DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG THE JAPANESE:
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VICTIMIZATION

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Japanese women suffer domestic violence by their significant male other but by cultural tradition lack the necessary support which relegates in myth. Members of the Japanese community both at home and abroad are no exception. Domestic violence in Japan is in fact committed for purposes of control by one partner of the other. Subsequently domestic violence is a problem which appears non-existent in the Japanese community at the expense of its victims. Real life contradictions, pertaining to domestic violence events among the Japanese are sustained not only by tradition but limited discourse as well. Therefore, accounts of domestic violence among the Japanese necessitate investigation of the pathology where it occurs regardless of culture, shame or demographic category.

Key words: domestic violence, victimization, Japan

It was in 1980 that a 20-year-old Japanese student in Kanagawa Prefecture just south of Tokyo beat his parents to death with a metal baseball bat. Sixteen years later in Japan a metal baseball bat was again used to commit murder in an equally disturbing domestic violence case. The murderer a graduate of the prestigious University of Tokyo beat his teenage son to death. According to investigation, the son had regarded his father as weak. As such he made the father kneel while he beat him with a plank of wood. The son also beat his mother kicking her in the face and breaking her teeth causing the father to eventually retaliate. The aforementioned cases of domestic violence caught the attention of the Japanese public vis-à-vis “kateinai boryoku” which has recently been replaced with the “katakana” version of its English equivalent of domestic violence (Pulvers, 2012). In the aftermath, despite cultural traditions, Japan has acknowledged its problem with domestic violence.

No doubt Japan is among the most technologically advanced and civilized societies in the modern world. As a first world nation, citizens of Japan enjoy high employment, low rates of crime and an ideal quality of life. However, despite its successes, Japan remains behind much of the rest of the world as pertains to a number of issues. Most dramatic among such issues is the occurrence of domestic violence which Japanese culture discourages acknowledgement of (Nagae & Dancy, 2010). However, while domestic violence in Japan appears to have risen in recent years, its statistics remain much lower compared to similar technologically advanced societies. It was not until 2001 that Japan, in a beginning effort to acknowledge domestic violence, passed a comprehensive

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domestic violence law i.e., the Act on the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims (Research Committee on Society of Cooperative Way of Life, 2012). In 2007, this law was amended. However, it remains the most significant of laws in Japan relative to domestic violence. As a matter of fact and concern for psychologists, domestic violence in Japan must be removed from the cultural context of shame and acknowledged in public discourse.

While most victims of domestic violence in Japan are women, those prone to acts of domestic violence cannot be universally identified as male (Stuart et al., 2006). The community appearance, status and demeanor of perpetrators regardless of sex make them appear personable and loving to their partner and family members. Their acts of domestic violence may occur in private concealed from public display. They may act out physical violence against their partner by injuries easily hidden such as scars not normally visible due to clothing or injuries which do not require medical attention. What qualifies such assaults as domestic violence is that they do not occur by accident. Perpetrators do not act solely out of stress, excessive drinking or drug abuse. Domestic violence in Japan is in fact committed for purposes of control by one partner of the other. The ensuing level of violence may escalate until the desired control outcome is reached. Failure to reach such an outcome may conclude in various manifestations of violence (Liem & Roberts, 2009). Among the Japanese such criminal acts are enabled by cultural traditions which discourage acts that might lead to shame (Yoshihama, 2002b).

According to Japanese cultural tradition, bearing burdens and not showing any verbal or nonverbal expression is the preferred response to domestic violence. When housewife, girlfriend, and mother are defined by societal roles which suggest it is better to endure, solutions to domestic violence become unnecessarily complicated. If a Japanese wife is culturally deterred from seeking help when being battered, confronting her abuser is not an option. What’s more Japanese communication is “highly contexted.” That is statements which appear vague to foreigners are actually highly rich with specific meaning. It is the task of the listener to decipher the sender’s message (Gudykunst, 2001). For example, if a husband returning home from work suggests the word “bath” to his wife, it is expected that she will serve dinner after he takes a bath. A foreigner would become totally confused by such subtlety. Japanese American wives experience conflict having been reared in such a way in a country where it is not the norm (Yoshihama, 2000).

As per culture, “self-blame” is the common response to domestic violence in Japan (Yoshihama, 2000). The attitude amongst Japanese women toward domestic violence is that they must “bear the burden” which stems from their being taught to take responsibility. They receive such training as girls during childhood watching their mothers. The Japanese woman who lacks the ability to endure pain is perceived as inferior (Yamawaki, Ostenson & Brown, 2009). Therefore Japanese wives who value personal endurance tend to blame their daughters for the domestic violence they might encounter. Unwilling to create what they interpret as a larger problem, Japanese women then become less likely to seek help in cases of domestic violence. Additionally for cultural reasons, Japanese wives tend to view seeking help for domestic violence as provocative. This then completes a cycle which suggests that it is the reason for their
husband’s brutality.

The intent of this paper is to illustrate via empirical evidence events of domestic violence as pertains to the Japanese community. While the statistical accounts of Japanese women subjected to domestic violence events may in fact fail to equal those of traditionally Western populations, it is here suggested that domestic violence is a social pathology immune to limitations by demographic category. Said pathology is thus not dictated by race, i.e., Japanese but permeates all classes and all ethnic groups as a human social pathology. This pathology hidden in view of the “model minority” has not been accurately addressed as pertains to the Japanese community evident in the psychology research literature. Said shortcoming contributes to the existence of domestic violence at the expense of victims regardless of their demographic category. As pertains to the Japanese community domestic violence is then commensurate with its cultural and social traditions (Kimenyi & Mbaku, 1995). By presenting an empirical exposé of domestic violence among the Japanese population at-large, this paper will inform psychologists in hopes of contributing to fact and scientific objectivity.

**ASIAN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Asian and the Pacific Islander populations in US statistics are often collapsed in data sets reported by the government. Despite the fact, empirical evidence suggests that 12.8% of Asian and Pacific Islander women report having been physically assaulted by their partners on at least one occasion during their lifetime; 3.8% claim to have been raped. This report by the Asian and Pacific Islander population of assault was lower than for whites (21.3%); blacks (26.3%); Latinos (21.2%); mixed race (27.0%); and Native-Americans/Alaskan Natives (30.7%). Investigators suggest that the lower rates may be a product of underreporting relative to culture and the traditionally closed Asian societies (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

In a study conducted by McDonnell and Abdulla (2001) 16% of Asian women reported that they experienced “pressure to have sex without their consent by an intimate partner.” Another 12% reported that partners had hurt or tried to hurt them by hitting, kicking, slapping, shoving, object throwing, or threatening their lives with a weapon. Furthermore, according to the same population, 27% were subjected to emotional abuse by their partner.

In another study using a sample of 178 Asian women, McDonnell and Abdulla (2001) sent out an anonymous survey. What they obtained from respondents were that 81.1% reported being subjected to violence pertaining to domination, control, psychological, physical, and/or sex in the past year. Of the same population, 67% were “occasionally” subjected to domination or controlling psychological abuse; and 48% were subjected “frequently” in the past year. Additionally, 32% were subjected to physical/sexual abuse “occasionally” within the past year. Considering the 23 women subjected to intimate partner violence, better than half (64%) reported that they knew of an Asian counterpart that had been subjected to intimate partner violence. A lesser number reported
that their mothers (9%) and sisters (11%) were subjected to intimate partner violence while 28.5% reported knowledge of an Asian woman who was abused by her in-laws.

A study on Cambodians was conducted by the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence in Boston, Massachusetts. It consisted of a survey administered to Cambodians frequenting ethnic fairs. Findings concluded that 44-47% of respondents interviewed indicated that they knew of at least one Cambodian woman who had been subjected to domestic violence consisting of either physical abuse and/or injury. Using the same data, 37% had knowledge of a man who had been beaten by his partner (Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Baig-Amin, 2003).

Yick (2000) conducted a study of domestic violence among the Chinese. The methodology included a random telephone survey of 262 Chinese men and women living in Los Angeles, California, US. Results indicated that 18.1% of respondents indicated that they had experienced “minor physical violence” by a spouse or intimate partner within their lifetime. Another 8% experienced “severe physical violence” during their lifetime. The categories of “Minor-severe” were assessed using the researcher’s classification criteria. Those Chinese who were more acculturated were twice as likely to have been victims of severe physical violence. According to the author, “It is possible that traditional cultural values serve as a protective buffer against stressors engendered by immigration.” Thus the higher rates of domestic violence events among more assimilated Chinese may have in fact been due to their greater likelihood to report domestic violence (Yick, 2000).

Filipinos in the US are a significant Asian population. Many are also among the recently arrived immigrant groups in addition to those who have migrated to Western societies historically. Hogeland and Rosen (1990) conducted a survey for the Immigrant Women’s Task Force of the Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services. Subsequently they report that 20% of 54 undocumented Filipina women living in the San Francisco Bay Area experienced domestic violence consisting of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Said abuse may have taken place in the Philippines or the US.

Last among reports of domestic violence as pertains to Asian populations are Koreans. Kim and Sung (2000) conducted a study using 256 Korean men from randomly selected Korean households in Chicago, Illinois and in Queens, New York. Queens, New York is location of the largest Korean population on the US’s east coast during 1993. Results of the data suggests that 18% of the males surveyed admitted to at least one of the following acts of domestic violence within the past year: throwing something, pushing, grabbing, shoving, or slapping their wives. Another 6.3% of those surveyed took part in what investigators classified as “severe violence.” Severe violence consisted of kicking, biting, hitting with a fist, threatening with a gun or knife, shooting, or stabbing their wives. In another Korean study conducted by Shimtuh (2000) on domestic violence a population of 214 Korean women and 121 Korean men in the San Francisco Bay Area were consulted. Results indicated that 42% of those surveyed knew of a Korean woman who had experienced domestic violence by their husband or boyfriend. Another 50% of those surveyed knew of a victim subjected to regular emotional abuse.
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As pertains to domestic violence among the Japanese, Yoshihama (1999) conducted face-to-face interviews. These interviews consisted of a random sample of 211 Japanese immigrant women and Japanese American women in Los Angeles County conducted in 1995. Results indicated that 61% of women interviewed acknowledged being subjected to physical, emotional, or sexual partner violence. Their reports included culturally demeaning practices such as overturning a dining table, or having a liquid thrown on them. Some 52% admitted to some form of violence within their lifetime. Considering the probability that some women not having reported being victims at the time of the interview, but who may expect to be victimized by the age of 49, 57% responded in the positive.

Yoshihama, Horrocks, and Kamano (2007) estimated the rates of domestic violence injuries for a sample of 1,371 women between the ages of 18 and 49 years in Yokohama, Japan. As per results by 30 years of age, 14.3% of the women who had ever had a partner had been subjected to domestic violence by their partner, and 3.3% suffered injuries pertaining to that violence. After turning 49 years old, these percentages were 19% and 4%. Relative to the need for more prevention efforts, investigators suggested the need for an expanded legal definition of domestic violence in Japan. That need is attributed to the current definition which does not account for premarital violence.

According to Weingourt, Maruyama, Sawada, and Yoshino (2001) there are improved changes in the social and legal understanding of domestic violence in Japan. Despite the fact, the extent of the problem has not been adequately investigated and/or described in the Japanese nursing literature. This descriptive investigation included a random sample of 177 Japanese women. They were assessed for the relationship between domestic violence and their mental health. Results indicate that 67% reported having experiences of physical, psychological and/or sexual abuse. 47% achieved statistically significant General Health Questionnaire scores which established their clinical depression or anxiety. Eisikovits and Enosh (1997) proposed to examine the role of moral feelings of guilt and shame in the emergence and aftermath of domestic violence. They wanted to determine the manner in which such emotions impact the self and behaviors of those involved. This was a phenomenological study which utilized content analysis of in-depth interviews using twenty male batterers and their female partners. Results suggest that the extent of authenticity and assumption of responsibility pertaining to moral feelings will determine if domestic violence will follow. The research makes it possible to follow five alternative paths of the relationship between moral feelings and domestic violence. This makes the creation of theories possible and future research about the role of moral feelings pertaining to domestic violence.

Yamawaki (2007) investigated the differences in Japanese and American college students’ ability to advise a hypothetical rape victim who is by instruction their sister. They were to consider seeking help from police, family members, or mental health professionals. The Japanese students tended to encourage their victim sister to seek help from her family members. American students tended to encourage their victim sister to
seek help from the police and mental health counselors. There were cross-cultural differences indicated by the following: (a) feelings of shame moderated advice to seek help from police; (b) minimization of rape mediated the likelihood to advise the involvement of police and mental health counselors; (c) attitudes toward mental health counselors mediated advice to seek help from them; and (d) the type of rape (stranger vs. date rape) which impacted the decision to seek help from the police.

Yamawaki and Tschanz (2005) conducted an investigation to determine the differences in perceptions of rape between Japanese and American college students. According to their results, the Japanese students minimized the seriousness of rapes. They blamed the victims, and excused the rapists more often than did American students. It was determined that cross-cultural differences in the traditional gender role (GRT) were found to mediate these differences. The GRT-mediated tendencies for increases relative to the intimacy between the victim and the perpetrator to be associated with one another increases rape minimization and tendency to blame the victim. Such tendencies were determined to be higher among the Japanese students compared to the Americans. Sex differences in the perception of rape were also indicated by Japanese students.

For the most part, crime relative to immigrants in Japan is much less of a problem compared to the U.S. However, when crimes do occur more often than not, it may involve personal disputes, theft, or vandalism. Of particular note are crimes which involve personal disputes. Violent domestic crimes including sexual assaults occur and are treated differently. Women may be randomly targeted because of their nationality or their race. When the official issue is domestic violence, Japanese police appear less sensitive, particularly concerning sexual assault. Subsequently, there exist few battered women's shelters for women and other victims in Japan. Those that do operate are more likely located in major urban areas that are for the most part unavailable in rural areas.

Female victims of domestic violence sexual assaults are subjected to examination by male police officers in the absence of female police officers. They may be questioned about their personal sexual history and previous relationships as a matter of official policy. The quality of Japanese-English speakers available in Japan varies extensively, and for immigrant victims of domestic violence, this is often a problem. These factors may be exponentially complicated by immigrant culture and tradition (Yoshihama, 2002a). Thus it would appear that domestic violence victims in the U.S. are more visible and have greater access to services than those in Japan. In comparison, the other Asian populations, domestic violence is similar. In comparison to the West, Japan has a lower rate of reported domestic violence but victims in Japan get less attention and have access to fewer services. Immigrants in Japan are subject to the same domestic violence policies as are citizens.

**Empirical Evidence**

A cursory review of the literature pertaining to domestic violence among the Japanese suggests it is a serious problem. When abused by their husbands and/or
significant male, other Japanese women may even experience such abuse as justified. Their assaults may extend not only from their partners but employers and mother-in-laws. What’s more Japanese cultural tradition provides little opportunity for victims to escape their circumstances given the family shame associated with accusations. Subsequently, domestic violence is a problem which appears non-existent in the Japanese community at the expense of its victims.

The aforementioned research contradictions, pertaining to domestic violence among the Japanese are sustained not only by tradition but the previously mentioned limited discourse as well. Said limitation is also empirically evident in the psychology databases where it has disserved the profession (Monteiro, 2000). This otherwise obvious assumption is not the least subject to challenge as indicated by one of psychology’s most esteemed resources: the Proquest database. A brief overview of limited domestic violence discourse among the Japanese can be gleaned from this database pertaining to papers written from 1894 to 2010. To assess the issue of domestic violence the author searched the following terms: Japanese batterer; Japanese perpetrator; Japanese victim; Japanese criminal; and violent Japanese. The results are presented in table format (1, 2).

According to Table 1 Japanese: Japanese batterer 1; Japanese perpetrator 2,560; Japanese victim 15,571; Japanese criminal 10,341; and Violent Japanese 10,483.
According to Table 2 Western: papers pertaining to White batterer were 119; Black batterer 2,766; White perpetrator 61,090; Black perpetrator 52,190; White victim 670,495; Black victim 563,534; White criminal 526,992; Black criminal 423,541; violent Whites 399,883; violent Blacks 356,270.

In comparing Table 1 to Table 2 Japanese batterers were .84% of Whites and .04% of Blacks; Japanese perpetrators were 4.2% of Whites and 5.0% of Blacks; Japanese victims were 2.3% of Whites and 2.8% of Blacks; Japanese criminals were 2.0% of Whites and 2.4% of Blacks; violent Japanese were 2.6% of Whites and 2.9% of Blacks.

Thus it would appear that in almost every category papers pertaining to the Japanese are fewer compared to Western populations. This reflects the extent of the problem by comparison. However it should be noted that according to these data, domestic violence is a problem in the Japanese community reflected in the peer-reviewed literature. While culture has discouraged attention to domestic violence in Japan, there exists evidence that it is increasingly acknowledged not only in the literature but by policy and services as well.

Suggested Solutions for Japanese Domestic Violence Victims

Suggested solutions to reducing domestic violence in the Japanese community, aimed at eliminating all victims including males as well as females, must necessarily begin with acknowledgement of the characteristic warning signs and symptoms. No partner involved in an intimate relationship regardless of their gender, nationality or other, demographic status should submit themselves to living in fear of their significant other whether legally joined or not (Ohnishi et al., 2011). When the warning signs or violence becomes apparent, victims should not hesitate to terminate the relationship or seek immediate help. According to domesticviolence.org (2010) the following are steps psychologists can advise victims to take modified for Japanese (Western*) in an effort to escape the risks of domestic violence:

1. Having important phone numbers nearby for you and your children. Numbers to have are the police, hotlines, friends and the local shelter.*
2. Friends or neighbors you could tell about the abuse. Ask them to call the police if they hear angry or violent noises. If you have children, teach them how to dial the local police number. Make up a code word that you can use when you need help.*
3. How to get out of your home safely. Practice ways to get out.
4. Safer places in your home where there are exits and no weapons. If you feel abuse is going to happen try to get your abuser to one of these safer places.*
5. Any weapons in the house. Think about ways that you could get them out of the house.*
6. Even if you do not plan to leave, think of where you could go. Think of how you might leave. Try doing things that get you out of the house - taking out the trash, walking the pet or going to the store. Put together a bag of things you use everyday. Hide it where it is easy for you to get to.
7. Going over your safety plan often (domesticviolence.org, 2010).
CONCLUSION

By definition, culture includes lifestyles, customs, art, religion, language, values and behavior associated with a particular group at a particular point in time (Deal & Kennedy, 1983). Culture enables life by empowering the weak to be collectively strong and thus integrating large numbers of people on the basis of a shared commonality. Culture does not require legal sanction in order to be effective, but more often than not in advanced technological societies, culture influences the structures of psychology and perceptions of reality.

In actuality culture is a “catch-all” term which appears to exclude very little quality of life matter (van Wormer, Besthorn & Keefe, 2007). However for comprehending domestic violence as social pathology, psychologists and other interested parties must consider the associations of culture with patriarchal tradition. Similar to culture tradition in general includes a set of interrelated phenomena through which reality is created, communicated and by psychologists conveyed. The results of their practice investigations include the application of statistical methods, demographics of the personnel conducting such investigations, their perspectives, and standards and ways of relating in a cultural context. When such phenomena operate in conjunction, they come to represent a significant aspect of what is assumed to be the most prudent resolution which under the current circumstances enables the “model minority” stereotype and omission of Japanese communities from domestic violence discourse (Monroe & Tiller, 2001).

Relative to domestic violence is the Japanese cultural value for “niceness.” According to Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times: “The Japanese people are, by and large, the nicest and most responsible people in the world. Not the friendliest, not the happiest, certainly not the funniest, but the nicest” (Kristof, 1998). As a result of this tendency, taxi drivers will give discounts to customers if they go out of their way; Japanese citizens will make every effort to say nice things about others; saying “no” is culturally discouraged by the Japanese which confuses Westerners because the Japanese may say “yes” when they mean “no” (Kristof, 1998).

The aforementioned accounts of domestic violence among the Japanese necessitate investigation of the pathology where it occurs regardless of shame or demographic category. Solutions to acknowledging the extent of domestic violence must include redefining cultural traditions and its appropriate place in the conduct of psychology services. In the face of two powerful barriers—“model minority” stereotype bias and the cultural status quo—this characterizes the reduced viability of the attempt. Cultural diversity in psychology worldwide stresses the process of self-acknowledgment and the proclamation of existence as the first critical step in personal and later social acceptance of what is different (Hall, 2003). For Japanese victims of domestic violence, this simple proclamation would be a revolutionary act in its repudiation of a culturally imposed limitation upon access to information. Japanese victims of domestic violence are unique in that their defining difference from other Western victim populations unless in Japan can be an experience with which most members of the psychology academy lack affinity. Since Japanese victims abroad can be identified by their appearance, their cultural
experiences with domestic violence may be unnecessarily complicated for reasons unnecessary (Straus, 2009). As a result, to the degree that psychology is not immune to culture, Japanese victims require psychologists whose sole purpose is the rescue and/or assisting victim populations.

Moving beyond the Asian stereotype and limited discourse of domestic violence in the Japanese community can be accomplished by the recognition that perception may in fact conflict with reality. That is, as a bon fide profession psychology’s attention to those victimized by domestic violence must not be influenced by stereotype, the politically correct or the traditionally culturally preferred. Recognized schools of thought suggest that scientific objectivity relative to competence means the capacity of psychologists to conduct investigations free of any forms of bias (Jones & Alcabes, 1989). This simple definition becomes obsolete when applied in the absence of objectivity leaving victimization of the Japanese community to fill the void. Furthermore, consistency and technological competence via objectivity enables psychology because the variations in events are made more intelligible commensurate with differing demographic categories (O’Neal, 1999). Whereas decision-making ability, research modality, knowledge base, as an extension of culture is important, none of these as a single criterion reign sufficient without the benefits of scientific objectivity. However, considered in conjunction with scientific objectivity they can potentially rescue Japanese victims from domestic violence and move humanity ever closer to elimination of a social pathology on a global scale.

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