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Domestic Violence and Women's Mental Health

Grace T. Douglas

The impact of violence, especially domestic violence, has plagued women and young girls for centuries. We, as a society, have only recently started trying to help victims and figure out ways to determine the effects that domestic violence has on their brains and ability to function regularly in society. Women and young girls across the world have to cope with this pain daily and the effects on their mental health can be immense. Only recently have studies began providing evidence for the pain these women have to endure. Even now, some people refuse to see the very real consequences that this pain scars on women.

In my research, I wanted to know how domestic violence is related to mental health. There are two themes that really resonated with me when I was reading through my articles and internalizing the overall concepts. The first was that depression, substance abuse, and other factors are impacting women suffering from Intimate Partner Violence, or IPV. The second theme is that socio-economic status both directly and indirectly impacts the prevalence of domestic abuse. These two themes came into light throughout all my articles and are the most relevant to the topic of domestic abuse and the healthy recovery of all its victims.

Intimate Partner Violence and Mental Health

The patterns in which women experience domestic violence and abuse can vary immensely, from multiple times a day to maybe twice a year. The intensity and

frequency of the attacks, whether verbal or physical, can vary based on the attackers' substance abuse history, current, and past mental illnesses, or even just their normal moods. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, and/or emotional domestic violence and can include controlling behavior. Many people have often misconceived domestic violence as being purely physical, and yet it can range to even financial manipulation. Another common misconception about domestic violence and abuse are that women will only experience one type and not another, when in reality it could be all of them at once, or different types at different periods in the relationship. Some attackers may start off with verbal and emotional abuse and then escalate to physical abuse, but it differs from one attacker to the next (Ziaei 2016).

When dealing with domestic violence, different types can impact a person longer than others in certain cases. Emotional abuse, no matter when it happened, is likely to last longer and victims are at an increased risk of common mental disorders (Cheng and Lo 2014). However, women with recent physical abuse are associated with having more suicidal ideation (Ishida et al. 2010).

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Culture, Society, and Praxis

Similarly, going through a traumatic experience, like domestic abuse, leads some women to have unhealthy coping mechanisms. Many women turn to different types of self-medication, instead of getting help from a professional therapist or lawyer (Cheng and Lo 2014).

Survivors of domestic violence may suffer from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideations and alcohol, and drug abuse when dealing with domestic violence and abuse (Ulloa and Hammett 2014). Other disorders associated with women and IPV are anxiety disorders and bipolar disorder (Chang et al. 2011). Some women also report memory loss, poor concentration, insomnia, fatigue and headaches (Ishida, et al. 2010). The intensity of each of these mental illnesses and disorders is dependent on how intense the experiences of the person and their relationship with the abuser. The range of diagnoses can also change based on what the perpetrator has put the victim through (Ziaei 2016).

Socioeconomic Status and Domestic Violence

The second theme relevant in my articles was that socioeconomic status has both an indirect and direct relationship with the frequency of domestic violence and abuse on a global scale. All my articles addressed the fact that socioeconomic status has an impact on the prevalence of domestic violence, whether it was a confounding variable that they controlled for, or it was an important part in their observational study. People with lower economic status or who live in poorer communities with more stressful life events have a higher possibility for domestic conflict, which in turn creates more risk for domestic violence and abuse of the spouse or

children (Ceballo et al. 2004). Most studies that deal with domestic violence list socioeconomic status as a confounding variable and can even block women from participating (Ziaei 2016). This is meaning to say that lower socioeconomic status has a correlation with the rates of IPV and domestic violence.

Although some countries have tried to make resources available to their citizens, many do not have the money or transportation to use them. For example, in post-genocide Rwanda, resources for women being abused are exceedingly scarce and the unpredictable and ambiguous government has better things to do rather than helping the victims (Verduin et al. 2012). The United States of America and other countries have made it easier for victims to get out of their hostile homes with the help of homeless and women's shelters and this has sparked other countries to try and do the same. However, many women are unlikely to report their experiences due to insufficient resources, fear of judgment, or lack of access to urban areas or the internet—two places where help can be found (Cheng and Lo 2014) (Ziaei 2016).

In conclusion, domestic violence and abuse victims and their perpetrators have been in the dark for years without the eyes of the wider community ever seeing or knowing the true consequences. Society, family, and friends of victims are now coming forward to help their loved ones get the support they need and deserve. These women are not, in any way, lifelong victims and with the right support can live a normal life.

Although much-needed research has been completed, there is still a lot more to be done for these women. Readers need to care about this research because it could potentially impact them or a loved one in the future. Also, our society needs to be more educated

Culture, Society, and Praxis

on the drastic implications not getting professional help has on the mental health of abused women. That being said, all of my articles have an overarching optimism, in that women, whatever ethnicity, age, or socioeconomic background they may come from, can get better and live the lives that they deserve with the family and friends that love them the most.

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