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Lessons Learned from an Interpretive Pilot Study of Japanese and American Women Survivors of Abuse

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Abstract

Lessons learned from an interpretive phenomenological pilot study of Japanese and American survivors of abuse are reported here. This qualitative pilot study was conducted to: determine the feasibility of the data collection procedures; assess the appropriateness of the selected data management program; increase understanding of the lived experience of family violence among Japanese and American women, extend the articulation of healing processes in intimate partner violence (IPV); develop an interpretive plan for comparing similarities and differences between the narratives from the Japanese and the American women; and furnish pilot data for an international comparative study.

Key Words: family violence, intimate partner violence, healing practices, survivors of abuse, interpretive phenomenology

Extent of the Problem

Violence against women has been described as the most prevalent form of violence worldwide in terms of proportions of people victimized (World Bank Report, 1993). Violence against women is generally recognized as a major health and social problem internationally (Weingourt, Maruyama, Sawada, & Yoshino, 2001). Evidence of the extent and impact of violence against women by an intimate partner has been documented in the United States. since the mid 1980s (Straus & Gelles, 1986). The 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) reported the pervasiveness of this issue, the immediate impact, and the longterm health consequences. Wife abuse was not recognized as an issue in Japan until the 1990s. The Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office of the Japanese government has been implementing specific measures to eliminate violence against women, and surveys on domestic violence have been conducted every three years since 1999 to enhance social awareness of the problem. The latest survey conducted in 2011 revealed that as many as one in three women had experienced spousal abuse, and around one in ten had repeatedly been the victim of abuse (Gender Equality Bureau, 2011).

Family Violence Research

Wife abuse has been difficult to understand for several reasons. Explanations for wife abuse abound and range from those focused on individual psychopathology to cultural mores (Burman, Smailes & Chantler, 2004; Klein, Campbell, Soler, & Ghez, 1997). Widely accepted explanations today focus on multifaceted models that point to the need for examining commonalities and differences among all forms of violence against women (Magnussen, L. et al. 2011) and searching for ways to prevent it (WHO, 2009). Factors that contribute to the development of violence include: power and control, jealousy, pregnancy, drug and alcohol use, violence in the family of origin, social acceptance of violence, women's intimidation and fear, violence as a

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private problem, and devaluing women (Tilley, 2004). Professional literature on intimate partner violence derived primarily from the objective scientific gaze may lead to victim blaming and failure to see the person beyond the problem (Foucault, 1973). Our aim was to try to uncover the meanings that structure the lives of women who survive and heal from being in abusive relationships. We were interested in articulating self-care practices that promoted healing and how significant others facilitated healing.

Method

Interpretive phenomenology was the qualitative research approach used to conduct this pilot study (Benner, 1994). We interviewed women using the narrative exemplar approach developed by Benner and colleagues (Benner, Tanner & Chesla, 2009; Brykczynski & Benner, 2010). Participants identified as survivors by directors of two crisis centers − one in northwestern Japan, and one in southwestern Texas − were contacted and recruited for this pilot study. After approval from the Institutional Review Board, we obtained informed consent to participate from three Japanese and three American abuse survivors who were coincidentally well-matched in terms of age, marital status, number of children, and duration of abuse (See Table 1). We asked them to share their abuse experiences by relating significant personal situations with as much contextual detail as possible. Participants selected the situations that they shared. We also asked the participants to identify individuals who helped them in their healing process so that we could further explore possible ways to provide assistance to abuse survivors. In order to promote a more collaborative atmosphere, we attended to details such as providing privacy and comfort, establishing rapport, avoiding power imbalance by giving the participants the choice of time and place for the interview, and encouraging the women to relate their stories fully and naturally. Each interview was actually structured by the woman's own narrative of her experiences.

Advantages of this participant-centered narrative approach include providing access to particular experience, capturing the temporal progression of situations, and eliciting stories in everyday language (Chesla, 1995). We analyzed the transcribed interview text by incorporating the multistage, interpretive phenomenological process that moves systematically from whole to parts and back to whole (Benner, 1994). We initially analyzed the data independently and then met to share our interpretations and advance our understanding of the narratives and their meanings in an ongoing recursive process. Participants received copies of their interview transcripts and contributed to consensual validation through face-to-face interview or telephone follow-up.

Table 1. Demographics of Women Survivors of IPV

Aiko	**Lori**
56	49
Japanese	African American
Married 30 years	Married 20 years, divorced and remarried
Abuse x 25 years, abuse ceased on birth of grandson	Abuse x 20 years by 1st husband
Hiroko	**Mary**
40	40
Japanese	European American
Married 3 times	Married x 1, divorced
Abuse 1st husband 2 years	Abuse by husband 7 years
Abuse 2nd husband 6 years	
Chieko	**Sue**
27	26
Japanese	Anglo American
Abuse by Father and coach	Single
Married for 2 years,divorced	Abuse by 1st partner 3 years
Abuse by husband 2 years	Abuse by 2nd partner 2 years

Interpretation began with the first interview and proceeded concurrently with data collection over the 12 months of data collection.

Two intensive one- to two-hour individual interviews were conducted about six months apart in Japanese by the third author over a 12 month period with the three Japanese women participants. These interviews were transcribed into Japanese first and then translated into English. During interpretive sessions, the researchers had access to the original Japanese transcripts to refer to when there were questions about particular meanings of text. The interviews with the three American women participants were conducted by the first and second authors. Follow-up interviews or phone contacts were conducted to clarify meanings and debrief with participants. In collecting the narrative data, we made every effort to maintain the situational context, which is crucial for clarifying understanding in this type of research. Vivid, specific contextual detail allows for confidence in the veracity of the data while at the same time contributing to interpretive agreement among researchers and participants. Gadamer (1975/2004) refers to this shared understanding as a fusion of horizons which signifies being able to look at what is close at hand by looking beyond it to see it better and within a larger whole.

Initially we used the Atlas-ti program for data management (Muhr, 1997), however, after several months we found that the meanings were becoming too divorced from the context of the situations. We felt we were losing the sense of the whole that is essential for interpretive phenomenological work. We returned to careful review of the narrative text and dialogue focused on interpretive notes completed independently by each of the authors. We then adapted an index of the situations using Microsoft Word, that the first author has used in previous studies, which enabled us to locate specific excerpts of the narrative data and maintain the situational context during interpretive sessions.

Our initial plans to interview "helpers" − those individuals the participants identified who helped them the most had to be modified during the pilot study. Friends, family members, counselors, and a nurse were identified as helpers by the participants. Helper interviews were completed for the Japanese participants. The identified helpers for two of the American participants were from long ago and therefore were not available for interview. The sister, identified as the helper for one of the American participants, agreed to participate in an interview, but failed to follow through with plans for the interview on two occasions, so we did not pursue this. As data analysis proceeded we found that the participants described their experiences with helpers in great detail in their narratives and we realized that our initial plans for interviewing helpers could be omitted because of redundancy and lack of feasibility. We did not follow-up the pilot study with a multinational comparative study as initially planned because of our own major life changes and lack of funding. We continued with our analysis and interpretation of the narrative data and hope that the findings from our pilot study are sufficiently compelling to share with the scholarly community.

Findings and Commentary

Commonalities and Differences Among Japanese and American Narratives

An interpretive plan developed through the iterative process of interpretive phenomenology was used to structure the analysis of commonalities and differences between the narratives from the Japanese women and the American women (see Table 2). Our initial expectation of major differences between the Japanese and American narratives was transformed soon after the pilot study began when we realized that the basic lived experiences of violence in the home were quite similar for the Japanese and American women and their children. Selected interpretations of our findings are included here using pseudonyms for the participants to assure confidentiality.

Emotional Abuse

"However severe the physical consequences of violence, most women find the psychological consequences to be even more long-term and devastating ... Recurrent abuse can erode women's resilience and places them at risk of other psychological problems as well, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, and alcohol and drug use." (Velzeboer, Ellsberg, Arcas, & Garcia-Moreno, 2003, p.7). Each of the Japanese and American women in our study described emotional abuse as more traumatic than physical abuse. Chieko (Hatashita, Brykczynski, & Anderson, 2006) related that verbal abuse was more hurtful and unforgivable than physical abuse, especially when her husband said bad things about her family as that was really taboo in Japanese

Table 2. Commonalities and Differences Among Japanese and American Narratives of Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence.

Individual
● Emotional abuse
● Healing practices
● Saving face
Family
● Divorce
● Familism
● Hidden nature of abuse
● Transgenerational transmission
Culture and Society
● Patriarchy
● Romanticism
● Unresponsive Systems

society. Lori explained: "It's not just the physical things that are stripped away from you. Your self respect, your self worth, your belief in the system – all of that is stripped away from you methodically by the abuser." She observed that "Being in an abusive family is like living in a war zone. You never know from day to day how much damage is going to be done to you. It's like a war zone, but worse because you are terrorized by someone you love."

All six women in our pilot study described situations where they contemplated or attempted suicide or homicide. Aiko described thinking of suicide after her husband tied her up for sex and tried to force her into the positions of the pornographic photos he showed her. She again thought of suicide when her husband took essential household money from her purse for gambling. She described going to a steep cliff above the seashore with her youngest daughter on her back. She stood there "feeling the cold, staring at the icy sea," wanting to jump off to end her suffering, and pictured her husband dead. She shivered and turned back.

Lori spoke of feeling as though she was not able to survive: "I was bogged down and feeling totally worthless and couldn't seem to get out of the bed in the daytime." She expressed that there seemed to be "no way out" and that there was no hope. She felt that she "died inside" because her kids didn't have enough food to eat and would lie in bed at night whining and crying because they were hungry and afraid. Later when their children got older, her husband began abusing them as well and she started fighting back in defense of her children nearly killing him once when she broke a ceramic figurine over his head. She stated: "There was blood everywhere." Mary related one time when her husband chased her into the kitchen and she slipped her hand into a drawer behind her back and grasped a knife. When she saw her three children watching from the living room, she let go of the knife.

These examples clearly communicate the acts of desperation that may occur in response to ongoing emotional and physical abuse. They illustrate the conflicting responses that reflect the complexity of emotions associated with these intense experiences. They are examples of the dialectical process of healing described by Draucker, et al, (2009) in their meta-analysis of healing from sexual violence.

Healing Practices

Healing practices are self care activities that individuals engage in to restore or maintain balance within themselves and their surroundings. Healing practices identified in our pilot study included introspection, religious study, and helping others. As Aiko's self awareness increased, she found introspection and religious study aided her healing process.Through her spiritual study, she has learned to see crisis as opportunity and persistence as power. She stated that she found salvation through self reliance. Flower arrangement and tea ceremony were other key activities that supported her healing process.

A defining moment for Mary occurred when she was in jail and was caught hiding a Tylenol tablet. She calls it "divine intervention" because she was sent to a substance abuse class where she was inspired by the counselor who had survived a situation not too different from her own. The counselor taught self-esteem building and had the inmates do geneology work. The straightforward

educational program focused on active learning and self reflection was just what she needed to regain her self-esteem. In addition, she began studying the Bible and became a Jehovah's Witness.

Healing through helping others deal with family violence was a practice engaged in by all six women. They were eager to share their experiences in the hope of helping others. After her divorce, Chieko took a position as a high school home economics teacher. She feels that she can be a positive role model for her students by sharing difficult life experiences with them and showing them that she has overcome obstacles and made a life for herself and her child. This kind of role modeling can be helpful for young people in any culture.

The American participants worked in the field of domestic violence as counselors when the interviews took place. Lori shared that her experience of nearly killing her husband enables her to be nonjudgmental when counseling incarcerated abused women who have killed their husbands. She explained that she understands the severe physical and emotional turmoil involved in situations of family violence from the inside out.

Saving face

Collectivist cultures like the Japanese emphasize harmony and obedience (Nibler & Harris, 2003). Even if there is a risk of personal harm as in wife abuse, a woman in a collectivist society will be more likely to acquiesce to save face and maintain the relationship (Ohbuchi, Fukushima & Tedeschi, 1999). In our pilot study the hidden nature of violence in the home of the Japanese women reflected their cultural beliefs about loss of "face" and bringing shame to the family. Similarly Huisman (1996) found these two factors kept the Asian battered women who participated in a study of cultural and structural constraints from seeking help. In the Tokyo Metropolitan Government study (Shouji, 1997), nearly 40% of the respondents who had been victims of abuse had kept it a secret. The fact that two-thirds of the Tokyo sample did not even respond to the survey was also likely related to the shame associated with abuse.

Hiroko described the following story that illustrates saving face: "My husband came home extremely drunk and broke the glass in the front door. While I was cleaning up the broken glass, he beat me. It was an unbearable humiliation for me that neighbors were able to see inside and see the reality of my situation which had formerly been hidden." She also related that she believed that she would lose face by returning to her family after marriage and that would be devastating to her spirit. She continues to live as a roommate with her husband without sexual relations. They are not partners any more. She prefers this kind of arrangement to divorce explaining that appearance and superficial social grace are important in the Japanese culture.

After moving back into her parents home, Chieko experienced flashbacks and would awaken screaming and her parents would close the windows to keep the neighbors from hearing. They believed that abuse was shameful and had to be kept secret. Her request for a letter of apology from her husband also illustrates the concept of saving face. She felt such a letter was important for restoring her spirit and helping her heal. Chieko explained that after receiving this letter, she felt she could forgive herself and move forward with her plans for life as a divorced woman.

These examples of saving face were found in the stories of the Japanese women, however, this phenomenon also occurs in American society with such practices as 'keeping up with the Joneses' and 'shotgun' weddings. Lori explained that even though she had doubts about the stability of her relationship prior to marrying her husband, she felt obligated to marry him because she was pregnant, and he was the father, and she felt it would hurt her mother if she remained single and pregnant.

Divorce

Divorce is more common and socially accepted in individualistic societies like the U.S.A. Divorce, while not as common in Japan, is becoming more prevalent. Two of the Japanese women participants were divorced. Aiko remained with her husband as a "roommate." She explained that while she obtained divorce papers several times as well as medical certificates documenting her physical injuries, she did not get divorced as noted earlier because she felt her children needed a father in Japanese society.

Hiroko's relatives called her first divorce "a big stain" when she was divorced at 23 with two small children. Under the traditional ie family system, a divorced woman was considered a failure (Tsuya & Choe, 1991). She hoped her second marriage would change their feelings and she would have an ordinary marital life and would be able to maintain it based on what she had learned the first time. She felt she could not consult her

family when the abuse began in her second marriage. She had already divorced once and felt they would think there was something wrong with her that she couldn't make a marriage last. She felt she had no choice but to stay married, because if she told relatives about the abuse they would blame her. She was determined to endure no matter what. After six years her second husband decided he wanted a divorce because he had a child by another woman and realized that he might eventually kill his wife if he stayed with her and continued to beat her so badly. He actually arranged her third marriage for her. She described her third husband as "kind and motherly."

Chieko tried very diligently to keep her marriage together for two years, but finally obtained a divorce and is raising her son as a single parent. Her mother told her that she would have thought of divorce herself if she ha dn't had four small children and if Japanese society had been more accepting of divorce at the time. It takes courage to divorce in a collectivist society like Japan where women may be more likely to resign themselves to stay with an abusive husband. The importance of keeping the family together remains strong in Japanese society, but it is changing during recent years along with rapid socioeconomic and demographic changes, industrialization, increased acceptance of divorce, and the recognition of wife abuse as a crime (Tsuya & Choe, 1991).

Even though divorce is common in the U.S.A., staying married is often preferred and sanctioned by certain religious and cultural groups. Mary grew up believing that divorce was the worst possible thing because of her traumatic experience with her parents' divorce when she was six years old. She explained that she tried to do everything possible to please her husband and to have a happy home life. After enduring seven years of severe abuse, she realized that divorce was not necessarily the worst thing and she divorced her husband when he was jailed after attempting to shoot her.

Familism

Familism is a cultural value that the family is more important than the individual. It is common to both Buddhist and Confucian teachings as well as many other religions and cultures (Spector, 2004). The importance of maintaining an intact family was apparent in several of the narratives. Aiko related that she often felt like dying because of the abuse she endured. She couldn't count on her family for help. So, she stayed with her husband because she couldn't make it on her own with the children and felt they needed a father in Japanese society. Mary and Hiroko had each been determined to endure and make their marriages work for the sake of their children. They both found themselves homeless and unemployed with young children to raise on their own after divorcing their abusive spouses. They were unable to manage on their own and felt very ashamed for having to give up their children.

Familism involves commitment to the marriage and the desire to raise the children as a couple. Strong moral and religious beliefs fortify the woman's resolve to make the marriage work no matter what. These beliefs were actualized by "peace at any price," a common theme in families that stay together for the "sake of the children," observed here as the women sacrificed their health and happiness and endured abuse to keep their families together. Our narratives suggest that less rigid adherence to the value of familism might enhance the emotional health and well-being of children and parents.

Hidden Nature of Abuse

Although violence against women is as old as recorded history and constitutes the most prevalent form of violence around the world, it often remains hidden. It wasn't until 1993 that the United Nations included violence against women as a human rights violation and that same year the World Bank recognized the economic impact on health care costs (Klein, Campbell, Soler & Ghez, 1997). The hidden nature of violence in the home was illustrated in our narratives by observations that the extended family was unaware of or denied family violence. For example, Sue's boyfriend hurt her covertly in the presence of others when he would pinch her fiercely under the table and she was too ashamed to acknowledge it. Lori's husband isolated her from friends and family in various ways including not allowing her to get a driver's license, keeping her poor and dependent by not letting her work and pregnant by refusing to allow contraception. His abusive behaviors were hidden behind the closed doors of their home. When Hiroko's parents visited her and asked about the blood stains they saw, she evaded their question by answering: "well, probably fish blood." Her silence about this covert, abusive relationship lasted for six years.

"Street angel and house devil" is a phenomenon which further clarifies understanding of the hidden nature of

abuse. This phenomenon has also been described as "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" by Tilley and Brackley (2004). Both Chieko and Mary described their husbands as "gregarious, congenial, and affable" to outsiders and business associates while each was beating his wife at home. Mary related that the police would arrive after being called by a neighbor, but they responded by minimizing the situation and chalked it up to harmless "good-old boy" behavior.

Transgenerational Transmission

The repeating pattern of growing up in an abusive home, then marrying an abuser, and having children who go on to be abused or abusive is commonly reported (Black, Sussman, & Unger, 2010) and is illustrated in our pilot study. However, this is not a simple linear, cause-effect relationship (Ehrensaft, Cohen, Brown, Smailes, Chen, & Johnson, 2003). Instead, it varies with specific aspects of the particular situations, such as the gender of the abuser and the abused and the response of others to the disclosure of abuse.

The bewildering situation of children growing up seeing their mother being abused by someone who is supposed to love and care for her contributes to repetition of this pattern in the next generation if the situation continues and there is no intervention. Mary was abused and neglected as a child and married an abuser. Chieko grew up with verbal abuse and repeatedly witnessed her father's abuse of her mother. She married an abuser, but has been able to break the cycle of violence by getting divorced. Lori grew up witnessing her stepfather's abuse of her mother and while just a teenager she felt compelled to protect her mother. She married an abuser, but later divorced him and married a "wonderful man." She related that she did not realize how her children were being influenced by growing up in their abusive household. She regrets that her son is now struggling with abusing his own wife and her daughter had to get a restraining order against a boyfriend who was stalking her while she was away at college. These examples suggest that the practice of "staying together for the sake of the children" may not benefit them in the long run.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is "an almost universal social norm that expresses itself differently across cultures" (Ahmad, Riaz, Barata & Stewart, 2004, p. 278). The traditional patriarchal system know as the ie was supported by laws in pre-World War II Japan. This system "involved a complex series of well defined hierarchical relations among family members according to the rules of supremacy regarding gender (males over females), generation (parents over children), and birth order (first-born over later-born)" (Tsuya & Choe, 1991, p.4). Gender roles were rigidly specified and separate with the external world for the husband and the home for the wife. The roles of wife and mother are the most accepted roles for women in patriarchal societies (Taylor, Magnussen & Amundson, 2001). Patriarchal beliefs include the ideas that the place for women is in the home where they should be housekeepers and child caretakers who belong to their husbands (Tsuya & Choe, 1991). In patriarchal societies women are expected to keep the home comfortable and peaceful and they are blamed for provoking abuse by their husbands. The ie system was dismantled legally in 1945 when a new constitution was adopted, however, subordination of women still exists in Japanese society to some degree with more liberal practices being associated with higher education, younger age and living in urban areas (Tsuya & Choe, 1991).

In our pilot study, even when women worked outside the home to provide essential support for their families, their husbands expected them to be solely responsible for housekeeping and childcare. Hiroko's first husband demanded total subservience from his wife, which included perfect cooking and cleaning. She reported being lonely, exhausted with work and child rearing, and fearful of going to bed and being forced to engage in unacceptable sex acts. Her second husband expected her to enact traditional gender roles such as housekeeping, cooking meals, caring for the children, fulfilling sexual desires, and he also expected her to pay the bills. He incurred large debts from entertaining clients through gambling, drinking, and buying women. She stated that "fooling around was his specialty." He would become violent when she could not pay his debts. He would throw things, break things, and he punched, kicked, grabbed her, and dragged her by her hair so that some was pulled out. He would throw the children aside when they tried to stop him from hitting her. He would lock them all out of the house at night and their daughters often had to go to school without much sleep.

The two American women who were married had similar experiences. Mary's husband expected her to work to support the family, yet keep an immaculate home, prepare three meals a day, and be an exciting sex

partner.

These examples convey that patriarchal beliefs and practices continue to exist in Japan and the U.S.A. Abusive husbands can rely on such beliefs to feel justified in dominating and controlling their wives.

Romanticism

The myth of romantic love emerged as a significant theme in our pilot study that helped explain why a woman would marry a man who had been abusive to her prior to the marriage. Lori related an experience of being punched forcefully in the face by her boyfriend in the presence of their friends after they left a club where he thought she was looking at another man. She went on to marry him after this incident and described him as a "perfect gentleman" during the courtship period: "gifts every day, he'd take me out to eat, called and checked on me…the romantic period was just like something you would dream about…When the relationship intensified after we became emotionally intermingled, he moved in with me. At that time his whole attitude completely changed. He was ten times more demanding after he moved in."

Another illustration of the significance of the love relationship was that the participants in our pilot study found the unfaithfulness of their partners more hurtful than the physical abuse. In response to her husband's unfaithfulness, Chieko relates: I can't describe it in words. It's like part of my heart is taken away. When we fall in love we say 'my heart rings' or 'my heart is captured.' This was totally opposite. Something was stabbed in my heart. How can I describe it ? The only expression I could make [sighs] getting frozen, squeezed ... I was too drained to boil with anger at him ... I couldn't cry even though I wanted to ... I felt helpless."

The importance of idealization of the love relationship in maintaining the woman's loyalty in situations of violence has not been well recognized.

We need to develop greater awareness of the importance of a self-defining relationship in organizing a pers on's life and constituting one's being as a person to create more individualized approaches for responding to the problem of family violence. Lloyd (2000) points out that "a discourse of romance" pervades popular culture. We are continually exposed to the idea that there is a perfect match for everyone and if we are patient and good enough true love will come along. Identifying, studying, and communicating about positive role models in popular media that breakdown gender stereotypes and myths may be one way to counter the negative effects of romanticism. Two movies, Billy Elliot (Brand & Daldry, 2000) about a male ballet dancer from a British mining town, and *Whale Rider* (Barnett & Caro, 2002) about a Maori girl who became a tribal leader in New Zealand are examples of media that can be employed in designing programs to attempt to change attitudes toward gender roles.

Lloyd and Emery (1999) maintain that in order to understand some of the paradoxes of intimate violence we need to recognize that romance and the accompanying beliefs of "forgiving and forgetting" and "love conquers all" are essential pieces of the puzzle. The intensity of sex commonly referred to as "make up sex" following conflict between partners is part of the issue as well. Attention to the three critical contexts of intimate violence: romance, conflict, and control-needs to be applied to prevent and intervene in situations of family violence (Lloyd, 2000). Community involvement and commitment will be required to transform the cultural norms that support men's right to control women's lives and condone violence as a way to resolve conflict.

Unresponsive Systems

Women do not report to police, according to a National Violence Against Women Survey, because they did not think the police could do anything about their victimization. More than 60% said they felt they would not have been believed (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In the U.S.A. where crisis shelters and services have been in existence since the 1970s, women may still be confronted with negative police and provider attitudes and lack of resources that deter them from seeking help. This was the situation with Mary as mentioned earlier. Abused women may not disclose information about their abuser because of fear about what would happen to their children. Lori was hospitalized after breaking her ankle when she jumped out of the car to escape from her husband. She did not reveal her abusive situation to the health care providers because she worried that her children would be taken away. She had three crisis shelter admissions before she was able to survive on her own with her three children. She maintains that the crisis center saved her life.

Health care needs of women in abusive relationships have only recently been addressed in Japan (Nemoto,

Rodriguez, & Valhmu, 2006). Hiroko explained that her options were limited since there was no safe house available and her family refused to allow her to live with them. Chieko related that when she went to the hospital where she learned that she had fractured ribs from her husband's kicks, the doctors and other hospital staff did not question how her injuries occurred and did not offer assistance even though she told them she had been kicked. She had no other option than to return to her parents' home where she again encountered her father's abuse. She later described feeling saved when a counselor hugged her.

Hiroko was homeless after her first divorce. She had two children, no job, no money and nowhere to turn. Her step parents forbade her to return to their home. She resorted to entrusting her children to the care of her in-laws and slept in the park for a month before she had enough money for a place to stay. When her second husband took her to the hospital with eight fractured ribs and a concussion, the doctor didn't ask how it happened and she was sent home after x-rays as her husband would not allow her to stay. If the medical, social and criminal justice systems the woman turns to for assistance ignore or minimize her problems, she can begin to believe that it is her fault and that she deserves the abuse (Weingourt, Maruyama, Sawada, & Yoshino, 2001). Our narratives suggest that more effective responses to family violence are clearly needed in both the U.S.A. and Japan.

Conclusions

The cross cultural pilot study reported here enabled us to determine the following conclusions: it will not be necessary to include helpers if we expand the study and use of interpretive notes and a narrative index would be more congruent with our interpretive phenomenological approach than using the computer data management program. In addition, we developed an interpretive plan to articulate universal and unique aspects of responses to abuse experiences. Our pilot study demonstrated more similarities than differences among the Japanese and American narratives. The experiences of abuse, survival, and healing described here appear to be universal in many ways and implications for practice are expected to be applicable to varied population groups. The abuse and survival experiences and healing practices described here show the strength and endurance of these women to survive and illustrate the resilience of the human spirit. There is an ongoing need for increased availability of resources and services to support, reinforce, and facilitate healing initiatives for all those involved including fathers and children.

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