

The complexity of talking about intimate partner violence: accounts of women living in shelters for abused women in Gauteng Province

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Introduction: Research has documented reasons why women stay and why women leave intimate partner violent (IPV) relationships. However, the process of leaving an IPV relationship is not well documented as well as the continuum of events that lead to leaving a violent intimate partner.

Objective: To explore and describe how significant others and societal norms influence women to stay or leave IPV relationships.

Methods: A descriptive phenomenological investigation was conducted with women recruited through purposive sampling from shelters for abused women in Gauteng Province. Inductive and deductive thematic analysis of transcripts was performed using NVivo version 12.

Findings: Participants were women aged 20 to 48 living in shelters after leaving the IPV relationship. The length of stay in IPV relationships ranged from 6 months to 15 years. Their narratives revealed two overarching themes that influenced their long stay in the IPV. The influence of others on the reason to leave or stay in the IPV subthemes and the complexity of telling others about IPV. Women who are trapped in intimate partner violence relationships often feel tied to their abusers due to societal and cultural norms and pressure from family members to stay. In addition, religious observance made it difficult for them to leave violent relationship, this was exacerbated by family members who used religion to discourage women to leave IPV. Women found it difficult to engage in conversations with significant others about the violence they experience as well as their plans to leave the IPV. The sub themes protecting others, keeping the secret about the IPV and leaving, anticipating negative response from significant others, and opting to have conversations with self describes the complexities that they experience.

Conclusion:

The findings revealed that women's decisions to talk about IPV is complex and influenced by the opinions and expectations of others, such as significant others and religious observance.

Key words: intimate partner violence, gender based violence, shelters for abused women; Gauteng Province,

Advocacy

Contrary to the common assumption that women who suffer IPV do not speak up. The study highlights the need for more awareness and support for women who experience IPV.