



MWIA CASE STUDIES

CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Case 26: Dowry Harrasment and Domestic Violence in India

Objective

- To demonstrate how cultural practices, in this case the expectation by a groom's family of a dowry can become implicated in domestic violence.

Narrative Case

I would like to share a story with you today, a story of a brave girl Sujata and her amazing father who would do anything for his beloved daughter. Sujata was a bright girl studying to be a Medical Doctor. Her parents, both doctors, proud of her achievements were looking for a prospective groom with similar educational pursuits. Marriages in India are still arranged by parents even for educated children. They eventually found such a boy. The wedding was done lavishly by Sujata's father. Her parents were sad to see their beloved daughter depart for her in-laws home, but were also very happy that the groom's family did not want any dowry.

Sujata was also happy with her marriage. Her husband Suresh was also doing his post graduate studies after his MBBS. Rituals, poojas and wedding reception in Suresh's hometown was done. After a month or so Sujata joined her PG course in Suresh's hometown. Everything seemed to fit in so well.

A few weeks later Sujata asked her in-laws about visiting her parents. They readily accepted. Her father-in law asked her to come and meet him on the eve of her departure. He asked her to get a substantial sum of money from her father, so that Sujata and Suresh could open a new hospital. Sujata was shocked to hear this. She was also infuriated. She did not say anything and walked away. She spoke to Suresh later in the day, expecting that at least he would reject the idea. But she was devastated when he agreed with his father. Suresh said "Your dad is a very busy doctor with a flourishing practice, so what's wrong if he

gives some money to his daughter for her professional ventures." Sujata flatly refused to ask her parents for money.

From this point her torture began. Sujata's in-laws and Suresh took away her cell phone and locked her in a room at the corner of the house. She was occasionally given food for sustenance. Whenever Sujata's parents called, they were told that Sujata has gone to the hospital. When her friends and colleagues came and called, Sujata's in-laws started accusing Sujata about her bad character and complained about their lack of knowledge of her whereabouts.

Her worried parents were frantically calling Sujata's marital house. When they couldn't get any news of Sujata, they started calling her friends and colleagues. NO ONE knew where Sujata was.

So her enraged father spoke to one of his very close friends who was a Senior Police Inspector. Sujata's Father along with the Inspector in civil dress visited her marital home. As guests, they were given a warm welcome. Sujata's In-laws behaved as if everything was normal. When asked about Sujata, they started accusing her father saying his daughter never told them where she went and whom she went with. Dr. Patil, Sujata's father, lost his temper and frantically started searching every room in the house, fearing for the life of his daughter. He finally heard his daughter's voice coming from a small room in the corner. He broke the lock and took his daughter home with him without another backward glance.

Next day Sujata's In-laws and husband started calling up saying they didn't mean any harm and they were sorry. How could they let the hen who would lay golden eggs go? But Dr. Patil refused to forgive the people who had hurt his daughter so badly. The day after that Suresh departed for Sujata's home town to pick her up. He had called Sujata to convince her to come back. Sujata's father along with his Inspector friend went to collect him at the bus stand. They

handcuffed him and arrested him on charges of domestic violence.

Today Sujata lives with her second husband who is very supportive of her and her lovely daughter. What would have happened had Sujata not stood up against Suresh and his parents? What if her father had not stood by her decision and had asked her to compromise? Lets appreciate Sujata's and her father's courage, her life took a better turn.

Learning Points

1. Even though the groom's family is well-educated, the cultural roles of women are difficult to change
2. In India, as in many countries, women are still treated as unequal to men and are expected to be obedient to their husbands

Background information

Marriage is a wonderful term.... Everyone has lots of dreams, thoughts, and expectations from it.... Marriage is a term synonymous with sharing, caring, nurturing, LOVE and growth.

Do all married couples share such companionship? Of course not, because no two people are alike. But what instigates one partner to hurt the other one?

Deaths due to Dowry harassment are not uncommon in India. The laws are very strict and giving or demanding dowry is punishable by law. However, it has not been possible to eradicate this system totally. As can be noted in this story, it is prevalent even in educated, upper middle class families. Basically it is caused by poor empowerment of women & lack of education, which makes girls from poor families vulnerable.

Cases like these show that this social evil has to be fought with strength & needs a good support from girl's family.

References

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