussed in order to inform the

greater definition of the South Asian culture.

Chapter 3 will aim to address the factors contributing to intimate partner violence (IPV)

and domestic abuse, which lead to separation. Within this chapter, the prevalence of domestic

violence among South Asian women will be explored, while also discussing the marriage

dynamics within the South Asian culture. In doing so, honour killings will be addressed through

case studies, and studying women's' lived experiences in marriages which will inform power and

control dynamics.

Chapter 4 will discuss the importance of cultural competency among counsellors working

with South Asian women who have left abusive relationships. This chapter will address the

stigmas around getting professional help and sharing experiences outside ones' family.

Moreover, resiliency among South Asian women as a self-preservation strategy will also be

highlighted and strategies for empowering women who have left abusive relationships will be

addressed. Furthermore, counselling strategies for women seeking help will be explored and

new recommendations to further support for South Asian women will be made.

CHAPTER II: DEFINING THE SOUTH ASIAN CULTURE AND ITS COMPONENTS

Introduction

The following chapter will define the South Asian culture and situate it within the context of South Asian women living in Western society. By reviewing and exploring the history of the South Asian culture and the societal traditions in India, it will give a background of the culture and some of the culture carried with individuals who have migrated to Western societies in North America.

This chapter will also discuss acculturation, and how South Asian women migrating from non-Western societies have experienced change. As acculturation can be challenging, "the primary question in acculturation is, Who should change and in what direction?" (Li, France, & Rodriguez, 2013, p. 142). This chapter will discuss the acculturalization process. Through this discussion, we will be able to better understand the Western cultural norms and traditions, and how culture has a large impact on South Asian women and families. By exploring the historical background of Sikhism and the South Asian culture, it will preface the proceeding chapters and create a full image of this thesis. Furthermore, as this chapter discusses cultural norms and history, South Asian family dynamics will also be explored, as the family system can and culture are certainly interconnected on many levels.

Given that culture has many unique meanings in itself, it is critical to recognize some of the differences between culture in India and the South Asian culture in North America. In doing this, it will become clear how culture may become confusing and unique depending on each individual or situation. Given that the focus of this thesis is on South Asian women, special attention will be given to the culture around South Asian women and their experiences both in

India and in North America. In doing so, it will also be important to address men's experiences within the culture.

History of Sikhism

It is important to discuss the history of Sikhism and its elements in order to build a strong foundation for the proceeding chapters. Sikhism's founder was Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who was the first of ten gurus, or teachers of the Sikh faith where,

> Sikhism stressed equality to mediate the caste system in India, and community service to get everyone actively giving back to their community and looking out for concerns of others. Sikhism and its teachings were further strengthened to reflect social needs of the time. The nine following gurus recognized what those needs were and clarified them within the Sikh scripture, *Sri Guru Garanth Sahib* (Rana & Sihota, 2013, p. 117).

Today, this scripture is still a holy element of the culture, and these values are very much embedded within the South Asian culture both in India and in North America. Sikhism was founded through the disharmony and coflict between the two dominant relgions of India (at the time), Hinduism and Islam. Since India was constantly being invaded by bordering countries, there were also violent attempts to convert Sikhs to different faiths. Therefore, "in order to survive, Sikhs needed to learn how to protect themselves, as well as their country. The value of protection, strength and defence became an ingrained part of Sikh identity" (Rana & Sihota, 2013, p. 117) and continues to be a value of the faith and culture today.

The tenth and last Guru, Gobind Singh Ji, introduced the notion of Sikh baptism of men and women, who wore their religion proudly and abolished ideals of caste and class, in the hopes of becoming equal with all (Rana & Sihota, 2013). At this time, Men were given the last name 'Singh' (meaning 'lion') and women held the name 'Kaur' ('princess'). Given that equality was

a strong virtue, Guru Gobind Singh Ji emphasized the importance of having strong beliefs and

self cofidence in one's beliefs. Given the history of Sikhism and the presence of strong willed

warriors throughout its history, Sikhism did not tolerate violence, but rather values the curiosity

to learn, peacefulness, courageousness, protectiveness of others and equality as a whole (Rana &

Sihota, 2013). Officially, the Sikh Empire was established in 1801 and rule by Maharaja Ranjit

Singh, the Emperor of Punjab.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is an important element of any ethinicities and culture. One of the key

elements of achieving an ethnic identity is having the understanding of oneself as an individual,

one's values and beliefs, while recognizing one's place in society. Ethnic identity can be defined

as "one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perception,

feelings and behaviour that is due to ethnic group membership" (Rana & Sihota, 2013, p. 118).

Ethnic identity can have two components: the objective and the subjective:

> Objectively, one can relate to one's ethnic group in terms of ascribed or external
>
> characteristics. These characteristics may include geographical birthplaces, language,
>
> religion, racial or physical attributes, history and customs. These external characteristics
>
> may not necessarily meet one's subjective affiliation with the ethnic group. Subjective
>
> affiliation is defined as one's sense of identity and feelings of belonging with the ethnic
>
> group. The subjective identification with an ethnic group leads to the development of a
>
> social identity based on ethnic-group membership (Rana & Sihota, 2013, p. 119).

It becomes evident that there can be various ways to portray ethnic identity from a subjective

perspective. For the Sikh, South Asian culture, ethnic identity from an objective perspective is

greatly based on one's famliy and their values. For example, religion and customs are learned

through one's family, based on a family's customs and traditions. The degree of religious

devotion to ones ethnicity and culture can generally be based on the family upbringing of an

individual and the importance that one's family places on certain elements of the Sikh culture.

The notion of ethnicity is "not simply a historical legacy of migration or conquest, but is

constantly undergoing redefintion and reconstruction…" (Nagel, 1994, p. 152) and our

understnading and the way we practice ethnicity can be fluid and constantly changing to allow

for new ideas and change. Given the history of Sikhism, over time, the South Asian culture has

evolved and the way religion is practiced varies from individual to individual. Traditional

baptized Sikh's would dress in traditional clothing, be devoted to prayer and follow a vegetarian

diet. Over time, traditions have changed, and it is socially acceptable for an individual to

identify as Sikh without wearing the traditional clothing and not being extremely devoted to the

religion. In identifying with the ethnicity, one's values have remained the same, where equality

and respect is still a large component of the ethnic identity.

Acculturation and Migration

According to Statistics Canada, "Canada takes in more immigrants, relative to its size,

than any other country in the world" (Li, France, & Rodriguez, 2013, p. 141) and most

immigrants and their families arrive from developing countries such as India. Given the shift of

location and culture, migrants are faced with new challenges entering their new country in terms

of adaptaiton and culture change. Traditionally speaking, the newcomers are expected to give up

their culture in order to fully assimilate to their new country with a new culture. As mentioned

by Li et al. (2013), "the ideal outcome of cultural acculturation is integration, a strategy most

migrants and some countries (such as Canda and Australia) prefer" (p. 142). This allows for

migrants have the opportunity to continue to identify with their heritage and ethnicity.

The first group of immigrants to arrive from India to Canada was in 1904, which was considered "as the year of start for official records of immigrants from India" (Zeynep & Kanungo, 1998, p. 452) . However, there was a hiatus where immigrants from India were restricted to enter Canada again until 1960 due to restrictions from the Canadian government. Once immigrants were welcomed back into Canada and migration was widely accepted, South Asian's have become one of the largest ethnic populations in Canada. According to Statistics Canada's Census of 2016, the South Asian population totalled 1.9 Million people, accounting for 5.7% of Canada's ethnic population. (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Given the large population of South Asian's in Canada, this has lead way to the term 'Indo-Canadian', referring to the home state (India) and the host-state (Canada) (Singh & Singh, 2008, p. 150), giving South Asian's a unique cultural identity in the western society. In attempting to maintain the Indian heritage, the term 'Indo-Canadian' was idenitifed to maintain cultural acculturation. This would allow for integration of some of the "migrants' desires to maintain key features of their cultural identity while they actively adopt principles and values of their host society [Canada] and modify their own" (Li, France, & Rodriguez, 2013, p. 142). However, the challenge of acculturation, as discussed by Li, France & Rodriquez (2013),

> The primary question in acculturation is, Who should change and in what direction? Even though change inevitably happens in every culture as a result of the contact, it is important to note that most research discusses the cultural changes of immigrants and refugees (p. 143)

as many people from India migrated to Canada for the prospect of a better quality of life and more opportunity for their families. Given that immigrants from India wanted to maintain their own culture and ethnic identity, it has become difficult to decide which elements to maintain and

which to assimilate to. As described by Singh & Singh (2008), "while it is necessary to show

heterogeneity within the larger Indian disapora, developing categories based on external factors

sets false parameters around groups and ignores their fluidity, flexibility, heterogeneity, and

political agency" (p. 143) which challenges the true identity of an Indo-Canadian, given how

changes should occur and who should do the changing.

Within the expectations of acculturaion, the experiences of this vary from individual to

individual. As highlighted by Aycan & Kanungo (1998),

> several studies have reported that there is a generation difference in attitudes, towards
>
> change: parents experience more difficulty in accepting and adjusting to changes in their
>
> lives, whereas children are more flexible and tolerant towards change. With regards to
>
> socialization values, parents find 'pragmatic values'… (p. 453)

different than the younger generation. For example, values around career and education are

static and change over time, where the parental generation who experienced challenges of

migraiton and acculturation did not always have the opportunity to focus on career and

education. Therefore, the parent generation has influenced their children to value and focus on

education and long-term career goals. In regards to marriage, relationships and dating, a

majority of families agree that the values and ideals around this have not changed as widely.

Culture of South Asian Families

South Asian families, those native to India and those who have migrated to the West have

a dynamic that is based around ideals of patriarchy. Within India, the patriarchal family system

is quite dominant, where women are typically viewed as the homemakers and their male

counterparts as the head of the household. Walton-Roberts & Pratt (2005) have suggested that

"Canadian immigration policy reinforces and produces patriarchy because it casts immigrant

women in a literal state of dependency on male household heads" (p. 175) giving women less power and autonomy. Many families migrate to Canada for a better quality of life or for more opprtunity; However, this is not always a reality for the women of the household. For some women and families, moving to Canada is a daunting feeling, as many leave their families upon marriage to start a new life and a new family with her husband and his family. Traditionally, in an arranged marriage, women are expected to live in her husband's home with his family, which tends to be comprised of his parents, grandparents (if they are alive) and any other unmarried siblings. The transition to a brand new family can definitely come with a lot of anxieties and stresses while this transition takes place. Furthermore, within the realm of an arranged marriage, women are not given the opportunity to assess whether the family is a good fit for her, and rather goes on the values and word of her family to help make the decision of the marriage. In giving this trust to her family, a woman is seen by following her gender role within the culture.

In terms of gender relations within the South Asian culture, Walton-Roberts & Pratt (2005) explain that we must disrupt "the preconception that immigrant groups are typically and wholly more traditional, more patriarchal than liberal, Western familes" (p. 175), since many immigrating families still wish to hold on to their culture for as long as they can. In considering the patriarchal discourses in the South Asian culture, most of the owness to uphold tradition is the woman's responsibility, whereas men are seen as the symbol of power and dominance within the culture. Since a woman is marrying into her husband's family, traditionally, the decision making is the male's responsibility. In the case that the couple may be a second generation, there gender roles may be more equal than that of a traditional relationship, there still may be an influence form the husband's family.

Furthermore, for many families who immigrate, holding on to patriarchy is the norm and is the socially appropriate way to run the family in a new place. When the time comes for a son of the household to marry, there are many considerations in aquiring an appropriate partner, and this is also true for those who have immigrated from India to Canada. As mentioned by Walton-Roberts & Pratt (2005), "although Sikhism's religious teachings shun the caste system, the cultural importance of maintaining upper caste status is evident…" (p. 185) where many families are conscious of the potential partner's caste, which can be determined by one's family name. Finding a partner is not just the responsibility of the son of the household, but rather the whole family, since the cultural expectation is that one marries the family, not just the individual. Coming from a collectivist point of view, there is a great deal of dynamics around the choosing of a partner, whether it be an arranged marriage or a love marriage (found organically). For some families, especially those who value the patriarchal system, it is important that the son's partner fit well with the family and can fulfill her expectations. Once a partner has been chosen by (or for) a man, one wed, the couple is expected to stay wed forever, no matter what circumstances may arise.

Given that there is an evidence of patriarchy in the South Asian culture, there are specific gender roles attached to the culture. Abiding by these gender roles ensures that one is well-accepted by others within the culture. For example, Mehrotra (2016) explains that "women's roles and behaviours are consistenly evaluated by others as they are viewed as guardians of tradition within the community" (p. 353) and are expected to pass these expectations on to the next generation, as they are viewed as cultural carriers. Further than a traditional hetersexual marriage and being part of the family dynamic, South Asian women are exposed to more than the daily interactions of cooking, cleaning and caring for her family. There is a prevalence of

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) within the culture and this impacts women even deeper than the

actual physical violence.

      Much of the time, Mehrotra (2016) asserts that many bodies of literature "talks about the

micro-level, specific ways that women experience messages about gender and marriage within

family and community" (p. 353) but do not include the actual experiences of women and the true

realities of the marriage dynamics. Within the South Asian culture, we can assert that "South

Asian women's gendered and familial experiences are understood and made legible even across

intersections of other salient identities such as generation, age and religion" (Mehrotra, 2016, p.

354-55) and these are important factors that could be telling of one's experience.

      For many South Asian women, the cultural expectation is to get married as young as

possible in order to begin childbearing. Marriage and family are a huge value of the culture and

abiding by these values will contribute to being a good Indian woman as marriage is a huge

cultural script. Mehrotra (2016) conducted a study, reasearching the experiences of 30 North

American South Asian women and the cultural ideals around marriage and some of the realities.

The women in her study were aged between 20 and 45 years old and carried quite a diversity in

regards to age, generation, religion, sexual orientation, education and marital status. Most

women in the study mentioned, "it was this inevitable thing… getting married by a certain age"

(Mehrotra, 2016, p. 358). Furthermore, by many, marriage was a pillar instilled by the

community and to be considered a woman in the South Asian community, being married in one's

early 20's would help to define that. There also remains the pressure of marrying within the

same culture, especially in the case that there is no arranged marriage. As mentioned in

Mehrotra's (2016) study, "while the majority of the second generation women in this particular

sample didn't feel the expectation to have an arranged marriage, they still often felt that there

were expectations about who would be considered a suitable husband" (p. 359).

Mehrotra's (2016) study explains that marrying within the same culture is also an

important value projected on the women in the study. Many women in study described that they

felt a pressure to ensure that they married wthin the same ethn-religious community to create

continuity and maintain the respect of her family. Another factor that unmarried South Asian

women face is the family hierarchy. Being the older sibling, there is pressure placed on the

oldest sibling to be married first, before the younger one(s). Once past a certain age and being

unmarried, it casts a negative connotation about the woman and her values and parents give up

on the expectation of marriage. Within the South Asian culture, there is a great deal of pressure

around the arena of marriage, as there are so many criterias in finding an appropriate partner.

Many of the women from the study "reported tensions and ruptures in the family and community

relationships if they were not meeting socially and culturally-sanctioned marriage expectations,

hence highlighting to the relational consequences within the family for not meeting the

requirements of the cutlural script" (Mehrotra, 2016, p. 363).

In considering the patriarchal discourses in the South Asian culture, most of the owness

to uphold tradition is the woman's responsibility, whereas men are seen as the symbol of power

and dominance within the culture. Since a woman is marrying into her husband's family,

traditionally, the decision making is the male's responsibility. In the case that the couple may be

a second generation, there gender roles may be more equal than that of a traditional relationship,

there still may be an influence form the husband's family.

Male Experience of South Asian Culture

Being a male in the South Asian culture comes with a great deal of benefit and in some respect, ease. There is less pressure for males to uphold their name in the South Asian culture, as women who marry into his family are expected to uphold and take his family name (Chaudhari et al., 2014). Furthermore, despite the notion that the traditional South Asian culture attempted to opt for equality, it still remains a patriarchal cutlure, especially when it comes to marriage and childbearing. Unlike women, men do not have the pressure to maintain their marriagability qualities, and since a woman will be marrying the family, there is less owness on a potential husband to provide for his wife, when rather, it is a full family effort. When looking for a potential wife, men place great value on the approval of his family and look for qualities in his potential wife reflecting her potential for getting along with his family (Chaudhari et al., 2014). This asserts her as a good wife. Men carry the expectation that his wife will uphold the culture through her values and carry the tradition, especially when the time comes for bearing children.

Intimacy of South Asian Marriage and Issues Domestic of Violence

Marriage is a strong pillar of the South Asian Culture and once married, there are a set of roles and expectations that a woman must follow in order to maintain her status as a good Indian wife. A large part of any marriage is intimacy, which can be viewed as a very private sphere of an Indian marriage. Given the privateness, it is important to take a close look at what this intimacy looks like and how intimacy can impact a marriage. For some women, using their bodies (within the realm of marriage) helps to maintain power and assertion within the relationship, expecially when it comes to childbearing.

As highlighted by Majumdar (2007), for women:

> Engaging in marriage and childbearing, her sample of working-class women in India was pragmatic in using marriage and sexuality to validate and improve their position in their families… the women's actions can be read as both submission and resistance to patriarchal norms (p. 318).

South Asian marriages can be oppressive for women and in order to counteract this, some women choose to show their power with their bodies; However, does this further stigmatize women as obejctifying their bodies?

There seems to be a binary of being a South Asian women, either being Western or Traditional and along with this binary comes factors that help define these terms. As suggested by Majumdar (2007), "to be educated and South Asian it seems to be 'Westernized', 'modern' and 'secular'; to be traditional is to be 'uneducated' and backward" (p. 318), and therefore intimacy and sexuality are not placed into these binaries unless it is viewed as being 'submissive' or being labelled as a a 'sex symbol'. Since sexuality is so private and not widely talked about within the culture, women are conditioned to act and be submissive rather than expressing their sexualities in the way they desire. Based on the South Asian culture and family dynamic, women who express their sexuality are further stigmatized as unmarriageable.

Exploring intimacy in the South Asian culture is very complex due to the silencing of women based on cultural expectations and their experiences of this. There are limitations of research in this realm, as many women are hesitant to share their experiences of intimacy as it may go against the cultural expectations of their families. However, for some women and families, "the patriarchal bargaining framework has been used to explain, for example, why women accommodate gendered practices of religious traditionalism, veiling and constraints on

sexual behaviour" (Chaudhuri et al., 2014, p. 142) and helps to explain some of the intimacy

experiences within the marriage, and the why behind Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

 For many women, there is a constraint within the marital relationship, where patriarchy

takes over each element of a relationship, especially intimacy, and could be the leading cause of

abuse. Chaudhuri et al. (2014) study a group of South Asian Women's experiences of a marriage

and hope to find answers to specific questions around patriarchal marriages and gender roles and

how or if their families support patriarchal arrangements or abuse (p. 142). The study explores

the answer to these questions using an ethno-gendered approach "to understand domestic

violence in the immigration context through the lens of gender and ethnicity" (Chaudhari et al.,

2014, p. 143). For some women, entering into a marriage, they are aware of the potential

oppression they will be facing, and due to patriarchal bargaining, they see some benefit in this.

As mentioned by Chaudhari (2014),

> some women tolerate negative treatment by in-laws when they first marry, expecting that
>
> when they assume the mother-in law role, they will have power over their sons' wives.
>
> Even women who receive informal power through women's groups and networks, and
>
> who gain economic resources by working outside the home, may accept patriarchy if it
>
> bring rewards such as the promise of long-term financial security (p. 143).

These ideals may be instilled by a woman's family, assuring her that she will benefit in the long-

term despite the short term mistreatment that she may experience.

 Chaudhari's (2014) study was comprised of 40 women who were newly immigrated from

India and either about to get married, or had recently gotten married to her husband in North

America (p. 146). Women reported on some of the qualitative descriptions of their marriages,

overall happiness, injuries, and emotional state. Results of the study suggested that the dynamics

around partner intimacy and IPV are relevant in that many of the wives experienced physcal or emotional abuse, and "with very few execptions, women participating in the study revealed that they wanted husbands who cared about, communicated with, loved, understood, and spent time with them" (Chaudhari, 2014, p. 149). Contrary to this desire, due to gender expecations of the South Asian culture, for 80% of the women, this type of intimacy was unfortunately not a reality. Many women who have ended up in marriages with IPV are due to the social pressures to marry and withhold their status of womanhood within the South Asian culture.

Conclusion

South Asian culture is built on the pillar of family, which has been constructed as the most important way to do the culture correctly. For many families, migrating from India to North America was a reality, in order to have the opportunity for a better life and more opportunity than the homeland could offer. In doing so, the definition of culture morphed into something that would include Western ideals while still maintaining elements of the South Asian culture, namely, religion and ethnicity. The term Indo-Canadian, has been formed in order to preserve the ethnicity of those who have migrated from India to Canada.

Sikhism, a major religion of the South Asian culture has guided many principles of the culture and values. Although considered a relatively new religion, the values of Sikhism has taught the people of the culture to be courageous, and strong. Furthermore, in the migration process, it becomes challenging to decide which customs and traditions to maintain and which ones to assimilate to. For many Indo-Canadians, the value of family has always been a permanent structure and therefore, marriage is viewed as an inevitable reality. The ideals of a traditional arranged marriage has become less common, but a hybrid arranged marriage is certainly a reality today, especially in North America, namely Canada.

Through marriage, one is given a partner to spend life with and build a family with, however, this can look very different in the South Asian culture. Since the South Asian culture is built on patriarchy, males are at the center of the family system and women can be seen as subservient and even oppressed within the family. Especially given that women marry into the man's family and she must abide by her new families traditions and customs. There is a great deal of pressure for a woman to maintain her marriageability and perform gender within her cultural script. In some cases, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a reality of many marriages, and the experiences of women in these situations vary, depending on the type of marriage, and the relationship dynamic. Both males and females are valued differently within the South Asian culture, in a way that creates a binary thought process around gender roles within this culture.

CHAPTER III: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE & SEPARATION

Introduction

The following chapter will examine traditional South Asian marriages, including an in-depth view of the marriage dynamics and some of the cultural factors causing conflict within a marriage, and those conflicts that extend into the larger family. By examining marriage dynamics and considering the root of conflict, the factors contributing to relationship violence leading to separation will also be revealed.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a prevalent health issue among women, worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines IPV "as any behaviour of an intimate partner that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship" (Ahmad et al., 2013, p. 1058). Within this context, South Asian women are seen as a vulnerable population, especially immigrant women, who move to Canada to build a marriage and a family. Due to rigid gender roles and unfamiliarity of the new society, South Asian immigrant women are at higher risk than women who are born in Canada (Ahmad et al., 2013).

Prevalence of Domestic Violence Among South Asian Immigrant Women

According to Shankar et al. (2013), "Domestic violence (DV) in the South Asian community is at least as prevalent as it is in the general population, yet it is massively underreported" (p. 248) and there are many contributing reasons for this that arise from social and financial situations. Furthermore, given the South Asian cultural dynamic, women moving into a new role as a wife, and a member of her husband's family bears new expectations and roles that she must fill in order to be considered a good wife and a contributor to the family as a whole. Unfortunately, there have been no long-term studies conducted in Canada around the prevalence of domestic violence in South Asian communities, however some of the studies

conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom can help to inform some of the realities

even within Canada. Shankar et al. (2013) outline a study conducted in the Greater Boston area

that included 160 South Asian women who were married or in long-term heterosexual

relationships. Results from the study concluded that:

> 40.8% reported they had been physically and/or sexually abused by their current male
>
> partners in their lifetime; 36.9% reported having been victimized in the past year. Only
>
> 3.1% of the abused South Asian women in the study had ever obtained a restraining order
>
> against an abusive partner (Shankar et al., 2013, p. 248-49).

Given the high prevalence of abuse within South Asian relationships, and the evident

underreporting of this, it becomes evident that domestic violence is a deep-rooted issue within

the culture, and there remains a stigma of reporting, possibly due to the implications of doing so.

For many women experiencing domestic violence from her partner, reporting this can

Domestic violence and partner abuse is prevalent across cultures and races and "affects

every person, across race, class nationality, and religious lines" (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005, p.

41). While this supports and acknowledges the prevalence of domestic violence, it "trivializes

both the dimensions that underlie the experience of these particular abuse victims and more

important, the ways we analyze the prevalence and impact of violence against them" (Sokoloff &

Dupont, 2005, p. 41). It is critical to acknowledge the unique cases and experiences of domestic

violence, as they are all different and should not be generalized.

For many women experiencing domestic violence from her partner, reporting this can

feel shameful and even act as betraying of her partner. Within the South Asian culture, it is

common for a female partner to migrate from India to Canada or the United States once married,

in doing this, she is leaving her family and traditions at home and trying to navigate a new

culture in the Western society. As mentioned by Shankar et al. (2013), there are many reasons

that domestic violence remains underreported,

> These include financial dependence on spouse for a period of 3 years after migration to
>
> Canada, poor English skills, a lack of understanding of sponsorship procedures, lack of
>
> knowledge of rights, loss of supportive networks due to migration and lack of knowledge
>
> of community resources (p. 249).

Given that there may be a lack of overall education around migration, at many times, married

women who migrate are taken advantage of in more ways than one, that can cause great mental

and physical hurt.

A study conducted in Canada, who has an ongoing immigration policy, by Ahmad et al.

(2013) examined the experiences of 11 women who considered themselves survivors of intimate

partner violence (IPV). All the women in the study had experienced physical, psychological and

emotional IPV, some of which was provoked in-laws. When asked, all of the women

appreciated the heightened sense of gender equality in Canada, and many of these women

"wished they had better knowledge of their own rights on arrival in Canada" (Ahmad et al.,

2013, p. 1063). When moving to a new country, for any individual, there are feelings of stress

and the overwhelming fear of the unknown, and this fear overrides some of the logical portion of

things such as learning new rights and roles in one's new society. For many South Asian

immigrant women, the culture suggests that education is not as valuable as being a good wife,

and therefore, south Asian women may be socialized to not focus on education, but rather fill

their gender roles appropriately before moving to Canada.

Marriage: Married to the Family not just her partner

The South Asian culture as a whole is viewed as the 'model minority', given by Western society (Shankar, 2013). Through the media, South Asians are portrayed as "law-abiding, hardworking, self-sufficient and enjoying happy family relationships" (Shankar, 2013, p. 249). Due to these constructs and expectations of the culture, the notion of domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV) within a marriage can be shameful for many women experiencing such to report about it. Shankar (2013) explains,

> This status has repercussions for South Asian women who experience domestic violence
> who find it embarrassing to ask for social services or police assistance and are unlikely to
> seek public assistance to deal with the abuse as revealing the abuse will destroy the myth
> (p. 249).

Furthermore, the implications of reporting domestic violence may increase the risk to further violence or conflict within the family system given the cultural dynamic.

Shankar (2013) highlighted a study from 2010 by the Women's Cultural Association discussing the beliefs and practices of the culture. The study acknowledged concluded that,

> Men are the providers and protectors of the family; boys have the responsibility to take
> care of their parents; a girl is a transient member of the family as she moves to her
> husband's family after marriage; a family is not complete without a son; a woman who
> does not give birth to a son has no status and can be divorced; women must suffer in
> silence for the sake of the family; if a family breakdown occurs it is the mother who is to
> be blamed; girls must be socialized to sacrifice their autonomy and freedom for the
> husband and his family; spousal violence is something that woman must learn to live with
> and it will end it will eventually end with time…women are men's property; the woman

must have the permission of her husband and in laws to go out, work, study and

socialize... (Shankar, 2013, p. 249).

Unfortunately, for some South Asian women, the reality of reporting abuse and violence in the

home can result in double victimization and further consequences in the home from her husband

and her in-laws.

Honour Killings

Gender based violence is prominent within the South Asian culture and has many

contributing factors relating to culture and tradition. Honour killings are defined from a cultural

perspective "as the killing of a woman to recover wounded, damaged, or lost patriarchal honour"

(Olwan, 2013, p. 535) where this is considered a type of "violence stemming from perception to

safeguard family 'honour' which includes sexual, familial and social roles and expectations

assigned to women as prescribed by traditional ideology" (Olwan, 2013, p. 535). Given that the

South Asian culture is viewed as patriarchal,

Feminist theories about power and control offer a useful framework for discussing how

honour killings emerge from the perceived need to support and/or restore patriarchal

power within the family; this, in turn, illuminates how these crimes represent a socio-

culturally defined form of domestic violence… (Aujla & Gill, 2014, p.154)

against women. Through challenging patriarchy within the South Asian culture, it is evident that

honour crimes and killings are viewed as a gendered base violence practice.

For women entering a marriage and into a new family, there are many expectations of

being a wife and daughter in-law. When an honour killing occurs, "they symbolize a wider,

more prevalent logic that shows women and girls what is likely to happen to them if they don't

behave and conform to social and patriarchal expectations" (Aujla & Gill, 2014, p. 154).

Instilling this fear of murder and death can be extremely detrimental to a woman as she may not

feel she is able to express her true self but rather conform to what her new family expects of her.

Women and girls are expected to be dependent on the males in the home, who are considered the

head of the family. Aujla & Gill (2014) explain, "if a man refuses to punish a female relative, he

risks losing his own social position and may be labelled as weak and unmanly by other men in

the community. This is a further disgrace that represents a severe wound to the man's pride" (p.

157) and ignores the well-being of his female counterpart.

Through an examination of statistics from Statistics Canada, it was concluded that there

were "12 or 13 [honour killings] between 2002 and 2011, or 16 between 1999. These figures

represent about 1% of all family murders during this decade" (Shier & Shor, 2016, p. 1170).

Given the prevalence of honour killings, there are many instances of abuse and other gendered

violence that goes unreported. "According to Statistics Canada, in 2011, only 5% of visible

minority versus 6% of non-visible minorities, self-reported experiencing spousal violence. In the

same report, 4% of immigrants and 7% of non-immigrants reported being a victim of spousal

violence" (Shier & Shor, 2016, p. 1174). Reporting abuse within the South Asian culture is

viewed as shameful to one's family and can have further repercussions and consequences for the

survivor. The cycle of abuse continues, as women are unable to escape. As Aujla & Gill (2014)

explain, "for some women, supporting honour-based violence may be the only way they can

protect their own honour and position within the family" (p. 157).

The murder of Jaswinder Kaur Sidhu.

Jaswinder Kaur Sidhu was a twenty-five-year-old South Asian woman from Maple

Ridge, British Columbia when she was murdered (in an honour killing) for marrying a man of a

lower caste, that her family did not approve of (Aujla & Gill, 2014). On a visit to India in 2000,

Jaswinder was kidnapped in front of her husband and later killed (Aujla & Gill, 2014). The

murder was plotted by her mother and uncle and her husband was forced by Jaswinder's family

to sign a fake document, stating that she wanted the marriage annulled (Aujla & Gill, 2014). As

explained by Aujla & Gill (2014), "since inter-caste marriages tend to weaken the differences

existing among different caste groups and disturb the caste hierarchies, marriage…between a

high caste girl and a low caste boy is always contested and criminalized" (p. 158).

Social hierarchy is valued in the South Asian culture, and despite the families migrating

to Canada and adopting some of the Western traditions, issues around caste and the social

hierarchy continue to exist in some families. Aujla & Gill (2014) continue to explain that

"Jaswinder's family believed that she had offended against their patriarchal values and violated

the concept of caste honour in a socially unacceptable way, in the process dishonouring the

whole family" (p. 158). Marriage is another social expectation within the South Asian culture,

and dishonouring this in any way can have fatal consequences, as it did for Jaswinder Kaur. As

Aujla & Gill (2014) explain,

> In 2012 Jaswinder's mother and uncle were arrested for plotting the murder on Canadian
>
> soil then carrying it out in India. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) are now
>
> concluding a long investigation examining how crimes committed in the name of honour
>
> have been planned in Canada, but carried out elsewhere (p. 158).

Honour crimes and killings are unique to culture, and finally, they are being recognized as a

criminal offence in Canada. Although Jaswinder will never have the opportunity to live freely

and make her own choices around marriage and relationships, hopefully the criminal recognition

of honour based violence will pave the way for other women and girls (especially in Canada) to

make free decisions without as much pressure from their families.

Conceptualizing Marriage

As there is a rise in the divorce rate among couples throughout Western society, the South Asian culture does not allow for divorce or separation. Within the South Asian culture, once a couple is married, the social expectation is that the couple stay married forever. Even in the case that a partner is widowed, it is expected that the remaining partner does not remarry. Furthermore, the idea of divorce and separation is highly frowned upon and not accepted among the South Asian culture. Jennings (2016) highlights that "women face greater obstacles in dissolving marriage than men. A divorced woman is considered to be 'impure' for any man other than her first husband" (p. 1353). Since separation is frowned upon within the culture, there are many implications around leaving a marriage, especially for a woman.

There is certainly a prevalence of domestic violence within the South Asian culture, however, no large-scale studies have been conducted in Canada (Shankar et al., 2013). An American study that examined 160 South Asian women in the Greater Boston area revealed that 40.8% had been physically and/or sexually abused by their male partners and 36.9% had been victimized in the last year (Shankar et al., 2013). Domestic violence remains underreported in the South Asian culture, mostly due to further repercussions. As mentioned by Shankar et al. (2013), "South Asian women who experience domestic violence who find it embarrassing to ask for social services or police assistance are unlikely to seek public assistance to deal with the abuse as revealing abuse will destroy the myth" (p. 249).

Post-Colonial feminism has lent itself to re-considering how we conceptualize marriage in the South Asian culture, especially with the influences of post-colonial feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins (Pande, 2015). Due to the cultural conceptions that talking openly about issues within the family system or within a marriage are

frowned upon, those women who are being abused and victimized are further oppressed by their

own culture. Pande (2015) addresses a significant point in stating:

> [it is] not how women can radically change their lives by an outright rejection of their
>
> cultural practices but how they navigate those existing norms, which to some eyes seem
>
> oppressive and patriarchal…to suit their life's hopes and ambitions and what reliance
>
> they seek from their religious and cultural heritages (p. 176).

However, even with the existing norms, there remains a great pressure from a woman's family to

abide by cultural norms and traditions. For some women, fear may keep them from being able to

navigate these norms to suit their lives. Since a woman's role in the family is less valued than

her male counterpart, it is expected that she remains selfless and in turn, cares for her husband

and his family before she considers her own needs.

Power and control: studying womens' lived experiences within marriage.

A study from the United States examines the lived experiences of twenty South Asian

women who have experienced domestic violence (Jordan & Bandari, 2016). The Power and

Control Wheel for immigrant women (Jordan & Bandari, 2016) was created to conceptualize

women's experiences through a theoretical framework. The eight tactics presented in this wheel

included: "(a) isolation; (b) emotional abuse; (c) intimidation; (d) economic abuse; (e) using

citizenship or residency privilege; (f) sexual abuse; (g) threats; and (h) using children" (Jordan &

Bandari, 2016, p. 229). The outside of the circle illustrates the function of physical abuse in

supporting power and control (i.e. Shoving, beating, choking, etc.) (Jordan & Bandari, 2016).

Findings suggest that all women experienced some form of domestic violence and many

reported a combination of abuse. In regards to physical abuse, Jordan & Bandari explain (2016)

"in the South Asian culture, discipline of the wife by either the husband or either side of the

family is permissible and culturally sanctioned" (p. 235). The emotional and psychological

abuse for the use of intimidation and coercion was also relevant to the study. A participant

explained a situation with her husband,

> He never gave me a single penny. If we went to the mall and I liked a T-shirt, I have to
>
> show him to ask him if I can buy it. After he decides then I can buy it. I cannot go out
>
> with my friends. No credit card for me. He decides what I have to wear. I cannot do it
>
> myself (Jordan & Bandari, 2016, p. 236).

From this situation, the power and control framework is so evident, where her male counterpart

has the opportunity to remove his wife's agency, and control her financially and emotionally.

All women in the study reported experiencing emotional and psychological abuse throughout

their marriage (Jordan & Bandari, 2016).

When addressing sexual violence, this was also prevalent throughout the study however,

it was not as identifiable among the participants in the study. Talking about intimacy and sex

within the South Asian culture can be challenging and even shameful, and therefore, through this

study it may have been challenging for the participants to report. Many of the women also

reported sexual violence in conjunction with pregnancy-related violence (Jordan & Bandari,

2016). For many of these cases, Jordan & Bandari (2016) explain,

> The male abuser would disregard doctor's orders and the woman's wishes and proceed to
>
> have sex with her during a dangerous time for her, physically. In many instances, the
>
> male would attempt to convince the woman that she did not know or understand the
>
> reality of what was best for her own body (p. 238).

The male abuser would once again remove his wife's agency through tactics of power and

control in order to satisfy his own needs.

Given the extended family dynamics within the South Asian culture, a woman's in-laws

may also be considered as the abuser, in order to gain power and control over her. Jordan &

Bandari (2016) explain that many women in the study reported "experiencing emotional abuse

from their partner's mother, often in the form of shaming her ability to be an acceptable wife and

mother, thereby placing the responsibility of the abuse on the victim" (p. 240). For many

women, this can be detrimental and lead to further mental health implications such as anxiety

and depression. The role of extended families in the South Asian culture are quite unique and

definitely can be a relying factor for domestic violence within a relationship. However, as

Jordan & Bandari (2016) discuss family involvement and abuse, "women did not find this type

of abuse to be unusual or unexpected, although, physical emotional and psychological abuse

was" (p. 241). South Asian culture has historically stigmatized the 'in-law' dynamics, and this

could hypothesize the reason why this type of abuse is not unexpected within the culture.

Furthermore, women entering a marriage may have been witness to their mother's experiencing

similar situations and normalizing them within their own lives.

Dissolving a Marriage

Dissolving a marriage, whether it be by legal separation or divorce can be a difficult

decision regardless of the reasons leading up to it. For many, "priority is given to personal

happiness and fulfillment rather than looking at the holistic view of the family system"

(Subarimaniam et al., 2017, p. 123). However, the dissolution of marriage within the South

Asian culture deems quite different and goes beyond that of self-fulfillment and happiness. A

study relating to marriage dissolution regarded that "domestic violence is one of the causes of

marital dissolution" (Subarimian, 2017, p. 127), even among South Asian women. However,

from a cultural perspective, a South Asian woman who leaves her husband is frowned upon and

leaving a marriage can be considered a bold move.

Conclusion

Marriage is considered a legal binding of two individuals, coming together as one to

build a life together and even have a family. Marriage "provides emotional support, promotes

healthy behaviours, healthy habits, and material well-being" (Subarimanian, 2017, p. 123).

While marriage is seen differently within each culture, the South Asian culture embodies an even

deeper connection, where a woman is marrying into her husband's family and must adhere to the

customs and traditions of his family rather than build a unique set solely with her husband. By

marrying into her husband's family, a woman may be controlled and expected to obey her in-

laws and be selfless in her pursuit of taking care of his family. In doing so, she may be subjected

to intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV). For immigrant women, the

prevalence of domestic violence within a relationship is high based on previous studies.

A large stigma in the South Asian culture is based around the idea of family secrets. The

culture stigmatizes those who speak out about issues or concerns that are happening within the

home and especially within a marriage. Therefore, women are bound to a code of silence within

their homes, this is a tactic of power and control over a woman, and can also be seen as a form of

abuse. Since gender based violence is prevalent within the South Asian culture, the conception

of an Honour Killing is also prevalent. Given the social patriarchy, when a woman has not kept

up her honour, she can be murdered as a form of punishment by her own family, or her in-laws.

They can also be used as a manipulation tactic by instilling fear into a woman, and if she does

not perform her roles correctly, she can be subject to this.

There are many factors contributing to domestic violence and intimate partner violence within a marriage. This chapter has reflected that the patriarchal hierarchy is prevalent within this culture, and power and control are important factors for males to maintain. Marriage in itself can be a daunting thing, given there is a transition into a new lifestyle, and moving into a new home. However, given the cultural factors, marriage within the South Asian culture seems more complex than other Western cultures.

When problems and issues arise in a marriage, typically, they can be addressed and resolved. However, when it is relating to power and control, leaving a male dominated marriage can be more challenging. Women attempting to leave an abusive marriage or relationship may be afraid to leave it, based on the instilled fear from her partner, or his family or because of the further repercussions if she reports the abuse or makes a failed attempt at fleeing her relationship. As much as women can be assertive in their relationship, navigating culture can be tricky based on the unique family dynamics of the specific family she is part of. Furthermore, the fear of consequences may be so deep for a woman that she herself is silenced and feels that she is unable to leave the relationship.

CHAPTER IV: CULTURAL COMPETENCY OF COUNSELLORS WORKING WITH SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN SURVIVORS OF ABUSE

Introduction

The following chapter will explore the importance of cultural competency within counselling. Given the South Asian culture, counselling that considers cultural aspects will be more impactful to the changes that a client will make in the future. Given the growing South Asian population in places such as Canada and the United States, there is a need for counsellors to consider multicultural factors within their work. As asserted by DuPree et al. (2013), "there is a general consensus across mental health disciplines for greater attention to training of competent multicultural therapists and counsellors in order to work with various racial/ethnic groups" (p. 312).

India is the seventh largest country in the world and the second most populated, behind China (DuPree, 2013). Given the large mass and population, inevitably, there are cultural factors that impact individuals and families and these factors must be considered, especially when working with clients of the South Asian culture. Traditionally,

individuals with mental, emotional or relational difficulties have consulted with native healers, shamans, gurus and exorcists more often than trained professionals. In contrast, Western psychology, which focuses on individualism, cognitive processing and material reinforcements, these native healers focus on strict social sanctions (DuPree, 2013, p. 313).

Therefore, the idea of professional Western psychology is stigmatized within the South Asian culture. Furthermore, as previously discussed, the notion of the South Asian family as a private sphere remains valued and speaking out about issues can be frowned upon. The idea of asking for help outside the family is often seen as a rebellious act, sometimes resulting in an individual

being disowned from one's family. In challenging some of the stigmas around counselling, an

increase in cultural competency among counsellors is needed, where creating a safe space, sense

of belonging and the idea of sameness between a client and therapist will help to bridge the gap.

Stigmatizing *"help"*

> Counselling can be defined as:

> The skilled and principled use of relationship to facilitate self-knowledge, emotional

> acceptance and growth and the optimal development of personal resources. The overall

> aim is to work towards living more satisfyingly and resourcefully… The counsellor's role

> is to facilitate the clients work in ways that respect the client's values, personal resources

> and capacity for self-determination (Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy

> Association, 2019, p. 1).

Through the process of counselling, changes are made and issues can be resolved. Within the

South Asian culture, DuPree et al. (2013) suggest that "most Indian immigrants have very little

experience with mental health professionals… until recently, mental health was given a low

prioirty in Indian public health" (p. 313). It is only recently that

> family therapy has become more prevalent among the South Asian culture, where

> studies indicate that "family therapy will continue to grow as mental health professionals

> continue to call for more family approaches and as the Indian family structure continues

> to evolve (DuPree, 2013, p. 314).

Sharing family secrets outside the family has been shamed upon by older generations within the

culture, based on the traditional mentality.

> In a study conducted by DuPree et al. (2013), the aim was to provide guidelines and

recommendations for working with South Asian identifying families where the purpose is to find

common themes that impact assessment, treatment and intervention. Within the study, a large

segment was focused on conceptualizing culturally competent family therapists. There were

several themes that were organized into major categories: Category 1: The impact of

intergenerational/extended family relationships on marriage; Category 2: The impact of eastern

and western traditions on marriage and the family; Category 3: The influence of gender roles on

marital and parental patterns; Category 4: The impact of modernization and globalization on

acculturation; Category 5: The role of intimacy and conflict in marriage; Concept 6: Parental

considerations with young children and adolescents; And Category 7: Patterns seeking help

(DuPree, 2013). Given the study, recommendations were provided based on the analysis of these

categories. Addressing problems of triangulation and transgenerational congestion would be

helpful in providing an intergenerational context to therapy (DuPree, 2013). Furthermore,

addressing intergenerational issues relating to boundaries and roles (DuPree, 2013) will also help

to build culturally competent counsellors. DuPree (2013) also suggest the importance of a

psychoeducational approach for families in addition to using solution focused and narrative

therapy, which would emphasize storytelling and short-term strategies for change. In

empowering and creating more culturally competent marriage and family counsellors, cultural

stigmas around the idea of getting help need to change. In order for change to occur, it is

important to recognize that liberalization and globalization as a whole will impact this change.

DuPree (2013), suggest that "MFT needs to acknowledge the complexities Asian Indian

American families in transition face" (p. 324) when it comes to assimilation and attempting to

balance western culture with one's traditional roots. It is important that therapists are asking

about family dynamics, gender roles between a couple and among the extended family in order

to understand some of the complexities a client may be facing.

Women seeking help

The idea of help is generally constructed to be a positive outcome from a negative

situation, where professionals who are trained are able to provide resources and services to those

who seek help. For women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV) and are also a

cultural minority, help does not always present itself in a positive light. Moe (2007) argues that,

> women's resistance to intimate partner abuse and success at utilizing avenues of help
>
> seeking are shaped by structural inequalities predicated on patriarchy, poverty and racism
>
> or ethnic bias. Indeed, although most battered women are likely to face some amount of
>
> disbelief, discreditation, or even outright hostility in their efforts to seek victimization, in
>
> the long-run they may fair better or worse within the social welfare, criminal justice, or
>
> political-legal system depending on the intersection of various sociostructural inequalities
>
> in their lives (p. 678).

For many South Asian women experiencing IPV or domestic violence, Moe's (2007) argument

around help holds true, where in-laws of the woman may not believe her, or she may be further

oppressed if she uses her voice to speak to the abuse, and therefore feeling further entrapped.

Studying resiliency among women who experience IPV.

The idea of seeking help can be daunting for anyone, feelings of guilt and shame may

dominate the idea of obtaining help and making changes, especially for women who are in

abusive marriages and relationships. Given the collectivist norms in the South Asian culture,

"personal goals are sacrificed in favour of group goals" (Ahmad et al., 2013, p. 1058), where the

idea of *the* self seizes to exist. Therefore, seeking help could also be seen as a selfish act among

a woman's family. In neglecting the self, this "not only limits SA women's opportunities to

work, learn or socialize outside the domestic sphere, but also heightens the power imbalance between women and men" (Ahmad et al., 2013, p. 1058).

Due to the oppression that many South Asian women face, they are left to their own skills to cope and make a fulfilling life for themselves, to the best of their ability. Despite the oppression, women still have a sense of agency in their roles and many exemplify resilience through their experiences. Ahmad (2013) explains "resilience as positive adaptation" (p. 1058) to a challenging situation, specifically, their circumstances of a demanding caregiving role at home. The idea of focusing on resilience,

> is vital for understanding the socially stigmatized condition of IPV. This is especially pertinent for SA communities because of the high value given to protecting 'face' (i.e. Group image and prestige) based on their collectivist orientation and immigrant minority status (Ahmad et al., 2013, p. 1058).

Ahmad et al. (2013) conducted a study exploring resilience among eleven South Asian (SA) immigrant women who were survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and were living in Canada. In-depth interviews were conducted in order to collect data around experiences of the eleven minority women. Participants were eighteen years and older, and fluently spoke Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi or English. The interviews were focused on "(1) how women overcame their experiences of violence, and (2) what was helpful to them" (Ahmad et al., 2013, p. 1059). All of them women from the study had experienced some sort of intimate partner violence (IPV), whether physical, psychological and emotional, and some which was aggravated by the in-laws.

Ahmad et al. (2013) identified themes:

> (1) resources before the turning point, (2) resources after the turning point, (3)
>
> transformations in self, (4) adapted social networks, and (5) being an immigrant. The
>
> turning point refers to women's decision to change their situation from victimization to
>
> survivorship by taking incremental steps (p. 1059).

For many of the women, willpower allowed women to reach their turning point and actively

allow them to make changes to their personal situations (Ahmad et al, 2013). Going through this

process allowed women to build their resiliency and even act as a model for their children.

> Ahmad et al. (2013) highlight that after the turning point, women received continual

support from family and friends both in Canada and from back home. After the turning point,

many of the women had a breakthrough and did turn to professional supports, including:

counsellors, information from the internet, social housing, legal aid and livelihood essentials

(Ahmad et al., 2013). Ahmad et al. (2013) explain that,

> at times, women felt hesitant in accepting assistance but later decided to do so for their
>
> children. Wanting to avoid placing a burden on the adopted country and the stigma of
>
> receiving social assistance were the reasons for their initial hesitance (p. 1061).

Given the cultural complexities within the South Asian culture, asking for help can be

stigmatized and a challenge for many. Through Ahmad et al. (2013) study, "women described

an enhanced sense of belonging to the community, a need for reciprocity and a desire to stop

trans-generational abuse" (p. 1061).

> Despite intimate partner violence and women being oppressed and feeling degraded, "it is

quite remarkable that abused women are such active help seekers" (Moe, 2007, p. 691) when

they have reached their threshold and are willing to challenge social and cultural norms. Women

who do come forward in seeking help are demonstrating their own resilience and advocating for

themselves and other women who may be experiencing similar situations. As Moe (2007)

highlights, "one helpful response may spur further help-seeking efforts. It may also legitimize a

woman's claims to other agencies. Just as failed help seeking may be cumulative in effect, so

too might successful help seeking" (p. 692).

Counselling Strategies for Women Seeking Help

South Asian women experiencing intimate partner violence and domestic violence may

wish to seek help against their cultural norms. In doing so, not only is a woman challenging her

culture, but also demonstrating her agency as an individual of Western society. In seeking help,

counselling may be a strategy in seeking help, in order to make changes for the well-being of

herself and her family. Despite the challenges to obtain counselling, due to cultural practices and

social shaming that one may face, it is vital to consider the cultural competency of a counsellor

who will be providing a woman support through a transition potentially out of her marriage.

Western based trauma therapy models are certainly appropriate for women who have

experienced domestic violence within their marriages or are sexual abuse survivors; However,

Singh (2009) highlights that there are several factors that are not accounted for in the Western

model. A culturally competent counsellor would "have multiple gender, ethnic and cultural

layers to address" (Singh, 2009, p. 362) when working with women from a cultural minority. A

culturally relevant model for South Asian women must,

> address both the individual and contextual influences on their experiences of … abuse.
>
> Because of the cultural values placed on family privacy and honour, women's disclosure

of sexual trauma creates a stigmatizing environment due to the potential damage to the family system (Singh, 2009, p. 365).

Since the family system is highly valued in the South Asian culture, further action needs to be taken to attempt to maintain the family system while allowing a survivor of abuse to speak out without repercussions. Singh (2009) explains that,

> South Asian women learn how to engage in silent rebellion and to confront adversity with silent tactics. They develop self-reliance and mental strength. Silence is no longer a mechanism; it becomes a testament to resilience. It is equated with inner power (p. 365).

The resilience of South Asian women is a cultural characteristic that allows them to eventually make a change in their situations, or the decision to leave an abusive relationship.

An integrative approach when working with South Asian women who have experienced abuse is critical, where,

> it is critical to place the constructs of gender and acculturation (traditional, bicultural, Western-identified) at the core of development of a cultural model. Gender and acculturation are sources of trauma and can be used to assess the degree to which the client is negotiating the acculturation process and the degree to which she ascribes to traditional South Asian norms (Singh, 2009, p. 369).

Addressing gender norms and acculturation will empower survivors of abuse to challenge their cultural and gender norms and make positive changes. Furthermore, in assessing the acculturation process, this will allow for a counsellor to meet their client at the stage of change they are at, whether they are contemplating change, by challenging cultural norms, or even ready to make a change to their situation to improve their well-being and situation. In doing this, the

therapeutic alliance will also be built to a degree that the client will feel more comfortable and trusting of the counsellor.

Feminist therapy, while being client centered also focuses on the equality of all individuals and in many cases, for the South Asian culture allows for the space to challenge the patriarchal norms. Traditionally, feminist therapy has "tended to have an individualistic and White, Western approach to ending sexism and violence against women, leaving out important cultural factors embedded in sexism and such as race and ethnicity" (Singh & Hays, 2008, p. 85). Feminist therapy can definitely be beneficial if there is a cultural layer included within the therapy. As asserted by Singh & Hays (2008), "feminist group counselling has been used with ethnic minority populations as a way of creating a space of empowerment that externalizes individual problems and links them with systemic oppressions" (p. 85). In externalizing problems and pressures within a group setting, clients have the opportunity to experience and hear similar stories from other group members. Not only does this create sameness, it allows for clients to become empowered through one another and create change.

For women of the South Asian culture, relationships and community relations are emphasized and therefore, feminist group counselling holds as a viable strategy for women who have experience intimate partner violence and domestic violence within their homes. As Singh & Hays (2008) discuss,

> South Asian worldview emphasizes individual control and respect of emotions and behaviour in addition to possessing a strong sense of individual dignity. What makes South Asian women's interpersonal relating unique is that this individuality must be relationally in balance within the family unit. For instance, a South Asian woman's worth in society is typically defined as her role as a wife and mother (p. 86).

South Asian women identify so strongly with their roles in a family, that this may be the way they present within a counselling session, and could create challenges with the therapeutic relationship. Singh & Hays (2008) suggest that in using a feminist group therapy approach with women survivors of IPV, this model "counters isolation by providing opportunities for individuals to develop empowerment skills… that increase their personal sense of power within a context of connection and support from other South Asian women survivors" (p. 87). Women have the opportunity to draw on their strengths and feel in control, especially when hearing other women's stories and experiences.

Recommendations

Considering the advocacy and literature that exists around women's issues and specifically South Asian women as survivors of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse, there is still a lack of research on this topic. Given that South Asian's are one of the largest populations in Western society, with one of the top immigrant rates, there remains a gap in research around sensitive topics such as domestic violence and mental health strategies. Kallivayalil (2007), explains that "the existing research on domestic violence in the South Asian community continues to grow and there is excellent descriptive work that addresses the role of gender socialization and the interplays of ethnicity, class and legal status with this population" (p. 113), there is a gap in action around women's advocacy and breaking down the patriarchy within the South Asian culture, perhaps because it has been embedded since the beginning.

While the idea of feminist family therapy would be ideal for women and their families who are survivors of intimate partner violence or domestic violence, "there is no empirical body of research on the use of feminist *therapy* with the Asian American women in general, or with specific subgroups (such as South Asians) under this large umbrella" (Kallivayalil, 2007, p. 113).

Further studies around specific feminist therapy for South Asian women who have experienced

intimate partner violence or domestic violence in the home is needed in order to assert that this

model of therapy is the most effective. Although feminist therapy is a way to empower women

and center around the strengths of a client, feminist theory "does not pay attention to the family

context and cultural values" (Kallivayalil, 2007, p. 115) of the South Asian society. Moreover,

Kallivayalil (2007) explains that,

> feminist theories on domestic violence emphasize values of empowerment and self-
>
> determination; however, these values may not be culturally congruent with [South Asian]
>
> values. When a [South Asian survivor] of domestic violence does opt to leave the
>
> abusive relationship, in essence, she decides to place her well-being over that of the
>
> collective system (i.e. The family). As a result, feminist ideologies espousing self-
>
> determination, autonomy, and individualism may be dissonant with a [South Asian]
>
> woman's cultural values (p. 115).

Deeper than counselling models, the competencies of the counsellor need to also be

addressed. As a counsellor, being developed and well-versed in multicultural competencies will

help to create an understanding of the client, and build a strong therapeutic alliance. As

highlighted by Kallivayalil (2007), "multicultural frameworks for therapy have explicitly

addressed shortcomings of traditional forms of therapy with understudied and minority groups by

calling attention to both ethnocentrism of mainstream therapy and the special needs and issues of

these groups" (p. 111). There is a need to diversify knowledge around cultures and especially in

having a deepened understanding of the family systems within the South Asian culture. For

example, since the South Asian culture values family systems and the idea of a collectivist

culture, a deepened understanding of this would be beneficial for a counsellor in order to work

with their clients. As a counsellor and working with clients, challenging the cultural values and

norms is also important to instill ideas of change and even fleeing an abusive relationship.

Despite the attempts of acculturation, challenging some of the norms such as patriarchy and

forced silence, this will lead to eventual change and increased advocacy for South Asian's

women's issues, while creating space for discussion around generally silenced issues.

Conclusion

For many, the idea of getting help or even receiving counselling around issues can be

daunting. For the South Asian culture, due to the cultural complexities and norms, getting *help*

can be frowned upon and for some families may lead to disownment or physical and emotional

abuse. Given that the South Asian culture is based on patriarchy, women are usually viewed as

the silent partners in a marriage, responsible for upholding the household and caring for their

children and in-laws. In the case that a woman desires to leave an abusive relationship, it is the

responsibility of the counsellor, along with other professional supports to maintain a level of

cultural competency in order to fulfill their duties as a helping professional. Foremost, since the

South Asian culture does not imply much awareness around mental health, it is important to

consider some of the biases that one may have, especially in entering counselling for the first

time.

It would also be important for counsellors to be learning about the family system of the

client they are working with, in order to gain a deepened understanding of some of the roles and

expectations the client may have at home and some of the traumas that may have been

experienced. DuPree (2013) suggests that clients "may also be worried about the individual

values that inform Western therapy and how these values may conflict with more collectivist

values" (p. 326). As a culturally competent counsellor, one must consider their own biases and

sociocultural backgrounds. Being self-aware around some of their own assumptions and allowing the client to teach about their respective culture will allow for a stronger therapeutic alliance. Using strategies such as a client-centered, strength based approach with survivors of intimate partner violence or domestic violence will help to re-empower clients, especially to make changes or even leave an abusive relationship. Furthermore, drawing on a client's resiliency will increase the therapeutic relationship and allow the client to re-gain a sense of self which may have been lost within the family system, which focuses greatly on a collectivism model.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

Summary

The South Asian culture is based on patriarchal values, where women are often oppressed and even victimized through intimate partner violence, domestic violence and emotional abuse. For South Asian immigrants who reside in North America and places such as Canada and the United States, acculturation is relevant to their processes when transitioning from their motherland to a new society. While the elements of acculturation encourage integration, and maintaining certain elements of their unique culture (Li et al., 2013), values such as patriarchal norms are discouraged. There are many challenges with acculturation and cultural complexities need to be considered, acknowledging that it is not necessarily simple enough to let go of one's engrained culture for another.

Immigrant women move to Canada for marriage, and under the ideas that they will have more opportunity, however, the realities of patriarchy still exist in women's new homes and they are at-risk of becoming oppressed (Walton-Roberts & Pratt, 2005) to the degree that intimate partner violence (IPV) can occur. IPV remains highly underreported due to the cultural stigmas of sharing personal information outside of the family circle (Shankar et al., 2013). Women marrying into traditional South Asian families lose their sense of agency and identity, as they become the caregiver to their new extended family, therefore, this may not necessarily be a new opportunity for immigrant women who marry into an Indo-Canadian family.

Canada as a whole has countless supports and resources for families and individuals who have experienced or been impacted by domestic violence and IPV. Although it is challenging for South Asian women and families to report violence and abuse, there are also cultural stigmas around doing so. For women who choose to dissolve a marriage, while there are cultural

implications associated with doing so, there is also a stigma around obtaining professional help from therapists and other professional supports.

Family therapy has only recently become prevalent among South Asian's (DuPree et al., 2013) and there are considerations that need to be implemented in order to provide the best care to a client. In order for survivors of IPV or domestic violence to get the right type of help and create a sense of agency, counsellors and professionals providing support must embody a level of cultural competency to bridge the gap between a client and professional. A culturally competent counsellor would embody the understanding of multiple cultural, gender and ethnic layers (Singh, 2009) to create a strong therapeutic alliance. In destigmatizing help, it is also important to give space to those who are willing to share their experiences without repercussions from her family and community (Singh, 2009). In doing more of this, less abuse will be underreported, eventually creating a safe space for it to be addressed by professionals and service providers. Furthermore, it would be ideal for counsellors and service providers to have a deepened understanding of a client's acculturation process, and a background of their experiences, in order to better provide them with care. Considering the South Asian culture is built on the value of family and collectivism, implementing assessments on family dynamics will help to bridge the gap between a survivor and therapist, depending the cultural competency of a therapist.

This thesis was written based on feminist theory, as a basis to support this work and research, where feminist theory allows the space to make inequalities visible and draw attention to oppression (McDowell & Fang, 2007), in hopes of creating more advocacy around IPV and domestic violence, while destigmatizing gender norms in the South Asian culture. Feminist theory has suggested that there are binary relationships between men and women, and this is evident in the South Asian culture, especially for those women experiencing abuse. Men are

considered to be perpetrators, while women are oppressed through abuse in order to maintain patriarchal values within the culture (Cannon et al., 2015).

There are certainly limitations to this work as there is a lack of research and studies available around South Asian women and strategies for seeking help. Given the nature of South Asian cultural norms around family and the act of getting help, women are resistant to help based on cultural inequalities (Moe, 2007) and therefore, there is less research done for it. In creating more space for cultural complexities, more studies need to be conducted, in order to raise more awareness around this issue.

Recommendations

In order to increase awareness and provide appropriate services to women who have survived IPV and domestic violence, there are some recommendations to bridge culture and professional help. Shankar et al. (2013) highlighted a study conducted in the Greater Boston area around the theme of women who have experienced IPV and domestic violence. While the study was thorough, in that it examined women who remained in marriages, left marriages and some of the repercussions (Shankar et al., 2013), it was also limiting. Furthermore, given sociological differences, there have not been any Canadian studies conducted with a similar scope and it is challenging to consider the acculturation processes and the culture of professional help in Canada. Creating more Canadian based studies will allow for a more specific population scope, focusing on the Indo-Canadian population with more accurate results. These results would aim to create space for conversation around this topic and even local advocacy for women who are experiencing IPV and domestic violence.

For professional service providers, such as therapists, going outside of the traditional therapy model would help to de-stigmatize therapy and help. Given that feminist theory

addresses power dynamics, it is critical to consider power relations (Collins, 1997) and how this may impact minority groups. For South Asian women, given their cultural identity, the stigma of participating in therapy may be a barrier in itself, and therefore it is clear that a different approach needs to take place and one that is seen as more collective. Collins (1997) asserts that "group-based experience, especially that of race and/or social class, continues to matter" (p. 377).

Psychoeducational groups would be a non-stigmatizing way to create a sense of collectivism and sameness, where women are able to learn while also hearing stories and meeting other individuals whose stories may align together. In doing so, the barrier of one-on-one therapy may be less and there would be an increase in empowerment. Within group therapy work, a strength-based approach would help to foster the existing skills and personal strengths of the group participants. For example, discussing what these strengths may be for each participant will help to increase self-esteem while empowering action to create and work towards goals, such as leaving an abusive relationship, or finding work in order to financially support oneself, with a long-term goal to eventually leave the current relationship. Within psychoeducational groups, interpreters who can speak and understand the minority languages would also be ideal as this would help to bridge the gap between the facilitators and the group participants and furthermore symbolize familiarity among the group, adding to the aspect of safety. Doing group work will allow participants to hear of others' experiences, through narrative stories and through the discussion of others' experiences using their personal strengths to create change.

In terms of therapy itself, an increase of low barrier community agencies would allow for more women to access services without feeling guilt and shame, or challenged by the processes. For example, community agencies that provide walk-in counselling, may be less overwhelming

than traditional ongoing counselling services, if the model is based from a solution focused brief

therapy model. In doing this, short-term goals can be created and clients have the opportunity to

return to counselling whenever they feel they are in need, rather than feeling obligated if it were

a traditional counselling model or weekly appointments. Within this model, short-term solutions

and goals will empower women to make their desired changes at their pace, and eventually

empower long-term plans. Moreover, by making short-term goals and plans, this will foster

resiliency towards a long-term goal, such as dissolving or leaving an abusive marriage.

Providing clear information about confidentiality is settling for most individuals, and for

South Asian immigrant women, clarity around confidentiality is critical. For many women,

taking the time to clarify confidentiality and answer questions will be the key to bridge them to

professional support. Since professional help is stigmatized in the South Asian culture, and there

is a fear instilled in some women about speaking out in fear of being further entrapped by her in-

laws (Moe 2007), confidentiality needs to be explained clearly, in order for the client to build

trust and feel safe. Resilience is a powerful tool and it has showed in studies that South Asian

women have overcome their experiences of being in relationships with domestic violence and

IPV with it (Ahmad et al., 2013). Giving women the space to talk openly in the community

about their experiences will allow for more resilience to be built. By creating a safe space to

speak, women are able to tell their stories and foster resilience from one another.

For facilitators and counselling professionals, asking questions to participants around

family dynamic and culture in the home, using a one-down approach will allow for women to

explain their unique cultures and even feel empowered in teaching the group counsellors and

facilitators about culture, helping to bridge the gap to create a stronger therapeutic alliance.

Furthermore, inviting group participants to participate in the discussion, rather than mandating

group participation is also ideal, as some participants may not feel comfortable sharing, and may need to feel empowered to do so after hearing narratives from their peers first. Furthermore, continuing to validate participants' attendance at group sessions will also continue to build resilience and empower them to move out of their comfort zones, whether to eventually share stories and have a voice, or continue to make changes towards their long-term goals.

In continuing to foster resilience, asking questions around protective factors is also important as this will encourage women to consider these factors towards meeting their long-term goals. For example, asking about specific supports outside of the group setting, such as friends and other family members who the client may rely on, or discussing positive hobbies or activities that one may participate that helps them feel good. For example, discussing self-care strategies would be helpful, where validating good sleep hygiene, or healthy eating habits will continue to create resilience among women, as there is focus on their strengths and what is already going well, and this may also create greater awareness around their own strengths. Allowing clients to teach their professional supports about their culture and norms will also strengthen the therapeutic relationship, and in turn create self-empowerment for a survivor of IPV and domestic abuse.

Conclusion

IPV and domestic violence are worldwide issues, stemming from patriarchal values and culture. Despite the prevalence and concern there is a limited amount of research relating to South Asian immigrant women. Given that Canada welcomes more immigrants than most countries in the world (Li et al., 2013), the need for advocacy around IPV and domestic violence against immigrant women remains high.

The South Asian culture in itself focuses on patriarchal norms, and this is at times, reinforced by Canadian immigration policy (Walton-Roberts & Pratt, 2005), for women to be reliant on their male counterparts. Canadian culture is individualistic, and does not tolerate domestic violence and IPV, however, due to South Asian cultural norms, speaking out about these issues are challenging for a woman, due to fear of further entrapment or control. Despite the attempts at acculturation, there are elements of the South Asian culture which remain embedded, such as the code of silence outside of the family sphere and seeking help is not widely accepted (Shankar et al. 2013). For women who do or are able to seek help, it is important that therapists and professional service providers are culturally competent, having the ability to understand and support their clients in the best way possible and to foster resiliency.

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