

HOW DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IMPACTS WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION & FAMILY WELL- BEING IN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

International Rescue Committee

Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
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Agenda

- ▶ Gender Violence over the Lifecourse
- ▶ Domestic & Family Violence
- ▶ Building Gender Parity in the Context of Trauma & Resettlement
- ▶ Responses to Mitigate Impact of Gender & Domestic Violence

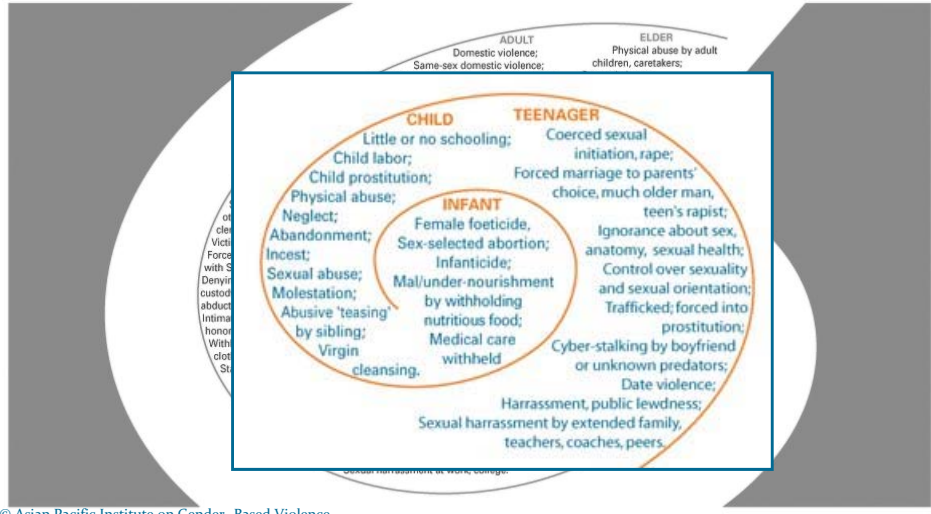
ANALYZING GENDER VIOLENCE OVER THE LIFECOURSE

Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence



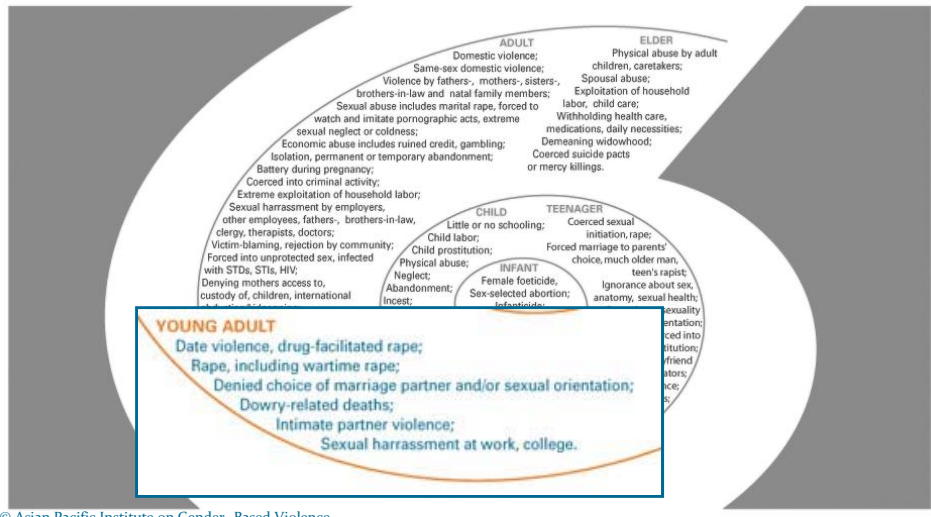
Lifetime Spiral: INFANTS CHILDREN TEENS

Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence



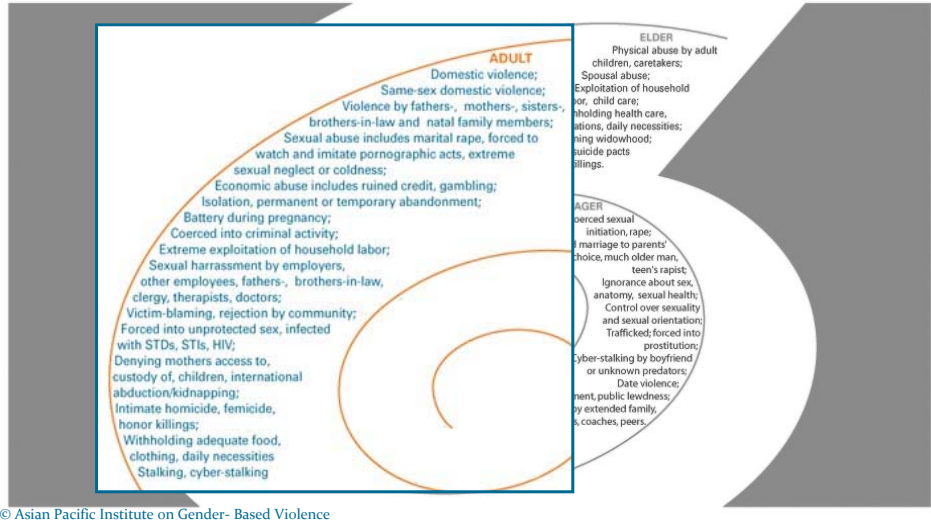
Lifetime Spiral: YOUNG ADULTS

Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence



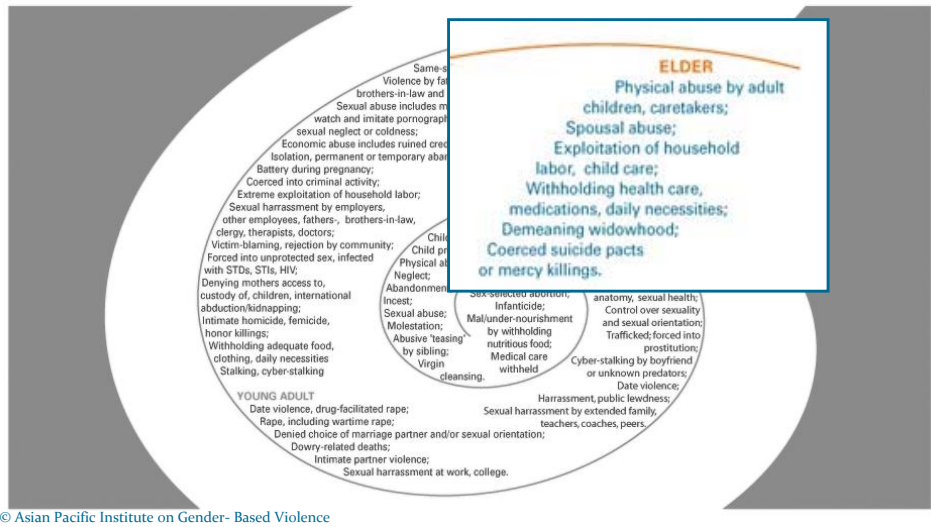
Lifetime Spiral: ADULTS

Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence



Lifetime Spiral: ELDERS

Lifetime Spiral of Gender Violence



What Does Lifetime Spiral Show?

1. Gender violence is historical, not accidental
2. Women/girls/others can be exposed to or be vulnerable to many types of abuses over lifetime
3. A range of abusers/perpetrators are located over the lifecourse

This has an impact on help-seeking:

- ▶ Research shows that many victims have negative help-seeking experiences over the lifecourse
- ▶ Negative histories of help-seeking influence help-seeking behaviors in the future

ANALYSIS: Cultural Justifications

Violence against women is perpetuated by cultural beliefs and norms based on the devaluation of women; and legitimized, obscured or denied by familial and social institutions, which:

- ▶ normalize or minimize abuse
- ▶ blame victims and excuse abusers
- ▶ ignore gender bias, sexism
- ▶ promote aggressive masculinity
- ▶ institutionalize women's devaluation of other women
- ▶ use men's roles & achievements to exonerate, excuse, deny the impact of their behavior

ANALYSIS: Cultures of Patriarchy

- ▶ Patriarchy is about maintaining the status quo of power between:
 - Men and men
 - Women and women
 - Women and men
- ▶ Cultures of patriarchy differ everywhere
- ▶ Immigrant/refugee communities become invested in cultural freeze
- ▶ Patriarchy prescribes and upholds traditional gender roles and cultural norms; patrols the spaces of culture to enforce tradition; exiles/blames victims; protects abusers; prevents cultural change and transformation.

ANALYSIS: Abuse & Sexism Compromise Women as Economic Actors

Spheres of economic empowerment can be dangerous spaces:

- ▶ Witnessing maternal abuse isn't conducive to good grades
- ▶ Bullying can make school a lonely and dangerous place
- ▶ Sexual abuse by clergy doesn't make religious institutions a place of spiritual refuge
- ▶ Sexual violence on college campuses inhibit learning
- ▶ Sexual harassment and violence in military, agricultural, industrial jobs don't make for productive workplaces
- ▶ Homophobic subjugation of sexual orientation makes the spaces of desire and love dangerous
- ▶ Lifelong physical injuries, death threats, chronic pain impact showing up for/being productive at work, building a loving home.

DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE IN OUR HOMES

- ▶ The presence of domestic violence tell us about the presence of inequality in the relationship, the extent of the violence tells us about the extent of the inequality

Extent of the Problem: US Data

- ▶ **12 million** are domestic violence victims each year in US
- ▶ **1 in 4 women** experience DV (physical, sexual & stalking)
- ▶ **1 in 7 men** experience domestic violence (mostly physical)
- ▶ Women are **4 times** more likely to be beaten, **6 times** more likely to be slammed, **9 times** more likely to be strangled
- ▶ **15 million** American children are impacted by DV annually

Domestic Violence: 1 in 3 Women

Studies from **different countries** show that the percentage of women 15 to 49 years old who've **experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner** in their lifetime ranges from

15% to **71%**

15

Domestic Violence Is a Pattern

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviors intended to gain or maintain power and control over a partner to intimidate, frighten, terrorize, humiliate, blame, injure. It includes:

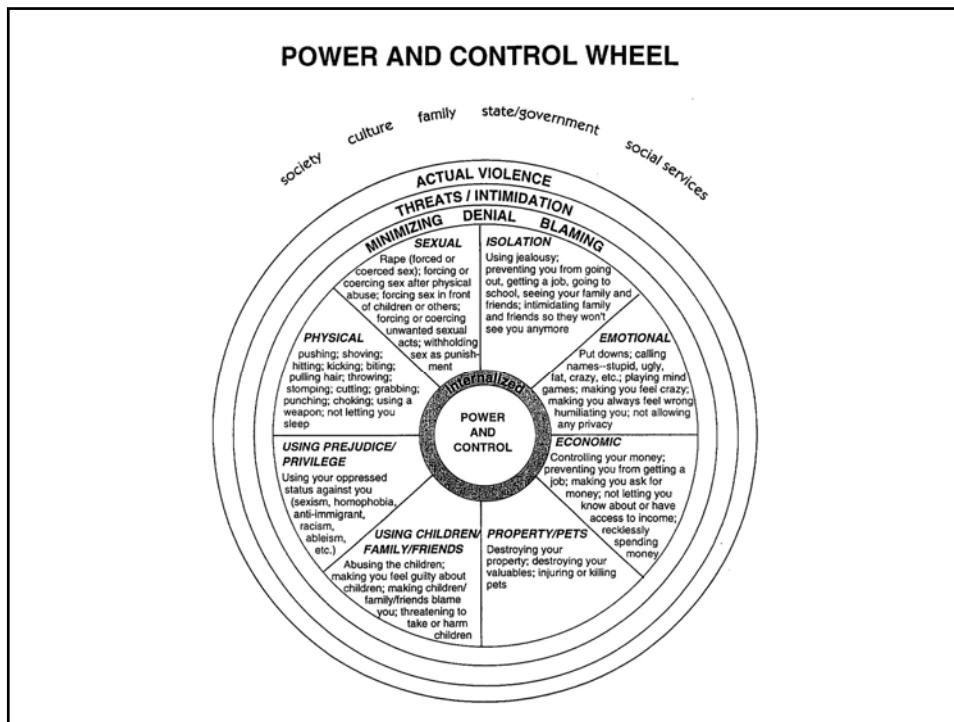
- ▶ Violent acts resulting in injuries, and even death
- ▶ Sexism, misogyny, devaluation, humiliation resulting in a climate of subjugation
- ▶ Coercive control are abuses marked by their 'routine' nature to establish fear, dependence, domination
- ▶ Systematic, repeated, oppressions resulting in complex trauma

Domestic violence is not couples conflict

Domestic violence is not caused by stress

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16



Domestic Violence

Physical Violence: Types

- ❑ **By Husbands/Partners:** Chronic abuses from battering to death
- ❑ **By In-laws and/or Parents:** Battering and coercive control in by male & female in-laws, ex-wives, natal family member
- ❑ **Stalking:** Monitoring activities and visitors, cyber-stalking; exercising abusive controls from afar
- ❑ **Withholding Necessities:** Food, healthcare, medication, climate-appropriate clothing, hygiene products e.g., soap
- ❑ **Transnational Abandonment:** Wife &/or kids abandoned in home country or in the U.S. without any resources; can include men getting new/younger wives
- ❑ **Hyper-exploitation for household labor, childcare, etc.**
- ❑ **Forced Early Marriage:** of girls, often to much older men
- ❑ **Forced Divorce:** but ex-wife stays to care for family/home
- ❑ **Abusive Acts w/Specific Cultural Meanings:** e.g., throwing water on partner, implying she is morally dirty

Physical Abuse by Multiple Abusers in the Home Can Result In:

- ▶ Increased physical injuries;
- ▶ Repeated trauma;
- ▶ Few or short recovery periods;
- ▶ Family collusion and a lack of sanctions for abusers;
- ▶ Less help-seeking behaviors because of lack of support;
- ▶ Diminished credibility in systems;
- ▶ Children being fearful of extended family members &/or isolated from their mother.

Emotional Abuse: Types

- ▶ **'Push' factors** out of the relationship by abuser and/or in-laws more frequently than 'pull' factors back into the home
- ▶ **Coercive Control** micro-controls marked by frequency, 'routine' nature; surveillance
- ▶ **Severe isolation** by inhibiting contact with family in the home country and other support systems
- ▶ **Using religion & culture** to justify abuse, to enforce nexus of shame and public disclosure → silence victims, blame them for dishonor to family, exile survivors from community
- ▶ **Natal family pressures** to tolerate abuse & stay in marriage, and refusing to help her if she leaves/returns home
- ▶ **Demearing widows**, exploiting their dependence on family

Sexual Violence Affecting Refugees/IDPs/Asylees Can Include:

- ▶ **By Intimates:** Being forced to watch & mimic pornography; marital rape including before, during & after pregnancy; son-preference enforced by forced abortions or multiple pregnancies despite health risks; reproductive coercion; being forced to tolerate infidelity; exposure to HIV/STIs.
- ▶ **By Family Members:** Extreme surveillance; body shaming/humiliation by female or male in-laws; harassment by men in extended family; “corrective” rape of lesbians; incest.
- ▶ **By Parents:** Enforcing restrictive practices e.g., forced marriage of teen girls; forcing daughter to marry rapist; female genital cutting; ‘honor’ crimes.
- ▶ **By State Actors & Combatants:** Rape in conflict/disaster zones; in camps; on un-safe transit routes; custodial rapes.

Effects of Sexual Violence on Refugee Women & Girls / Families Can Include:

- ▶ Silencing and/or blaming victims;
- ▶ Rejecting women and the children resulting from rape;
- ▶ Negative experiences of help-seeking result in women/ girls not getting medical attention or mental health counseling;
- ▶ “Transgressions” are narrowly defined and harshly disciplined in the name of culture, religion, honor;
- ▶ Chilling effect on women & girls to report sexual assaults and increased impunity as perpetrators go unpunished;
- ▶ Trauma from feeling re-victimized.
- ▶ **Brothers, Sons, Fathers** traumatized by being unable to protect female family members from sexual assault

DV Dynamics in Muslim Communities Can Include

- ▶ Using religion to justify/condone domestic violence including misinterpretations of verse 4:34 which in fact is meant to limit wife abuse
- ▶ Using Islamic marriage contracts ('Nikah') and divorces as tools of abuse e.g., insisting on religious vs. civil divorce
- ▶ Resorting to '*Talaq*' i.e., unilateral, divorce
- ▶ Appropriating '*Mehr*', hiding property,
- ▶ Threatening her reputation
- ▶ Gaining custody of children/disregarding their best interests
- ▶ Coercing wives to accept polygamy, infidelity
- ▶ Using co-wives to abuse
- ▶ Muslim Power & Control Wheel:
<http://www.peacefulfamilies.org/dvwheel.html>

Other Types/Dynamics of Domestic Violence

Abuse Connected to Immigration Status

- ▶ Refusing or neglecting to file paperwork;
- ▶ Escalated deportation & other threats in current climate
- ▶ Using lack of English proficiency to manipulate systems

Abuse Connected to Refugee Status

- ▶ Refugees' triple trauma from conflict-transit-resettlement is used to silence DV victimization
- ▶ Refusal to file paperwork for status changes
- ▶ Blocking access to support, assistance, benefits, services, job training, English-learning
- ▶ Controlling economic resources
- ▶ Other?

Other Types of Domestic Violence

Abuse Directed at Mothers

- ▶ Disrupting maternal child bonding
- ▶ Threatened or permanent loss of custody/access to children
- ▶ False allegations of child abuse
- ▶ Stigmatizing divorced, single mothers

Abuse Connected to Same-Sex Relationships

- ▶ Risks and harms for outed victims are elevated in homophobic communities

BUILDING GENDER PARITY in the CONTEXTS OF TRAUMA & RESETTLEMENT

- ▶ When the trauma of domestic violence gets added to the triple refugee traumas of leaving, transit and resettlement, it means that both state actors and family members become sources of harm and danger to women, family and community

Types of Trauma

1. PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
2. Chronic trauma: Repetitive, prolonged
3. Historical trauma: Resulting from historical oppression, intergenerational trauma,
4. Refugee triple trauma during conflict-transit-resettlement
5. Insidious trauma: gradual, subtle, “death by a 1,000 paper-cuts”, daily micro-aggressions
6. Community-, family-, culturally-generated trauma
7. Systems inflicted trauma
8. Vicarious or secondary trauma

Trauma disrupts time, memory, identity in individuals/group

Traumas from refugee experience & gender violence can compromise:

- ▶ Health: headaches to permanent disabilities, food insecurity
- ▶ Mental health: anxiety, depression, humiliation, psychosis, suicidality, affect dysregulation,
- ▶ Architecture of the brain: cognitive development, functioning
- ▶ Attachment: in relationships, parent-child bonds,
- ▶ Coping strategies: substance abuse, fight-flight-freeze
- ▶ Ability to heal from trauma, illnesses, injuries;
- ▶ Ability to work, study, concentrate, be productive, hold a job;
- ▶ Relationship to one’s body, sexual pleasure and autonomy;
- ▶ Sense of self, trust, safety, well-being; and
- ▶ Resettlement, acculturation, integration, belonging.

Increasing employment readiness → self-efficacy → can help cope w/trauma, improve health and mental health

Witnessing DV Further Traumatizes Refugee Children

Already exposed to high levels of violence and dangers in conflict zones and sometimes in camps, **children are further traumatized by violence in the home**, resulting in:

- ▶ Fear, exaggerated startle reflexes, inability for self-soothing, hyper-vigilance;
- ▶ Acting out (physical, social and/or sexual), aggression and anger in the classroom, playground, home;
- ▶ Lack of trust, feelings of helplessness;
- ▶ Sleep difficulties e.g., bed-wetting, nightmares, inability to fall asleep;
- ▶ Difficulty concentrating and learning in school;

How DV Affects Refugee Children, cont.

- ▶ Traumatic and/or anxious attachment to mother, parents, to home, to siblings & friends;
- ▶ Depression, psychosomatic problems
- ▶ Profound sense of loss due to war and leaving family, community, home country are exacerbated by DV;
- ▶ Physical and psychological needs of children are difficult to meet or even identify for mothers coping with domestic and family violence.
- ▶ **Prioritizing women's physical safety & economic security**
→ would mean that all family members, not just mothers, are responsible for children's well-being.

Impacts of DV on Family, Home, Community

- ▶ Chaotic/tense/violent homes expose women/children to increased dangers from family and poor systems interventions
- ▶ Family abuse and coercive control of women blocks ability to cope with/recover from trauma
- ▶ Tight nexus of public disclosure and shame means women's suffering is disregarded ('our men suffered in war, you are dishonoring them')
- ▶ Traditional gender norms and practices that devalue women & girls are justified; reinforcing gender inequality
- ▶ **Prioritizing women's physical safety & economic security**
→ means re-building a supportive community

Why are employment opportunities for women → controlling behaviors?

- ▶ Cultural freeze vs. acculturation: are there gender differences?
- ▶ Does workforce training for women feel threatening to male breadwinners? Why?
- ▶ If women have jobs, what fears/feelings come up:
 - For men: husbands, brothers?
 - For other family members?
- ▶ Can women's economic independence / self-sufficiency feel undermining of male authority/roles?

Promoting women's economic independence adds to and builds up family resources depleted prior to resettlement.

BUILDING GATEWAYS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY & FAMILY WELL-BEING

33

1. Become Trauma-Informed

- Philosophically, being trauma-informed means asking
 - “What happened to you?”
 - Not “~~What’s wrong with you?~~”

34

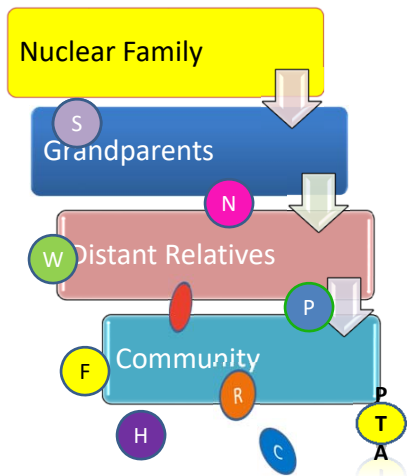
Trauma-Informed Care

Service-provision w/ trauma-informed lens involves:

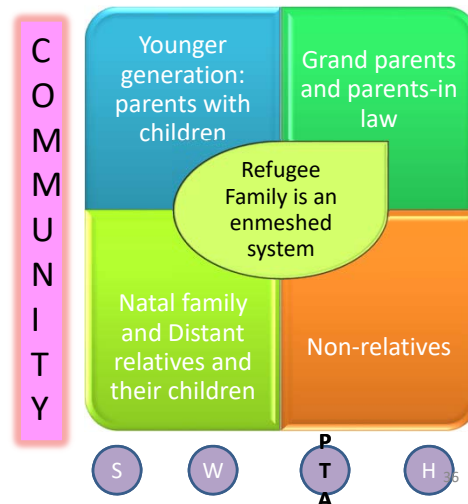
1. Having a basic understanding of trauma
 2. How it impacts clients and their everyday lives
 3. Providing information about trauma
 4. Understanding client's trauma triggers
 5. Avoiding re-traumatization of clients
 6. Acknowledging one's own trauma triggers
 7. Understanding emotional safety so clients feel accepted
 8. Helping clients manage feelings
 9. Helping clients feel in control of situations
- Trauma-informed care is asking "What happened to you?"
 - Be trained to respond to disclosure
 - Educate clients and staff on triple trauma

2. Understand effects of 'High Context' family structures (dev. by Masha Teverovsky)

American family



Refugee/Immigrant Family



Understand cultural conflicts arising from prioritizing individual over family

- ▶ Refugee family structures are collective, ‘high context’
- ▶ In contrast, employment programs emphasize *self-sufficiency, individual independence*
- ▶ Women, more than men, are expected or even required to put family before self
- ▶ Individual decision-making in high context families may be seen as undermining family structure and authority
- ❑ **Use chart in to map decision-making, identify decision makers; discuss integrating 2 structures into new ones**

3. Give the message that abusers, not victims, are responsible for domestic violence

- ▶ Include general statement at all intakes for all clients about domestic violence “Domestic violence –physical & emotional– can be a problem in many homes, so I give all my clients some basic info”
- ▶ Screen only if you are trained to respond/have resources
- ▶ Acknowledge to client that there are high levels of victim-blaming in most communities and families
- ▶ Understand that victim-blaming is deeply internalized by multiple perpetrators and abuse over the lifecourse
- ❑ **Establish contract w/ culturally-specific DV program**
- ❑ **Coordinate responses bet. case workers, employment specialists, others re: high risk triggers on timeline**

4. Realize that women's past help-seeking experiences influence current attempts

- Build trust given that refugees have had positive and negative help-seeking experiences in home and transit countries

Exposure to multiple forms of familial abuses and abusers	→	Shrinks the pool of potential helpers
Victim-blaming and support for abusers by community and family;	→	Diminishes autonomy; increases impunity; deepens internalized devaluation
Negative actions and attitudes of helpers	→	Colors the ability to trust others and/or one's own judgment; increases danger
Societal oppressions e.g., racism, poverty, sexism	→	Diminishes access, increases barriers to services

5. Build support for culturally-relevant concepts of gender parity

Have staff and client discussions on:

- ▶ What gender parity looks like in the context of a particular refugee group
- ▶ What's in it for men & women to uphold or ease up on traditional roles?
- ▶ Why is culture defined as maintaining traditions – especially harmful ones? What will it mean if women & men, all generations define dynamism of culture?
- ▶ How can changing gender roles benefit and build family well-being?

6. Work with men about the intergenerational transfer of care-giving

- ▶ Acknowledge the impact of trauma on men
- ▶ But it's not an excuse for domestic violence – many traumatized men and women are non-abusive
- ▶ Discuss why men spend ~42% of their income on their family when women spend over 90% of their income on the family
- ▶ Educate Muslims that Islam
 - Doesn't permit wife-beating but emphasizes gender equality
 - Requires the laws of the land to be observed (e.g., on marriage)
- ▶ Enlist male leaders to start conversations w/about replacing the intergenerational transfer of violence w/ the intergenerational transfer of care-giving

What Kind of Cultures Do We Want?

Cultures contain the histories of a people that include traditions, struggles, achievements, triumphs. Cultures nourish pride, resilience, belonging, power, intersectional identities, connection to community.

We want cultures

... where gender parity, not gender violence, is the norm

... where relationships of power are replaced by relationships of meaning



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