

Original Article

Gender Violence: An Intrinsic Case Study with Insight for the Novice Nurse

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Abstract

Introduction: Gender based Violence is any violent act that results (or is likely to) in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women.

Aim: The purpose was to understand an abstract construct and generic phenomenon, of gender violence in its contemporary form within a defined geographical area with real life circumstances from the viewpoint of a victim.

Methodology: A small intrinsic qualitative case-study was conducted in April 2018 in Ceuta, Spain to assess personal meanings, experiences, feelings, knowledge and thoughts on various aspects concerning gender violence.. Data was collected via an unstructured interview and the respondent's identity and personal details were safeguarded. Thematic analysis was used in order to narrate findings in a cohesive manner and the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative research guidelines were used to ensure thorough reporting of the results.

Results: The interview lasted for 40 minutes, and after initial introduction and greetings, followed by full explanations on the study's purposes plus informed consent obtained, an open discussion followed as illustrated by the excerpts from the actual interview.

Discussion: The interviewee's personal account resembled a well recognized cycle of various phases that a victim of gender based violence goes through. The pattern of her unique story is well recognized within this paradigm of gender violence.

Conclusions: Despite advances in the social environment as enjoyed in most western countries, perspective of this issue needs further elaboration as women are more than often found in a position of inferiority with respect to men.

Key words: gender-based violence, qualitative research, violence, female

Introduction

Any act of sexist violence that has as a possible or actual result physical, sexual or psychological harm, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether it occurs in public or private life" (UNFPA), (1998).The latest data collected show that around 35% of women in the world have suffered some form and degree of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner

or third parties (WHO, 2002). Yet, one must bear in mind that this is social inequality that may affect all women regardless of their nationality, age, culture, social, financial or other status, among other factors.

However, one should consider the longstanding social misconception that mainstream culture has

forged in many societies, that women are per se inferior to men within the social scale. Furthermore, for centuries women did not enjoy equal rights and were without access to fair education. Thus, leading to continuing oppression, resulting in gender submission (Taft, et al., 2019). During the previous century there have been many advances in women's rights, such as recognizing women as citizens on a plane equal to that of man. Another great advancement is the distribution of rights equally between both genders; this affirmation is already accepted in several countries without forgetting that there is still a long way to go. In these lines, the political equality of women in the Charter of the United Nations was expressly stated and proclaimed to the whole world in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, in which text it can be read that "*we are all free and equal in dignity and rights ... without any distinction of race, color, sex ...*" (UN, 1948).

The profile of the abuser is usually that of an ordinary person. Yet, according to Campbell et al., (2002) men who abuse are "*very clever, smart and extremely charming. Most of these men have a personality that draws people in because of their level of charm. This is part of their art to deceive and manipulate*". Moreover, according to their interest and control, abusers may display (or present with) several and different profiles. Sometimes the abuse can be silent but complicated and devastating for the person who is at the receiving end.

GBV includes: battering, intimate partner violence (including marital rape, sexual violence, and dowry/bride price-related violence, sexual abuse of female children in the household, honor crimes, early marriage, forced marriage, female genital mutilation (clitoris cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women), sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in school and elsewhere, commercial sexual exploitation, and trafficking of girls and women (UNFPA, 2014).

In 1995, the U.N. expanded the definition of GBV to further include: violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, including systematic rape, sexual slavery, and forced pregnancy; forced sterilization, forced abortion, and coerced or forced use of

contraceptives; and prenatal sex selection and female infanticide. It also recognised the particular vulnerabilities of women belonging to minorities: the elderly and the displaced; indigenous, refugee, and migrant communities; women living in impoverished rural or remote areas, or in detention (UN, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

Violence and **aggression** are two terms that are closely related but not identical. Violence is an act which one is aware of at both the receiving and delivering ends. Aggressiveness is at large an unconscious act that can be regulated through culture, education, counseling and other interventions. Violence is the actual outward expression of aggression to hurt deliberately another person. Yet, it is common to confuse gender violence with domestic or sexist violence but these are three separate terms as follows:

- **Gender Violence** also known as gender-based violence or gendered violence, involves men and women, although women are by far the usual victims. It is primarily derived from an unequal power base between a man and a woman. It may include many forms and aspects, including, physical, sexual, economic and psychological harm. Yet, the most pervasive form is abuse of a woman by an intimate male partner or ex-spouse and it is not necessary that there has been an affective relationship between them. Moreover, a single action is enough to qualify for commitment of gender-based violence (Heise, 1994).
- On the other hand, **Domestic Violence** or **Family Violence** affects all members of the family; that is to say, for example, the man may suffer from his spouse or ex-spouse and vice-versa, the woman from her parents or siblings or the children from their parents or relatives. The aggressor can be any family member. It includes any abuse that occurs within the family context where the perpetrator is known to the victim. Common examples are spousal beatings; forced marriage; verbal abuse and trauma related to "dowry" and "not giving birth to a son".
- **Sexist Violence** is an aggression or act of violence by a man towards a woman in

which there is no affective or sentimental relationship. An example of this type of violence would be the rape of a woman by a man with whom she usually does not know; other forms include: marital rape; sexual abuse of a girl by a father, uncle, or stepfather (Maguele & Khuzwayo, 2019).

- **Community Violence:** This includes violence at the hands of a perpetrator unknown or unrelated to the woman and often comes in the form of rape, forced prostitution or trafficking, sexual harassment, and public humiliation.
- **State Violence:** This includes violations that are condoned and committed by individuals associated with the government or related officialdom. This is often seen in the form of violence at the hands of police, prison guards, refugee camp guards, border officials, and even peacekeeping troops. In conflict regions of the world, systematic rape and sexual violence is often used as a tool of war (E Ilsberg & Heise, 2002).

According to a number of authors, (Tullio et al., 2020; Contreras-Urbina et al., 2019; Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; Krug et al., 2002) gender violence comes under various forms, which often are interrelated or coexisting as per the following: **Physical violence:** may involve blows, wounds, fractures, falls, attacks with a knife that cause permanent or temporary damage to the victim. **Psychological violence:** Involves a series of behaviors such as insults, humiliations, threats and psychological attacks by the aggressor towards the victim in order to provoke feelings of guilt and devaluation in the victim and increased control of the aggressor over the victim. It may (or not) be accompanied by physical violence. **Sexual violence:** is forced sexual activity against the victim's will. It is not necessary that there is (or not) partial or full penetration, the simple fact of exercising an act beyond one's will defines sexual violence. This violence also includes rape within a couple, forced prostitution, forced conception or abortion, genital mutilation, sexual harassment or unwanted touching among other aspects and forms. **Economic violence:** can occur when all the economic activity of the relationship is controlled and dominated by the man reducing

the monetary freedom and privacy of the victim since she has to ask and give explanations for everything she buys or does. The victim does not work or have an income. **Patrimonial violence:** is defined as any act or omission that affects the survival of the victim. This particular form of violence may manifest itself in the transformation, subtraction, destruction or retention of objects such as personal documents, goods and values, economic rights or economic resources destined to satisfy their needs and may include damages to the common or proper property of the victim. **Social violence:** It leads to the aggressor is isolating the woman from family and friends thus avoiding continuous contact with them. **Vicarious violence:** is produced in pairs where there are children involved and the aggressor uses the children as a tool of threat or harm to the victim, such as avoiding seeing their children, mistreating them or even in the most extreme case, murder of the children in an effort to ultimately harm/punish the victim. Moreover, according to Fried (2003), furthered by Krantz and Garcia-Moreno (2005), the categorization of gender violence falls into four groups, as listed below: *Cultural factors:* traditional sexual roles, marital customs, convincing oneself that violence is a means by which conflicts are resolved, acceptance of the superiority of the male over the female figure, stereotypes. *Economic factors:* Women depend financially on men, male control of household economic activity, and restriction of women towards access to monetary freedom, employment, education and training. Inequality of salaries of men compared to that of women. *Judicial factors:* Divorce laws and custody of the child favor the male, lower legal status. *Political factors:* Often, the media or key personalities within a society do not act accordingly against sexist violence. Also, there is a marked misrepresentation of participation of women in politics. Women victims of abuse often have common characteristics, since they adopt certain behaviors and attitudes such as 'locking inwards' as a survival mechanism. This also may include isolation of the woman subjected by her aggressor keeping her away from family and friends (Martín-Fernández et al., 2019). Another significant feature of the victim's personality is low self-esteem, usually resulting from self -

incrimination mixed with the fear of losing what is left in the relationship, whether economic, family, or other aspect. They can also develop a false perception of reality, since they may not recognize/accept that they are being mistreated, defending and/or justifying their aggressor and even denying the aggressions (Kishor & Johnson., 2004).

Along these lines, 'battered' women often reach a stage in which they acquire a 'learned helplessness syndrome', which consists of passive behavior and a tendency to accept the situation in order to avoid confrontation, without responding or defending against the aggressor, or look for a means to an end. This is a syndrome often related to clinical depression and other mental disorders (Winter et al., 2020). Women suffering from this syndrome have usually been subjected to abuse for a long period of time and in an intensive way with numerous beatings by their aggressor and enduring inhuman levels of humiliation, attaining extreme psychological deterioration. The first attempts to denounce the aggressor or escape are best applied when the victim is still strong enough emotionally, and has not yet entered into the learned helplessness syndrome (Ellsberg, 2006).

However, during this stage the victim tends to place hope in wishful thinking that the aggressor will change, and they take this separation not as a flight but rather as a warning to make the aggressor reflect, so that they return to their side shortly after the separation (Kuskoff & Parsell, 2020). When this happens, each time she returns to her aggressor, the woman enters more and more into a repetition loop, since it is destined to almost certain failure, and after the own awareness of this failure for the woman it is more difficult to face the situation, by the exhaustion of possibilities and a future that is unknown, adding everything to the despair and fatigue that the global situation entails (Abbey et al., 2004).

Once the battered woman has already entered the stage of learned helplessness, she will only escape if she finds an instinctive force to support her and help her to get ahead. The woman focuses her desire to fight in an incentive that arises for various reasons, whether the risk to die; fear for their children, and more (Raphael et al.,

2019). This means that in the battered woman the instinct of survival prevails over the other factors and thus, with psychological and social help, she can definitively move away from her aggressor, and embark on a new path, a new life totally different from what she had (Ward & Vann, 2002).

Aim: The main purpose of this paper was to come to understand an abstract construct and generic phenomenon, i.e. gender violence in its contemporary form within a defined geographical area with real life circumstances, i.e. from the viewpoint of a victim itself.

Methodology

For this paper's needs, a small intrinsic qualitative case study as defined by Stake, (1995) was conducted in April 2018 in Ceuta, Spain to assess personal meanings, experiences, feelings, knowledge and thoughts on various aspects concerning gender violence. Thanks to the Women's Advisory Center of Ceuta we were able to access one of the many victims for a personal interview, in an effort to explore her experiences in depth.

This particular methodology was chosen as the first author, has a genuine interest in the theme subject and her intent was to better understand the case and not because the case represented other cases or because it illustrated a particular trait or problem but because the case itself is of interest. Data were collected via an unstructured interview and the respondent's identity and data was safeguarded.

Thematic analysis was used in order to narrate findings in a cohesive manner and the CONSolidated criteria for REporting Qualitative research (COREQ) guidelines were used to ensure thorough reporting of the results (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Tong et al., 2007). With regards to ethics and deontology, the participant was reassured that all her personal details would be safeguarded and that data confidentiality was secured.

Results

The interview lasted for 40 minutes, and after initial introduction and greetings, followed by full explanations on the study's purposes plus

informed consent obtained, an open discussion followed as illustrated by the excerpts below.

Age and Nationality: 42 years, Spanish.

How old and how did you meet your partner?*I was 19 years old when I met him at a friend's wedding.*

When did the mistreatment begin? At first everything was pink and rosy, but that lasted for about three months at the most. Before I knew it, I did not go out with my friends anymore; I did not have another life other than him. In a very short time he became everything for me. My family did not accept it and I had to turn my back on them, they gave me a choice and I had a clear decision. As soon as he saw that my only support was him, it was even easier for him to totally control my life, and that's when everything started.

Did it start by being psychological or physical? Before the first time he hit me, there were a thousand instances of psychological abuse. Before I knew it, he was in charge and kept reminding me that this or that was not right, or that nothing would go well if I did not do things the way he wanted. Eventually a point in time came when I, myself, thought that if I did something outside his 'guidelines' I would be wrong, that I would end up with him anger and I would be left alone. Only once we started living together did physical abuse begun. Nothing hurts more than the first time you're hit. The world fell on me and as I couldn't believe what had happened. You mentalize that it is your fault and the fact of not forgiving was not an option for me, since forgiveness focused on my own person, I blamed myself for what happened instead of him. Even after he had hit me I kept protecting him.

When did you begin to be aware of the abuse?As soon as I was a mother my mind stopped working the same way. My love was completely destroyed but the love I felt for my daughter and for all that I would suffer if we continued to grow in that environment made me understand that I was not to blame for anything, that the poison was him and that I should find a solution sooner or later.

Was that when you reported the situation? No, I was aware of the abuse, but I still did not

have enough resources, I depended on him completely, I had left my studies as soon as I met him and had never worked. First of all I improved my family ties and once I had the support of my parents I took my girl away and reported him. But not a week had passed when he was already asking for forgiveness, swearing that he would not do it again. I ate my head and I do not know how or why I fell again, believing him. Even knowing how much getting back with him would hurt my family, my daughter and myself, I was so blind that I went back with him. And the story was repeated in no time with even more abuse.

How did the whole situation affect your daughter?*It affected her in all aspects; she was unfriendly to her father. When we parted she rested from the situation but the disappointment showed when we returned. She was not a happy child, when only four years old she already had many responsibilities. Most of the time she knew that I was tired because the previous night I had received a beating, and she would basically get up and prepare herself to go to school. I will never forgive myself that she had to suffer so much because I did not have the courage to put an end to this much sooner.*

So the relationship of the father with the daughter was not good either? To tell the truth, he always tried to get along with her, never put his hand on her, the focus of his anger was me, but the girl suffered when she saw me suffer. That is why the girl took a grudge and anger to her father, and as much as he tried to approach her, she always dodged. Today my daughter is of age and does not want to have a relationship with him.

How much time has passed since you started everything until you put an end to it? The abuse began in my 20s, I finally divorced him when I was 26.

And what factors have helped you to take that step? I contacted the Women's Advisory Center, they knew more cases and they were all very similar to mine, and they told me much more similar ones that ended with the battered woman murdered. I had already made my family suffer a lot, it was six years in which, besides being unhappy, I had made my loved ones unhappy too.

Also, the 'bandage' fell from my eyes, I was not in love with him anymore, all the love that made me forgive him and all the manipulation that he exercised over me turned into hatred, in resentment. I just wanted him away and to start a new life. I got a job as a cleaner in a residence, my daughter was much happier living with her grandparents, she already had stability and we supported her together. It was the best decision I made in my life.

What would you change if you had the opportunity to go back in time? If you mean if I had not married him, I suppose so, because of all the bad things I got out of him, having had my daughter compensates for all the evil. But it is clear that I would have put an end much earlier, the first time I reported him I should not have fallen again. That is what I would change, to end everything very much sooner.

How do you feel now? Free. And that is something that I should never have given up, freedom of oneself should be like an insurmountable limit, and the moment I let it cross that limit I had lost everything. But thank God I fought and regained my freedom.

What advice would you give to someone who is going through what you went through? Fight, don't stop fighting, in this life there is always something to do it and you should not give up, I know very well that sometimes you think it's the end, that there is no return or exit, but that is not true, that if I could they could too. They take as reference the many cases that there are like me, that we overcome and live free and happy. We have to do it, it is obligatory, for us, for our family, and for all those women who could not fight and ended badly. Fighting is the viable option, so don't stop doing it.

The interview conducted with this woman was carried out with the purpose of knowing a real case of gender violence. Life has given her a second chance and she is today, after all, recovering from the trauma that she experienced. However, not all cases end positively, as worldwide, between 960,000 to 3,000,000 incidents of domestic violence are reported each year, with many women dying at the hands of their partners, while many other incidents go unreported (WHO, 2005).

Discussion

In this paper, an attempt was made to reflect on the experience and personal pain of a woman affected by gender violence in order to illustrate its complexities to the novice nurse. Furthermore, this case study, also illustrates the importance of making society aware of a problem that is very much in place but often overlooked or dismissed.

Reflection on this case study's findings may reveal how different dimensions, influences of our patriarchal society and the different consequences of gender violence on women's lives and their own health. Along these lines, one should contemplate that in many cases, women pay a very high price just for the simple fact of being of female gender.

The interviewee in this study, described phases of the violence she suffered which resemble those outlined by Walker (1979) who presents four phases of the cycle that a victim of GBV is going through:

- **Calm Phase:** As its name suggests, this phase corresponds to a calm stage, without arguments between the parties. If the victim has already lived the full cycle, he may have the feeling that this phase exists, because according to the aggressor everything is fine.
- **Tension Accumulation Phase:** In this phase, the tension between the parties is increasing, there are differences between them. It is important to know that here, the aggressor begins to exercise psychological abuse, the aggressor wants to control the victim and it is usual that at this stage, the victim tries to please the aggressor, so that the tension between them does not increase. Tension is manifested through various behaviors such as: disparagement, insinuations, anger, sarcasm, long silences and physical aggression can also occur. The victim tends to minimize the problem and justify the behavior of the aggressor.
- **Explosion Phase:** In this stage the aggressor discharges all the tension of the previous phase. It is characterized because in it, the most important physical, psychological and/or sexual aggressions take place.
- **Honeymoon Phase:** In this stage, the aggressor shows repentance for what

happened and initiates compensatory behaviors, to show the victim that he feels what happened and that it will never happen again. This phase makes the victim, observe and focus on the positive side of the relationship with the aggressor.

Yet, regarding this particular case study and its wider significance, it must be noted that although this particular subject had a safe-place to turn to for help and support, yet, such services are not readily available in most parts of the world. Furthermore, there is a wider lack of in depth information in most societies about gender violence and all the particular aspects and conditions surrounding it.

There are also a high percentage of young people who think that you should not cut a relationship off, just because your partner hurts you and makes you suffer. It is noteworthy, that more men than women believe it is legitimate to harm their partner (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005).

Nevertheless, in many societies, due to technology and contemporary forms of digital networking, big parts of the population have developed a change of attitude and awareness towards this social problem. Unlike a few decades ago, we have now improved in the reduction of prejudices and stereotypes about gender violence, yet, it continues to prevail as a social concern.

In the interview we were able to hear first-hand how a woman felt guilty and thought she deserved the aggression or punishment bestowed upon her by her partner, and how she initially tolerated, excused and hid his aggression and violence. Yet, the case reveals that the woman did not solve the situation for herself, but rather on behalf of her daughter.

Essential to her decision making was the help and support received by getting to know other women's experiences with gender violence, through the Women's Advisory Center, which works as a self-help group. Moreover, the support of her family was also essential to help her gain confidence in herself and ultimately make the decision to break away.

Yet, this case study is not necessarily typical, as many women have nowhere to turn to, and usually end up losing their freedom which is

replaced with daily dependency and submission to their partner, often resulting in tragic events.

Nowadays, increased awareness of GBV is rising in comparison with past generations, as it has not been until the last decade in many places in the world that battered women have begun to denounce the mistreatment they have been receiving and being open about it. Attitudes within society are also changing and there is more recognition in many countries that there should be equality of conditions within a relationship.

Conclusions: This small qualitative case study focused on the mistreatment of a woman by her partner and the experience this entailed. The pattern of her unique story is well recognized within this paradigm of GBV. The paper covers the key phases that a GBV victim goes through when experiencing the lived horror of a relationship with an abusive partner.

Despite advances in the social environment in which we enjoy in most western countries, our perspective of this issue needs further elaboration as women are more than often found in a position of inferiority with respect to man. In this respect, personal stories should be read closely and acted upon, in an effort to help prevent similar stories to be repeated.

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