

Emotional Violence Among Women in Intimate Relationships in Botswana

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A Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological approach was used to investigate the lived experience of women in Botswana who had experienced emotional abuse in intimate relationships. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the human experience as it is lived. Ten educated Botswana women who had formal employment and have been in intimate relationships for longer than ten years, narrated their life experiences with abusive men. Extensive interviews took place over a six month period. Sociocultural practices in Botswana emerged as salient factors that contribute to emotional abuse and predispose women to mental illness. Entwined in these cultural practices are issues of age, ethnicity, payment of lobola (bride price), financial standing, change of name, and relocation to the man's residence. Education and employment seem to worsen the abuse. Depression and anxiety are common results of abuse. Understanding how the sociocultural factors perpetuate abuse can assist nurses in the way they provide health care services to women.

Botswana is a country in Southern Africa with an estimated population of over 1.8 million. About 60% of the people of Botswana are of Tswana origin. Although the ethnic composition of Botswana is diverse, only eight tribes were recognized as the major tribes until the late 1990s. The other ethnic groups were subsumed under ethnic elements of the major tribes and were referred to as the minor tribes (Schapera, 1952). This ethnic division was corrected by amendment of the Botswana constitution. However, a prevailing mindset about majority tribes and minority tribes still persists.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES IN BOTSWANA

The country has only one mental hospital which is supported by 13 outreach clinics. The clinics are next to the district's hospital. Psychiatric nurses are responsible for care given in the clinics. In the referral hospital, psychiatric nurses are still

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in a majority but other personnel such as psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, and psychiatrists also render service. There are two other private mental health services in Botswana. One is manned by psychiatrists and offers curative care while the other is a mental health centre that mainly deals with preventive care and focuses on the psychosocial needs of clients.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women in intimate relationships is well documented in the literature. It has been stated that it would be artificial to separate emotional abuse from all other forms of domestic violence (Tolman, 1992). The authors of this article argue that while some forms of violence can be explicit and easy to document, emotional violence is hidden within cultural expectations and has adverse impacts on mental health. Arguments raised in most forums of women in Botswana assume that lack of formal employment and lack of education for the girl-child predisposes her to emotional violence by her partners. The above argument presupposes that women in formal employment would not experience abuse. In the present study, we examine this assumption.

Violence against women is a global issue (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002; World Health Organization [WHO], 1998). Violence may represent a violation of women's human rights. However, in many African countries, including Botswana, violence against women may be enshrined within the dictates of culture and the traditional subservience of women (Erlick, 2003; Letsholo, 2003). Violence is abuse of power and domination and victimization of a physically less powerful person by a physically more powerful person (Eyler & Cohen, 1999). There are several types of domestic violence. For this paper (a) violence will mean emotional abuse or emotional violence, and the two terms are used interchangeably; (b) formal employment means being in a salaried job or business; (c) education will mean attending an overseas school, resulting in a certificate and above.

Predisposing factors to intimate partner abuse against women are complex. Disparities that originate from cultural or societal expectations should be understood in order to reduce the women's vulnerability to emotional abuse and the mental health risk, especially as these factors have strongly interacted to undermine women's social status and their decision-making capacities in the home setting.

Significance

Intimate partner abuse has been studied from different perspectives. A perplexing question is the willingness of women to stay in abusive relationships, which has been attributed mostly to societal expectations and family pressure. Additionally, there is stigma attached to divorce and singlehood in most African societies. In Botswana, as is in other African societies, marriage is between families and not just the married couple. This in itself is a complication that makes women stay in such relationships. Despite the widely accepted concept of gender equality, cultural factors still work against equality (see Sabone, 2009, for further elucidation of cultural characteristics of Botswana). Whenever there is abuse, women still find themselves the victims of such abuse. The findings of the present study add new knowledge in this area and perhaps accentuate the understanding of this complex situation, thus leading to better provision of mental health services.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence is usually perpetrated by men known to the women such as boyfriends, husbands, or even ex-husbands or ex-lovers (WHO, 2001). Such acts of violence may be physical or sexual (Gelles, 2000). Acts of violence are frequently accompanied by emotionally abusive behaviors such as prohibiting a woman from having contacts with family members and friends; ongoing belittlement, humiliation, or intimidation; and economic restrictions, such as preventing a woman from working or having control of her earnings (Alexander, 1993; Loring, 1994). Emotional abuse has been variously characterized as the use of verbal and non-verbal acts to hurt the other person (Shepard & Campbell, 1992).

Researchers have reported that the effects on women who experience emotional abuse are long lasting and worse than the effects of physical abuse (Gelles, 2000; Mechanic, Weaver, & Resick, 2000), and that emotional abuse sets the pace of abuse in the household (Loring, 1994). Intimate abusive partners also prevent women from possessing or maintaining any type of self-sufficiency (Adegboyega, 2005). Social isolation is common in emotional abuse, where the abusive partner destroys or impairs the victim's support network, making the victim depend on him for social interaction and satisfaction of emotional needs (Loring, 1994).

Domination of women by their intimate partners is embedded in the social practices of African culture so that the victim may not perceive domination as abuse (Bourdieu, 2004). Bour-

dieu further argued that emotional abuse among women has become accepted as a way of life. Letsholo (2003) explained that women have always accepted control and discipline from their male partners as a norm in the African culture. This assertion is supported by the research findings of Gibson (2004), whose study was conducted in South Africa. It was reported that abused women do not present themselves as having been abused, but rather present violence as being a measure of love and respect.

Emotional abuse creates feelings of inferiority and worthlessness in women (Loring, 1994). These verbal and non-verbal acts both hurt women and inflict mental harm to them (Shepard & Campbell, 1992). Such acts also adversely impact the woman's well-being (Gondolof, 1988). These two statements are further supported by Loring (1994), who observed that the ongoing process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another may lead to anxiety attacks in the person being abused. This is because the victim's feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics are constantly belittled. Depression has been found to be the most prevalent negative consequence of domestic violence (Dienemann et al., 2000). It was further noted that the end results of abuse make the woman lose her sense of worth and independent thinking (Packota, 2000). Research also has cited financial problems and an uneven relationship as contributors to depressive illnesses (Dienemann et al., 2000; Loring, 1994). Epidemiologic data also point to the fact that women's mental health problems often grow out of entrapment and economic dependence (Miller, 1995).

Most of the literatures on emotional abuse of women has been conducted in Western countries. The authors have not seen any research study on emotional abuse of women in Botswana, and available police reports only pertain to women who are not working and have little or no education (Sebeso, 2005, personal communication). The purpose of this study was to discover the experience of women who are educated and employed yet also experiencing emotional abuse.

METHODS

Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology was the research approach used to gather and analyze the data. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the human experience as it is lived. The focus is to illuminate seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with the goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Heidegger viewed humans as being primarily concerned with an emphasis on their fate in a strange world (Annells, 1996). Heidegger believed that understanding is a basic form of human existence in that understanding is not the way we know the world, but rather the way we are (Laverty, 2003). Heidegger argued that a person's history or background includes what a culture gives a person from birth and what is handed down over the lifespan, presenting a way of

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant	Age of Participant	Age of Partner	Marital Status	Level of Education for Participant	Level of Education for Partner	Type of Job for Participant	Earning Less or More than Partner	Major or Minor Ethnic Group	Ethnic Group of Partner
1	56	65	Married	University	High school	Lecturer	Less	Major	Minor
2	53	58	Married	University	Nil	Attorney	More	Minor	Major
3	50	54	Married	University	University	Bank manger	Less	Major	Major
4	48	54	Married	Technical	University	Company director	Less	Major	Major
5	44	60	Married	Technical	High school	Lecturer	Less	Major	Major
6	40	48	Co-habiting	University	University	Social worker	Less	Major	Major
7	39	50	Co-habiting	University	University	High school head	More	Minor	Major
8	38	44	Married	University	Nil	Engineer	Less	Major	Minor
9	35	40	Married	University	University	Medical practitioner	Less	Major	Major
10	35	42	Married	Technical	University	Accountant	Less	Major	Major

understanding the world. Heidegger viewed the people and the world as intrinsically related in cultural, social, and historical contexts (Munhall, 1989). Meaning is found as we are made by the world, while at the same time we are making this world from our own background and experiences. Heidegger stressed that understanding involves interpretation, and interpretation is influenced by the person's background and history. Hermeneutics is viewed as an interpretive process that seeks to reveal and understand phenomena through language (Annells, 1996). According to Heidegger (1962), all understanding is connected to one's background and history and these influences cannot be eliminated. Therefore, one needs to be aware of and account for these interpretive influences. This interpretive process is achieved through the hermeneutic circle, which moves from the parts of experience, to the whole of experience, and back and forth again and again to increase the depth of engagement with understanding of texts (Annells, 1996).

Participants

Ten participants were recruited into the study. According to Thomas and Pollio (2002), an appropriate sample size for a phenomenological study can range from 6 to 12, depending on whether there is thematic redundancy after hearing the narrations of at least six participants. To be included in the study, the women had to have (1) been married or in a steady relationship for not less than ten years; (2) been clients at the mental health center where the first author works; (3) completed requirements

and received a certificate at an overseas school; (5) been in formal employment at the time of the study; and (6) been willing to participate in the study to share their experiences.

Protection of Human Subjects

The study was submitted to the local ethics committee for approval. A verbal invitation to join the study was presented to women who met eligibility criteria, followed by a letter describing the research study. A copy of the consent form was sent to the women before the first interview. The consent form described that the interviews would be recorded, individuals could withdraw from the study without giving reason, and anonymity of the participants would be respected by using codes instead of names so that data could not be traced back to them.

Data Collection

The participants were interviewed once a week for six months. Each interview lasted for one to two hours. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed with the participant's consent. The interviews took place at the mental health center. The center provided tea, drinks, and snacks to keep the environment relaxed. The initial interview started with the researchers asking the participant to tell them a story about their lives. Some participants began their lives from their primary families while others started their life story from the time of courtship with the intimate partner and ended with what they see as the current situation. All participants took a minimum of one and half to

two hours in the first interview. Some participants came with already prepared notes that they later submitted to the researchers. The initial interviews were conducted by the first author with assistance from the second author. Subsequent interviews were conducted by both researchers. Each interview was transcribed, reviewed and analyzed before the next interview. The participants were sent the transcript before the next interview. The participants shared clarifications and described omissions from the previous interview. Interviewees also were asked to write the stories of their lives as they have experienced them in their intimate relationships.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the circular hermeneutic process derived from the philosophy of Heidegger (1962). The circles were further explicated by Taylor (1989, p. 75), who said, "If interpretations seem implausible or if they are not understood, there is no verification procedure we can fall back on. We can only continue to offer interpretations; we are in an interpretative circle." The researchers read each new transcript to gain a sense of the overall meaning of the narrations, and then wrote a short summary of the interviews. The researchers then read each transcript line-by-line to identify the themes and gradually grouped them into larger themes. The researchers continued to check and re-check one another. This checking enhanced credibility, provided consensual validity, and helped in the grouping of themes into larger constitutive patterns.

FINDINGS

Sociocultural Practices

Sociocultural practices in Botswana emerged as salient factors that contributed to emotional abuse; such cultural practices predispose women to mental health problems. Entwined in the sociocultural practices are subthemes of age, financial standing, ethnicity, and payment of lobola, change of name, and relocation of the woman to the man's family residence. Education and being in formal employment were linked to emotional abuse, and abuse was more pronounced in women who came from minor ethnic tribes. This was summarized by one participant who said it was, "as if I had to pay for being who I am."

Age

All the participants were younger than their partners with an average of five years. Partners told stories of how during their marriages/association they were told to be subservient to their partners in accordance with the cultural expectations. The women told stories of how they could not answer their partners back even when they were humiliated in the presence of other people like friends, colleagues, and even their children. One participant said, "How could I answer back, he is older than me by almost twenty years, he is almost a father to me."

The most intriguing thing about age from the participants was when one of them reported that she was young when they married, and her husband must have thought she would not mature. One participant reminisced about her days and nights of waiting for her partner to come home. She remembered the one time when he did not come home for a week. The participant said she stayed up the whole night wondering whether there had been an accident. When he showed up at the end of the week, he scolded her, as if she were a child, for needless worrying.

Financial Standing

Most of the participant's male partners were earning more than them by an equivalent of USD \$500.00. Participants who earned more than their partners still had the family finances controlled by their partners, making participants dependent on them. One participant remembered that her partner would give her presents that she never got from her own family and would always remind her that her life depended on him financially. Common statements at the very beginning of the relationship were, "I can afford you; you should never get anything from anybody." The participant said that she believed him and treated him like he was all she had. Participants believed that since their partners were better placed financially, they had to submit to their needs and do as they were told.

Ethnicity

The participants who came from a minor ethnic group were punished for it. One of them said her husband called her names about her origin even in front of other people. Participants whose husbands belonged to the minor ethnic groups also suffered. Participants said they were always reminded that they may be of major ethnic groups in society, but in their households they will pay the price for their parents' past discrimination against the minority ethnic group. Participants said that this made them become overly obedient and strive to please their partners. One participant summed it up when she said, "I learnt his native language, learnt how to cook his native foods, and ate them even though I really never liked them."

Payment of Lobola

Lobola or brideswealth was said to evoke rebuke from men, which led to feelings of low self-esteem in the women. One participant summed it up when she said her partner liked saying, "How could you allow yourself to be turned into property and be bought?" More than half of the participants strongly believed that lobola should be done away with. They strongly believed that without payment of lobola their spouses would respect them and treat them as equals. Some participants voiced the fact that they are being isolated from their primary families because their spouses believe that they have bought them through payment of lobola.

Changing of Name

Participants also stated that the change in name is a socio-cultural practice that predisposes one to emotional abuse as a woman becomes part of the partner and some of the participants' partners used this against them. For instance, one of them said: "Every time I do something wrong, I will be told to remember that the name I am using is not mine, and as such I should carry it with respect." One participant reported that because her husband's name is well known in society, whenever she gets promoted at work she was told that it was not because she deserved the promotion, but because she has the "right name."

Change of Residence for the Married Women

Participants said the cultural practice of moving a woman to the man's residence is abusive in itself as a woman loses her relations and friends to join the man at his residence. Participants felt that you then have to do as the men did, even if it is something you do not like. Participants from minority groups were mostly outspoken about this as one of them said, "I was expected to cook every day for my husband's family, even for the young ones, and I found this annoying and belittling. When I tried to raise this with my husband, I was reminded who I am." A woman has to conform all the time to what her husband says or what he expects her to do. Otherwise she is constantly reminded where she comes from or where she originates from (the quotation then clarifies that she has to oblige).

Education

If educational achievement was unequal between wife and husband, then this could be problematic. For example, a participant might have a university degree while the partner had a high school certificate. A participant reported that it caused her much unhappiness because the partner always alluded to it. Her husband always started the abuse with this statement, "You think your certificate means anything. It is just a piece of paper, whereas you are my piece of paper." This statement would be followed by her husband calling her derogatory names and then storming out of the house.

Why Participants Persisted in an Abusive Relationship

The participants gave different reasons why they stayed in the relationship they believed to be abusive. Almost all of them cited the fact that they have taken the marriage vows and for them a vow is binding. One of them said that she knew her husband was abusive, but she vowed to keep the marriage going and did not want it to fail because her parents kept on telling her that marriage was forever. Other participants believed that, with time, their husbands would come to respect them and the situation would change. Other participants reported that they stayed on because of their children. One participant emphasized that she did not want her children growing up like her, with no father to look up to. One other participant said that, apart from the children, her work was what kept her sane. Leaving

her husband would mean looking for a job elsewhere. Participants did not even consider divorce. This was supported by statements from two of the participants: "He may continue humiliating me and controlling my money, but I will never leave him, I know deep down he is a decent man" and "All women experience abuse from their partners, it is the way men are made."

Participants also believed that their partners would someday reward them by being more loving and respectful to them. This was explicit in the fanciful speculation of one participant about her situation: "Even though my partner has gone out to marry another woman, I know he will come back to me someday." This statement was made ten years after the participant's partner married another woman.

DISCUSSION

Emotional violence affects women's health and general well being. Understanding that society has imposed cultural practices that have negative consequences may help Botswana policy makers to look closely at what it is they could do to emancipate women from the chains of violence and abuse. Understanding the experiences of women as a marginalized population would assist the mostly female workforce of nurses who believe themselves to be marginalized in the health care system to change their strategies for fighting for their recognition in that system. In addition, understanding how the sociocultural factors perpetuate abuse would assist nurses in the way they provide health care services to women. For a nurse who also is in an intimate abusive relationship, hearing other women's experiences may give her strength to extricate herself from such a relationship.

Narrating their experiences was therapeutic for the women in this study. In sharing their experiences, which they might not have shared with any other person, the women found a way of reflecting on their situation and making sense of it. For most of the women, they came to accept and find solace in their life situation. Narratives also are useful for opening up possibilities for women to create new life narratives (Draucker, 1998). Narrating a story can provide an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of one's experiences for oneself and improves one's mental health. When stories are shared together, it creates a distinctive pedagogical interaction between the storyteller and the listener. Narrations also can help women make a self-assessment of the cultural practices that affect their lives (Evans & Severtsen, 2001). Banks-Wallace (1998) alluded to the fact that storytelling or narratives can be a tool that assists nurses in providing holistic care to clients. Unless nurses listen to the voices of the marginalized, we are likely to remain oblivious to the harm being done.

The Heideggerian hermeneutic research approach encourages women to voice and share their experiences in a culture that has assumed that its dictates are acceptable and good for everyone. The method used in this study encouraged women to

share their experiences as women living in an abusive relationship with their intimate partners. Narrations became a powerful tool of communicating pain and distress and fostered a realization that it is the cultural dictates that has, for most part, made their partners believe that emotional abuse is acceptable.

CONCLUSIONS

The narratives of these women in Botswana, obtained through six months of interviews, exhibit many commonalities with abused women across the globe. Emotional violence is under-recognized in Botswana. Generally, domestic violence is defined as any home-based assault, like beatings that result in serious bodily harm. Evidence of domestic violence in Botswana is largely based on police statistics. Those who report the violence are mostly persons of low socioeconomic status; those with high socioeconomic status are more concerned about the social implications of reporting affrays in the household that could damage their social standing. Emotional abuse is not understood or even considered as abuse as it falls under the dictates of culture and its effects are attenuated by the ever-present family network of siblings and relatives of the husband, neighbors, and local well-wishers. Emotional abuse is not codified in the Botswana law because it is difficult to define abuse in legal terms in the absence of physical injuries. The study showed that women who are educated and employed suffer emotional abuse. Study findings assist nurses to understand abuse from their social and cultural standpoint. Because the study participants found the interviews therapeutic, provision could be made for ongoing counseling conducted by mental health nurses. Societal transformation through the education of upcoming and existing generations through public and cultural displays would create awareness that sociocultural factors can be transcended, without jeopardising the family.

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