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Disclosure of victimization experiences of Chinese male survivors of intimate partner abuse

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Abstract

Male victimization in intimate partner abuse situations has long been a neglected phenomenon in academic research and is rarely mentioned in social service provision. The abused male is often absent from the overall picture, such that intimate partner abuse against males remains an invisible occurrence. This is in part due to the reluctance of society to support them, because men are culturally perceived to be masculine and strong. The factors that facilitate or prevent their disclosure are worthy of study because in doing so, could provide a better understanding of how their help-seeking behavior contributes to service planning for both men and women in conflict. This study, therefore, focuses on the individual, organizational and cultural factors that facilitate or prevent the disclosure of intimate partner abuse when experienced by men in a Chinese context. Three general areas have been identified from a literature review: namely, the attribution of the victimization experiences, professional encounters, and cultural conception of masculinity. Eight male survivors have voluntarily participated and recruited through purposive snowball sampling. In-depth interviews are used to obtain the qualitative data. After conducting a thematic analysis, six themes are identified, which are: the perceived uniqueness of the victimization; perceived severity of the victimization; perceived sincerity of the helping professionals; professional actions; 'macho competence'; and 'macho protection.' In conclusion, suggestions are made on how the study findings contribute to developing gender sensitive practices for helping professionals, especially social workers and counsellors, when they work with male survivors of intimate partner abuse.

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Introduction

Intimate partner abuse (IPA) is a serious social and public health issue worldwide (Abbott and Williamson, 1999; Garcia-Moreno et al.2005; Heise et al., 1999). Female survivors of IPA have long been the focus of studies and there is strong evidence on the prevalence and severity of their experience with IPA, regardless of their race, color, socioeconomic status or country of residence so that globally, it is found that an estimated one in three has experienced some form of abuse (Heise et al., 1999). However, there is comparatively much less in the literature on male victimization (Tsang, 2015), and even less in the context of Hong Kong with only two related research studies (see Choi et al., 2015; Tsang, 2016). Work on the disclosure of the victimization experiences of male survivors is also rare.

Therefore, this article draws on the findings of a study that involves eight Chinese men who have experienced IPA with the aim to contribute to the literature on IPA against men in the Chinese context. To do so, the article specifically examines individual, organizational and cultural factors that facilitate or prevent the disclosure of male survivors of their victimization during the help seeking process. First, the related literature will be reviewed and presented as background information. A data analysis is then carried out and provides the themes for the disclosure behavior of the participants, which will be analyzed and conceptualized. The implications of the findings with reference to gender-specific practices for working with IPA male victims will then be discussed.

Intimate partner abuse and male victimization

Western studies on IPA have long debated about whether gender is asymmetrical or symmetrical (Johnson, 2005, 2006) in IPA situations. The former is the belief that violence is perpetuated by men against women while the latter is the notion that men and women can both be victims (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Straus, 2011). A recent study by Black et al. (2011) indicated that both men (28.5%) and women (35.6%) in the US have experienced physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner. There are also numerous reported cases of IPA in Hong Kong with 3917 cases in 2014 (Social Welfare Department, 2014), and substantial increases in the number of cases of male abuse by female intimate partners or ex-partners from 445 cases in 2005 to 531 cases in 2014 (47% increase) as opposed to cases of female partner abuse from 3153 to 3262 cases (3.5% increase) (Social Welfare Department, 2005, 2014).

Even though statistics and large scale research studies have revealed the increasing prevalence of male victimization, the focus continues to be on female victims

due to the high rates of violence against women. As well, while some studies have addressed the gender differences in IPA and psychological forms of violence, for instance, Archer (2002) found that in physically aggressive acts, women are more likely to throw something at their male partners and slap, kick, bite or punch them, while men are more likely to repeatedly strike or choke their female partner, and Coker et al. (2002) found that the prevalence of the psychological abuse of men is higher than that of women (17.3% vs. 12.1%), studies on the disclosure of victimization by men are lacking, especially in the Chinese/Hong Kong context.

Disclosure of victimization experiences

The disclosure of victimization informs practitioners of the most effective interventions that can help IPA survivors (Sylaska and Edwards, 2014). However, a number of individual, relational and environmental factors are found to affect disclosure (Alaggia et al., 2012) including demographics, and intrapersonal (such as the feelings and perception of the victim), and situational (such as the nature and frequency of violence) factors. Relational factors which include a wide range of positive and negative social reactions experienced by survivors also influence disclosure (Sylaska and Edwards, 2014). Most of the related work focus on women; for instance, Ansara and Hindin (2010) found that female survivors (81%) are more likely to disclose their victimization to at least one informal support compared to male survivors (57%). There are relatively few studies in the literature that concern the disclosure of men. After carrying out an extensive literature review, three themes are drawn from existing work: the attribution of the victimization experiences, professional encounters, and cultural conception of masculinity, which are conceptualized at the individual, organizational and cultural levels, and examined in this article accordingly. The intention is to examine how these three domains apply to the disclosure of men of their victimization during the help-seeking process.

At the individual level: Attribution of victimization experiences

The literature has indicated that the type, severity and perceived meaning of victimization are all related to the disclosure intentions of female victims. Vatnar and Bjorkly (2008) found that women who experienced physical or psychological IPA are more likely to disclose their experience than those sexually abused by their partners. Flicker et al. (2011) found that female IPA survivors who were stalked by their partners more frequently seek help from informal supports than those who experience psychological, physical or sexual IPA. Women who experienced the co-occurrence of physical and sexual abuse are less likely to disclose to their family (Flicker et al., 2011). Moreover, there is a greater likelihood of disclosure with increased physical injuries (Barrett and St. Pierre, 2011). As such, the intention to disclose is associated with the type of violence, and the severity and frequency of

IPA (Ansara and Hindin, 2010; Fanslow and Robinson, 2010; Levendosky et al., 2004).

Furthermore, the basis of the violence is important as female victims are more likely to disclose abuse that stems from anger or jealousy as opposed to violence used as a means of control or love (Black et al., 2008). Those who blame their partner for the violence are also more likely to disclose than those who self-blame (Edwards et al. 2012). Therefore, how female IPA survivors attribute their victimization influences their disclosure intentions. The relevance of these findings is subsequently applied to examining male IPA survivors and their victimization experiences, and the effects on their disclosure.

At the organizational level: Professional encounters

In seeking help from professionals, some factors affect disclosure, including accessibility to professional services, risk of rejection and reactions of the professionals. Tangible or intangible support given to female survivors facilitates the disclosure of IPA (Bosch and Bergen, 2006; Goodkind et al., 2003; Trotter and Allen, 2009). Research work has also indicated that the negative feelings of women after disclosure, such as shame and embarrassment, influence their disclosure intentions. Those who are not taken seriously, disrespected, or blamed during their help seeking process are not inclined to further disclose abuse information (Bosch and Bergen, 2006; Edwards et al., 2012).

In Cheung et al. (2009), one-third of the service providers indicated that male IPA survivors feel that their services only target women, and thus, feel isolated and neglected by mainstream services (Tsui et al., 2010). Hines and Douglas (2011) indicated that 67% of the men in their study reported that formal service agencies, hotline services and police enforcement are not effective because they only targeted females. Henning and Renauer (2005) found that female perpetrators arrested for violence against a male partner are treated with more compassion than their male perpetrator counterparts. Thus, male victimization cases are not taken seriously by police officers in comparison to female cases.

Ultimately, these men are re-victimized when they are rejected or neglected by service providers (Hines et al., 2007). Thus, the service exclusion of male IPA survivors negatively affects their intention to disclose even when motivated to seek help. These findings are also drawn on to examine the male IPA survivors and their victimization experiences in this article, and the effects on their disclosure.

At the cultural level: Masculinity values

Montalvo-Liendo (2009) identified cross-cultural factors, including fear and shame, that impact the disclosure of IPA by women. Rentoul and Appleboom (1997) indicated that when male IPA survivors do seek help, the most prevalent issues are related to reconciling their masculine identity with their experience as abuse survivors. This is because victimization disclosure conflicts with stereotypical male

images (Blanchard, 2003; Good et al., 1994), which elicits feelings of shame, disgrace, emotional loss and humiliation; any one of these emotions could silence them (Curtis, 2001).

Masculinity is closely related to the role of men as protectors, that is to express their masculinity, men perform protective roles (Woloshyn et al., 2013). For instance, fathers demonstrate hegemonic masculinity when they provide and care for their children and family and protect them (Endersteina and Boonzaie, 2015). Men also manifest masculinity by demonstrating physical and mental strength (Blanchard, 2003; Good et al., 1994).

In the Chinese context, masculinity is situated within values that include avoidance of shame, collectivism, conformity to norms, deference to authority, emotional self-control, family recognition through achievement, filial piety, humility, and compliance based on hierarchical relationships (Kim et al., 1999). Most if not all of these adhere to the concept of 'face' (Chan, 2006, 2009), an important social value that denotes respect, honor and prestige. A man, therefore, loses face when he fails to meet the essential requirements necessary to perform masculine roles (Ho, 1976). However, the correlation between cultural factors and the disclosure of victimization experiences by men has not been fully examined, particularly in the Chinese context. Therefore, these factors which affect the disclosure of their victimization are explored in this article.

Methods and data analysis

This research work is exploratory in nature due to the lack of studies on the conception of masculinity among male survivors of IPA. The participants were recruited through purposive snowball sampling. Invitations were sent to non-governmental organizations and independent associations for men in Hong Kong as the means of purposive sampling. The solicited participants then referred other individuals for interviews as the means of snowball sampling. They took part in semi-structured in-depth individual interviews, in which they responded to this key question: What are the individual, organizational and cultural factors that facilitate and/or prevent your disclosure of being abused by your intimate partner? The participants were asked to provide specific examples and stories to illustrate the reasons that facilitated or deterred their disclosure. All of the participants are permanent residents of Hong Kong, 18 years old and over, and have experienced physical and/or psychological abuse from their intimate partner. Eight men between the ages of 39 and 67 years old participated. Four are divorced, and seven have a child/children (see Table 1 for profiles).

Approval for conducting this study was obtained from the Hong Kong Baptist University. Prior to an interview, the interviewers (authors) outlined the research purpose and procedures to the participant, emphasizing the voluntary and anonymous nature of the study. The interviewers also informed the participant of his right to refuse or discontinue the interview at any time. The consent form was read and signed by the participants, and all interviews were conducted in Chinese,

Table 1. Informants' socio-demographic profile.

Informant	Aaron	Benny	Charles	Dickson	Eddy	Frankie	Gary	Henry
Age	52	58	43	58	62	65	67	42
Education level	Junior secondary	University graduate	Senior secondary	Senior secondary	Junior secondary	Senior secondary	Post-secondary	University graduate
Current Relationship Status	Divorced (since 2010)	Married	Married	Separated (since 2012)	Divorced (since 2002)	1st Marriage (1967 to 1986) 2nd Marriage (since 1989)	1st Marriage (1976 to 1988) 2nd Marriage (1990 to 2003)	Married (since 2009)
No. of years married	5	33	13	17	31	25	13	7
Partner's age	38 (ex-wife)	55 (wife)	43 (wife)	48 (wife)	59 (ex-wife)	62 (wife)	63 (ex-partner)	39 (wife)
Employment type	Unemployed	Unemployed	Clerical work	Clerical work	Taxi driver	Retired	Retired	Teacher
Age of children	F/6 F/5	F/28 F/24 F/20	N.A.	M/17	M/40 F/33	F/31	F/21 F/18	M/5 M/3

audiotaped, and transcribed for analysis, and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure confidentiality. The thematic analysis techniques proposed in Braun and Clarke (2006) were used because they are applicable and flexible for qualitative research. The techniques involve searches for themes or patterns. They are also analytical, which allows organization and analysis of the data by examining the rich details (Smith and Sparkes, 2009). The techniques are usually used in health research projects, especially those that are simply descriptive or describe the key issues of specific groups or individuals, and IPA is indeed a public health and social research project. In the data analysis process, the transcribed text is repeatedly read and the initial ideas noted to gain familiarity with the data. Then, the interesting features of the data are coded. Constant data mining is used to cluster the codes into meta-codes and identify the themes. Accordingly, the data are organized at the semantic level by using basic codes to the latent level with theme development. At the latent level, the themes reflect the underlying assumptions and interdependent concepts.

A two-member team independently reviewed the transcripts to develop the initial set of codes and then discussed the generated codes and theme construction (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2008). Each member defined his or her codes and discussed the relationships between the codes and text in the individual interviews. The meetings allowed for discussion of the coded transcripts and identification of divergence and convergence (Flick, 2006; Gibbs, 2007).

The code clusters were discussed by the team members and each member was challenged to 'make sense' of the codes and organize them into themes. They then reviewed the remaining transcripts and indicated whether they agreed with the generated codes. Any new codes developed required the described procedure to be repeated. The team met again to discuss the code list and resolve points of disagreement. Afterwards, each member reviewed his or her codes again. Twelve codes were initially generated and then reduced to the six themes of this study. Ongoing analysis took place to refine the specifics of each sub-theme and then further conceptualized into the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). All of the participants (eight) reviewed the generated themes and definitions, and indicated whether they agreed with the themes, and if not, to provide a short rationale. Finally, these sub-themes were matched to the summarized findings from the literature review, which allowed clustering into the three themes identified. This is the fifth step of the thematic analysis, in which the sub-themes were defined and named into the main themes, which concurred with the three themes identified in the literature review, and justified their use. Cohen's kappa of this analysis was 0.74 which indicating a satisfactory inter-rater reliability reached.

Results

Six sub-themes were found, namely perceived severity of victimization, perceived uniqueness of victimization, professional actions, perceived sincerity of the helping professionals, macho competence and macho protection.

Attribution of victimization experiences

Perceived severity of victimization

Five of the eight participants (Aaron, Benny, Charles, Frankie and Gary) indicated that they shared their physical or psychological injuries with helping professionals based on how they perceived the severity of the victimization. Aaron disclosed his IPA situation after his ex-wife physically assaulted him. He felt that the situation was dire and reported the incident to the police.

Aaron: She hit me hard with a ball, and my left eye was bleeding, so I immediately went to the hospital for medical treatment... I then reported to the police officers at the hospital about being hit by my ex-wife... (But) sometimes... it's not such a 'big deal' that she hits me, so there isn't the need to ask for help if I can cope with it.

Henry disclosed to a social worker because he felt that the situation was escalating.

Henry: ... we were quarreling ... suddenly, she got really emotional, and said that I wasn't listening to her ... The tension was escalating and then suddenly, she punched me in the face. I was in pain ... lost my balance ... fell down ... knocked my head on the table corner and bled a lot ... I left and ran to a private clinic nearby for treatment. I also told the social worker about this incident so that s/he could see that my wife could get so emotional.

Similarly, Benny disclosed the assault incidents to social workers when he felt that the assaults by his wife were increasing in severity. However, he did not disclose the minor physical injuries.

Benny: Sometimes, she didn't hit me so badly, only bruised me. I didn't mind the bruises very much as these would go away ... But sometimes, she hurt me so badly that it made me bleed ... I had to go to the hospital for treatment ... But I was afraid of reporting the incidents to the police, so I decided to ask for help from the social workers ...

Therefore, it is evident that these male IPA survivors take the severity of the abuse into consideration as one of the factors that facilitate their disclosure. However, their subjective perception of the severity may be downplayed by their perception of the male gender role, which is characterized by the masculine trait of macho-ness, as evident in phrases such as 'she didn't hit me so badly' or 'I didn't mind the bruises very much as these would go away' and it is 'no big deal'. This perceived male role, therefore, explains why in comparison to female survivors, relatively few males disclose to informal supports (Ansara and Hindin, 2010).

Perceived uniqueness of victimization

Five of the male survivors (Aaron, Benny, Dickson and Eddy and Gary) perceived their victimization experiences as unique and exceptional in their social networks, which to a certain extent, prevented disclosure.

Aaron avoided disclosure if he was met with a disrespectful reaction from his friends. Moreover, he indicated that when he was trying to share his experiences with them, he would make light of the situation and pretended to be nonchalant. He felt that this would reduce any embarrassment and protect his masculine image during the disclosure. He also wanted to gauge their response since they may not believe him as they considered that men should not be assaulted by women. In other words, he felt that other people perceived that a man should be tough and strong, and therefore being victimized by a woman is not socially acceptable.

Aaron: When I told my friends . . . I would try to appear to be cool about it because I didn't want to show them that I wasn't man enough . . . When I acted cool . . . that is, I . . . pretended that it was 'not a big deal', I didn't feel so embarrassed. If I felt that my friends didn't believe me . . . then I wouldn't say anything more.

The male survivors perceived that their victimization experiences are unique and exceptional, and that others have a similar view as male victimization is not socially acceptable. This is possibly due to socialization with Chinese cultural values, in which male victimization is a societal taboo (George, 2007), and therefore further deters disclosure as the men are already socialized to believe that male victimization is not acceptable.

Professional encounters

Actions of professionals

The research data revealed that all of the survivors except for one made decisions based on the actions of the helping professionals, which determined whether they would further disclose their victimization experiences. In this case, these include promptness in action, helpful advice and suggestions, and neutrality.

Benny revealed that he was reluctant to disclose to a helping professional since they did not take immediate action to help him which reinforced his view that social services are not helpful, and thus discouraged further disclosure. Consequently, the lack of professionalism of a professional affects the intentions of victims to disclose.

Benny: I phoned the hotline many times, but wasn't able to successfully connect with the social workers. I did eventually make contact with one, but he didn't help me right away, and arranged for an interview with me later. However, he changed the interview

time again and again . . . When he changed the time again, I gave up . . . didn't feel like asking for help anymore.

Frankie indicated that he was unwilling to disclose any further details of the abuse because the social worker asked him to sign a written statement of repentance. Consequently, he felt that the social worker sided with his wife and was not neutral in handling the case.

Frankie: The social worker asked me to sign a written statement of repentance . . . to admit that it was my fault for the problems in the marriage. I felt that she was a bit biased and favored my wife . . . When I finally decided to sign the repentance letter, in my mind, I had given up on disclosing the actions that my wife used to hurt me.

However, Henry felt comfortable in disclosing since the social worker provided suggestions and advice that would protect him in the event of an abuse episode.

Henry: My social worker told me that my sons' emotions are affected a lot because they cry whenever our arguments escalate . . . that if we got into conflicts, it would be better if I calmed down first so that I would not risk provoking my wife. I thought that this made sense as I didn't want my sons to be affected any more . . . so I told the social worker that my wife was so emotional that she once hit me really bad, and the social worker reminded me about the importance of protecting myself by noting the signs when my wife would have emotional outbursts . . .

It is evident that these male survivors take the actions of the helping professionals into consideration as a factor that influences their willingness to disclose. Offering immediate help, unbiased solutions and suggestions can help social workers gain the trust of male IPA survivors, who would then be more willing to disclose.

Sincerity of helping professionals

The data also revealed that the sincerity of the helping professionals affects disclosure intentions. Aaron, Dickson and Gary indicated that their social workers worked with them in a sincere manner, and therefore, they were willing to talk. In this context, sincerity is the positive attitude of the professionals, such as showing genuineness and respect. For instance, Gary trusted his social worker because the social worker helped his daughters. He then proceeded to disclose the incidents in which his ex-partner treated him violently.

Gary: I felt that the social worker had helped me when the social worker found a place for my daughters to live. And I thought that this social worker could probably help me a lot, so I shared the incidents where I was badly treated by my ex-partner.

However, Benny, Charles, Eddy and Frankie felt that their social workers lacked sincerity in validating and resolving their difficulties which discouraged their willingness to talk.

Charles: Some people would respond by saying that you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. That means, you cannot force someone to do something against his/her will. This told me that they did not understand my sufferings at all.

Likewise, Eddy encountered a social worker who did not believe that his ex-wife had affairs, and felt that the social worker was very biased and insincere in resolving his relationship problems, which discouraged him:

Eddy: When I told the social worker that I had evidence of my ex-wife's affairs, the social worker told me that I didn't have any concrete evidence. I felt very disappointed. I thought that the social worker didn't trust me, and only sided with my ex-wife. So, I did not want to tell the social worker anymore about how badly my ex-wife treated me.

Apart from evaluating the actions of the helping professionals, consideration is also given to their sincerity by the respondents. This means that helping professionals need to adopt a neutral position and accept that men could be weak in order to secure a relationship of trust in which male survivors will feel comfortable enough to share their victimization experiences.

Cultural conception of masculinity

Macho competence

'Macho competence' in this context is the cultural expectations of being strong, capable and powerful as a man. Six of the eight respondents adhered to these expectations, which, therefore, prevented them from disclosure.

Benny: ... being competent is very important as a man, followed by having confidence, then power ... these are masculine qualities ... since being abused by the wife is shameful, I'd rather not say anything.

Gary: I also felt embarrassed when I wanted to share the violent incidents with others. If I could solve the problems by myself, I would not talk about them with other people.

Dickson: I felt ashamed when I was criticized by my ex-wife in front of other people. I could not fulfill my role as a man as she had financial control over me, and therefore I did not have any power in the family.

The respondents felt that the societal expectations of masculine competence are shared among the Chinese community, and nobody would believe that a masculine

and competent man could be abused by his spouse. As physically and psychologically abused victims are considered to be weak, which is socially and culturally unacceptable for men, the male respondents were further deterred from speaking up. Abuse from the wife is very embarrassing, and violates the cultural expectations of masculine competence (Blanchard, 2003; Good et al., 1994). Aaron, Charles and Eddy all acknowledged the cultural expectations. Aaron felt that others would not believe him; Charles said that others told him that men should be strong and capable; and Eddy felt ashamed and did not tell others because he was worried that they would judge him negatively.

Macho protection

Rentoul and Appleboom (1997) emphasized that male survivors tend to reconcile their masculine identity with their experiences as abuse survivors, but this manifestation in the Chinese context is complicated. Men are expected to be strong, rational, and competent (Blanchard, 2003; Good et al., 1994), but there are various expectations of how masculine identities play out. Other than macho competence, men are also expected to protect their spouse, which could be the manifestation of the Chinese cultural value of face (Chan, 2006, 2009; Ho, 1976) but becomes a dilemma if the wife is the one who is hurting the man. This means that men are supposed to sacrifice themselves, which prevents disclosure. The respondents indicated that they would not hit their spouse back to avoid hurting her, and chose not to disclose so as to protect the wife from criminal charges. Five of the eight respondents indicated that they would even tolerate the abuse to protect their spouse and children.

Aaron: I was afraid that I would kill her if I really fought back.

Benny: I just run away instead of hitting her back, I really don't want to hurt her . . .

Eddy: . . . I wouldn't hit her back, she wouldn't be able to take it . . . so I had to tolerate her hitting . . .

Frankie: I could not use violence to solve the conflicts . . . I didn't want to hit back and hurt her . . .

Gary: I also thought that as a man, I need to protect women . . . therefore I . . . gave in to my ex-wife and accommodated her.

In summary, macho competence and macho protection prevent these male victims from disclosing. However, they might in turn experience much more pressure as a result of the distorted images of masculinity (Pleck et al., 1993).

Discussion

In the course of disclosure, male survivors have to consider several factors. At the personal level, the findings indicate how male IPA survivors attribute their victimization experiences subsequently influences their intentions to disclose. The findings here echo previous work in the literature in that two sub-domains are found to be closely related to the attribution of victimization experiences, namely, 'perceived severity of victimization' and 'perceived uniqueness of victimization'. The victimization experiences are unique and exceptional, partly because the abuse is taboo (George, 2007) and unacceptable in Chinese society. Thus, physical and psychological injuries may be downplayed. The tendency to undermine the severity of victimization is found to be closely related to Chinese cultural values of masculinity, specifically macho competence. Additionally, it is found that these male IPA survivors perceive that their victimization is unique, which is associated with the Chinese concept of 'face'. The more that they perceive male IPA as extraordinary and inconceivable, the more that they are inclined to perceive that others have a similar perception. Their attribution that male IPA that is not socially acceptable consequently inhibits their ability to disclose in order to protect their own 'face'. However, they take into consideration the severity and escalation of the abuse and when it becomes intolerable, they are more inclined to disclose. These findings echo those of a number of studies, such as Ansara and Hindin (2010) and Barrett and St. Pierre (2011).

In terms of male IPA at the organizational level, the result affirms that 'professional encounters' actually consists of two sub-domains, namely, the 'actions of the professionals' and 'sincerity of the helping professionals'. These are both important because they affect the intentions of male IPA survivors to disclose their victimization. A disrespectful reaction prevents any further disclosure even though help-seeking may have already been initiated. These findings support the work of Hines and Douglas (2011) and Hines et al. (2007). It is argued that the professionals are also shaped by the Chinese cultural values on masculinity, such as men should be competent and responsible for everything. Therefore, the relationship between the attribution of victimization experiences and professional encounters can be understood from a social constructionism perspective because male IPA survivors and professionals both co-construct the meaning of male victimization in Chinese society.

At the cultural level, there are two sub-domains: 'macho competence' and 'macho protection', that is, men are expected to be strong and capable enough to protect their spouse and children, which again prevents disclosure. These perceptions of masculinity are relatively fixed, thus echoing the conclusions of Finkelhor et al. (1990) in that, males are less likely to share accounts of abuse and more likely to experience additional pressure as a result of the distorted images of masculinity (Pleck et al., 1993). Thus, the social construction of masculinity in

the Chinese culture, which is expressed through macho competence and protection, deters the disclosure of victimization experiences. It is argued that since male IPA survivors are shaped by the cultural values of masculinity, the more they experience victimization, the more they find themselves trapped in gender role conflict. In other words, these male IPA survivors perceive that they have failed to meet societal expectations of the male gender role.

It is argued that the interplay of the 'attribution of victimization' and 'professional encounters' is shaped by 'cultural values towards masculinity'. As such, the latter has an essential role in shaping the values and beliefs of male survivors as well as professionals in terms of male victimization. Based on the positive interaction between male IPA survivors and professionals found in the result analyzed, the professionals are not passively shaped by cultural values. Some professionals are able to co-construct the helping process so that the male IPA survivors feel respected. Therefore, professionals could co-construct the meaning of male victimization, and consequently, there are related implications for social work practice as follows.

At the individual level, public education on male victimization in IPA should be carried out in the Chinese community to enhance the awareness of both men and women. As the perceived severity and uniqueness of victimization are greatly shaped by cultural influences on masculinity, this issue should be given more visibility so as to encourage male survivors to disclose their abusive situations if they seek help.

At the organizational level, social workers should self-reflect on their sincerity, provide immediate help and unbiased advice to establish a relationship of trust with male IPA survivors so that they will disclose the abuse. They should also receive gender sensitivity training.

At the cultural level, social workers need to understand the constraints that arise from the cultural conception of masculinity, which affect how male IPA survivors express their experiences. Furthermore, from a critical postmodern stance, social workers should go beyond the traditional views and consider how the cultural conception of masculinity oppresses survivors, rather than seeing only the related privileges. Connell (2005, 2007, 2009) argued that hegemonic masculinity may result in secondary victimization or re-victimization because male victims do not fulfill hegemonic expectations. Therefore, the sensitivity of social workers towards their own local and personal conceptions of masculinity will inevitably shape their approach to assessment and intervention. Finally, they should bear in mind the lens of masculinity in their own culture, which contributes to shaping disclosure behavior.

The implications for social work practice include promotion of guidelines for the development of gender-sensitive practices. It also involves training in IPA services in the Chinese community in terms of male-focused service delivery and gender-specific practice theory and skills (Dienhart, 2001; Good et al., 1990) to facilitate the disclosure of male IPA survivors.

Conclusion

IPA is clearly a negative experience for male survivors, but has not been acknowledged. Since the existing work in the literature cannot provide a full understanding of the situations experienced by these men, this article draws on findings of a study to demonstrate the need to provide tailored help, in which professional encounters, attribution of victimization experiences, and cultural conception of masculinity are important considerations.

Based on the findings, it can be said that among these three domains, the perceived uniqueness of victimization, severity of victimization and sincerity of the helping professionals, professional actions, and macho and macho protection are the key factors that affect disclosure.

This paper also indicates that cross-cultural factors have an impact on the disclosure of IPA as identified in Montalvo-Liendo (2009) and also on the reconciliation of masculine identity in the help seeking process of male IPA survivors under the Chinese context (Rentoul and Appleboom, 1997). The findings fill a knowledge gap in the current literature and have practice implications for social workers and mental health professionals, partly because there are no tools and resources that are readily available.

IPA impacts all survivors, and thus it is unfair to neglect male survivors. In light of their absent voice, this article, therefore, highlights some of their situations while arguing that there is the need for further investigation into the issues as well as the development of gender-sensitive services for male survivors.

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