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The Changing Concept of Self and Identity in Aging Working Women from Shelter Homes: Case Studies on Rebuilding of Interpersonal Relationships

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Abstract

Violence against women has been the subject of study in many countries and in different cultures. The fact that women enjoy a secondary position in many societies is proved through different studies, in spite of the changes in the laws of the countries. How differently a woman is treated at home and work front too is a known subject of research. There are numerous women out there who have been forced into the work force without any option left for them to decide otherwise. May be they don't enjoy the recognition they deserve and the only motivating force for them is the preservation of their individual dignity. There is no certainty about their future yet they are successful in many ways. Here are three women who have dared to raise a voice against the injustice done to them and have ended up in shelter homes for having a mind which thinks differently than the imposed social norms and customs set by the society and have used their voice to get help to preserve their dignity. From uncertainty about life and hopelessness to gaining confidence, having a strong resiliency to hoping for a better future for the future generation, they have seen it all and have extraordinary inspiring life stories to share with the ordinary women.

Keywords: women empowerment, self-concept of women, violence against women

1. Introduction

When we talk about women's identity and their role in the workforce we normally refer to women with designations and well defined job descriptions that are certain about their roles in their homes and offices. A woman plays many roles in her lifetime and each role that she plays requires her to be perfect. An idea about their roles and job details helps them to perfect their roles accordingly. But there are numerous ladies out there who have been forced into the work force without any option left for them to decide otherwise. May be they don't enjoy the recognition they deserve and the only motivating force for them is the preservation of their individual dignity. There is no certainty about their future yet they are successful in many ways. I have been privileged to work with lesser privileged women who are

the bread winners of their family after being severely traumatised by the violence done to them or are leading a life of a single working woman in a male dominated society without realising their unique strength. My visit to some State runs short stay/shelter homes and my interaction with those destitute women in 2003 was the beginning of my beautiful journey with these beautiful souls. I was the district member of the advisory committee of the Odisha State Social Welfare Board which comes under the Women and Child Development Department. What struck me there was their unfailing spirit to celebrate life in spite of the difficulties that they have faced in their lives. That led me to work for them more seriously trying to understand the underlying psychological principles of their successful lives. To be able to work more closely with them I have been involved with a residential home for such women in Odisha since 2008. Recognizing the need to prevent women from exploitation and to support their survival and rehabilitation, the scheme of Short Stay Home/Shelter homes for women and girls was introduced as a social defence mechanism in India, by the then Department of Social Welfare in 1969. The scheme is meant to provide temporary accommodation, maintenance and rehabilitative services to women and girls rendered homeless due to family discord, crime, violence, mental stress, social ostracism or are being forced into prostitution and are in danger. Another scheme with the similar objectives namely Swadhar –A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development in 2001–2002. The scheme through the provisions of shelter, food, clothing, counselling, training, clinical and legal aid aims to rehabilitate such women in difficult circumstance. The shelters provide a physical space for women, where they could escape violence temporarily, stay safe and make decisions about their lives. Furthermore, communicating with other victims of violence helps them to overcome the feeling of isolation and the perception of being the only woman that has a violent partner. Violence against women prevails in increasing numbers in India as well as in other parts of the world.

It becomes pertinent to focus on the social setup and the belief patterns of the society of which these women are part of and have grown up to believe that men are important members of the society, men are to take major decisions in the family, women should worship their husbands after marriage as they are Gods for their wives (there is a day in the year called *Savitri Puja* they observe by fasting and worshipping their Husband Gods believing that by doing so their husbands will live for long). The dowry system still prevails in spite of many legal reforms where demanding dowry is a punishable offence. The birth of a male child is still celebrated over the birth of a female child in rural Odisha as it is believed that a son only has funeral rights and after death, parents will get *Moksha* or liberation if their pyre is lit by their son. Fortunately things are changing in urban Odisha and people are treating their daughters equally as with their sons. But unfortunately there are areas where education is still important only for boys and highly educated girls are considered as a curse to the family, women don't get to marry their choices, dowry decides the happiness of the girl in her in law's house after marriage, giving birth to girl child is scorned upon, widowed women are considered as bad omen on auspicious occasions, it is desirable for a young girl to be able to cook for her father and brothers if she doesn't have a mother or any elderly lady in the family, even if she is as young as 8 or 10 years old, women raising a voice for claiming their own rights is considered as a sin. Growing up in such social set up has made the women more tolerant of the injustices done to them. But when it becomes too much for them, they try to find their own mental balance by questioning the system and leave their houses to maintain their individual dignity. For these battered women their own houses have failed to be their safe havens. In most cases they are considered as rebels and have been declared to be mentally unsound by their own family members

and end up in rescue homes/shelter homes. Though there is provision of providing counselling by mental health professionals in such homes to these devastated women, they take time to gather their pieces and to start thinking for their future life which they never did as they were never allowed to participate in decision making regarding their own lives in their own family by the male members. Their sense of self is always blurred and their self introduction always featured the names of their fathers or husbands. Their beaten self has emerged as a winner for these women because of their optimistic outlook and hope for a better future and most importantly for their resiliency they could bounce back into life with positivity which calls for special mention and admiration. Not much qualitative research has been done to study the positive psychological variables at play in such population which can throw light on the character strengths and virtues of these women and can implicate for training in such direction like self efficacy in such rescue homes as it is a state like concept.

2. Aim

Women in India still feel the gender differences in all areas of their lives and when a battered woman seeks help, it is the family members who don't come forward to help her. In spite of all the odds women face and even if they are victims of violence and injustice; there are some psychological variables at play which help them to bounce back into life. Since most of the success stories of such victorious women are not documented to emphasize on the importance of the character strengths and virtues which help in maintaining the balance in difficult life situations, this is a humble attempt to portray the real life case studies of three strong women, who can be examples of showing high resiliency, gratitude and epitomising hope and optimism. They are the women who stayed in rescue/shelter homes for a brief period when life became tough for them, fought with the injustice and for their own dignity and rights, and moved on with their own lives setting examples for others.

3. Method

To collect the information from subjects that are taken here as case studies have been followed up staying in different short stay/rescue homes in Odisha and I have been working for such women as a volunteer for the last 14 years in the coastal districts of Odisha, a backward state of the Indian subcontinent, situated in the eastern region on the coast of Bay of Bengal. The subjects were carefully chosen and they are the ones who were followed up over a period of time. It seems perfect to cite their life stories as case studies because of the way they have handled their lives with a little bit of therapeutic intervention and a lot of self determination which can be referred to as a high level of self efficacy.

4. Case presentation

Sometimes the age factor is so embedded in our culture that we don't get surprised when an illiterate person reports his/her age to be half of the age that he/she appear to be. The first two case study women mentioned here are above sixty years of age, though they have reported their age to be lesser than their real age. In rural Odisha, especially those who are not literate have no idea about their age as none of

them have birth certificates and birth certificates became compulsory only in the 90s. They have a way of referring to their age as "one Kodi" or "two Kodi" or "three Kodi, where 'kodi' refers to twenty years. So it jumps from forty years to sixty years or eighty years and the safest way we follow to know their age is by asking the age of their youngest kid and then calculate the age of all kids by asking the age difference between them. In the case studies I have kept their ages as reported by them. Thus the two women in case study 1 and case study 2 are above 60, but the case study 3 woman is now 47 years old and is taken here as a case study for the confidence and resilience she has shown which can be emulated by other shelter home women. All these women after moving out from a shelter home normally continue to lead an independent and fulfilling life till their end.

5. Case study 1

She was the second daughter of her parents and had a younger brother who was pampered by all. As the parents were very poor they could not afford to send all their kids to school. Her brother was allowed to continue schooling though she was better than her younger brother in studies while he struggled through the classes. The eldest daughter was married off at a very young age with huge amount of dowry and she, as the second daughter, was considered as a burden to the family and was forced to do the household chores from a very young age. She felt unwanted and unloved and looked sad always as a teen. She wished to be a boy instead, as she thought boys will always be loved by their parents even if they are no good in other aspects of life. When she was 19 years old she was discovered to be pregnant by her grandmother, who she was sharing her bed with, as she noticed her bulging stomach and morning sickness. She was almost beaten to death by her father but did not reveal the name of the person who was responsible for her pregnancy. Her mother pleaded her to leave home as she feared for her life and was also worried about facing the social ostracism because of her daughter's pregnancy before marriage. They also thought that their elder daughter will be thrown out from her in-law's house if they come to know about the younger daughter's plight. She was sent to stay with her aunt who was instructed to take her for an abortion in her village. This was back in 1985 when medical help was not good in villages in rural Odisha. Her aunt took her to a quack who expressed his inability to terminate the pregnancy but suggested to sell the new born to a childless couple. She started worrying for her unborn child and went back to her own village to ask her lover to marry her who was a married man already with two kids. He called her a liar and denied having any relationship with her. She didn't budge from his house and kept sitting there in front of his house for two days. She was abused physically and mentally by the man's family members and was rescued by a social worker in an almost unconscious state. The lady who rescued her was a teacher in a primary school and brought her home. By this time almost the whole village had come to know what had happened to her and started ridiculing her as if she was only to be blamed for the whole thing and wanted the family of the married man not to be disturbed. She was forced to stay with her parents and her parents were not willing to take her back home. When she reached home she was singled out and was flogged again by her mother and the next day she had a miscarriage. After few days she was sent to that aunt of hers again where she had to stay permanently or till they could find her a suitable groom. She was happier there as no one knew about her history in that village except her aunt. After staying with her aunt she joined a village tailoring unit to learn some stitching so that she can be independent financially and earn some money for her own expenses. As she continued stitching she made few friends in that area and

also started believing in herself again. She was happy to take care of her ailing aunt who by now had become sick and old. After her aunt's death she was forced to leave that house as the aunt's brother wanted to sell the house and her aunt was a child-less widow. She went on to stay in a shelter home, one of the oldest shelter homes of Odisha, where she was requested to teach stitching to the other inmates who are also abandoned by their own families. She is looked upon as a mature and confident lady who is capable of taking care of distressed women with her gentle approach. She gets a minimum amount of salary for her services by the organization which she spends on the children of her younger brother who is not having a constant source of income. Though her brother's family wants her to come and stay with them she doesn't want to go as she feels her presence here in the organisation is more important and she exudes confidence while quoting that these women who come to stay in the shelter home have to learn a lot in life and her assuring smile indicates that she is there for them and it gave a sense of relief to the young woman who was standing close to her and was a new entrant in the home.

Here are some excerpts from the interview that echoed the importance of optimism and meaning in life for the overall well-being of a person. Asked about what she values in life, she said "its relationship with the right kind of people". In response to what is it that she wants the other women to learn in life, she said focussing on a bigger reason and other's problems will make them learn the biggest lessons of life automatically and their own problems will be reduced into dust. She said it's the journey after deciding the goal will teach them the most... she blurted out "...for me I have reached a point in life where I don't feel helpless anymore". The meaning of her life is the total of her experiences that she experienced in her life through her relationships, work and more importantly self analysis as she puts it.

6. Case study 2

This woman came to the short stay home when she was almost 50 years old. She was married when she was 22 years old. Her husband used to work as a sweeper in a private organisation and also used to do some odd jobs like a daily wage labourer. He used to drink everyday at night and beat her black and blue. As her parents were very poor and never supported her when she complained about the beatings by her husband, saying it is normal for a man to beat to 'control' their wives. She chose to put up with her situation. She delivered a son after few years of marriage. But the beatings never stopped. The child grew up in an environment where he witnessed his father coming home drunk and beating his mother and his mother keeping quiet and silently taking care of them. As the child grew up he got into bad company and started smoking at a young age. Then drinking followed. Meanwhile her husband was not keeping well and was admitted into the hospital for stomach ulcer. After months of treatment he passed away. Her son was not doing anything and as the wife of an employee who died before retirement, she got her husband's job. She used to finish all the household work and then leave for her job. Her son used to roam around doing nothing. Then he started taking money from her on the pretext of starting a small shop. But one day she discovered that no money has been spent on any shop building. He has blown it all on drugs and alcohol. When she confronted him he got violent and abused her verbally. She was saddened by her son's behaviour and thought of addressing it more seriously as she didn't want him to follow his father's path. But at that night her son came with one of his friends and forcefully took her gold ornaments that she was wearing. He didn't come home for the next few days. Then he emerged after few days, drunk. He fought with her and asked for money and pushed her and punched her. When she protested he tried to

suffocate her by throttling her. The neighbours came and rescued the woman who was coughing incessantly. She couldn't speak for the next two days and her neck got swollen. But her son was unmoved and stayed in the same house expecting his mother to cook for him and take care of him while he continued with his evil ways. The woman's employers enquired about her absence and got to know about her serious condition. They took her out to a gentle man who was working in a program meant for destitute women. As there was threat to her life they wanted her to stay there and take legal action against her son. After a few days the son was arrested for attempting to murder his mother and was sent to a rehabilitation centre meant for drug addicts and alcoholics. She didn't know that it was so easy to get the protection and didn't feel alone for the first time in her life even if she was not staying with her own family members. She keeps saying that now it is very important to believe in one's worth and not to be afraid of anything. If anyone has to be afraid of then it should be the one who is doing wrong. It is our duty to be happy as she puts it and says that she always hoped to see her son different from that of his father. She hasn't lost hope. She goes to visit him once in a month with lots of gifts. Now she is working as a sweeper cum gardener in the same shelter home where she is staying. In addition to that she is the one who is in charge of coordinating with the doctors whenever there is any medical emergency. Her strength of personality, as other women said, makes other women look up to her for help and guidance in times of difficulty. She has started reading out short educational stories and informative articles on various issues to other inmates during their leisure time. When she took me to the house where her son and daughter in law are staying she met a lady who used to be her neighbour. The old neighbour pointed out to her that she looked happy and healthy and different from those days when she used to stay in the same house where her son lives now and teased her saying that she should take her along.

7. Case study 3

I met her for a session after she was handed over to the staff of a short stay home by the senior psychiatrist of the mental health department of a State run hospital. The doctor felt she doesn't need hospitalization and her family members were not responding to their calls. She seemed to be from a very good, well to do family and spoke perfect English. She excused herself for being shabbily dressed and felt very conscious for the way she was dressed and kept on repeating that she doesn't look like that on normal days and she is very ashamed of her condition. She was a beautiful 45 year old lady and agreed to stay in the short stay home which functions like a stepping stone for women who want to do something in their lives but never got the opportunity because of financial problems or no parental support or are the victims of domestic violence. This lady seemed to be mature enough and could adjust well with the other inmates quickly. It is normally those from the lower socio-economic backgrounds with very little education that are found in such rescue homes/shelter homes. But here she was, a graduate and her father was the Director of the Veterinary Hospital. She opened up in the first session itself and kept crying and seemed as if she was in shock. Her life story seemed nothing less than a cinema story, only difference being her story is real and she lived every bit of it and has fought with the situation, with the injustice done to her and with her parents and finally is settled in a job as a teacher in a school for mentally retarded and autistic children. This is how her life has been as she described as follows:

She was taken to the mental health department of the hospital by her father and as the doctors advised him to keep her in the hospital under observation; her father went out on the pretext of getting bed sheet and pillow for her and never returned.

In Odisha it is still a social stigma to have mental disorders of any kind and people try to hide it unless and until it becomes out of control. For them the 'stamp' of being "mad" gets attached to the person after visiting a psychiatrist is still looked down upon and is something to be ashamed of. As the doctors found her perfectly okay to go home they tried to contact her family members but couldn't trace them. As days passed she couldn't think of ways to get out of the hospital as per the rules of the hospital she cannot be left alone and allowed to go home alone. The senior psychiatrist was sure about one thing that she doesn't need hospitalization and if she is not rescued from there she will get seriously ill and it will harm her more. On one of those days when the doctor was on duty, thought of giving it a try by taking his own initiative. He called the staff of a shelter home and enquired if she can be taken in from the hospital as she is perfectly fine. She was welcomed with love and from day one she made sure that she will be staying there till she is capable enough to take care of herself. She had made up her mind that she's going to take charge of her life from that moment onwards and while having sessions with her, she told me about what she has gone through in her life.

She was the second daughter of her parents and has a younger brother also. Her elder sister is not married. She is convent educated and was in college doing her graduation when life took a sharp turn for her. She was very good in studies and was very sociable. She fell in love with a man who was known for his *tantric* pujas. When her parents got to know about her interest in that man, they stopped her from going to college. She was locked up in a room and was not allowed to meet her friends even. After two years they thought she must have forgotten about the man and allowed her to go to temple once in a week only. But the man somehow got to know about her and came prepared to take her away from the temple. They eloped and got their marriage registered. She was very simple and naive. He took her to a remote area and kept her again in a locked up room. She felt like a sex slave as she was not allowed to open the doors and windows of the house. Here also she was in a cage like her parents' place. She was very young at that time and kept crying and stopped eating. One day she fainted in the morning and couldn't stand on her own feet. Seeing all this, the man got frightened and put her in a car and brought her to her parents' house and dropped her in front of the gate in an unconscious state and fled. The family members of this woman were so worried about losing their name in the society that they kept quiet about it and hushed her up. Here again she was made to stay put inside the house and was not allowed to meet anyone. Not even when guests came to their house.

After 3 years her father enrolled her in a computer course. She never got treated well by her own family members. The computer course that she got admitted into after 5 years of leaving college was the only incident that brought a smile to her face. In the computer centre one of the lecturers wanted to marry her as she was very pretty looking. He followed her to her house and met her parents and begged for her hand in marriage. The parents were reluctant to agree but after knowing about her past he wanted to marry her as she was legally divorced by then from her first husband. After their marriage they moved into their house. The husband got a job in London as he was a software engineer. He kept working from home for a few months and kept postponing his trip to London. But he blew all the money in buying cars and a house. He also developed the habit of drinking. After few months he suddenly left his job. As they had a son, this woman wanted to contribute by doing a job. She took a part time job and also did Nursery Teachers' Training course. Then she got the job of a teacher in a reputed school. Her husband had become an alcoholic and used to take money from her and when she questioned about him being absent from home for days together he used to beat her. Once he hit her so hard and his son also that her face got deformed. She gathered all her courage and lodged a complaint in the police station. She stayed in the police station

with her son for the whole night for her own protection and the next morning he was arrested. After a few days, he got released and came home to take revenge. Her in-laws also never supported their own son and asked their daughter-in-law to leave him and come and stay with them. In Odisha it is still not desirable for a woman to leave her husband's house, no matter what the situation is. The woman's parents never got to know about the difficulties their daughter was facing. Again she was hit by her husband very badly and this time it happened in the school where she was working. She was completely devastated and felt humiliated. She went to the police again and got him arrested. But the husband was furious this time and threatened her with dire consequences. She came home with her son and completely lost it and went on sobbing inconsolably. She called her mother to come and take her and couldn't speak more on the phone. Her parents got her back home saying that everything will be fine after a few days and wanted her to go back to her husband, as they believe that a married woman's place is always her husband's house. But as her condition worsened and her crying didn't stop she was referred to the psychiatrist. She couldn't even say her name to the doctors as she was in a state of shock. That is when the parents felt it was a disgrace to the family to let their daughter stay in the mental hospital ward and left her there and never came to take her back. The elder sister of this woman is unmarried and she started taking care of her son's study who is now going to college. She stayed in the hospital till she came to this rescue home.

The psychiatrist gave a certificate to her that she is in good condition to go home and hospitalization is not required. So she was brought to the short stay/rescue home and made good progress in a few days. She was ready after two sessions to go out looking for jobs. She is also a certified physiotherapist. Getting a job was not a problem for her. She got the job of a physiotherapist in a nearby hospital which was very close to the short stay home where she was staying. Meanwhile her parents were contacted and were requested to meet her. They came to meet her with home cooked food and dresses for her. But they denied her when she expressed her desire to see her own son. She shed tears silently and believed that maybe it's good for the son not to see her. Her parents requested her not to come to their place as her brother's wife is pregnant and they didn't want her to see her. Meanwhile, the husband came back looking for her and wanted to take her signature for a joint account she had with him. She strongly protested. After a few months the husband died of an accident. She informed me about his death in a very flat tone as if she was unaffected by the news. But then she said now that the husband is dead, she is clear about what she wants to do in life. After six months of stay in the short stay home and the hospital job she moved into a rented house and took up the job of a special educator in a school and is serving the mentally retarded, autistic and cerebral palsy students. When asked about her fear she bravely states that now she fears nobody and it was the social system she was scared of, what others would say was the fear that her parents transmitted to her. By staying alone she has learned to fight. Even now, whenever she talks to her mother over the phone and gives her opinion on something her mother quickly asks her if she is still taking the psychiatric medicines thinking that she is still "mad". In one of the sessions she told me laughingly that in our society our own parents want us to keep quiet about the injustice and make us feel guilty about things which we haven't done. She doesn't blame her parents as she empathises with them saying that after all they have to stay in the same society which judges a woman but never a man, even if it is always the woman who is a victim of the injustice and violence done to her by man. She has plans for her son and wants to sponsor his studies. He too wants to be an engineer. She smiles so confidently and looks so hopeful; I kept wondering if she is the same woman I met when she was brought from the mental hospital, crying incessantly. These days she sends her school kids' pictures and never forgets to send a good morning

message with a smiley and thank you. It's her gratitude, I feel, which has helped her overcome the low phase of her life. Now she is always a bubbly, laughing, talkative lady, full of energy.

8. Discussion and conclusion

Women learn to suffer silently and bear the injustice perpetrated on them as they are expected to make other members in the family happy by sacrificing their own needs. Male dominance in all matters including finances and the male violence manifested in different ways in the different stages of a woman's life are the causes of the suffering of women in the male dominated patriarchal societies. A woman sees the father and brother as the provider and protector when she is a child and then the dependency gets transferred to the husband and in her old age she relies on her son for her financial, emotional and social needs. The ruthless customs of patriarchal society and the male arrogance leave women with no other option but to seek outside help and leave their own home for their own safety. The causes of a woman leaving her own house can be blamed for poor education, poor living conditions, strained family relationships specially oppression, violence, sexual abuse, subordination and devaluation of women by the men in their own families. Violence against women within the family is a global phenomenon. However, its intensity is much greater in India. The most pathetic aspect of such atrocities is domestic violence.

When a woman is tortured and violated and finds her own family members as perpetrators, life becomes a big confusion for them. As they get ready to step out of the house which is not quite encouraged in patriarchal societies, they are trying to find a new identity which is devoid of their husband's name or father's name and she is not quite sure if she has any identity of her own. But one thing she respects at that moment while taking the big bold step of leaving the house is that it's her individual dignity and that helps her to find new meaning in life. The meaning of life that we are talking about for these women here means their significance, relevance or value in their own eyes.. Out of many attempts made by many to handle this question of meaning in life, it is Martela & Steger (2016) whose take on meaning seems to be appropriately handling the question that these women must be facing consciously or otherwise. Yalom talks about cosmic and terrestrial meaning. Cosmic meaning comes up with religious or spiritual connotations, because it sees meaning as a part of a bigger picture that is superior to that of the individual. Whereas, terrestrial meaning comes up with an answer to the question- what is the meaning of my life? Thus the debate regarding cosmic and terrestrial meaning, as put by Yalom, is between the external and internal. As the woman in case study 1 puts it that focussing on a bigger reason and other's problems will make them learn the biggest lessons of life automatically and their own problems will be reduced into dust it makes me wonder if we believe meaning is something imposed on us or we are free to create it for ourselves. These women suddenly become responsible for creating meaning of their life, though unknowingly. And it is the Hope which keeps them ticking in such trying times. Their families generally do not take them back without legal intervention after they come to the shelter homes as victims of violence. As it is, these women are in a very vulnerable state, yet they adjust in a new situation which becomes their home until their case is resolved. Adjusting with the emotional turmoil and to a new environment with unknown people is not an easy task for these battered women. Sociological data and demographic features are available on destitute women both in global and national context but no bold serious attempt has been undertaken to understand the dynamic process of adaptation of these women. Whatever scanty attempt has been made is made in

clinical terms. However, positive psychologists are attempting to explain behaviour in terms of virtues and strengths. Positive psychology takes interest in positive subjective experiences, positive traits, and the adaptation methods used by individuals when life seems meaningless. It also answers despite all hurdles in life how people manage to improve the quality of life and live with dignity. In these women resilience, a positive psychological construct, emerges as a strong component of their personality. Resilience refers to patterns of positive adaption or development manifested in the context of adverse experiences or situations in life. It refers to a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development. The trauma theory of resilience suggests that exposure to psychological or physical trauma may have long-lasting negative consequences for children and adults [1, 2]. Trauma is often discussed along with resilience. Some theorists suggest that the two can co-occur. A child may exhibit signs of being highly traumatized and resilient at the same time [3]. With these women it can be observed that they themselves were unaware about their self worth until it became unbearable for them to deal with the abuse, both physical and mental abuse. The resilience they showed is only after facing the traumatic situations in life. It is the resiliency of these women and their optimistic outlook about life makes them adapt to a new situation in life successfully.

Psychosocial adaptation is defined as the process of putting oneself in harmony with the changing circumstances of life so as to enhance one's sense of well-being and long-term survivorship. Behavioural scientists in general and psychologists in particular have examined the role of pertinent psycho-social variables in women's empowerment. Although a number of variables have been delineated, psychologists have focused on the empowerment process in terms of women's personality and self-concept variables [4]. The pertinent literature has shown that the positive self-concept of women and certain specific personality variables such as dominance and achievement orientation have contributed significantly towards successful adaptation of women.

The construct of hope offers the scope for understanding women's adaptation. Lynch [5] considered hope to be "the very heart and centre of a human being. It is the best resource of man, always there on the inside, making everything possible when he is in action, or waiting to be illuminated when he is ill." He defined hope as the fundamental knowledge that a difficult situation can be worked out and that goals can be reached. Hope in case of these women serves as an important ingredient which helps in their better adaptation to the current situation and helps them to flourish. It is a powerful construct in positive psychology.

The hope theory can be used to help in the better understanding of the adjustment process. Psychological adjustments are influenced by hope through the belief in one's self. Adjustment or coping is the ability to effectively respond to a stressor so as to reduce psychological and physical pain [6]. In hope theory stressor is the element that interferes with one's normal ongoing goal of being happy. When confronted with a stressor one must find alternative paths to attain the goal and be mobilized to use those paths. People with higher hope produce more strategies to deal with the stressor (pathways) than people with lower hope. Higher hope persons find more benefits in their ongoing dealings with stressors [7, 8]. As in the case of the woman in case study 3, we can see that in spite of what she faced in her life, it was her hope for a better future and belief in her own self, she could bounce back in her life after such difficulties and hardships.

The purpose of taking up these case studies was to illustrate that those battered women who do cope with life after being victims of violence and injustice by their own family members have a number of strategies to help them survive. It is obvious that these women have varied skills to manage in extremely adverse situations. Of

course, these remarks should not be interpreted to mean that destitute women do not need assistance. Studies of women often fail to use data that emphasize their potential. The more information becomes available about the means they use to survive, the more probable it becomes that development assistance could be structured in a manner most likely to achieve the desired results. After all, the objective of development is to actually empower them psychologically.

Additional information

Disclosures

There is no personal or competing interest.

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Human subjects

Consent was obtained from all participants in this study by explaining them the purpose and they were assured about the maintenance of their privacy. They all agreed to the publication of their case for academic purpose as they are assured about their privacy being maintained. Care has been taken to protect their personal information and the cases are used only for the purpose of academic activity.

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