

***YOUNG WOMEN SPEAK OUT: THE IMPACT OF VICTIM  
BLAMING***

**Assistant Lecturer \ Danear Jabbar Abdul Kareem \ *General  
Directorate of Education in Diyala***

**Danearjabbar1990@yahoo.com**

**Lecturer \ Omar Najem Abdullah \ *University of Diyala - College of  
Administration & Economics***

**Omareconomics@uodiyala.edu.iq**

**Assistant Lecturer \ Ismail Khalaf Salih \ *General Directorate of  
Education in Anbar***

**Ismail\_19702000@yahoo.com**

**Abstract :**

No community around the world is unaffected by some kind of domestic violence. Malaysia, like any other nations around the world has their own share from domestic violence. This social issue brings the attention of the government, human rights and even writers that's why the phenomenon is being reflected in Malaysian Literature in English (MLE). Domestic violence is one of the major issues that still affect the society in general and women in specific which considered one of the reasons for the existence of some organisations defending women who suffered from this phenomenon. This paper intends to shed some lights on the constriction that hindered women to speak out their situation and defend themselves. As for this paper we choose victim blaming as one of the main aspects that add to women's abuse by hindering them to act without fearing of blaming and its consequences. Two of the short stories used for this particular paper which are "The Decision" by Janarthani Arumugam and "Raped...Or Not" by R K Boo. This paper will analyse the action of the two main female characters and how the society and concept of victim blaming is affecting them.

**Keywords:** domestic violence, abuse, victim blaming, speak out, Malaysian society.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Women are particularly the victims of some kind of violence around the world. World health organization carried out study in 35 countries and turned out that between 24 per cent and 53 of the women suffered and are physically abused in their life, a very large portion of that violence has been perpetrated by men who has an intimate relationship with the victims (1).

Violence can take many forms such as Physical assaults, Sexual assaults and Psychological assaults. Women and Health Learning Package defined domestic violence as the use of “Emotional, psychological, sexual or physical force by one family member or intimate partner to control another. Violent acts include verbal, emotional and physical intimidation; destruction of the victim’s possession, maiming or killing pets; threats; forced sex; and slapping, punching, kicking, choking, burning, stabbing, shooting and killing victims” (2).

Domestic violence yet exists very widely in the world. Malaysia is one of these countries that we can see traces of such violence in their society. As a result of that, it is reflected in its literature and for the same reason many organizations have been established. All Women’s Action Society (AWAM) is one of the organization that established in 1988 in Malaysia and its only goal is to improve the lives of women in Malaysia. They have three main areas of work; public education, legal reform and services for women in crisis.

AWAM published an anthology under *Young Women Speak* in 2007. The anthology consists of five poems and thirteen short stories written by the victims of domestic violence. The main purpose of this anthology was to create awareness about some issues of gender discrimination such as domestic violence, abuse and rape practiced by the men in the society. The writers of the anthology want to break down the stereotypes about women and encourage them to break the silence and defend themselves. Most of women say nothing to no one about their abusive partners and that is one of the reason domestic violence still accrued.

We are looking at the reasons why the victimized women do not speak and defend themselves. Even if they do, is that resistance leads to resolution? Therefore, this paper intends to shed some lights on the constriction that hindered women to speak out their situation and defend themselves. For this particular research we are looking at victim blaming as one of the reasons that affect women even aftermath the abusive relationship and also hindered other women to act without fearing of the blame and the consequences.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There are some reasons that domestic violence always being problematic. One of the reasons is that there is no clear given definition to it. For example, violence is an extreme and complex problem because of some effects such as geographical, ethnic and religious factors as well as the judgment that the definition had to carry for the victims and against the offender as stated by World Health Organization, Geneva:

Violence is an extremely diffuse and complex phenomenon. Defining it is not an exact science but a matter of judgment. Notions of what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of behavior and what constitutes harm, are culturally influenced and constantly under review as values and social norms evolve. (1)

Moreover, in criminal laws, domestic violence defined by Schechte & Edelson as “any criminal offense involving violence or physical harm or threat of violence or physical harm” (3) committed by one family or household member against another. Domestic violence also has many names: wife abuse, woman battery, marital assault, spouse abuse, wife beating, battering, partner abuse, and intimate violence. Moving on, UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) stated that:

“The United Nations and the ASEAN have issued their respective declarations on the elimination of violence against women. Eight of ten ASEAN countries have legislation on domestic violence. The phenomenon is however widespread in Asia as in other parts of the world. Legislation that lacks a comprehensive definition of domestic violence, laws that are gender-neutral, that do not clearly define domestic violence as a human rights violation, that do not judiciously combine penal sanctions with provisions for reconciliation and that lack provisions for prevention and robust and accessible remedies, contribute to continued prevalence.” (4)

The countries in ASEAN region issued domestic violence as a violation of human rights and to incorporate international standards into domestic legislation. Eight of the countries in the ASEAN region have enacted special laws and provisions on domestic violence. The only two countries have not any laws on the issue are Myanmar and Brunei

Darussalam. The first country to pass a law in ASEAN region was Malaysia in 1994.

A special committee on 1989 was created and is composed of Women's Aid Organization (WAO), the Association of Women Lawyers, All Women's Action Society and some other groups of societies to discuss, find out and enact new legislation for domestic violence. Officers from Royal Malaysian Police (RMP) were invited to the discussion concerning the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators. This enabled the RMP to contribute and played a major role in enacting the Act of 1994. (4)

The Domestic Violence Act 1994 was a great and positive point to reduce or end women's oppression because it was designed to grant both criminal and civil remedies for the survivors of domestic violence, irrespective of race, religion, cultural and family background differences. Problematic of defining domestic violence helps this phenomenon to increase, according to the statistics by Royal Malaysian Police (2008) states that domestic violence cases increased by 47% from 2555 cases in 2003 to 3756 cases in 2007. (5)

One of the reasons for increasing the cases of domestic violence despite the Domestic Violence Act 1994 is that this type of violence had a historic roots and it exists in most of the societies (6, 7, 8). The socio-cultural beliefs also has a very big influence on violence against women by upholding a widely shared values, beliefs and myths associated with gender violence, and the general relationships between women and men (9).

Understanding domestic violence is very important to understand how people behave towards the perpetrators and the victims (10). Usually the attitudes are often blaming the victims, therefore the perpetrator is exonerating and their acts and behaviour is justified (11). Furthermore, the tendency of exonerating the perpetrator and blaming the victim is far greater when the women doesn't act according to the traditional role and challenges male's position in the relationship (12).

Attitudes toward victim blaming act is based on misunderstanding of others which leads to believe that the victim deserves what happened to them (13). Therefore this phenomenon has not been taking seriously when the victim is hold responsible for the assaults that they have gone through. The victim blaming can be seen as a form of 'negative social responses'

from medical, legal and mental health point of view. Also from the family members and media and other associates (14).

When the victim of any kind of domestic violence act is held responsible for the harm, trauma and family separation that they are going through entirely or partially that leads other women with similar issues to stop acting and defending themselves. Thus, the idea of victim blaming in the society could be considered as an act of hindering women to speak out and ask for their right and try to overcome the abusive relationship that they are living in.

Therefore, this paper dealing with victim blaming as additional burden on women's shoulder which affects their wellbeing even after they act and end the abusive relationship that they are going through. For this particular research we chose two short stories from the anthology *Young Women Speak out* which are "The Decision" by Janarthani Arumugam and "Raped...Or Not" by R K Boo. This paper looks at domestic violence acts in the two chosen stories and how the society look at their actions. Furthermore, this paper looks at the act of victim blaming by the society, family and how it affects the victim aftermath the incidents and how that affect later women who want to follow their footsteps.

### 3. DISCUSSION

In order to further support the main arguments that the victim blaming is one of the reason for the domestic violence to exist and also to hindered women to flee the abusive relationship two short stories has been chosen from Alina Rastam's anthology *Young Women Speaks Out*.

#### 3.1 "THE DECISION" BY JANARTHANI ARUMUGAM

Janarthani Arumugam recollects the story of her own mother's *Decision to leave her* abusive husband. She narrates the story from child's perspective who witnesses all kind of violence and abuse by her father toward the mother. Besides, she also highlights how the society was blaming her mother to drive her husband away by doing that she did not respect and break the traditions. It was a norm that the husband beats the wife and the children as she said "it was the way of the world. I saw it happens often enough in the Tamil movie" (15)

Through the event Arumugam describes how her mother endures the beating and all kind of insults from her father for trivial reasons:

I have seen him hit my mother repeatedly over the years. The littlest things set him off – a dish that was too salty for his taste, excess food, lousy report cards, and messy rooms. My mother always held back, immobilized by his unleashed madness. He would rain blows on her and she would cower in pain and shame, humiliated before her children and humbled by his brute force (15).

The mother knew that she was a victim of domestic violence but what prevented her from acting was the society. The tradition of being a shame to report your husband to police or any organization for help takes her along time before she decides to defend herself and the children. Arumugam's mother after a long time she decides to resist against the oppression that been through over years and ask for her right in life to be free and live the life in decent way:

In 1989, when I was 15, my mother made the most important decision in our lives. This decision probably saved our collective sanity and delivered us from our father. After a particularly violent and vicious beating, she made a police report against my father (15).

Arumugam's mother decision by making a public statement against her husband changes her life for better. The family became free and there is no more violence act and abuse around all that because of the mother's courage to speak out and break the chain of cultural ideology. What she did was great to her and the children because there is no more oppression and abuse around but unfortunately the society seems had a different interpreting to the incident. It was not something ok for women to report her own husband to the police or court, that why Arumugam said that everyone blamed my mother for driving my father away:

Everyone chastised my mother for driving away her husband. To them my mother was an ingrate who had no respect for tradition. According to them, no women had done such a thing before. It was the norm for women to be beaten by their husbands, why did she have to overreact with a court order? Everyone advised her to repent. We experienced the collective judgment of a town bent on keeping my mother in line. (15)

We can realize that not only the husband was the problem. The cultural context also participates and helps in one way or another for creating such kind of abuse and oppression. The cultural beliefs in certain society

somehow restrict and make it more difficult for the women to resist while everyone would accuse her and blame her to be wrong. Even though, Arumugam's mother is brave and she overcomes her husband's oppression and cultural beliefs also. By doing that she creates a sweet and safe life for her and her family. So we can conclude from that the act and resistance will definitely help to overcome the oppression.

### 3.2 "RAPED...OR NOT" BY R K BOO

The author talks about date rape in the story "Raped...Or Not?" The story is about a girl named Eve Chang. She was raped by her fresh boyfriend Rob, after both of them had some alcohol and later he invites her to his apartment. Eve resists Rob's advances and pushed his hands away and tries to get up but he gripped her from behind and starts to remove her clothes while she was screaming and begging him to stop, but without any avail:

The images refused to melt away, filling her mind with nightmarish vividness. Strong hands ripping at her thin silk blouse, pushing her miniskirt roughly up to her waist. "No, Rob... please, don't do this..." Cries falling on ears deaf to everything else but the call for the fulfilment of his vicious desires. Pink panties ripped off with animal hunger. She had tried to get away, push him off. Anything to stop the desecration of her body. But her limbs, weakened by the toxic alcohol coursing through her body, failed to exercise the anger and desperation within her. (16).

In addition to the rape, society and the family was blaming her for what happened, when the police wrote the report they asked her "What were you doing in his house so late at night, eh? Wearing such a short skirt, too. Just asking for it" (16). It is obvious that the police as a part of the society blaming her for being raped because of the way she dressed.

Moving on, even her own friends and family blamed her for the incident, her friends offer flowers of sympathy embedded with blames, one of them asks her " why on earth did you follow him back to his place?" and "see where drinking landed you" (16). Worst of all even her own mother joining in throwing the blame on her by saying why you go back with him to his apartment and why you didn't listen to my advice as she told her in the hospital after the attack:

This could be avoided- if you only took my advice and had not gone back to his place alone, after drinking alcohol, at that. You know

how guys are – always thinking with their brain downstairs. You should have prepared yourself. Avoid such situations. Guys can't control themselves. It's the girl who draws the line (16).

What made the matter worse, when Eve was walking out of the lawyer's office, she picked up a newspaper and suddenly she saw a picture of her beside a picture of another young women. The reading headline: *Clubber and Church-Goer Raped!* Made her angry because of the way media highlights her dresses, and her engaging in the club and drink. Thus, the media contributes in making her labelled as "cheap" and deserve what happened to her especially when they compared her with another girl who is raped on her way to church.

Eve was so sad and disappointed because she knew that she is the victim of date rape even the society sees it otherwise. Eventually, she set up a support group for date rape survivors after the friends and the family left her to continue with her life. She became brave enough to convert her unforgettable experience to give a lesson and help other women in the same situation. In last, it is obvious that her way of resisting the stereotypical society was creating this support group to help other and make her better and brave person who never gives up her rights.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In short, domestic violence still accrued worldwide for many reasons. In some countries there is no clear law against domestic violence and in others there is, but the society hider it from working. Malaysia has come a long way in addressing domestic violence and passed a law in 1994 to be one of the first ASIAN country to pass the law. Yet that didn't help much and instead of reducing the cases of domestic violence, it increased by 47% in 2007. Defining this phenomenon was not clear that creates a gap and leads to increase the assaults. In addition to that, other reasons became the additional factors for existing domestic violence like some cultural and traditional beliefs. On cultural level, the victim blaming is one of causes that might help domestic violence to exist till today.

The writers in both stories successfully elaborated and delivered their main points through the events of stories about issues of domestic violence and abuse on women in Malaysian society. The main characters were able to break the silence which helped and motivated the abused women and children to speak out and ask for their rights as human being. In

addition, traces of victim blaming exist in both stories. In the first story “The Decision” by Janarthani Arumugam, the victim to be blamed by the society because she reported her husband to the police while in the second story “Raped...Or Not” by R K Boo, the victim was blamed for the rape that happened to her by her own family, friends and police. As a result, victim blaming might be an additional factor that hindered women to speak out and ask for help.

#### LIST OF CITATION

1. World Health Organization (2005). *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women*. Geneva: World Health Organization. Page 2
2. Ja'afar, Rogayah. Abdul Rahi, Zaleha. Ahmad, Zulkifli. Ismail, Zalina. (2006). *VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. Women and Health Learning Package*. Available: [http://www.the-networktufh.org/sites/default/files/attachments/basic\\_pages/WHLP%20Nutrition.pdf](http://www.the-networktufh.org/sites/default/files/attachments/basic_pages/WHLP%20Nutrition.pdf). Page 4
3. Schechte, Susan. Edelson, Jeffrey. (1999). *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice* (Reno, NV: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 122-123. Page 1
4. Initiative, L. C. W. s. R., & Women, U. N. D. F. f. (2009). *Domestic Violence Legislation and Its Implementation: An Analysis for ASEAN Countries Based on International Standards and Good Practices*: United Nations Development Fund for Women UNIFEM. Page 9
5. Malaysian Royal of Police Report. (2008). *Statistics of Domestic Violence*.
6. Straus, M. A. (2006). *Future research on gender symmetry in physical assaults on partners*. *Violence Against Women*, 12, 1086-1097. doi:10.1177/1077801206293335. Page
7. Vieraitis, L. M., Brito, S., & Kovandzic, T. V. (2007). *The impact of women's status and gender inequality on female homicide victimization rates: Evidence from U.S. Counties*. *Feminist Criminology*, 2, 57-73. doi:10.1177/1557085106294187.
8. Yoshioka, M. R., Dinoia, J., & Ullah, K. (2001). *Attitudes toward marital violence: An examination of four Asian communities*. *Violence Against Women*, 7, 900-926. doi:10.1177/10778010-122182820.
9. Bhanot, S., & Senn, Y. (2007). *Attitudes towards violence against women in men of south Asian ancestry: Are acculturation and gender role*

- attitudes important factors?* Journal of Family Violence, 22, 25-31.  
doi:10.1007/s10896-006-9060-0
10. Gracia, E., García, F., & Lila, M. (2009). *Public responses to intimate partner violence against women: The influence of perceived severity and personal responsibility*. The Spanish Journal of Psychology, 12, 648-656.
  11. Yamawaki, N., Darby, R., & Queiroz, A. (2007). *The moderating roles of ambivalent sexism: The influence of power status on perception of rape victim and rapist*. The Journal of Social Psychology, 147, 41-56.  
doi:10.3200/SOCP.147.1.41-56
  12. Valor-Segura, I., Expósito, F., & Moya, M. (2011). *Victim Blaming and Exoneration of the Perpetrator in Domestic Violence: The Role of Beliefs in a Just World and Ambivalent Sexism*. The Spanish Journal of Psychology, 14(1), 195-206. doi:10.5209/rev\_SJOP.2011.v14.n1.17
  13. Coates, L., Richardson, C., & Wade, A. (2006, May). *Reshaping Responses to Victims of Violent Crime*. Presented at Cowichan Bay, B.C., Canada.
  14. Henning, K., & Holdford, R. (2006). *Minimization, Denial, and Victim Blaming by Batterers: How Much Does the Truth Matter?* Criminal Justice and Behaviour, 33 (1), 110-130.
  15. Arumugam, J. (2007). The decision. In Alina Rastam (Ed.), *Young women speak out: A collection of writings by the participants of AWAM's writers for women's rights Programme* (pp. 9-14). Selangor: All Women's Action Society.
  16. Boo, R. K. (2007). Raped... or not. In Alina Rastam (Ed.), *Young women speak out: A collection of writings by the participants of AWAM's writers for women's rights Programme* (pp. 17-29). Selangor: All Women's Action Society.

## REFERENCES

1. Arumugam, J. (2007). The decision. In Alina Rastam (Ed.), *Young women speak out: A collection of writings by the participants of AWAM's writers for women's rights Programme*. Selangor: All Women's Action Society.
2. Bhanot, S., & Senn, Y. (2007). *Attitudes towards violence against women in men of south Asian ancestry: Are acculturation and gender role attitudes important factors?* Journal of Family Violence, 22, 25-31.  
doi:10.1007/s10896-006-9060-0.
3. Boo, R. K. (2007). Raped... or not. In Alina Rastam (Ed.), *Young women speak out: A collection of writings by the participants of AWAM's writers for women's rights Programme*. Selangor: All Women's Action Society.

4. Coates, L., Richardson, C., & Wade, A. (2006, May). *Reshaping Responses to Victims of Violent Crime*. Presented at Cowichan Bay, B.C., Canada.
5. Gracia, E., García, F., & Lila, M. (2009). *Public responses to intimate partner violence against women: The influence of perceived severity and personal responsibility*. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 12, 648-656.
6. Henning, K., & Holdford, R. (2006). *Minimization, Denial, and Victim Blaming by Batterers: How Much Does the Truth Matter?* *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, 33 (1), 110-130.
7. Initiative, L. C. W. s. R., & Women, U. N. D. F. f. (2009). *Domestic Violence Legislation and Its Implementation: An Analysis for ASEAN Countries Based on International Standards and Good Practices*: United Nations Development Fund for Women UNIFEM.
8. Ja'afar, Rogayah. Abdul Rahi, Zaleha. Ahmad, Zulkifli. Ismail, Zalina. (2006). *VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN. Women and Health Learning Package*. Available: [http://www.the-networktufh.org/sites/default/files/attachments/basic\\_pages/WHLP%20Nutrition.pdf](http://www.the-networktufh.org/sites/default/files/attachments/basic_pages/WHLP%20Nutrition.pdf).
9. Malaysian Royal of Police Report. (2008). *Statistics of Domestic Violence*.
10. Schechte, Susan. Edelson, Jeffrey. (1999). *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice* (Reno, NV: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, 122-123).
11. Straus, M. A. (2006). *Future research on gender symmetry in physical assaults on partners*. *Violence Against Women*, 12, 1086-1097. doi:10.1177/1077801206293335.
12. Valor-Segura, I., Expósito, F., & Moya, M. (2011). *Victim Blaming and Exoneration of the Perpetrator in Domestic Violence: The Role of Beliefs in a Just World and Ambivalent Sexism*. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 14(1), 195-206. doi:10.5209/rev\_SJOP.2011.v14.n1.17.
13. Vieraitis, L. M., Brito, S., & Kovandzic, T. V. (2007). *The impact of women's status and gender inequality on female homicide victimization rates: Evidence from U.S. Counties*. *Feminist Criminology*, 2, 57-73. doi:10.1177/1557085106294187.
14. World Health Organization (2005). *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
15. Yamawaki, N., Darby, R., & Queiroz, A. (2007). *The moderating roles of ambivalent sexism: The influence of power status on perception of rape*

مجلة أبحاث في العلوم التربوية والإنسانية والآداب واللغات، المجلد 02 العدد 07 بتاريخ 2021/08/01م

ISSN: 2708-4663 DNNLD :2020-3/1128

*victim and rapist*. The Journal of Social Psychology, 147, 41-56.  
doi:10.3200/SOCP.147.1.41-56.

16. Yoshioka, M. R., Dinoia, J., & Ullah, K. (2001). *Attitudes toward marital violence: An examination of four Asian communities*. Violence Against Women, 7, 900-926. doi:10. 1177/10778010122182820.