



Indo-Caribbean Immigrant Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract

This exploratory study examined how the predominantly Indo-Caribbean ethnic enclave community of ‘Little Guyana’, located in Richmond Hill, Queens, New York, perceives cultural attitudes surrounding intimate partner violence (IPV). This paper focuses on interviews with Trinidadian and Guyanese immigrant women (of Indian descent) of varying ages and religious backgrounds that reside in the community. This paper explores women’s perceptions of partner violence in relation to social issues within the community including immigration, inter-generational disconnect, alcoholism and access to social service organizations.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Immigrants, Gender.

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV), alternatively referred to as spousal abuse or domestic violence is a global phenomenon that occurs across various intersections of society regardless of race, class, culture, sexual orientation or immigrant status (Sokoloff, 2003; 2008; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Raj & Silverman, 2002; Menjivar & Salcido, 2002). Recent studies among immigrant women who migrate to the US, reflect notably higher occurrences of sexual and physical victimization by male partners and increasing homicide rates yet, few studies related to policy, research and practice address domestic abuse among immigrants (Raj & Silverman, 2002). While it is important to understand that some aspects of intimate partner violence are culturally specific, for example, the widespread use of kerosene or acid in Asia versus “Indian cocktails” (a poisonous weedicide based drink) (Kanhai, 1999), hangings or death by cutlass (short sword used for slashing) prevalent in Caribbean countries like Trinidad (Wilson, 2009), oppressive dehumanizing practices are not part of culture. Historically, women have not accepted traditional patriarchal customs over generations but rather external forces (colonization, racism, capitalism, and so forth) have contributed to efforts within groups to preserve identity (Almeida & Dolan, 1999).

Violence against women on a global scale is triggered by opposition to conventional gender roles that challenge the authority and dominance of the male figure and consist of perceived disobedience and inadequacy in providing childcare, suspicion of infidelity, questioning of duties, and sexual relations (Ward, 2005). Religious documents and the

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dominant culture of societies promotes patriarchal practices that reinforce beliefs that legitimize and even perpetuate partner violence (Fortune & Enger, 2005; Caribbean Media Corporation, 2008; Krob & Steffen, 2015). In some societies, these social norms have been internalized by women and contribute to the cycle of abuse documented by domestic violence agencies (Ward, 2005). The literature on intimate partner violence in the United States is plentiful in nature yet, little attention has been paid to immigrant communities of the South Asian diaspora and the cultural legitimization of violence against women in these communities (Abraham, 2002). Immigrant women experience unique issues in relation to intimate partner violence including language barriers, fear of deportation, misunderstanding of the legal system and extended family structures that may contribute to the abuse (Abraham, 2000; Sokoloff, 2007; Dasgupta, 2007). It is also increasingly important to recognize that the intersection of culture, ethnic background, minority status and overall community response also shapes women's perception of IPV (Kasturirangan, Krishnan & Riger, 2004)

The purpose of this exploratory study among Indo-Caribbean immigrant members of an ethnic enclave community examines perceptions of IPV among female transnational migrants from origin countries where IPV remains largely understudied (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006) and attitudes that justify tolerance remain prevalent (Mitchell et al, 2013). This study identifies indicators and factors stemming from the homeland culture that impacts issues such as tolerance of violence against women within the community that remains largely isolated from accessible non-profit governmental services. Furthermore, the findings contribute to a better understanding of cultural experiences of violence within isolated Indian diaspora communities in the US including perceptions of cultural attitudes surrounding IPV among Indo-Caribbeans and how intimate partner violence is acknowledged within the culture.

Indo-Caribbean Diaspora in Relation to South Asian History and Culture

Indo-Caribbean is defined as the population of people residing in the Caribbean with roots in India. Indo-Caribbeans are also referred to as (East) Indians or West Indians in the literature, with the highest population concentrations in Guyana (Indo-Guyanese), Trinidad and Tobago (Indo-Trinidadians) and Suriname (Hindoestanen). Although sometimes referred to as a subset Hindu population (Rao et al, 2008), a number of Indo-Caribbeans practice Islam, Catholicism and Christianity (CIA World Factbook, 2016). These East Indian immigrants were originally brought to the Caribbean from 1838 to 1917 during a period of indentured servitude as a direct result of the abolition of slavery in 1807 (Williams, 1970). Cultural similarities are linked to ancestral Indo-Caribbeans originating from the Indian provinces of Uttar Pradesh, Oudh and Bihar (Khan, 2004). Of the 383,000 East Indians in Guyana (formerly British Guiana) and Trinidad, more than one quarter returned to India by 1924, the others remained, evolving into the modern day population now known as the Indo-Caribbeans (Williams, 1970). Some of these Caribbean nationals eventually migrated to North America and Canada. This subset South Asian diaspora group has remained largely understudied including their immigration patterns out of the Caribbean (Gupta et al, 2007).

A vast majority of this population currently resides in the Richmond Hill, Queens community sometimes referred to as "Little Guyana" where the largest concentration of Guyanese immigrants in New York reside (Kilgannon, 2009; Lobo & Salvo, 2013).

Guyanese immigrants represent the second largest foreign-born population in Queens alone, accounting for 82,538 residents while, 26,209 Trinidadians reside in the borough as well (nyc.gov, 2013). According to *The Newest New Yorkers: Characteristics of the City's Foreign Born Population* (2013), the majority of Guyanese immigrants in Queens reside in South Ozone Park (21,245), Richmond Hill (11,050) and Jamaica (6,721). Furthermore, the U.S. Census Bureau (2007–2011) American Community Survey and the Population Division of the New York City Department of City Planning reports that 2,829 foreign-born Trinidadian nationals reside in Richmond Hill, 6,574 in South Ozone Park and 1,208 in Jamaica (Lobo & Salvo, 2013). Richmond Hill and South Ozone Park are the largest immigrant neighborhoods in Southwest Queens with one third of all immigrants being of Guyanese descent and eight percent Trinidadian-born. The neighborhoods of South Ozone Park, Richmond Hill and Jamaica were primarily targeted as recruitment areas for this study. The majority of these migrants are of Indian descent and live alongside Indian-born immigrants that account for nearly sixteen percent of the population in the ethnic enclave as well (Lobo & Salvo, 2013).

Indo-Caribbean Women and Community Based Organizations

The primary social service organization serving the community, Sakhi for South Asian Women (sakhi.org, 2015), a multi-lingual (Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali language service provider) anti-domestic violence organization notes that of the 645 calls received in 2008 related to IPV, almost six percent (43) of the calls were from women of Indo-Caribbean origin. Over 200 calls (almost thirty percent) came in from the borough of Queens alone. A year earlier, in 2007, 29 Indo-Caribbean women reached out to Sakhi accounting for four percent of total call volume, a relatively small sample in terms of the overall population of the community. Although this may not initially appear to be significant, it is important in terms of the increase in the number of calls between 2004 and 2008 as the rise in call volume does not necessarily indicate an increase in IPV but perhaps greater community outreach, improved access to services and the recognition of gender-based violence within under-served marginalized ethnic enclaves.

Furthermore, immigrant women face unique obstacles while residing in the United States. The concept of IPV among immigrant populations is entangled with a plethora of other issues including economic strain, language barriers, misunderstanding of the complex criminal justice system and cultural factors that lead to isolation (Abraham, 2000). Indo-Caribbean women, like other South Asian immigrants similarly endure familial pressure including threats of defamation and potential slander to the family name if they seek help regarding abuse. Stigma surrounding abuse and its cultural tolerance lead to conflict within families and immigrant women especially are threatened with deportation (Abraham, 2000).

Although non-governmental organizations in the US provide accessible services to survivors of intimate partner violence, there is a lack of immigrant support services regarding many communities and a lack of understanding in terms of specific community needs. The Indo-Caribbean community remains one such place as it remains isolated from many social service organizations. In Richmond Hill, the community mimics the “home” cultures of Trinidad and Guyana, sharing similar traditions, customs and places of worship within a community that provides for those needs (Kilgannon, 2009). Richmond Hill has steadily maintained itself as a community that resists assimilation into mainstream American society and South Asian immigrant culture (Hussain, 2005). However, among

Indo-Caribbeans the practice of private matters remaining as such (Lazarus-Black, 2007) and the reality of abuse is not publicly displayed, similarly to South Asian culture (Abraham, 2000).

Culturally competent solutions that reflect effective interactions with various cultures and people from different socio-economic locations are needed to address concepts of intimate partner violence within marginalized communities. The provision of assistance for survivors of abuse while recognizing their cultural identity or group membership is important (Sokoloff, 2003) even when services cannot directly prevent violence or result in cessation of abuse. It is therefore necessary to acknowledge the differences of the Indo-Caribbean population as a result of the impact of colonization, indentureship and migration that creates a distinct experience emerging from racialized histories and blended cultures (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1987; Williams, 1991; Jayaram, 2003; Birmalsingh, 1989; Mangru, 1996; Chatterjee, 1997; Peake & Trotz, 1999; Mohammed, 2002; Trotz, 2004; Mangru, 2005; Warikoo, 2006; Bahadur, 2013; Roopnarine, 2011; Kanhai & Singh, 2011).

Community Needs and Recognizing Violence

Marital violence in the South Asian context encompasses abuse perpetrated by extended family members and is defined as an alliance of two families; thus, the control exerted over a woman is apparent in various forms: as a wife, as a daughter-in-law, as a sister-in-law, aunt or mother (Abraham, 2000; Das Gupta, 2007). Adding to this subordinate status is an immigrant woman's plight as someone who is unfamiliar with the American culture, legal system and her economic and personal rights or lack thereof. Cultural constraints relevant to a woman's oppressed status remain apparent among Indo-Caribbean women as well as religious aspects of the culture remain similar to South Asian traditional practices. However, there are distinguishable cultural differences as a result of Caribbean influences, enduring East Indian traditions and unique politicized colonial histories documented by many scholars (Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1987; Williams, 1991; Jayaram, 2003; Birmalsingh, 1989; Mangru, 1996; Chatterjee, 1997; Peake & Trotz, 1999; Mohammed, 2002; Trotz, 2004; Mangru, 2005; Warikoo, 2006; Bahadur, 2013; Roopnarine, 2011; Kanhai & Singh, 2011).

In Trinidad, the country of origin of half of the participants in this data set, intimate partner violence is a serious social problem that remains largely under-studied (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006). Because the justice system undermines partner violence as a social problem, under-reporting of crimes linked to shame and fear, as well as negative familial and cultural responses (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006) has continued to pose challenges to studying the plight of abused women that seek legal assistance (Lazarus-Black, 2001). As a result of the international attention garnered by battered women seeking asylum in the US and Canada circa 1997, limited data collection efforts were implemented by courts, crisis centers and law enforcement agencies (Hadeed & El-Bassel, 2006). These studies indicated that women with less financial stability reported higher incidents of violence while loss of life was more prevalent among Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Caribbean (cited as East Indian) women in Trinidad. Studies show that in 1995, eighty percent of women who sought shelter were housewives of Indian descent (Babb, 1997; Clarke, 1995; Mondesire & Dunn, 1995). In Guyana (another predominantly Indo-Caribbean nation and also the country of origin for half of this study's sample), survey data indicates that over eighty

percent of women believe that domestic violence is endemic to Guyanese society and more than thirty percent of women (including those of Afro-Guyanese descent) have experienced partner violence in their adult lives (Trotz, 2004). Furthermore, comparative studies find that Trinidadians are more tolerant of intimate partner violence in relation to their US counterparts and are less likely to intervene in domestic abuse situations involving friends, neighbors and co-workers (Griffith, Negy & Chadee, 2006). Cultural attitudes, including tolerance of violence, transfer with immigrants to communities upon migration and therefore, persist in resettlement areas.

Theoretical Basis

In designing the study and analyzing the data, the researcher was influenced by feminist transnational perspectives and intersectionality theory. Feminist theory encompasses varying perspectives related to gender oppression and inequality indicating IPV manifests itself in unequal power relationships that are sustained socially and legally through patriarchal dominance (Burgess-Proctor, 2006). Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) is grounded in an understanding of multiple overlapping systems of oppression that are rooted in power structures that shape the life experiences of women (Collins, 2000). A transnational feminist perspective encompasses being aware of intersections between nationhood (Henne & Troshynski, 2013), race, gender, sexuality, economic exploitation and citizenship within capitalism on a global scale (Mohanty, 2003) and highlights the social, political and economic factors emerging from colonialism (including the racialization of groups and its consequences) in order to better understand inequality in social relations across borders and cultures. Furthermore, recent literature on IPV among immigrant women has begun to reflect the emerging importance of legal status in relation to victimization and help-seeking behaviors. An intersectional paradigm therefore allows an examination of the unique issues surrounding IPV among immigrants and the intersecting issues of how immigrants deal with violence in their communities (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005; Sokoloff, 2008).

Research Questions

The primary research questions encompassed whether the women of the community were familiar with or aware of domestic violence services and resources provided by non-profit organizations. What were their perceptions regarding cultural attitudes surrounding domestic violence among Indo-Caribbeans? And overall, what were women's observations regarding how gender-based violence was acknowledged within the culture?

Methodology

This exploratory study consisted of a sample of twelve women that fit the criteria of being Indo-Caribbean (a person of Indian ancestry that hails from Trinidad/Guyana or another Caribbean nation or is a descendant of a former Indian indentured servant of the Caribbean) and a resident of New York City (specifically, the borough of Queens). Indo-Caribbeans have a diverse ethnic heritage and multi-racial women with South Asian and Afro-Caribbean (*dougl*a) parentage were also included. The sample consists of women of varying religions (Hindu, Muslim, Christian) and citizenship statuses (second generation US citizens, Caribbean nationals, international students and immigrants native to the community).

Throughout the first half of 2010, a sample of female residents of the Richmond Hill, Queens, New York area derived from the local empowerment group, the Jahajee Sisters (<http://www.jahajeesisters.org>), an Indo-Caribbean community based organization were contacted by the advisory board. The specific location in Queens was selected as it is estimated that approximately 63,000 Indo-Caribbeans reside in Richmond Hill (Warikoo, 2006). Survey data from the Population Division of the New York City Department of City Planning document a total of 17,624 Trinidadian and Guyanese immigrant residents in this neighborhood (Lobo & Salvo, 2013). These estimates are broad as Indo-Caribbeans in the US lack an obvious racial and ethnic categorization in traditional measures such as the US Census and some self-identify as either Asian Indian or Black (Warikoo, 2006). The sample recruited was based on women's participation in the Arts and Empowerment Workshops conducted by the organization in collaboration with a South Asian IPV organization.

A research recruitment website was also developed in order to create an ease of accessibility to participants (indocaribbean.webs.com), access to social media and snowball sampling was also utilized throughout the data collection process. In addition to these efforts, recruitment occurred through social networking platforms such as Facebook which included online groups such as the Jahajee Sisters: Empowering Indo-Caribbean Women's community based organization web page forum, the Rajkumari Cultural Center of Richmond Hill, and the Guyana Cultural Association. Student groups including the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin Youth Professionals (GOPIO Youth and Young Professionals), the Queens College Guyanese Students Association and the St. John's Guyanese Students Club were contacted. Indo-Caribbean heritage and ancestry groups were also contacted inclusive of Indiasporas, Indo-Caribbean Identity, GOPIO Caribbean and Indian Diaspora of the West Indies: Crossing the Kala Paani. Social and culturally specific organizations in Richmond Hill including the Indo-Caribbean Alliance (ICA) and the Richmond Hill 2010 Census group received social networking recruitment letters. South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!), which does a significant amount of work with Indo-Caribbean students, were also contacted in an endeavor to reach young women.

Despite these recruitment initiatives, there was still a limited community response. Only two participants over the age of 40 responded to recruitment endeavors and only one followed through. This can perhaps be attributed to participant availability, scheduling problems, disinterest along with the reinforced culture of silence, or viewing the study as geared towards younger women. In regards to overall responses, Muslim women and older women were least likely to discuss the issue of IPV within the Indo-Caribbean community.

The demographic information collected included country of origin, age, marital status, birth in another country, length of time residing in US (and Queens in particular), religion, education, and self-identification as Indo-Caribbean. The interviews had a duration time of between one to two hours and were conducted privately at a college in New York City (one interview was conducted at a local restaurant as requested by the participant). The researcher accompanied participants throughout the interview process and provided information regarding mental health services.

The interviews were transcribed into Word files by the researcher and a multi-step coding pattern including NVIVO and thematic analysis (via hand coding) was used. Identification numbers were relabeled with pseudonyms reflecting cultural names. Post-

transcription the data was examined with pattern and content analysis (Patton, 1990), a process which includes seeking repeated phrases or trends in text. The measure of content analysis is time consuming as it requires the ability to identify potentially relevant concepts within the interviews as well as developing appropriate coding thereafter (Shaw, 2006). In terms of pattern analysis, direct quotes and paraphrasing were examined. Thematic analysis which relies on identifiable themes and patterns derived from quotes and common ideas (Aronson, 1994) was used to define emerging codes in vocabulary, feelings and perceptions. Themes are identified by the collaboration of fragmented experiences which appear meaningless in the context of one interview; however, the emergence of cultural links between multiple interviews emphasizes a distinct collective experience (Aronson, 1994).

Interviews were initially coded with deductive codes that emerged from the research questions which included: *issues related to alcoholism and drugs, shame, silence, generational gap, and awareness/accessibility*. Broad codes elicited from the data include *labels, social tolerance, legal immigration status, and dominance*. *Labels*, for example, is a significant code as intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and other academic terms are not culturally relevant because they are not utilized within the community to describe acts of violence against women. For example, the women noted that while they understood what the term meant, it was referenced in their community as “beatings”, “marital problems”, “black magic” or “lix” (the slang word 'licks' indicating to punish with a beating).

Findings

1. *Shame: Cultural/Religious Taboos Surrounding Divorce*

Indo-Caribbean women noted that factors of shame and the historical acceptance of abuse shapes the community's stigma surrounding violence against women. The literature on South Asian immigrant IPV survivors note that divorce is discouraged even in the context of abuse (Dasgupta & Warriar, 1996) and frequently results in social ostracization and a sense of shame for the entire family (Kallivayalil, 2010). Indo-Caribbean women supported that cultural values included stigma surrounding divorce, retained that abuse remains a “behind closed doors issue” and suspected prevalence of violence among more “religious women”. The participants narrated stories of women who were isolated from families because of accusations of abuse towards their spouses. It appeared husbands’ garnered sympathy while wives became outcasts. Seeking help regarding familial matters was in itself detrimental to women. The humiliation surrounding this status and divorce seemed to only contribute to the stigma:

Another issue that I think stems right out of our culture is the negative stigma of divorce. Often, women are ashamed of getting a divorce, even in the cases of domestic abuse...Most of my aunts express concern about women who are abused but often see no way out of the marriage or relationship. (Kamala, 23, Hindu, single)

Women are ashamed. They talk if concern is shown, they sugarcoat it and lie about it. [My] cousins have abusive husbands and they say they were accidentally hit when they have black and blue eyes. They don't seek help from family members. (Nadira, 24, Muslim, single)

It's embarrassment especially in a culture that promotes keeping up a good impression from their neighbors. (Rani, 28, Hindu, Married)

Perceptions surrounding religious women also appeared to play a role in ideas surrounding cultural taboos:

There are a few religious and traditional women in Richmond Hill who may still believe it is okay and that people may not talk about the issue because of the concept that men know everything and husbands will find out everything and there's the fear that they will get beat up more. (Gauri, 22, Hindu, Single)

There was a story about a couple that attended mandir [*Hindu temple*] for twenty years but when the woman accused the man of abuse and left, she became an outcast and people felt sorry that he was alone. (Anjali, 30's, Atheist, Married)

In regards to identity, there is a stigma surrounding divorced women who are seen as lacking a major component of oneself (husband, family, children) while those who endure difficult marriages to maintain family unity are glorified (Venktaramani-Kothari, 2007). Participants believe this is linked to community/familial shame, the fear of further abuse, and traditions that encourage silence.

2. Silence

While there appeared to be a connection between dominant religious traditions and the silencing of women's voices in regard to domestic partner abuse, overall, women who were not Hindu shared similar experiences. The literature reflects that many battered immigrant women view IPV as a family issue which results in family and community members ignoring abuse or encouraging silence (Raj & Silverman, 2002):

It's not usually discussed... I believe if it is happening, it's not a topic of discussion. Women not feeling comfortable talking about it. I believe it exists but not discussed, mostly out of fear. (Asha, 34, Hindu, Divorced)

No one likes to talk about it. [It's] never a topic of discussion which may be the problem. The woman/victim don't get to talk or be listened to. (Rani, 28, Hindu, married)

There is a division and disdain towards speaking about this particular issue. The silence needs to be broken but women who do speak out are isolated from the community and their families. (Anjali, 30's, Atheist, Married)

Participants noted that part of the issue of IPV within the Indo-Caribbean community was related to silence, the lack of discussion by community members, the silencing of victims, the isolation associated with speaking out, the fear of further violence and the closeted nature of the issue of abuse.

3. Generational Gap (Age)

The majority of participants (women in their 20's and early 30's) conveyed that they felt a greater silence surrounded abuse against older women. Indo-Caribbean women noted that elder family members were more likely to accept IPV as a part of their lives, which may be attributed to religious values, and the stigmatization of divorce within the community. These perceptions of IPV are believed to be transferred as the immigrants bring their culture and traditions to the United States; furthermore, the lack of acculturation in ethnic neighborhoods like 'Little Guyana', may additionally compound issues of violence against women along with younger women being exposed to American culture and the emergence of resistance to cultural practices.

With respect to the older generation, the issues surround their tolerance of domestic violence. I have mostly had discussions about this issue with my aunts and it creates a generation clash. (Kamala, 23, Hindu, Single)

The older generation[s] of men specifically have more defensive beliefs and say things like 'she deserved to be hit'. The new generation is more open. Victims of an older generation may still seek help.... they talk as an outlet to vent. The younger generation would seek help rather than the older generation who keeps things amongst themselves especially about being battered and verbal abuse. The younger generation is more likely to make the call for help rather than the mother or victim. (Gauri, 23, Hindu, Single)

Participants reflected on their observations and discussions with older family members, both male and female, and stories surrounding IPV in the community. Interestingly, there was a shift concerning help-seeking behavior and intolerance among the younger generation of Indo-Caribbeans.

4. Awareness of Organizations and Accessibility

When asked about organizations that provide services to the Indo-Caribbean population the majority of women noted that they knew of none, with one indicating that she had heard about the organization only during the interview.

None. I have never seen any help for the women in our culture. (Kamala, 23, Hindu, Single)

Currently not specifically for the Indo-Caribbean community. (Asha, 34, Hindu, Divorced)

While outside interventions are discouraged because it can bring shame and dishonor to the family (Abraham, 2000; Dasgupta, 2000), services that are culturally relevant are deficient as participants note that such programming is largely unavailable in the community or inaccessible via public transportation. While South Asian domestic violence programming is lacking, participants noted that they were unaware of any help existing for their specific community and needs.

5. Subcode: Alcoholism

A study conducted in Trinidad found that aggressive sexual behavior is more prevalent in alcohol-dependent men and spouses of alcoholics were subject to more traumatic sexual experiences and aggression. From 1988 to 1994, among 423 cases of IPV, eighty percent of battered women were also victims of sexual abuse. Alcoholism, sexual abuse and wife battering are all linked in terms of the cultural aspect of how abuse is carried out in this primarily Indo-Caribbean nation (Maharajh & Ali, 2005). However, the findings of this study of migrant Indo-Caribbeans in the US suggest otherwise. While participants noted that tolerance of alcohol was an issue in the community, it was not the only factor considered to influence men's violence against women.

I think another issue that directly relates to domestic abuse is our culture's tolerance of alcohol. So many men in our community have drinking problems, most of which won't ever realize it because of the high tolerance of alcohol...Our community is surrounded by alcohol. (Kamala, 23, Hindu, Single)

Alcohol abuse is an excuse. (Anjali, 30's, Atheist, Married)

It's always going to be there. Male rage, economic stress and alcohol or drugs influences behavior. (Nadira, 24, Muslim, Single)

There is a group of 40 to 50-year-old women that congregate at the laundry mat and discuss abuse as a group and what they experienced. They talk about drunk husbands that batter them and husbands that force themselves on them. (Gauri, 23, Hindu, Single)

Participants recognized the link between alcohol and IPV within the community however, some saw it as a distinct problem separate from partner abuse. Indo-Caribbean women also spoke about the issue of alcoholism in the community as though it had become a normalized phenomenon that was used as a scapegoat in relation to violence against women.

6. Tolerance: The Social Norm

Like Indian-Americans, Indo-Caribbean's have endured histories of colonization and oppression within their homelands and in the US as well therefore, values of tolerance and passivity have assisted in dealing with discrimination (Dasgupta, 1996). Participants viewed the normalization of partner violence in the community as a result of hopeless situations or values and beliefs derived from their homeland:

I would say that the domestic violence is obviously not acceptable, however, tolerated and quite the norm in our culture. [The older generation] often have excuses for the abuser or built up a tolerance. They see no way out of marriage or the relationship and by default adjust their view of domestic violence to be okay. (Kamala, 23, Hindu, Single)

It's not something that a mature, respectful, Indo-Caribbean American would ever think is a social norm. The ones that just so happen to live here take their stereotypes with them and honestly believe that the way things should be is that a

woman is property. It's not their fault, it's a product of growing up in a society and/or home where this type of behavior is encouraged. (Rani, 28, Hindu, married)

[Some] women think it's... part of the society that they're originally part of. (Gauri, 22, Hindu, Single)

A subcode of tolerance, labeled as *lack of seriousness*, indicated that IPV was not taken seriously, especially by men within the community and that contributed to the social normalization of partner abuse. Participants noted that:

People mainly joke about it. (Anjali, 30's, Atheist, Married)

[It's] joked around among guy friends. (Rani, 28, Hindu, Married)

While this further de-legitimizes the experiences of abuse among women, it can also further silence an already marginalized group that has no access to services. These issues are additionally compounded by immigrant women's legal status and dependency on males.

7. Legal Immigration Status

According to the literature, non-immigrant women are twice as likely as documented immigrant women and four times as likely as undocumented women to file reports, clearly indicating a fear of reporting to authorities based on one's legal status (Sokoloff, 2008). Immigrant women endure status-related abuse that hinders their ability to leave violent relationships. These barriers include abusers threatening to report victims or children to immigration services (for example, threatening deportation or withdrawing immigration paperwork that has been filed), failure to file papers to obtain legal status for spouse or her children, denying access to documentation needed for legalization paperwork, hiding notices of appearance for immigration court, interfering with her ability to survive economically separate from the abuser and using legal status (and lack of familiarity with US customs and law) to enforce isolation and fear of losing custody of children (Sokoloff, 2008). Members of the Indo-Caribbean community revealed fear and isolation associated with these behaviors:

Most of the women depend on their spouse or are illegal and are afraid of their immigration status jeopardizing their family. (Asha, 34, Hindu, Divorced)

Yet, the women also conveyed a distinct cultural experience related to lighter criminal sentences for men who murder their spouses in their home country and a sense of hope surrounding authority's responses to victims needing help in the US:

In Trinidad... the culture is ingrained within the legal system. [There are] mild sentences for men who kill their spouses in Trinidad. This has a lot to do with the legal system supporting cultural values. (Anjali, 30's, Atheist, Married)

Women are more likely to report it here than in Trinidad because there are more laws, more awareness of the legal system and a quicker response from the authority if reported versus waiting days if at all getting help from the police in Trinidad. (Gauri, 23, Hindu, Single)

8. Dominance and Dependency

The literature surrounding South Asian Indian families indicates that male-centered relationships are the core of the family (Dasgupta, 2000; Abraham, 2000). While women are glorified in religious scriptures, they are largely devalued in the home (Almeida & Dolan, 1996). The silence that so many women witness within this community may be a direct result of the norms of male privilege that justify domestic abuse that play itself out in actions that are meant to 'discipline the unruly wife'. Participants noted their observations surrounding female family members and friends about partner abuse:

...One of the things I can think of right of the top of my head is the mentality of ignorance of the sex. I think for the most, well, 98% of it is men because of that patriarchal society that people has always known before and it's just something that's unwritten, that's handed down. They see it and that is how they think it's to discipline a woman who is doing something 'wrong' in a relationship. (Gauri, 23, Hindu, Single)

In Indian culture women are seen as property. Possibly a result of historical circumstances where there were limited women. [There are also] mild sentences for men who kill their spouses in Trinidad. Women are lesser and the attitude towards women is generally diminishing. (Anjali, 30's, Atheist, Married)

Old fashioned traditional ways of men always having power over women (Nadira, 24, Muslim, Single)

IPV experts consider partner abuse to be related to patriarchal social structures and gender relations where husbands maintain power and control over wives (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996) which still appears in the context of Indo-Caribbean migration to the US. Indo-Caribbean immigrant women attributed ignorance and aspects of patriarchy (such as discipline, tradition, superiority) to factors behind partner abuse.

Discussion: Unifying the Community: Looking Towards a Better Future

The findings suggest that while IPV is referred to within the Indo-Caribbean immigrant enclave by various names, physical violence against women is pervasive as it is in various communities and cultures around the world. Similar to the South Asian community, shame and silence persist (Dasgupta & Warrier, 1996; Kallivayalli, 2010) in the community partly because of cultural taboos and inter-generational divisions, in addition to a norm of social tolerance surrounding partner violence and stigma around women who seek divorce rather than endure abuse to prevent familial shame (Venktaramani-Kothari, 2007). The findings highlight women's concerns with male dominance, the difficulty surrounding legal immigration status and victimization and the lack of serious consideration given to IPV within the community. This study also disrupts notions of traditional homeland beliefs that portray alcoholism as the root cultural cause of

intimate partner violence (Maharajh & Ali, 2005) as women viewed alcoholism as a scapegoat rather than a cultural link to abuse.

The findings also present evidence that while South Asian women's organizations exist, they remain inaccessible and somewhat unknown to Indo-Caribbean women. Participants discussed lack of social service organizations in the community and were generally unaware of where they could seek help. Culturally competent services for Indo-Caribbean women remain deficient as there is little outreach to the community, residents are unaware of programs and the community remains isolated from mainstream service providers. While organizations that follow a South Asian model may be especially helpful (in terms of addressing extended family violence, cultural competence, and economic empowerment), there appears to be lacking outreach and inadequate service provision overall. This is perhaps one of the more profound findings of this study as South Asian service providers exist nationally, however, it seems that there is a disconnect between social service organizations and the marginalized community that could be attributed to outreach, awareness or even cultural gaps. Furthermore, the isolated location of the community (especially in terms of limited public transportation) creates a dynamic where it is difficult for immigrants to seek help outside of the neighborhood while simultaneously being inaccessible to organizations that could potentially provide outreach. In addition, it is also possible that help-seeking behaviors are deterred by the potential dishonor outside intervention could bring, similar to notions of familial privacy in South Asian culture (Abraham, 2000; Dasgupta, 2000).

The community's outlook of IPV is not entirely bleak as women expressed passionate feelings about moving towards a better future through encouraging education and openly discussing taboo issues that stands in stark contrast to literature that conveys cultural views of IPV as familial issues that are ignored and silenced (Raj & Silverman, 2002). The women also reflected on their commitment to addressing this issue personally including wanting to volunteer with organizations that met community needs including speaking out or disseminating information. While participants worried that elders and less educated members of the community may be resistant, perhaps reactive and proactive endeavors were both needed. Participants also remained optimistic about the future of addressing violence against women in the community however, there was also a sense of helplessness as the women expressed that they were not sure how to move forward within the limited scope of options.

The limitations of the research include the lack of literature surrounding IPV specifically among Indo-Caribbeans in the United States and in their countries of origin. The absence of defining IPV as a social issue is also applicable to homeland countries (Prasad, 1999), as well as inadequacy of research data in this area. Furthermore, the few available community media sources (including newspapers) usually report homeland news (Tanikella, 2009) while local incidents of violence may remain unacknowledged in larger scale publications further obscuring the prevalence of intimate partner violence in 'Little Guyana'. Limited community based organizations and privatized information is another issue. In this particular case, at the time this study was conducted, only one South Asian anti domestic violence agency in the tri-state area that explicitly acknowledges that they serve the Indo-Caribbean population. Although some women were aware of this organization, others explicitly stated that not only did they not know about any organization serving the particular needs of victims of IPV but also that the service provider in question followed a "South Asian model" of dealing with abuse and that

approach did not suit their particular needs as a community. However, a participant noted that being an Indian woman in any part of the Caribbean meant that the cultural implications and experience of abuse would be similar throughout the diaspora.

The silence surrounding IPV within the community and the existence of a culture of reconciliation (Lazarus-Black, 2007), where partners are encouraged to address issues privately also has repercussions for the Indo-Caribbean community in the US. Also, women who were affiliated with cultural community organizations, activism or students with at least a college education who were familiar with the plight of women and the destructive community dynamics were more willing to participate in the study rather than those who continued to adhere to cultural standards or did not feel comfortable discussing the issue as it is still considered to be a private affair. While this exploratory study was limited by a small sample which hinders accurate assessment of possible trends, patterns and group differences and cannot be considered representative of the Indo-Caribbean immigrant population overall, similar issues that exist within this community, as well as among other racial/ethnic minority groups nationally also emerged.

Conclusion

Future studies should examine the role of community in terms of addressing cultural acceptance of IPV among Indo-Caribbean men in particular. A recent study conducted in Trinidad (and the only one of its kind) examines male batterer's accounts that reveals patterns of denial, minimization, excuses and justification towards violence against women (Sukhu, 2012). It is important to assess men's knowledge of their role as perpetrators of IPV. Another important topic to further explore is how the role of immigration status contributes to endurance of abuse within this community. Specific types of abuse should also be examined and accounted for as the literature appears to provide supporting information regarding emotional abuse yet, fails to address issues related to sexual abuse, marital rape or how acts of aggression may contribute to health issues within the community. Additionally, research should aim to understand how religiosity and cultural interpretations of the pious role of women plays into women's beliefs about IPV as it affects the sanctity of marriage. For social service organizations, the Indo-Caribbean community provides a unique space to provide culturally competent solutions to an immigrant group that is under-served and rendered invisible through marginalization and isolation.

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