

Episode 146 - Dr. Venus Tsui: The Invisible Ones: Male Survivors of Intimate Partner Abuse

[00:00:08] Welcome to in social work. The podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at www.insocialwork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice to research. We're in social work. The social work team would like to let you know that we have updated our website and as we are trying to avert 3 this year we're looking to do a little bit more remodel and in the process of doing this. We've also had to update some of our servers behind the scenes. So if you have any issue with your RSS feed for your subscription to our podcast series we encourage you to go ahead and resubscribe from the new file that you will find on the server today as you listen to this pod cast and in the future moving forward. Thank you High from Buffalo. It's late June so that means the Chautauqua Institution season will run from now through August 24th. Founded in 1874 as an experiment in vacation Werning the summer season features renowned lecturers opera symphony theatre dance recreation and much more. People come from all over the country but Chautauqua is less than 90 minutes from downtown Buffalo. It's a western New York gem. I'm Peter Sobota. And yes I do have a cold. Many are aware that when it comes to utilizing health and mental health services men are not as likely as women to seek out helping professionals. This is especially prevalent when men are the victims of intimate partner abuse.

[00:02:00] In this episode our guest Dr. Venus Tsui describes the pervasive shame that male victims experience and their common belief that the services that do exist are built for them. The resulting alienation and hopelessness present powerful barriers to seeking support. Dr. Tsui work suggests that men's reluctance to seek help for intimate partner abuse is significantly influenced by societal perceptions that exaggerate men's physical capacity to stop violence and general expectations that men have the financial resources and physical ability to solve problems on their own. Dr. Tsui research describes the extent to which the meager existing services are used by men and when they do access help. What kind of formal and informal helpers do they find most beneficial. Dr. Venus Tsui Ph.D. is assistant professor of social work at our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio Texas. Her practice and research interests include intimate partner abuse against men domestic violence child abuse and neglect child welfare practice marital relationships mental health of Asian Americans and Hispanic Latino populations and provisions of culturally sensitive practice. Dr. Tsui was interviewed by Charles Syms clinical associate professor at the UB School of Social Work and the taller of the two cohosts of the in social work podcast series Dr. Tsui was interviewed in May of 2014. So Venus I'm wondering how you came to this work I've worked in domestic violence with both the batters as well as the victims or some people like them refer to themselves as survivors but I never worked with men as an intimate partner violence victims. Curious how you came to this work. Yeah I think this is a great question. Thank you Charles.

[00:04:01] Actually these questions has been come to my mind for years. Always you know I come from Hong Kong. I had to work in the field for about 14 years both in Hong Kong China and also in Texas. So majority of the clients came to our self-assessed most are females. Honestly however rediscover that we find they are not the only victims. And we also find mutual violence and the males is a hidden part and some males came for it. It's really hard for them to share issues and stories because of the shame. So we realized that they do not come forward partly because they are concerned and there are no services available and nobody will listen to them and they feel helpless. I think this is an important social issue so that affect all people all family members. OK are there any statistics are there anything that gives us some idea of what the prevalence is right besides the personal experience in the practice. Actually I searched the fashion those statistics that relates to

one of my pallette studies. So based on the U.S. national statistics there's some projection number like every year about 800000 of men experienced rape or physical assault. This is a projection number and you put Jahshan and besides us. I also search around some other countries like Canada and UK for Canada. The number is as high as 500000 of men experienced spousal abuse for UK. Wow. This is huge. Two point seven million men experienced partner abuse. So this is not a little problem. Yeah this is not a single case. This is a social issue.

[00:05:55] I think as you pointed out a couple of your articles about it being hidden that it doesn't exist. Yes exactly. So you mentioned the pilot study and I would imagine there are some other studies that followed that so I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about your pilot study and how that went to inform your more elaborate work. This is really something I would love to share. These are the preliminary studies. I did a two pilot studies before the current one. I'm going to share. So the first one is related to an Internet search. I really want to know what services are available exclusively for male survivors or male victims of intimate partner abuse. So search on I throw difference of states go to different websites organizations and eventually what I found is there are only 19 male focused services and four shouters in the United States served male victims. And that has a lot of implications for me. Look at the numbers. Only 4 shoutings into not just days but when you look at the national numbers even though these are the projection number. How can we accomodate of male survivors. This is number one and not a study it's from the perspective of these service providers. I want to know from their service providers perspective that the men really come forward to approach them for services and also the helpfulness of the Sufis order issues or barriers experienced by men to seeking help. So what I found in this online survey based on the service providers. One fourth of the respondents the view that male victims do not utilize social services at all.

[00:07:48] And the barriers they addressed are related to shame and embarrassment denial stigmatization fear and the male victims feel that they are not the surface target and this officer is not for them. So because of these two pilot studies that really gave me a solid and some preliminary empirical data for me to conduct the current research. And that's one the target population is the male survivors is not the service providers. This time is that victims including the survivors. Let me just interrupt for a second because I do have a question and that is you spoke a little bit ago about there being 19 male focus groups. Now were those standalone services or were those services that were also I guess you could say did more traditional intimate partner violence services geared for women what they had a track or a component that dealt with men what a Fondas far refuse services address exclusive for men. I think it refers to the latter one that you mention is that intrude a component to serve men as well. OK so you've kind of got your preliminary studies done now. You're moving into a more formal or more extensive study. Can you talk a little bit about that. Yes sure. So my research question for the current study. So let me focus on two because I have number of different questions. The first one is about to what extent the existence surfaces being utilized by male victims and how helpful did exist in services for them. This one refers to the surface utilization and a second set of questions.

[00:09:35] Me first to to what extent are different helpers being approached by male victims and how helpful a difference Helper's for male victims. So does one refers to the helpers and I included both formal and informal helpers. The formal helpers include demand to health professionals doctors police and informal helpers family friends church and internet source. OK what were your outcomes. What kind of things that you're fine. Because I'm sure that palang that work you have some thoughts about where social work should go both from a research education practice perspective. So what kinds of things you're fine. Before I address the findings let me also state about the sample who will be included in this survey. Are the male victims that include a survivors who had experience abuse at least one or more forms of intimate partner abuse by their partner leaving the United States adults that means age 18 or above. So I use on my survey. I use a mixed

method that included quantitative and qualitative questions so some basic demographics so most were white followed by Hispanic and the mean age was 43 and most have female partners and over one third were divorced separated majority had children. And this is important to note here and then that would be Furbank majority had children and more than half achieved college graduate level or above most were employed pointing United States and there are non U.S. born respondents. One of the main findings refers to the surface utilization.

[00:11:27] You know what surfaces most popular in terms of conjuring digo surfaces Magico shouter may apply suffixes relate to substance abuse so dieser Domingue six types of services that are just so among these 6 type of surfaces consonant surfaces were most used and followed by legal services and the respondents indicated that concert services is a helpful surface. So I feel good as a social worker. However in terms of the Sufis helpfulness even though for cancelling honestly based on a five point scale this is the highest one. I still like to point out. Not even up to three out of five point scale. So it has implications for us as social workers. Definitely not the observation I think is important to share. It's about the substance abuse treatment. Interestingly it is perceived as the most helpful. Well I would say not most helpful is perceived that helpful among the male respondents however is the least popular. Do know why I'm listening here. Now I'm curious. Yes. I tried to find what happened and remember I have some quantitative data and then I check those data. If my quantitative information and found dead that might be related to the social stigmatization they find that this is useful. Substance Abuse Treatment. However because of the social stigmatization less likely to approach for the treatment and the other one is significant it is extremely helpful. Source of self-assessed that is just shouter. This is rated as one of the worst and I think based on the data it might be related to the discrimination and biases against male victims. I'm also wondering if the stigma might play a role in it also that people might feel like they are being looked down upon for moving out of or escaping a situation that many folks probably feel they should be able to manage. Oh yes some to some fondness they share. Well you just said. Yes. And one more observation.

[00:13:42] I think that it's important for the mental health or healthcare professionals that you know is about one in three respondents indicated the use of mental health and health services. And that may be related to because of the. For those you know who suffer from physical injury because of the negative consequences that they might approach the console systematical and health care professionals. So I think this is important that's fought back to coal and health care professionals to be sensitive and be aware of when they have this kind of screening questions when these male victims approached them and sometimes they will make some excuse oh I just you know because of spas because I play soccer. Yesterday I got those wounds and bruises but that might not be true. So it's very important that the mental health and health care professional to have the knowledge and the sensitivity to ask the questions for the male survivors. I think as well as the training I'm wondering how well trained are they. I mean we have screens that people may utilize but are they gender neutral. How would they rephrase the question. So they take gender out of it so that a person may be inclined to say OK they're asking about me. Right. Yeah exactly. Just something that is a sign notes but I think this is important to share. I remember a couple of years ago on the Martin fellowship alumna. So I went to Michoacan for a research training and unfortunately I suffered from hives and I needed emergency care. I read to that emergency care and I had to intake form you.

[00:15:23] Oh you know what I saw on the foam desk question screening question about massive Bowdens. I was surprised at the time I just asked a medical doctor. Hey as a doctor I'm a doctor a student at a time as a rabbi and working on this area. I really appreciate that you included this piece of important question in your intake form and I cannot include this forum into my dissertation as in the appendix to alert the field and people working to fill the mental health healthcare or social stuff is it organizations to be aware of this important piece and then he said of course why not. So I think that has implications for us as a social work professionals. Yes we currently have some social workers to work with medical students and there is a domestic violence question or questions and

you're making me think I have spoken with the medical students about making sure that they ask everyone as opposed to just singling out people who they think they ought to ask the question. Right. Right. Very good. And I saw some literature mentioned that police ask the same questions for Mayos. When we asked these questions for the female be gender inclusive. If you talk a bit about informal supports also Rhye. This is something very important besides the surfaces and that the findings refers to the helpers. Remember just mention there are 7 types. So 3 famo helpers including the mental health professionals police and medical doctors. So the research shows that male respondents prefer informal helpers than formal helpless and Armando's informal helpers and this source is the most popular. They prefer part of the reason because of anonymity.

[00:17:20] I think it's really hard for anybody including male female victims to dig the trauma and difficult experience for men I believe. I mean it's really difficult. So they mentioned that they prefer using the Internet and then some also mention some online support groups. Something that has implications for the practice. We have to explore the options of services for different genders besides internet is followed by family friends. However church I need to make a note here. Church is still least popular or least used or at least preferred. When I look at the qualitative data or some may not just want some male victims and mentioned that they feel like their rejection by some church people ministers because they think they're not sensitive to the issues. One of the male respondents was honest. Go back to talks to your wife. I think you'd just have to add just a little bit your communication Skewes. Something like that and the man feel like his question was not was not well addressed and it's not. Trust in that relationship. So that's why the guy did not go back to the church again. It is something it in the quantitative data almost sounds like some of the old advice that was given to women many many many years ago about how to manage or how to deal with a violent situation at home. It's like shifting responsibility to you to take care of or individual to take care of it and not to notice about the famo helpers. So again I mean the mental health professionals were ranked number one in terms of the helpfulness.

[00:19:04] So you feel good but there's not enough we need to work hard. But the least helpful in terms of the famo helpers to this. So it's very low out of the five Pasko is just one point Nice three as compared to the mental health professional. Three point zero is eight. So I think it's something that's their legal aid already to mental health professionals. We all have to be aware of the issues and that's why that also creates some barriers for the male victims to step forward and really want to share a little piece a couple of sentences that I cite from my qualitative data and actually that piece has been published as well. And I've got a publication on this research just last month April 28 2014 in social work. So I want to share this piece is a qualitative data that also revealed a hardship experienced by the male survivor. So this male respondents wanted to share about his sufferings and also concerns about how custody and finances in the process of seeking professional help. So here's what he said. It's hard for anyone to help my state's divorce and child custody lawyers make it impossible for me to initiate divorce as I would lose my daughter. Most of our assets and I'll be on the hook for alimony possibly for life if I seek help through mental health professionals doctors or the police. She would certainly divorce me and again I would lose everything I choose to stay in this relationship to be with my child and not be a financially Wolf. So this is a piece from connotative that I feel fairly from set. I feel trapped. He's trapped in a situation yes and very helpless.

[00:21:02] The reading from this individual the statement just brought something to mind for me. There is a kind of a format about thinking about intimate partner violence and call it the wheel of violence some people call the circle of violence that talked a number of different areas where individuals can experience intimate partner violence over and above physical violence things like intimidation privilege financial violence. I'm wondering if that kind of material came out in the work also. Yes. Regarding my research the definition of a Beal's refers to all forms of abuse including physical sexual psychological intricately verbal abuse in particular and also stalking

economic abuse. And I saw something new to me. It is from the qualitative data not just what interests me I remember about two to three main respondents mentioned the same term. They said this is a legal abuse because of child custody. They are very concerned about if I'm going to report who's going to be arrested. And they are very concerned about losing the child custody. They are no longer be the father. So this is the biggest concern. So they stuck. Rather they should report or not. Kind of takes me back to what you were talking about with law enforcement or with the police is this notion of two people fighting and obviously if two people are fighting the male can't be the victim of that and that some people have these preconceived ideas about how intimate partner violence plays out and what it looks like and your research is beginning to talk to us in the ways of saying it's not what you think and you really really need to reconsider that.

[00:22:46] So that I think that's really important. Just one or two more questions for you. I'd like to hear if there's something that you think we're social work ought to be thinking about and moving towards in order to address this in a more proactive in a more helpful way for not to reach traumatizing an individual who may be trying to deal with the already very traumatic situation. Yeah that's why we're here. That's why we're here. This is very important to address in terms of the practice implication. I think it's important for us as social work professionals educators researchers be gender sensitive be gender neutral. And I think we also need to encourage some besides some programs for females. We also need to decide some programs for male and should be male Fondy programs. This is very important I think both genders have a unique needs is different. So this is number one and number one is I think I mentioned about when I talk about the demographics. It impacts not just one ethnic groups. It's a fact. All ethnic groups. So I think it's important to identify and develop culture sensitive Protestants offices. And another one is a social worker I think the term because this is specifically for male survivors. I think there's something related to this socialization Trumps of the masculinity. Why don't they seek help to suddenly it is related to how men perceive seeking help. For some men seeking help is a weak this is a weakness. So I think it's important that they also relate to this as a challenge to the man's image.

[00:24:32] So I think it's important to reframe masculinity and social classes to practice across a research cross. I posed this question for student. How do we reframe must Kalena in a way that is more acceptable so that men feel more comfortable to share experience and we figured out. I think maybe this is part of her future research as well. So some students and we cocreator talk about instead of using the term help maybe we can use some term be more neutral like support. This is also seeking help or seeking support is a way of problem solving. It shows your courage to solve the problem not just for yourself but also for your family including in particular your children. This is something that men really concern. So we frame it in a way to give the energy to positive thinking and also demonstrate men's courage and their problem solving and this important. So I don't know maybe it's something that we can further investigate for future research how to reframe masculinity. Yes and when do we begin sending that message and how do we begin sending that message. I think you make a very good point I'm saying men who may be escaping these kinds of situations for their own children. How do you begin to reframe that term or those terms of the term masculinity or whatever you want to call it in a way that so that they have a different perception of what that looks like. And so that's a really basic.

[00:26:06] I think you're right I think it's a really basic idea about how do we rethink this whole term and that has implications for how support help whatever we want to call it gets conceptualized by the person who needs it. Exactly. I think you'll also remind me actually this research is not just limited to two heterosexual partners all couples. Actually this isn't a nationwide study and include heterosexual and homosexuals same sex partners. Wow. So that means in terms of masculinity or sexual intuition I think is something that we have to start exploring a future because the term masculinity might be different in the same sex partners. So I think this is important to be another focus for future research. And the one thing that you mentioned earlier is as petitioner I think we

need training very important and they said because of the ever changing demographics and the issue's complexity of the situation I think this is an ongoing and continuing education. Yeah the more I think about this or more I've considered this it becomes very apparent that there's a hole in what we do and how we train social workers who are coming out of school to be prepared in this area. I can't let you go without asking you. You talked a little bit about same sex partners in your research and I was wondering are the prevalence rates the same as far as we talk about intimate partner violence. Are the responses that individuals get from their environment very similar to what heterosexual partners experience. Yes this is a very good question. And based on the data about 10 percent are same sex partners. So majority heterosexual and they experience similar negative consequences in terms of physical psychological consequences. However I mean because a relatively small number of December size I think this is something that really alerts me for future research.

[00:28:08] I think we need to separate different sexual orientation so that we can address the unique needs and nothing when I look at some other studies and data and naturally they mention about the prevalence rate more or less the same. Well you've given us a wealth of information a wealth of things to think about and really consider for practice as well as education. I really want to thank you for your time and your energy and I look forward to reading some more about your work. I think this is work that most of us don't get a chance to read or don't think about reading but based upon what you've been able to study far it's something that we really need to be including in our work. You are very welcome. I really appreciate this opportunity. But before the end can I add something very important now. Koenig teaching social work research and also practice. So I think as a social work researcher and educator it's important to continue our research and also about expertise but at the same time is to incorporate empirical findings into teaching because it is important that we have to train up our social work students because they are the future practitioners. If we can't have this peche to help them to equip with this knowledge skills so that in the future they are looking to field to take and help more people in need. So this is how I always use my current research incorporated into my practice and also teaching so that they have to think about this current issue and that the thing is about the cultural competency that I want to emphasize because one doesn't fit all.

[00:29:46] So students need to be culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of different and diverse populations. And this is also what you know does iPass having them size contest really matters. We have to engage diversity in differences in practice. So I think something that I want my students to be aware of the difference needs of people from different backgrounds and this is a topic that a massive Bowdens against the victims because of the gender their ethnic backgrounds socio economic classes. Still they need treatment and support. And this is my conclusion. Well that's an excellent conclusion. Excellent way to leave this conversation and to leave this discussion. Thank you for your time and your energy and keep up your research because it is critical. Thank you. Thank you Charles I appreciate the opportunity to share the peppery you have been listening to Dr. Venus Tsui discuss male survivors of intimate partner abuse in social work. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth professor and dean of the University at Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history our programs and what we do we invite you to visit our Web site at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu.