

Spiritual Abuse: An Additional Dimension of Abuse Experienced by Abused Haredi (Ultraorthodox) Jewish Wives

Violence Against Women

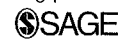
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Abstract

This article aims to conceptualize *spiritual abuse* as an additional dimension to physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse. Growing out of an interpretivist participatory action research study in a therapeutic Haredi (Jewish ultraorthodox) group of eight abused women, spiritual abuse has been defined as any attempt to impair the woman's spiritual life, spiritual self, or spiritual well-being, with three levels of intensity: (a) belittling her spiritual worth, beliefs, or deeds; (b) preventing her from performing spiritual acts; and (c) causing her to transgress spiritual obligations or prohibitions. The concept and its typology are illustrated by means of examples from the women's abusive experiences and may be of theoretical and therapeutic worldwide relevance.

Keywords

spiritual abuse, spirituality, ultraorthodox Jewish women, wife abuse

*Wife abuse*¹ crosses races, cultures, societies, socioeconomic statuses, and geographic environments. This phenomenon, for long underestimated and ignored, was defined as a social problem in Western societies three decades ago. It has been studied extensively since then in the United States, Great Britain (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Dutton, 2006; Gelles, 1979, 1997; Haley & Braun-Haley, 2000; Lundberg-Love & Marmion, 2006; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1981), and in southeastern, Middle-Eastern, and African countries.

Theories of wife abuse were first generated by academic scholars using a quantitative approach in the context of Western culture. Over the past two decades, qualitative studies have pointed to the particularity of the phenomenon in other cultural contexts (Badyal, 2003;

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