

Domestic Violence: Why Women Choose to Stay

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Abstract

Many people make assumption that if a woman is in an abusive relationship, she is choosing to stay and that by leaving, she will be able to stop the abuse. With the growing numbers of women reporting to be harassed in a relationship across the globe, most of us must wonder why women stay in abusive relationships. It is common to hear people claimed, "I would leave the second he raised his hand", "I do not allow it happen to me" or "I would never tolerate with it," when discussing domestic violence. It is easier said than done. To point the finger and make judgement. Only the victims are aware of the truth. This is tremendously complicated issue for many of us to understand, even for those who have been in a violence relationship. Hence, this paper aim to identify reasons for victims to stay while putting their safety at risk.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Abusive Relationship, Stay, Leaving, Safety

Introduction

Various definitions are used to describe domestic violence, sometimes even interchangeably. The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (UN, 2014). The majority of domestic violence assaults against women are committed by men.

Victims are subjected to physical, psychological, social, sexual, or financial abuse (WAO, 2017). According to Idris et al (2018), statistics in 2016 by the Royal Malaysia Police and Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development showed that cases of domestic violence are increasing every year, and has been recorded as the highest form of violence against women in Malaysia for more than a decade.

Why are domestic violence rates increasing despite the numerous campaigns, and law enforcement efforts that have been made? Even though the topic of violence against women has long been pervasive, there are still a lot of questions that remain unanswered.

Literature Review

Under this topic provides an overview of previous research on knowledge sharing in the context of this paper.

Contributing Factors to Domestic Violence

Individuals, families and communities contain elements that have been linked to domestic violence. Social-economic status for instance, is one of the contributing factor for the domestic violence problems. In most Asian nations, the unequal distribution of power between men and women has a negative impact on women's social and economic status as well as on the respect they receive from society (Mariny, 2014). In order to dominate the wife who are more typically categorised as passive, dependent, and maternal, Malaysian society, especially the Malays, adopts the position of men as the breadwinner in tandem with the masculine nature. Gender mainstreaming, which is better suited for women at home and the responsibility of managing domestic matters, was formed as a result of this way of thinking.

While studied by WAO (2017) demonstrated that women are frequently more vulnerable and unable to escape an abusive relationship when they are financially dependent on the abuser. This control that husbands are imposing over the wife can be a kind of social and financial abuse. It also has an impact on the socioeconomic level of the victims, who are financially reliant on their husbands. Hence, the husbands' attempts to dominate the wife may constitute both social and financial abuse.

Barriers to Disclosing Violence Experience

One of the most common questions for anyone who knows someone who is being abused and violently treated at home is why they don't just walk away. This person could be a friend, co-worker, or family member. Understanding the magnitude of the coercive control, the practical barriers to leaving, and the many emotions an abuse victim must sort through can be challenging. Among the reasons why victims stay are:

Inadequate Awareness of Rights

In Malaysia, various groups and individuals have organised awareness-raising efforts in recent years with the goal of raising awareness of the violence against women issues but it was also noted the finding from the research Malaysian Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards Violence against Women is still low (WAO, 2021). Hence, according to Paula (2017), to ensure that women are capable of fully enjoying their rights on domestic violence, awareness is crucial.

Love keeps them from leaving

According to Dutton and Goodman (2022), love has the power to keep people in violent relationships, prevent them from leaving, or keep them from leaving and coming back. It is also arguably one of the most difficult reasons to understand. An analysis responses from Twitter campaign #WhyIStayed illustrates the significant impact that social commentary on love, marriage, and families has (Storer et al., 2021).

Fear Grippped the Victims

Rishal et al (2016), found out that victims feared, might being judged negatively or evaluated by surrounding for examples form their family, friends, neighbours and societies. On top of that, according to Mariny (2014) an abuser will exert control by limiting the victim's access to family, friends, money, and transportation, isolating them and making it more difficult for them to escape. This contribute the victim to constantly experience anxiety.

These barriers are strongly relates with the findings from this study too. As a result, this category illustrates the total of three themes: inadequate awareness of rights, fear gripped the victims as well as love keeps them from leaving.

Methodology

This qualitative study aims to explore why women choose to stay in violence relationship. Purposive sampling was employed based on several criteria, involving individual who actively participate in domestic violence against women campaigns for at least five years. This paper applies in-depth-interviews which based on the interview protocol that were developed according to the study objective and the data has been analysed manually.

Results and Discussion

A thorough literature research and in-depth interview with 15 informants are implemented to study each factor. As a result, a conceptual framework is suggested as shown below, which is in accordance with the literature review and as indicated by the results of this study.



Figure 1: Three main factors why women choose to stay in violence relationship

Demographic Background of the Informants

Table 1

Demographic Background of the Informants

List of Informants	Position/Education Background
Informant 1	Head of Unit, State Government
Informant 2	Head of Department, Federal Government
Informant 3	Social activist, NGO
Informant 4	Social activist, NGO
Informant 5	Policy Maker, Member of Parliament, House of Representatives
Informant 6	Policy Maker, <u>Member of State Legislative Assembly</u>
Informant 7	Policy Maker, <u>Member of State Legislative Assembly</u>
Informant 8	Policy Maker, <u>Member of State Legislative Assembly</u>
Informant 9	Social activist, NGO
Informant 10	Policy Maker, <u>Member of State Legislative Assembly</u>
Informant 11	Social activist, NGO
Informant 12	Social activist, NGO
Informant 13	President, NGO
Informant 14	Advocacy Officer, NGO
Informant 15	Senior Corporate Communication Officer, NGO

Source: Data derived from an in-depth interview conducted by the author

Inadequate Awareness of Rights

Majority of the informant agreed that, awareness about domestic violence and related issues is still low. This make the victims stay in violence relationship. Although in Malaysia domestic violence is a crime and we have specific Act, but low awareness permits them to stay and contributed to raise number of cases as expressed in the following excerpts:

“Raising awareness of the various forms of violence against women is an important part of preventing violence against women but bring awareness is the still the biggest challenge in domestic violence.....” (Informant 2)

“We can see that many women out there still don't recognise their rights on a broad basis for example how the government can assist them when they involved in domestic violence. They don't know the existence of legal aid department and can assist domestic violence cases” (Informant 5)

Sometimes knowing whether someone has been abused can be very difficult. Sometime they decided to keep quiet because they don't aware of their rights. They don't aware about the Act that can bring justice to them...” (Informant 12)

Even after Domestic Violence Act has been implemented, issues on domestic violence never end. That's why we need to continue give awareness by having a campaign especially victims are aware of their rights...” (Informant 14)

“The finding from the research shows that the level of awareness on domestic violence among Malaysian is still low. There's a lot we need to do as recommended by the research for

examples Malaysia should enhance public understanding towards violence and forms of non-physical violence...” (Informant 15)

Fear Grippled the Victims

Based on the research findings, majority of the informants believe that fear is one of the main reason why none of these victims have shared their tales even though there are several campaigns being held to raise awareness on domestic violence. In Malaysia, numerous body are there to support but victims reluctant to come forward. The concerns were deliberate in the following excerpts:

“Victims are too scared to tell or discuss about it because the fear that they might be judged...” (Informant 4)

“They are afraid to come forward because they considered themselves to be lock up, marriage is prison to them...” (Informant 6)

“The victims are afraid to go out from the violent relationship. They may not have their own source of income and can’t survive...” (Informant 7)

“Some of these domestic violence victims feel insecure about reporting. They thought that people might not believe their stories...” (Informant 10)

“Being the victim, makes them feel fear. It is challenging to overcoming fear and seeking assistance...” (Informant 8)

Love Keeps Them from Leaving

Even though they were victims of domestic violence, majority of the informant, agreed that some of the victims admitted love has stopped them from leaving the violence relationship. They were still eager to stay simply because they love their marriage. Their statement was divulged in the following excerpts:

“Dealing with domestic violence cases sometimes very upset. Some of the victims revealed that they willing to stay even they know they are victims of domestic violence just because they love the marriage and they hope that husband will change one day...” (Informant 1)

“The challenges existed because there are many women afraid to get divorce. They still love the marriage and will easily forgive and forget because the wife always have faith that their beloved husband will change...” (Informant 3)

“They fall in love, get married and share a life together for so long sometimes. This feeling make it hard for them to leave the marriage even experience violence...” (Informant 9)

“Usually after the incidence, victim continue to generate strong, passionate feelings towards their abusive partner because of love. The victims still love the family especially if they have children together...” (Informant 11)

“Loves keep the relationship intact and leads to forgiveness, even at the risk of their own safety due to violence...” (Informant 13)

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, findings evidence that inadequate awareness of rights, fear gripped the victims and love keeps them from leaving revealed the reasons for victims to stay in violence relationship. In addition, it can be noted as well, the findings support the aim of this paper. These results demonstrated clearly the need for continued spreading knowledge, enlighten people, and raise awareness concerning domestic violence against women. The results of this study are anticipated to stimulate further research to explore factors that might provide additional information on effective strategies to eliminate domestic violence against women. The Policy Makers, Authorised Agencies, And Non-Governmental Organisation may find the findings too, as useful in planning and effectively creating high-impact programmes that can cater barriers to disclosing violence experience. Supporting victims who are afraid to go through the legal system, marginalised and vulnerable requires a coordinated approach between Policy Makers, Authorised Agency as well as Non-Governmental Organisation. Even by reaching out and letting the victims know we are there for them can provide tremendous relief for the victims, as the world for these mistreated wives can be lonely, isolated, and filled with fear.

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