



Case Study: Intimate Partner Violence in Peru

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Sarah Moxley recently graduated from a baccalaureate nursing program in the United States. During nursing school, she participated in a 1-month immersion program in Guatemala to educate indigenous people about health issues. Recognizing her desire to continue working in a Latin American country, after graduation she accepted a volunteer position with a nongovernmental organization (NGO) to educate low-income women in a small community in the southeastern region of Peru. The mission of this organization is to empower women through education and to promote economic development for women and their children in the remote villages of the nearby Andes Mountains.

Sarah lives with a host family in a small town near the site of the NGO. Living and working in the small community allows Sarah to become friends with many of the local people within the town. The home where she lives shares adjacent walls with the neighbors' homes. The proximity of homes is representative of the collectivistic culture of Peru and allows for little privacy. It is quite common to hear the family activities of the neighbors.

Sarah has become a close friend of a young Quechua mother, Silvia Puma Quispe, who lives next door. Silvia is 18 years old, has two small children, and lives with an older man, Jorge, whom she plans to marry in the future. It is common for Peruvians to cohabit for several years before getting married. Silvia's family arranged her relationship with Jorge when she was 15 years old. While the legal age of marriage in Peru has increased to 18 years, the age of sexual consent remains at 14 years. Prior to this recent legislative change, the age of consent for marriage was 16 years. The common practice of early marriage is a major contributing factor to young girls dropping out of school early to assume the duties of wife and mother, rather than completing an education.

In the last week, Sarah has been hearing shouting and sounds of fighting coming from Silvia's house during the late hours of the night. This morning, Silvia arrived in the market with a swollen right cheek and a black eye. When Sarah asked Silvia, "What happened last night?" Silvia replied that Jorge sometimes has too much to drink and gets angry with her. If she argues with him, he will hit her or push her to the ground. Silvia starts to cry but tells Sarah it is her duty as Jorge's future wife to make her husband happy and not anger him. He is the father of her children, and it is important for her to stay with him. Because Silvia quit school early, she has a very limited education and no way to support her

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children financially. Silvia's mother and father are poor and have too many mouths to feed to take her back into their home.

Sarah is angry and frustrated by what she hears from Silvia. Sarah has been brought up in a culture where women are expected to be educated, have an equal voice in the marital relationship, and should not be hit by a man. She cannot understand why Silvia would choose to stay with a man who beats her. Nor does she understand why Silvia believes it is her duty to remain in a relationship for the sake of her children when she is being hurt and abused.

13.1 Cultural Issues

Intimate partner violence (IPV) represents a major public health problem in Peru. In 2009, over 45% of Peruvian women experienced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Cripe et al. 2015). Women who reside in rural areas of Peru experience even higher rates of IPV with estimates as high as 69% (Gelaye et al. 2010). Girls are taught the concept of *marianismo* (to model their behavior after the Virgin Mary) that encourages females to be submissive and to accept the burdens of life without complaint. Furthermore, boys are instilled with values of *machismo* (dominance and strength) which precipitates the power issues that often arise in a marriage or relationship. Men are expected to have control over the women in their lives.

Even the state of Peru has perpetuated violence against women in the past. Indigenous Quechua women underwent forced sterilization from 1996 to 2000 and were the frequent victims of sexual violence during the 20-year reign of the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), a communist terrorist group that operated in Peru starting in the 1970s. According to the World Health Organization Multi-Country Study on Domestic Violence Against Women, violence often begins early with one in five female children experiencing sexual abuse in urban Lima, Peru (Devries et al. 2011). While Peruvian legislation is now in place to reduce violence against women, the laws are poorly enforced.

Family values play an important role in the decision for women to remain in abusive relationships. The collectivistic nature of Peruvian culture supports the concept of *familismo* (the importance of putting the needs of the family before the needs of the individual) (Bernal and Rodriguez 2009). Women commonly will choose to remain in a relationship to ensure the needs of their children are met, even when the woman faces tremendous physical or emotional abuse. Only when her children's health or safety is at risk, then a woman may choose to leave the abusive relationship (Kelly 2009).

Economic status plays a major role in the decision to remain with an abusive partner. The illiteracy rate is approximately 20% with an average 6 years of school for women in rural communities (Pan American Health Organization 2012). Indigenous women of Quechua descent are more likely to be less educated and live in poverty in rural areas of Peru. A lack of education leads to fewer opportunities for work outside of the home. Poverty rates in rural areas exceed 50% with extreme poverty being present in more than 20% of the Quechua populations in Peru. Early marriage or cohabitation leads to greater risk of dropping out of school and fewer opportunity to engage in the workforce (Malé and Wodon 2016). Women with limited education and a lack of financial resources are much more likely to remain under the control of an abusive partner. Both low socioeconomic status and poverty are commonly linked with violence (Holtz 2017).

13.2 Cultural Competent Strategies Recommended

Nurses must engage in critical reflection to examine their own cultural beliefs and values and how these values influence the provision of culturally competent care (Douglas et al. 2014). Reflection is the process of "inner awareness of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, judgments, and perceptions" (Smith et al. 2015, p. 28). Critical reflection allows one to analyze personal perceptions to improve future care, especially in situations

where the nurse's values conflict with the values of the patient or family.

Sarah engages in critical reflection when she asks herself the following questions:

1. How do my own cultural values of relationships between men and women affect my response to Silvia's experience with IPV?
2. How do my values of individualism influence my expectation that Silvia will leave her abusive partner?
3. If I were Silvia and based on her worldview in rural Peru, what options would I see available to me to leave an abusive situation?
4. How can I provide culturally competent recommendations for IPV to Silvia based on the resources available in her situation?

13.2.1 Individual- or Family-Level Interventions

- Examine one's own personal values, beliefs, perceptions, and biases related to IPV.
- Encourage Silvia to discuss her previous experiences with violence, including any history of sexual violence.
- Help Silvia to recognize that abuse is not acceptable (Cripe et al. 2015).
- Assess Silvia for signs of depression, suicidal behaviors, anxiety, or alcohol dependency, which are common in women who have experienced IPV (Gelaye et al. 2010).
- Determine if Silvia engages in violent self-defense behaviors with Jorge during periods of conflict. Women who are severely abused are more likely to respond in a violent manner to defend themselves, therefore, increasing the amount of violence witnessed by children in the home (Gelaye et al. 2010).
- Encourage Silvia to participate in a secondary IPV prevention program available through the local NGO to learn about help-seeking behaviors, rather than remaining a victim.
- Assist Silvia to enroll in a microcredit (small loan to promote self-employment) program available through the local NGO if available.

- Provide information in a nonjudgmental manner about the childhood effects of witnessing violence in the home (Amerson et al. 2014).
- Respect Silvia's autonomy to decide whether to stay or leave (Cripe et al. 2015).

13.2.2 Organizational-Level Interventions

- Encourage the NGO where Sarah volunteers to start a primary IPV prevention program to help break the cycle of violence (Gelaye et al. 2010).
- Design an intervention program to teach self-help behaviors for abused women (Gelaye et al. 2010).
- Maintain a database of available microcredit programs or other financial program to help women become more self-sufficient.

13.2.3 Community- or Societal-Level Interventions

- Begin gender equality education in primary school to break the cycle of violence.
- Recognize "gate-keepers" such as forensic doctors, police, and nurses who can affect the outcome of IPV cases that go to trial; therefore, training for service providers is crucial to prevent further victimizing of women who come forward to report IPV (Cripe et al. 2015).
- Start a support group for women who are victims of IPV where they can find and maintain supportive relationships (Cripe et al. 2015).
- Work with community and government leaders to establish professional counseling services and legal services to assist battered women (Cripe et al. 2015), while recognizing that resources will be minimal in more rural, isolated areas.

Conclusion

Sarah now realizes that her initial reaction to Silvia's situation and the expectation that Silvia should leave her partner are based on

Sarah's own cultural values; therefore this may not be the best solution for Silvia and her children. The combination of economic, cultural, and educational factors has a crucial impact on a woman's decision to leave an abusive situation. Simply telling a woman to leave may actually create new problems when a community does not have resources in place to protect or provide shelter to a woman and her children. Few rural communities in rural Peru will have battered women shelters, and many members of the community will simply see IPV as a "burden the woman must bear."

Teaching self-help behaviors, providing psychological counseling, and establishing support groups may be the best choice for helping women cope with abusive relationships when there is simply no place to go in the short term. Helping the woman to become more financially independent may be a good long-term solution to helping escape the abuse. Each woman has a unique situation where one size does not fit all. Finding the right solution involves weighing the risks and benefits to have an optimal outcome while maintaining a safe environment for the woman and her children.

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