

Mom, Why Don't You Just Look for a New Good Daddy? Women's Lived Experience in an Abusive Marriage

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Abstract

This study aimed to understand women's experiences of domestic violence and their decision to terminate the abusive marriage in Yogyakarta. Criterion sampling of three woman survivor of domestic violence was performed. These consented to be interviewed and a semi structure interview guide was used. The women shared their life experiences since the dating time up to the time after divorce. A phenomenological approach was employed to analyze the data, to explore, share, and validate their feelings and insights on their life experiences. From this study numerous factors that facilitated as well as hindered the women to terminate their abusive relationships, and the dynamics of the transition process were identified. The women's experiences reflect the complexity of domestic violence. The women's transformation from victims, meaning women living under the authorities, into survivors, meaning woman with self-autonomy, is demonstrated through their stories. The complexity of domestic violence among Indonesia women is only a little known. By comprehending the complexity of domestic violence, a more visible and practical programs to address the national commitment to improve the Indonesian women's situation can be developed.

Keywords: domestic violence, phenomenological approach, women survivor of domestic violence, Indonesia.

Introduction

Only in the beginning of the 1990s, violence against women started to emerge as a focus of international attention and concern (Population Report, 1999). Violence against women was acknowledged as a priority for international action by the launch of the General Assembly Resolution on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (GA Resolution of 48/104, 20 December 1993). Three years later, the 49th WHO Assembly adopted a resolution (WHA49.25) declaring violence against women as a public health priority (Population Report, 1999).

One of the most common forms of violence against women is abuse performed by the husband or a male intimate partner (Heise, 1993; Population Report, 1999; WHO, 2002). Although women have been the victims of what we currently term "domestic violence" since at least 750 AD, the medical and public health field did not recognize intimate partner abuse as a problem until recently (Rothman, 1998). Domestic violence, or violence perpetrated by a person known to the victim, is not limited to any class or culture (PROWID, 1998) as it occurs in all countries, irrespective of social, economic, religious or cultural group

(WHO, 2002), and now is considered as a major social and public health concern, as well as a human rights issue, in which governments have the right and obligation to intervene (Ellsberg, 2000). Domestic violence by an intimate male partner has both physical and mental health consequences (Heise, et.al. 1994). The effect of violence can be devastating to a woman's reproductive health as well as to other aspects of her physical and mental well-being. Women with a history of physical or sexual abuse are also at increased risk of unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and adverse pregnancy outcomes (Population Report, 1999). Further, WHO (1999) has concluded that worldwide, it has been estimated that violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as is cancer, and it is a greater cause of ill health than traffic accidents and malaria combined.

Terminology and definition of domestic violence

The concepts of 'abuse' and 'violence' have frequently been used interchangeably by those who study domestic violence (Gelles, 1985). The term "abuse" is a source of considerable difficulty and confusion because it covers many types of abuse, not just acts of physical violence, and because there is no consensus on the severity of violence required for an act to be considered "abuse" (Strauss & Gelles, 1986).

The terms "family violence" and "domestic violence" have also been used interchangeably in many studies around the globe. "Family violence"

refers to any violence that is committed by and targeted to all family members, regardless of the sex of the offender and the victim (Strauss, 1974; Gelles, 1980; Strauss & Gelles, 1986). According to this perspective, family violence - including wife abuse - is an act of violence within the family caused by social-structural conditions such as low socioeconomic status, unemployment, financial problems, and social isolation (Gelles, 1985). But, according to feminist scholars, domestic violence is seen as violence against women within the home as a manifestation of unequal gender relations between the man and the woman in the relationship (Kurz, 1989; Lenton, 1995). They believe that the root of violence is gender and power inequity (Anderson, 1997), or what is called ideology of male dominance or patriarchy (Lenton, 1995).

The United Nation has formulated and categorized all kinds of violence against women as "gender based violence". According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination Against Women (that was launched by the United Nation General Assembly in 1993), violence against women is defined as:

"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life"

This definition allows us to understand that domestic violence is one of many forms of violence against women, which is based on gender, and occurring in women's private life.

Prevalence and consequences of domestic violence

WHO (2002) revealed that population based studies in Canada, Chile, Egypt and Nicaragua have found that 6 – 15% of ever partnered women have been physically or sexually abused during pregnancy. In the US, estimates of abuse during pregnancy range from 3% to 11% among adult women, and up to 3% among low-income teenage mothers. A population based study on 765 rural married women in Indonesia (Hakimi, et al., 2001) showed that 22% were suffering from sexual violence, 11% from physical violence, and 24% from emotional violence from their husband. Among these women, 8% suffered from violence during pregnancy.

Studies on domestic violence have largely shown the impact of domestic violence on women's health, and in many cases it has even caused woman's death. Physical and sexual abuse can put women at risk of infection and unwanted pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and complications of pregnancy (Population Report, 1999). Studies on domestic violence in Australia, Nicaragua, Pakistan and US, revealed that women who are abused by their partners suffer more from depression, anxiety and phobia than non abused women (WHO, 2002). A national survey in Canada among 12,300 women showed that 45% of the abused wife cases involved physical injury, 40% saw a doctor at least once because of the violence, and 85% reported types of emotional problems such as fear, depression, or anxiety (Dobash & Dobash, 1995).

Recent studies in this area also focus on how women themselves view the phenomenon of wife battering. Among the women in the Indonesian study, 54% felt that it was justified that the husband may hit the wife if he found that she has been unfaithful, and 14% felt that it was justified if the wife disobeyed the husband (Hakimi, et al., 2001). Another study in Jordan showed that although a substantial proportion of the Jordanian women agreed that "there is no excuse for a man to beat his wife", the women did acknowledge some justifications for wife abuse, the strongest being in cases where the wife was perceived as "sexually unfaithful", as "challenging her husband's manhood", or as "insulting her husband in front of his friends" (Haj-Yahia, 2002). Meanwhile in Zimbabwe, a study conducted by Hindin (2003) estimated that more than 50% of the women believed that domestic violence was justifiable in five certain situations, which included arguing with her spouse, neglecting the children, refusing to have sex, burning food, or leaving the home without telling the husband. World wide, studies seem to identify a consistent list of events that are said to "trigger" male violence as all of these represent a transgression of dominant gender norms (Hakimi, et al., 2001).

An ethnographic study of 40 indigenous, economically marginal women in the community of Chiapas, Mexico, was conducted with the aim to understand local perceptions of and responses to violence (Glantz, et al., 1998). Using open-ended interviews, this study revealed how women experienced physical and or sexual violence, the typology and characteristics of violence, and

causes and consequences of violence. Other study conducted by Riessman (1994) revealed how a woman survivor of sexual violence retell, reflect, interpret and re-experience her anger, and transform herself from a victim to a survivor (Riessman, 1994). Another qualitative study on domestic violence was conducted to elucidate how Javanese women coped with domestic violence (Marlinawati, 2002). From her study it was revealed that Javanese women suffering from domestic violence would keep the violence to themselves in order to protect their husband's honor and maintain the marital harmony.

Domestic violence among Javanese women in Indonesia

The new government in Indonesia during early 2000 addressed the issue of violence against women by declaring a National Plan of Action *Zero Tolerance Policy* in the year of 2000, as a joint commitment between the government and the people to eliminate violence against women. As a country that signed the ratification of the *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) in 1984, the government of Indonesia is actually strongly obliged to address any kind of discrimination acts against women, including violence against women. In the political field, efforts to enhance the participation and the number of women as decision makers has been carried out to promote gender advocacies in various government institutions (Indonesia 2001, an Official Handbook).

According to Javanese tradition, women are constrained by the traditional feminine ideal that extols the virtues of submission and obedience. Javanese traditional values are strongly influenced by Islamic teachings that interpret men as the leader of women, and therefore require a woman to be obedient to her husband. The importance of women's obedience is reflected in the expression, *swarga nunut nraka katut*, which means that a woman should follow her husband faithfully, whether he goes to heaven or to hell (Cholil et al., 1999). As the dominant religion among the Javanese, Islam has penetrated the core of Javanese culture, largely because the Sultan (the theocratic ruler of the Javanese people), is a Muslim. Islam has also exerted a strong influence on the beliefs and rituals of the people of Central Java and forms the basis for social interaction and daily life of Javanese people (Woodward, 1999).

Traditional values, shared by most Javanese, state that once a woman gets married to a man, she belongs to her husband and the parents have no more power over her. Brides are advised by their parents to carefully hide conflicts with their husbands. This is referred to as *njaga praja*, meaning that the husband's honor must be protected from people outside the family. Once married, a woman is bound to fulfill the socially prescribed roles of housekeeping, childbearing and support of her husband (Djohan, 1994).

As the ideology of harmony is widely applied in the Indonesian government's policies, people in general adopt and practice the 'spirit' of harmony by not taking into account, and even denying,

conflicts and oppression that have happened in many parts of the state. Conflict is seen as a failure to live up to the principles of harmony and peace. Therefore, for both political and cultural reasons, domestic violence remains invisible, because the acknowledgement of domestic violence exposes failure of two important spheres: revealing a lack of harmony both within the family and the nation (Sciortino, 1997). At the family level, application of the ideology of harmony is performed by the wife's obligation of being a loyal supporter of the husband, supporting his official duties, and maintaining the harmony in their home (Sciortino, 1997).

The data recorded by the Division of survivor assistance at Rifka Annisa 1988-2006 reveal that only around 10% of the women decided to end the abusive relationship through divorce (Table 1). Mostly women continued living with their abusive husband for several reasons, such as the presence of children, social status, or stigma (Rifka Annisa, 2001). Initiating divorce is not easy for women, because the consequences are adverse for women, especially in the Islamic based family court system, where the women are entitled only to three months of alimony. It is often the case that divorced women do not receive alimony at all even during the short period of three months. This is likely caused by the absence of enforcement of alimony payment.

Aims

The study aims are:

To understand women's experiences of domestic violence.

To understand their experience in deciding to terminate an abusive marriage.

Table 1.
Percentage of women survivors of domestic violence who decided to divorce

Year	Total cases of domestic violence reported	Total number of women deciding to divorce
1998	125	14 (11.2%)
1999	225	18 (8%)
2000	223	14 (6.2%)
2001	235	19 (8%)
2002	247	24 (9.6%)

Source: Rifka Annisa's data base on domestic violence cases reported by women from 1998-2006.

Method

Sampling

This study uses a qualitative approach to gain a better understanding of women's experiences of surviving violence. The approach chosen was phenomenology. The sampling technique used in this study was the criterion sampling, as the participants must be individuals who has experienced the phenomenon being explored and who can articulate their experiences (Creswell, 1998). In this study, three urban women survivors of domestic violence who had already

terminated their marriage were interviewed. Information on the names and contact numbers was provided by the Rifka Annisa's Coordinator of Survivor Assistance that also coordinating the Support Group program, who had a list of Support Group program members who were willing to be contacted for activities related to the advocacy work of Rifka Annisa. Five women were identified as suitable (already terminated the marriage) for this study, and three consented to join as they could manage their time to do so, along with the schedule provided by the researcher. All of those three women chose to have the interview at Rifka Annisa's office for different reasons, primarily for the reason of privacy. Being in a counseling room during the interview seemed to make them feel secure enough to talk about their past. In their own home, this situation would not be reached as they lived with other family members.

Data collection

After receiving approval for the study from the Board of Rifka Annisa, informants were contacted based on the list provided by the Coordinator of Survivor Assistant. None of these women had met the researcher in her role as counselor. Three informants gave their consent and underwent the interview. Based on the institutional policy of Rifka Annisa, women who are invited for the purpose of research and advocacy receive a compensation for their transportation and time given during the research.

Before providing their verbal consent, all informants were informed about the aim of the study, the topic that would be discussed, and the presence of an audio tape recorder. They were also informed that their interview would be transcribed. Confidentiality was assured to them in that none of their personal data would be included in the transcript. Dates and time were sometimes changed prior to the interview, as these women all were working single parents at that moment. A semi-structured interview guide was used, which focused on the history of dating time, marriage phase, consideration to leave and the time after divorce. Each of the interviews was conducted during the month of July 2003 and took about 1.5 – 2.5 hours in complete privacy. Notes on some methodological barriers were taken during the interview.

Research design

Abused women might not get appropriate social support when they reveal their abusive experience in their marriage life, because domestic violence is still socially viewed as a shameful and private matter. However, within an empathetic interview, a woman survivor of violence was able to formulate her life history in the past to present time, and the interview also will give the woman an opportunity to explore, share, and validate her feelings and insights (Davies, 2002).

Three women informants were interviewed in this study, and phenomenological approach was used to transcend or suspend past knowledge and experience to understand the phenomenon of do-

mestic violence on a deeper level. This type of research allows the women survivors of domestic violence to communicate experiences, share insights, and reflect on experiences, thus giving them a voice to the meaning of their own experiences (Davies, 2002). Phenomenology is the method best suited to providing women with a voice about their experiences, because phenomenology endorses informant's own perspectives about their life experiences (Davies, 2002).

Data analysis

Founded by Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher in the early 1900s, phenomenology is formulated as a study of the structure of consciousness that enable consciousness to refer to objects outside itself. His famous slogan was "*to the things themselves*", which refers to the emphasis on the world as lived by a person, not the world or reality as something separate from the person (Laverty, 2003). From this epistemological point of view, the researching of human experience must avoid personal bias from the researcher's side, so that the essence of the living experience of the researcher can be captured.

In this study, the phenomenological guide developed by van Manen was employed. A set of steps were followed to give a systematic path in capturing the essence of the informants' life experiences. Adapted from van Manen, the steps consist of (1) Reading the transcripts several times, to try to establish a sense of the data until a vigorous image is achieved; (2) Finding and coding the sections (phrases,

sentences or statements) that are significant for the purpose of this study. These parts are called the 'Meaning Units' (MU); (3) Clustering of the meaning units and interpreting or grasping the meaning of those MUs, and formulating it; (4) Interpreting the formulated meanings into sub themes; (5) Clustering sub themes into themes, and (6) Integrating the themes into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon (Davies, 2002; Anderson & Spencer, 2002; Caelli, 2001).

Results

The three informants ranged in age from 30 to 32, and all of them were Javanese. Each of these women had one child, and had been divorced for 5 years to 4 months ago (at the time of interview), with the marriage period being between 3 to 9 years. All of the three women had graduated from senior high school. Two of the women ran a small enterprise by themselves, and one was working as a housekeeper in the private sector. The range of time of first visit for counseling to Rifka Annisa up to decide to terminate the marriage was 1 to 4 years, and all of the women underwent psychological and legal counseling.

From the three transcripts, 80 formulated meanings were identified and these were clustered into nine themes. Table 2 illustrates the process of analysis, and gives an example of how the sub themes and themes emerged from the text. Thereafter, the nine themes are presented. The three women will be referred to as Susan, Eva and Uta (invented nicknames).

Table 2.
Selected examples of meaning unit, formulated meaning and sub theme

Meaning Unit	Formulated meaning	Sub Theme
I started to learn to understand him because I was thinking that he is my fate.... So I have to learn to love him whatever he is....who knows...by loving him that way...he...he would change and realize how bad he is and be willing to become a good man. But...he even got worse and worse...I even felt more humiliated, he got a lot of mockeries on me...	She tried to love him no matter what to make things better but she was still treated badly by him	Tried to love him unconditionally Disappointed of his continuous abuse
Lately our neighbors even noticed and saw by themselves how he treated me. They sometimes talked to me “why don’t you feel humiliated, because your husband treats you that way?” And later on I reported him to the Police ...I did so because of the support from my friends.	She was encouraged by her friends to make a legal report	Social support to get legal aid

Theme 1. Attaching to authorities: being a woman socially

This emerged theme illustrates the women’s stories on the history of their relationship with their spouses. Their stories reflect the women’s way of thinking about being a woman in an intimate relationship within their social context. Looking for a patron figure, someone who could be relied on and protect them, is the main reason for these women to develop the relationship with a man. When the friendship developed into dating, two of the women (Susan and Eva) knew that their dates were still married. The third woman (Uta) came to know later on, after she married her date. What made these women love their dating partners?

”I thought that I had found such a nice person, someone who knew, who cared, and who was willing to accompany me, someone who would be glad to take care of me...I was so naïve...

you know...away from my parents, and I could not recognize or differentiate who were good or bad guys... (Eva, 32 years old, mother of a son)

”I liked him because he was sort of a strong person, willing to work for a living...it was good, I think, that he was willing to work hard, whatever he could...to earn for family living...I wished that he could provide the living for us... besides, I was concerned about my age...I was already 24, it was time to become a mother...” (Uta, 31 years old, mother of a son).

Both Eva and Uta felt that they found a man who would become their guardian in their future life as a woman. For this reason, they seem to have ignored the oddities of their dates, which later led them into difficult situations. Besides of those considerations, Eva was also concerned about her age and did not want to delay chances of a marriage. Her words “*time to become a mother*” reflect her concern about the ‘biological clock’ as a woman and its reproductive matter.

Quite different from Uta, both Eva and Susan were chased by their dates. The way their dates expressed their love to them led them into a powerless situation that later on entrapped them into a situation of 'no return' but to marry these men. Their dates used different trickeries to capture these women. Eva realized that she was chased by a married man, but the way he courted and cared for her made her give in, and later to cohabit with him. When he started to limit her social interaction and treated her in a possessive way, she began to realize that things were getting worse. Given this situation, why did Eva decide to marry this man?

"I was about to leave him and obey my father, when I realized my menstrual absence.... And the doctor congratulated me to my positive pregnancy test...I answered by screaming and crying...I had no choice except to marry him for the sake of my baby..." (Eva).

Susan was also chased by a married man, and felt that she was entrapped into a troublesome marriage, because he did not give any chance for her to choose,

"I did not know why, he was so mad about me. I refused him many times, but he kept chasing me... I realized that married him not because of I fell in love with him, but...but more ... I felt like he forced me, and I did not have a chance to refuse. I did so (marry him) to prevent myself from a stigma from my surroundings as we already slept and lived together" (Susan, 31 years old, mother of a daughter).

Both Eva and Susan were actually entrapped by their dates through their dates' playing out the social norms. Being pregnant without husband and living together without being married are considered embarrassing situations for these women.

Theme 2. Dwelling under authorities: loosing oneself

This theme emerged as an illustration of the life experiences of these women during their relationship with their men, both during dating and marriage. Both Eva and Susan had difficulties with their dates from the beginning of their relationships. They had experienced emotional pressures as well as physical assaults already from the beginning of their dating time, and these experiences actually became the beginning of their living under the authority of someone else. This meant that actually they have started to lose their self-reliance since dating time:

"He liked bad words like 'whore'...and many other bad words...including female genitals and yelled to me...He even did this in front of many people...his friends. Even when I had not yet decided to marry him, he liked to force me, humiliate me, and even beat me up." (Susan).

"During the inauguration days at my university, I was supposed to be in the camp with other new students...but he restricted me. He forced me to stay with him in the motel, and restricted me from having social interaction with my new friends...I refused to do so, but then he started to beat me...I had to do what he said..." (Eva)

Entering the marriage time, these three women were to face an uncomfortable treatment by their husbands. Their life was under the control of their husbands; as the husbands defined the rules within the marriage, such as what was right and wrong, what to do or not, etc. For Eva and Susan, beatings, throwing, yelling, sexual coercion and other abusive acts from their husbands was a continuation of the situation during the dating times. All these three women suffered from sexual, emotional and physical abuse in

a different manner and intensity. Susan's ex husband liked to harass her by talking about his past sexual adventures with her:

"He talked about many of his ex girlfriends or women who slept with him. It was so disgusting... He just kept telling me "I was making love with her...", or "I have a lot of sexual experience with many women, you know..." or sometimes "I might have been having sex with 300 women"..." (Susan)

Quite different from Susan, Eva suffered from more overt sexual coercion from her husband. He demanded her to serve him sexually at any time, and if she refused she was punished:

"He was apparently hyper sexual...days and nights I must serve him at any time...I felt so exploited to fulfill his demand. If I refused, he beat me...He really saw me as an object of his sexual desire. I was his wife, but I felt treated as a whore...(Eva)

Sharing the family income within the marriage did not happen in Uta's life, as her husband did not tell about his assets or allow her any control over the income. She did not know where he worked, how much his income was, or how he used and allocated his income. And she was even being controlled by her husband in using her own income:

"He worked somewhere... I didn't know, and he didn't share his income, not even during the Idul Fitri¹, that was very strange. I was wondering where his income went to...? But I tried to have positive thinking that it must go to his brother or sister. Another time, I spent my money for my sister who was ill, and he became upset, saying that I was supposed to prioritize my family's expenditures, not my sister ..."(Uta).

The physical violence suffered by these women were of various intensity. Susan and Eva received serious physical assaults from their ex husbands, leading them to have medical treatment for their internal and external injuries:

"I thought I would receive protection and security from him, but I got the other way around...He forced me to do things that he wanted. If I refused to have sex with him, then he beat me up, or got upset and threw things around him. Once, he beat me in a public place and caused bleeding in my face... I went to the hospital several times, and once for a burn wound because he burnt my hand ... (Eva).

Susan suffered from physical symptoms such as collapse, seizure and dizziness. Up to the day of the interview, she still had problems with her hearing. She only received medical treatment once, when her family took her to the hospital after she got a concussion from being banged in the road surface by her ex husband:

He would beat me once we had a misunderstanding or dissent. He beat me here in many parts of my face...and he not only beat me in the home, but anywhere in public space... In the road, in my workplace, wherever he got mad at me...he banged me up in a surface of the road...(Susan).

Another type of abuse that these women experienced was emotional abuse, the type of abuse that leaves an 'invisible wound'. All of the women suffered from emotional violence in different forms and intensity that degraded their self esteem, damaged their self confidence, and led them to feel worthless. Uta's husband's preference to have a baby boy led him to accuse her of committing adultery:

¹ Idul Fitri is Muslim's holy day, a celebration of the ending of the fasting months

"He was not happy with my first pregnancy...I thought it was just because he was not really ready to be a father. But then he accused me of committing adultery if the baby born was a girl. Only if the baby born was a boy he confesses that he was his father..." (Uta)

Beside this accusation, Uta also got several treatments from her husband that degraded her, such as his leaving without any information and overwhelming her with domestic work. Meanwhile, Eva's husband treated her as an 'object' and visited prostitutes as compensation for her not providing 'ready at any time' sexual services:

"He treated me like an object, and that made me felt so bad...He used my weakness in serving him sexually as the reason for his promiscuity ... you know it was disgusting that he committed to have sex with the prostitute...he could have given me a disease ...But he always defended himself as doing what man do..." (Eva)

How did these women survive under these circumstances? The three women had both common and different ways of managing their life under their authoritative husbands. Silence was a common reaction among these women who dwelled under the abusive relationship. Susan tried to love her husband unconditionally, as she had an expectation that he would change:

"I started to learn to understand him because I was thinking that he is my fate.... So I have to learn to love him what ever he is...who knows...by loving him that way...he...he would change and realize how bad he is and be willing to become a good man. But...he even got worse and worse...I even felt more humiliated, he got a lot of mockeries on me" (Susan).

Almost similar to Susan, Uta tried to be patient in facing the oddity of her husband. She patiently

accepted his introversive behaviors, his rejection of her pregnancy, and even his accusing her of committing to adultery if the baby born were girl;

"I just prayed to God to really have a baby boy. I tried to understand it as he was two years younger than me, so he might not be really ready to have a kid. And I never told anybody about all that happened in my family. I pretended to be happy..." (Uta).

Meanwhile, Eva's silence was caused by her 'liability' to her parents, as they had not agreed to her marriage several years earlier. Her parents knew that her husband was rough:

"I did not tell them about my life. They knew already what kind of man that I married, so I must face my life..." (Eva).

Theme 3. The price of losing oneself

Being hurt physically and emotionally on one hand, and trying to protect the unity of their marriage on the other hand, seemed to put these women into a complicated situation. Living with the abusive husbands had put them in a high risk of having personal health problems. Physical assault had obviously caused physical health problems for them, either permanently or temporarily. Eva has permanent scars on some parts of her body, because of hits and cigar burns from her ex husband.

"I was burnt by his cigar, once, and mostly he beat me up. Bruises and scars in my body is a common thing, but sometimes it really hurt because of bleeding..."

Susan, who was beaten many times in her face, has a permanent hearing disability. The

concussion that she suffered from also caused frequent dizziness.

“I had physical complaints, several times. I did not know what symptom was it ... I got several seizures in my body; collapsed in my room ... I also got trouble with my hearing. You know, I am a little bit deaf because of his several beatings. And last time he bangs me on the road... I think it was an internal injury that I got, here ... (pointing her head). My hearing is still lacking up to now”. (Susan).

Being treated in a bad manner by their husbands for years had put these women into a feeling of worthlessness, losing self confidence, as well as other psychological problems such as insomnia, lost appetite and nightmares. These sorts of consequences are more invisible as they do not appear as marks in the body, instead they destroy the non-physical part of the women latently.

”Yes I felt insecure and had frequent nightmares. Sometimes I also lacked concentration so that I forgot a lot. I also felt jealous to my friends, how could they be so close and nice to their spouses? I really felt that I had bad luck, a worthless person... I easily felt irritated as I felt that everybody talked about me... that was terrible, maybe because I was not happy”. (Susan).

”Even though I never told anybody about my marriage problems, my performance could not hide it. I was getting thinner and thinner, and pale, as I lost my appetite. My face also looked unhappy, and I could not laugh, and was so silent... I really felt that my life was so worthless... I have a husband, but he is not on my side...”. (Uta).

Another consequence was being fired from the workplace, thus losing economic independence. Susan was fired because her husband’s first wife accused her ‘of stealing her husband’ at Susan’s workplace.

“I also was fired from my job that time, because his wife came to my work place, and reported me to my boss that I was such a bad woman that took her husband.... You know... that was so bad, I had been madly looking for a job, but then was fired not because of my wrong doing but...”

Hence, Susan was not only entrapped into a dating relationship, but also received a kind of ‘moral sanction’ from her social life. Thus, after being entrapped into cohabitation with the man that chased her, next she was entrapped into a chain of events that made it impossible for her to defend her own life. First she lost her self reliance and then her economic independence.

Theme 4. Listening to oneself: a voice from inside

Realizing that the efforts they made to improve their marriage life were futile, these women started to listen to their inner voice. All of the children of these women had witnessed their mothers being hit, thrown at with something, or degraded emotionally by their fathers. These facts were the major concern on the women’s minds.

”My son many times saw the way he threw things at me. My son seemed stressed at that time, because I left home several times to avoid his madness. My son asked me sometimes, ”why was daddy upset?” or “why did daddy throw things at you?” I was so very depressed; thinking that my son will imitate him. I was so worried about that” (Eva).

”My son seemed to hate his father as he many times saw how he threw and yelled at me. My son cried along with me... and one day he asked me “Mom, why don’t you just look for another

daddy? A good daddy...?" I was worried that the way my husband threw objects and yelled would affect my son" (Uta).

Eva's and Uta's children were never abused by their fathers. However, Susan's daughter was abused by her stepfather, alongside of witnessing her mother being abused. Hatred toward their fathers developed among the children of these women. Being a woman, Susan's daughter even generalized that all men are bad and requested to the mother not to have any husband at all.

"My daughter was burnt by his cigar so she hates him so much. And she also witnessed how badly he treated me. She asked me "Mom, you'd better not to have a husband. I think all men are bad. You'd better never know any men". That was not a good sign, right, for a child?" (Susan).

The women realized that their men did not change over time. These women had tried to accept and tolerate what their men did to them. However the husbands kept being the same person who defined the rules for their life, and put them into a life in uncertainty and insecurity.

"I thought that I was no longer his wife because he never shared his income with me, and kept coming and going just like a single man...I felt so uncertain...I kept asking myself, "Am I his wife?" because he never talked about any future plans for our marriage, plans for the kid..." (Uta).

"I was thinking that he is my fate.... So I have to learn to love him unconditionally. But...he even got worse and worse...I even felt more humiliated, he got lot of mockeries on me. And that was the time when I started to think that maybe I was doing this for nothing... it was useless...and I started to lose my love for him ..." (Susan).

After these turning points, these women started to resist their husband's behaviors and tried to

seek a way out. Uta realized that her husband's way of living (coming and going without letting her know where and when), would continue through her lifetime, unless she herself broke that pattern.

"I realized that he would do the same thing, always the same. It will always happen again and again. If I kept the relationship, I did not feel that it would bring prosperity for me and my son" (Uta).

Meanwhile, Susan and Eva both believed that bad temper was the cause of their men's rough behaviors. Therefore, they would not be able to change their men. They realized that separating from their husband was the only way out:

"The most important thing was that I could no longer bear this suffering. It became unbearable, and why did I not just end it? For the sake of my future life ... I got an insight that I had to end this" (Susan).

"By the time, I felt that I must keep myself away from him, whatever the risk. I knew that I might be separated from my son, but I could no longer stay with him...I was so insecure and stressed. I could not stand this any longer..." (Eva).

Theme 5. The affectionate pitfall

When these women started to listen to their inner voice and make resistance towards their husbands, suddenly they received special attention from their husbands. This included apologizes for what he had done to her, promises that he would change, or begging that she would stay in the relationship. This strategy was used by the husbands to keep the women in the marriage. Indeed, for a while these apologizes softened the women's heart, and kept them in the marriage.

“He begged me to stay with him as he loved me more than his wife. I felt so flattered at that time... And during the marriage time, he several times promised not to drink alcohol any longer, not to beat me any longer, but the he did it again and again...” (Eva).

“My mother was so disappointed with him. And she talked to him and he started to apologize and beg my parents. “I am so sorry, I am so sorry, I apologize for doing this... Please forgive me...” The way he apologized was very convincing. He could cry, kiss my knee and other things...he did it many times but he kept his bad behavior towards me” (Susan).

“He sent me a letter, saying that he divorced his first wife, and begged me to come back home, come back to him. He also apologized to my family for abandoning me. I felt that this time he would really change... but, again, he went away, never told where to go...just disappeared and I, again, felt so down...” (Uta).

Eventually, the fact that their husbands never changed their way of treating them made them realize that their life would be the same.

Theme 6. The crossroad

Finally these women had come to the insight that they must do something to save their lives. When they arrived at this ‘crossroad’ of their marriage life, it was not easy to decide which direction to take. If they kept staying with their husbands, they would keep suffering physically as well as mentally. If they left their husbands, they would be safer but the mothers of the sons would have to face their future lives without their father. This may hurt their sons’ social status,

“The only thing in my mind was my kid. How about my kid if his friends asked him “where is your daddy?” I was so worried that their friends

would tease him as he did not have a daddy... So I really had to consider his mentality” (Uta).

Eva attempted to separate from her husband but he threatened to separate her from her son. As a woman with no income of her own, Eva was extremely stressed when facing the crossroad of her marriage,

”I was so stressed over being away from my son. I asked myself, “Can I live without him? How will his life turn out if I leave him?” (Eva).

Susan was concerned about her social status as a divorcee, as she was in her second marriage. That concern kept her in doubt,

”I was deeply concerned about my social life... what would people say about me as this would be my second divorce... they could have been saying negative things about me...and I started to get weaker and weaker ... (Susan).

These concerns represented an internal barrier for women in this study when they considered breaking up of violent marriages.

Theme 7. Rescuing oneself

What did these women do to survive their abusive relationships? Realizing that their husbands would never stop hurting them physically or mentally, these women started to seek help. Seeking medical care was done several times by Eva, as she got several injuries because of her husband’s abuse.

“When I got an injury because of his beating, I got medical treatment in the hospital and the health worker there encouraged me to make a report to the Police about what had happened to me... (Eva)

Quite different from Eva, Susan only once received medical treatment even though she actually suffered from much physical abuse from her husband, which for example caused a permanent loss of hearing.

“My family took me to the hospital when he banged me, and I stayed there for a week because the doctor diagnosed that I had a concussion” (Susan).

After receiving counseling sessions in Rifka Annisa, Eva and Susan joined Support Group sessions, where they listened and learned about other women’s experiences in facing domestic violence problems. Through these sessions, both Eva and Uta got an understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, as well as the alternatives they could choose to overcome their problems.

“Listening to other women’s experiences, I became stronger and stronger...and I started to convince myself that I can do this. I got convinced that I was strong enough to do this...” (Uta).

”I learned from the women in the Support Group about several alternatives for my life, what I would get if I stayed and what if I left. I learned a lot from them” (Eva).

By involving themselves in a self help group, Eva and Uta learned how other women with similar problems managed their lives. Some of the other women in the group had separated from their partners and some still lived in the relationships. Learning from others opened up a wider perspective for Eva and Uta in viewing themselves as women living in abusive relationships.

Theme 8. Bridges over troubled water

Did these women receive support from their surroundings? Who supported them? Each of three women had strong support by their families at the critical time, which was when they decided to separate from their abusive husbands. Actually, all of the women had experienced lacked of support from their family when they decided to marry these men several years earlier.

“When they heard (the whole family) from me that I will leave him, they supported me, and they seemed so relieved...” (Susan)

“Well, my family was really on my side, and even encouraged me to make a report to the Police about his spurious ID. But the most important thing to me was to separate from him, and my family was very happy with that decision” (Uta).

“My uncle sent a letter to my father, saying that I should divorce my husband, that he totally agreed. He said that I deserved to be away from that bastard...”(Eva).

Susan and Uta also received support from their friends during their troubled marriages:

“Lately our neighbors even noticed themselves how he treated me. They talked to me sometimes “why don’t you feel humiliated, because your husband treat you that way?” I finally reported him to the Police, because of support from my friends” (Susan).

”I talked then, to a friend of mine, and she was so sorry about what had happened to me, and she was very supportive to me. And, her support really strengthened me that time” (Uta)

All of these women found that they got significant help from an organization based assistance, especially because they proceeded with legal actions. The existence of organizational support

was based not only helpful to take this action, but also in facilitating for these women to gain an understanding of the nature of domestic violence.

“I read *Kedaulatan Rakyat*^{2c} everyday, and I noticed that there was a weekly consultation column for women with specific problems. I became interested and tried to communicate with Rifka Annisa and then I got counseling (Eva)

“It was Rifka (counseling at Rifka Annisa) that helped me to become a brave person. I got brave enough to ask for separation from him, I... I also come to Rifka for counseling. And I started to be assertive, to be more aware of what I really want. Maybe if I were not here, had not met with people here (Rifka Annisa) I might still be the same person... a woman suffering from his madness...” (Susan)

”Well in Rifka I got a very good support, and they told me what to do to proceed with the process (divorce). It made me strong, really ... (Uta).

Eva who had her divorce five years ago, remembered that she did not receive any support from the Police, as they saw domestic violence as a family problem rather than as a criminal matter.

”The Police officers were not as supportive as nowadays. I know that now they are trained to handle this problem, but five years ago, they didn’t support my report, they suggested me to handle this matter on a family level, not through the Police” (Eva).

These stories reflect how these women received favorable as well as unfavorable support during critical times. Overall, they seem to have received appropriate support from their surroundings, and

this support greatly helped them in persisting with a separation process from their abusive husbands. The existence of support for these women helped them transform themselves from a woman under authority into a woman with autonomy.

Theme 9. The new self, the new hope

After separating from their abusive husbands, how did these women feel? What were their future plans? Eva and Susan felt free and relieved, as they were now free to manage their lives by themselves:

”I feel free now, free to manage my life. Sometimes he still passes in front of my house, but I no longer worry. I know he is only tempting me to get back to him, but I will not” (Eva).

“I feel so relieved, and free from uncertainty. I feel like I have no hardship to bear now” (Uta).

The women have now become independent, emotionally as well as financially. They are aware that they face big challenges ahead, but they feel optimistic about their future, even with respect to raising the children.

”I’ll do whatever to continue earning a living. I want to settle my life, settle in a job and become a strong woman who has bargaining power in front of a man. I won’t be entrapped again, I have to be strong... In fact, it is hard to be away from my son, but still, it is good that I get a chance to see him on the weekend” (Eva).

”I feel secure now, and am able to focus on my work. I also feel free to move, to decide, to earn for my living and for my daughter. I have skills for making a living, and I am glad that I can have my own money and proud that I can use it

² *Kedaulatan Rakyat* is a well known daily newspaper in the local Province of Yogyakarta

anytime my daughter needs some money to buy her goods” (Susan)

”My focus is on how to earn for my son’s future now. I want him to be educated, and grow up well. And that is my highest priority now. Even without a spouse beside me to discuss, but at least I feel like I have a certain future, more than before” (Uta).

After releasing themselves from an abusive relationship, what are their futures plans regarding new relationships? It seems that all of these women have a positive attitude towards the possibility of a future relationship:

“At the moment, I want to be alone. I must build my internal strength, still. I have a plan to be open for somebody, someday. I know that not all men are as bad as him (her ex husband)” (Eva).

”Having a new boyfriend is easy...but having the right man is not that easy, I think. If I only want them for fun, these kinds of guys are everywhere ... a lot...But I am thinking that in the future I must be more selective and find a guy with a good heart, with a good quality inside his heart. I realize that not all men are that bad” (Susan).

”I know that not all men cheat, but I will think many times before I decide to be in a new relationship. I might need more time to get to know somebody now, as I may worry that he could potentially be bad to me” (Uta).

Hence, these women find it possible to have a new relationship in the future, but realize that they must be more careful and wary in building a new relationship.

The overall stories revealed from this study tell us about the transformation of three women survivors of violence, from victims, meaning woman living under authorities, into survivors, meaning woman with self-autonomy. The

transformation processes continued through years of internal struggle that included the women’s thoughts, feeling and actions.

Discussion

This study aimed to get a deep understanding of women’s experiences of domestic violence and their decision to leave their abusive husbands. To meet this aim, in-depth interviews with three consenting women survivors of violence were conducted. The interviews covered the history of marriage, marriage time, decision to leave, and time after divorce. After the analysis was performed, nine themes emerged. With respect to the decision to leave the abusive husbands, two major factors were found and this included a personal dimension and a situational dimension (Hendy et al., 2003). The overall results demonstrate a process of transformation for these women, from someone seeking a patron to rely on to someone with self reliance.

The first theme that emerged “*Attaching the authorities: being a woman socially*” is reflecting the history of how the relationships started. The stories showed how two of these women considered themselves as a person who needed a patron figure that they could rely on as their spouse for their future life. Here, the women saw themselves as someone needing a patron to secure, protect, and shelter them in the intimate relationship. However, their patrons later became authorities who controlled their lives, and they failed to get safety from the men. According to the ‘*Attachment Theory*’ that was developed

by Bowlby about children in the early 1970s - and then further developed by Bartholomew to focus on the attachment pattern among adults - this pattern of attachment is referred to as the 'preoccupied type' of attachment (in Henderson et al., 1997). Preoccupied type of attachment is one of four types of attachment in adult relationships, and it is characterized by a negative self view and a positive view of others. In the current study, the women initially saw their male partners as more capable to provide security for their lives than they could do themselves. This pattern reflects the sex role stereotypes as perceived by women in their cultural context, ie that men are active and competent while women are passive and incompetent (Belenky et al., 1986). Moreover, Belenky and colleagues mention that this view undoubtedly helps the women make sense of their own dependence and admiration to authorities.

From their stories, we could see that the abusive behavior of their men did not happen suddenly or only after some years of marriage. Indeed, it was already established since their dating time. The continuation of attachment to the abusive partner is indicating that the attachment was unrelated to the quality of the relationship, and more related to the condition of threat that activate such an attachment system (Henderson et al., 1997). This explanatory model, known as '*The Battered Women Syndrome theory*' and proposed by Lenore Walker in the early 70s (in Campbell, 1989), emphasize the mix of low self-esteem and traditional attitudes about women that underline the reasons of these women to stay in the abusive relationship. Furthermore, the relationships continued with an intermittency

of abuse and this is usually known as 'the cycle of abuse'. This intermittency of abuse produce a persistent pattern of behavior that strengthens the emotional bond between the abused and the abuser, so that the attachment between the two is like an elastic band stretched over time (Henderson et al., 1997). The cycle of abuse faced by these women created a behavior that fits with another explanatory model, called '*learned helplessness*'. This model states that the batterers condition the women into believing that they are powerless and unable to escape, by subjecting them to a continued pattern of uncontrollable violence and abuse (Campbell, 1989; Toombs, 1996). In the Indonesian case, this approach helps us to understand the life of these three women during the phase of living in an abusive marriage.

The second theme "*Dwelling under the authorities: losing oneself*" reflected how the women suffered from and coped with physical, emotional and sexual abuse from their husbands. In this stage of their lives, the women saw blind obedience to their authorities as being of utmost importance for staying out of trouble and insuring their own survival (Belenky et al., 1986). Moreover, Belenky et al. (1986) mention that this is the phase of "silence", i.e. an extreme denial of self and a dependence on external authority for direction. At some point in the relationships, the way these women coped with their abusive husbands corresponds to such 'silence', and this was characterized by attempts to be patient, loving him unconditionally, ignoring his oddities, and keeping all problems to themselves. This type of coping with the

abusive husbands is similar to the findings of another Indonesian study on domestic violence; in which 49% out of 80 women who had suffered from physical abuse explained that they never talked to anybody about their problems (Hakimi et al., 2001). Javanese culture states that once a woman gets married, she belongs to her husband and the parents have no more power over her. Women must be able to maintain the unity and harmony of their marriage. As mentioned earlier, the importance of woman's obedience to her husband is reflected in the expression that women should follow her husband faithfully whether he goes to heaven or to hell (Cholil et al., 1999). Nevertheless, this type of coping is actually far from silence in the meaning of 'passive' or 'helpless', but rather implies an active response to violence in diverse ways (Cavanagh, 2003). Moreover, Cavanagh (2003) points out that battered women's struggle to establish their own contrary understandings of violence is often putting them at significant risk.

The theme "*The price of losing oneself*" represents the consequences of living in the abusive marriages. From the three women's stories, the abusive relationships had put these women at high risks of getting physical as well as mental health problems. This finding is consistent with the international recognition as well as results from multiple studies around the world on the impact of domestic violence on women's health. In some developed countries, the health consequences of domestic violence are clearly identified as the number one health problem faced by women (Dutton et al., 1997).

In this study, the women suffered from physical injuries, ill health, psychological problems such as insomnia, concentration problems and loss of appetite; and permanent disability such as loss of hearing in Susan's case. Further, the type of abuse suffered by these women also showed that physical, sexual and emotional violence are intertwined. From the study of domestic violence in Indonesia, it was identified that 4% out of 765 women suffered from all of these three types of abuse, while 9% suffered from both emotional and sexual abuse (Hakimi et al., 2001). A similar study in Nicaragua found that 20% out of 360 women had experienced those three types of abuse (Ellsberg, 2000).

The theme "*Listening to oneself: A voice from inside*" reflects how the women started to think that their children were living in an unsafe relationship as the abuse was getting worse. All children of these women witnessed their mothers being abused by their fathers. These facts seemed to become the major concern of the women in this study and made them think about separation. Other studies on decisions to leave an abusive partner in the US confirm that concern for the safety of children often becomes the turning point in a woman's decision to leave (Hendy et al., 2003). This concern is understandable as several studies have revealed that children who witness wife abuse are at higher risk of problems such as poor social & emotional adjustment, lower self-esteem, depression and aggression (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 2001). More over, the study in Nicaragua showed that children who witnessed the abuse were seven times more likely to have been abused (physically, emotionally or

sexually) themselves than were children of non-abused women (Ellsberg, 2000).

Beside the concern about the psychological development of their children, these women realized that their husbands would never change, in the ways that they had promised. Multiple times their men apologized and enticed them to stay, but this only prolonged the suffering of the women. This realization was one of the main considerations expressed by the women in this study. A study by Strube & Barbour (1984) in the US revealed that the women's belief that their partner would change significantly contributed to the decision to stay with the abusive partner. In this study, we could see that these women finally became distrusted their husbands' intention to change. Through the *'affectionate pitfall'* (one of the themes of this study), which consists of apologies, promises to change and begging; these women were for a while enticed by their husbands to stay in the abusive relationship. A wide scale study on women responses to domestic violence in Latin America, *La Ruta Critica*, revealed that the recognition that the abuser was not going to change had motivated those women to act (WHO, 2002).

The theme *"The Crossroad"* illustrates the situation when these women arrived to an understanding that they had a choice: they could stay with or leave their abusive husbands with all of the consequences. We could see from their stories that after the years of insecurity and uncertainty, all of these women showed significant courage in making the big decision to leave their abusive husbands for their future life, whatever

the price. Yet, the decision to leave did not fall in place in one day; rather the women went through a prolonged and difficult time. Their lives were up and down following the cycle of violence that had put them into continuous insecurity. Besides the concern for their children's safety, these women also told us that their insecurity feeling was the next encouraging factor that led them to think about separation. This finding is consistent with that of a similar study that revealed 'the fear of harm' as the encouraging factor for women to leave their abusive partner (Hendy et al., 2003). According to the *'Investment Theory'* proposed by Choice & Lamke (1997), situational factors associated with an evaluation of costs and benefits of a violent relationship influence the final decision to leave. In this study, the findings that the women's concern about their children and their own safety lead them to leave the abusive husband are consistent with this theory.

The theme *"Bridges over troubled water"* encompasses the network system or bridges that helped these women to start thinking about their life. From the stories of two of the women, we could see that they received social support from their surroundings when they disclosed their abusive marriage experiences to their kin. In the cases of Susan and Uta, they disclosed their problem to their kin networks first, before they followed up their disclosure to a professional or organizational based support. This preference of disclosure by approaching the kinship network is a typical pattern among Asian women living in the US (Yoshioka, et al., 2003). Only Eva exhibited a direct help seeking pattern as she approached the organizational based support because her parents

lived in a remote area. Their disclosures helped them receive instrumental and emotional support that was critical to them in obtaining a secure life. The organizational based or professional support showed a major role in assisting the women to proceed with legal actions, which usually takes time and is tiring. Many studies have found important contributions by this social support to the process of terminating an abusive relationship (Yoshioka et al., 2003; Fraser et al., 2002; Strube & Barbour, 1983; Hendy et al., 2003).

The theme “*The new self, the new hope*” reflects the feelings and future projections of these women. “Freedom” and “relief” were commonly expressed to describe these women’s feelings after being released from the abusive relationships. At that moment, they stated that they would focus their remaining lives on themselves and their children, except for Eva, because she did not live with her son. These women’s expressions on “freedom to manage their lives and their kid” are reflecting what was stated by Belinky et al (1986) as ‘maternal authority’. These women were no longer under their men’s authority but instead on their own, and they were confident that they were able to manage their lives by themselves.

From the voices of these women, we learn about the struggle when women living under abusive relationships move into being able making the decision to leave that relationship. These stories tell us about the transition process, a process of changing from a woman who seeks a ‘safeguard’ to a confident woman who trusts her own inner voice. Through a long struggle, these women moved away from their silence that

was characterized by hearing and obeying the authorities. They learned to speak and listen to their own voice and, next, they broke the vicious cycle. Finally, they arrived at a turning point of their lives which led them to leave their abusive husbands. In the words of Riesmann (1994), this is a process of a woman who transforms her consciousness; to name the abuse, to interpret it as oppressive, to re-experience the anger, and to make the transition from *victim* to *survivor*.

Methodological considerations

To get these deep portrayals the phenomenological approach was employed, as phenomenology is a highly appropriate approach to researching human experience (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000; van Manen 2002). With the focus of the interviews on the experienced meanings of the subjects’ life world, phenomenology appears relevant for clarifying the mode of understanding in a qualitative research (Kvale, 1996).

In the initial process of analysis, it would be fair to say that the process of interpretation in phenomenological work was only a little understood, and this may reflect that the practical aspects of the phenomenological approach are still heavily debated among phenomenological researchers. Even though the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl himself, considered that phenomenology is all the three: a philosophy, an approach, and a method (Ray, 1994), still, the lack of articulated methods for conducting phenomenological research and understanding the philosophical underpinning

of such research are the two greatest challenges faced by the researchers who wish to follow the phenomenological path (Caelli, 2001).

The involvement of an external colleague for the triangulation during the analysis process was helpful in the effort of suspending prejudgments and bracketing assumptions along the path of grasping the meanings to accomplish the themes. In this study, acting as the external colleague was a Swedish researcher with nutritional and epidemiological background. Hence the pre-understanding from the author could be balanced through the joint discussions during the analyses steps. The existence of an external colleague is suitable when doing a phenomenological study, since phenomenology has a long history of lacking in practicalities. The cooperation of researchers to act as external colleague will enable them to enter each other's perspective and pointing out aspects that have been overlooked (Cohen & Omery, 1994). Yet, the different backgrounds with respect to nationalities and languages of the two persons in this study may have been a barrier in formulating the themes. Since the transcripts had to be translated into English, some local dialect, terminology or idioms might not have been able to be translated accurately, and there could have been difficulties in grasping the meaning of the narratives. Only one third of the whole transcript of one informant was translated and analyzed jointly.

In addition to triangulation for attaining methodological rigor, member checking also was performed. Using the phenomenological approach in research means that the researcher is

borrowing other people's experiences on a certain phenomenon; to become more experienced themselves (van Manen, 2002). Because the objective of the phenomenological study is to achieve a 'radical criticism', the participants' critique of their own data is essential to the study (Caelli, 2001; Barkway, 2001). Thus, it is necessary to return the transcripts for clarification and validation to the participants (Caelli, 2001). This attitude thus reflects what Lincoln & Guba (1985) called the effort of achieving credibility through member checking.

The next consideration is that battered women's reactions to violence and abuse may vary, with respect to different emotional reactions, changes over time in beliefs and attitudes about self, others, and the world, and different symptoms of psychological dysfunction (Dutton, 1996). Nevertheless, from this study we can learn about factors that facilitated for these women to terminate their abusive relationships, as well as the dynamics of the transitional process. We can also learn about the future aspirations of these women after being released from an abusive relationship. Their experiences reflect the complexity of domestic violence, and may be used to improve the existing practices in supporting women survivors of domestic violence.

Even though these findings cannot be generalized to all abused women in Indonesia, the experiences of the three women represent women survivors of domestic violence who decide to terminate an abusive marriage. In this sense, their shared experiences help us comprehend the dynamics

of internal (thoughts & feelings) and external (support systems) factors that lead to the decision to leave an abusive relationship among the group of women survivors of domestic violence who eventually leave the abusive marriage.

Conclusions

This study revealed a small picture of women survivors of domestic violence in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Three women who agreed to be interviewed revealed their past experiences of domestic violence and the decision to leave their abusive husbands. Several factors were identified as supporting the women to leave the abusive relationship, such as social support, concern for children's safety and the realization that the husbands would never change. The dynamics of women living and struggling in abusive relationships were also revealed, and

the stories provided a comprehensive picture of the feelings, thoughts, doubts and wishes of these women survivors. The phenomenological approach employed in this study enabled the women to express and reflect on their own voices.

With regard to the international appeal on domestic violence, an adequate picture of the domestic violence faced by Indonesian women is still lacking. In fact, studies on domestic violence in Indonesia are far from complete. More studies, both large scale and small in-depth, are highly needed to reveal the reality of domestic violence among Indonesian women. The rich cultural diversity in Indonesia might conceal different dynamics on how women cope with and struggle under domestic violence. The more aspects that are revealed, the more knowledge and understanding will be gained to support the implementation of the National Policy on the elimination of violence against women in Indonesia.

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