

Intimate partner violence in South Asian communities: Exploring the notion of ‘shame’ to promote understandings of migrant women’s experiences

Jenny Tonsing

The University of the South Pacific, Fiji

Ravinder Barn

Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

Abstract

The notion of ‘shame’ is increasingly being recognised as a tool with some explanatory power to help promote understandings about a range of social problems. Through an exploration of migrant South Asian women’s experiences of domestic violence and help-seeking practices, this article considers the relevance of the notion of shame as a unit of analysis to help contribute to the growing theoretical and empirical literature. The article sheds light on the meanings, events, processes and structures in the lives of migrant South Asian women respondents living in Hong Kong. Within the framework of the discussion on shame and intimate partner violence (IPV), the article also identifies the implications for social work practice.

Keywords

Intimate partner violence, migrant, shame, South Asian

Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is undeniably a universal phenomenon and is one of the most damaging and widespread social problems. It remains one of the most common forms of violence against women (World Health Organization (WHO), 2013). While it is true that IPV affects both men and women, research evidence indicates that generally it is women who are more commonly the victims of abuse, and although women may also engage in some physical aggression, it has been observed that violence is more often perpetrated by men against women than vice versa

Corresponding author:

Ravinder Barn, School of Law, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey, UK.

Email: r.barn@rhul.ac.uk

(Espinosa and Osborne, 2002). This article provides an empirical account of the narratives of migrant South Asian women experiencing IPV in Hong Kong. The main objective of this article is to explore the notion of shame and to examine narratives and context within the social and cultural framework in which women experience IPV/domestic violence. The discussions of the findings draw upon the in-depth qualitative interviews with 14 South Asian women who had experienced domestic violence. In our discussion and analysis, we explore the tight connections between shame and other categories including pride, honour, guilt and fear of retribution. We also examine the gendered aspects of shame and the impact of shame in terms of how feelings of fear/retribution and pride may reduce one's ability to seek help and assistance.

Background

The word 'shame' can be traced back to the Indo-European root *Kam/Kem* and refers to 'hiding', 'concealing' and 'covering up' (Karlsson and Sjöberg, 2009). Social scientists have attempted to promote theoretical understandings of the notion of shame with discussions about related human emotions, including guilt, embarrassment and pride (Chase and Walker, 2013). Definitions of shame demonstrate an array of components that rest on the central plank about the fear of the external gaze. Such fear can manifest itself in feelings of powerlessness and belittlement (Tangney et al., 2007).

Kaufman (1985) has argued that shame is taboo in society since there is shame about shame. In other words, the perceived impact of shame serves as a powerful deterrent and prevents individuals from engaging in discussions that are regarded as shameful. Thus, it becomes shameful to talk about shame. In social psychology, shame has been linked to various forms of public self-consciousness and fear of negative evaluation from others (Crozier, 1990). Thus, shame is associated as arising from internal judgement about how an individual exists for the other or the impression they make on others. Central to shame is the idea of being observed or watched by others. It is the gaze of other people from which one feels ashamed. Such actual and/or perceived public scrutiny ensures that the shame experience is kept as private as possible.

Arguably, therefore, shame is a social force that can have tremendous impact on people's lives as it can make a person feel alienated, worthless and stigmatised (Kaufman, 1985). Shame has also been considered both an interpersonal and personal experience (Scheff, 1998, 2000, 2014).

Kaufman (1985) describes the notion of shame in terms of social control utilised by all cultures as a primary socialisation strategy to inculcate and reinforce the integration of personal and social behaviour. In most Asian societies, family disputes are kept within the family. Where collective sharing of shame is institutionalised, shame is often associated with pressure for conventional conformity. Members of the collectivist are likely to take caution not to cause vicarious shame for others, or conversely, to make efforts to achieve honour to be shared by others. In collectivist cultures, shame is a group rather than an individual concern (Wilson, 1978, 2006). Failing to live up to certain standards, norms and ideals of others can be a source of emotion such as shame. Shame has an impact on diverse human phenomena from its impact on the individual to that of culture and society (Cheers et al., 2006). One must preserve practices specific to each community, or if one chooses to abandon, shame may occur if those practices or values are abandoned. In South Asian societies, shame and honour can impact one another, for example, in families where family honour is considered highly important, it can impose a high degree of restriction on the freedom of women. Migrant family contexts may be particularly susceptible to this due to the increased pressure to 'save face' and preserve the unity and sanctity of the family (Raj and Silverman, 2002). Here, the failure to control the behaviour of women (and children) can result in

shame if they fail to live up to the role expectation of the family in a 'foreign' country. In a context where social, cultural and community support may be vital, family honour becomes an invaluable commodity. Memoirs such as *Shame* by Jasvinder Sanghera (2007) and English/Hindi films including *Provoked* (2006) and *Heaven on Earth* (2008) are authoritative depictions of the powerful and pervasive nature of shame and its negative consequences for migrant women. Guilt, self-blame and fear of retribution can all be seen to have associative connections with shame that serve to maintain secrets, deceptions and lies.

Fear of rejection and loss of both familial and community support can act as key deterrents to prevent disclosure and help-seeking. Individual sense of shame is tied to the fear of being ostracised by causing disruption to the family system. Thus, shame operates to ensure individuals avoid tainting the family name and honour to help preserve social standing in the community. In general, one's image or reputation is intensely affected, if not entirely shaped, by others' image of them. Due to collectivism, individual behaviour reflects largely upon the family reputation. And in the case of IPV, abused women risk losing everything if they take steps to leave an abusive situation. This loss is accompanied by the burden of shame. Family honour, in relation to availability of resources, social economic status and support of male kin, can not only benefit women but also be a source of control and abuse (Figueredo et al., 2001). In South Asian cultures that operate with strong dynamics of shame and honour systems, there can be additional sources of shame that can act as barriers to problem identification and help-seeking. Research literature on IPV has consistently reported that shame is one of the many factors that hinder disclosure and seeking help (e.g. Crandall et al., 2005; Fox et al., 2007; Shiu-Thornton et al., 2005; Yoshihama, 2002a; Yuen-Tsang and Sung, 2005).

Notably, the role of shame in the context of IPV is largely understudied. Although shame may be reported as an all too common emotion and an obstacle to disclosure and help-seeking in some IPV studies, it has been inadequately explored as a unit of analysis (Buchbinder and Eisikovits, 2003; Ismail et al., 2007; Lievore, 2003; Montalvo-Liendo, 2009). There is some scholarship that has focused on the destructive nature of shame and the ways in which it targets the very centre of a person's sense of identity and may involve feelings of self-disgust, failure, low self-esteem and disgrace (Rahm et al., 2006; Weiss, 2010). Invariably, the action of shame is to hide and conceal personal difficulties for fear of exposure, stigma and isolation (Frijda et al., 1989). Often, women who are abused feel ashamed of what happened, as being a victim of partner abuse can cause a loss of social honour and respect, thus preventing them from disclosing the abuse or confiding in others (Lievore, 2003). The paucity of research literature in this area has led to the particular focus of this article which seeks to examine the role and impact of shame and IPV.

Research aims and methods

To explore and examine women's experiences of domestic violence, it is imperative to understand their subjective realities (Burr, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). A methodological approach was required that was best suited to the sensitive and exploratory nature of the research which could help provide a rich contextual understanding of the participant's experiences of shame and IPV as told from their own perspectives. As such, a qualitative approach in the form of in-depth interviews was considered the best means to meet the aim of encouraging the active involvement of the participants in the construction of narratives about their lived experiences in their own words. Moreover, the use of in-depth interviews can help to provide a rich contextual understanding of the participants' experiences as told from their own perspectives.

The study was granted ethical permission by the second author's university ethics committee board. The 14 respondents in this study were first-generation South Asian women residing in Hong

Kong, comprising Pakistani (n=10), Indian (n=2) and Nepalese (n=2) backgrounds. They ranged in age from 27 to 39 years (mean age=33.9 years), and the length of residence in Hong Kong varied from 3 to 20 years. Of the 14 participants, 6 were married and the others were divorced or separated at the time of conducting the interview (all divorces/separations were initiated by the husbands except for two). All the respondents had attained some level of high school education, and one a university degree. Six of the women were employed part-time and eight were housewives. In terms of types of employment, they were mostly in elementary occupations (e.g. shop assistant and cleaner).

Participants were recruited through the assistance of four social service agencies providing services to ethnic minorities, utilising a purposive sampling method. However, not all participants were recruited from these social service agencies, and a snowball sampling method was also employed. Initially, these social service agencies referred five respondents who in turn referred nine other women. The snowball sampling method is considered an appropriate sampling method for exploratory studies among members of a vulnerable or stigmatised group who are difficult to locate (Lee et al., 2001; Rubin and Babbie, 2008). Nine women were referred by the first five participants. Ultimately, a total of 14 women who had experienced or were experiencing domestic abuse participated in the study. Following provision of informed consent, participants were interviewed individually by the first author. All information was kept confidential and pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identification.

After potential participants were identified and the initial contact was made, the respondents were reassured of confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and of the voluntary nature of participation. Individual, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews with nine of the respondents were conducted in English with some Hindi, and the remaining five interviews were conducted through an interpreter with consent from the participants. Interviews were tape-recorded with consent from participants.

Interviews were subjected to a rigorous and systematic analysis by reviewing the transcript of each interview together with the field notes, memo and journal several times in order to foster clarity of thought and gain familiarity with each woman's story. Interview data were analysed based on the procedures of the grounded theory outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990). This involves open coding of data in the first instance whereby data are broken down and examined, and then a process of categorising and labelling takes place according to emerging themes or concepts. In the second step, that is, axial coding, the researchers reviewed and re-reviewed the various categories to help make connections between categories. Although open and axial coding occurs in two separate phases, they can proceed simultaneously as researchers attempt to organise and analyse the data.

Findings

The findings of the study highlight the role and impact of shame in the context of partner abuse. As outlined in the previous section, the women respondents in this study were first-generation migrants living in Hong Kong. This was a country context that was relatively new and foreign for some respondents. They had moved to Hong Kong to live with their husbands, and while some had only been there a few years, others reported having lived there for almost two decades. The experience of IPV had resulted in disillusionment, alienation and isolation for these women. Below, we identify the major themes encountered in this analysis.

Shame and silence

Shame is associated with loss of status, including being devalued, disgraced, demoted and dishonoured, and it would appear that one way of dealing with shame is to operate within a

framework of secrets, deception and lies (Gilbert and Andrews, 1998). Hence, to understand shame is to understand denial, silence and secrecy. Importantly, shame as a powerful feeling was a recurring theme and most participants reported similar experiences of shame in the course of their struggles against partner violence. Shame operates strongly against women and their families addressing issues of domestic violence in order to prevent a loss of dignity for the individual and family. A framework in which domestic violence is conceptualised as a private and family affair, one that risks family honour, pride, status and prestige if exposed, serves to maintain a veil of silence. Here, minimisation and denial of domestic violence become common strategies among abused women and witnesses as well as the abusers and general society (McCue, 2008). For women in abusive relationships, minimisation and denial are determined by feelings of shame and loyalty to family. On the other hand, society, including family members, may often refrain from defining the matter as 'violence' and the abusers may minimise their violent behaviour as necessary or 'disciplining'. Crucially, shame serves to silence the victim through a process of concealment of personal troubles for fear of exposure, stigma and isolation (Frijda et al., 1989; Goffman, 1956).

Additionally, the fear of embarrassment and public humiliation plays a powerful role in maintaining privacy and obviating disclosure and help-seeking, leading to possible discrimination and disadvantage (Paul and Nadkarni, 2014). Women expressed apprehension about sharing their troubles with outsiders as the consequences of doing so were feared to be considerable. Such fears were captured in the words of one respondent:

I do not share with others because if I share with someone, then that someone might tell another person who might happen to know my mother-in-law and so on. And the news will spread and it will bring bad name to my family ...

In most South Asian cultures there is a strong emphasis to keep personal troubles within the family, and individual members are discouraged from speaking out or sharing what are considered 'private' family matters. The fear of losing 'face' and bringing shame to the family may hinder women from disclosing the abuse and seeking help (Dasgupta, 2006). This is evident as reflected in the following respondent's voice:

I know if I leave the marriage I cannot go back to [my] country ... people will talk and say 'she is a bad woman' ... maybe she has done something wrong ... it is not easy.

Shame of divorce/family break-up

The notion of shame has been described both as self-shame and avoidance of shame to the family. In this study, women talked about avoiding bringing shame to the family and expressed their reluctance to disclose the abuse to others. As one participant shared,

If I leave the marriage, I cannot go back to [my country]. People will talk, and the shame, the shame on my family ...

In most South Asian cultures marriage is considered central to family life, and a woman's identity and social status are embedded within this framework (Abraham, 1999). With the values and importance attached to marriage and family, women will strive to maintain their marriage and keep their family intact. Past research and studies among South Asians in Western countries have also observed that factors such as stigma of divorce and fear of shaming the family hinder disclosure of

domestic violence (Dasgupta and Warriar, 1996; Prasad, 1999). As evinced from the sharing by participants in this study, they also strive to make the marriage work and put the needs of the family before their own, regardless of the personal costs. As participants shared,

I do not think of divorce ... I want my marriage to work. I want the children to have a father. If I divorce I feel ashamed to my friends and the community ... also I cannot go back my home-country.

Due to the stigma associated with divorce and the blame attached to women for the break-up of marriage, disclosure of abuse and seeking help are hindered. Despite facing abuses, the women in this study do not consider divorce as an option, as suggested from the following excerpts:

It is not socially accepted that women get divorce. It is the reason why women will not initiate divorce. The situation is, whether the woman applies for divorce or whether the husband leaves the wife, the woman is the one to be blamed for the breakup of the marriage ... yeah; women get the blame if there is problem in the marriage ... and shame it brings ...

Women in our study also expressed concern about the shame of being a 'divorced woman with children'. This was perceived as an added component. The fear of being alone, being ostracised, being marginalised, being an outcast was compounded by the fear of being a divorcee with children. In the words of one respondent,

I do not think of divorce or separation as I am afraid to be alone and also because of my two children.

Individuals who are abused usually go to great lengths to hide what is happening in their lives because they feel shame. Such concealment was a common theme. As one respondent said,

It is hard to let other people know about your marriage problems ... you don't want [others] to know, you want to cover it up ...

Shame, disclosure and help-seeking

The notion of 'shame' is a central factor that hinders women in abusive relationships from disclosure and help-seeking (Gill, 2004). Here, the impact of shame is not merely individual but familial, social and communal. Thus, feelings of fear of retribution, guilt, blame and 'keeping face' prevent women from reporting their situation to others who may be able to help or advise. It was not uncommon to hear that even when women reported the abuse to their maternal family, they were invariably advised to adopt a vow of silence and continue with their lives. To speak about domestic violence was to solicit family disapproval, shame and humiliation. The message conveyed to the women was to keep silent in order to avoid bringing shame. Here, shame was used as a powerful weapon and a key deterrent to disclosure. In the words of the respondents,

My mother advised me to keep quiet and bear it ... shame and humiliation ... my family ...

When the abuse started, I shared with my parents. But they told me to bear it and when I shared that I wanted divorce, they said they would not support divorce. My father said, if you divorce, you are dead to me, do not come back home ...

When I shared to my brother about the abuse...he told me to try my best to live together with my husband and to keep quiet. He said such problems are part of marriage ...

Women in this study who were now separated or divorced shared that for many years they deluded themselves and others that all was well with them. Importantly, such women were still living isolated lives as they feared being judged by others. The fear of blame and being labelled a 'bad woman' is palpable in the quote below:

Divorce is not a good thing in our culture. We lose respect from friends and community ... and nobody wants to talk with you. Even if a woman is divorced by her husband, the community will blame her, they will say that she is a bad woman.

Discussion

Our findings reveal a picture in which shame wields a powerful and controlling influence for migrant women living in a foreign country context. A common experience for the women in this study was that they had left their families in their countries of birth to join their husbands. In their new environment, and in the absence of a family network, they reported the existence of a veil of silence behind which they endured the abuse. Many of the narratives suggest that abuse was tolerated in the context of shame. That is, the feeling of shame prevented women from disclosure and help-seeking, it prevented them from initiating separation/divorce and it prevented them from identifying their situation in a way that might be perceived as selfish and individualised.

Given the fear of blame and retribution, our study identifies the difficulties encountered by the women. For instance, even when disclosure and help-seeking are initiated, women report being advised to keep quiet and carry on. One can see how family order and harmony are privileged over individual suffering. Women themselves demonstrate a feeling of acceptance of such thinking in the context of children's 'best interests' and the preservation of family honour, pride and prestige.

Kaufman (1985) conceptualises the notion of shame in terms of power and social control utilised by all cultures to reinforce acceptable social behaviour. In South Asian cultures, shame is intrinsically tied to the fear of rejection and loss of both familial and community support. Individual sense of shame is tied to the fear of being ostracised by causing disruption to the family system. The strong feeling of shame in IPV wields an important influence on individuals, families and communities in this study population. This is made possible principally because individual behaviour is controlled by shame through the norms and values of socialisation in which one's actions and behaviours are influenced by what is acceptable by the social groups. Crucially, such acceptability is conformity in behaviour, and to conform to social groups is to avoid shame (Goffman, 1963).

Our study findings suggest that shame is reflected in myriad feelings, behaviours and practices. These operate at the level of the individual but are intrinsically related to the individual's perception of self, family and community. The strong influences of fear and stigma, within a framework of shame, operate in ways that lead to secrecy, self-blame/self-shame and family shame. Crucially, shame manifests its power to maintain social control. The different components are inter-related and serve to enmesh the individual in a climate in which a perceived dichotomous context of harmony versus disruption instils a strong fear of disruption and disequilibrium that prevents help-seeking. So, for example, a fear of victimisation, of disruption, of loss of status/dignity and of familial/community support serve to ensure that a veil of silence/secrecy is maintained to preserve the status quo. Similarly, the shame that would arise from the stigmatic consequences of disruption, for example in becoming a 'divorced woman' and/or a 'divorced mother of children', serves as a powerful agent of social control to obviate help-seeking practices. As such, women are discouraged from revealing 'shameful' events that may tarnish the family's reputation and honour within the community (Abraham, 2000) and they often remain silent about issues such as domestic

violence to save the family honour. In this study, it has also been observed that women tend to make every effort to maintain the marriage even when experiencing abuse. The shame and stigma attached to IPV and divorce also underpin how they respond to the abuse. Thus, for many women in this study, their struggles against male violence are also influenced by the need to maintain family honour. The concept of shame and the responsibility placed on women for maintaining the family honour are often used as forms of control to keep women from seeking help. This information supports and extends our knowledge into the connection between shame, honour and gender in the South Asian context. It is apparent that the existence of gender roles for women and men whereby women are expected to adhere to the socialisation of gender role makes it difficult for women to openly challenge these hierarchies of gender and status.

The findings of the study not only suggest how shame produces silences but that the different gender roles for women and men also mean that women are subjected to gender hierarchy that are either employed directly by the women abused or operate socially to ensue women abused do not disclose their victimization. Those outside the relationship may also contribute to the construction of shame, although not always consciously. This is especially noticeable in this study in relationship to the woman's family, when others attempt to evoke a sense of shame around their leaving the marriage or seeking a divorce as manifested in the 'shame it will bring to the family' strategy. Most of the marriages were arranged by the family for the participants in this study, and some of the women were married to their first cousins. Women who had been abused found themselves positioned as 'bad' mothers/wives if they end the relationship and 'destroy' the family. Therefore, even if the women were to consider divorce, they were concerned that it would affect not only their immediate family but also the extended family. From the interviews with the participants, it can be observed that they tend to keep silent in order to avoid bringing shame upon themselves and to their family. Moreover, women reported not wanting to be viewed by others as having a 'failed marriage' as that would expose them to the demoralising effects of shame. In essence, shame, both actual and threatened, promotes silence and isolation as the women in this study seek to protect themselves from its painful experience. For women living through abuse, already battered by ongoing processes of disgrace of the self, this can make any attempt to shed stigmatised and shameful positioning an extremely complicated undertaking, risking the attribution of further stigmatised identities and yet more shame. For instance, even response to shame, for instance concealing abuse, can constitute them as not really wanting or needing help.

Our study shows that South Asian women perceive themselves very strongly in relation to others. Since individual behaviour and practices are thought to reflect on their family's status within the community and since they were raised to embrace family unity and harmony, they are usually very attentive that their actions do not bring shame to the family (Segal, 1991). Crucially, their hesitation to pursue disclosure or help-seeking should not be considered as consenting to male violence. Exploring the notion of shame in relation to domestic violence and how this influences their help-seeking may lend some understanding to the complexity of disclosure for the women in this study.

Implications for social work practice

Through an understanding of the process and impact of shame, it is important that helping professionals develop a nuanced approach to supporting women in violent intimate partner relationships. Crucially, helping professionals and service providers working with women in abusive relationships need to address women's experiences of abuse and shame in the context of a variety of inter-related factors including guilt, self-blame, fear of retribution, stigma and family honour. It is

important to address barriers such as fear, secrecy and social control which serve to fuel shame and prevent women from seeking help.

It is vitally important to explore ways to keep women and children safe from abuse within their most intimate relationships. Mary Koss (2000) suggests taking seriously the notion of social responsibility, rather than individual responsibility, suggesting that eradicating abuse of women within their intimate relationships relies heavily upon social responsibility rather than individual change. It is important to understand that a combination of institutional, cultural and language barriers can serve to deter women from seeking help (Tonsing, 2016). The promotion of better understanding of domestic violence and its negative impact on both physical and psychological health of women and their children is paramount. It might be useful to consider development of shame-focused interventions to break the barriers that hinder disclosure and to assist women in acknowledging and naming their experiences of abuse as 'violence', and it is recognised as a social problem within the community (Tonsing, 2016). Thus, it will enable and empower the women to name their oppression and to address their needs. It is vital for helping professionals to facilitate the process of voicing and naming of the trauma/abuse. Many women may feel ashamed to share the abuse as they may adhere to a self-blame and self-responsibility framework of thinking, for example the thinking that if they had been good wives, the abuse would not have occurred. The fear of being judged negatively by others is crucial to recognise. Educating women about the causes and consequences of partner abuse is vital. It is imperative to find ways to encourage women experiencing IPV to consider early disclosure of abuse and to seek help for safety and well-being both for themselves and their children. Additionally, it is also important for social care professionals and practitioners to provide culturally sensitive care to these women facing abuse. Rorie et al. (1996: 95) proposed a cultural competence model when working with abused women. This model conceptualises cultural competence as 'acceptance of, and respect for cultural norms, patterns, beliefs, and differences... (with) self-assessment... and interplay between policy and practice'. Cultural competence denotes an ongoing process in which one continuously strives to achieve the ability to work effectively within the cultural context of the individual or community. Such recognition would provide services that are culturally sensitive and cater to the needs of women who would otherwise hesitate to seek formal interventions.

It is also vital to raise awareness within the family and community through educational workshops and programmes since family and community exert a strong influence on the individual through conformity to traditional beliefs, values and social behaviours (Tonsing, 2016). Most often, the women will turn to the family when they experience abuse. In this study, the majority of the participants also reported that they first shared their experiences of abuse with their family. However, not all women received support from the family. Some of the women were advised to make the marriage work, not to break up the family or to keep silent. In many South Asian groups, the concept of self includes a familial aspect, and an individual's behaviour affects not only that person but also their whole family (Bhuyan, 2008). The family may also experience shame if their daughter gets a divorce or the marriage breaks up, as the family can experience a loss of respect and social standing in the community.

Educating families and community members about the impact of partner violence on women's and children's psychological, emotional and cognitive development may be one way to help families and communities understand the importance of taking steps to end violence and extend help and support to abused women. Another strategy is to enlist the support of family and community in applying pressure so that the abuser will be held accountable and that domestic violence will not be tolerated within the community. Programmes and services can build upon this strength and focus on developing family support intervention which can serve as an important support structure for abused women.

Conclusion

Although the elements of power and control exist in all abusive situations, abuse within the South Asian community is compounded by the influence of societal views and the role of shaming. The escalation of shame by the social constructs that surround marriage and gender roles to position IPV to the private realm will maintain the suffering of victims of abuse. Shame is enmeshed with power and social control, in which the individual behaviour is influenced and controlled to conform to the social group so as to avoid bringing shame. The women in this study demonstrated internalisation of norms and values through the process of socialisation in which their behaviour and practices are aligned with what is acceptable by social group standards. Being subjected to abuse can be a humiliating and demeaning experience and will, invariably, leave abused women with feelings of shame and humiliation which can disempower them, and they will continue to suffer in silence. It is important that those who work with abused women are pro-active in recognising and understanding the negative effects of shame to help prevent the social problem of partner abuse for women and the associated fear, silence and secrecy of shame. The availability of creative and supportive responses and services is vital to help engage meaningfully with victims of abuse to help overcome the barriers that shame can so powerfully impose.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

References

- Abraham, M. (1999) 'Sexual Abuse in South Asian Immigrant Marriages', *Violence Against Women* 5: 591–618.
- Abraham, M. (2000) *Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence among South Asian Immigrants in the United States*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Bhuyan, R. (2008) 'The Production of the 'Battered Immigrant' in Public Policy and Domestic Advocacy', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23(2): 153–70.
- Buchbinder, E. and Z. Eisikovits (2003) 'Battered Women's Entrapment in Shame: A Phenomenological Study', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 73(4): 355–66.
- Burr, V. (2003) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Chase, E. and R. Walker (2013) 'The Co-Construction of Shame in the Context of Poverty: Beyond a Threat to the Social Bond', *Sociology* 47(4): 739–54.
- Cheers, B., M. Binell, H. Coleman, I. Gentle, G. Miller, J. Taylor and C. Weetra (2006) 'Family Violence: An Australian Indigenous Community Tells Its Story', *International Social Work* 49(1): 51–63.
- Crandall, M., K. Senturia, M. Sullivan and S. Shui-Thornton (2005) 'Latina Survivors of Domestic Violence: Understanding through Qualitative Analysis', *Hispanic Health Care International* 3: 179–87.
- Crozier, W.R. (1990) *Shyness and Embarrassment: Perspectives from Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dasgupta, S.D. (2006) 'Women's Realities: Defining Violence against Women by Immigration, Race and Class', in N.J. Sokoloff (ed.) *Domestic Violence at the Margins*, pp. 56–70. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Dasgupta, S.D. and S. Warrior (1996) 'In the Footsteps of "Arundhati": Asian Indian Women's Experience of Domestic Violence in the United States', *Violence Against Women* 5: 238–59.
- Easterby-Smith, R., M. Thorpe and A. Lowe (2002) *Management Research: An Introduction*. London: SAGE.
- Espinosa, L. and K. Osborne (2002) 'Intimate Partner Violence during Pregnancy: Implications for Practices', *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health* 47: 305–15.
- Figueredo, A.J., V. Corral-Verdugo, M. Frias-Armenta, K.J. Bachar, J. White, P.L. McNeil, B.R. Kirsner and I.D.P. Castell-Ruiz (2001) 'Blood, Solidarity, Status and Honor: The Sexual Balance of Power and Spousal Abuse in Sonora, Mexico', *Evolution and Human Behavior* 22: 295–328.

- Fox, A.M., S.S. Jackson, N.B. Hansen, N. Gasa, M. Crewe and K.J. Sikkema (2007) 'In Their Own Voices: A Qualitative Study of Women's Risk for Intimate Partner Violence and HIV in South Africa', *Violence Against Women* 13: 583–602.
- Frijda, N.H., Kuipers, S. and E. Shure (1989) 'Relations among Emotions Appraisal and Emotional Action Readiness'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 57: 212–228.
- Gilbert, P. and B. Andrews (1998) *Shame: Interpersonal Behaviour, Psychopathology and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gill, A. (2004) 'Voicing the Silent Fear: South Asian Women's Experiences of Domestic Violence', *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice* 43: 465–83.
- Goffman, E. (1956) 'Embarrassment and Social Organization', *American Journal of Sociology* 62: 264–74.
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Heaven on Earth* (2008) Director: Deepa Mehta. Canada: Hamilton-Mehta Productions Inc.
- Ismail, F., H. Bermna and C. Ward-Griffin (2007) 'Dating Violence and the Health of Young Women: A Feminist Narrative Study', *Health Care for Women International* 28(3): 453–77.
- Karlsson, G. and L.G. Sjöberg (2009) 'The Experiences of Guilt and Shame: A Phenomenological–Psychological Study', *Human Studies* 32(3): 335–55.
- Kaufman, G. (1985) *Shame: The Power of Caring*. Rochester, VT: Schenkman Books.
- Koss, M. (2000) *Blame, Shame and Community: Justice Response to Violence against Women*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse.
- Lee, D.A., P. Scragg and S. Turner (2001) 'The Role of Shame and Guilt in Traumatic Events: A Clinical Model of Shame-Based and Guilt-Based PTSD', *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 74: 451–66.
- Lievore, D. (2003) *Non-Reporting and Hidden Recording of Sexual Assault: An International Review*. Canberra, ACT, Australia: Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- McCue, M.L. (2008) *Domestic Violence: A Reference Handbook* (2nd ed.). California: ABC-CLIO.
- Montalvo-Liendo, N. (2009) 'Cross-Cultural Factors in Disclosure of Intimate Partner Violence: An Integrated Review', *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 65(1): 20–34.
- Paul, S. and V.V. Nadkarni (2014) 'A Qualitative Study on Family Acceptance, Stigma and Discrimination of Persons with Schizophrenia in an Indian Metropolis', *International Social Work*. Epub ahead of print 8 October. DOI: 10.1177/0020872814547436.
- Prasad, S. (1999) 'Medicolegal Response to Violence against Women in India', *Violence Against Women* 5: 478–506.
- Provoked* (2006) Director: Jag Mundhra. UK: Private Moments Ltd.
- Rahm, G.B., B. Renck and K.C. Ringsberg (2006) 'Disgust, Disgust beyond Description: Shame Cues to Detect Shame in Disguise, in Interviews with Women Who Were Sexually Abused during Childhood', *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 13: 100–9.
- Raj, A. and J. Silverman (2002) 'Violence against Immigrant Women: The Roles of Culture, Context, and the Legal Immigrant Status on Intimate Partner Violence', *Violence Against Women* 8(3): 367–98.
- Rorie, J.L., L.L. Paine and M.K. Barger (1996) 'Cultural Competence in Primary Care Services', *Journal of Nurse-Midwifery* 41: 91–100.
- Rubin, A. and E.R. Babbie (2008) *Research Methods for Social Work*, 6th edn. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole.
- Sanghera, J. (2007) *Shame*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Scheff, T.J. (1998) *Emotions, the Social Bond and Human Reality: Part/Whole Analysis*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Scheff, T.J. (2000) 'Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory', *Sociological Theory* 18(1): 84–99.
- Scheff, T.J. (2014) 'The Ubiquity of Hidden Shame in Modernity', *Cultural Sociology* 8(2): 129–41.
- Segal, A. (1991) 'Cultural Variables in Asian Indian Families', *Families in Society* 72(4): 233–42.
- Shiu-Thornton, S., K. Senturia and M. Sullivan (2005) 'Like a Bird in a Cage: Vietnamese Women Survivors Talk about Domestic Violence', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20: 959–76.
- Strauss, A.L. and J. Corbin (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Technique*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

- Tangney, J.P., J. Stuewig and D.J. Mashek (2007) 'Moral Emotions and Moral Behavior'. *Annual Review of Psychology* 58: 345–372.
- Tonsing, J.C. (2016) 'Domestic Violence: Intersection of Culture, Gender and Context'. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 18(2): 442–446.
- Weiss, K.G. (2010) 'Too Ashamed to Report: Deconstructing the Shame of Sexual Victimization', *Feminist Criminology* 5(3): 286–310.
- Wilson, A. (1978) *Finding a Voice: Asian Women in Britain*. London: Virago.
- Wilson, A. (2006) *Dreams, Questions, Struggles: South Asian Women in Britain*. London: Pluto Press.
- World Health Organization (WHO) (2013) *Responding to Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence against Women: WHO Clinical and Policy Guidelines*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO Press.
- Yoshihama, M. (2002a) 'Breaking the Web of Abuse and Silence: Voices of Battered Women in Japan', *Social Work* 47: 389–400.
- Yoshihama, M. (2002b) 'The Definitional Process of Domestic Violence in Japan: Generating Official Response through Action-Oriented Research and International Advocacy', *Violence Against Women* 7: 339–66.
- Yuen-Tsang, A. and P. Sung (2005) 'The Social Construction of Concealment among Chinese Women in Abusive Marriages in Hong Kong', *Affilia* 20: 284–99.

Author biographies

Jenny Tonsing is Lecturer in Social Work at the University of South Pacific, Fiji. She is a licensed/registered social worker. Dr Tonsing's research is focused on disenfranchised and vulnerable groups in society along the paradigm of social justice.

Ravinder Barn is Professor of Social Policy in the School of Law at Royal Holloway University of London. She is the author or editor to 8 books and has published over 100 peer-reviewed papers. Ravinder writes on gender, ethnicity, children and young people, welfare, and criminal justice systems.