

Chapter 13

A Review of International Perspectives on Intimate Partner Violence



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Throughout this brief, we found that the authors from most countries reported similar challenges and opportunities. The challenge between focusing on gender and focusing on family highlighted by the authors from Colombia seems to be a thread across volumes. In addition, a challenge highlighted by almost every author is the discrepancy between services available in urban and rural areas. Whereas excellent services may exist in metropolitan areas, in many cases, there are no services for rural communities or for victims or offenders who do not speak the primary language of the country. Another challenge mentioned by most authors is a challenge of underreporting by women victims. This challenge is exaggerated in countries with male-dominated cultures, such as Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African countries. Related to this challenge is the challenge of developing ways to make information about services available to everyone to encourage victims to seek help. We also found a few unique challenges, resources, and policy implementations among various countries. We highlight some of these unique situations here.

13.1 Unique Challenges

13.1.1 Colombia

The authors of Chap. 7 explained that in Colombia, laws and social policies divide violence that most scholars identify as intimate partner violence (IPV) into two groups. One group focuses on gender-based violence (GBV), or violence based on

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gender inequality perpetrated by a male to a female. Agencies working from a GBV perspective do not offer services for perpetrators or for couples who want to stay together. Instead, they focus their efforts on empowering women by offering services such as empowerment workshops and legal advice, as well as by referring women to mental health services. They also have shelters available for women and their children. Family commissaries work from an IPV perspective and offer legal mediation and refer couples to therapy. They encourage families to stay together and work on their issues. Family commissaries also offer shelters, depending on the evaluation of the case. They encourage mediation, reconciliation, and family therapy first. Each of the services is important in reducing or eliminating IPV. People are not necessarily referred to agencies working from a GBV perspective or to family commissaries; they access these organizations themselves through 24-hr phone lines or by making appointments. In most cases, people contact family commissaries when, in addition to IPV, there is violence against children or other family members, as well as issues related to fathers not providing economic support for their children.

We believe that if services are tailored to the needs and desires of individuals experiencing different types of violence, staff working at these differing agencies need to collaborate and clearly assess the specific issue being presented. The authors of Chap. 7 have published their thoughts on this issue, “In our view of current policies on IPV, there is a need for more specific guidelines on how to intervene when coercion and control are present (or absent), and when violence is primarily unidirectional or bidirectional” (Jaramillo-Sierra & Ripoll-Núñez, 2018). The divided services provide unique challenges in Colombia.

13.1.2 Finland

A second unique issue was described by the authors of Chap. 8, discussing IPV in Finland. Gracia and Merlo (2016) identified the “Nordic Paradox” as being unique in Nordic countries. Finland has one of the highest rates of gender equality in Europe. In fact, Finland was the first country in the world to have universal and equal voting rights for men and women in the parliamentary elections in 1907. Finland also has one of the highest rates of IPV in Europe. This paradox is perplexing to us. One theory identified by Gracia and Merlo (2016) is that there is a backlash effect as traditional definitions of manhood and womanhood are challenged. Another theory is that people are more comfortable reporting IPV because of the high levels of gender equity. However, the survey of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2014) showed lower levels of disclosure of IPV to the police in Nordic countries as compared to other EU countries. One possible explanation for the Nordic paradox is that the higher levels of economic development and gender equality are associated with stronger gender differentiation in

preferences. Thus, the gender equality index is not measuring gender equality accurately (Falk & Hermle, 2018). Of course, more research is needed to understand this paradox.

13.1.3 United States

An important challenge in the United States (US) is the availability of firearms. The United States has the highest rate of gun-related deaths among industrialized countries, with more than 30,000 gun-related deaths annually (Stark & Shah, 2017). A recent meta-analytic study found that if an abuser has direct access to a firearm (e.g., having a gun in the home), it increases the likelihood of an intimate partner homicide by over 1000% (Spencer & Stith, 2020). While the United States has enacted laws requiring offenders to remove firearms from their homes, many firearms are not registered and, therefore, not removed from the home.

13.1.4 China

Two primary challenges were highlighted in Chap. 5. The authors highlight the unprecedented growth of women's domestic violence activism and women's NGOs in China, especially after the fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995. These NGOs have been active in empowering women by informing, educating, and training women about their rights. In 2015, the Chinese parliament passed its first domestic violence law. However, the authors point out the two potentially conflicting objectives of the law: (1) to stop and prevent domestic violence and (2) to promote family harmony and social stability. There is no mandatory treatment for batterers, but couples are encouraged to meet with an informal mediator to help them resolve their issues. A conflicting issue appears to be present in China. Is the focus on family harmony and maintaining marriages or is it on ending violence and supporting women's ability to safely leave violent marriages?

The second challenge the authors highlighted was that despite China having the largest population in the world, in 2009 less than 20 women's shelters were available for victims, and they are mostly underutilized due to a limitation of allowable length of the stay and traditional beliefs of keeping "family face" (Tam et al., 2012). Based on Tam and their colleagues' research, they reported that the length of allowable stay ranges from 3 days to a week. Survivors also worry where they can go after the stay in the emergency shelter since a longer-term shelter is not provided (Tam et al., 2012).

13.1.5 New Zealand

The editors of this brief (Stith and Spencer) are both from the United States. We were surprised at the unique issue present in New Zealand (NZ). The indigenous people of NZ (Māori) represent 16.5% of the population. This is significant in relation to the NZ Treaty of Waitangi—an agreement made between a number of Māori chiefs and the British Crown in 1840—which contains important principles concerning Crown obligations to Māori that are used to guide government policy and practice. While both Australia and NZ have clear laws and regulations designed to prevent IPV, the laws in NZ require any responses for Māori to reflect traditional values and practices. We recognize that the respect and honor given to a treaty from 1840 present a unique situation in NZ and possibly in other countries. The authors of this chapter also emphasized the importance of programs for indigenous peoples. They highlight that the experience of IPV is partially due to multigenerational trauma resulting from the active destruction of culture—resulting in “loss of cultural identity, isolated and fragmented family systems, weakened traditional mechanisms for support, loss of land, language and self-determination” (Dobbs & Eruera, 2014; p. 23)—as well as the imposition or adoption by peoples that formerly revered and respected women of colonizing western belief systems that denigrate them (see also Stubbs & Wangmann, 2017). The authors have clearly highlighted the importance of respecting Māori culture and made us think about how other countries, like the United States, are addressing indigenous people’s needs.

13.2 Unique Resources

India stands out for having many creative and original resources at the state or local level to prevent IPV. Two of the resources, which stood out to us, were Nari Adalats (women’s courts) and Bell Bajao. Women’s courts are designed to involve local women from the community to staff courts. The women receive basic legal information about women’s rights, divorce, marriage customs, dowry, child marriage, and property issues (Kethineni et al., 2016). The idea is that victims of IPV will feel more safe seeking legal help from women. Bell Bajao (Ring a Bell), a nationwide community and media campaign against IPV, was launched in 2008. It targets men and boys as proactive bystanders to intervene and halt domestic violence incidents in their vicinity by ringing the household’s bell when they witness a couple fighting. An evaluation study conducted in three states demonstrated that the campaign effectively transformed bystanders’ response to abuse, both at home and in the community (Breakthrough, 2013). Other programs are designed for specific ethnic groups or rural communities.

In the UK, the Women’s Aid Federation is one of a group of charities that provides safety, assistance, and support to women and children. There are four main federations for each nation in the UK (Women’s Aid Charity, England, 2020).

Shelters are available in all UK counties, and many in metropolitan reflect the needs of women and children from different cultural and ethnic groups.

In Turkey, families are highly valued, and it is a difficult decision to leave a marriage, which explains why 92% of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence from their partner do not consult any governmental or nongovernmental organization (Şener Bozkurt, 2010). There are 143 shelters in Turkey with a total capacity of 3444 inhabitants. Women can stay at the shelter with their children for up to 6 months and may request an extension (Ministry of Labor, Social Services and Family, 2019). Additionally, when a victim of IPV seeks help, the ministry agreed to pay a 4-month or a 2-month fee for childcare based on the working status of the victim.

In **Finland**, the Psychotherapy Training and Research Centre at the University of Jyväskylä in cooperation with several social and health-care service has been conducting and researching treatment for offenders and for couples who want to stay together for many years. It is clear that in Finland, the response to IPV goes beyond shelters and criminal charges, to making a difference in providing treatment. The male offender group treatment, which has been conducted and studied for more than 20 years, focuses on security, violence, choices, feelings of guilt, and masculine identity (Holma et al., 2006). The Jyväskylä research project on couple therapy for IPV was conducted within a cooperative multicenter research network (Vall et al., 2018). Therapists try to empower marginalized voices and give voice to the female client while acknowledging the male client at the same time. Moreover, violent behavior, responsibility, parenthood, and client satisfaction emerged as crucial topics.

In **Nigeria**, which also highly values family, the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), with affiliates in all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, provides prompt, effective representation for IPV survivors. The FIDA state chapters collaborate with the federal and state ministries of justice, serving as an important resource for IPV survivors who lack the financial capacity to pay for representation. The concept of having female lawyers supporting female IPV victims makes a lot of sense.

In **Australia**, the mid-late 1980s and early 1990s also saw a dramatic growth in the availability of men's behavior change programs. These programs typically involve between 12 and 24 rolling group work sessions, which follow an individual assessment, with partner engagement and support.

In **New Zealand**, treatment of offenders is less explicit about the assumed gender of aggressors and focuses on family/whānau violence. The New Zealand Ministry of Justice (NZMOJ) closely monitors program standards for their contracted providers. They have adopted a code of practice rather than a highly prescriptive approach, which has allowed diversity of service development, including a number of Kaupapa Māori (indigenous) providers. Agencies may contract to provide programs for men, women, or children and for perpetrators or victims, but attendance is only mandated for perpetrators on correctional sentences or respondents of protection orders.

While in many ways, Russia has a long way to go in order to eliminate IPV, we were impressed that progressive representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church are taking an active stand on the movement against domestic violence and developing an approach aimed at encouraging zero tolerance attitudes toward violence in Christian families. In many of the countries represented in this brief, the faith community can be an important resource. When leaders of a religious community take an active stand on eliminating IPV, a big difference can be made.

13.3 Laws and Policies

Throughout the book, it is clear that there is great variation regarding laws and policies criminalizing IPV, as well as providing protection to victims. For example, **Russia** currently does not have any law officially criminalizing IPV. Although physical IPV resulting in bodily harm could be prosecuted, it would not be prosecuted as IPV (it would be charged as a crime regardless of relationship status). Additionally, emotional abuse, economic abuse, stalking, and harassment are not punishable under Russia's current criminal code. For many other countries examined in this brief, legislation protecting women from violence and holding perpetrators accountable began in the 1990s. Colombia passed the new constitution in 1991, which initiated a series of regulations targeting a greater emphasis on protection of human rights, including women's rights. The Violence Against Women Act was passed in 1994 in the United States, which made IPV a national crime, provided funding for victim services, and created the Office on Violence Against Women located in the Department of Justice. In the **UK**, the Family Law Act 1996 Part IV was passed that criminalized sexual assault, physical assault, homicide, and harassment. IPV was considered a prosecutable crime since 1995 in Finland.

Other countries started passing legislation to support victims and prosecute perpetrators in the early 2000s. In **India**, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act came into effect in 2006. In Nigeria, the Gender-Based Violence (prohibition) Law in Ekiti State (2011) and the Prohibition Against Domestic Violence Law of Lagos, State Law No 15 (2007), were passed. In 2012, legislation was passed in Turkey providing support services for victims of violence, providing prevention programming, and providing 24-hr monitoring services for IPV. Additionally, in 2011, Turkey participated in the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and signed the treaty promising to protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. In **China**, the first domestic violence law was passed in 2015, making both physical and emotional abuse illegal, as well as introduced the ability for victims to file a restraining order.

Other countries have introduced new legislation and continue to update laws and policies to criminalize IPV and support victims. For example, **New Zealand** recently passed the *Family Violence Act 2018*, which broadened the definition of what constitutes as IPV (e.g., strangulation), increased access to protection orders, and improved communication between agencies. In the same year, the *Domestic*

Violence-Victims' Protection Act 2018 introduced the further protections and support for victims of IPV and family violence, such as providing victims 10 paid days' leave a year. In **Australia**, the *Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Act 2011* (Cth) expands definitions of IPV to include coercive and controlling behaviors.

Individuals in some countries are still working toward enacting legislation to provide further protections to victims of IPV. For example, in Iran, a group of advocates and lawyers have drafted a bill that would criminalize all forms of IPV (e.g., emotional, sexual, and physical), as well as provide more shelters for women in violent relationships. This bill has not yet been passed. In the **United States**, the Violence Against Women Act, an act providing support services and resources to victims of IPV, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking, expired in September of 2018. It was provided an extension until February of 2019. As of 2020, the Violence Against Women Act has not been reauthorized by the US Senate. Other challenges faced by many countries are related to the implementation of the current legislation and policies in place.

13.4 Conclusion

Overall, we have thoroughly enjoyed being able to learn more from our colleagues all over the world about the state of IPV in their home countries. This brief began by examining risk factors for IPV. The more we learn about the unique challenges various countries face, we continue to wonder how risk factors vary between countries. We wonder if family therapists working in Nigeria need to focus on different factors than if they were providing therapy in the UK. As Dr. Knudsen-Martin emphasized in the foreword, this brief continues to leave us with many questions. We have identified many unique challenges, resources, and services from various parts of the world. We have also noted many similarities. Overall, we hope this brief highlights that IPV is a serious international concern and occurs in all societies and cultures. Although countries vary in legal commitment to eradicate IPV, there are advocates to combat IPV and to protect victims in every country. This brief also highlights the ways we can (and should) work together to address domestic violence internationally. Continued legislative efforts to protect victims and support services remain important moving forward to reduce IPV and help victims.

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