

Blanketed By Tradition, Empowered By Support: Riwa's Story

Dramatization by the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
(Formerly, Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence)
Based on an exercise developed by Ellen Pence
Credited to the Duluth Project and Ellen Pence
Adapted by Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

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- You will need:**
- Eleven blankets (or shawls) – the blankets produce a more dramatic effect.
 - Eleven individuals, mostly women, some men.
 - Riwa
 - Narrator

- The scene:**
- 1 A person representing a battered woman sits in a chair in front of the audience, she plays Riwa.
 - 2 Eleven characters stand in a circle, each holding a blanket, facing outward, with their backs to Riwa.
 - 3 The Narrator stands outside the circle, to the side and reads the script of Riwa's story. *The entire script is read by the Narrator only.*
 - 4 The Narrator pauses after each statement from Riwa's story.
 - 5 After each statement, one character steps forward and places a blanket over Riwa.
 - 6 Then the reversal begins. After each statement, each character removes a blanket from Riwa and then faces into the circle towards Riwa.
 - 7 The exercise is followed by audience discussion.

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants see the structures that can cause harm and how they can be different – contributing to making change in their work.

Cast of Characters

Riwa (seated in the middle)

Narrator (stands to the side, outside the semi-circle)

Blanketing

(Characters in order of appearance)

- 1 Husband
- 2 Her mother
- 3 Her father-in-law
- 4 Clergy (male)
- 5 Community leader (male)
- 6 Child (youngest looking person possible)
- 7 Auntie
- 8 Grandmother (oldest looking person possible)
- 9 Friend
- 10 Uncle

Empowering

(Characters in order of appearance)

- 10 Uncle
- 9 Friend
- 8 Grandmother
- 7 Auntie
- 6 Child
- 5 Community leader
- 4 Clergy
- 3 Her father-in-law
- 2 Her mother
- 1 Husband

Script

(The entire script is read by the Narrator only.)

Riwa is thirty-five years old. She has been married for 16 years to Lee. She has two children ages seven and sixteen. The 4 of them and their extended family have been in the U.S. for about 5 years. *(Pause)*

As the family and their community struggle to adapt to a new culture; Riwa, like many women, carries the burdens of blame.

Blanketing

1 Husband

Lee has just been let go from his job because of the poor economy.

“Oh stop your crazy crying – so I got drunk and forced myself on you last night; blame it on stress or machismo, I don’t care...What are you going to do about it?”

(Pause, wait for one person to step forward and cover Riwa with a blanket. This is repeated each time after the narrator reads the part of a character.)

2 Her mother

Riwa confides to her mother that Lee keeps yelling that he’s the man of the household and she’s useless; but he actually doesn’t contribute to the household and even the kids are now scared of him.

“Try harder Riwa. You were always the most stubborn one of all your sisters, their marriages are all fine, they listen to their husbands.”

3 Her father-in-law

Riwa’s father-in-law is living with them temporarily.

“Don’t whine so much Riwa it’s not my son’s job to help you look after the kids. He must have a good reason for not allowing you to drive the car...you are harassing him too much, asking him to drop them at school, and now, you want him to drop you at work too.”

4 Clergy

Riwa tells the pastor she is worried that Lee is gambling and spending money on other women.

“He’s the bread-winner; he can do what he wants with his money. You have to submit to his will – even God says so. If you pray harder, things will work out.”

5 Community leader

Community leaders know the family well.

“Lee is an important member of the community; he was a big hero in the war. You got him arrested for domestic violence Riwa; you have no shame, spoiling our name like that. ”

6 Child

Riwa's 7 year old son is hungry.

"Ma, get up, get up, cook me breakfast – I don't care if you are feeling sick. Papa says morning sickness is just lazy women pretending, so they can sleep late."

7 Auntie

Because Riwa's auntie had gotten pregnant when she was 14, Riwa thinks she'll understand and confides in her that Jasmine's boyfriend is pressuring her to have sex.

"The problem is that you are not controlling that teenage girl properly. I can't believe you are letting her play basketball like those American girls. If she gets pregnant, it will be your fault."

8 Riwa's Grandmother

Riwa's grandmother, according to her cultural traditions, married at a young age.

"You should be teaching my grand-daughter to cook and clean. Really Riwa, you are supposed to find her a husband, not a college scholarship. So what if she is an excellent student, a woman has to be prepared for marriage."

9 Friend

Riwa's friend is angry at her because she took out a small loan from the bank.

"Women are not supposed to start their own business. Just because you were a bank manager back home doesn't mean you know anything about finances."

10 Uncle

Riwa's uncle has come over for dinner.

"You know how everyone thinks your aunt is so nice – but let me tell you my wife is really dumb. She even goes to this Women for Change group – ha, as if women can change things. We men don't like change; you women come here and think you are equal to us."

Narrator asks Riwa: "Riwa, why do you put up with all this? Why don't you just work on your attitude?"

(The actor playing Riwa under the blankets replies non-verbally by attempting to move but cannot get up because of the weight of the blankets.)

Empowering

(The Narrator pauses after reading each of the next statements. Then each character steps forward and removes a blanket, and faces into the circle.)

10 Riwa's Uncle

"Your aunt is a clever woman; she speaks her mind so clearly – just like the woman prime minister of our country. Of course men and women are different, but I'm so proud when she tells community leaders about the Women for Change group working to help our communities understand that equality is not a threat, it's good for all of us."

- 9 Friend**

“Hey, I was blown away when you told me that women spend over 90% of their income on the family, and men spend about 42%; they spend the rest on themselves. Wow! I have a lot of respect for you Riwa, your business is going to succeed big time.”
- 8 Riwa’s Grandmother**

“You are right Riwa to encourage my grand-daughter to go to college instead of getting married like we all had to. You know something, I always secretly dreamed of being an architect, but everyone would have laughed at me.”
- 7 Auntie**

“I wish I had talked to Jasmine when you asked for my help...you know, I wish someone had talked to me before I got pregnant at 14. Why can’t the men in our community teach boys that preventing pregnancy is their responsibility?”
- 6 Child**

“Mama, will you be OK? Is the baby in your stomach making you feel sick? I’ll ask Papa to make breakfast, and even though I’m only 7 years old, I know how to help him.”
- 5 Community leader**

“Because I’m a leader in our community; I used my authority to tell Lee he does not have our permission to treat you like this, even if our culture says it’s OK. If he wants our respect, he has to earn it back. You did not get him arrested, his behavior did.”
- 4 Clergy**

“As your pastor I’m here to support you, Riwa. I talked to Lee to remind him that in marriage it is also his duty to be a responsible spouse and father instead of mistreating you and the children. Being traumatized in the war back home is no excuse for gambling or womanizing.
- 3 Riwa’s father-in-law**

“I feel ashamed when I see my son doesn’t share childcare and housework with you, I know you are also tired after working two jobs. In America, when I see men pushing their kids in a stroller, or holding and feeding them; I wish I could have done such things...there’s something wrong with our culture teaching men they are strong if they hit their wives and kids, but weak if they cook dinner for them.”
- 2 Her mother**

“Listen my dear daughter, you do try so very hard to take care of all of us, it’s Lee who doesn’t. Your stubbornness is your strength. If I was in your shoes, I don’t know if I can carry all the burdens you do and still stay so cheerful.”
- 1 Husband**

“I felt so confused and lost Riwa, I just wanted to hold you, tell you how much your love means to me, and how your power makes us all stronger as a family.”

Riwa gets up and stands encircled by her supporters.

Audience Discussion

Invite audience to discuss and comment on their reactions.
Be sure to ask the actors, especially Riwa, how they felt.

This skit can be used to raise awareness about:

- Rigid gender expectations by women and men
- How they perpetuate harsh and unforgiving environments
- Frozen culture in refugee and immigrant communities
- Benefits of change to women, men, elders, youth and children of
- How gender equality enriches family and community life

Permission to adapt this script for different communities is granted.

The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence would appreciate if you let us know you used *Blanketed by Tradition, Empowered by Support* and if you adapted it. Please send us the adapted version at info@api-gbv.org. Thank you.