



Culturally Responsive Services to Immigrant Victim-Survivors

Case Examples for Discussion

Case Example #1:

Asha grew up in a small town in Afghanistan. When she was 20, her parents arranged for her to marry Salman, a US citizen of Afghan descent. Asha agreed to be married, and within two weeks, they were married in a traditional ceremony. Salman went back to the US but was able to bring her over six months later.

Adjusting to life in the United States was difficult for Asha. She spoke no English and did not know anyone other than Salman. They lived in a small town where there was no public transportation. At first, Salman was kind—he took her shopping and drove her around town to show her the sites. But after a few months, he no longer brought friends over or took her out of the house for get-togethers, and he became distant and cold. Salman refused to let Asha learn English or leave the house without him. He mocked her and told her she was there to be a “good wife,” to cook, clean, and take care of him. Salman monitored her phone calls and sometimes hid the phone so she could not call anyone.

A few months later, Asha got pregnant. She was thrilled, and believed that Salman would be excited, too. But Salman wasn’t thrilled. He said they weren’t ready to have children yet, and berated Asha for not taking birth control and being more careful. Throughout Asha’s first trimester, Salman grew more abusive. He refused to buy Asha food or to take her to the doctor. Salman threatened to divorce Asha and send her back to Afghanistan. Asha knew that if she returned to Afghanistan as a divorced woman, she would have no way to support herself and would have to return to parents’ home, which would be deeply shameful. She would be scorned in her community.

One day, Asha begged to go to the doctor because she was in horrible pain. Eventually, when she started to bleed, Salman took her. The doctor confirmed that she had suffered a miscarriage and asked if “everything was OK” at home. Asha did not disclose the abuse because Salman was in the room the entire time and the doctor was a man.



Following the miscarriage, Asha continued to suffer abuse in her marriage to Salman. On one occasion, when Asha tried to refuse sex shortly after the miscarriage, Salman ripped the *hijab* off her head, called her a prostitute, grabbed her by the hair and pushed her to the bed, and raped her. After he was done, Asha managed to run toward the front door. She saw Salman's phone on the table, grabbed it and managed to dial 911 before Salman snatched it away from her and hung up.

A police officer, however, did arrive a few minutes later. Salman did all the talking, explaining that his wife had been depressed and acting "crazy" lately. The police officer suspected something else might be going on, so after calling for back up, they separated Salman and Asha and interviewed each separately. Asha, however, still not speaking any English, couldn't explain what had happened and didn't know that what Salman had done to her might be a crime in the US. Frustrated, the officer took Asha to the station and Asha filed for an emergency protective order. No one spoke her language, and Asha couldn't explain everything that Salman had done to her. Still, she got the protective order and Salman was made to leave the home for a week until the hearing.

When Salman was served with the protective order, he was furious. He showed up at the house and told Asha that if she went through with the protective order, he would have her deported back to Afghanistan, and that he would make sure everyone in her hometown knew that she was a bad Muslim and a bad wife. He threatened to force her family to return the dowry and to accuse her of infidelity and of having an abortion to shame her and her entire family.

Terrified, Asha agreed. Asha did not appear at the protective order hearing, and it was dismissed. Salman went back to the home and locked Asha out. When a neighbor found her sleeping in a nearby park, she took Asha to a homeless shelter, where she was finally connected to legal and social services to assist her.



Case Example #2

Hilda is from a small, rural community in Mexico. Shortly after arriving in the US as a teenager, Hilda met George, A U.S. citizen. Their relationship evolved quickly and within a few weeks she began living with him, to the disapproval of her family in the US. A year later, their daughter, Susie was born, and they decided to get married.

When Susie was two years old, George's behavior toward Hilda changed. At first he insulted and belittled her, calling her "trash," "whore" and other demeaning names. The abuse then became physical; at one point, when she spoke back to him, George grabbed Hilda by the throat and threw her against a wall. He also grabbed her upper arms regularly during arguments, which left bruises. Hilda wore shirts that covered the bruises in order to hide them from her family. George repeatedly threatened to report Hilda to immigration if she reported the abuse to the police, which she particularly feared because it meant she would be separated from Susie. On one occasion, he drove her to a junkyard and told her it would be easy to "make her disappear." Although Hilda's family lived nearby, she did not disclose the abuse to them because they never approved of her relationship with George, and she felt embarrassed and ashamed for not listening to them.

One night, after Hilda refused to have sexual relations with her husband, George forcibly raped her. She was unable to walk and felt tremendous shame. George violently raped Hilda on two more occasions, leaving her completely demoralized and depressed. Hilda became terrified of George and succumbed entirely to his control and sexual demands. She went to great lengths to hide the abuse and further isolated herself from her family to avoid provoking his anger.

When Susie was four years old, George abandoned Hilda and Susie. She reconciled with her sister and with her encouragement, Hilda reached out for legal assistance. She was very worried about her lack of status and what would happen to Susie if she were ever picked up by immigration.