

Intimate Partner Violence: Case Studies of Divided Loyalties of Muslim Women

Linda Copel PhD, RN, PMHCNS, BC,
CNE, NCC, FAPA



VILLANOVA
UNIVERSITY

College of Nursing

Background

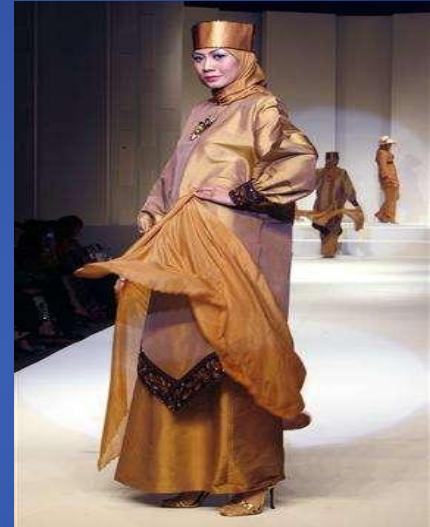
- There is a belief by selected scholars that some Muslim communities are in the midst of transition.
- Movement is occurring from traditionalism to modernity.
- The shifting is from a conservative, patriarchal, patrilineal family structure to an increasingly liberal, urbanized society.
- Influences for this shift include: Western patterns of life, increased education, increased exposure to different cultures in work settings, and exposure to the media.

Background

- Both genders are affected by movement towards modernity.
- Modernity brings with it divided loyalties between cultural traditions and a new lifestyle.
- Many Muslim men see their authority being undermined.
- Muslim women historically “lived with marital problems.”
- Today these problems are sometimes motivations for divorce.
- Increased stresses of modernization are linked to an increase in intimate partner violence (IPV).
- “Violence is a justifiable response to a man’s perceived misbehavior of a woman” (Douki et al. 2003).

Clinical Issues Presented

- Educated Muslim woman's decision to **cover** when her husband wanted her not to cover resulted in IPV
- Educated Muslim woman's decision to **uncover** when her husband wanted her to cover resulted in IPV



Purposes of the Study

- The purposes of exploring these cases studies were:
 - To address the factors that influence the Muslim woman's divided loyalties between maintaining cultural traditions and experiencing a different social structure or lifestyle.
 - To determine if the rejection or acceptance of Western culture was an antecedent to intimate partner violence.

Guided Questions

- What is the process of the Muslim woman's decision to uncover after beginning a life in the United States?
- What is the process of the Muslim woman's decision to remain covered after beginning a life in the United States?
- Can the woman's rejection of Western culture serve as an antecedent to IPV?
- Can the woman's acceptance of Western culture serve as an antecedent to IPV?

Methodology

- Case Study Method proposed by Yin (2002)
 - Procedure:
 - Develop the design protocol
 - Conduct the case study by obtaining data sources:
(use interviews & documentation)
 - Analyze data
 - Determine conclusions, implications & recommendations

Case Study Limitations

- Provides only a description of the event or phenomenon.
- Includes a single individual or several individuals.
- Will not be representative of a group or population
- The information collected is partially retrospective data.
- The problems inherent with reliance on memory may be present.

Case Study #1

The Muslim woman who decides to
uncover against her husband's wishes and
experiences IPV

Case #1: Decision to Uncover

- In her extended family some women covered and others who studied abroad did not cover. Her mother covered in public.
- Discussed wearing/not wearing cover with her husband.
- Husband decided when she would and would not cover.
- She was mandated to cover to pray.
- When she decided to remain uncovered, it became a source of conflict between them.
- She reported covering again as an attempt to stop the violence.
- Episodes of verbal abuse and physical violence occurred when she was perceived as uncovering without asking him.

Case #1: Decision to Uncover

- The beatings escalated and she was beaten when she was covered or uncovered.
- She was told the beatings were the result of her disobedience.
- Her physical and emotional health suffered.
- She struggled to keep the abuse secret, but finally told her friend and together they contacted a community mental health center.
- She contacted her parents and went home with father.

Case Study #2

The Muslim woman who decides to remain covered against her husband's wishes and experiences IPV

Case #2: Decision to Remain Covered

- The woman had always covered, but her husband wanted her to uncover.
- Husband disparaged her and her family, was verbally abusive, accused her of sabotaging his career and future, beat her, tore her coverings, and took some of her traditional clothes.
- Sometimes she covered to help herself feel better and to pray, but if he witnessed this he became infuriated and violence occurred.

Case #2: Decision to Remain Covered

- Began to wear non-revealing, Western-styled, clothes with matching head coverings to please her husband.
- Became fearful and anxious about the bad things that would happen if she uncovered.
- Described feeling distressed, depressed and disappointed with herself. Referred to herself as “broken glass” and bringing shame to her family.
- Persuaded by a fellow student to talk to someone at the community mental health center.
- She contacted her parents and went home with them.

Common Themes

- Conflict related to covering/uncovering
- Lack of preparation for cultural shift
- Wife's desire and actions to please husband
- Wife's disobedience as explanation for violence
- Family influence

Literature: Covering

- Covering is based on religious doctrine, although the Qur'an does not mandate it. However, there is the Surah XXXIII, Verse 59 in the Qur'an cited by the clerics to support covering.
- The practice of hijab comes from the Hadith which is the tradition of Mohammed.
- There is ongoing debate as covering is viewed as providing protection from male gaze, freedom of movement, personal liberty in a world that objectifies women, or it is the illusion of protection and it absolves men from the responsibility of controlling their behavior (Shirazi, 2001).

Literature: Cultural Shift

- People experience conflicting feelings of loyalty between cultural dictates, and the husband's or family's demands.
- There is an attraction to the new social structure and Western lifestyle, which often makes people question their allegiance (Ammar, 2007).
- Conflict occurs between traditions and customs of the family's culture and the social structure of the new country.
- People struggle with the dilemma to reject or embrace integration, secularism, and westernization.

Literature: Marital Relationship

- The male is the authority figure for all family matters.
- Women's social status is contingent on marriage and raising children.
- Divorced women suffer physically and emotionally, have few options for remarriage, and may lose custody of the children to the former husband (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).
- Marital discord, controversy and negativity are not sanctioned within the marriage relationship.

Literature: IPV

- IPV can be triggered by the male's perception of the wife's disobedience.
- In Muslim societies in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia the incidence of IPV is estimated to be high (although the available information is limited).
- IPV occurs within the private domain of the family and is difficult to study and document (Hajjar, 2006).
- Wife abuse produces serious physical and mental health problems, chronic pain syndromes, and death (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001).

Literature: Family Influence

- Society is organized around the family.
- Although a Muslim woman may work outside the home, she is expected to manage the home and be a submissive wife who obeys her husband, in-laws, and parents.
- Traditional families are uncomfortable with females learning to do things to attain independence (Cohen & Sarvaya, 2004).
- Families do not seek mental health care. One traditionally obtains help from family members, good friends, and clerics, however, this practice is slowly changing (Douki et al., 2003).

Conclusions:

- Factors contributing to the phenomenon of divided loyalty:
 - Increased sense of freedom and personal decision making
 - Greater accessibility to financial resources
 - Experience of Western culture
 - Success in occupational and educational settings
 - Role modeling of peers and friends
 - Difficulty with husband's inconsistency and use of control
 - Distance from family members

Conclusions:

- Acceptance or rejection of the nuances of Western culture depended upon the couple's interpersonal dynamics:
 - The wife's perspective and decision making process
 - The husband's perspective, decision making process, and the degree of power and control in the relationship
 - The woman's decision being different from her husband's decision prompted IPV
 - Her decision not to comply with his decision or obtain his permission to act in a particular manner prompted IPV.
 - Disagreement between the couple related to the level of assimilation and integration into a Western lifestyle was the identified antecedent for the occurrence of IPV.

Implications

- Concepts of respect and the development of inner resources were essential components facilitating adjustment to Western society
- Change from tradition or cultural patterns triggered abuse.
- The women made attempts to be flexible and blend both cultures.
- The women had to determine how to “get it right.”
- The couple had difficulty assimilating into Western culture when each held divergent views, and when the woman did not capitulate to his husband’s will.

Research Recommendations

- Examine the acculturation process of the women and men
- Explore the concept of divided loyalties
- Address the coping process and communication for Muslim couples in relation to divided loyalties
- Investigate IPV in young, married, adult Muslims living in the United States
- Research the family dynamics when confronted with issues that go against traditional social and cultural norms