(Un)making the good woman: The process of resilience development and recovery to end partner violence

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Abstract

Women's agency in resolving partner violence (PV) is well documented. However, empirical, theoretical, and clinical understandings of PV in South Asia in general, and Sri Lanka in particular, are limited. This is the first in-depth investigation into women's help-seeking, coping, and social support in the context of PV in Sri Lanka. Its primary aim is to examine women's coping strategies and support systems in ending violence, whilst developing a theory for women's responses to PV. Insofar as it links these variables in a single study, and attempts to develop a theory of resilience in the face of PV, this investigation is also the first of its kind for South Asia. Women's process of responding to PV is examined using a representative sample of types of PV, relationships, PV experiences, help-seeking, and socio-demographics.

Eighty-four participants accessing crisis centres and hospital desks were selected. The mixed methods design included questionnaires and interviews. For analysis, qualitative grounded theory was employed, backed by quantitative analysis of the constructs examined.

The main contribution is a theory developed to explain the process of women's responses to PV. The theory encapsulates the process of resilience development and recovery in responding to PV. It demonstrates that responses to violence occur as a non-linear, five-stage process, with regressions in most stages. The theory posits that critical incidents and turning points facilitate moments of insight leading to insight-mediated personality changes and to progression through the stages. It also demonstrates that participants employ increased resilience to transform themselves, the PV, and the culture they occupy. The theory also demonstrates that coping, support seeking and support giving occur as non-linear processes, whilst cognitive development and women's development of agency occur as linear processes. The findings support the study's hypotheses by demonstrating that various coping strategies

(problem and emotion focused) and support systems (informal and formal) are necessary for ending PV. The study identified the critical roles of socio-cultural factors as obstacles, and children as essential support givers, for women's agency in ending PV. Besides contributing theoretically and empirically to several research domains, this study also addresses service-provision needs of help-seeking women.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis titled "(Un)making the good woman: The process of resilience development and recovery to end partner violence" has not been submitted for a higher degree to any university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in this thesis. I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research conceptualized and written by me. Any help and assistance I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis have been appropriately acknowledged.

This thesis is submitted as a thesis by publication and includes a published chapter as part of the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research), Reference number: HE24NOV2006-M04956.

Parvani Pinnewala

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