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The Impact of Culture and Minority Status on the African-American Female Domestic Violence Experience

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ABSTRACT

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THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND MINORITY STATUS ON THE AFRICAN-
AMERICAN FEMALE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERIENCE

Committee Chair: Corinne D. Warrenner, Ph.D.

Thesis dated May 2017

The purpose of this non-probability sampling, qualitative study is to explore how culture (being African American) and minority status (being a woman) impact the domestic violence experience. Participants were recruited by the author and within the Atlanta University Center Consortium. This study sought to answer two questions: 1. What factors put a woman at risk for experiencing domestic violence? 2. What factors aid in a woman's recovery from domestic violence? Based upon both questionnaire data, as well as prior research, the author can reasonably conclude that being an African-American woman increases the risk of experiencing domestic violence.

THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND MINORITY STATUS ON THE AFRICAN-
AMERICAN FEMALE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EXPERIENCE

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY

SAMUEL PERRY

WHITNEY M. YOUNG JR. SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to address the background, incidence, and scope of the research problem. The research problem of focus is domestic violence. More specifically, this chapter will review the literature with regards to some of the cultural and gender-specific issues surrounding this topic.

Background, Incidence, and Scope of the Research Problem

An emerging body of scholarly work is acknowledging battered women from disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds. The literature review in chapter two encompasses a variety of theoretical perspectives that emphasizes the experiences of ethnic women as well as the systemic underpinnings of domestic violence within their communities (Garfield, 2001; Waits, 1998). Per Mann and Grimes (2001), race, gender, and class represent an interesting and emerging area of scholarship that attempts to explain the social problems of marginalized women (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). Although women from all social and economic backgrounds are victims of abuse (Hampton & Gelles, 1994), the demographic profile of victimization indicates that African-American women who are young, divorced, disadvantaged, and inhabitants within urban areas are more likely to be victims of domestic violence (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Disadvantaged African-American women who are recipients of government assistance were 67% more likely to experience physical abuse and 95% more likely to endure psychological abuse

(Honeycutt, Marshall, & Weston, 2001). Additional risk factors include a history of violence in their families of origin (Hampton & Gelles, 1994; Huang & Gunn, 2001); imprisonment, substance usage (Richie, 1994; Davis, 1997; Curtis-Boles & Jenkins-Monroe, 2000), and a positive HIV status round out the risk factors (Wyatt, Axelrod, Chin, Carmona, & Loeb, 2000).

Researchers are beginning to consider cultural variances in the relationship termination process (Kearney, 2001). With few exemptions (Burke, Gielen, McDonnell, O'Campo, & Maman, 2001), little research has focused on the strategies that battered African-American women use to extricate themselves from their abusive partners. More research is needed on how African-American women endure in abusive relationships and how they formulate plans to leave these relationships.

Incidence/Prevalence

It is estimated that roughly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. Within one year, this equals more than 10 million victims of physical abuse (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence [NCADV], n.d.); 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men will have experienced some form of physical aggression from an intimate partner within their lifetime (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence [NCADV], n.d.). Domestic violence among African Americans is correlated with economic factors. Domestic violence among African Americans occurs more frequently among couples with low incomes. This is especially true for relationships in which the male partner is underemployed or unemployed (Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community [IDVAAC], n.d.).

Scope of the Research Problem

Domestic violence is the primary cause of harm to women ages fifteen to forty-five. It is more prevalent than auto accidents, mugging, and cancer combined. Eighty-five percent of domestic violence victims are women (South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault [SCCADVASA], n.d.). Ninety-six percent of all domestic violence victims were killed by someone they knew; of the murder victims who knew their abusers, 62% were killed by a husband, ex-husband, or boyfriend (South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault [SCCADVASA], n.d.). African-American women comprise 8% of the U.S. population, however, in 2005 African-American women accounted for 22% of domestic violence-related homicide victims and 29% of all female victims of domestic violence homicides (Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community [IDVAAC], n.d.). Abused African-American women are at greater risk for attempting suicide, particularly if they were physically abused as a child for being depressed (Institute on Domestic Violence in the African-American Community [IDVAAC], n.d.).

Statement of the Research Problem

This study is intended to address the dearth of research on African-American women within domestic violence literature. Research suggests that the classical feminist approach to domestic violence has been an emphasis on common experiences of battered women to forge a collective feminist movement to end female battering (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). This approach has increasingly been scrutinized by scholars and activists alike who demand a stronger voice for marginalized women (Richie, 2000; Ristock, 2002; Russo,

2002). Despite an increase in research on domestic violence, very little is known about the influence of culture and minority status on women's experiences of abuse; this scholarly deficit points to a lack of awareness among researchers (Hampton & Gelles, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate if culture (being African American) and minority status (being a woman) impact the experience of domestic violence. The themes investigated within the study are abuser characteristics such as the perpetrator's annual income as well as survivor characteristics; e.g., the survivor's use of spirituality to aid in recovery. These characteristics highlight the richness of the individual voice.

Understanding the context and environment of the individual provides for a robust research experience that cannot be quantified.

Summary Statement

As previously stated, the purpose of this chapter was to address the background, incidence, and scope of the research problem. African-American women that are disadvantaged are more likely to experience psychological and physical abuse among their counterparts. Although additional scholarly research is needed to understand the influence that culture has on abuse, recent studies have correlated domestic violence with low income. This is a widespread problem affecting the rates at which African-American women are abused; but due to a lack of scholarly research, African-American women victims of domestic violence remain underserved.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will discuss the conceptual definitions, a review of the literature, the historical perspective of domestic violence, theoretical frameworks, and gaps within the research.

The literature review will discuss several themes that have repeatedly appeared throughout the literature. These themes are necessary for assigning meaning and understanding the effect of cultural status on the domestic violence experience of African-American women.

Conceptual Definition

For this thesis, when defining domestic violence, the United Nations definition will be used. It states the following:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (UN General Assembly 85th Session, 1993)

A Need for Assigning Meaning

After more than two decades of research in this area, there continues to be an absence of information on domestic violence against African-American women. There is

a need for research on how African-American women assign meaning to the psychological, physical, and sexual violence in their relationships (West, 2002). Per the National Family Violence Survey of 1994, 17% of African-American wives were victims of at least one violent act in the survey year (Hampton & Gelles, 1994). The more recent Violence against Women Survey in 2000 states that one-quarter of Black women have experienced physical partner violence, and 4% had been stalked (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). When considering rates of violence, African-American women were perpetual victims of wife battering; 7% of African-American female domestic violence victims stated they were subjected to beatings, choking, and weapon attacks. Furthermore, the battering remained when the woman became pregnant (West, 2002).

The roots of domestic violence can often be traced back to childhood sexual abuse. African-American girls are overrepresented in this category. The first episode of abuse often occurs when the girl is eight years of age (West, 2002). This is due in part to unsteady marital relationship patterns within the African-American community; many African-American girls are exposed to the presence of a stepfather or a boyfriend of their mother (Abney & Priest, 1995). These demographic influences may leave African-American girls more vulnerable to sexual abuse. Many African-American female survivors of childhood sexual abuse enter adulthood to be re-victimized by at least one physical or sexual abuse incident (Wyatt, Notgrass, & Gordon 1995).

The Effect of Cultural Status on Domestic Violence

Social and cultural contexts are critical to establishing responses that are contemporary and logical to a particular population (Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, & Jones, 2007). For African-American women, the acknowledgment of the importance of race,

ethnicity, and class is the foundation for understanding how these variables intersect to define the domestic violence experience (Pinderhughes et al., 2007). African-American women's views of domestic violence may differ from mainstream interpretations of what constitutes an act of violence. In one study regarding life history interviews of 9 African-American women, the researcher found that the women did not always define physical aggression as a form of violence; but discriminatory actions based on race were invariably experienced as such (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005). The latter suggests that there are varying descriptions of domestic violence as well as multiple definitions regarding mild to severe forms of abuse (Sokoloff & DuPont, 2005).

Moreover, suspicion of outsiders, mistrust of public officials, and fear of reporting abuse because of potential intolerant treatment or further violence are explanations that African-American women have offered with respect to seeking help for domestic violence (Bent-Goodley 2009). This provides further evidence for a need for culturally competent services that reflect the insight and suggestions of the women they intend to serve (Bent-Goodley, 2009).

The Role of Minority Status within Domestic Violence

Although domestic violence occurs in all racial, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds (Straus & Gelles, 1986), it disproportionately affects African-American women (Hampton & Gelles, 1994; Rennison & Welchans, 2000). According to the National Black Women's Health Project, domestic violence is the number one health issue among African-American women (Avery, 1990/1994). However, African-American women may fail to perceive it as an issue (Briggs & Davis, 1994; White, 1994). This is likely because African-

American women often assume the role of protector for others. According to Hill-Collins (1991), it is widely known that African-American women place the needs of others before themselves. African-American women, then, may feel hesitant about reporting abuse out of fear of further exposing African-American men to the injustices of the criminal justice system (Hill-Collins, 1991). Protecting her abuser, however, can take a devastating toll on the mental and physical health of the African-American woman (Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Historical Perspective

One insight into understanding the African-American female experience with domestic violence is the oppressive historical images of Black women. These images are often used to normalize violence against African-American women (West, 2004). For example, when the American slave trade became illegal, forced breeding and rape were utilized to increase the slave population. Instead of acknowledging this sexual brutality, slave owners portrayed enslaved women as immoral Jezebels who sought sexual gratification from their masters (West, 2004). There were no legal or social ramifications against raping African-American women (West, 2002). Today, these stereotypes may lead people to believe that African-American women are less credible as rape and domestic violence victims; thus, condoning their victimization (George & Martinez, 2002; Gillum, 2002). Although these stereotypes are unpleasant and often taken for granted, researchers should examine how they affect institutional and personal responses to African-American women who have experienced domestic violence (West, 2004). In many ways, historically perpetrated sexual violence and its rationalization appear to have

dismissed African-American women as individuals undeserving of male protection (Allard, 1991).

Although feminist activism has brought international attention to domestic violence as a social issue, feminism's concentration on gender does not always address the importance of other social identities such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and or sexual orientation (Kasturirangan, Krishnan, & Riger, 2004). Other identities may be viewed as less important than gender; this sabotages a researcher's efforts in understanding how these other identities influence women of color (Kasturirangan et al., 2004).

As a result, researchers may conclude that a uniform non-White culture exists with common motifs and complexities, thus neutralizing the need for culturally diverse research (Kasturirangan et al., 2004). The challenge issued to feminist therapists and researchers is to reach beyond the notion of sexism and to scrutinize their classist and racist assumptions. Failure to address this leaves women of color in a perplexing state of upholding gender identity over their ethnic identity (Kasturirangan et al., 2004).

Conclusions and Limitations of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review was to review several arguments that have attempted to explain the effects of domestic violence on its victims and determine whether the information was comprehensive. There are quite a few limitations noted within the literature. When reviewing the studies that discussed assigning meaning and or effect of cultural and minority status, it was discovered that many of the studies utilized a longitudinal design. A longitudinal design includes causality; meaning the researcher can determine that the independent

variable affected the dependent variable. A longitudinal approach can be a limitation due to the length of time of the study. Other outside influences, for instance, death, can affect results of longitudinal studies. Several of the studies utilized a multiethnic sample, making generalizability difficult. Furthermore, there is also a lack of information looking at the effects cultural and minority status has on the domestic violence experience of African-American women. Future research needs to be mindful of how familial structure and religion reinforce a woman's victimization and legitimizes the abuser's execution of violence. These barriers may open a new portal of domestic violence research.

Theoretical Frameworks

This theoretical framework section will explore the concepts of the Afrocentric Perspective, gender entrapment theory, and critical race theory (CRT) to discuss African-American women and their relationship with domestic violence.

Afrocentric Perspective

The Afrocentric Perspective offers a set of principles upon which to create culturally competent assessment tools and interventions within domestic violence research. The Afrocentric Perspective is based on eight principles: fundamental goodness, self-knowledge, communalism, interconnectedness, spirituality, self-reliance, language, and oral traditions thought and practice (Schraver, 2011). The Afrocentric Perspective reminds clinicians and domestic violence researchers that culturally competent assessment tools and interventions are fundamental to understanding and intervening in gender-based violence (Bent-Goodley, 2005). These tools and interventions should be cultivated through needs assessments, community feedback, as well as members of the family who have experienced and or perpetuated the cycle of abuse.

The development of culturally competent practices across disciplines informs both practitioners and researchers of the intersectionality of domestic violence and issues related to ethnic identity; thus, increasing the probability of addressing abuse and keeping African-American women safe (Bent-Goodley, 2005). The incorporation of the Afrocentric Perspective into domestic violence research pushes the clinician and researcher to move beyond the historical oppression of domestic violence and to draw upon the collective strength and resources utilized to empower and nurture African people throughout the world (Bent-Goodley, 2005).

The tenets of spirituality as well as respect for community can be utilized to uplift the abuse victim. Spirituality is a critical component of the Afrocentric Perspective; it can be defined as a sense of the sacred and the divine (Bent-Goodley, 2005). The Afrocentric Perspective recognizes that spirituality is not happenstance, but rather a source of strength and a viable coping mechanism (Bent-Goodley, 2005). The recognition of spirituality from the Afrocentric Perspective allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation for the supernatural and the fundamental need to use it within the helping process (Bent-Goodley, 2005). Another important aspect of the Afrocentric Perspective is that of community. Community can be defined as sensitivity toward the interconnectedness of others (Bent-Goodley, 2005).

This belief states that concerns of the group transcend the need of the individual (Bent-Goodley, 2005). In general, however, this same emphasis on community promotes the importance of extended family as a significant factor in the development of the individual (Bent-Goodley, 2005). Moreover, the Afrocentric Perspective is reverent to

African-American women because it recognizes that spirituality can free from physical and mental captivity and transform one into a courageous survivor.

Gender Entrapment and Critical Race Theories

The impact of domestic violence can also be studied from the perspective of gender entrapment theory (Bent-Goodley, 2004). The term *gender entrapment* is derived from the legal view of entrapment (Beth, 1994). Gender Entrapment is the theoretical model centered on the dynamic process of collective experiences that begin with the establishment of individual gender identity within the family of origin leading to experiences of violence in intimate relationships and culminating in forced involvement in illegal activities (Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Gender Entrapment results in some battered women being penalized for activities they engage in and emotions they express even when those behaviors are a logical extension of their gender identities, productive strategies that enhance their safety, reflections of culturally constructed gender roles, and a response to the violence they experience in their intimate relationships; a circumstance whereby an individual is lured into a compromising act (Bent-Goodley, 2004).

In analyzing domestic violence in African-American communities, gender entrapment theory assumes that African-American women who are susceptible to male-centered violence within their intimate relationships are punished for engaging in logical behaviors that are extensions of their racialized identities (Bent-Goodley, 2004). This theory also provides a foundation for understanding how women who experience domestic violence may be further victimized by social structures like the criminal justice system. Specifically, gender entrapment theory states that there is a connection between

African Americans, domestic violence, and imprisonment (Plass, 1993). African-American men and women are at higher risk of being arrested and incarcerated for domestic violence than their White counterparts (Beck & Mumola, 1999; Fagan, 1996; Peterson-Lewis, Turner, & Adams, 1988; Richie, 1996). Critical Race Theory (CRT) expands on gender entrapment theory via the recognition of cyclical abuse factors such as race and power. Furthermore, CRT posits that mainstream White dominance is preserved by not recognizing that racism, socioeconomic status, and color-blindness aid in the reinforcement of the existing power structure (Schiffer, 2015). Critical Race Theory approaches domestic violence by highlighting racial disparities among ethnic women who are victims of domestic violence (Schiffer, 2015). For example, women of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to be victims of domestic violence; African-American women represented 26% of lower socioeconomic status women who were also victims of domestic violence (Schiffer, 2015). This staggering statistic is further augmented by unfair treatment within a legal system that purports to protect all.

Although gender entrapment and CRT provide explanations as to why African-American women experience domestic violence, there are still many questions that remain about how African-American women perceive domestic violence. It is a lack of this knowledge that makes it impossible to establish effective interventions and programs that may address the issue (Bent-Goodley, 2004).

Summary Statement

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the roots of domestic violence and how it can often be traced back to childhood sexual abuse. This chapter also highlighted the importance of social and cultural contexts when establishing interventions that are

timely and logical to African-American women. This section also examined how theories like Critical Race Theory provide a foundation for understanding how African-American women who experience domestic violence are further victimized by specific social structures; e.g., the criminal justice system.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers the research questions and research goals, the research design, sample methods, data collection methods, the questionnaire, and data analysis methods.

Research Questions and Research Goals

This study seeks to investigate if culture (being African American) and minority status (being a woman) increase one's risk of experiencing domestic violence. The study consisted of 14 qualitative questionnaires completed by African-American women who have survived domestic violence in a previous relationship. The author used purposeful sampling among 30 African-American female domestic violence survivors. The questionnaires were distributed and collected by the author of the study. The questionnaire included factual questioning; namely, the type of relationship the survivors had with their abusers and divergent inquiry; i.e., if spirituality has aided in the survivors' healing. The questionnaires were completed by the survivors within the privacy of their respective residences.

The research topic that this study will investigate is the effect culture and minority status have on the African-American female domestic violence experience. This topic was investigated through the exploration of abuser and survivor characteristics from a survivor's perspective. The focus of abuser

characteristics was the type of relationship the survivor had with their abusers, the form of domestic violence experienced within the relationship, and the annual income of the abusers. The focus of survivor characteristics centered on the recollection of the last episode of abuse, personal characteristics that aided in healing, and the survivor's current relationship status.

Research Design

The questionnaire was developed by the author. The study utilized an exploratory-descriptive design. After a careful literature review, this design was chosen due to an interest in hearing the African-American female perspective on and experience within domestic violence. Each survey consisted of 12 questions: 8 close-ended and 4 open-ended. The questions seek to ascertain the characteristics of both the domestic violence survivors and their abusers. No personally identifiable information was captured. Additionally, all responses were combined with those of many others and summarized in the thesis to further protect participant confidentiality.

Sample Methods

The data for this project came from qualitative questionnaires completed by African-American female survivors of domestic violence (N=30). The original sample consisted of 30 respondents; however, after thoroughly examining the surveys, only 14 were fully completed. Therefore, the sample was reduced to (n=14). The recruitment method involved person-to-person contact as well as e-mail correspondence. Participants were recruited by the author within the Atlanta University Center Consortium. The invited participants received an electronic copy of the questionnaire, which they could complete and email back to the author or print out and return to the author upon

completion. All participants in the study are 18 years of age or older. All procedures were approved by the Clark Atlanta University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data Collection Methods

Survey distribution was conducted from October 12, 2016 to October 31, 2016. All participants were compensated with two points of extra credit—an academic incentive that offers students opportunities to enhance their grades—by the professor who assisted the author with participant recruitment and survey distribution. Questionnaires were typically completed in one hour. Participants completed the survey in the privacy of their respective homes. Upon completion, the professor informed the author that the surveys were completed. Subsequently, each completed questionnaire was returned to the author for analysis.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was created by the author. This was after a careful review of relevant literature that revealed a lack of research instruments that would sufficiently address the issues outlined in the study. Each survey contained 12 questions: 8 close-ended and 4 open-ended. The questions focused on the characteristics of both the domestic violence survivors and their abusers. Factual questioning was utilized to elicit straightforward responses. For example, participants were asked the following factual question: “What was your relationship with the abuser?” Participants were given the option to choose "Married," "Former boyfriend," etc. Divergent questioning was another method used in the questionnaire. Divergent questioning encourages a variety of answers, critical thinking, and personal reflection. An example of a divergent question is: "Has

spirituality aided in your healing?” The full questionnaire is available for viewing in the appendix section of this thesis (Appendix B).

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis proceeded after questionnaire collection. As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990), data collection continued to the point of theoretical saturation; that is, to the point at which collection and analysis of additional data failed to produce new perceptions. To analyze the data, the author reviewed each survey, took detailed notes, and independently identified important themes. After completing the qualitative data analysis, the author identified two salient themes: abuser characteristics and survivor characteristics.

Abuser characteristics were defined as the type of relationship the survivor shared with their abuser, the form of domestic violence experienced within the relationship, and the annual income of the abuser. Survivor characteristics were defined as recollecting the last episode of abuse, personal characteristics that aided in healing, and the survivor’s current relationship status. The author then coded the surveys using the final themes. The questionnaire allowed for both pre-domestic violence and post-domestic violence experiences to be compared and contrasted to identify patterns in the data.

Summary Statement

This methodology section addressed the practices and procedures employed to conduct the study. This section included a review of the research questions and research goals. There was also a discussion of the study design, the sampling methods, the data collection methods, and the data analysis methods.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter covers the description of the sample, questionnaire themes, credibility analysis, and the results of the study.

Sample Description

Fourteen African-American female freshmen students completed the questionnaire. The characteristics of domestic violence identified in the data were organized into two themes and several categories. The first theme was Abuser Characteristics: a) Abuser characteristics are defined as the relationship the victim had with the abuser; e.g., is the abuser a former boyfriend or even husband of the victim; b) the type of abuse perpetrated against the victim; i.e., physical or psychological abuse; and c) the socioeconomic status of the abuser; specifically, his annual income. The second theme was identified as Survivor Characteristics: a) Recollection of when the last episode of domestic violence occurred; b) description of the last domestic violence incident; c) personal characteristics that aided in domestic violence recovery; and d) identification of current relationship status.

Questionnaire Themes

Abuser characteristics emerged as an important contributing component to abuse, as all 14 respondents identified their abuser as a former boyfriend or lover. These responses are in line with previous research from Straus and Gelles (1986), which states

that 16% of couples experience violence in a given year. Regarding participants in this study, all respondents stated they were verbally and physically abused. Twelve of the fourteen respondents also suffered psychological and emotional abuse. The following example vividly illustrates the turmoil of domestic violence:

My ex-boyfriend would talk about and joke about my insecurities to put me down. He wouldn't allow me to enjoy anything. He wanted me to quit all extra-curricular activities so he [could] have all my attention. He cheated on me multiple times and threatened to kill himself if I left. [I felt] very empty, I was unsure how to love, and I was sure he did not love me.

In addition to the abuser characteristics described above, the annual income of one's abuser was also considered. Eleven of the fourteen respondents noted that the annual income of their abuser was between \$15,000 and \$30,000. Although there were no specific studies that examined the income of male domestic violence perpetrators, this study shares similar themes to a study done by Kalalichmen et al. (1998), which explored sexual coercion, domestic violence, and condom usage among low-income African-American women. Kalichman, Nachimson, Cherry, and Williams (1998) found that sexually coerced women are at a greater risk for encountering physical violence from a male partner who has a low income. This study's results align with the findings of the Kalichman et al. (1998) study; concluding that males who occupy lower socioeconomic strata; particularly with respect to income, pose an increased risk of physical aggression toward their African-American female partners.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, survivor characteristics are also significant in defining the African-American female domestic violence experience. Eleven of the

fourteen survey respondents could recall their last encounter with domestic violence; with 7 out of 14 respondents stating that the incident had occurred more than a year ago and the other 4 noting that the incident occurred six months ago. A major personal characteristic that aided the domestic violence survivors was spirituality; 13 of the 14 study participants noted that spirituality was vital to their recovery. This is beautifully articulated in this survivor's testimony:

"I did not let him interfere with my faith; I believe the Lord delivered me from this situation. Once I felt that my faith was being tested, I left him."

As an aspect of spirituality, faith is a crucial factor that allows African-American women to cope with domestic violence; and the association between spirituality and depression is important (Watlington & Murphy, 2006). In fact, Watlington and Murphy (2006) observed that African-American women who reported higher levels of spirituality and greater religious immersion reported fewer depressive symptoms in the wake of surviving domestic violence. Thus, the research findings of Watlington and Murphy (2006) and that of the author, respectively, align to suggest that faith and personal strength are great protective factors that help facilitate the healing and rebuilding processes for African-American women survivors of domestic violence.

Additionally, all 14 respondents stated that personal strength aided in their survival; and 13 of the 14 respondents indicated that they are currently in a relationship. The following response seems to exemplify and summarize the qualities that were palpable in each participant's testimony; i.e., faith, perseverance, and optimism:

I am in another relationship. We have been dating for two years now, and he has shown me what true love is. I don't have to worry if he loves me or not or if he is

cheating. He has never talked down to me or tried to control me in any [way]. I can honestly say I know what love is, no it is not perfect, but this current relationship has the foundations of being something great.

Credibility Analysis

The credibility analysis seeks to establish that the results of qualitative research are credible and realistic from the perspective of the research participant. In qualitative research, the participant perspective is utilized to describe or understand phenomena of interest from the participant point of view. The participants, then, are the only ones who can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. The Domestic Violence Survivor Questionnaire was purposely designed to elicit responses that were reasonably detailed and authentically captured one's experiences. Each question was both credible and realistic in its exploration of each participant's encounter with domestic violence. Therefore, based upon the credible and realistic answers of the participants, the questionnaire that was used to elicit such data is both credible and realistic.

Results

The primary goal of this study is to determine if being African American and a woman would increase one's risk of facing domestic violence. To achieve this goal, two themes were examined: abuser characteristics and survivor characteristics. The characteristics were analyzed via a credibility analysis that found the data to be both credible and realistic. Based upon examining the two themes and the credibility analysis, the author concluded that being an African-American woman appears to elevate one's risk of experiencing domestic violence.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter will summarize the study findings, discuss the findings as they relate to social work, highlight issues around human subjects, note study limitations, and provide the summary statement.

Summary of Study Findings

This study assumes that one's culture (being African American) and minority status (being a woman) increase the risk of experiencing domestic violence. This study sought to answer two questions. First, what factors put a woman at risk for experiencing domestic violence? Second, what factors aid in a woman's recovery from domestic violence? After perusing prior research and analyzing the questionnaire data for this study, the author can reasonably conclude that being an African-American woman increases one's risk of suffering domestic violence.

Discussion of the Findings

The results from this study offer a better understanding of how culture and minority status may impact the African-American female domestic violence experience; namely, encounters with physical abuse. Data from the National Family Violence Survey of 2000 states that one-quarter of Black women have experienced physical partner violence and 4% have been stalked (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). These study results

accord with the findings of the author's study, which found, perhaps even more staggeringly, that 12 of the 14 study participants, or 85% of those surveyed, experienced physical abuse.

Watlington and Murphy (2006) noted that African-American women who reported higher levels of spirituality and greater religious involvement reported fewer depressive symptoms in the wake of surviving domestic violence. This observation mirrors the results of the author's study, which revealed that 13 of the 14 participants identified spirituality as vital to their recovery.

Human Subjects Issues

The participants were informed of the purpose of the study, which was to examine if culture (being African American) and minority status (being a woman), with some consideration given to socioeconomic standing, increased one's risk of enduring gender-motivated violence. Selection criteria for participation in this study required that participants be African-American women and 18 years of age or older. Study participation involved answering closed-ended, open-ended, multiple choice, and demographic questions from an electronically distributed questionnaire.

Participants were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and, should they no longer wish to participate, they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or consequences. It was also communicated that the study offered both risks and indirect benefits; and while there were no direct benefits, study participants would contribute to a larger body of knowledge via their involvement. Participants were further advised regarding the risk that they may experience emotional and or

psychological discomfort while answering questions about sensitive topics. To mitigate this risk, contact information for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) was provided; including the phone number: 800-950-6264 and email address: info@nami.org. Study participants were informed that the documents of the study would be kept private; but if a report was published, it would not contain any identifying information from the participants. Contact information was also made available for the participants to submit any questions or concerns.

Implications for Social Work

This study is significant because it will contribute to a body of research on a topic that is still very much unexplored. Moreover, because minority communities often disproportionately suffer from overarching systems of oppression and discrimination, but minority women typically experience sexism from *within* their communities, having research that facilitates an understanding of how such oppression is manifested and coped with by minorities could prove invaluable in increasing culturally competent social work practice.

This study sought to acknowledge that minority women navigate multiplicative forces of racism and sexism in their responses to domestic violence (Sharma, 2001, as cited in Kasturirangan et al., 2004). This study can also help inform policy by providing service providers with knowledge about how societal forces influence the lives of their minority clients as well as how these clients access resources (Kasturirangan et al., 2004). Considering minority coping mechanisms, particularly those of African-American women abuse victims, the tenets of the Afrocentric Perspective underscore that

community and spirituality figure prominently within the lives of African-American women who have survived domestic violence. Therefore, it is incumbent upon both policymakers and practitioners to establish interventions that will benefit survivors of domestic violence *and* the communities in which they reside.

Furthermore, this study serves as a catalyst for service providers to develop and implement nontraditional methods of outreach that honor the community values and practices of their minority clients (Kasturirangan et al., 2004). Researchers can aid in the creation of novel and responsive interventions by researching how communities support and restore domestic violence survivors. Researchers may also wish to investigate spiritual healing as a component of survival.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include its small sample size and self-reported questionnaire. For future studies, the investigator could increase the generalizability of research results by increasing the sample size and perhaps eliminating the use of self-report questionnaires; these types of surveys may elicit information that is fraught with social desirability bias. Lastly, there was also difficulty in recruiting women for the study. This barrier could be attributed to the principal investigator being a male. In future explorations of this study's topic or similar investigations, male researchers may consider working with at least one female researcher to control for gender bias in the process of recruiting human subjects.

Summary Statement

As stated above, this chapter focused on several different sections including the summary of the findings, discussion of the findings as they relate to implications for social work, the limitations of the current study and recommendations for future studies, and issues surrounding human subjects.



APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER

CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board Office of Sponsored Programs
June 5, 2016

Mr. Samuel Perry <samueloperry@yahoo.com> School of Social Work, Clark Atlanta University
223 James P. Brawley Dr. SW Atlanta, GA 30314

RE: The impact of culture & minority status on the African-American female domestic violence experience.

Principal Investigator(s): Samuel Perry

Human Subjects Code Number: HR2016-5-653-1 Dear Mr. Perry:

The Human Subjects Committee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your protocol and approved of it as exempt in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Your Protocol Extended Approval Code is HR2016-5-653-1/A Type of Review: Expedited.

This permit will expire on June 4, 2017. Thereafter, continued approval is contingent upon the annual submission of a renewal form to this office.

The CAU IRB acknowledges your timely completion of the CITI IRB Training in Protection of Human Subjects – “Social and Behavioral Sciences Track”. **Your certification is due for renewal before March 24, 2018.**

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office or Dr. Paul I. Musey, (404) 880-6829.
Sincerely:

Paul I. Musey,
Ph.D. Chair
IRB: Human Subjects Committee
cc. Office of Sponsored Programs

223 James P. Brawley Drive, S.W. * ATLANTA, GA 30314-
4391 * (404) 880-8000

*Formed in 1988 by consolidation of Atlanta University, 1865
and Clark College, 1869*

APPENDIX B

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Domestic Violence Survivor Questionnaire

Date _____

Female Male Birth Date _____

Are you under 18 years of age? yes no

If yes, name of parent/guardian _____ Relationship to you _____

Petitioner's Place of Birth _____ Race: Black White Latin Asian

Ethnic Origin _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

What was your relationship to the abuser?

- Married Divorced Dating, if yes, how long? _____ Roommate
 Boyfriend Former Boyfriend Intimate Partner Neighbor
 Girlfriend Former Girlfriend Other, please specify: _____

Are there any children in common with your abuser: yes no

If yes how many 1 2 3 4 5

Does this person have a drug problem? yes no I don't know

Does this person have an alcohol problem? yes no I don't know

Does this person have a history of *clinically diagnosed* mental health problems? yes no I don't know

What is the income of the former abuser: 0-15,000 15,000-30,000 30,000-45,000 45,000-60,000 60,000 +

Are you a victim of?

- verbal abuse
 psychological abuse
 sexual abuse
 physical abuse
 stalking

The last episode of abuse took place:

- This week Last week A month ago Three months ago
 Six months ago One year ago More than one year ago other _____

Briefly describe the last incident of abuse:

Has personal strength helped you to heal?

Has spirituality aided in your healing?

Do you see yourself in another relationship?

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