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INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORK MECHANISM AS A MITIGATION APPROACH

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Abstract

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is any behaviour that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to intimate partners. It is one of the worldwide social dilemmas that negatively affects individuals, families, and the community. Sri Lankan experiences with IPV are more or less the same as those in other countries. This paper focused on the features, reasons and mitigation approaches of IPV. The Research Objective was to identify the factors behind mitigating IPV. The tested research problem was 'how does apply IPV mitigation strategies to the Sri Lankan context'. Four scholarly articles written by Iverson, K.M., Bogat, G.A., Garcia, A. M. & Levendosky, A.A., Miller, E. and McCaw, B and Maguele, M.S.B., Taylor, M., and Khuzwayo, N. for this systematic desk review. The social network support mechanism was developed through a thematic analytical approach. Findings show that plenty of biopsychosocial effects happen with IPV against women. It can happen from scratching to death, including fractures, frequent headaches, neck and facial injuries, brain damage, abdominal injuries, sexual assault, and homicide. Psychological abuse is caused by frequent verbal aggressions, including scoldings, blaming, insulting, threatening, intimidation and various forms of control. Its final results are associated with emotional damages such as low self-esteem, hopeless life, moody situations, less eating, less sleep, more thinking, depression, anxiety, substance misuse and PTSD. Background factors to IPV are cultural customs and religious beliefs, illicit drug use, less economic opportunities, lack of economic independence and lack of awareness of human rights. Suitable implications include strengthening the social support networks with awareness programs on IPV to young women, increasing available hotline services, forcing the implementation of laws and regulations that protect women's and girls' rights, making dialogues on IPV, its impact on family and women, improve economic opportunities, introduce primary care practices programs and introduce tailor programs for different special in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Against woman, Biopsychosocial Effects, Intimate partner violence, Risk factors, Social support network

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Introduction

The effects of violence on a country are harmful not only to its selected citizens but to the entire society. It directly affects that country's economic, social, and mental well-being. Violence of various types is common in contemporary society. It can be seen as verbal violence, physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence and financial violence. In addition to this, it has various aspects, from threat to death as pain, neglect, injury, damage, abuse, rape, and murder. It comes from physical force to psychological harm from self-directed, interpersonal or collective ways. There are various victims of violence, including children, women, and men. Consequently, violence can be categorised into different types: domestic violence, gender-based violence, institutional violence, and community violence. World Health Organization define violence as 'Violent behaviour is the intentional use of physical force against oneself, another person, or a group or community to cause actual or threatened injury, death, psychological harm, disfigurement, or loss' (Hamdan, 2015). When looking at the occurrence of violent behaviour, it seems to be based on individual characteristics as well as socio-cultural intergenerational practices and acceptance. These include personality traits such as negative aspects of personal experience, drug or alcohol addiction, excessive fatigue, and uncontrollable hostile behaviour (Nolan et al., 2001).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as harmful acts and threats to criminals based on their gender, basically aiming at women and girls (Allwood, 2016; Speed, 2020). Healthcare professionals' lack of understanding about how best to interact with patients, especially those with mental illness, has been linked to violent behaviour (Cooper & Swanson, 2002; Subasinghe & Dissanayake, 2021). Domestic violence who are victims, including children, parents, elders, and siblings, is one side of the most common violent pattern in the community. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is also a form of domestic violence.

IPV against women is considered as violence initiated by intimate male partners within the marriage or living together partnerships. IPV discusses any mode of violence, physical, social, and mental, that can be done by a past or current intimate partner, maybe a spouse, girlfriend/ boyfriend, dating or sexual partner. IPV against women is one of the most critical and dangerous life events for women in the world. A social worker and counsellor, *Ms Anoja Makawita*, says that one in five Sri Lankan women have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse by an intimate partner. Domestic violence should not be discussed openly (UNWOMEN, 2023). WHO indicates that globally, about 1 in 3 (30%) of women have been experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Worldwide, almost one-third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years face IPV (WHO, 2024). IPV can be prevented and controlled when the policymakers realise the features, symptoms, background factors and intervention programs.

Women bear the brunt of intimate partner violence. Especially for women who have the least resources and are powerless to escape or confront violent behaviour. (Fagan & Maxwell, 2006). IPV against women was found to be affected by injuries to the head, face, breasts, abdomen, genitalia, or reproductive system. In addition to that, the most common consequences are headaches, Insomnia, Loss of interest in any work, sexual dysfunction, and vaginal infections. IPV is continuously happening all over the world, and thousands of women face severe biopsychosocial consequences from this long-term experience. Health professionals, social workers and sociologists are primarily concerned about this to mitigate for the betterment of society.

The countries' cultural backgrounds help maintain theitheative behaviour) in their communities. Women have no chance to reveal or claim to the legal authority because of their religious or some other cultural

beliefs, including fear, shame or myths. The female population represents 49.76% of the world population (Statistics Times, 2024). When this situation comes to the Sri Lankan context, IPV is linked with religious beliefs, the cultural concept of 'being a good wife', partners' alcohol/drug abuse and partner's extramarital affairs, young age of victims, less access to seeking services rate (2%) from women's organisations are the risk factors (Ilesinghe et al., 2011). Hence, this IPV is a complex social incident.

Research Objective

To identify the behind factors of IPV towards mitigation of IPV.

Research Problem

How do IPV mitigation strategies be applied to the Sri Lankan context?

Research Method and Materials

This paper focused on the desk research approach, and the study is entirely based on secondary data. Internet-accessed scholarly journal articles were used for the systematic review. The discussion was directly based on previous research findings. There are four research articles selected randomly related to IPV as follows,

- A secondary data-based article on '*Practical Implications of Research on Intimate Partner Violence Against Women'* was written by Iverson, K.M. (2020).
- Primary data-based research article on '*Assessment and Psychotherapy with Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Violence'* done by Bogat, G.A., Garcia, A. M. & Levendosky, A.A. (2016).
- Primary field data-based research article on '*Intimate Partner Violence* by Miller, E. and McCaw, B. (2019).
- Primary field data-based research article on '*Intimate Partner Violence: Views and Perspectives of Young Women at Maputo-city Secondary Schools, Mozambique*' done by Maguele, M.S.B., Taylor, M., and Khuzwayo, N. (2023).

Discussion and Findings

i. The Nature of Biopsychosocial Effects of IPV

Physical Violence: Intimate partner violence is mainly characterised by physical symptoms. Physical violence is the most common form of abuse women experience from their intimate partners. She faces it at any time in her life. It can happen at home, a relative's house, on the bus, at the farm or at a place of worship. Physical abuse can start with a simple act of violence such as hitting, burning, biting, throwing, shaking, grabbing, or beating and reach an extreme situation. Otherwise, it can also start with brutal physical injury using various weapons such as knives, sticks or ion rods. Therefore, the characteristics of physical violence are different. It is a fierce series of experiences ranging from scratching to death. It can be identified as throat pain, hoarseness, lacerations, fractures, frequent headaches, neck and facial injuries, strangulation, traumatic brain injury, thoracic and abdominal injuries, Sexual assault, and homicide. Physicians identify this as a 'history of domestic violence' (Miller & McCaw, 2019).

Physical violence can also be classified as sexual, physical violence and non-sexual physical violence. The purpose of doing non-sexual violence can also be sexual violence. Damage to reproductive organs, coercions to abortions or natural abortions, sexually transmitted infections and other common infections that harm reproductive organs and the body. In addition to that, These violent activities can be affected

by various illnesses like diabetes, high blood pressure, depression, asthma, arthritis, stroke, cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, uterine diseases, etc. (Iverson, 2020; Miller & McCaw, 2019). It highly impacts the baby as well as the mother if she experiences IPV during her pregnancy period. This IPV is a considerable cause of unintended pregnancy. According to Pavey AR (2014), there are risks related to gynaecological implications, pregnancy-associated death, preterm birth, and low birth weight (Miller & McCaw, 2019).

Emotional Violence:

Emotional or mental abuse is one of the most significant and painful violence among women. Frequent physical abuse and verbal abuse lead to psychological abuse. According to Bogart, Garcia, and Levendosky (2016), 'one-third involved jealousy about supposed infidelity on the part of the woman; one-third concerned the perpetrator's parenting style; and one-third were related to life stressors, such as financial concerns, unemployment, or transportation problems'.

This has the most adverse effect on women's mental or physical health. Women suffer severe psychological abuse because of frequent verbal aggressions, including scoldings, blaming, insulting, threatening, intimidation, demeaning comments, and various forms of controlling their day-to-day life events (Miller & McCaw, 2019; Iverson, 2020). The perpetrator tries to isolate them from family and friends. He tries to keep his wife away from her children and her parents but does not allow her to meet his close relatives (Bogart *et al*., 2016; Iverson, 2020). These social restrictions affect an intimate partner's social interactions and activities to isolate them.

The fact that the woman is still with the man is essential in considering the emotional distress. Otherwise, the stress caused in her current life should also be considered because the woman has left the abuser. Also, leaving a relationship does not always lead to a reduction in mental health problems (Bogart et al., 2016). These background actions are strongly associated with long-term mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, substance misuse and PTSD (Bogart et al., 2016; Iverson, 2020). IPV's mental reasons can affect her daily routines, such as a hopeless life, moody situations, less work, less efficiency, less eating, less sleep, more thinking, less self-esteem, and less self-confidence.

ii. Reasons and Background Factors to IPV

There are common reasons for IPV, such as refusing sexual activities, consistent consistency arguments, ignoring compromising and getting permissions, less respect, less listening, neglecting household tasks, infertile issues and economic issues among them. There may be many more stories behind these fights and insults. There are matters such as dowry issues, virginity-seeking rituals, sexual impotence, venereal diseases, and relatives living inside the house are some factors.

- Cultural factors in marriages related to endured violence exchanging their daughter with gifts and money as dowry promoting violence (Maguele et al., 2023). It can appear as if there is social acceptance of violence in a social structure which supports gender inequality and masculinity norms (Maguele et al., 2023).
- Religious beliefs and practices: A believing woman who lives according to her religious principles might tolerate such abuse if they endorse the belief that males have the right to make all the decisions, which may perpetuate violence, endorse religious beliefs of mala superiority and use them in marriage; (Maguele et al., 2023).
- The perpetrator's psychological problems (Bogart et al., 2016).

- Violent intimate partners may use alcohol, medications, or illicit drugs, causing violent incidents. (Maguele, Taylor & Khuzwayo, 2023; Bogat, Garcia & Levendosky, 2016).
- Abusive behaviour in adolescent dating relationships is associated with a risk of intimate partner violence later in adulthood. The importance of understanding the client's developmental history in terms of childhood experiences of IPV and early dating violence (Bogat et al., 2016).
- The low economic status of the families and women (Maguele et al., 2023; Bogat et al., 2016).
- The seriousness of violence: Some women felt that some of the physical consequences of the incident did not indicate actual abuse and, ultimately, made their experiences worse. (Bogat, Levendosky, & Davidson, 2016). Some women are only aware of physical abuse and ignore the resulting psychological abuse (Maguele et al., 2023).
- There are fewer awareness programs on IPV; many people learn about IPV through their observations and the experiences shared by their peers. The advice of friends and the attitude of mothers were seen as providing guidance and a determining factor in their understanding of IPV (Maguele et al., 2023).
- Less knowledge on reproductive knowledge, sexual health and IPV and its connection among different modes. Many of them know only about physical violence forms; the study mainly reported physical and sexual violence with less emphasis on psychological abuse (Maguele et al., 2023).

iii. IPV Impacts to the Family and Risk Factor Identification

IPV occurs everywhere without essential requirements, such as social strata, locations, and cultural backgrounds. However, it is significantly attached to marginalised people, such as racial and ethnic minority groups and people with mental and physical disabilities.

- Often, this starts at a young age. Dating and abuse begin after engagement, early in marriage, or within the first few years of marriage; the current IPV prevention efforts appear to be inadequate in addressing the needs of young women (Maguele et al., 2023).
- If this happens after having children after marriage, its adverse effects are released to the children as well. Children also face verbal abuse as well as physical abuse. It is a severe problem that parents do not consider that these two types of abuse lead to psychological abuse. This includes using children to send messages to each other, making children feel guilty about each other, or using children to bully a partner.
- This adversely affects the future development of the entire family. This adversely affects children's learning, employment and development, and economic and overall family satisfaction.
- This abusive environment causes mental discomfort for everyone in the family. It causes deficient personality traits in children.
- Due to this abusive environment, the woman who faces it falls victim to various mental illnesses such as stress, anxiety, depression, suicide attempts and PTSD.
- Because of this abusive environment, all those who encounter it become accustomed to aggressive behaviour. The children get scared, and the mother gets angry and hostile. As this happens regularly, aggression becomes normal. This is a nuisance to social relations.
- Although violence is caused by taking illicit drugs or alcohol, it becomes addictive on the part of the people involved in IPV.
- Violation of human rights (Maguele et al., 2023).

iv. Social Support Networks to Mitigate the IPV

Social Support is essential for mitigating IPV because these harmful activities occur within society. Everyone has a responsibility to pay attention to and address this issue. It has several aspects, as listed below.

- Protecting women from IPV leads to the development of a country. Social network support is a form of connection that provides social, emotional and instrumental Support, contributing to mental and physical health. Community support is a crucial relief available to victims of abuse. They had little support networks. However, later on, relationships and long-term friends may decrease. (Bogat, Levendosky, & Davidson, 2016).
- Family members as support system (specifically siblings and mothers, paternal Support)
- Integrated support centres for IPV victims: Need to raise awareness about available services and also the need for specific services where young women can report IPV and other sexual and reproductive-related problems ((Maguele et al., 2023). Hospitals/clinics; medical facilities providing healthcare services to the community; public health departments; government agencies responsible for public health initiatives and services in the community.
- Friends as a social support group.
- Youth-focused support services; Healthy relationships support group in after-school programs.
- Contextual gender-based prevention programs, including specialised social assistance services such as case managers, social workers, health clinicians, psychiatrists, counsellors, and rehabilitation officers, are professionals who provide Support and assistance to individuals in need (Maguele et al., 2023; Iverson 2020)
- Men Stopping Violence: An organisation that focuses on ending violence against women by educating and mobilising men.
- Technological Support: New monitoring or home technology types may also be used to control partners. Subtle aspects of psychological aggression include interference with a person's attempts to seek medical care, keep appointments, obtain medications, adhere to treatment recommendations, or improve health behaviours, potentially making the person who is experiencing such controlling behaviour appear to be medically nonadherent (Miller & McCaw, 2019).
- Referral hotlines for emergencies.

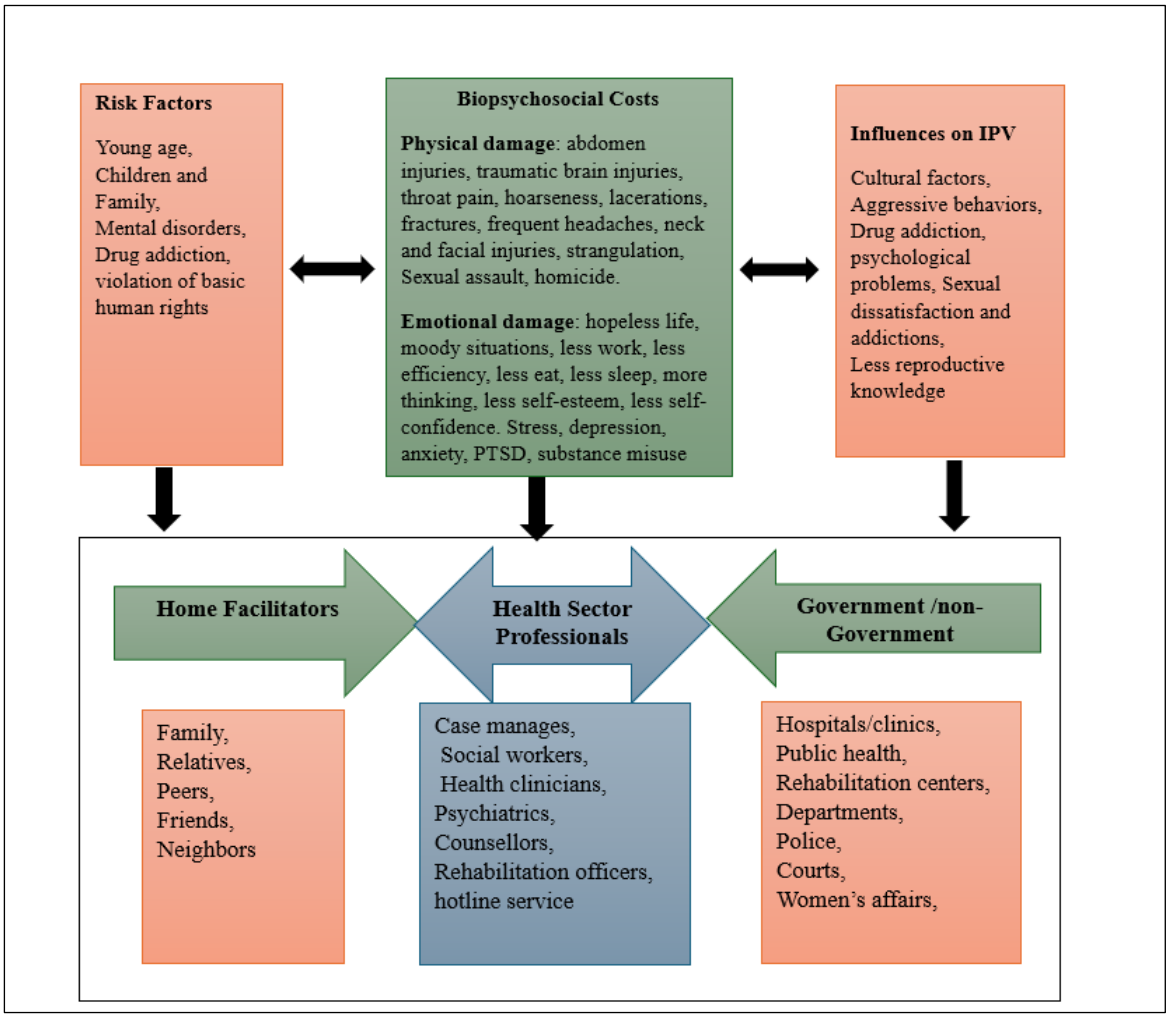
Conclusion and Recommendations

Research shows that a majority of femicides were perpetrated by intimate partners (42%), such as husbands (28%) and ex-lovers (14%), followed by family members (20%) (Edirisinghe *et al.,* 2021, p.64). Research shows that social support strategies can play a significant role in reducing the effects of IPV. Community support is needed to resolve children's problems, especially when mothers have low levels of education. (Miller et al., 2014). Having Support from family members can reduce the frequency of IPV perpetration. When an accident occurs, neighbours are often the first responders. Therefore, strengthening neighbourly relationships, including connections with peers and friends, is important. However, the absence of such Support from some neighbours can diminish the effectiveness of social Support in addressing IPV (Wright, 2015).

- **Increase awareness programs on IPV:** Educate the public about IPV, its signs, and its impacts to foster a supportive community environment.
- **Awareness about available services:** Ensure that women and families know the available services, including shelters, counselling, and legal aid.

- **Enforce National Laws and Regulations:** Strengthen the implementation of national laws and regulations that protect women's and girls' rights. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act should be implemented by trained police officers to make use of the provision to ask pertinent questions, obtain restraining orders and provide compulsory family counselling sessions. (Edirisinghe *et al*, 101p, 2021).
- **Make dialogues on IPV and its impact on the family and women**: Promote discussions about IPV and its impact on families and women to break the stigma.
- **Improve economic opportunities among young women**: Empower young women economically to reduce their dependency on abusive partners.
- **Introduce primary care practice programs for women:** Develop and implement primary care programs focused on women's health and well-being.
- **Introduce tailored programs for special cases:** Create special cases that address unique cases and needs, ensuring all victims receive appropriate Support.

fig. 1: Social Support Network Mechanism to Sri Lankan context to mitigate the IPV



Source: Developed by researchers, 2024

In conclusion, addressing IPV efficiently needs a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening community and neighbourly Support, enhancing awareness and access to services, enforcing protective laws, promoting dialogue about IPV, improving economic opportunities for young women, and

implementing specialised programs for unique cases. These strategies, supported by policymakers and social workers, can significantly reduce the impact of IPV and improve mental health outcomes for survivors.

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