

Counselling domestic violence victims



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Domestic Violence

1. Background information on the controversy surrounding the topic

Domestic violence is when one family member abuses another physically or psychologically. The person who is the abuser may be a man or a woman and the person who is being abused may be a spouse, a child or a parent. Domestic violence is one of the biggest public health issues of our time. 1 in 4 of all women has experienced some sort of domestic violence. Violence against women is a direct result of decades long unequal power between men and women, which has led to discrimination against women by men. (Kumar, 2009) Violence against women and girls continues to be a global epidemic that physically, psychologically, sexually and economically kills, tortures, and maims. It is one of the biggest human rights violations, denying women and girls' equality, security, dignity, value and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms. (Kumar, 2009). Violence against women is present in every country and does not discriminate age, sex, gender, race, or economic background. Most societies do not condone violence against women, the reality is that rights violations against women are often not being enforced. Majority of the time when these acts happen within the home and not in public it is just kept as one big secret.

Any women can be in a relationship and experience domestic violence but immigrant women are at high risk for domestic violence. Immigrant women because of their illegal status often times face a more difficult time escaping abuse. Immigrant women often feel trapped in abusive relationships because of immigration laws in which they fear they might get deported. Immigrant women have issues with language barriers, social isolation, and lack of their

own financial means to leave. Lack of economic resources affects most women's ability to leave an abusive relationship. Women who lack the financial means to leave are more vulnerable to domestic violence. The relationship between domestic violence and lack of resources can keep someone in an ongoing circle. On the one hand, the threat and fear of violence leads women to look for jobs which most times they will accept even a low wage job that can keep them vulnerable to being exploited further at work. Sometimes even economic freedom is not enough for a woman to escape said violence. Despite recent federal legislation that has opened new and safe routes to immigration status for some immigrant women who are victims of domestic violence, abuse is still a significant problem for immigrant women, as it is for all women in the United States. Laws regarding the mandatory reporting of incidents of domestic violence vary state by state, but are generally captured in one of four categories: (a) injuries caused by weapons, (b) injuries caused by a criminal act, (c) domestic violence cases, and (4) no mandatory reporting laws. (Modi, 2014). However, domestic violence is not just something that only impacts women, immigrants and refugees. Domestic violence is something that happens with abused persons with disabilities and the elderly.

2. Discussion of the different views of the issue

Victims of domestic violence bring cultural norms and ideas with them. There cultural backgrounds and ideas can dictate how they see and feel about domestic violence. People who live in rural communities may adhere to strong values of independence that prevent them from seeking help from “outsiders” or urban programs. People of color can sometimes adhere to a

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code developed through historical experience that has taught them not to trust the “white” culture and the formal systems it offers for assistance. When people in same-sex relationships disclose domestic violence, they risk exposure to societal norms as to possible hate crimes. (MU, n. d.) As psychiatrists, we can do a tremendous amount for patients suffering from domestic violence, but mandatory reporting is seldom necessary. Some of the things we can do include specifically inquiring about the presence of domestic violence and whether children, elders or other members of the household are victims. We can treat the patient’s symptoms; we can support their efforts to improve the situation; and we can refer the batterer to treatment and the patient to resources that can help.

3. How the issue will relate to your work in the field

As a counselor, we shouldn’t expect that a client will bring up their abuse histories on their own and their many reasons for this. Some clients may not even recognize they are in an abusive, controlling relationship because that type of relationship may be “normal” for them according to Working through the hurt (2014) Other clients assume that the term *abuse* should be applied only if a spouse or intimate partner has hurt them physically. These clients do not necessarily recognize psychological, verbal or other nonphysical forms of abuse as abuse.

Many victims and survivors feel a sense of shame or embarrassment about these experiences. Some even feel they are somehow to blame for being the target of abuse. Others fear being judged or are otherwise unsure of how a counselor might react to their revelation. And some clients try to keep the

truth hidden for safety reasons. (Bray, 2014) As a counselor we will come across many people from different walks of life. As a counselor, we must be trained and educated with theoretical models of diversity, practice skills and techniques, in order to be more culturally competent assisting clients' needs and concerns. Competent cultural social work practice is needed to expand the understanding of the meaningful events in the clients lives as well as in your own life. Openness and respect of cultural differences , culturally sensitive to others life experiences , and genuine openness to the uniqueness of cultural development in a client's life are essential for viewing another's approach to making daily life events meaningful (Danis, 2010).

4. How your values and beliefs about this issue will impact your work?

Imposing your values on clients means that you attempt to exert direct influence over their beliefs, feelings, judgments, attitudes and behaviors.

Self-awareness is perhaps one of the best tools you can use to avoid imposing your values on clients. This involves taking a comprehensive inventory of your feelings, values, attitudes and behaviors and noticing your reactions to your clients' statements or actions, especially those that provoke a strong or negative feeling. In an article on values for the American School Counselor Association, professor and counselor Rhonda Williams points out that it can be difficult to avoid steering clients in your direction while at the same time maintaining a helpful attitude. Williams advises checking your values, becoming aware of your clients' beliefs and values and making an effort to be honest with yourself. This can help you cultivate a greater sense of self-

awareness and help you avoid unconsciously imposing your values on your clients.

5. Relevant case study

Case Study # 1

A 23-year-old woman was brought to the ED by her mother. She was acutely psychotic. Her mother told the psychiatrist on call that she thought her daughter's state was related to how her boyfriend was treating her. The patient had no prior psychiatric history and was not using any drugs. She was hospitalized and treated with antipsychotic and anxiolytic medication. As her thinking became more coherent, she described repeated episodes of physical abuse, sexual coercion and controlling and threatening behavior on the part of her boyfriend. After supportive interventions, she was able to access resources for herself and her small children, and was able to call the police and have him evicted when he threatened her again.

6. Discussion of the steps you would take in working with the client

Before inquiring about abuse, it is essential to create an environment in which it is safe for a woman to talk freely. A battered woman may be afraid to disclose information if she thinks the batterer will learn that she has talked about the abuse. Let the woman know that the information she gives you is confidential and, within the confines of the law, will not be revealed to the batterer or anyone else without her permission. It is important to discuss the patterns of abuse in violent relationships. It may be helpful to describe the typical controlling behaviors used by perpetrators Safety planning with a

battered woman will depend on her situation, her priorities and the options she decides will work best for her. Her safety and the safety of her children must be top priorities.

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