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**“For Us It Is Like
Living in the Dark”**
**Ethiopian Women’s Experiences
With Domestic Violence**

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This article discusses the experiences of domestic violence among Ethiopian refugees and immigrants in the United States. A subset (n = 18) of the larger study sample (N = 254) participated in three focus groups with Amharic-speaking survivors of domestic violence who were currently in or had left abusive relationships. The research was conducted through a public health department, University, and community agency partnership. Findings show domestic violence as taking place within a context of immigration, acculturation, and rapid changes in family and social structure. Participants expressed a need for language and culture-specific domestic violence support and advocacy as well as education programs regarding U.S. laws and resources.

Keywords: *domestic violence; Ethiopian; immigrant; women*

It felt like the end of the world. For us it is like living in the dark. When they abused us, it is really living in hell.

—Ethiopian Survivor

Domestic violence is widely recognized as a leading public health issue with significant consequences for women’s health and well-being (Greenfield, 1998; Pratt & Deosaransingh, 1997; Satzman & Johnson, 1996). There is agreement in the literature that ethnicity and culture are significant influ-

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ences on how women respond to abuse (Ho, 1990; Krishnan, Hilbert, VanLeeuwen, & Kolia, 1997; Long, 1986; Pinn & Chunko, 1997). If researchers can reveal how ethnicity and culture affect women's responses to violence, service providers may be better prepared to meet immigrant and refugee women's needs through more culturally appropriate and accessible services.

Ethiopians are among many recent African immigrants in Washington State who are currently presenting for care and assistance from domestic violence providers. However, providers have little information about this unique group of women. The purpose of the current study was to explore culturally defined notions of domestic violence for Ethiopian ethnic groups and to identify barriers to care for Ethiopian women in need of domestic violence services.

Ethiopian is a designation of nationality, within which many ethnic groups are represented. Some of the largest Ethiopian ethnic groups are the Oromo, Tigray, Amhara, and Somali. Christianity and Islam are the dominant religions (Byrne, 2002). For several decades, there has been political turmoil and repression in Ethiopia, leading to forced migration (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001). Some key features of the political history include large-scale famine in the 1980s, the overthrow of the Mengitsu regime in 1991, partition with Eritrea in the early 1993, and war with Eritrea from 1998 to 2000 in which tens of thousands died and more than one million people were displaced (Byrne, 2002; Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001). This political turmoil has led to Ethiopian refugees and immigrants resettling in the United States, among other places.

In Seattle and King County, Washington, refugee arrivals from Ethiopia and Eritrea began in the early 1980s, then slowed through the mid 1990s. Between 1996 and 2000, only 165 new Ethiopian refugees arrived in the County (Workforce Development Council, Seattle and King County, 2000). The most recent King County census data report that there are 5,371 people who identify as Ethiopian; of those, 3,899 were born in Ethiopia (U.S. Census, 2002).

A review of several studies conducted in Ethiopia illustrates the prevalence and significant impact of domestic and sexual violence on women's health. A cross-sectional survey of violence against married women in south-

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ern Ethiopia revealed that 45% had experienced physical violence in their lifetime, 10% had experience it in the past 3 months, and 53% of women who were abused reported experiencing injury (Deyessa, Kassaye, Demeke, & Taffa, 1998). In a survey assessing sexual violence among female students, 74% reported sexual harassment, 10% reported attempted rape, and 5% completed rape.

In addition, Ethiopian researchers and women's rights activists have documented gender-based practices in Ethiopia that lead to negative health outcomes for women including female genital mutilation (Berhane, Gossaye, Emmelin, & Hogberg, 2001), early childhood marriage, marriage by abduction (Getahun, 2001), child prostitution, and trafficking of women (afrol News, 2003). Health consequences of these practices may include high maternal mortality, obstetrical fistulae, injuries because of domestic violence and rape, psychological trauma and HIV infection (afrol News, 2003). While in recent years, the Ethiopian constitution has been changed to afford some legal protections to prevent these practices, protections have yet to be widely and uniformly enforced (Jefferson & Takirambudde, 2001). Ethiopian refugees may also suffer post-traumatic stress disorder from exposure to large-scale social violence (de Jong et al., 2001).

Few studies have looked at Ethiopian women's health status in the United States (Wasse, Holt, & Daling, 1994), and no studies have addressed domestic violence among Ethiopian immigrant and refugee women in the United States. To our knowledge, the current study is the first project to systematically examine experiences of domestic violence among Ethiopian refugees/immigrants in the United States. Consistent with the other reports in this issue, the current study focused on Ethiopian survivors' perspectives on four topic areas: (a) the cultural experience of domestic violence; (b) access to and satisfaction with domestic violence services in Seattle and King County; (c) concerns about children; and (d) ideas for addressing domestic violence in the Ethiopian community.

METHOD

As described in previous articles, the research was conducted following a participatory action research model (Sullivan, Bhuyan, Senturia, Shiu-Thornton, & Ciske, 2005; Whyte, Greenwood, & Lazes, 1991). Although several community partners were on the research team, Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA) was the partner with expertise working with the Ethiopian community. The ReWA Ethiopian domestic violence advocate was an integral member of the research team and provided guidance to the team on tailoring

the project to meet the needs of Ethiopian women. In addition, ReWA's Ethiopian domestic violence manager provided ongoing consultation to the project.

Sampling, Screening, and Recruitment

The research included Ethiopian Amharic speakers. Although Amharas constitute an ethnic group, people who speak Amharic may be Amharas or of another ethnic background (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001). We attempted to recruit Amharic speakers from various community settings, using word of mouth and flyers written in Amharic. For the most part, however, we were only successful in recruiting women who were already receiving services at ReWA. We felt that it was important to attempt diverse recruitment strategies even though we knew impersonal recruitment was unlikely to succeed for some cultural groups. The Ethiopian domestic violence advocate conducted outreach at community centers, posted flyers, and attempted word-of-mouth recruitment. However, most of the participants were from her past and present caseload.

Even among those women with whom the advocate had established a trusting relationship, recruitment was difficult and time-consuming. Prospective participants had many questions about the nature of the research and about confidentiality, and some refused to participate when they were told that the facilitator would be unknown to them. We had justified using an unknown facilitator on the methodological grounds that women would be more comfortable critiquing services honestly if they were not interviewed by their service provider. However, this approach turned out to be unacceptable to participants; women only wanted to talk with someone that they knew and trusted. As a result, the Ethiopian groups were conducted with the Ethiopian domestic violence advocate as the facilitator.

Eighteen Amharic speakers participated in a total of three focus groups. The average age of participants was 31 years. The average length of residency in the United States was 4 years. Of participants, 95% had incomes of less than US \$20,000 per year. Almost all (89%) had used services for domestic violence, and 55% reported that their abuser was their husband.

Data Collection

Women were asked to choose between focus groups and individual interviews based on their own perceptions of safety and/or comfort. Allowing the informant to select between an interview and a focus group represents participatory action research (PAR) and culturally competent research. All of the Ethiopian participants chose focus groups rather than interviews. The focus

group topics included the cultural context of domestic violence (including community definitions of domestic violence and abuse), awareness of services, cultural factors affecting service utilization, problems with service delivery, and recommendations for helping victim and/or survivors experiencing domestic violence. We collected brief demographic data through an eight-item self-administered survey at the beginning of each focus group. These were the only quantitative data collected.

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Washington. Informed consent was obtained from all participants using consent forms that were translated into Amharic and were read aloud to participants. Care has been taken to protect the identity of the participants in reporting the findings.

Data Analysis

The focus group discussions were audiotaped. Tapes were transcribed into Amharic then translated into English by interpreters. Although the word-for-word translations may appear awkward, we believe they are closer to the intentions of the speakers. Consistent with the participatory nature of the project, a subset of interested advocates continued to work with the project to code and analyze the data. This team-based approach is described in the overview.

FINDINGS

Community Awareness and Attitude Toward Domestic Violence

The Ethiopian participants reported that their community is aware that domestic violence occurs but that the behavior is often not discussed openly. Participants pointed out that domestic violence is fairly common in Ethiopia and the United States but is observed less frequently here because living arrangements differ between Ethiopia and the United States. As one woman explained, "In this country, we do not see them but, in our country, women get abused all the time. There is an Ethiopian saying that goes like this: 'Women love to be abused.'" Study participants were aware that domestic violence is illegal in the United States and that survivors can seek protection; however, they felt that the rest of the community has not embraced this definition of domestic violence. The larger Ethiopian community responds to domestic violence just as they did in Ethiopia, which minimizes the significance of the abuse and supports the abuser over the abused. The women asserted that their

community needs to be educated about how domestic violence is legally defined and addressed in the United States. They praised laws that were against domestic violence and that protected women's rights in the United States. One woman explained:

Domestic violence is not clear to our community. It is very important to educate the community. For example, when I was abused, no one understood me. My friends did not understand me. Our culture is totally different. When the woman is complaining about her husband, there will be an arbitration committee to tell us what to do next. They would say "Get along together," that is it. . . . Therefore, there should be a community education or a program in order to teach what domestic violence is.

According to participants, because there is not a shared community understanding of domestic violence, and because men's violent behavior is not seen as problematic by the majority of the community, men are much more likely to get support from the community than women. As one woman said: "The Ethiopian women within the community don't get help. . . . They think we are complaining for nothing. Rather than helping the woman, they will take side with him and support him." Some women described being pressured by the community to get back together with abusive husbands. One said,

After we are separated, they beg us to get back together again. He comes with his friends and say, "I will never do this again. Please give me another chance." It is not easy to turn your back when you lived with a person and experience a lot of things together. Our community does not understand what domestic violence is.

Focus group participants had a vision that marital relationships should include love, mutual help, support, equality, and respect. However, the women described their relationships as being far from this ideal: "We are their wives. We should love and help each other. We should not be abused. Our men believe they are superiors, and women are inferiors. That is not right. . . . We have no right. The men should be educated."

Participants also connected women's rights and equality to the experience of, and the struggle against, domestic violence. Many talked about domestic violence in the context of gender inequality arguing strongly for equality and respect for women. One woman stated, "I do not want this to happen to Ethiopian sisters. There should be a woman rights organization to stop this abusive relationship."

In Ethiopia, women could turn to family or friends for help. For many women, familial and social networks have been disrupted as a result of emi-

gration, such that elders are not available to help solve marital problems as they might have been back home. One participant observed, "It is better back home. The pressure is less. The old people get the solution for our problems." Another woman reported that she turned to non-Ethiopian neighbors for help because she did not feel that the Ethiopian community here would understand her plight. As she said:

My neighbors are from this country, so they understand my problem and give me some advice. Ethiopians don't live in my neighborhood, they live far away. My neighbors are American. They are supporting me for what I did. Nobody understands what we are going through.

Women expressed that when men talk about domestic violence, it was to cover up their responsibility for their behavior. According to the participants, many men blame the U.S. system for favoring women over men, and for problems in the family. As one woman described:

What they [men] do is going to friend's house and tell them, "Our women are on welfare. They live in low-income housing. They kicked us out from the house, if you do not be careful, this will happen to you." They are teaching them not to respect and love their wives. Not only their relationship with their family is messed up, but also they are brainwashing other men not to have a good life with their families. They are pretending as if their wives are abusing them. They tell friends lies that never happened. In our community, men have supported each other. When women divorce them because of abusive relationship, they warn their friends not to trust their wives. We are suffering everyday with our kids, and yet they are the ones who get support from the community. Men are the ones who talk about their abusive relationship to cover up their act. They say, "This is America; it is only for women. We have to pack our cloth and leave the house for women."

Participants said that, unfortunately, children are aware of abuse in the home. Women recognized that children saw and heard abuse by their fathers; participants expressed concern that children may learn to act aggressively in their intimate relationships: "Our kids have problem dealing with us. When we argue and fight in front of them, when they see our husbands humiliating, beating, and cursing us, they will get affected. They will learn everything they see."

Descriptions of Abuse

Ethiopian women talked at length about men using "the system" to gain or maintain power and control in the relationship. The women's use of the word *system* referred to all of the government systems with which the family inter-

acts. For immigrant and refugee families, this might include immigration officials, welfare, child support, or public housing, among others.

According to the study participants, Ethiopian men quickly learn the system and learn English because they have the freedom to meet and interact with others and to learn how things work in the United States. Men were also more likely to have received formal education in Ethiopia. By contrast, newly arrived immigrant and refugee women do not speak English and, in some cases, are prohibited from learning it. Women who do not have refugee status may be afraid to interact with the system for fear of deportation. Furthermore, women may be forbidden to leave the home, go to English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes, or interact with neighbors or members of the Ethiopian community. One participant explained that,

We Ethiopian women do not get enough information like the men do. The reason is because our husbands do not let us socialize with our neighbors. They are the one[s] who get more information and have more friends. They know the law very well. We stay in the house with our kids and cook food for them. We are hopeless. They beat and use the system. They hurt their women. In our country, if the woman works outside of the house she gets in the house on time to take care of the family. Women do not go everywhere and chat like the men do. In our culture and religion, women do not go out and stay late. They do not get information like the Americans. Our men have the ability to get along anywhere they go so they learn the system right away.

One specific example that women discussed in which men manipulate women through the system is when men bring women into the country either on a fiancé visa or as a woman's sponsor. In cases where the woman is sponsored, unbeknownst to his wife, the man may claim that the woman is his sister or another relative. The woman does not realize that legally, in the United States, the marriage is not recognized. Then, when the man leaves the relationship he is able to deny that the woman is his wife and the children are his responsibility. The woman then faces having to use the court system if she wants to collect child support, which can be very difficult for women who are low income with limited English.

Another way in which women reported that men use the system is by working without reporting income to the government. This lowers the amount of child support that women are entitled to when they divorce. A survivor described her husband by saying:

He never cares for his own kids. Men are free. Some of them buy two town cars and make a lot of money while we are suffering with little income. They are living a good life. Their kids are in a dangerous situation, and they don't care. If it was in our country, all this wouldn't have happened. All this happens because

we live in America. They say, this is America. With this system, we are crying every day.

The women in the current study reported that abusive men may divorce their "old" wives here and bring young wives to the United States from Ethiopia using the immigration mechanisms described above. Participants said that abusers bring young women to the United States, isolate them at home, and "treat them as maids." These women are said to be particularly vulnerable because of their young age. Because they do not have refugee status and are dependent on their sponsors and/or husbands for a green card, they may also be threatened with deportation if they try to take steps to change their situation. Women felt the need to band together to address the situation:

When they bring their new wives what they do is hide them not to meet their old friends. Ethiopian men can marry to an underage girl. For example, my ex-husband married an 18-years-old girl. Mind you he has a 15-year-old girl (daughter). . . . They bring in underage girls maybe 16 and 17 or 20 years of age and abused them. I feel sorry for my Ethiopian sisters. Something has to be done.

A few women described the abuser involving his friends or the larger community as a feature of their abuse. If victims call the police or speak out about their abuse, they may face loss of support or direct intimidation from the community. This can be a particularly effective tactic in small communities. For refugee and immigrant women whose only social support comes from other Ethiopians, community disapproval or sanction may be too much to bear. As one woman said,

I was afraid to appear for the hearing, I was afraid of his group. He has a lot of friends to support him. They lied for him, but the police saw blood on my face when that incident happened. His friend tried everything to let him free. My only friends were my kids. All our friends were turning their back on me. It was too much for me.

Ethiopian participants described profound levels of isolation that are related to the immigrant and refugee experience and to what some women called cultural practices. Isolation for these women was expressed in abusers not letting women go to school, learn English, visit with other Ethiopians, or leave the house at all:

There are men who do not want their wives to go out of the house. They do not want them to go to school. If their wives know how to speak English, they think

it will be a problem. They think their women could call a police. Women do not know where to go. They do not know how to speak English to communicate.

For women brought to the United States for the purpose of marriage, they may not know anyone except their husbands.

The most obvious form of domestic violence mentioned was physical abuse, though women did not discuss episodes of physical abuse in detail. However, women mentioned husbands and/or partners hitting and beating them. In addition, as with other immigrant women, coping with physical abuse is compounded by language and economic problems. Focus group participants said that abusive partners control the household money and do not share it with the family. As one woman said: "My husband works and makes money for himself. He never gave me a penny." While participants did not provide detailed descriptions of emotional abuse, Ethiopian women frequently used the word *humiliate* when describing this abusive behavior.

Some participants described male privilege as a feature of their abusive relationships. As women, they have full responsibility for the children, for all of the housework, even for those who work outside the home:

I work outside. When I get in the house there is a lot of work to be done and problems are waiting for me. Men have the privilege to relax in the house. They can humiliate us...They think they are the only humans that have full right.

The following statement further illustrates the perception that men have more freedom in the United States:

They do not even remember where we came from. I mean before we came together to America, we suffered together. We worked hard together. They don't care for their wife sister. Once America is a free country all they do is making them happy. When men complain about their relationship to their friends, they would tell them to get a divorce and get another woman from back home. They tell their friends not to waste their time with the woman in the house.

Women spoke of how this increases not only their stress and burden but also how the children suffer without a father in the home to provide a role model.

Responding To Abuse

Participants provided few specific accounts of feelings and reactions in response to abuse. However, several women discussed the fears they had when they thought about responding, including being afraid to use the law to

address abuse, because they did not understand the law and because they believed their husbands' threats regarding deportation. Women also described feelings of depression and despondency: "As if you are at the end of the earth or in a living hell." A participant said that it was "like the end of the world. For us it is like living in the dark. When they abused us, it is really living in hell. I don't know what I have been through. It is bad."

Women indicated that it was hard to ignore the long history they shared with their spouse, often dating to premigration. Regardless of where the marriage originated, it was hard for women in long-term marriages to give up on the relationship. This was compounded by the men's promises that they would change and pressure from the men's friends or family. For most women, finding out about available services made seeking help possible: "If I knew about the service before, I would not sit there and be abused for a long time." Reasons for seeking help included women learning about their rights (not to be abused), finding out about ReWA, and wanting a better life for their children.

Survivor Needs

Women outlined diverse needs that reflected the fact that many were cut off from community and family support. Help to meet basic economic needs was a priority. Women often lacked money to cover expenses. This was particularly true for those who had been isolated and prohibited from working and/or keeping personal income.

Participants said that limited English skills restrict job options, and welfare and child support payments are inadequate to support a family. Many women reported receiving welfare, which they found very helpful; however, they still did not have enough money to pay for child care so that they could go to school, learn English, or learn job skills. Women also mentioned needing transportation for themselves and their children. They described waiting for buses with children and missing appointments. Women had neither driver's licenses nor cars and, without adequate English skills or money, had no opportunity to change this.

Lack of knowledge of the legal system added to women's difficulties dealing with abuse. Women said that their husbands were able to manipulate the system to their advantage. In other words, men were able to divorce their wives, remarry, and keep their money because women lacked basic knowledge about their rights and how to work within the American legal system. Beyond education about rights and the law, women mentioned the need for legal assistance to obtain protection orders and/or divorce proceedings.

As the primary child care providers, women are constrained by having to take care of children while seeking help. They identified safe and adequate child care as a critical step to help mothers access services and educational opportunities. Other basic needs such as food and shelter were also noted, as were literacy and English language classes. Limited English means that some women are unable to seek out help and, even if services are found, are often unable to communicate their problems to service providers. Furthermore, limited English skills prohibits women from achieving economic independence and finding housing: "If you can be able to educate us how to get different services and teach us the English language it will be easy for us." Knowing how to access available services was particularly important for those women who were ready and able to leave their abusive relationship.

Participants described how help is available from the government (welfare, legal assistance, police) when they find out how to access it. However, victims' linguistic and physical isolation are significant barriers to accessing available assistance. They also reported a lack of clarity about the limits of the system to help women who are abused; that is, women know that they are entitled to some protection and assistance under the law. However, they are not entirely clear about what the system can and cannot do. As one woman described, the available help is confusing for someone unfamiliar with our social services:

I had no money. I had no choice but to call the police [911]. They came and asked me what happened. I told them what he did to me and asked them to get my money from him. Unfortunately, they told me that they could not do that. They advised me to get a restraining order from court.

Use of Services

Participants believed that most Ethiopian women are generally unaware of domestic violence services in the community:

I believe most Ethiopian women do not know that there is help out there. They do not even know what ReWA is. There are men who do not want their wives to go out of the house. They do not want them to go to school. If their wives know how to speak English, they think it will be a problem. They think their women could call the police. Women do not know where to go. They do not know how to speak English to communicate. Because of their husbands, they do not get any help.

This is especially true for women who are new to the United States and have not had the opportunity to learn about American opportunities and the American social service system.

Despite their lack of knowledge and the other barriers previously discussed, most of the participants had sought services for domestic violence. ReWA is the primary agency about which focus group participants were informed. Over and over, women cited ReWA as the place to go for help. While they sometimes relied on welfare for economic assistance and the police as a first step, they repeatedly noted that because of language and culture-specific services, ReWA was able to help meet their needs as well as link them with other helpful services.

Women were referred to ReWA through a variety of channels, including clinic staff, friends, or the police. In addition to moral support, women said they received help obtaining protection orders and divorces and getting into domestic violence shelters. A few women who had used domestic violence shelters found them to be very helpful as they provided not only the basic needs of food and housing but also the emotional needs of companionship and support. As one shelter user described,

I was at the women's shelter. People thought that shelters are only for drug addicts or homeless. Most Ethiopians think that way, too. When I started living in the shelters, I found it more than I expected. It felt that I am with my immediate family. We helped each other. We also discussed our problems.

One of the women's biggest concerns was with respect to child support enforcement. Participants said that this bureaucracy does not adequately pursue husbands who are making more money than they report. This was echoed by several women who have struggled financially while their husbands have plenty of money to support subsequent wives and families. Women felt that the American government should do more to track down husbands, research their finances, and require diligence in paying child support.

Importance of Same Culture and Language Provider

Because limited English language skills are one of the ways that abusers isolate their wives and girlfriends, providers with same language skills are especially needed for this community of women. Although women were grateful for any assistance they could get, they noted that access is limited by their language problems. Thus, being able to speak with someone in Amharic meant being able to learn about and understand the system and access services.

Children and Teens: Needs and Issues

Most of the participants in the current study had children and were intimately aware of how children have additional and sometimes closely linked needs. Women were concerned about raising their children without fathers and, as mentioned above, were worried about child support payments and having overall support to raise healthy children. In particular, they wanted an environment where children could be protected from gang involvement, drugs and alcohol use, and abusive and/or aggressive behaviors in future intimate relationships. Some of this concern arose from living in neighborhoods where the women feel their children are at risk. Women called for additional funds to support children's needs, education for children about healthy male-female relationships, and safe, affordable child care. The following quote illustrates this point:

Our brothers are becoming gang members. They do not have father in the house; we could not control them. They are going to kill each other. The system is so hard for us to understand. The government knows that kids will be gangsters when there is no father in the house.

Women's Ideas for Addressing Domestic Violence in the Community

This section discussed ideas elicited by asking women to imagine that they had \$500,000 to help women in their community who were experiencing domestic violence and to discuss how they would spend the money. Although the survivors had many ideas, they are summarized below in three key areas—outreach, developing skills for independence, and prevention.

Participants identified outreach to isolated Ethiopian women as one key strategy for helping other women. To address women's different circumstances and to circumvent batterers attempts to isolate women, diverse strategies were presented. One suggestion dealt with providing women with information on domestic violence and related services as women received their visa and before they enter the country:

There should be a way for these women, I mean for newcomers, some kind of education that there is help out there for them. Before they come to America, you should be able to reach these women and teach them how they can solve these kinds of problems. It would be perfect if they can be reached before they get their visa in Ethiopia. If they come here without any knowledge their sponsors will lead them their way.

A second suggestion was to provide education on women's rights and domestic violence through the radio and television. In Seattle, there is an Amharic radio station that women thought could broadcast this information so that women who are isolated at home and/or unable to read might be able to learn about these issues. A third suggestion was to provide pamphlets in Amharic and other Ethiopian languages at churches, Ethiopian restaurants, and other community locations. Survivors saw themselves as playing an active role in helping other women find out about available services. In addition, women emphasized that information needs to be available in several Ethiopian and Eritrean languages in addition to Amharic. Participants saw all of these strategies as necessary to overcome the barriers raised by lack of literacy and by abusers who prevent their partners from accessing helpful information.

Participants had numerous ideas for helping survivors gain skills for independence. Women mentioned the importance of opportunities to develop English literacy and job skills; however, they also noted that day care needed to be provided so that women with children can take advantage of such programs. Participants also wanted to learn business skills to open their own businesses so that women who do not speak English could still be employed. Many ideas were discussed within the context of survivors playing an active role in helping each other rather than passively receiving services, such as providing opportunities for women to learn how to drive, providing moral support to other women who were abused, and opening a women's rights organization. As one woman said: "If I have the money for those women who have problems and lonely like me, I will help them to have their own business. If they cannot drive, I will help them to learn."

Ideas for preventing domestic violence strongly centered on education and support for children. Women discussed using community meetings and religious services as forums to educate and inform men and women throughout the community of the problem and the need for community action to reduce domestic violence. The participants felt strongly that it is important to pay attention to the needs of children. Because they feared that children exposed to violence would become perpetrators themselves, they said that children need services and support as well. One woman said: "I will open more activity centers for kids with domestic violence. They need a peace of mind for what they have been through."

Marital counseling and support groups for men and women were also cited as a way to prevent domestic violence. This ties in closely with the need for education and for community awareness. However, the women did not speculate about how responsive men might be to these kinds of intervention. The women also spoke strongly of the need for men to be held responsible for

their actions. This reflected personal frustrations about how men had gotten away with abuse along with the need for examples to be set in the community: "If men continue to abuse their wives, they should be held responsible for their actions."

DISCUSSION

It is clear from these data that domestic violence for Ethiopian women is taking place within a context of immigration, acculturation, and rapid changes in family and social structure. Participants' experiences of, and responses to, domestic violence are embedded in and exacerbated by the challenges they face as refugee and immigrant women. It is also clear that there are divergent opinions within the community regarding what domestic violence is, and how it should be addressed. The participants in the current research clearly defined domestic violence as destructive and unacceptable. They wanted to use laws and services to protect themselves and their children. Although there are no other studies of Ethiopian women in the literature with which to compare our findings, many of our findings are consistent with research done with other refugee and immigrant communities.

Refugee and immigrant women in the United States, although diverse in culture and ethnic background, often face similar issues in their experience and response to abuse. Researcher and advocate reports on the difficulties faced by immigrant women are consistent with our findings. The stresses and strains of immigration that may lead to changes in gender roles, levels of family support, and employment difficulties may all contribute to or exacerbate domestic violence (Jang, Lee, & Morello-Frosch, 1990). Language barriers, lack of knowledge of the legal system, lack of awareness of community services for domestic violence, and limited access to resources may all contribute to difficulty seeking help (Easteal, 1996; Weissman, 2000). Furthermore, leaving a relationship may make an immigrant woman more vulnerable to isolation because she may have to leave her entire community behind (Jang et al., 1990).

Although these are preliminary data, our research confirms and supports the importance of language- and culture-specific domestic violence support and advocacy services. Services such as ReWA's provide support and advocacy and also help women access other community resources. Implementing educational programs for women regarding U.S. laws and resources for domestic violence may help to ensure that women who are being abused can get help in a timely manner. Domestic violence service providers working with immigrant and refugee women should consider ways in which they can

link women with ESL classes and job training. Finally, these findings highlight the importance of learning from survivors how best to support them in addressing domestic violence within a particular cultural context.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the current research that must be acknowledged. First, because nearly all of the women in the current study were accessing services for domestic violence, their views on domestic violence may be significantly different from other Ethiopian women who see their own situation differently and have not accessed services. The opinions and stories told by those who have accessed services may underestimate the barriers to service that even more isolated survivors may face. Second, because the group was facilitated by a domestic violence advocate, questions related to services may be subject to bias because women are likely to be reluctant to criticize those who are in a position of helping them. Third, these focus groups included a small number of women whose experiences may not be representative of the diverse community of Ethiopians living in Seattle or other urban areas. Future studies should attempt to include greater numbers of women, those who speak other primary languages, and those of varying socioeconomic status to expand or confirm our findings.

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