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http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/realworldresearch/world_events/empowering-survivors-of-human-trafficking.htm

My academic research focuses on products and services aimed at marginalized populations, including disadvantaged communities in developing nations, survivors/victims of human trafficking, labor trafficking, etc. And, victims of domestic violence certainly fall in that category.

Around 1 to 3 million incidents of domestic violence are reported in the U.S. each year, while the annual estimates of people experiencing domestic violence in the U.S. are well over 10 million. According to a study published in *American Family Physician*, "Domestic violence may be the most common source of serious injury to women. Recent research indicates that it results in more injuries requiring medical treatment in women than rape, auto accidents, and muggings combined."

The issue of domestic violence is an issue of public justice. To make the matter worse, domestic violence and related physical/mental trauma have different meanings across cultures; healing takes place within one's own cultural beliefs. Survivors of domestic violence come from a wide range of backgrounds. And, these domestic violence incidents have reported increased during coronavirus lockdowns.

Social researchers often attribute domestic violence to toxic masculinity, a catchall phrase for culturally-endorsed stereotypically male traits, such as aggression, entitlement, stoicism, violence, sexism, etc. And while, toxic masculinity can be usually reserved to imply that men, in general, are the insensitive gender, in reality, it can denote these traits exhibited across genders.

In my understanding of the research, addressing the issue of toxic masculinity is only half the battle. Toxic masculinity is part of the larger issue—of toxicity across gender designations to include both toxic masculinity and toxic femininity. Arguably, toxic femininity encourages silent acceptance of violence and domination to survive. Numerous anecdotal pieces of evidence exist of extended/joint family households

(with parents-in-law, and even, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, etc.) that had documented cases of domestic violence. Many times, such instances of domestic violence get swept under the rug and never to be discussed again by family elders to avoid social stigma. Owing largely to deeply rooted cultural and social expectations, such instances can be mistakenly viewed as a culturally-acceptable behavior not just by sons but also daughters.

To root out domestic violence, we may have to adopt a multi-pronged approach: to Educate, Prevent, Advocate, and Empower. Among other strategies, we need to educate and empower our children, sons, and daughters alike, to be aware and understand the symptoms of domestic violence. They should also be instilled with a sense of urgency to communicate and mobilize support against such instances. In regards to advocacy, U.S. law requires sex education lessons to be given to students, once in middle school, and again in high school. It may be worthwhile to consider whether or not introducing the topic of domestic violence to students will raise their awareness and understanding.

So how can one engage to further the dialogue on the topic of domestic violence and be a part of the solution? While we all anxiously await to get back to the “normal” work routines once coronavirus-related shelter-in-place orders are relaxed, we can view these times as an opportunity for personal growth and reflection. Among a variety of choices to stream online entertainment, we can also explore online courses to attain the requisite tools and techniques for recognition, intervention, and abatement of domestic violence. Several MOOC courses, some even free of charge, are available online. One such course is titled, “Positive Psychiatry and Mental Health”, which is offered by The University of Sydney through the Coursera website.

It’s time to talk openly and address domestic violence collaboratively. The more we can inform and educate people about this bane to society, the closer we can come to eliminating and/or preventing it. And by advocating for the victims of domestic violence, we are empowering them to end the cycle of abuse.