

Community Leaders' Roles in Handling Women Victims of Domestic Violence

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ABSTRACT

Women victims of Domestic violence might experience high anxiety, prolonged depression and suicide attempts. The significant impacts are big challenges for nurses to work with community leaders and the government in handling domestic violence against women. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of community leaders in handling women victims of domestic violence in Indonesia. This qualitative study uses data collection with the *Focus Group Discussions* (FGD) method. Participants in this study were 12 community leaders. The study found that several parties involved in handling women victims of domestic violence include community leaders, religious leaders, and related agencies. Those who first handle domestic violence involve relevant stakeholders in a hierarchy and act as buffers or mediators. The results of this study indicate that the role of community leaders in handling women of domestic violence must be continuously improved so that women of domestic violence receive protection and support to improve coping mechanisms and adaptation.

Keywords: Social Support, Victims of Domestic Violence, Women

INTRODUCTION

According to UN Women, violence against women in the household is a global health problem. It is fatal to the physical, mental, sexual, and socio-economic health of women (2020). Physically impacted by pain and mentally can experience depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, difficulty sleeping, eating disorders, suicide attempts, and become addicted to alcohol WHO, 2013 in Węziak-Białowolska, Białowolski, & McNeely, (2020).

The problem of domestic violence is evident. The burden of domestic violence against women in the household based on the regional WHO working area as follows 37.7% Southeast Asia Region, 37.0% WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, 36.6% WHO Africa Region, 29.8% Americas Region, 25, 4% WHO European Region, 24.6% Western Pacific Region, and 23.2% occur in high-income countries(UN Women,2020). Furthermore, The cases of domestic violence against women in Indonesia are the most prominent cases in its classification, which increased drastically to reach 75%, namely 11,105 cases consisting of (1) Physical violence ranked first, which reached 4783 cases (43%), (2) Violence sexual violence, namely 2807 cases (25%), (3) psychological violence, namely 2056 cases (19%) and (4) economic violence (neglect), namely 1459 cases (13%) (Catahu, 2020).

The victims of domestic violence also experience mental health problems (Akyazi, S., Tabo, A., Guveli, H., ?Inem, M. C., & Oflaz, S, 2018). The mental health problems they might experience include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Bailey, K., Trevillion, K., & Gilchrist, G, 2019). Therefore, It is crucial to prevent or solve the problem of domestic violence in the community.

A community leader is believed to be able to handle the problem of domestic violence at the village level. In order to be able to explore the experience of community leaders in dealing with women victims of domestic violence, this research aims to explore how community leaders take their roles in handling women victims of domestic violence.

METHOD

This phenomenological design was conducted among community leaders in Aceh, Indonesia. The *Focus Group Discussions* (FGD) method was employed among key participants, which include Keuchik and Tgk. Imum. They are all the leaders at the village level who handle community social issues, including marriage and the problem that might come along with it. The number of participants in this study was 12 participants. Data analysis includes data reduction, data presentation stage, and verification – conclusion.

RESULTS

Any social problem occurred at the village or community level, usually the community leaders or religious leaders, who started handling domestic violence first. *Geuchiek*, the community figure who leads the village, is often found to be the first person to handle cases of domestic violence that occur in his village. The victims of domestic violence see *geuchiek* as the first place for complaints regarding domestic violence experienced by the female victim. *Geuchiek*, having received the report, summoned both parties to inquire chronologically and find the best solutions for the lives of women victims of domestic violence and their husbands. Following are the participant submissions:

“A woman came to me (and said) “sir, I am (having a problem (violence) like this”. Then, I asked for more information... If the woman does not want it anymore (with the husband), I call from the man’s side. That is how it usually happens. They just come to see me at my home and talk about their problem (P5F1).

Tgk. Imum, as a religious figure or a priest in society, is also often the person who starts handling cases of women victims of domestic violence. Women victims of domestic violence come to meet and complain about the incidents of domestic violence they have experienced, so the figure *Tgk. Imum* often takes the first step in handling cases of women victims of domestic violence. *Tgk. Imum* summons for the couple in conflict and looked for common ground to resolve problems with spiritual advice related to households. The following is what the participants said:

In my village, I have been a priest for 18 years. The villagers, the couple, often talk to me about their couple’s problems, usually about household conflicts. I gave them advice based on Islamic guidance to the couple. They listened to me, and some problems were solved, but sometimes tricky (to solve) (P7F2).

Besides *Geuchik* and *TgkImeum*, we also found that the Women’s Empowerment Service from the government had also been the initiator in handling women victims of domestic violence. This happened because the woman was embarrassed if she had to report the case of domestic violence she had experienced to the *geuchiek* or *Tgk. Imum*, afraid of being embarrassed by the village community and being slandered.

In this condition, the Women’s Empowerment Service cross-checked the case with the village community leaders of women who were victims of domestic violence, coordinated with the village and then returned

them to the village to be resolved at the village level.

“They did not immediately report to the Geuchik (about their household problems) but to the women’s empowerment service, and then back to the Geuchik until they have solution. Mediation (between the couple) also came with the Geuchik there” (P12F3)

Community leaders usually invite other stake holders to deal with women victims of violence. They refer the issue to a higher level If the mediation in the village is not successful or if the mediation is successful. However, there is a violation of the agreement. The primary purpose of this coordination is to improve all the conditions of the women victims of domestic violence themselves. The following are participant statements.

“What we have the authority to do is when it reaches the final stage in the village it doesn’t finish either, we give a letter to the KUA (religious office affair) which usually goes to the sharia court” (P1F1)

“So, I wrote this letter, you better write it to KUA, hand it over to KUA where did it go to Islamic sharia, I ask for help from KUA please mediate” (P3F1)

Involvement of Sharia Courts

When the violent case is complicated and cannot be solved at the village level, Geuchik and TgkImum usually coordinate with the sharia court to resolve cases. In this case, they are usually asked to provide evidence about the violence base on what they see or know. Here are the details of the conversation:

“I had once attended the city Sharia court as a witness. The couple wants a divorce, had mediated (at village level) but could not solve their problem, and thus taken to court, they want to divorce” (P11F3)

Involvement of the Women’s Empowerment Office

Village community leaders also involve the Women’s Empowerment Service in a situation where women who are victims of domestic violence report independently because requests for divorce at the village level are not facilitated, as in the case of unregistered marriages. The village and the Women’s Empowerment Service will present the consultants and religious and legal experts to the family. The women empowerment office plays a significant role when the community leaders cannot facilitate or resolve the couple’s problem. Here are the data details:

“If we don’t finish that, we will improve it again, we call it women’s empowerment and they will do (the facilitation)” (P1F1)

Role of the community leaders

Community leaders are entrusted by the community as wise parents in the village and become a place for women victims of domestic violence to tell and ask for help in wisely solving the domestic violence cases they experience. So that community leaders will carry out a mediation process with the husband who did the domestic violence to find the best solutions by considering all important aspects of life; for example, there are children. Etc. Here is the data:

“First we mediated together in the village, how did it go, we’re sorry. Suddenly we received an invitation from the child and women protection service, we were told to go there, there were people from the AB village who were victims of violence, even though we had mediated yesterday” (P1F5)

DISCUSSION

Community life in the village will be led by community leaders and religious leaders, who often become a place for the whole community to complain about their fate with various problems they face, one of which is the case of women victims of domestic violence. Not only that, related agencies, such as the Children's and Women's Empowerment Service, also play an important role as a place to start handling women's problems of domestic violence.

Research (Khalkoh et al., 2017) community leaders are people who have authority and much experience, so the community entrusts them by being given a unique social position as a leader within a time limit set by the state in which all problems the village, including domestic violence, the community trusts community leaders for the solution. Besides, the most common perpetrators of domestic violence are males (Bannister, M., & Moyi, E, 2019), and the male would obey more to other community leaders more than their families.

Community leaders involve other stakeholders, such as the KUA and the Sharia Court, if there is no common ground in dealing with women victims of domestic violence, such as women victims of domestic violence wanting a divorce. In some instances, such as to cover the embarrassment in their environment, women victims of domestic violence also go directly to the women's empowerment service asking for a solution. Community leaders come to the office's summons by involving the service in solving the problems of women victims of domestic violence. Furthermore, the community leader's role includes protecting women and children with medical, psychological, legal and shelter services and preventive by forming a task force to protect children and women (Puspitasari & Rodiyah, 2022). The community leaders can also act as an extension of the government at the village level in reducing domestic violence. (Elista et al., 2020). Therefore, the roles of community leaders are significant to the villagers.

CONCLUSION

Women victims of domestic violence experience problems both physically and psychologically. So, support is needed from the surrounding people and stakeholders. The positive impact of this support can improve coping and one's adaptation to life. It is hoped that community leaders will increase awareness by supporting women victims of domestic violence.

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