Intimate Partner Violence against Women: Perceptions across Gender in Aizawl City

Catherine Lianhmingthangi[1], Grace Lalhlupuii Sailo[2]

[1]Ph. D Scholar, Department of Social Work, Mizoram University, Aizawl Mizoram, India

[2]Corresponding Author & Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, Mizoram University, Aizawl Mizoram, India
gracesailo[at]gmail.com

Abstract: *Violence against women is serious and pernicious. It ruins lives, breaks up families and has a lasting impact. Target 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals seeks to eliminate all forms of violence against women in public and private spheres. Violence within the family can have significant consequences for other family members who are not directly victimized. IPV has been associated with long lasting, intense, and negative emotional and behavioral influences on children who witness domestic violence. Intimate Partner Violence includes psychological, physical or sexual harm by a current or former partner or spouse. The fact that women are often emotionally involved with and economically dependent on those who victimize them has major implications for both the dynamics of abuse and the approaches to dealing with it. Intimate Partner Violence is perpetuated by factors which are cultural, political, economic and legal in nature. Because the problem of IPV is complex, it is important for all community sectors to be involved and work together. Therefore, this paper throws light on the findings of Focus Group Discussions conducted across gender in Aizawl city with regard to their perceptions on intimate partner violence against women.*

Keywords: women, perceptions, intimate, partner, gender

1. Introduction

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal- development or deprivation.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as any actions inside an intimate bond (married, unmarried, and live - in) that result in physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those involve in that relationship. This description incorporates physical, sexual, and psychological violence/abuse or controlling behavior of any kind. (Krug EG, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi AB, Lozano R., 2002).

Violence against women – particularly intimate partner violence is a violation of women's rights. Conflict, post conflict, and dislocation of anger can exacerbate existing violence by intimate partners, and may also lead to new forms of violence against women (WHO, 2017).

2. Literature Review

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, proposed an opportunity to achieve the assurances on the prevention of violence against women. The Sustainable Development Goal 5 addresses gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Target 5.2 also seeks to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in both public and private spheres, counting trafficking and sexual and all other forms of exploitation (García & Avni, 2016).

Intimate Partner – Violence: International Scenario
Violence can negatively affect women's physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health, and may increase the risk of acquiring HIV. Global estimates published by WHO (2016) indicate that about 1 in 3 women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence. Men with low education, history of mistreatment as a child, exposure to domestic violence against their mothers, harmful use of alcohol, unequal gender norms including socio - cultural attitudes accepting violence, and a sense of entitlement over women are found to be more likely to perpetrate violence. On the other hand, women are more likely to experience intimate partner violence if they have low education, exposure to mothers being abused by a partner, abused in childhood, social attitudes accepting violence, male privilege, and women's subordinate status.

Globally, a number of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner. It was reported that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non - partner sexual violence. More than a third of women murders are committed by an intimate partner (World Bank, 2019).

One of the most universal and pervasive human rights violations, affecting at least a billion women across the globe is violence against women and girls (VAWG) which takes many forms, including physical and emotional abuse, forced and unwanted sex, early and forced marriage, female genital cutting, trafficking and deprivation of resources and rights. Femicide Watch, in 2017, recordedthat 87, 000 women were intentionally killed. Among them, their own partners killed more than one - third. A 2015 study based on data from 44 countries, revealed how societal norms supporting male authority over women and discriminatory ownership rights, were predictive of the prevalence of physical and sexual partner violence. Yet, survivors are still often blamed for the way they speak or behave to justify the

use of violence. Victims do not benefit from institutional support and the majority is still afraid to report abuse (Virginie Le Masson, 2019).

India: National Scenario of IPV

Human Rights Watch (HRW) in its November 2017 report found out that sexual harassment victims inIndia face significant barriers to obtaining justice and critical support services. The report, *Everyone Blames Me': Barriers to Justice and Support Services for Sexual Assault Survivors in India*, found that women and girls who survive rape and other sexual violence often suffer humiliation at police stations and hospitals.

There is an Indian idiom that goes: "The hand that hits is the hand that hugs. " It wraps the idea of control within a relationship especially violent control. Indian popular culture reinforces this, telling young men and women that love often finds expression in aggressive ways, and that controlling behavior and possessiveness are not abusive but signs of passion. Narula&Narula (2012) state that women are applauded for silently grieving intimate partner violence and not abstaining from their expected roles as wives, mothers or daughters.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS - 4) suggests that 30 percent women in India in the age group of 15 - 49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15. The report further reveals that 6 percent women in the same age group have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime. About 31 percent of married women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their spouses.

It was found that in India, one in every three women had faced spousal violence where Sikkim reported the lowest percentage (3.5%). The highest percentage of spousal violence was reported from Manipur (54.7%). Ever - married women who have experienced spousal violence in their lifetime in India is 37.2 % which is 22.1% for Mizoram (NFHS - 4).

3. Statement of the Problem

Unlike other social problems, there are few characteristics that define risk groups for Intimate Partner Violence. There are many reasons why victims of IPV do not report incidents. Emotionally invested in the relationship, a victim may hope that the abuser will not be violent in the future. The victim may be economically dependent on him, or may be under pressure from the abuser, family, friends, and community to stay in the relationship. Even if the victim is ready to end the relationship, her abuser may continue to represent a danger to her and those closest to her. Victims may stay in violent relationships because they instinctively know that it may be more dangerous to leave the relationship (Peterson, R. R., Deirdre Bialo - Padin, 2012).

Intimate Partner Violence is a silent crisis affecting many women even in Mizoram yet it has not received its due attention because it takes place within the gamut of family system, socially acceptable relationships as well as in

relationships that society does not sanction. Women's experiences are often unvoiced and often, women are lauded for their ability to endure their hardships. This paper brings to light the perceptions of Intimate partner Violence against women across gender in Aizawl city.

Objectives of the Study

1) To understand perceptions across gender on Intimate Partner Violence against women.
2) To suggest possible measures for rehabilitation of IPV victims.

4. Methodology

This paper employs exploratory design and it is cross sectional in nature. Primary data was collected using qualitative method. Married men and unmarried women from two urban communities (One Peripheral and one Core) were identified purposively as participants in the discussion based on the following inclusion criteria:
1) Married men whose age ranged between 18 - 30 years.
2) Unmarried women between the age of 18 - 30 years.
3) Literate
4) Willing to give informed consent on perceptions.

Focus group discussion I: Perceptions of Married Men on Violence against women.
A Focus Group Discussion was conducted among men to probe into their perceptions on violence against women. Eight men whose age ranged between 18 - 30 years participated in the discussion. From the discussion, it was found that Mizo men have begun considering violence against women as a serious crime. Recognition of women's role in family and society is emerging. The participants stated that it is men who create problems and violence in any relationship although women, in their perception, had a role to play in it. "Men need to realize that true masculinity is not about whom you can control and violate; that it emanates from who you can positively affect", said one of the participants. The statement clearly shows that consciousness of responsibility by men is present and that there is recognition that the intimate relationship is one of power relations.

The next sub - theme discussed was to do with *women empowerment* wherein the group members believed that a patriarchal system is prevalent in Mizo society and hence very few women are empowered. However, some of them expressed that women's empowerment is not necessary in patriarchal society and that men should always be the head of every relationship and women should play a secondary role living by the rules set by men.

The group members also mentioned that Mizo women are more empowered compared to women in other parts of the country. "The society pays too much attention for women empowerment that many women misuse their rights and opportunities thus creating problems in many Social Institutions".

Since theories of violence discuss the root causes as being embedded in family and parenting, information was sought

on the same. Half of the members agreed that *witnessing violence in childhood teaches children that Violence is normal,* and they are more likely to become perpetrators in adulthood. On the other hand, half of them argued saying, "We don't become what we see, but our morals are important. People don't always tend to repeat what they see if they have clear principles in life".

Focus Group discussion II: Perceptions of unmarried women on Intimate Partner Violence against Women.

A Focus Group Discussion on Violence against Women was facilitated among unmarried women between the ages of 18 - 30 years. The group had 8 participants who raised their voices on the said topic. They believed that *society teaches its Men that Women are weak physically, as well as mentally.* Women must accept abuse as normal and are expected to stay under men's control. Wrong education and messages by the media and society and also the attitude of some men create unsafe and unhealthy relationships for women. "Society oftentimes punishes women who get hurt or violated by saying she asked for it so she got what she deserved". The participants also believed that "Women need to wake up to the fact that their personal power is internal, recognition of self worth would be helpful to some extent in order to avoid violence in relationship".

The participants agreed to "having been inculcated with messages that violence against women is just part of the way life is, we give less weight to the reports, sometimes even placing the blame on the victims. " The main coping strategy used by these women was *passive endurance*. They considered being a victim of violence is shameful and that none of them shared their experiences with their families. Though some participants shared their violence experience with friends, it is not very helpful when the problem becomes critical. Discussing the coping and social support aspect, unmarried women agreed that *emotional support* is most helpful in a violent relationship as per their experience. Since women in the group are unmarried, they do not go looking for help from families, neighbors or society. When they are in abusive relationships, they tend to keep it to themselves and continue to suffer. The realization, according to them, is that it is a man's world and their (women's) rights would not be recognised.

The discussion revealed that unmarried women in abusive and violent relationships need to exercise their rights and the worst part according to them is that most people are unaware of it. "Many women learn that they are the subordinate gender regardless of their intelligence, their talents, their worth and their gifts. " As a woman, it is essential to stand up for oneself and for each other, they said.

5. Conclusion

The focus group discussion conducted among the two groups (married men and Unmarried women) reveals the different perceptions on violence against women. It may be concluded that many women in abusive and violent relationships are unaware of their rights and have to learn the need to exercise their rights. Many women perceive themselves as the subordinate gender regardless of their intelligence, their talents and their worth. The main coping strategy used by women in their perception was *passive endurance*. Being a victim of violence is considered shameful by them to the extent that even when they are in abusive relationships they tend to keep it to themselves and continue to bear the pain silently. This was attributed to the beliefs held in society. On the other hand, although recognition of women's role in family and society is emerging among men, some of them expressed that woman's empowerment is not necessary in a patriarchal society where men are the head of every relationship and women must live by the rules set by men. It was also added that Mizo women are so much empowered and they often misuse their gender - based advantages and rights. Some male participants in the group discussion strongly opined that as men and as head of the family, they have the power and control that they can use against their partners. It was further exclaimed that women with higher education are respected in society especially by male citizens and are more likely to escape violence due to their social status.

6. Suggestions

There is tremendous scope to raise awareness at the community level in Mizoram as well as in other parts of the region. Networking with Government and Non Government Organizations is indicated in order to generate awareness on legal and other aspects for women. Even in a general community setting, a number of women still continue to suffer from violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. Towards this end, social work intervention may be addressed through mezzo and macro levels to prevent violence basically though appropriate awareness generation.

Women experiencing intimate partner violence are often accused of having provoked the violence by the way they behave, failure as a wife, or infidelity. Girls or women who have been assaulted are frequently said to have "asked for it" by the way they were dressed or behaved. This attitude of society is in requirement of change and the suggestion is to begin this change by intervention in educational institutions as well as in communities.

The suggestions involve bringing about an attitudinal change in men as well as women through appropriate interventions. Such drastic attitudinal changes may be better brought about by church elders andcommunity leaders. Social work intervention therefore may be directed at influencing church elders and community leaders.

Community level interventions are required so that people realize the need to be involved and that they can make a difference in supporting women and reducing violence. The ultimate change required is the general perception that involvement in any case of violence against women is 'interference' in the intimate, personal affairs of an individual or family.

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Author Profile

Catherine Lianhmingthangi is currently pursuing her Ph. D at the department of Social Work, Mizoram University. She has completed her M. Phil from the same while focusing on gender issues for her research area.

Grace Lalhlupuii Sailo is an Assistant Professor at the department of Social Work, Mizoram University. She received her Doctoral degree from Mizoram University in 2015. She has been working on gender research, mental health and well - being of adolescent and research on urban poverty.