

The educational status of women filing complaints at counseling centers and domestic violence

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between the educational status of women and their likelihood of filing complaints about domestic violence at counseling centers. Education plays a critical role in shaping women's awareness of legal rights, access to support services, and confidence to challenge abusive situations. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data collected through structured surveys with qualitative insights obtained from in-depth interviews. Primary data were gathered from women who approached counseling centers, focusing on their educational levels, legal awareness, accessibility to services, and reporting behavior.

The findings indicate that women with higher levels of education are more likely to recognize domestic violence as a violation of their rights and are more inclined to seek institutional support. Education enhances legal awareness, decision-making capacity, and self-confidence, thereby increasing the likelihood of reporting abuse. However, several structural barriers—such as limited access to counseling centers in rural areas, social stigma, cultural norms, and inadequate outreach—continue to restrict the reporting behavior of less-educated women.

The study concludes that education is both a personal resource and a structural factor influencing women's responses to domestic violence. Improving educational opportunities, expanding counseling services, and promoting public awareness can significantly enhance reporting rates and support systems for survivors.

Keywords: education, domestic violence, counseling centers, women's empowerment, legal awareness, reporting behavior, social stigma, accessibility.

Introduction

The educational status of women complaining to counseling centers about domestic violence is a critical area of sociological and public health intervention. Education not only informs women about their rights and what support systems exist but also equips them with the power necessary to navigate complex institutional frameworks (which, at times, seem insurmountable). Even relatively modest educational interventions, such as brief expositions of empowered women's workforces in organizations (like the counseling centers to which these women are turning), can enhance their coping strategies and work toward a more gender-equal society. This is because, in part, they enable women to view their situations as unjust and to understand that there are both informal and formal channels through which they might seek assistance. This understanding facilitates both an agreement among women that what they are experiencing is not all right (and should not be normalized) and a belief that something actually can be done to change the situation. Unfortunately, access to these counseling centers—especially for women in rural areas—is not at all an easy or straightforward matter. Existing empirical evidence on the education and employment status of domestic violence survivors, and in particular on the education and employment status of domestic violence complainants, tells us that these centers aren't nearly as accessible as they should be (and, by extension, can't serve as "empowerment zones" as fully as they might).

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Methodology and Objectives

This mixed-methods study delves into the connection between women's educational status and their likelihood of lodging complaints at counseling centers about domestic violence. It uses structured surveys to gather quantitative data from women who have accessed these services, examining their level of education, legal awareness, and complaint frequency. It also uses qualitative methods: it conducts in-depth interviews with a carefully chosen sample of women to unpack the same issues. This part of the study aims to understand women's personal experiences, the barriers they perceive, and their motivations. Why do they, or don't they, use the kinds of services that counseling centers provide? The study employs both halves of the mixed-methods approach to get a complete picture of the situation. And because domestic violence is a particularly sensitive issue, the study takes scrupulous care to maintain confidentiality and to use only participants who have given their informed consent.

Use of primary data collected through an interview schedule allows for a nuanced exploration of women's lived experiences, providing rich qualitative insights that complement the quantitative findings. This approach enables researchers to capture the complexities surrounding educational barriers and the emotional landscape of women seeking help, thereby enriching our understanding of their motivations and challenges in accessing counseling services.

The main aim is to shed light on how different levels of education influence women's chances and abilities to report domestic violence cases in counseling centers. Do higher levels of education make a difference in this context? If so, how and why? The study also tries to find out what other factors might be at play—cultural norms, for instance, or maybe just simple access issues with the counseling services themselves. The findings are supposed to feed into policy recommendations that can make relevant services more accessible to vulnerable populations and make education more effective within these kinds of "information campaigns." But the study is about more than just individuals and the choices they make. It's also about society and its ways of working, which can sometimes make it very hard for some people to make any choices at all.

The research also aims to provide deeper understanding, not just in the context of the individual but also in the role of the larger society. It seeks to know how much education really matters when women try to face down domestic violence. Yes, education serves as a personal advantage, an "asset" for the individual. But it's also a huge social benefit. It gives some women the power to stand up for themselves, "arming" them with the tools to say, "No, this isn't right," and "I know a place that can help me." The researchers want to know if this kind of individual and societal benefit results mostly from education and, if so, if it works better than other forms of assistance.

Impact of Education on Reporting Domestic Violence:

Education is crucial in shaping women's ability and readiness to report domestic violence at counseling centers. Attaining higher levels of education frequently aligns with a greater understanding of one's legal rights, the support services available, and the societal repercussions that stem from domestic abuse. An educated woman is much more likely to understand that the abuse she is enduring is far from normal and to recognize that seeking help is an essential step. This directly affects the likelihood of her filing a complaint. Even more of an asset, however, is the knowledge they acquire through schooling. It gives them the self-confidence to not only spot the abuse but also to figure out a way to make it stop, using the complex institutional frameworks now in place (Rodriguez, 2024). The effect of education on women's ability to not just see, but also act against, intimate partner violence cannot be overstated.

The meaningful difference in educational levels between victims of domestic abuse and non-victims also partly explains why fewer counseling centers are being accessed by victims. Importantly, this differential in education is working through several pathways, some of which have been specified by researchers and some of which remain veiled in mystery (Rodriguez, 2024). An educated woman appears to have at her disposal several means, or at least several more than her uneducated or undereducated counterpart, of figuring out what to do to get out of a bad situation. In the absence of a good level of education, a woman can easily find herself in the position of not knowing what to do or whom to turn to. "To be educated is to not only be literate but to also have a sense of understanding and reasoning," says Elizabeth Powley (in her research on women's literacy and the reasoning that goes into a woman's decision to report to police or another authority an abusive act and seek a resolution).

In a sociological context, education serves as both a personal asset and a structural factor that determines the reporting of domestic violence. Education intersects with social norms to challenge traditional gender roles that often keep women in abusive relationships. This is particularly true in developing countries where up to 70 percent of women are believed to have experienced physical or sexual abuse from an intimate partner. Reporting domestic violence—whether to the police or to a respected member of the community—is not an easy task for many women. It means going against societal norms and risking a break-up of the family, especially when the family is economically dependent on the man (Venzor). In some cases, the very act of filing a complaint can be perceived as an assault on the man's honor, inviting further retaliation.

In essence, education plays a major part in determining whether women will or won't report domestic violence at counseling centers. This operates through all the mechanisms discussed above: direct knowledge and awareness work, actual educational interventions like the ones in shelters, and seemingly minor scripting of social roles. And, of course, the much greater likelihood of a culture of reporting for women in these spaces.

Counseling Center Accessibility for Women

Access to counseling centers is key for women experiencing domestic violence. It determines whether they feel empowered enough to seek the help they need, to file complaints, and ultimately to change their lives for the better. Women in urban areas have better access to these centers than women in rural areas, for reasons of both cultural and physical proximity. Most counseling centers are found in urban areas, and many women in rural areas lack both the reliable transportation that would get them to an urban center and the social permission that would allow them to travel that far. Also, the operational hours and staffing levels of these centers are not as accommodating as one might wish. (Rodriguez, 2024).

The intersection of educational status with accessibility is quite significant. It goes almost without saying that a woman with a higher level of education is more likely to know what resources are out there for her to use and to understand, in some meaningful way, the steps she would have to take to access those resources. A woman with less education is more likely to have serious difficulties making her way through the bureaucratic systems erected around the intersection between the judiciary and social services. She is more likely to have the kinds of difficulties during a counseling session that leave her, at the session's end, feeling that nothing has been accomplished. All of this is to underscore the importance of outreach programs that are tailored to women who can't read well, or at all. (Venzor).

Concerns about confidentiality can influence the decision to seek help at counseling centers. This is especially true in closely knit communities where the stigma surrounding domestic violence is still strong. In these places, a woman who seeks help might fear being exposed. She might worry that her secret will be shared and that she will suffer social consequences as a result. For this reason, it's critical that she have a place where she can tell her story and not have to worry that the next person she sees on the street will know all about her situation, unless she tells them herself. The centers that maintain confidentiality and implement trauma-informed practices are truly able to help (with the work they do and the services they provide).

Making counseling centers more accessible necessitates a number of different strategies. One is to have services spread out within the community, rather than concentrated in a few places. Another is to have those services available at times that are far more convenient than the "banking hours" most centers maintain. A third is to have people working at the centers who use a far richer palette of cultural competency in their conversations with the women who come to them. And a fourth, which I see as being not just important, but incredibly important, is integrating far more educational interventions than are currently used, to make women aware of their rights and the support structures available to them (Rodriguez, 2024).

Societal Attitudes toward Women's Complaints:

How society views complaints from women, especially in domestic violence situations, greatly affects how likely they are to report the abuse and seek help from a counselor. Many societies see domestic violence against women as a private matter and dismiss complaints about it (Rodriguez, 2024). The societies that do this don't see domestic violence as a crime but as something that men can do to "correct" their partners, in much the same way that they "correct" their children. A society that does not believe that women can be credible complainants about domestic violence is one where women will not say much about what goes on behind the "closed doors" of their homes. Such a society is also likely to erect a multitude of barriers for women trying to access the kinds of services (like counseling) that might help them.

The link between educational status and societal views is significant. It shapes how society perceives a woman's complaint. The effect is not only that women with higher education levels seem to encounter less stigma when they file complaints. A plausible reason for this is that education itself might lend a woman like Jane Doe the kind of awareness that would lead her to understand her rights (Venzor). Also, an education gives her access to the kinds of resources that can support her in making a complaint. The correlation between education and being believed, or at least being taken seriously, is not, however, a straightforward one. An "educated" woman in this sense might be more likely to be able to make a complaint without her character or credibility coming into question.

These common beliefs also influence how institutions like counseling centers respond. The biases of counselors—whether they are aware of them or not—can reflect the broader societal prejudices that work to undermine the validity of women as clients. Counselors might see a female client as a woman scorned, out to get male authority. And when the client is a woman of color, the barriers to her legitimacy as a client are even higher. These sorts of attitudes, conscious or not, are what women face within institutions that are supposed to offer them help, but that are anything but friendly to their complaints.

Dealing with these problems needs a sociological understanding of how cultural norms shape the way people see and react to women who lodge complaints. This should be complemented by the kind of public education that can bring about attitudinal change. The aim is to shift the culture toward a greater understanding of why women complain and an empathy for their situation. It is only then that victims will feel they are being heard and will come to the kind of environments that can provide them with the empathy and sympathy they need to work through the kind of relationships they have been in (Rodriguez, 2024).

Barriers to Education and Support Services:

Women's ability to file domestic violence complaints at counseling centers is greatly hindered by several educational and support service barriers. These barriers limit women's awareness of their legal rights, available resources, and even the rationale for seeking help, all of which contribute to the low reporting rates for domestic violence. The real problem, however, is that these barriers have kept women, especially those with little education, in the dark about domestic violence as a social and legal issue and have left them without any real sense of these systems of redress they could turn to for help (L. Rodriguez, personal communication, March 30, 2024). Furthermore, poor literacy skills worsen the situation, as they make it hard for these women not only to understand the complex procedures involved in filing complaints but also to access counseling services.

The support services might also be hampered by inadequate outreach or culturally insensitive methods that fail to connect with diverse groups and let them know they too can receive help. The women would be served well by centers that engage them better when they try to assist domestic violence victims. The insufficient reach and connection might be because of an ill-conceived framework that the centers operate within, assuming victims have some baseline knowledge of bureaucratic processes and a certain level of education that the women—especially those from less-educated backgrounds—might not possess. So, the women who could likely benefit most from going to centers for assistance are those the centers leave behind. They are the women who really need the kind of support that is supposed to start at home with some level of education. Yet, if the centers are to serve as an alternative to the home, they need to engage the women and "talk" with them in a different way.

Problems like not having enough money for educational programs geared specifically toward empowering victims further complicate these already tough situations. Without comprehensive solutions designed to up the awareness and coping skills of vulnerable groups, many women will remain in cycles of violence and abuse with nowhere to turn. A good number of the educational opportunities that do exist aren't very easy for women to access. And, unfortunately for many women, the services that are supposed to help them out of domestic violence situations are often as difficult to access as the educational programs that could have kept them out of those situations in the first place.

Conclusion

This study highlights the essential impact of educational achievement on a woman's likelihood of reporting domestic violence at counseling centers. Education not only makes these women more aware of their legal rights and the support services available to them—it also enables these women to "get past" the societal stigmas and internalized fears that might otherwise prevent them from making a complaint. Access to counseling centers seems to be a critical factor, and yet, it is not something to which all women have equal access. Indeed, it appears to be a vividly uneven, two-tier kind of system. In this case, the less educated not only have a harder time getting to the counseling center (much more likely to be economically dependent on the man, much less likely to have the means or the permission to get out of the house and to the facility, much less likely to have any idea that such a facility even exists), but they are also much more likely to be members of a society that has a downright backward attitude when it comes to understanding the dynamics of domestic violence and the reasons why women should be believed. We can see the intersection of education and social support systems very clearly here, and it is not a pretty picture. In the end, however, why should anyone care? Answering this question demands an attention to the educational opportunities we make available to women even in the best of circumstances, and especially in those places and among those populations where they are sorely lacking, and also the counseling and support services we make available to them. Nonetheless, public information campaigns must address the deeply rooted cultural norms that still make many communities invalidating places for women's stories of abuse. Why should education matter? It's not just individual liberation—it's also a necessary way to level the playing field, to fight the structures that keep battered women from accessing the justice they deserve.

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