



International JOURNAL of SOCIAL and HUMANITIES SCIENCES RESEARCH (JSHSR)

Uluslararası Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırma Dergisi

Received/Makale Geliş 14.03.2023
Published /Yayınlanma 31.05.2023
Volume/Issue (Cilt/Sayı)-ss/pp 10(95),1213-1221

<http://dx.doi.org/10.26450/jshsr.3635>
Research Article
ISSN: 2459-1149



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THE EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE VICTIMS IN A TRANSTHEORETICAL MODEL-BASED EDUCATION AND COUNSELING PROGRAM: TWO FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

ABSTRACT

This study draws the framework for an analysis of the changes experienced by female intimate partner violence victims after participating in a transtheoretical model-based education and counseling program. An effort was made to determine the situation of women in the face of intimate partner violence following the administration of an education and counseling program. Based on the theoretical framework, 8 women who were victims of intimate partner violence engaged in discussions in two separate (4+4) focus groups. All the focus group discussions were recorded and then transcribed, after which the data collected were analyzed using the techniques of thematic analysis and discourse analysis. It was seen that the women's behavior and experiences after the education were affected by the various elements of the model, namely, the stages of change in the relationship, decisions about avoiding intimate partner violence, self-efficacy, cognitive processes, and behavioral processes. In summary, nurses can make use of exemplary education and counseling models in institutions and organizations to which victims of violence apply.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence, Nurse, Focus group discussions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The exposure of a woman to intimate partner violence is a serious public health issue that is widely witnessed in all societies (CDC, 2015; WHO, 2017). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one out of every three women globally experiences physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of their husbands or intimate partners (WHO, 2020).

The results of the Intra-Family Violence Against Women Survey (Turkish acronym, KYAİŞ) of 2015 show that 35.5% of women suffer from physical, 12% from sexual violence, and 43.9% from emotional abuse (KYAİŞ Survey, 2015). The 2020 statistics of the Purple Roof Foundation, which serves female victims of intimate partner violence in Turkey, showed that 91% of women are exposed to psychological, 66.3% to physical, 29.2% to economic, and 15.4% to sexual abuse (Purple Roof Annual Report, 2020).

The World Health Organization reveals that counseling interventions carried out to protect and empower female victims of violence are significantly effective in preventing or reducing intimate partner violence directed at women (WHO, 2017). Nurses assume important roles in creating safe surroundings for women who are victims of violence, helping them to avoid violence, seeing to it that they are provided with psychological support, boosting their self-efficacy, providing education and counseling on violence, and otherwise supporting and caring for these victims (Tel, 2002; Özvarış et al., 2008; Tiwari et al., 2012; Reisenhofer ve Taft, 2013; Koci et al., 2014; McLain et al., 2015). Studies attesting to the fact that nurses can provide female victims of violence multifaceted assistance and support have increased (Jack et al., 2012; Tiwari et al., 2012; Koci et al., 2014; McLain et al., 2015), but although there is wide consensus on the significance of studies focusing on female victims of abuse, there are fewer studies on the degree to which such research contributes to the wellbeing of victims (Sullivan, 2011).

The Transtheoretical Model was created by James Prochaska and Carlo Di Clemente. According to the model, behavioral change is less a result than a process. Prochaska and Di Clemente assert that the primary way to facilitate a change of behavior is to identify the stage of change that an individual is in and then employ interventions accordingly (DiClemente ve Prochaska, 2009). In recent years, the transtheoretical

model has begun to be used to help women who are victims of intimate partner violence make changes in their relationships (Kearney, 2001; Burke, Denison, Gielen, McDonnell ve O'Campo, 2004; Ford-Gilboe, Wuest ve Merritt-Gray, 2005; Cluss, Chang ve Hawker, 2006; Catallo, Jack, Ciliska ve MacMillan, 2012). The model serves to identify the stage of change that the woman is in and then to choose the appropriate interventions that will guide the woman in the process of change. In using the model for female victims of violence, motivational talks are held with women to give them confidence, and the possible positive and negative effects of change on the woman's life (on a personal scale and in terms of her spouse, children, social circle, and job) are discussed to create awareness and empower women to help them increase their self-efficacy (Burke et al., 2004; Yaman, 2009; Çiçek, Sözbir & Erenel, 2019).

A look into the research in Turkey conducted on intimate partner violence committed against women indicates that the studies in the literature are focused on the reasons for intimate partner violence, impacting factors, the outcomes of violence and attitudes toward the issue of women exposed to violence (Aslan, Lofçalı, Uğur ve Tuğlu, 2005; Tunçel, Dündar ve Peşken, 2007; Şahin, Yetim ve Öyekçin, 2012; Kanbay, Işık, Yavuzaslan ve Keleş, 2012; Sabancıoğulları, Taşkın, Ar ve Çakmaktepe, 2016). Studies on education and counseling directed at victims of violence and qualitative studies are few (Çelik, Türkoğlu, Apay, Aydın ve Pasinlioğlu, 2015; Kaplan ve Kömürçü, 2017; Çiçek et al., 2019). Based on these findings, the aim of the present study is to describe how women who are victims of intimate partner violence describe their emotions, thoughts and experiences after attending a transtheoretical model-based training and counseling program.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study Design

The study was conducted with women who applied to the Bureau of Investigation for Family Protection and Crimes of Violence Against Women at a Court of Justice over the period March-September 2018. Data for the study were collected through semi-structured interviews. The study sample consisted of 8 victims of intimate partner violence who had participated in the transtheoretical model-based education program. The education and counseling program given to the women as part of the research treated topics such as gender, intimate partner violence against women, healthy communication in the family, legal mechanisms to fight against intimate partner violence, self-efficacy and problem-solving. The education and counseling program was set up and implemented on the basis of the stages of change stipulated by the transtheoretical model. The women in the study were individually interviewed before the start of the education and counseling program. An interview was held with each woman in a safe environment where they were informed about the research and the program. After it was determined which stage of change each individual was in, the women were provided with education and counseling approaches that suited their needs in their particular stage of change. In the fourth and fifth months after the education, the women were further supported with motivational discussions. In the sixth month after the education and counseling, the eight female victims of violence were engaged in focus groups to discuss such matters as what they experienced in the last six months, what they had gained from the education and counseling about violence, the process of their empowerment, and whether or not they experienced the violence again. To be able to make a comparison, two separate focus groups were created with four individuals in each group. The discussions continued for 60-90 minutes and were held in the meeting rooms of the Izmir Courthouse. All the discussions were recorded, with permission from the participants, with two separate voice recorders and notes were taken. The researcher saw to it that the female victims of violence met and got acquainted with each other. After the introductions, semi-structured discussions were conducted by initiating questions addressing the women.

In collecting the data for the study, the researchers developed a questionnaire on the women's demographic features and a semi-structured interview form in line with the transtheoretical model. The open-ended questions on the interview form were as follows:

- 1- Violence is a subject that comes up a lot today. Everyone has a different definition of violence. How would you define it? What would you call violence?
- 2- What are the types of events that constitute violence, what types of violence are there?
- 3- Did you experience any violence in the last six months? What kind of violence did you experience?
- 4- How beneficial was the education and counseling you received on violence in combating violence? Can you tell me something about that?

- 5- What were some positive and negative changes in your relationship in the last six months?
- 6- What has changed in your life since you began to fight against violence?
- 7- What was the most important thing in your life in the last six months that you succeeded in doing for yourself?
- 8- What is the most unfavorable event that you lived through in the last six months?
- 9- How did you feel when you found persons from whom you could get information and counseling about violence?
- 10-What do you think must be done to prevent intimate partner violence?

Inductive reasoning was used in the analysis of the data. The written material and the data on the recording device were compared in order to complete the missing parts and the recording was transcribed. The two researchers divided the data obtained from the interviews into six groups in the form of themes that were identified in line with the transtheoretical model. Numbers and percentages were used in the analysis of the descriptive characteristics of the female victims of intimate partner violence.

3. RESULTS

The mean age of the female victims of violence was 36.7 ± 1.71 years. Of the women, 50% were in middle school, 37.5% were in high school, and 12.5% were primary school graduates. Among the women, 75% were married; 25% were unemployed. It was seen by examining the data by income level that the income of 12.5% of the female victims of violence was less than their expenditure, the income of 75% was equal to expenditure, whereas 12.5% had income that was greater than their expenditure.

The main themes and subthemes that pertained to the eight women who were victims of intimate partner violence are shown in the table below, together with the findings recorded for each theme (Table 1).

3.1. Changes of Change in the Relationship

Three of the women who were in the contemplation stage according to the model stated that they became fearful when they applied to the court system for the first time prior to the education and counseling program.

"I had never been in court before and going to the police to give them-what do you call it? My testimony was very bad of course. All of a sudden, my future flashed before my eyes. The uncertainty. I was scared." (Participant 1, Age 38, High School graduate)

"I was very scared, I was afraid he would get angry, get even more angry, I was just so scared. Because he was doing what he was doing as a result of his anger. He could have gotten angrier that I came here (to court) and gotten into a rage and caused more harm." (Participant 3, Age 39, Middle School graduate)

"I applied (to the court), and that's when it all started. The divorce case is still in progress. You experience violence from someone you would never have believed could have done this. It's a bad thing, not a good thing at all. You get scared. You get scared that he'll sneak up behind you." (Participant 8, Age 34, Primary school graduate)

Four of the women who were in the maintenance stage according to the stages of change in the model stated after the education and counseling program that they had succeeded in overcoming many problems in their lives.

"I used to think about whether I could go on, what would I do if I separated, how would I live, where would I work, how would I keep the children under control, and then I realized that I could do all of this by myself. It's so good, it looked all bad to me then, but I went through a very calm divorce. I was able to succeed at it all. You can succeed after all." (Participant 3, Age 39, Middle School graduate)

"And I'm saying I'm so glad I did this, I'm so glad I came here (to court). I'm glad I stood up to it all. Even though he's still not leaving me, even if he doesn't leave me, I will succeed." (Participant 4, Age 48, Middle School graduate)

“Now, after knowing someone like this—someone bad like this, you start to think that you’ll never trust anybody again. But I don’t know, I got custody of my daughter, the apple of my eye, and that’s my greatest accomplishment.” (Participant 6, Age 20, Middle School graduate)

“I haven’t really accomplished anything but if you look at it, my biggest achievement is trying to stand on my own two feet. I’m still trying to succeed.” (Participant 8, Age 34, Primary school graduate)

3.2. Decisions about Staying Away from Intimate Partner Violence

One of the women stated after the education and counseling program that she was successful in continuing her relationship.

*“You know, as I’m talking to you about whether it (**the education and counseling program**) should be like this or like that, I think I’ll wait a little while longer. I’ll do this... When my husband says something now, I used to just say, never mind. I’d take my bag and head off but then I felt bad, and I came back with a smile on my face. I don’t know how long it’ll last... (**smiling**)” (Participant 4, Age 48, Middle School graduate)*

One of the women who had divorced her husband after the education and counseling program said that she felt much calmer now.

“I did the right thing. I feel much better, I’m at ease, I’m happy. There’s no one swearing, no one making a face, no one throwing this or that out of anger. I never felt like doing anything for someone who did that, but I felt like I had to.” (Participant 7, Age 54, Middle School graduate)

3.3. Self Efficacy

Three of the women said after the education and counseling program that they were not as afraid of their partners as before.

*“There’s no point in being scared. So... (**smiling**) The world doesn’t only belong to men.” (Participant 2, Age 35, High School graduate)*

*“I would hear him say ‘Did anything happen?’ And I would get scared. And I would say, ‘No, it’s not like that.’ I couldn’t speak with anybody just to chat. I had resigned myself to loneliness (**crying**). Now when something happens, I react. And then he says, ‘The government gave you this opportunity—you wouldn’t have talked back before, you couldn’t have talked back as a woman before.’ And I say to him, ‘What’re you talking about, if you hurt me, of course, I’ll speak up. I couldn’t do this in the past.’” (Participant 4, Age 48, Middle School graduate)*

“I tell everyone not to fear their husbands. Everybody can find shelter in the laws of the State.” (Participant 6, Age 20, Middle School graduate)

Four of the women stated that they felt more self-confident in their lives and relationships after attending the education and counseling program.

*“I have to say first that I always had self-confidence. And if anything happens from now on, this is where I’ll come (**the court**). It’s not a problem.” (Participant 2, Age 35, High School graduate)*

“Everybody has some self-confidence, but you can lose it when you’re up against violence.” (Participant 6, Age 20, Middle School graduate)

*“I used to just take my bag and go. Now I don’t do that. Now you have confidence, he says (**my husband**) whenever something happens, I tell him I’m going to court and he backs off.” (Participant 4, Age 48, Middle School graduate)*

*“When I applied here (**to the court**), I was still living in Izmir and I wasn’t working, as I told you before. I was looking for a job and I had confidence that I could do it, I could move, and I could get a divorce—I did have confidence. I did it all.” Participant 5, Age 26, High School graduate)*

3.4. Cognitive Processes

Four of the women who attended the education and counseling program said that they could now recognize other women who were experiencing the same kind of violence and tried to help them.

*“I tell these women who are victims (**about my experiences**). I even say to the women at the workplace who are very serious victims... I tell them, ‘You have such and such rights.’ I am*

definitely not in favor of divorce, but I try to guide women about their rights. If she's getting beaten, I tell her, 'You have a right to go to the prosecutor's office, you can get a restraining order. I explain it to her. First I tell my own sister. I tell her I'll do what I can to help you, I'll even go with you. We are not condemned to suffer from violence because we're women.' (Participant 2, Age 35, High School graduate)

"For instance, there's a woman living behind (me) and it's been going on for two months now, it's only a few days in the month when it doesn't happen. You know how sometimes people quarrel and you can hear their voices. Stop, don't, don't do that, don't set it on fire, all the way up until three in the morning. She's being tortured. You call the police, it's just a domestic fight, they say and the woman's face is covered with blood and no one does anything. We called the police three or five times." (Participant 3, Age 39, Middle School graduate)

"The woman, some women have this attitude, they're actually happy to be beaten up, they want their husbands to be with them no matter what. One time, this woman was pregnant and her husband had made her fall down the stairs, she was about 5 months along, and I don't know how I rushed out of my house and ran to her to take her to the hospital. I told her, 'Ayşe, you're not going to take back your complaint. (She says) I can't look after a child without the father!' That's not right. I was there when she filed the complaint about her husband and the next day, she took it back." (Participant 5, Age 26, High School graduate)

"I even tell my mother at home that when my father raises his voice (smiles), they should stop, there are people around. We need to speak up." (Participant 8, Age 34, Primary school graduate)

Three of the women who had attended the education and counseling program said that the best place to go in the event of violence is the prosecutor's office.

There, you have the law of the State behind you, you can go to court (prosecutor's office) and you have someone to listen to you." (Participant 1, Age 38, High School graduate)

"You know, there are some people who watch Müge Anlı's (a popular daytime investigative TV host) program and they cry over it, I think that's so stupid. It's really ridiculous. Maybe they can find missing persons but that's not a place to talk about violence. It's not for me. This is the place (prosecutor's office). Or the police station. Or the gendarmerie but not TV." (Participant 2, Age 35, High School graduate)

"I came to claim my rights. I came because I knew I wanted to finish it. I came to finish it. I came here (to the prosecutor's office) because I can't take it any longer." (Participant 3, Age 39, High School graduate)

3.5. Behavioral Processes

Eight of the women who had attended the education and counseling program stated that they benefited from the program.

"I'm very happy to have met somebody like you. Because I like you. Gaining self-confidence was the thing that supported me the most. You know, when you hear somebody speaking about psychology and you tell that person your troubles and you feel that you're being understood... In all my life, I received the best support from my mother, my father and now you." (Participant 1, Age 38, High School graduate)

"I want a good life, a good future. In all my life, you're the person that has supported me the most." (Participant 2, Age 35, High School graduate)

"For instance, the divorce took such a long time in court. Waiting outside like that. My mother kept calling me to ask, yelling loudly, 'Aren't you divorced yet? You called me and asked me, 'How's it going? You must be tired, it's taken so long, are you OK?' Your saying that there—I feel like crying, I was so touched. However bad it was, this is still a marriage that you're ending. That kind of support is such a beautiful thing. It gives you strength. This is what I experienced, and it's been good. Good, very good for me. I hope there will be more programs that address a lot more women. So that you can reach out to more women like us." (Participant 3, Age 39, Middle School graduate)

I felt really supported, and I benefited a lot (from the education and counseling program). (Participant 4, Age 48, Middle School graduate)

Every woman should really attend a course with psychologists, and pedagogues, every woman should become more conscious. But even if a woman is conscious, it still doesn't work—everyone thinks she understands but she doesn't. We talked with you about this before—if a marriage isn't going well, the violence isn't just physical, it's psychological, sexual. I think a woman should attend a program like this once a year because with the pressure she's under—from the community, the neighbors, the husband, the children, the mother-in-law, the sister-in-law—it's really hard for a woman to remain standing in this world. It's especially hard in this day and age; a woman should come to the program once a year. I was really well supported.” (Participant 5, Age 26, High School graduate)

“I attended the program. The first thing I learned was not to be afraid of anybody; the second is that you can succeed at anything if you really want to.” (Participant 6, Age 20, Middle School graduate)

“I met all of you. We talked about and had a dialogue about the same things. I feel completely comfortable, free, and determined, I really feel that way. I used to share what we discussed with my daughter. In fact, I was sick last night but she told me to go anyway (to the session), definitely go. She said it would do me good. She really said that, so I said okay. I got up in the morning and took two painkillers before I left home and so I came. Thank you very much for your support. I hope this will continue. These vulgar people can't terrorize everybody like they do at home, they can't show off like that. That's what we want—men and women, we're all human. Nobody deserves to be beaten up. They don't deserve to be cursed at. If they don't like a person, if that person is nothing in their eyes, then get a divorce! That's what they do, they belittle you, insult you, offend you, they do everything in their power, every dirty, vulgar thing, every threat to avoid getting a divorce. I don't want such things to happen anymore.” (Participant 7, Age 54, Middle School graduate)

*“Your (**the interviewer's**) support is so important. My father was the first to support me, I wish I'd told my father about what I was going through; maybe I would have come to this point sooner. Because I didn't speak up (**2 seconds of silence**) my first support was my family, and then you (**the interviewer**). Just coming here to relax, to be able to speak, to tell my story, to cry if need be. It's a wonderful thing, women need to have some support like this behind them (**the education and counseling program**). It's wonderful to have the rule of law supporting women. I tell everybody around me, I tell everybody in my circle of friends.” (Participant 8, Age 34, Primary school graduate)*

4. DISCUSSION

Brown asserts that the transtheoretical model does not only provide an opportunity for a woman to change, but because of the impact of this change on the relationship, the relationship will also go through a change (Brown, 1997). Our study showed that female victims of intimate partner violence who were at the start of the stages of change felt emotions such as fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Similar studies also have pointed to the feelings of fear and anxiety that women experience at the beginning of the process of change (Daly, 2004; Burke et al., 2004; Chang et al., 2006; Reisenhofer ve Taft, 2013). The women in the study said that they had put a stop to the violence of their own volition, they were eager to make a change, stand on their own, and succeed. Similar results were reported in a 2018, who described the experiences of women in the process of divorce (Larence, Garrison ve Seeley, 2018). The women who were victims of violence in our study revealed in their statements that they had considered the pros and cons of their relationships. They said that they had made an effort to continue the relationship on the one hand, seeking to maintain it because of the children, and on the other, that they either left their husbands or avoided contact with them due to the risk of exposing themselves to violence once again. They expressed feelings of calm and comfort when they were away from their husbands. It was reported in a study in 2006, in which the researchers used the Transtheoretical Model to draw relationship maps of victims of violence, that the women shared similar statements and chose either to stay or to leave. Some women left their spouses due to the violence in the relationship (Chang et al., 2006).

Among the women's statements regarding gaining self-efficacy were expressions that confirmed their self-confidence and their overcoming the fear they felt toward their husbands. Similar studies have also

reported that female victims of violence gain self-efficacy and become able to function on their own during the process of change (Zink, Elder, Jacobson ve Klostermann, 2004; Chang et al., 2006; Catallo et al., 2012; Reisenhofer ve Taft, 2013).

Women exposed to violence have said that the education and counseling program they attended served to raise their consciousness, make them feel stronger and more determined, feel the strength of the law in their pursuit of asserting their rights and that the program provided them with guidance. Other studies have revealed similar results (Zink et al., 2004; Reisenhofer ve Taft, 2013; Larance et al., 2018; Çiçek et al., 2019).

4.1. Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of a nurse-led education and counseling program based on the Transtheoretical Model on the process of change experienced by women who are victims of intimate partner violence. We found, based on the women's own statements, that they felt stronger, had more self-efficacy and awareness, and ultimately chose to live a life without violence.

4.2. Recommendations

- A program of nurse-led continuous education and counseling for victims of domestic violence should be set up in units under the auspices of the Courts;
- One-on-one interviews should be conducted by experts in the field with victims of violence, with telephone follow-ups;
- A multidisciplinary educational approach should be adopted by those who work with female victims of violence applying to law enforcement, the courts, shelters, women's advisory centers, and guesthouses;
- Protocols should be put into place to ensure that women facing violence are directed to the appropriate departments;
- New education and counseling programs should be developed to create awareness and, gleaned from women's own statements, to determine the protective factors that will empower women;
- Making this study available for application in other provinces and ensuring data-sharing with the Ministry of Justice.

4.3. Limitations of the Study

The small size of the study sample and the fact that the study was only conducted at a courthouse in Izmir were limitations of the research.

4.4. Acknowledgments

We thank all the women who agreed to participate in the study.

Funding: None

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests: None declared.

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