



Valeri Lolomari on Raising the Awareness to Collectively End Domestic Violence among Asians in the UK

In their 1996 publication, Dasgupta and Warriar explained that “an Asian woman’s identity is tied to her role as a wife and mother; a divorced or single mother is perceived to be a failure, regardless of any abuse she may have endured.”

Women of many ethnicities recently recounted their diverse experiences with perpetrators of abuse at a seminar. A British-Asian woman described how her ex-husband and his family had subjected her to heinous acts of gender-based violence (GBV). She described how she was intimidated into quiet before she made the decision to speak up. After being admitted to the hospital due to a period of sexual and physical abuse, she made the decision to leave. She had the bravery she needed thanks to that encounter. Having gone through a long healing

journey, she shared her story to encourage women in abusive relationships to take the necessary steps to leave that place of abuse.

She further explained that Asian communities, like many others, are known to be patriarchal, with males naturally ranked above females. Women in these cultural contexts are indoctrinated to believe they are inferior to men, so they endure abuse passed down from generation to generation. Cultural considerations like ‘Sharam’ and ‘izzat’ effectively keep women from reporting domestic violence, and that act of silence translates to shame and honour, respectively. Most of these women exhibit repressive tendencies, one of the reasons they face domestic abuse even as immigrants.

The United Nations describes do-

mestic violence as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It also describes abuse as “physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. Abuse includes any behaviour that frightens, intimidates, terrorises, manipulates, hurts, humiliates, blames or injures someone.” Abuse is unlawful and punishable by the law in the United Kingdom, which is why perpetrators keep their victims injured, isolated, unemployed, and barred from visiting.

Perpetrators of abuse are not limited to husbands but extended family members like the in-laws, who live in the same household as the couple. Since abuse is underreported, Asian women become susceptible to do-



mestic violence, enabling the culture of silence. They live in isolation, have a language speaking barrier and do not have supportive friends and family to encourage them; this prevents them from seeking help from authorities mandated to protect them. Some have suffered fatal injuries, died in the process or resigned to fate. The unfortunate thing in the midst of all this is that the perpetrators go unpunished.

With the recent developments in the world, one would think there will be a steady decline in the prevalence of domestic abuse, and women will be regarded as equals and not humans to control or subject to abuse. Sadly, this is not the case. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) states that 7.9% of women in the UK, equal to 1,300,000, suffered domestic violence in 2018. Regrettably, the gender of a child, mode of dressing, desire to further education, the network of friends and something as minor as visiting family could predispose them to domestic abuse. With all that's happening, one would wonder why these women are yet to divorce their men. Sabri et al.'s (2018) study about "Patterns of Abuse Among South Asian Women" discovered that the fear of the stigma associated with divorce barred the women from leaving their abusive partner. Other reasons were a threat to life, lack of financial empowerment, illiteracy, lack of self-preservation, children, cultural norms, and pull factors such as apologies and reassurances.

Approach to curbing domestic abuse

Advocacy groups supporting Asian women living in Britain against domestic violence have been strategic in the fight to curb the menace. They have employed the services of women who can communicate effectively with the victims when they call help care lines. Since adopting this strategy, the number of women seeking help has increased; these women have also got protection from these agencies. Organisations such as Asian Women's Resource Centre (AWRC), Muslims Women's Network (MWNUK), The Asian Project, Kiran Support Services, The Asian Circle, Ashiana, Roshni, Aanchal, and Karma Nirvana have all secured the safety of thousands of women. They give hope, provide support while understanding the differences in ethnicities and ensure the well-being of all who come to them. They offer a safe, confidential and non-judgmental environment, where women undergoing any form of violence in their homes are encouraged to speak out.

According to UN Women, the percentage of women who say they have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime is significantly higher than the global average of 27%. It is 35% in India, 38% in Timor Leste, and 50% or more in Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Bangladesh, to name just a few countries. In some cases, the accomplishments of

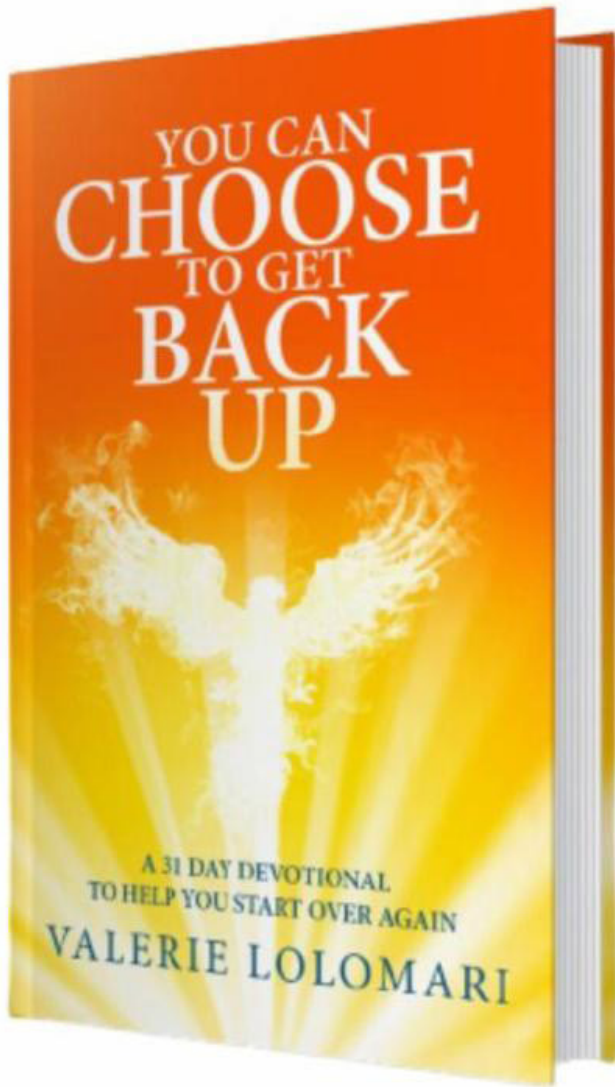
men exonerate them from prosecution for crimes, but women are hardly ascribed the same treatment. Women are painfully trained to accept toxic masculinity as the norm, while men are raised as entitled and celebrated beings. Harmful cultural norms have prevented justice and kept women and girls in chains within and outside their communities. In these societies, violence thrives without repercussion to the perpetrators because cultural factors adversely influence the number of victims seeking help from the authorities. Record also has it that the growing number of survivors has shown that violence against women and girls is still a prevalent plight in our world. The earlier we adopt protective approaches such as education, empowerment and awareness, the better results we will receive. These approaches are needed to encourage the adoption of new traditional norms that enhance equality and equity and will also ensure women's safety.

One of such approaches recommended for adoption is to raise the male child to respect women and girls at home, in schools and the society at large. Older men should show good examples that will be seen and emulated by younger boys. We should unlearn toxic masculinity, and our women and girls should be treated as humans by all and sundry; none must suffer any form of discrimination because "she's female." The fight against abuse against women and girls is collective.

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