Intimate Partner Violence in Muslim Families

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Introduction

• Multi-cultural competencies call us to be knowledgeable about gender, cultural, and religious differences (American Psychology Association [APA], 2007, 2017; Canadian Psychology Association [CPA], 2007, 2017).
• Current estimates of Muslims in the US is 3.45 million, or 1.1% of the population (Pew Research Centre, 2017).
• Current estimates of Muslims in Canada is 1.05 million, or 3.2% of the population (Hamdani, 2015).
• Globalization, migration, wars, politics, and religious and sexual oppressions have increased religious diversity in North America and increased in the need for a multicultural understanding of Muslim traditions (Ibrahim & Dykeman, 2011).
• Religious practices and cultural customs can differ significantly from common Western culture and be as diverse as those found in Christianity.
• Muslims face stigma and discrimination due to lack of understanding about their religious and cultural practices, placing them at increased risk of psychological stress.
• When Muslims do seek mental health support, they face lack of access to relevant mental health resources and lack of understanding of spiritual and cultural needs.
• Lack of spiritual and cultural understanding is particularly true when addressing intimate partner violence (IPV).
• While Islam is inherently non-violent, isolated texts from the Qur’an are misused to uphold violence.
• In the US, 35.6% of women and 28.5% of men have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking in their lifetime and nearly half of all women and men in the US have experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner (Smith et al., 2018).

Discussion

• The Duluth Model was developed in Duluth, MN in the 1980s by listening to the experiences of hundreds of women who had experienced IPV.
• The framework is based on the theory that power and control are used by the perpetrator to control the victim.
• Theoretically, power and control translates cross culturally but specifics of how it manifests in Muslim communities is missing in the Duluth Model.
• Ways in which power and control operationalize in a Muslim context have been introduced in a Muslim Wheel of Domestic Violence, expanding on the original wheel and creating a multicultural context for Muslim families.

Conclusions

• Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is the perpetration of violence against an intimate partner (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012).
• “Domestic violence” is often used interchangeably with IPV, although some definitions broaden domestic violence to include household members other than the intimate partner (WHO, 2012). Family violence is also a legal definition used in some jurisdictions.
• IPV is commonly broken down into several domains including emotional, mental, psychological, physical, sexual, financial, religious, and cultural violence. These categories are not exhaustive nor exclusive of each other.
• Women are more commonly victims of IPV and IPV is one of the common forms of violence against women and girls. This is true across all settings and all demographic backgrounds. Immunity is not granted by age, socioeconomic status, education level, religion, or cultural group (WHO, 2012).
• Muslim women may face more barriers to leaving a relationship with IPV than other North American women due to:
  • pre-existing negative perceptions of Muslims
  • personal sense of shame
  • a societal/cultural exclusion as a divorced woman
  • lack of understanding of foreign systems such as legal, medical, police, child protection support
  • fear of undocumented status or status attached to her husband.
• Given that 1 in 3 women experiences sexual or physical abuse in her lifetime (World Health Organization, 2013), the increase in diversity in the North American population, and barriers to Muslim women leaving IPV relationships, there is an ethical imperative as psychologists to become versed in the intersection of IPV as it related to Muslim families.