



MWIA CASE STUDIES

CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Case 7: Honour as a Factor of Domestic Violence in India

Objectives

- To demonstrate the impact that a woman's sense of honour can have in domestic violence
- To demonstrate the role of drug or alcohol abuse or addiction in domestic violence

Narrative Case

This is a true story of a lady aged 39 years who was my patient for many years. She was educated up to 7th Standard but did not complete high school as she was married off by her parents at the age of 17 years to a Police Constable. She had 2 children aged 19 years & 21 years, both being daughters. This did not satisfy the husband as he was keen on getting a son.

She used to come with some bruises off & on. Once she even had a fracture of the forearm. She said she had fallen. But some direct & indirect questioning led her to confess that she was facing Domestic Violence.

Her husband had become alcoholic & started an illicit relationship to fulfill his dream of getting a son. His job was with Crime Branch in the Police force & he was used to seeing violence in the Society. He would come home from work, get drunk & beat her up often. The girls used to get frightened but were not in a position to help. Money was in short supply as he had to support the other woman in his life.

We did a lot of counseling & called her daughters to discuss possible solutions. Her husband had never once accompanied her to a Doctor's Clinic. The daughters denied any sexual assault by the father. They were interested in studies & getting a job & getting out of this household.

The woman refused any sort of help. First of all, she could not make a Police case, as the husband was part of that force & had many friends. She did not want any neighbours to know & did not allow any counselor to visit their home. Her constant refrain was that she had to cope with it otherwise the daughter's lives will be ruined. Any story of domestic violence would ruin the chances of marriage for her girls as arranged marriages are the norms in that society. Only her parents were sympathetic but they were old & sick & needed help themselves.

When last seen, she had become very thin & pale & developed hypertension. The violence was continuing. There was no social life with him & he was not interested in sex with her. He was spending more time with the other family. She was very sure for her decision to carry on. Some marriage proposals were coming for her daughters & her sole intention was to live for them. All she looked forwards to was to settle them well and see them happily married. As far as her own life she said she had no hopes for any happiness & wanted to live only for her children & to look after her old parents. She was never going to consider divorce or separation & come out openly with her life story. Rather than that "dishonour" she would rather die in one of the violent episodes.

Learning Points

This story highlights three issues:

1. Some women refuse any help. For them it is a question of honour. They feel too ashamed to let others know about violence. They cannot accept being socially ostracized. Family support is not there if parents are old and poor.
2. Secondly, we put so much faith in the Police Force. They are sensitized to issues of domestic violence. But they come from the same social background. Because they deal with crime and acts of violence, they are susceptible to alcoholism. This in turn makes them take out their frustrations at home. Counseling in such cases becomes extremely difficult. If this case had been registered against this constable he would certainly have lost his job & the family would have lost everything.
3. Finally, addiction to alcohol is prevalent worldwide. It is the under lying cause in many cases of domestic violence. In India, there is Prohibition & alcohol sale is regulated. However, it has not reduced alcoholism since the laws were enacted 67 years ago.

Background information

The article below demonstrates the high prevalence of violence against women in India, including a review of some cultural aspects of this violence.

<http://www.trust.org/item/20141110100628-ax25b/>

Useful Resources

Son preference in India: <http://www.trust.org/item/20141110100628-ax25b/>