

Indian women's Experiences of Domestic Violence in the Context of Migration to Aotearoa New Zealand: The Role of Women's In-Laws

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Indian migrant women may experience violence and abuse not only from their partner but also from members of his family, including the mother-in-law. Such violence and abuse need to be understood within a cultural context in which arranged marriage and the provision of dowry are still normative. These arrangements give in-laws considerable leverage over married women and their natal family. We show how these dynamics can play out in the context of migration making women vulnerable to exploitation, close surveillance, control, isolation and abuse. It is important that service providers in the host country become educated about such dynamics.

Keywords: gender-based violence, migration; dowry, Indian culture, family structure

Introduction

A common view in the West is that domestic violence primarily involves the abuse of a lone woman by a lone man. It is widely thought that such violence thrives in isolation. In fact, isolating his partner from family and friends and keeping her under surveillance is a well-documented part of the male abuser's tactics to exercise power and control over her (Avni, 1991). Some historical analyses point to the undermining of the extended family and the weakening of community links as factors which have exacerbated violence against women (Cooper, 2012, p.18). Thus, service providers in New Zealand and other places where the relatively isolated nuclear family is the norm may be tempted to see involvement in extended family and community networks as a protective factor.

In fact, in certain contexts, such thinking is naïve and dangerous. Far from being protective, both the extended family, especially the woman's in-laws, and the wider community may be heavily implicated in the abuse she is experiencing. This may be the case in certain religious communities, sects, gangs and some "upscale" communities (Shapiro, 2013). Our research involves a group of women for whom extended family and community networks are particularly problematic: Indian immigrant women in New Zealand who are experiencing domestic violence. We think that the lessons to be learnt from our participants have important implications for service providers throughout the Indian diaspora.

Our study takes a broadly feminist view of domestic violence. That is, we see violence against women as, at least in part, both a reflection of – and a reinforcement of – a gender hierarchy in which the interests of men are privileged while women are systematically oppressed. Thus, we begin our article by providing a broad account of patriarchy in Indian culture. We focus particularly on the status of women, common assumptions and arrangements regarding marriage, and some key features of the nature and extent of domestic violence in India. But while such things reflect a strong gender hierarchy in

Indian culture, it is insufficient to explain the role of the husband's family and the wider community in the abuse of Indian immigrant women. Thus, we also examine power relations between the families of men and the families of women and certain aspects of mother-son relationships. In our view, these power relations are important if one wants to understand the role of the husband's family, particularly the mother-in-law, in the perpetration of violence against women. Moreover, as our introduction shows, these features of Indian culture tend to survive migration to the West.

Following the example Bronfenbrenner's (1979), Ecological Systems Theory, we argue that domestic violence in Indian migrant communities can be best understood as occurring within nested systems of oppression. While interveners will typically focus on the victim and, less frequently, the perpetrator, victim and perpetrator behaviour need to be understood in the context of their respective families, including the power disparities between those families. In turn, family dynamics are strongly influenced by the norms and values of the wider community. In the case of Indian immigrant families, that includes the community of the homeland and the immigrant community within the new country. Moreover, the way immigrant communities respond to domestic violence is shaped by their relationship with the wider host society. It is important to understand the way processes at each level can serve to exacerbate the challenges facing women, provide barriers to accessing help and undermine some of the protective factors which might otherwise serve to protect women's interests.

The Indian context

Social mores and attitudes regarding the status and treatment of women as second-class citizens in Indian culture have a long history, dating back to ancient times. For example, the epic tale of Ramayana (over 5000 years ago), resonates with the concept of sex-appropriate behaviours by portraying women as possessing exaggerated feminine qualities and being subordinate to

men (Sarshar, 2010). As various authors have pointed out, In India, the ideology and practices of patriarchy ensure the domination of men over women at both an institutional and family level and condone violence against women (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004; Chaudhuri, Morash, & Yingling, 2014; Esqueda & Harrison, 2005; Fernandez, 1997; Kapoor, 2014; McDuire-Ra, 2012; Nanda et al., 2014). Women are brought up with values that stress that family matters must be kept private and that husbands deserve respect regardless of the manner in which they treat their wives. But perhaps the most graphic examples of women's second-class status are female infanticide and foeticide. Estimates of the number of female fetuses selectively aborted in India each year range from 250,000 to 500,000 and where ultra sound scans are unavailable, an unknown number of girls are killed at birth (Summer, 2009).

It has been argued that patriarchal practices do have a protective factor for women. In what Kandiyoti called the "patriarchal bargain" (1988), a favourable marriage is said to provide women with financial and physical security and enhance their status within the community. In return, they are expected to assume a subservient role within the family and to ensure that other women maintain their subservient status within their families (Fernandez, 1997). While this helps explain how women may collude in the oppression of themselves and other women, it is not a paradigm that treats women as equal to men

It should be recognized that the status of women in India has seen significant change over the last few decades. For example, in the cities, there is little difference between the literacy rates of men and women (Kumar & Sangeeta, 2013). Women are seen in a much wider range of careers and more are holding positions of power in politics than used to be case (Nielsen & Waldrop, 2014). Nevertheless, many women have not experienced such improvements and continue to face significant levels of discrimination and oppression, including high levels of sexual and domestic violence, most of which goes unreported (Aduja et al., 2000).

It is also important to recognise that Indian culture is not monolithic. India is a land of religious diversity with an ancient caste system operating within each of the major religions (Almeida & Dolan-Delvecchio, 1999). However, across religions, certain scriptures are often cited as justifying the submission of women to male authority, even if more nuanced readings produce a more complex picture. This is evident in critical readings of texts from Hinduism (Omvedt, 1990), Islam (Hajjar, 2004), Sikhism (Sharma, 2000) and Christianity (Kroeger & Beck, 1996).

Marriage and dowry

About 90% of Indian marriages are arranged (Toledo, 2009): that is, the parents of the prospective bride and groom are primarily responsible for making the match.¹ They also discuss how much dowry, and in what forms, is to be given to the groom's family. Dowry is the money, goods and presents the bride's family is expected to give to the groom's family as part of the implicit marriage contract.

Dowry both reflects and perpetuates the status differential between men and women. This is graphically demonstrated by the widespread practices of female infanticide and foeticide. That is, parents often prefer the birth of a son over a daughter. A daughter is often seen as a financial liability due to the dowry her parents will need to provide when she marries and is given to another family (Kakar, 1988; Rudd, 2001). This is particularly so among the poor and those with little or no education (Nanda et al., 2014). In contrast, a son may be regarded as an asset who can attract dowry and thus elevate the position of his parents, not only within their family, but also within the wider community (Hegde, 2015).

Although outlawed by the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), the dowry system continues in all parts of India (Rastogi & Therly, 2006). There are no set rules for these demands: they are usually proportional to the status, social class, and education of the groom (Billing, 1992). For example, the groom's parents are likely to feel entitled to demand significantly greater dowry if the prospective groom is resident abroad, highly educated and has a well-paying job (Rastogi & Therly, 2006), all of which are commonly held out as enhancing the standard of living and status of the bride. Significantly, dowry demands are not restricted to the beginning of the marriage: often they continue for years after the wedding ceremony (Kumari, 1989; Rao, 1997; Schular, Hashemi, Riley, & Akhter, 1996). In the most egregious cases, a woman whose family has not met demands for further dowry may be killed. Typically, she has kerosene poured over her before being set alight so that the death looks like a kitchen accident or a suicide (Rastogi & Therly, 2006; Stein, 1988; Stone & James, 1995). In New Zealand, dowry-related abuse has been included in the definition of family violence (Family Violence Act, 2018, s.9(4)). Dowry is one of the most widespread social practices that leads to oppression of women in India (Jeyaseelan et al., 2014).

Dowry places the bride's parents in a subordinate position in relation to the groom and his parents. Typically, the daughter is "given away" to the groom's family and can no longer rely on her parents financially and emotionally. Instead, she is expected to devote herself to her marital family (Jeyaseelan et al., 2014). Traditionally, the groom's family make all decisions for her. If she is subjected to domestic violence, the expectations of being a "good wife" will typically restrict her from reporting the violence owing to fear of being ostracized and isolated from her natal family and community (Ragavan, Iyengar, & Wurtz, 2015). It is considered highly shameful for the woman to return to her parents' home. In addition, most parents consider her a financial burden as they empty their savings on her wedding and dowry (Rastogi & Therly, 2006). As Rew (2013) points out, an abused wife's parents and other relatives may rationalize the situation, coercing her to remain in the relationship.

Migration

As mentioned, the pressure to provide dowry may continue well beyond the wedding. As our research shows, it may also continue when the couple migrate.

without the consent of at least one of the parties (Simon-Kumar, 2019)

¹ Arranged marriage should not be confused with forced marriage in which the marriage goes ahead

Usually a groom who has permanent residency or citizenship can use that status to leverage dowry demands upwards because of his ability to get his bride into the host country (Tse, 2007). In other cases, arranged marriages are fixed in order to get funds in the form of dowry for the groom and his bride to emigrate (Natarajan, 2002).

Historically, New Zealand is a bicultural country but a multicultural society in terms of contemporary demographics (Simon-Kumar, 2019). India is currently the largest source of migrants into New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). Along with new, positive opportunities, migration can present significant challenges. These include limited knowledge of the language of the host country, lack of access to jobs of good standing, separation from community and family, and non-resident status (Abraham, 2000; Hass, Dutton, & Orloff, 2000). These challenges are particularly problematic for an immigrant woman experiencing any form of domestic violence, including continuing demands for dowry. For example, isolation from friends and family, lack of knowledge about the law and available services, and fear of being ostracised by the family and the wider community will likely discourage seeking help. She may be reluctant to involve the police because of negative experiences with the authorities at home. Her ability to remain in the country may depend on the perpetrator who may be the sponsor of her application for residence (if he is already a resident) or the principal applicant on their joint application for residence (Robertson et al., 2007). Perpetrators leverage these factors to exercise power and control over their partners and preventing women from seeking help (Raj & Silverman, 2002; Robertson et al., 2007). Sometimes, his family is heavily implicated in the abuse.

There are number of different scenarios regarding migration and in-laws. In some cases, wife and husband emigrate together after their wedding, leaving their respective families in India. In some cases, the man is already a resident in the host country and "imports" a wife from India. Less commonly, it is the woman who is a resident and brings her husband into the country. In all three scenarios, one or (occasionally) both sets of parents may follow their children in migrating. Sometimes, they may have already settled in the host country before the younger couple have married. A further possibility is that parents do not migrate but nevertheless visit the couple from time to time. Whether they stay in India, migrate to New Zealand or just visit, the women's parents- in-law can remain a powerful force in her life and can be heavily implicated in the abuse she experiences. This is particularly the case where the parents-in-law (and sometimes other of their children) live in the same household, as is the custom in India. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that abuse by the in-laws can occur irrespective of their proximity: that is, abuse can be meted out to daughters-in-law from a distance.

Of course, extended family structures and multi-generational households can prove beneficial to the immigrant bride by provide support in various forms, including help with childcare (Baldassar & Wilding, 2014; Natarajan, 2002). However, naïve professionals working with immigrant Indian women may misinterpret the role of the in-laws in their client's life, assume that is

beneficial and fail to recognise the potential or actual abuse that may be perpetrated. As our research shows, parents-in-law, especially mothers-in-law, have a particular role in abuse directed against their daughters-in-laws.

METHODS

This article is a part of a larger study which explores how Indian women who experience domestic violence navigate safety in the context migration to New Zealand. The study was conducted in two stages. The first stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with 20 key informants in India and New Zealand (10 in each country), including counsellors and social workers associated with women's refuges and facilitators of stopping violence programmes in immigrant communities. These interviews helped us better understand the context within which Indian immigrant women resist domestic violence. They also helped us plan the second stage; four case studies of Indian immigrant women who experienced domestic violence in New Zealand. The case studies were based on interviews but in some instances, were supplemented by analysis of related documents such as applications for protection orders and written decisions by judges. Such documents provided insights into women's interactions with statutory authorities. Open-ended interviewing allowed women to tell their story in the way they wanted. Particular attention was paid to how cultural norms and factors relating to migration had an impact on their reaction to domestic violence in the host country. Case studies allow those stories to be understood in the context of such factors.

The first author conducted the interviews. All key informant interviews were interviewed in English while three out of four case study interviews were in Hindi but then transcribed into English. The first author is an Indian immigrant in New Zealand who was born and raised in South India and is fluent in both English and Hindi.

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology at the University of Waikato. The safety of the participants was paramount. We communicated with them using only channels the women felt were safe from interception. The interviews were conducted at places they felt safe: in each case, the premises of an ethnic service provider with which the women were familiar. We maintained their anonymity by using pseudonyms and having them check the draft case studies. Because these types of interviews may trigger strong feelings and can result in some discomfort or distress, the interviewer called woman participants a few days after the interview to check if they were okay. If needed, follow-up interviews were arranged.

Analytic Process

The interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, a widely-used technique for the analysis of qualitative information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis provides a practical, yet flexible, research tool which leads to an in-depth analysis of the data by recognizing recurring themes or patterns within them (Braun & Clarke).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings are discussed below under five main themes: collusion by in-laws in the violence, in-laws' sense of entitlement, continuing dowry extortion, control of property, isolation, and domestic slavery.

Collusion

Research conducted across various settings confirms that outcomes for women who are being abused are much better if they receive a positive response from the people to whom they disclose the violence or who otherwise become aware of the violence (e.g. Domenech del Rio & García del Valle, 2019; Dworkin, Brill & Ullman, 2019; Hydén, 2015; Sylaska, & Edwards, 2014). Invariably, our participants reported that members of the extended families into which they had married knew about the violence and either did nothing about it or actively colluded with it. For example, none of the ten members of the household intervened when Reena was being beaten by her husband although all were aware of it. Her sister-in-law would stand right outside their bedroom door hearing Reena wince in pain, but she did not come to her rescue.

Everyone at home knew I was being beaten and I would cry. The door would be closed and no one would come in. And no one would say anything after... One day I told my mother-in-law that he hits me so much, why doesn't she tell him anything? She replied, "How can I say anything? I can't do anything."

Although Reena's mother-in-law has positioned herself as a helpless, passive pawn in the patriarchal system, it is clear that she manipulated the situation, playing an integral role in undermining the relationship between Reena and her husband. For example, she would go to great lengths to ensure that Reena and her husband did not get time alone. She would distort facts and complain to her son about Reena in what Reena saw as a deliberate attempt to drive a wedge between husband and wife.

Similarly, when Nisha questioned her mother-in-law about the way things were, she would not only be verbally abused but her mother-in-law would complain to her husband about how she was being disrespected – for which Nisha got “punished” by her husband.

It seems likely that Amandeep's mother-in-law used manipulation to carry out physical abuse through her son. There were many instances where Amandeep would be slapped or beaten by Raj after he had talked to his mother. Although she couldn't tell for sure, Amandeep felt that these discussions involved her mother-in-law bad mouthing her to her husband. She overheard a conversation in which her mother-in-law “was telling my ex that he should have more control over me and he should be restricting me financially and he should be asking me where I am going and why.”

In-laws entitlement

Consistent with the general tendency for a son to be seen as an asset and a daughter as a liability, when a marriage is formed, the family of the bride is often in a subordinate position in relation to the family of the groom. In return for taking on the “liability” of the bride, the groom's family may feel entitled to exercise control over the woman, to treat her as a servant and to make demands of her family. Indeed, a sense of entitlement on the part of the groom's family can be evident before the wedding. This was evident in Nisha's marriage. Her husband's family were initially interested in her cousin but when they came to talk to the family of the prospective bride, they were more impressed by Nisha, who happened to be visiting. They called Nisha's mother saying they wanted their son to marry Nisha instead. This clearly indicates the power imbalance from the start between the families of the groom and the bride. The former has the “asset” of an eligible son and is able to demand a “better” outcome while the latter, burdened by the “liability” of a daughter, is in no position to make demands.

Such displays of entitlement continued throughout Nisha's time with her in-laws. The day Nisha went to her in-laws' house after her wedding, her mother-in-law yelled at her for not formally inviting her daughter to the dining table although everyone was aware when meals were being served. She said it was shameful to be treated that way by Nisha's family.

Continuing dowry extortion

One important set of demands are those related to dowry. These can continue into the marriage. For example, after the birth of a child, a new mother's family is usually expected to distribute presents to members of her husband's family. Typically, the presents are more extravagant and expensive if the child is a boy.

When her daughter was born, Amandeep bought clothes for her parents-in-law and sister-in-law. Her mother-in-law was angry: she had expected gold jewellery and her father-in-law demanded Rs. 2.5 million (approximately NZD 55,600) in cash. Similarly, Usha's parents-in-law were unhappy with the gifts they received from Usha's family. “(They) gathered around me, pestered me and had a huge fight with me till 3am because they were not satisfied with what they got.” Similarly, her husband was fond of telling her that he could have married a girl from a family who was willing to give him a lot more dowry because he was resident overseas. In this way, continuing concerns about dowry can become a focal point for abuse.

It should be evident from the above examples that it is not only the daughter-in-law who is subjected to dowry-related abuse, but also her parents. The woman's parents are often subject to threats if the dowry demands are not met. One of our key-informants discussed this:

The pressures put on by the families back home in the country of origin; you stay in that (abusive) relationship because the perpetrator... he'll have links back home. Then his family will be harassing the wife's family, all sorts of things happen.

Control of property

Economic abuse, in which an abusive man controls his partners access to resources, is a well-recognised tactic of power and control associated with domestic violence. Our research shows that that the abuser's family, particularly his mother, can be complicit in this.

For example, Amandeep's mother-in-law took all of Amandeep's certificates and jewellery for "safe keeping." She would give her the jewellery if they had to go to the temple or a wedding. She would take it off Amandeep once they got back home. All of Nisha's jewellery was held by her mother-in-law back in India, even though Nisha herself was in New Zealand. When Nisha visited India for a wedding, she asked her mother-in-law if she could have her jewellery back, but was told that the keys to the locker which held the jewellery were lost, although Nisha knew that was not the case.

In the context of migration, one piece of property is particularly important: one's passport. Several of our key informants described instances in which women were denied access to their passports by their husbands and/or their mothers-in-law. In some cases, the women did not even know what visa they were on or when it expired. This made them vulnerable to threats of being reported to immigration authorities if they sought help with the violence they were experiencing.

Isolation

Isolating the victim is a well-recognised tactic of power and control. Migrant women, living in an unfamiliar community far away from their own family, can be particularly vulnerable to isolating tactics (Abraham, 2000). In the West, isolation is usually understood as being enforced by the male abuser. As our research shows, in the context of Indian migration, the abuser's family can be heavily implicated in this process.

In-laws can participate in such isolation by insisting that their daughter-in-law severs all ties with her natal family and by otherwise controlling her access to the outside world. The case studies include many examples of this. For example, Amandeep's mother-in-law not only took jewellery for "safe keeping": she also maintained control of her certificates. By keeping them in her possession, she could ensure that Amandeep could not look for a job without her knowledge. Nisha got a job in a school but...

My brother-in-law and sister-in-law made sure I got late to school, by taking a long time in the bathroom...When I'd come back from school, they would lock me out of the house and not open the door for hours. I would stand there in the scorching heat. When the neighbour came to my rescue by asking me to sit inside their house, my mother-in-law picked a fight with her. Finally, my father-in-law went to the principal and asked him to fire me.

Nisha's in-laws imposed strict rules on how often, and for how long, Nisha could visit her parents. After she rang her parents for help, they picked her up from her in-laws' house. However, despite knowing at least something of the abuse, her parents delivered her back to her in-laws five days later, in what can only be understood as keeping

their side of the marriage contract. Presumably, this was preferable for her parents than the shame of having a separated daughter.

In another story, Usha's parents-in-law followed her and her husband to New Zealand. They insisted on knowing her whereabouts throughout the day. They would ring their son and complain to him that Usha was not home on time. This in turn would lead to him calling her and yelling at her for not being home. These were attempts to isolate Usha, which often escalated to nasty verbal abuse.

There are other unique forms of surveillance to which migrant women may be subject which further increase their isolation. One of the key informants, a social worker with an ethnic social service provider, spoke about incidents where women attending community events and celebrations were constantly monitored by their in-laws and husband. They often dictated who the women were allowed to talk to. If suspicious of her interactions with others, they interrogated the daughter-in-law when she returned home.

Domestic slavery

As the lowest ranked adults in extended family households, our case study participants were often expected by their parents-in-law to do the bulk of the cooking and cleaning. For example, when Reena joined her husband and his family in New Zealand, she was expected to take over all the household chores. When Nisha went to live with her husband's family her mother-in-law fired the housemaid and expected Nisha to do all the household. When Nisha suggested that the workload be shared with her sister-in-law, her mother-in-law became enraged, yelling at her. Similarly, Amandeep's mother-in-law demanded Amandeep did all the household chores but made no such demand of her daughter.

Such examples reflect the difference in the status of daughters and daughters-in-law. Although the daughter falls under the surveillance of her father or brother before she gets married, she is still given more privileges than the daughter-in-law. Moreover, she may well collude with – or actively participate in – the abuse of the daughter-in-law. For example, as mentioned above, Nisha's sister-in-law actively participated in sabotaging Nisha's attempts to hold down a job. Reena's experience with her sister-in-law helps explain the dynamics. Initially, Reena thought her sister-in-law was "sweet" but in one telling incident, she overheard a conversation between her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. The sister-in-law was speaking positively of Reena only to have the mother-in-law angrily tell her to "shut up" and stop praising Reena. In a strict patriarchal hierarchy, loyalty to the system which may offer some protection is likely to take priority over any feeling of solidarity with an outsider.

Conclusion

We need to preface our conclusions by noting that we cannot extrapolate from our research to all Indian communities in New Zealand. Like India itself, Indian migrants in New Zealand are incredibly diverse: for example, in terms of religion, language, class and regional origin. Some families have been here for generations while others, such as our participants, are first generation

migrants. However, from the themes discussed, it is clear that those Indian migrant women who experience abuse from their husbands are highly vulnerable to extended family abuse as well. The roots of such abuse can be traced back to the second-class status of women in India wherein a birth of a son is celebrated while a birth of a daughter is usually a sombre occasion. Additionally, female foeticide and infanticide have been on the rise and have a direct link to financial pressures brought about by the practice of dowry. Following her wedding, the daughter typically enters a household comprising of her husband, his unmarried sisters, his brothers and their wives and in-laws. This household typically has a strict gender hierarchy with the men in the family at the top, followed by their respective wives. The new daughter-in-law is at the bottom. It is duty of the mother-in-law and other daughters-in-law to ensure that the new entrant submits to this hierarchy and the rules that accompany it. Disobedience will result in disciplinary action – although it needs to be added that following the rules will not necessarily protect her from abuse. As we have seen, her mother-in-law may directly abuse her or manipulate the situation such that the husband enacts the abuse. Either way, by such tactics, the mother-in-law seeks to maintain her position in the hierarchy. This hierarchy continues after migration to the host country, even if the in-laws remain in India. In such cases, the abuse continues via telephone, e-mails and the manipulation of family relationships.

Although it might seem like mothers-in-law are to be blamed, it is useful to place them into a broader context of structural patriarchy. As discussed earlier, Indian migrant women operate within nested structures in the ecological model that comprise of the perpetrator, family, Indian communities, Indian culture and the host society. The family layer can further be broken down to the patriarchal gender hierarchy wherein women are under the surveillance of men. That is, while mothers and mothers-in-law do not lack agency, they do operate within tight constraints of gender roles and gender power relations. According to the “patriarchal bargain” (Kandiyoti, 1988), either passively or actively, they may engage in self-perpetration of oppression in return for certain benefits patriarchy is presumed to bring. This includes the abuse daughters-in-law are subjected to by their mothers-in-law.

The production of a son plays a key role in advancing the position of women. The birth of a son and the hope of impending power it brings with it, subsequently play an important role in the way mothers treat their daughters-in-law. In this manner, giving birth to a son can be seen as a woman's first step in gaining a position of power and control within the family. The corollary of this is that a woman who is oppressed and abused by her mother-in-law can look forward to the possibility of giving birth to a son and becoming the oppressor.

In the ecological model, the family level is nested within the community level. From our analysis, it is evident that some parts of the wider Indian immigrant community condone domestic violence. This takes us back to cultural norms, on the family level, around the role of women in not bringing shame to the family and the community. On a community level, there is pressure to preserve home-cultural values within the context of

migration to a host society. For women, this could sometimes mean tolerating domestic violence. Since reporting abuse in a host society is largely viewed as bringing shame to the immigrant community, women are often expected to suffer in silence. Such community norms not only affect lower-order systems (family, perpetrator and woman) but also are affected by these systems. That is, there is reciprocity between the community and family levels. While mothers-in-law are viewed as elders in the community, there are certain implicit expectations that come with this position. Indeed, a mother-in-law can be frowned upon and may lose respect within the community if she does not keep her daughter-in-law in her place.

That is, mothers-in-law are endowed with the responsibility to maintain gender hierarchy within the household. In return, the community may condone the abuse to which daughters-in-law are subjected. In fact, in some cases, the community colludes with the husband and in-laws in perpetrating abuse. It can equally be said that the community's attitudes towards abuse allows extended family abuse to thrive within the household and the wider community.

While the status quo for Indian migrant women looks grim, it is important to remember that domestic violence in Indian migrant communities occurs within the wider context of the host society. Therefore, the host society also has some responsibility to ensure that migrant communities feel welcome and understood.

Implications for research

There is a paucity of research about family violence within the context of Indian migrant extended families, particularly research which considers the diversity of migrant communities in New Zealand. We argue that exploring in-laws' involvement in the lives of couples will help understand the family dynamics that help to perpetuate domestic violence in Indian migrant families and increase awareness among service providers about unique aspects of domestic violence in Indian families. Further, interviewing abusive mothers-in-law have the potential to not only help analyse how and why they became abusive but also to understand how women navigate their safety in this context.

Immigrant women are likely to benefit from research that identifies levers of change within Indian communities. Currently, the potential for communities to make a stand against domestic violence is largely unrealised. This in turn puts pressure on in-laws to keep their daughter-in-law in her place. Since the community level is the one that maintains and reinforces cultural norms that promote tolerance of abuse, studies identifying and tapping into community resources that do not condone violence against women could contribute to meaningful social change within Indian communities.

Implications for practice

Intervenor (e.g. social workers, counsellors, police officers) need to possess a culturally-nuanced understanding of domestic violence involving Indian migrant families. As can be seen from our analysis, it is particularly important for practitioners to be aware of the dynamics of extended families and the real possibility that

in-laws, including mothers-in-law, may be complicit in the abuse.

Indian women operate at the core of an ecological system, within multiple nested structures. These structures hinder women's efforts to seek help in the event of domestic violence. At both a family and community level, women can experience strongly negative consequences for breaking ranks and seeking outside help to end the violence. It is essential for social service providers to understand the constraints under which women live their lives and the dangers that they face when they seek help. These dangers may be amplified for women who are not New Zealand citizens or permanent residents. Service providers need to be persistent and patient in helping immigrant women. For instance, they should not give up if women are seen to be unresponsive. Instead, agencies should make the most of the opportunities presented to them in interacting with these women. They should do so in a culturally appropriate manner with an understanding of women's position within larger structures of their family and community. In particular, extended family dynamics should be explored.

Similarly, lawyers representing Indian migrant women need to understand the dynamics of migration and pay close attention to sociocultural aspects of the home country. For instance, according to some experts in this research, dowry and in-laws' involvement in abuse are largely overlooked in many cases by women's advocates. Lawyers need to understand the particular cultural and immigration barriers migrant women have had to overcome to seek help. That is, lawyers should be cognizant of the pressures facing Indian women on a family and community level. Perhaps this awareness can be achieved if professionals asked the 'right' questions when women approached them for help. For instance, asking them about their relationship with their in-laws has the potential to reveal the tough constraints women operate under while navigating their safety.

Education can help here. In our observations, training programmes, across a range of professions, pay inadequate attention to domestic violence in general and even less attention to domestic violence in the context of the diverse immigrant communities in New Zealand. Such education needs to go beyond broad stereotypes. For example, in relation to Indian immigrant communities, it is important to note that not all instances of arranged marriages involve the practice of dowry, not all instances of dowry lead to domestic violence and not all domestic violence in Indian migrant communities is caused by dowry. However, it is important for service providers to be vigilant about these cultural factors that play a vital role in sustaining injustices to women.

In paying attention to the sociocultural aspects of domestic violence, the multi-level factors that play out at community, family and individual level and the challenges posed by migration, there will likely be an improvement in not only the safety of women and children but also long term statistics of incidence of domestic violence in Indian immigrant communities in New Zealand.

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