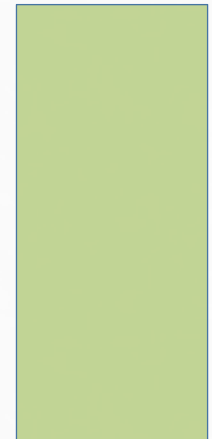


THE IMPACT ON FEMALE SEXUALITY FROM EMOTIONAL ABUSE AND EMOTIONAL SEXUAL ABUSE

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS FROM THE HEALING JOURNEY
STUDY

BY: DANA K SAFINUK



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INTRODUCTION

SEXUALITY & INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

INTRODUCTION

- Sexuality:
 - Includes sex, gender roles, attitudes towards sexual behaviours, and sexual feelings
 - Plays a role in personal and social identity
- Intimate Partner Violence:
 - Physical, psychological, or sexual harm coming from a current or ex-partner¹
 - Instrumental Violence
 - The deliberate use of violence as a tool to punish or control the victim's behaviour¹

METHODS

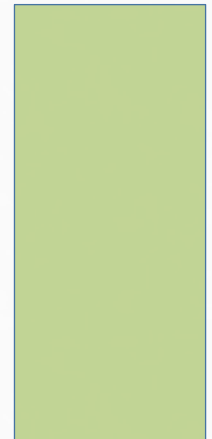
HEALING JOURNEY STUDY & GROUNDED THEORY

HEALING JOURNEY STUDY

- P.I. Dr. Jane Ursel
- Tri-provincial study about women's experience of IPV
- 7 waves of interviews at 6 month intervals
- 216 Saskatchewan women participated in Wave 1
- **In-depth qualitative interviews with 31 women**

RESULTS

PROPOSITIONAL THEORY & THEMES



PROPOSITIONAL THEORY & MATRIX

- Stage in healing was a significant factor in experience of self and sexuality
- Emotional-sexual abuse was damaging to sexuality and sense of self for women
- Self and sexuality are linked
 - Abusive partners could use sexuality and gender to impair the participants' self-worth and self-confidence
 - Damage to one can damage the other
 - Healing to one can help heal the other

Losing
Self

Severe/multiple types
Abuse
Less Severe/Absent

Passive
sexuality

Loss of self-
esteem,
agency,
and
control

Emotional-
sexual abuse

Entering
Abusive
Relationship

Regaining
Self

Isolation

Support

Agentic
Sexuality

New Partner

Building
Confidence

Leaving
Relationship

Silencing

Breaking Silence

THEMES

- **Experiencing intimate partner violence**
- **Sexual intimate partner violence**
- Silence/breaking the silence
- Gender assumptions
- Forming new relationships after the abuse
- Destruction and rebuilding of self
- Sexuality as experienced by female survivors of intimate partner violence

EXPERIENCING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Emotional abuse:
 - Participants were often scrutinized and appraised by their partners, and were constantly being told that they were coming up short
 - Paula's partner systematically took away her ability to take pride in her appearance
 - Focus on body size as a primary target for emotional abuse
 - Used children as a means to degrade

"I was nothing. He used to say that I was nothing, nobody would take me because I got kids, I was useless."

SEXUAL INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Sexual IPV was not always physical
 - Emotional/verbal sexual IPV was discussed by many women
 - Included things like:
 - Accusations of infidelities

“If I was even late a minute getting home he’d start accusing me of, you know, f*cking the teachers (laughs).”

SEXUAL INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Sexual IPV was not always physical
 - Emotional/verbal sexual IPV was discussed by many women
 - Included things like:
 - Accusations of infidelities
 - Name calling

“[he was] calling me every name possible. I was a tramp, slut, whore, bitch, skank, wench...”

SEXUAL INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Sexual IPV was not always physical
 - Emotional/verbal sexual IPV was discussed by many women
 - Included things like:
 - Accusations of infidelities
 - Name calling
 - Attacks on body and sexuality
 - Using past sexual abuse against them

“...he raped me. And then he was saying stuff like, you know like, ‘oh you’re, you’re enjoying this aren’t you?’ You know because I had told him about my rape, and I had told him about my husband doing the same thing to me. And then *he* was doing that to me. And then he was saying stuff like, ‘you enjoy it, don’t you? You enjoy being raped.’”

SEXUAL INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

- Physical sexual IPV is very damaging to women and had a wide range of consequences:
 - Decreased self-esteem
 - Increased promiscuity at an early age or decrease in sexuality
- Women described being raped by coercion
 - “sex on demand”
- Women described the dismissal of sexual assault

“[They] didn’t see why it was such a big deal because I wasn’t penetrated, I was just, you know, fiddled with. You know there is that stupid attitude out there; that ‘oh he just touched your breast, that’s not a big deal.’ In a lot of women’s minds they’re just as bad, and its rape is rape is rape, no matter how far it went or whatever, but that, that wasn’t the male attitude at the time.”

SILENCE/BREAKING THE SILENCE

- Silencing can prevent women from seeking or receiving help from others
 - Silence initially comes from society
 - Shame surrounding IPV
 - Unwillingness to acknowledge the prevalence of IPV
 - Silence that comes from participants
 - Adhere to social views and place blame on themselves
 - Shame and internal placement of blame can disrupt healthy identity and contribute to the wearing down of positive self-conceptions
 - Don't want others to know
 - Not appropriate to discuss with others

“this is another one of those dirty little dark secrets that, you know, you just don't air; you just don't share this kind of stuff.”

BREAKING THE SILENCE AS SOURCE OF HEALING

- Sharing stories help to relieve the burden

“It felt good..., I’ve held this in for so many years, and it feels like ten pounds is just bang, gone.”

- Contributes to healing
- Helps other women

“you get strength from it, from meeting other people and learning; like, how did you do this?”

FORMING NEW RELATIONSHIPS AFTER THE ABUSE

- Healthy relationships contributed to regaining sense of self, and building/re-building agentic sexualities
- Some women were cautious about entering a new relationships
 - New relationships in which they were not sexually active
 - Friendship turned into romance
 - These relationships were “deeper” and “more intimate” than previous relationships for these women.

“we’d talk every night for like 5 hours a night, so he knew me so well before we even physically got... it’s weird, so like our souls fell in love.”

FORMING NEW RELATIONSHIPS AFTER THE ABUSE

- Some women **chose** not to become involved with anyone after leaving the abuse

“This guy came up to me at the bar one night (we were there dancing). And he says, “so what’s your name?” and I’m trying to hear him, and I’m yelling, and I’m ughh, now I don’t wanna do this. And I looked at him and I said, “I’m a single mother with two kids,” I said, “I have about ten suitcases full of baggage that I haven’t even begun to unpack yet.” I said, “ya still interested now?” and I walked away. I’m not ready. I haven’t unpacked. I have things that I need to deal with for me, for my kids, for my future.”

LOSS OF SELF

- Attack on independence, appearance, self-esteem or confidence, or encouraging self-blame
 - This attack on identity and self-worth can contribute to decisions about leaving the relationship
 - Led to believe they were undesirable – became convinced that they were also worthless as a person
- Lose self due to abuse

“I had no name, I had no identity.”

“I gave all my power away,”

“You’re just everybody”

REGAINING SELF AS PART OF HEALING

- Some women mentioned some of the things that contributed to regaining self
 - Education
 - Leaving the abuser

“I started to build up a little bit of self-confidence, a little bit of myself, I started getting it back, going to school, getting some good grades, doing really, really well.”

REGAINING SELF

- Some women mentioned some of the things that contributed to regaining self
 - Education
 - Leaving the abuser
 - Independence
 - Receiving support from others

“I’m so happy with my freedom now. I don’t have much money, but I have no lack of freedom (laughs) ... I have the feeling that I can manage myself, I have the right to my life now.”

SEXUALITY AS EXPERIENCED BY FEMALE SURVIVORS OF IPV

- Impact from abuse
 - Some women felt “dirty” and “used” after sex
 - Some women, despite negative experience, still want sex as part of their life

He makes me feel like because I'm chubby and I'm not perfect I don't need sex. His good-looking women, that's the people that should have sex; not chubby, not stretch marks. I feel like a hooker with him already, because it's kind of like service him, it kind of makes me feel like he gags if he has to do anything to me, and it's like, “if you want to get satisfied do it,” you know, do it, like “that's great, ok you done? Do you want something to eat?” You know I just feel like, I'm so embarrassed, it's like I'm begging for sex with him, like, “please touch me,” you know? “Please pay attention to me,” and I said, “I just feel like I have to beg you to want to be with me and it's humiliating, but you expect me to perform your services all the time, like I feel like I should get a \$50 bill at the end of it.

SEXUALITY AS EXPERIENCED BY FEMALE SURVIVORS OF IPV

- Agentic and Positive Sexuality
- Defining different kinds of sex
 - Sex that provides connection, love, or intimacy
 - Vs. sex that leaves you feeling used and unsatisfied

Sex can be on [my] terms and can be enjoyed. It doesn't have to be forced ... it should be enjoyed by both parties involved. ... Sex is not dirty or bad. It is okay for a woman to want sex and [I] have learned that it is natural for a woman to have a sex drive.

SEXUALITY AS EXPERIENCED BY FEMALE SURVIVORS OF IPV

- Agentic and Positive Sexuality
- Defining different kinds of sex
 - Sex that provides connection, love, or intimacy
 - Vs. sex that leaves you feeling used and unsatisfied
- Assert wants and needs
- Having control
- Mutual decision making
- Safety

“If I’m in control of the intimate situation, I feel better.”

DISCUSSION

- New relationships and healing
 - Provide exposure to positive relationships
 - OR women CHOOSE not to be in a relationship and focus on self-healing
- Emotional-sexual abuse
 - Attacks on weight, body image, sexuality, gender, using past sexual abuse as a tool to cause harm, and accusations of infidelity
 - Impacts sense of self
 - Impact on sexuality

IMPLICATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Implications
 - Additional perspective on how emotional abuse can target sexuality
 - New definition of sexuality to include motherhood, gender roles, safety, confidence, and sense of self
 - Implies the need for research that can isolate the effects of emotional-sexual abuse to better understand the relationship between IPV and sexuality
- Conducting future research on IPV and sexuality
 - Isolating emotional abuse
 - Revisiting research on emotional abuse – checklists of behaviours may be inappropriate
 - Mixed methods could be used to determine if measures are tapping in to the experience of emotional abuse

THANK YOU

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS?

