Intimate Partner Violence in a Cultural Context: What impacts women’s decisions to leave

Siyi Yang, BA, MFTT
University of Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry

Introduction

• Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a prevalent and serious public health issue globally.
  • 1 in 3 (~35%) women globally report either sexual and/or physical IPV or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (Ellsberg & Emmelin, 2014; Smith et al., 2018; WHO, 2012, 2017).
• Many factors that contribute to stay in or leave decisions:
  • Financial support, social support, fear and danger, self-blame, minimizing thoughts, and unrealistic hope for improvement (Craven, Whiting, & Aamar, 2015; Strube & Barbour, 1983; Whiting, 2016).
• Importantly, cultural context may also have a profound influence on women’s decision to leave in situations of IPV.
  • Entrenched-cultural values, fear of social reaction, responsibility of keeping family intact (Estrellado & Loh, 2019; Kelly, 2009).
• Chinese culture is grounded in strong traditions that can similarly impact women’s decisions to stay or leave in the context of IPV.
  • About 4.4 million Chinese Americans, 57% are married (US Census, 2018).
  • 19.6% Asian American or Pacific Islander report IPV experience in 2010, and 6.5% are Chinese American (Hu, 2018).

Intimate Relationship in Chinese Culture

• According to a collectivistic culture, individual traits and needs are less important relative to those of family and society.
• Marriage is essential (particularly for males), as it demonstrates filial piety and the continuation of family lineage.
• Traditional gender roles promote women as submissive.
• Chinese women marry earlier to avoid being “Leftover;” Chinese men marry later, after financial success and stability.
• Belief that children need to raised by a both parent.
• Domestic Violence (DV) is seen as a private scandal especially when violence intersects with sex.
  (Blair & Madigan, 2016; Lee, 2015; Feldshuh, 2018).

IPV in Chinese Culture

• 24.7% of women reported some form of DV in 2014 (Feldshuh, 2018).
• DV Law was offered in the very first time in 2016. Yet, China still has no national legislation to punish marital rape and sexual harassment (Feldshuh, 2018).
• Practices such as “culture of silence” and “cold violence” enable IPV from legal and social perspective (McLaren, 2016; Rauhala, 2016).
• Chinese women in the US in interracial relationships may experience more difficulty leaving due to cultural shame, language barriers, pressure to be “model minority,” and institutional barriers (complicated court system) (McLaren, 2016).

Clinical Implications

• Practice cultural humility and critical self-reflection when seeing patients with a different cultural background.
  • Ask about culture as it relates to beliefs about relationships, roles, violence, and expectations.
  • Consider offering psychoeducation on IPV under the State/Federal law
  • Focus on helping patients change the dysfunctional patterns of interaction that keep them trapped in the abuse with consideration of cultural context.