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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

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ADDRESSING VIEWS OF KEY INFORMANTS WHO ARE WORKING FOR WOMEN RIGHTS REGARDING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Some married women are experiencing different types of intimate partner violence by their current or former husband. However, the awareness and services for those women are still needed. This study explored the key informants' perspectives to provide more comprehensive services to those women. Qualitative feminist method was used and five participants were purposefully selected to interview in depth. Key informants reflected upon intimate partner violence as causes of intimate partner violence, why intimate partner violence cases were underreported, why didn't women leave their violent partner, what they actually felt for intimate partner violence, gaps with intervention for survivors and planning for better outcome. It was found that awareness among women who experiencing violence and the people around them needed to be raised. And services provided for them also needed to be more concise and updated. Therefore, it is essentially important to extend education session to all people regarding violence against women. Collaboration and cooperation of government and non-governmental organizations is also helpful to decrease various kinds of violence committed to women.

Keywords: key informants, service providers, intimate partner violence, women's rights

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence is one of the most common forms of violence against women and includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner.¹

Violence happens because of men's greater power and their misuse of that power. Women are not guilty for violence committed by men on their body, mind and spirit.² Therefore, it is

needed to increase conscious awareness among women regarding intimate partner violence.

In Myanmar, there are many government and non-government organization to help women. Both male and female service providers are working in those organizations. Types of their help depend on organization's functions (advocating women's rights, enforcing law, engaging men) and their concern.

Key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews to collect information from a wide range of people who have first-hand knowledge about the community (community leaders, professionals, or residents).³ These community experts can provide insight on the nature of problems and give recommendations for solutions based on their knowledge and experiences.³

Key informants here mean the people who are helping women encountering intimate partner violence by the means of their different services. Their concerns and experiences regarding intimate partner violence may vary like attitude, sense of their help, previous work, recent difficulties, and future planning. Therefore, it is worth revealing their experiences, current trends and issues and difficulties of giving services regarding intimate partner violence for the benefits of the survivors with intimate partner violence.

The aim of this study was to discover the information that would not have been explored in the survivors. The research question to guide this study was "what are the views and feelings of

key informants who are working for women rights' regarding intimate partner violence?"

METHODS

The study was qualitative feminist study and conducted in Yangon Region, Myanmar from January to April- 2017. Data were collected by face to face in-depth interviewing methods. Five participants (3 females, 2 males) were selected purposively from non-governmental organization, which were trying to help women by means of increasing their awareness and helping women to fulfil their needs.

Interviewed data were analysed using Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases of thematic analysis.⁴ These six phases are i) Familiarising with data, ii) Generating initial codes, iii) Searching for themes, iv) Reviewing themes, v) Defining and naming themes, and vi) Producing the report.

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee of Military Institute of Nursing and Paramedical Sciences, Yangon. Written informed consent was also obtained from all key informants prior to the interview. Protection from anonymity and confidentiality is also assured by using codes as K1 to K5. Right to participation and withdrawal is also guaranteed by informing to be able to withdraw within one month after participation in the study.

To enhance credibility of data triangulation method was performed by collecting data using interviews and observation methods of data collection. Credibility was also enhanced by working

with the peer reviewer who independently read the transcripts and identified key themes. Dependability was met through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and member checking. Persistent observation was achieved primarily by continuing interviews beyond the point of data saturation. By sampling participants from multiple organizations, including both male and female, triangulation was accomplished and transferability was enhanced.

RESULTS

The age of five key informants who consented to participate in the study ranged from 23 years to 26 years. They all are graduated and they all have working experiences at least 3 years. They all are from different NGOs working for women rights. As key informants, they gave services for survivors of intimate partner violence in their own way. They all started their work for their career first and then they involved actively in violence against women activities. After conducting key informant interviews, the following voices of key informants on intimate partner violence could be revealed.

CAUSES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Discrimination against women allows violence to occur daily. However, women themselves did not acknowledge that they are violent by their partner.⁵ Women are violent by their husband due to their inferiority throughout their lives.

Gender based discrimination

“Most of the women have encountered intimate partner violence in their lives. In

our country, there are so many gender-based discrimination. The mind set of people has been like that in our country. I think this may be main source for violence. Women should endure their husbands because of being women and for that reason men commit violence to women.” K2

Misuse of dominant power

“The main reason is power. In our country, there is no power equality in men and women according to our religion and culture. Mainly, women must cook in home to fulfil husband’s needs and for men even though he is drinker or not, he is the leader of household. They gave such a kind of power and men misuse that power. This became predisposing factor of violent behaviour.” K4

“Men are trained to be strong and not to be graceful in their childhood. So, they used to live as smart guy for they wanted to be appreciated. Therefore, they grew up with that tradition as they wanted to be appreciated as a man. And then, their responsive action become very aggressive and uproariously manner. Because of this, violence happens between intimate partners.” K5

Male dominance in the family

“We, men are delighted in favorism/ giving precedence. So, men have an idea of we are men, we must be in priority and everybody should listen to us.” Their mind is like that. So, they don’t know how to give priority or give precedence to another person. For example, in a marriage life, as in relationship between husband and wife, men said I am men, I am breadwinner, do not criticize to me. They accepted patriarchy willingly in their life.” K5

Violating education rights

“Violent person did not notice themselves that they commit it. For example, if a man did not allow his wife to go to work or to continue her education, it is the kind of

violence he commit to her. We should try to educate them to get awareness.” K4

“Sometimes the violence occurred between educated persons, especially threat psychologically. It became the iceberg in the ocean. It is the violence that they forbidden their wife’ knowledge and development.” K5

Experience of family violence as predictor for later violence

“Mainly it formed in family and if that child went into community, he would commit violence. We allowed such kind of violence to develop in family and then spread outside. What we need to do is to change within family, with community and then national level. As a result of this, the amount of violence and suppression on women would be eradicated one day.” K3

UNDER REPORTING

Although women in Myanmar might face numerous kinds of violence to them, there is no base-line data and whatever data there it may be incomplete. Little is known of the prevalence and types of violence women encountered in their home by their partner as countrywide violence-focused information data is lacking. This is because police figures only count cases of rape and violence that have been reported to them. There may be hidden cases that have not been reported to police or any other organizations. Key informants’ views on why women underreport their problems were the followings:

Lack of responsiveness

“In my opinion. It has related to cultural norms. Even though we complain about it, there is no supporting group who may intervene the problem. I think this is the main source.” K1

“In Myanmar, the main problem is that people do not understand the meaning of violence. Violence is happening everywhere and violent is not recognized and reporting delayed because of their acknowledgement. That’s why violent case is not reported.” K4

Being proud of their husband’s violent behaviour

“Women are proud of their husband’s violent behaviour even though legally protected for them. If women are not silent and report the problem, men would not continue their behaviour to some extent.” K4

Keeping secret personal affairs

“Women are not used to tell friends regarding problems between their husbands and them. This all also included. In people’s mind, they accept violence unconsciously. If it was like that, we should change mind set of the people.” K4

WHY DON’T WOMEN LEAVE VIOLENT PARTNERS?

There are many various reasons why women may stay in violent relationships. The followings are the service provider’s views on why women still continue their unpleasant relationships with violent partners.

Family pressure

“Sometimes in our community, some parents knew that their daughter is violated by their husband. However, they said to their daughter to consider for children and for them. In our countries, people accept divorce as women’s fault. For that reason, women cannot leave their violent husband and continue their violated relationship” K4

“Many of us heard from our parents, “Boys will be boys, so girls must take care”--the

message being that we can avoid unwanted male attention if only we are careful enough. If anything goes wrong, it must be our fault. Blaming the victim releases the man who commits violence from the responsibility for what he has done. Friends or family may blame the victim in order to feel safe themselves.” K3

Stigma: community pressure

“Even if it was because of her husband that they divorced, only she would be bad-mouthed and criticized by the community. A divorcee is just destined to be devalued and looked down on.” K3

Lack of alternative means of economic support

“What I want to say is that women themselves cannot stand alone on their feet without their husband. We have a duty to support them until they can stand on their feet alone.” K5

Culture

Social and cultural norms also play an important role in reporting of violence by survivors. As survivors are deeply embedded in longstanding social and cultural norms, cases of violence are rarely reported to the police.⁵ Social and cultural norms came down from generation to generation and they become custom in context. Participants noticed that culture influenced the violence behaviour and they would like to change the culture to reduce the occurrence of violence.

“Cultural norms make us to be blind and parents themselves make this custom to be powerful.” K1

“In our country, culture and norms play a key role in intimate partner violence. If women are clever than men, our culture don't accept that and blamed for it. And then, people forced men to be jealous of his wife and their personal woes grew up.” K3

“The influence of culture is terrible. To say, culture influences in non-sense things. If couple is in a quarrel and the wife want to divorce, relatives and surroundings give pressure to wife. Why do you want to divorce? Divorcee is not good. And then, women cannot divorce by following the culture. Culture still influence on violence as well as gender issue. The thing we cannot fight against is culture and we are still trying to change it.” K5

Hoping that the partner will change

“Especially because of culture and community pressure, survivors cannot escape from their violent husband. Moreover, there is also affection. They expect their husband to be changed because of love. This is one of the facts why they can't divorce their husband.” K5

WHAT THEY FELT

The existing legal framework does not meet the needs of women vulnerable to, or survivors of violence.⁵ With the urgent need of a law to protect women from violence, Myanmar has recently endorsed the UN Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, and its commitment to enacting anti-violence legislation.⁶ The approval of the Anti-violence against women law is now waiting permission from advocate general's office.

Law restricting to women

“If ones' husband living together with another women, how can she show evidence for that? Should she call and show the house or place they lived? Why people don't believe the women. They must believe the women who came and reported to them. If they don't believe, it would be the burden for women and women would feel emotional uncomfortable.” K2

“According to our Customary Law, there is no equality in men and women's rights. For

women, their entitlement is still less than men have.” K4

“In our culture, we must follow the law. Customary laws restricted the women’s activities. Next, restricted education also narrowed down individual vision and scope and women became victims of violent by their husbands. That’s all are our views on current situation.” K3

“In Myanmar, policy and law don’t have women session in every sector. In other countries, Law are launched for women in session and chapter. In our countries, we have to back up for women rights in any law which was launched here. And also, women workers who would help survivors are also rare here. Most of the staff are men and women workers are only a few numbers. Then, most of the justices are men and they themselves don’t understand the women’s feelings.” K3

Among 3 female and 2 male participants, 2 male participants expressed their emotions from the point of view of men and 1 female participant expressed it is needed to explore men’s feelings on why they commit violence. Therefore, it was found that not only from the point of survivors but also from points of perpetrator is needed to be explored.

Accepting the idea: “The husband has the right to beat his wife”

“In my opinion, I accept that men must control their emotional feelings and their anger. If they cannot control themselves, I cannot accept them as good and smart men. Sometimes, some of the male volunteers from our gender group themselves have an idea that men worth beating their wife. They said men can beat women depend on the situation. I cannot accept that guys. I have different opinion from them.” K5

“Sometimes, we, ourselves also violated to others. If you don’t like violation to you, you should not violate to others. Do not misuse your power of being Patriarchy.” K4

Complaining men use their Patriarchy power

“From our women’s right, we thought men are Patriarchal and they always influence in decision making and look down on women. But this is only our views. There may be some instinct from men’s view. We need to explore and get to know them.” K2

ADDRESSING GAPS WITH INTERVENTION FOR SURVIVORS

Safety

“We cannot give good support for survivors. For example, if the women quarrelled with their husband and reported to us for the sake of their safety and we cannot give any guarantee for them to be safe.” K5

Services provided

“In raising awareness, we should not focus only on women and should also include men. Not only men, but also ethic leader should also be included in our programme. At some region, in raising awareness in men, men do not accept female volunteer to train them. They thought women fight for women and now we are trying to engaging men by giving peer education. It is because men can only want to accept male volunteer to educate them or train them.” K4

“And also, in counselling, we cannot support with good consultation services here. In other countries, they have good consultation services and we cannot give counselling easily here. Through counselling, empowerment of survivors could get supported.” K5

PLANNING FOR BETTER OUTCOME

What they consider to do in their future are to give training regarding reproductive health, to raise awareness among gender

non-sensitive women and persuading men to be involved in their activities.

“Even though we cannot give technical support, we are trying to give awareness individually or in group. Our future plan is to give gender awareness in primary level and reproductive health in University level.” K3

“There are still gender non-sensitive women in our society. We are considering to change them first.” K4

“In our project, we focused only on women. However, it is not the way to empower women only, we should also empower men as well. We should also understand the habit of men and later we have moved to the topic about “engaging men”. We negotiate with men and try to understand the nature of men. We are asking question “Why do men want to violate?” We considered such a question. There is not much because we cannot give training very well. We tried to discuss in engaging men and what we have got is that we should not forget the feeling of men in intervening our project.” K5

DISCUSSION

In this study, perspectives of key informants regarding intimate partner violence were explored. They expressed their views depending on their experiences and their perception. It was found that all key informants in this study expressed the causes of intimate partner violence as gender-based discrimination, men misusing their dominant power, male dominance in the family, experience of family violence as predictor for later violence.

Discrimination against women allows violence to occur daily. Women themselves did not acknowledge that they are violent by their partner.⁷ Women are

violent by their husband due to their inferiority throughout their lives.

Power become one of the predisposing factors of men’ violent behaviour in this study and unlikely it was found that having power in women protects them from violence while it is also a risk factor itself.³ Beliefs about gender roles and norms, and structural dimensions that may support violence against women vary cross culturally. These inconsistencies may lead to underreporting of violence in some settings. Moreover, barriers to reporting such as social taboo, stigma may significantly impede accurate collection of epidemiological data.

Children who grow up in families where there is violence may suffer a range of behavioural and emotional disturbances.⁸ These can also be associated with perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life.⁹ It is congruent with the findings from this study that the violence formed in family and it spread out to community. In the study regarding women experiencing intimate partner violence it was found that women did not get their reproductive rights¹⁰ and most of the key informants in this study have a plan for giving training regarding reproductive health and the rights women would get. Their ideas support the study which explored education as one of the main tools for fighting against violence against women.⁷ Moreover, raising awareness among gender non-sensitive women and men active involvement is also crucial. Therefore, it is same as empowerment of women was the most cited strategy for prevention of violence against women and increasing the educational levels of the whole society.⁷

CONCLUSION

Intimate partner violence poses enormous burdens in social, economic and sexual effects on women and their ripple effects spread throughout society. It has tremendous burdens on the whole community and the collaboration and coordination of all people and organizations is essentially needed to help women with various kinds of violence.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

None declared.

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Authorship Contribution

This is the original work of the corresponding author.

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