

From victims to survivors: Turning points in ending spousal abuse

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Spousal abuse can be traumatizing both physically and psychologically to the victims, but many women continue to stay in abusive spousal relationships. This is despite the fact that trauma experienced as a result of betrayal from a loved one is much deeper with serious psychological scars. This study examined the turning points that could be used in helping abused women to end spousal abuse and turn from being victims to survivors. Data were collected from 10 women survivors in Embakasi Sub county of Nairobi County by use of an in depth semi-structured interview schedule and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs). A phenomenological data analysis process was used to analyze the descriptions of the turning points that were brought out by the participants. Results showed that awareness of abuse, social support, economic empowerment, sense of autonomy and severity of abuse, were the main turning points that triggered the survivors to reappraise and end their abusive situations. Using the Transtheoretical model, the article recommends that women need to be empowered to reappraise their stay decisions so as to move progressively from contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance of abuse free relationships.

Key words: Spousal abuse, victim, survivor, turning points, empower

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I. INTRODUCTION

A plethora of studies view the family as a haven for personal safety, affectionate relationships and shared trust, yet it can be a trap of restraint, injury and death (Weizmann-Henelius, Gronroos, Putkonen, Eronen, Lindberg & Hakkanen-Nyholm, 2012).

According to Gutierrez & Boselli (2010) about 70 % of women are abused by their intimate partners globally and according to Durose, Harlow, Langan, Motivans, Rantala & Smith 2005 and Astion & O'Brian, 2009, 85 % of intimate Partner Violence victims are women. Further, rates are even higher in some countries. For example, LaViolette & Barnett (2014), reveal the annual rates of femicide in Russia to be as high as 16000; the highest wife murder rates worldwide. Moreover, Speizer & Pearson (2011) & Pandey (2014), echo that these rates are even higher among adolescent married women despite massive underreporting due to a number of individual and cultural factors.

Spousal abuse broadly encompasses economic, sexual, emotional and mental torture as well as threat of such harm (Azziz-Baumgartner, Homaira, Hamadani, Tofail, Dahlberg, Haque, Luby & Naved, 2014, Limukii-Kaaria, 2016). The manifestations can be physical assault, rape, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, verbal abuse, threats to kill or to harm and denial of access to resources among others (Garcia, Soria & Hurwitz, 2007; Basile & Smith, 2011).

Battering of women by their spouses poses enormous health and psychological challenges. For example, a conference held in Rome in 2009 reported that among women aged 15 to 44 years, spousal abuse is the main cause of death and disability as it supersedes cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined (Gutierrez & Boselli, 2010). Moreover, victims of abuse experience a myriad of psychological effects such as diminished self esteem, confusion and memory lapses, anger directed to self and others, depression, poor interpersonal relationship and psychosomatic illnesses like hypertension, ulcers, gastrointestinal complications, and excessive loss of body weight among others (Enander, 2011, Al-Modallal, Sowan, Hamaideh, Peden, Al-Omari & Al-Rawashdeh, (2012). These sufferings have a ripple effect in that other family members also get affected (Riger, Raja & Camacho, 2002, Limukii-Kaaria, 2016).

Despite the debilitating effects of the abuses on women, most victims, watch in helplessness and despair and stay in their abusive situations (Lazenbatt, Devaney J & Gildea, 2013, LaViolette & Barnett, 2014, Limukii-Kaaria, 2016). As they continue to stay their psychological upheavals spiral into a pit of heightened stress, frustrations, self blame, depression and suicidal ideations (Hinga, 2006; Lindgren & Renck, 2008). There

was therefore a need to find out the turning points that can be utilized to help victims end their painful abusive situations.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research question guiding the study was “What turning points can be used to help abused women end their spousal abuses? The current study is derived from a larger study on “Women’s perception of endogenous factors influencing them to stay in abusive spousal relationships in Women Rights Awareness Program in Nairobi County, Kenya”. In this section, the focus is on the methodology used for the specific components of the study that were relevant to understanding women’s turning points that assisted them to move from victims to survivors of spousal abuse.

Participants and recruitment

The study focused on 10 women who were survivors of past abusive spousal relationships. To participate in the study, the women had to meet the following inclusion criteria:

- a. They had been in past abusive spousal relationships where they experienced various forms of spousal abuse.
- b. They had been in those abusive relationships for at least two years before the abuse ended.

The ten survivors were recruited through purposive sampling from Embakasi Subcounty of Nairobi County through identification by their Community Health Workers (CHWs). The purpose of the study was explained to the participants and they were also informed that participation was voluntary. Before the sessions, the participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity by use of pseudonyms of their choice.

The study utilized phenomenological research design which is a qualitative method of inquiry. Phenomenological inquiry focuses on the experience as lived by a person and the meaning one attaches to it. It aims to obtain in-depth descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the meaning of the experience (Patton, 2002; Groenewald, 2004). By delving deeper and deeper into the reality, the researcher uncovers and interprets the inner essence of the subject’s cognitive processing of the experience and gets in touch with the true meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. In the process, the researcher has to bracket the outer world and the personal biases in order to have an objective view of the essences (Lavery, 2003). To this end, the researcher identified her personal biases on spousal abuse and attempted to set them aside so as to remain objective. The researcher engaged the participants in active face to face interactions so that they could explore and describe the various turning points that had helped them to end their abusive situations. This led to revelation of the stages at which the individual women had been stuck in as they attempted to end their abuses and set themselves free.

Instrumentation and procedures

This study used an interview guide and two Focused Group Discussions each comprising of five members. The use of interview and FGDs allowed for triangulation and richer data. The responses were audio recorded with participants consent. The participants were requested to voluntarily participate in the study and signed an informed consent before data collection. At the end of the sessions, the participants were debriefed to help them vent out any emotions that may have been elicited by the in depth modes of data collection.

The interview guide had a series of open-ended questions about participants’ experiences of their turning points which were captured in section A. The FGD formed section B. The questions were as follows:

Section A :Women’s Turning Points

- 1.a. What action did you take to deal with your abusive situation?
- b. Describe what finally enabled you to take that action.

Section B: FGD

The FGD was based on a case scenario of a woman who had in an abusive spousal relationship but had managed to end the abuse. The question was:

1. Describe the factors that may have enabled the woman to take action to end spousal abuse.

Data analysis

The data analysis process utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis(IPA). According to Willig, 2008; Hays &Wood,2011, Creswell, 2013, interpretative phenomenological analysis involves identifying the initial themes from the descriptive summaries and initial interpretations of the verbatim. The method was found suitable as the study aimed at identifying the participants’ lived experiences of their turning points in ending their abusive situations. Prior to analysis, the analysts bracketed their assumptions and any personal views on abuse of women by their spouses so as to avoid any potential biases during transcription and analysis.

The researchers independently read the transcripts several times and highlighted participants' expressions that were indicative of how they managed to end their abusive situations. The researchers then worked together to compile the list of meaning units they had identified from the descriptive summaries of the verbatim. Once the final list was created, the researchers identified the final themes from the initial themes within the items on the list. The researchers then wrote textural and structural descriptions of these themes with excerpts serving as illustrations. Some of the steps taken to enhance validity were: (a) reading and re-reading the transcripts several times to get accurate descriptive summaries (b) keeping an audit trail through the records during the data analysis process (c) identifying the meaning units from the descriptive summaries independently before the researchers compared their lists of initial themes (d) obtaining a feedback on the final themes from the participants

The Study Findings

Actions Taken to End Spousal Abuse

The findings revealed that the survivors had ended their abusive situations through separation, divorce and mediation. Out of the 10 survivors, 9 (90%) had left their abusive marriages: 5(50%) had separated and 4(40%) had divorced. Only one woman, (10%), had resolved by use of mediation and retained her marriage. From the foregoing, it is clear that leaving the abuser was a popular strategy most women had used to resolve their abuses.

Turning Points in Ending Spousal Abuse

The phenomenological data analysis revealed that certain turning points had enabled the survivors to end their abusive situations. These turning points were, awareness of abuse, severity of abuse, counseling, sense of autonomy, economic empowerment and social support. The participants' experiences were as presented:

Awareness of Abuse

Some women realized the meaning of their abuses as a result of their own evaluation of their situation as hereby recalled:

...my husband got me at twenty four when I was a virgin. That bitterness in my heart made me feel that my husband does not respect me, because if he got me a virgin, and here he comes moving out, I felt in my heart, that bitterness in my heart, that he doesn't respect me. So how do you live with somebody who does not respect you? And then when somebody goes out like that with other women, that means that he does not respect you, that is the thing that was pushing me, I felt if somebody does not love me, then that means there is no need of staying with somebody under the same roof, so I decided to quit because I felt there is no love here, there is no trust here, there is no respect here and those are some of the things that put up a marriage standing firmly. So I felt if these things were missing in my marriage, I said no, I said, let me move on with my own life.

(Kawira, 42yrs)

Kawira decided to quit her abusive marriage when she realized that there was no trust, respect or love and yet this is what she highly treasured.

Awareness of meaning of abuse or its effects can come through seminars or psycho-educational groups as expressed by one participant:

...so I think both the empowerment of women and men so that they can both work in partnership would be better because most of the time we empower women and forget the men and the men never get to hear some of these things because, even the Bible says how will they know if there is no one to tell them? The men need to be told that women need to be respected; women need to be treated this way. So the men even don't have enough places to go and seek this support, yeah, so they need to have somebody.

(Knifa, 43 yrs)

Involvement of men and women through psycho-education raises their awareness and gives them an opportunity to work as co-partners in ending spousal abuse.

One participant had separated from her abusive husband after realizing she had potential to manage her life out of the relationship:

...The threat and eeh the issue of being told to move out of the house. So one day I moved out of the house, I was told to go and I am given the deadline to go eh. I faced reality and said, ' *haiya* ', so I can even survive on my own? So, that one statement that I don't want to see you here by 6pm, though it was meant to suppress me , I found myself marshalling some strength, I didn't know I have some strength inside, so I found myself marshalling that strength and I realized that if I can survive one day, even these other days I can survive. And because I had gotten used to paying school fees, for my children, I just needed to do a few adjustments, but I found that I have a lot of strength in me to continue though the first few stages were a bit challenging.

(Njeri, 48 yrs)

Njeri had made her final decision to separate from her husband after she discovered that she had a lot of psychological resources to manage her life out of the relationship.

Severity of Abuse

One respondent had resolved her abuse after realizing that the levels of abuse had escalated and, moreover, her life had stagnated due to her abusive situation. Her verbatim depicts the scenario:

...finally he brought his relatives to come, his sisters to come and verbally abuse me and they, they went to levels that I thought were too insulting and maybe we needed another intervention, maybe from the parents or somebody else so that we can also get to understand their perspective in terms of the relationship. Because once you involve your sisters to come and insult and abuse your wife then it becomes, it's too much yeah... sometimes, you know , it escalates, the levels escalate and that's why you say enough is enough , I cannot deal with this anymore...

(Knifa, 43 yrs)

When abuse escalated to levels she could not bear, Knifa decided to involve her parents in addressing her situation. Finally, she ended up quitting the marriage.

Another respondent realized her situation was worsening and left her abusive relationship as expressed:

...I used to sell food to the hawkers in Kangemi. One day my husband came and urinated on all the food after I had cooked. When I asked him why he had done that, he started beating me. My landlord heard about it and told me to call the headman so that we could be helped to sort out. The headman came and told us that we should go to his office with our parents by Monday. My husband told the headman he could not bring his parents. When my husband said he could not do that, I sensed danger; I told the headman that the abuse was not over and I was intending to leave because there is even a time he poured paraffin on me wanting to burn me...

(Njoki, 45 yrs)

When her husband refused to engage in abuse resolution, Njoki realize that her situation was worsening and could lead to severe consequences if she continued to stay.

Counselling

After attending counseling, one participant realized that she needed to end abuse in her life:

...I had been beaten and insulted for long by my husband, in fact for five years I have not had peace in my house. So I used to cry and cry, sometimes even the whole night and then stay even for some days without talking to him. Some days when I am in the house alone I would pray telling God to change my husband and praying used to help me feel better...Now, I realized my crying and keeping quiet made him very happy. He would even try to get opportunities so that he could insult me or call me a useless woman...So I decided I have to change my way of dealing with the issue. I consulted a counselor who helped me to realize I could use dialogue. But now my husband has been brought up in a very dysfunctional family, he has no room for dialogue because he believes in fighting and insults when I try to talk to him...So I called my pastor and he spoke to both of us. The pastor told him it is wrong to beat me and he actually looked very remorseful. From then he has at least stopped beating me but he still insults me...

(Maria, 38 yrs)

After realizing that mechanisms such as crying, praying and keeping quiet were not working, Maria decided to go for counselling which empowered her to confront her situation through a mediator. It is therefore in order for a woman who is not able to confront her abusive husband directly to seek external support as Maria did.

Sense of Autonomy

Another respondent added that women can be empowered as follows:

....separate yourself with the children, because eeh, you find that eeh even the children when you are in the abusive marriage you are not helping these children because you are also oppressing them emotionally and psychologically, so if somebody would separate themselves from the children and from the spouse and from the community and from the family, you start realizing that you are a unique individual

(Njeri, 48 yrs)

Njeri was emphasizing that a woman should be able to cut off from external forces or social pressures that may influence her to hold to an unhealthy relationship. She felt a woman needs to stand out and ensure she has her own identity.

Economic Empowerment

A method that was suggested by all the women as a means of helping women to resolving spousal abuse was financial independence as expressed:

...if I was not having my own salary, where could I get money to sustain myself during the time I have been separated? I believe even to get bread for my children, it would have been very difficult, even to get fee for my children for education; it would have been very difficult...get empowered, not necessarily with any other thing even you get empowered with money, your financial strains even if you are having so many but at least you have something at the end of the month you know you are getting something for yourself, you are not going to ask from somebody's pocket...

(Kawira, 42 yrs)

Some other women decided to get means of financial empowerment and then realized they could manage on their own:

....I decided to engage in some casual jobs like washing clothes for people in the estate so that I could get something to take care of my children. Gradually I realized I could manage on my own and that's when I thought of leaving...so it is the casual jobs I do that sustain me and I am able to take care of the children peacefully. That is what made me think of leaving my husband; after all being beaten in front of the children and the verbal insults was too stressful for us to bear.

(Dorcas, 37 yrs)

Dorcas believed in herself as she realized that she could provide for her family alone. That awareness was the one that motivated her to leave her marriage.

Social Support

Most of the women reported that they were supported by family or friends in their struggle towards resolution of abuse as shown:

...So I felt no, I think enough is enough, then I shared with my brothers... So I told my brothers I want to move on with my own life, they told me, its ok, it's you now to make your own decision... and that's when I decided to move on, through a separation.

(Kawira, 42 yrs)

After Kawira had decided to leave, she sought support from her family who encouraged her to move on.

III. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

From this study's findings, there were several factors that had influenced the ten women to take action to end spousal abuse. These acted as catalysts for change and thus acted as their turning points.

A plethora of past studies have prescribed leaving as the only way of ending spousal abuse ignoring the impact that leaving would have on the family stability (Shurman & Rodriguez, 2006; Moe, 2009; Zuckosky, 2011; Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013). Furthermore, Panchanadeswaran and McCloskey (2007) argue that leaving an abusive relationship should not be perceived as an end to the abuse and other relationship struggles.

However, the findings of the current study have also revealed that apart from leaving the abusive relationship, end of spousal abuse can be achieved through processes such as mediation which would lead to preservation of the family unit as seen in Maria's case (See page 17). In addition, the narratives presented suggest that battered women exhibited the need for maintenance of the relationship and end of victimization as they engaged in other strategies of ending abuse such as dialogue and seeking help from available community resources (See Njoki page 17). End of spousal abuse through other alternative options questions the validity of the transtheoretical model, which candidly prescribes attainment of an abuse free situation as leaving the abusive relationship. Moreover, the participants indicated that men should be involved in the process of ending abuse while the TM lays a lot of emphasis on the involvement of the victims only. This means the process of ending abuse should not be viewed within the narrow confines of the TM as it can encompass actions such as dialogue among the partners, mediation and counseling that could end abuse without necessarily ending the marital relationship.

Based on the findings, it is evident that certain events or circumstances acted as turning points in the women's decision to end spousal abuse. These were severity of abuse, sense of autonomy, social support, economic empowerment and awareness of abuse among others. These findings buttress those by Alexander, Tracy, Radek, & Koverola (2009), Fanslow & Robinson (2010); Chang, Dado, Hawker, Cluss, Buranosky, Slagel, McNeil, & Scholle (2010); Murray, King, Crowe & Flasch (2015) who indicate that certain triggers such as social support, escalation of abuse, fear or threat of death, awareness creation and economic empowerment had acted as women's catalysts for resolution of abuse.

Though the current study identifies social support as a turning point, a past study by Bliss, Ogleby-Oliver, Jackson, Harp, & Kaslow (2008) found there was no correlation between social support and women's readiness to change their abusive situations. This discrepancy may be attributed to the characteristics of the study samples used in the two studies. While Bliss *et al* (2008) utilized a sample of marginalized African American women who may not have received appropriate social support by virtue of being a disadvantaged a

group, the current study used a sub-sample of women survivors who had received appropriate support from significant others like their family members. Nonetheless, as expressed by participants in the current study, social support is very important for a woman intending to take action to resolve spousal abuse. For example, availability of an emotionally supportive and encouraging person in the battered woman's life could help to promote an enabling environment that could make her realize that she was important. These results are echoed by Zuckosky (2011); Shorey, Tirone, Nathanson, Handsel, & Rhatigan (2012); Zapor, Wolford-Clevenger & Johnson(2015) whose findings indicated that social support was important for women especially at the initial stages of attempting to end abuse. Further, Crabtree-Nelson (2010) emphasizes that emotional support, ability to normalize abuse, offering concrete suggestions and a non-judgemental attitude towards survivors of abuse helps to foster a positive therapeutic alliance and increases chances of healing. Moreover, Rodriguez(2011);Kennedy,Adams, Bybee, Campbell, Kubiak and Sullivan (2012) underscore the importance of social support as it can aid in positive coping and mitigate the negative effects of abuse which can increase likelihood of ending an abusive situation. Conversely, Goodman, Gillum, Bybee & Sullivan (2003); Latta & Goodman (2011); Ondicho (2013); Sylaska & Edwards (2014), assert that, rejection by significant others may lead to self-blame, low self-esteem, hopelessness and depression which may gradually entrap women in abusive marriages. Hence there is need to help abused women establish satisfying social relationships so as to be able to navigate to the final stages of ending abuse. However, as noted by Alexander *et al* (2009), it would be useful to differentiate those social supports that are useful in aiding women's resolution of abuse from those which act as barriers.

Past studies by Moe (2009); Fanslow & Robinson (2010) and Estrellado & Loh (2013) identified abuse of children as a factor that prompted women's decision to end abusive relationships. This is unlike the current study where women maintained their abusive relationships despite the severity of abuse of their children by their fathers. This could imply that the perceived benefits of remaining in the relationship outweighed the risks of losing it which would mean absence of a father figure for the children.

Noticeably, the current study has added a unique dimension in resolution of abuse such as involvement of men in the change process which is not acknowledged by the transtheoretical model of behaviour change and most previous studies. Engaging men in ending spousal abuse is affirmed by Merry (2009) as he asserts that collaborative engagement of men and women in could help men demystify beliefs associated with abuse as well as replace them with alternative to violence (ATV) behaviours. Further, Cobia, Robinson & Edwards (2008) reiterate that perpetrators need to be helped to modify the personal beliefs that support the use of aggression toward their partners. In this way, interventions could help both women and men in changing their perceptions of abuse in support of and implementation of safety enhancing behaviours.

Chang *et al* (2010), acknowledges that abused women need to identify their turning points. This would lead to dramatic shifts in their beliefs and perceptions of themselves, their partners, or their situations (Reisenhofer & Taft, 2013; Murray, King, Crowe & Flasch, 2015). Moss, Pitula, Campbell & Halstead (1997), echo that battered women have to deal with their strongly held beliefs which could give insights that the relationship is unhealthy. Further According to Miltenberger (2004) and Corey (2009) individual's cognitive processes are central to behaviour change and the clients' recognition of their cognitive behaviours/irrational thoughts is a prerequisite. Hence, helping women to recognize the thoughts, images or self-statements that they engage in and influence their stay in abusive marriages is a requirement to restructuring their cognitions. Citing Sonkin (1994), Nelson-Jones, 2013), what a person thinks influences their feelings and this ultimately determines their actions like staying in an abusive marriage. For example, some participants in the study realized that their abuse was escalating and decided to quit the relationship (See Knifa Page 16).Some other women realized they had some inner potential and believing in themselves acted as a turning point to end their abuses. The realization of one's potential is supported by Estrellado & Loh (2013) who argue that women's psychological and financial resources can help to attenuate their psychological effects of abuse and sustain their monetary needs.

Maintaining ones sense of identity is crucial for women to deal with abuse as supported by Estrellado & Loh (2013) though Ting & Panchanadeswaran (2009) argue that the need to conform to family or societal pressures may compromise their autonomy. However Engel (2002) maintains that women in marital relations need to establish firmer boundaries in the relationship so as to retain their own identities. The concept of maintaining self identity is in agreement with differentiation individuals are able to separate their emotional and intellectual spheres (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2013; Titleman, 2014).. Thus, differentiated individuals are able to make autonomous decisions without undue influence by external agents such as the family members or the society. Indeed, Panchanadeswaran & McCloskey (2007) and Buchbinder & Barakat (2014) point out that autonomy and sense of separate self is a key requirement for a survivor especially at the maintenance stage of behaviour change. However, Rodriguez (2011) notes that women in abusive situations have difficulties in resisting social pressures as the sense of autonomy is eroded by the effects of their abusive situations. Hence

women need interventions that can empower them to attain self determination as an essential component of ending spousal abuse.

One participant brought out the importance of counseling as a turning point that helped her to end her abuse through mediation. This finding is supported by past studies by Rasmussen, Hughes & Murray (2008) and Crabtree-Nelson (2010) which brought out the importance of counseling with survivors of domestic violence. For example, Crabtree-Nelson (2010) realized that counselor-survivor relationship, knowledge of domestic violence and utilization of specific interventions were perceived as mutually helpful by the survivors and their counselor. In addition, use of appropriate interventions by the counselors is important. Thus according to Rasmussen, Hughes & Murray (2008), if survivors receive interventions such as motivational interviewing, they could get more motivated for change of their abusive situations. MI is both client-centered and problem focused as it psychoeducates clients to identify differences between their stated goals and current behaviour, increase their self-efficacy and take the necessary steps to make and maintain behavioural changes.

As noted by most of the participants, economic empowerment such as through employment, business or by doing some casual jobs helped women to support themselves and their children which decreased dependence on their abusive spouses. These findings echo those by Sabina & Tindale (2008); Estrellado & Loh (2013) and LaViolette & Barnett (2014), who found that employment helps female victims to improve their financial stability, increase their self-esteem, enhance social connections and provide cognitive relief and purpose in life. In addition, working away from home decreases the victim's emotional dependence on her abuser and minimizes possibility of entrapment in the relationship. In addition, Perez, Johnson & Wright (2012), assert that resource acquisition has a buffering effect on the severity of spousal abuse and its psychological consequences especially when abuse is not severe.

During the interviews and FGDs, it was observed that though most of the survivors had managed to end their abuses by leaving their spouses, they were still struggling to cope with their state of singlehood. As revealed by the field notes, a participant known as Knifa had financial difficulties due to child care and housing responsibilities but her father had assisted her by giving her a accommodation. Another participant by the name Amina had expressed that it had been difficult for her son to cope staying without the father and therefore compensated by allowing him to stay with him or the paternal grandmother during the school holidays. The two observations by Amina and Knifa imply that economic stability, housing, social support and child welfare were of paramount concern to the survivors after breaking free from their abusive partners. The finding is supported by Belknap (2007); Bostock, Plumpton & Pratt (2009); Goodman, Smyth, Borges & Singer (2009), Varicoe, Hankivsky, Ford-Gilboe, Wuest, Wilk, Hammerton & Campbell (2011); Logan, Walker & Hoyt (2012) who realized that though some women manage to end their violent relationships, they may continue to struggle in terms of obtaining housing, employment, re-building self confidence, reconnecting with family and developing social network. Consistently, Thomas, Goodman & Putnins (2015) echo that after separation from abusive spouses, experienced loss of emotional and physical safety, long term depression, loss of control over parenting and loss of freedom. Moreover, Fleury, Sullivan & Bybee (2000); Logan & Walker (2004) pointed out women who left their abusive marriages experienced continued harassment, manipulations, stalking and sometimes forced sex by their abusers. Further, Miller & Smolter (2011), reiterate that other survivors experience psychological torture through frivolous lawsuits and false reports of child abuse by their ex-partners. Furthermore, Turner & Helms (1995), point out that after leaving, women have to deal with other issues such as community divorce and role realignment. In other words, end of abuse is a process and not a onetime event; at some point the survivors are likely to experience some challenges especially when they leave their abusive situations.

From the foregoing, it appears survivors could require additional maintenance strategies such as creation of safe havens or to share their experiences after ending their abuses. This idea is echoed by Crabtree-Nelson (2010) that survivors of spousal abuse would benefit from counseling especially when there is a good relationship with their therapists and if they perceive their interventions as useful. The survivors would be empowered to address how they were keeping themselves safe, how leaving the abuser had affected them emotionally and what they were doing to cope with their new way of life. Additionally, Wuest & Merritt-Gay (1999) argue that after breaking free, a survivor has to go through the process of reclaiming the self which gradually enables her to disengage from the spouse and to move on. Therefore it would appear that a woman has to reach acceptance and reconstruct her new identity in order for maintenance to be fully accomplished.

Moreover, interventions such as occupational therapy have been found to be beneficial in increasing survivors independence and reducing relapse. To this end, Gutman, Diamond, Holness-Parchment, Brandofino, Pacheco, Jolly- Edouard, & Jean-Charles, (2004); Helfrich Aviles, Badiani, Walens, Sabol, (2006), have demonstrated that occupational therapy can be used to increase survivors' life skills and ability to adapt to end of an abusive relationship. In addition, survivors could utilize their past experience of abuse as an opportunity for resilience building. In this respect, Murray *et al* (2015) assert that survivors can draw upon their experiences

and act as change agents through advocacy. This would have therapeutic gains to themselves and others who may be survivors or struggling in abusive relations.

Strengths and Limitations

The findings of the study gave rich, holistic insights gained from the lived experiences of the participants through the interviews and FGDs. According to Padgett (2008); Willig (2008), the use of personal narratives makes the qualitative data more trustworthy and credible. The diversity of the participants' demographic variables such as age, type of marriage, duration of stay in the abusive marriages and education level provided diversity and richness to the findings

However, the findings have certain limitations. For example, data obtained in the study was based on self reports of the survivors whereby social desirability was likely to be a bias. In addition, the study engaged a small sample of ten survivors of abuse who had been identified through their community Health workers. This coupled with the qualitative nature of the findings limits the ability to generalize the findings to other survivors of spousal abuse in Nairobi County.

Implications of the findings

The findings offer implications for future research, policy making and practice, especially for therapists who work with clients who are victims of spousal abuse.

The study realized that certain events acted as turning points towards end of spousal abuse. Therapists and other professionals dealing with abused women could utilize these turning points as catalysts of change that could help to realign victims' beliefs towards their abusers and the abusive relationships, hence end of abuse.

Further, demographic factors like education and economic empowerment have been shown to be some of the factors which contribute to ending abuse by women in abusive marriages. Hence, the government could scale up the existing provisions for women's higher education and economic empowerment so as to boost their economic status and self-efficacy. This would assist more victims of spousal abuse in ending abuse.

For further research, a quantitative study could be carried out with the shelters of abused women in Nairobi County so as to enable generalization of the findings to the entire county. Since the participants from WRAP were mainly of the lower socio economic status, future studies need to incorporate women of a higher economic status. This would help to control the effects of economic instability as a factor which increases women's vulnerability to stay in abusive marriages. Future research could also utilize Correlational studies to investigate the influence of various turning points in ending spousal abuse. Finally, it is imperative to explore through future research, the interventions that can be tailored to the unique contexts of the survivors so as to empower them maintain their abuse free situations after they have ended their abusive situations.

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