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Male Victims of Sexual and Domestic Violence : Status of Support and Policy Tasks

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I . Objective and Necessity of Research

Over the approximately past 20 years, the support system for sexual violence and domestic violence has been greatly improved in Korea, but the support system has been specialized for the majority of the victims, who are female, so it is difficult for male victims to access. Although existing support agencies for victims of violence receive male victims' cases, they are unable to provide adequate services due to a lack of understanding and the lack of a support system. Recognizing the importance of supporting male victims, as policy tasks, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family suggested strengthening support for counseling and medical treatment of male victims of sexual violence and writing a related manual in the "Basic Plan for Gender Equality Policy" in 2015. (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2015). Considering this situation, it is important to identify the current status of support for male victims of violence and areas for improvement.

There are not many Korean studies on male victims of violence, and most of the relevant data is about the prevalence of sexual violence

against men, as seen through survey data or crime statistics (Yoon Deok-kyeong et al., 2014; Lee In-seon et al., 2016; Hwang Jeong-im et al., 2016). Outside of that, a portion of the research on victims has discussed boys or male youth victims and support (Lee Mijeong et al., 2015), and in research on sexual violence in the military, the occurrence and characteristics of male victims has been confirmed (Kwon In-sook et al., 2004; Lee, Mijeong et al., 2016). In this way, in existing data and research, it has been confirmed that there are male victims of sexual violence, but deeply rooted research on their experiences of victimization, their special characteristics, and the status of support is lacking.

In this study, we review the experiences and support needs of male victims of violence by reviewing existing statistical data and articles related to male victims of sexual and domestic violence; analyzing domestic violence survey data; reviewing male victims' experiences of harm and the support they requested through in-depth interviews with them, as well as interviews and surveys of practitioners working at victim support agencies. We also analyze problem points related to the support of male victims. Based on the analysis of data, we intend to suggest a plan to construct a comprehensive support system for male victims.

II . Research Method

A variety of research methods were utilized to grasp the current status related to the actual situation, special characteristics, and support of male victims of violence. First, in order to analyze the original data, the 2016 Survey on the State of Domestic Violence tried to discover if there were any social factors related to victimization by examining whether or not there was victimization, classifying groups according to the gender of the victim, and investigating causes of domestic violence against males. The subjects were 1,388 married men between the ages of 19 and 65, and a comparative group of 2,877 married women. Through analysis, we examined the special characteristics of male victims, the reality of the victimization, and difficulty in coping with the victimization, etc.

Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with two male victims of domestic violence and two male victims of sexual violence. We requested contact with male research subjects through the “Korean Men’s Hotline” which is part of the National Domestic Violence Counseling Center & Sexual Violence Counseling Agency, as well as sexual minority organizations, women’s organizations, and related researchers. In the interview, we asked about the victim’s experience, response and emotion after the violence, the police report, and use of support agencies.

Third, we conducted a survey of practitioners working in victim support agencies. A total of 197 people responded to the questionnaire targeted at national counseling centers supporting victims of sexual and domestic violence, the Sunflower Center, the women’s 1366 hotline, and university counseling centers.

Fourth, in-depth interviews were conducted with practitioners at agencies that provide support for victims of violence, and thus we

grasped the current situation and identified problem points of support related to male victims. In order to grasp the current state of support and awareness about male victims of violence, 30 interviews with activists and practitioners at women's organizations were conducted at domestic violence counseling centers, the Sunflower Center, gender equality counseling centers inside universities, and sexual minority organizations.

〈Table 1〉 Common Characteristics in In-depth Interviews with Adult Male Victims of Domestic Violence

Case No.	Age	Region	Occupation	Offender	Content of Victimization	Date of Interview
V-1	36	Seoul	English teacher	Wife, mother-in-law	Verbal, emotional, physical violence	1st: June 8, 2017 2nd: June 15, 2017
V-2	50	Gyeong-gi	Agriculture	Wife	Threatening with a weapon, physical, verbal violence	1st: June 9, 2017 2nd: July 7, 2017

〈Table 2〉 Common Characteristics in In-depth Interviews with Adult Male Victims of Sexual Violence

Case No.	Age	Region	Occupation	Offender	Content of Victimization	Date of Interview
V-3	25	Seoul	Graduate of school	Organization member (male)	Sexual assault	Sept. 6, 2017
V-4	23	Gyeong-gi	Student	Professor (male)	Sexual assault	Sept. 13, 2017

III. Difficulties of Male Victims of Violence

The analysis of two cases of sexual violence and two cases of domestic violence against men examined the grievances of victims. Despite the perception that it is not very serious when males are victims of gender violence, it was discovered that the harm caused by violence against male victims is very serious.

Men who are victims of violence perpetrated by their wives suffered from shame, social stigma, and pity for their wives, and although the incident was exposed through the presence of their children, they did not reveal their grievances. In the process of gathering up their courage to ask for help, victims also suffered secondary harm because of prejudice in society. In the case of the police, victims' difficulties were aggravated by inappropriate responses, such as the idea that there cannot be a one-sided victimization if a man is a victim, or questioning why the man goes on living. It was observed that the quality of service varied depending on whom the victim contacted at which organization, and the expertise of the practitioner at the victim support organization.

In this research, male victims of sexual violence who were interviewed had difficulties in immediately resisting or responding to the perpetrator who had power, and suffered from trauma, anxiety, drinking problems, and interpersonal relationship problems. Depending on the environment they faced, the interviewees actively responded, or responded by passively soothing their emotions without receiving professional treatment. Those who actively responded felt frustrated by the system for handling victims' grievances because they did not receive appropriate protection and support from the organization in charge.

Different aspects of harm could be seen in male victims depending on the gender of the offender, the relationship between the offender and the victim, and the type of damage. People experienced severe aftereffects due to their victimization, and there were hardly any cases where they received proper treatment or protection. It is urgently necessary to prepare an expert support system based on the characteristics and grievances of male victims of violence. A variety of methods should be devised in order to achieve a smooth recovery through steady management of continuing support, as opposed to one-off support. Efforts should be made to prevent secondary victimization through improving the awareness of police and support agency practitioners.

IV. Spousal Cause of and Response to Male Victimization

While married, 3.53% of men experienced physical violence from their wives, 12.83% of men experienced emotional violence, and 16 out of 100 married men experienced both physical and emotional violence from their wives. The most common causes of violence against men were “personality differences” and “economic problems.” “My own drinking problem” was cited as a cause of violence in explaining the perpetration of violence and harmful behavior.

More than 95% of male victims are passively handling the occurrence of violence, for instance by persevering alone or avoiding situations. Men who asked for help also concentrated on personal systems such as “family/relative” or “neighbor/friend,” and there were no cases where help was requested from a public support system such as the police,

counseling center, or support organization. Efforts to seek help from a family member or friend who is not a specialist, or to find a way to overcome the situation alone, can bring about extended violence. As factors contributing to their difficulty in actively responding, male victims emphasized psycho-social aspects, such as “feeling shame and losing self-respect,” and “being ashamed to do housework.” Interagencies need to recognize the potential risk of male victims who can become perpetrators, and it is necessary to provide related support policies. There is a demand to install and actively advertise a specialized support institution where men can ask for help, and which considers the unique characteristics of male victims.

From the perspective of “revictimization throughout the life cycle,” we examined children and adolescents’ experiences of abuse, and in this group that was victimized, there was a high rate of experiences of abuse. It is suggested that a general understanding of psychological problems, such as unstable attachment while growing up, immature conflict resolution, helplessness and permissive attitude toward violence, depression, and psychological atrophy, is concurrently necessary when supporting male victims who have been revictimized, and we need to find policy that considers this. In addition, from the preventive point of view, in order to prevent the revictimization of children who can have experiences of abuse in marriage, it is necessary to try to intervene according to their age group.

V. Status of Support for Men at Victim Support Agencies

According practitioners at agencies that support victims of violence, the defensive actions of the few male victims was regarded as mutual violence, and during the course of violent occurrences becoming officialized as incidents, they were disadvantaged. Male victims were late to recognize that the incident was sexual violence, and social stigma against male victims or the tendency to caricature these incidents was strong, so it was difficult to expose and handle the incidents.

Seeing that there are fewer male victims than women, there is a desire to receive feedback on their experiences of support and to receive education related to supporting men. The necessity of making good use of existing guidelines or manuals is recommended, and a manual about victims of domestic violence is also needed. It is also necessary to provide guidance on programs such as counseling and education about male victims.

Various opinions were presented on the installation of separate agencies for the support and counseling of male victims. There were opinions expressed ranging from the idea that supplementing and strengthening existing counseling and support agencies would be realistic, to the opinion that an independent agency is necessary symbolically while an agency for each region is necessary. In addition, there was also the opinion that it would be beneficial to male victims if there were a male counselor or a male assisting in the case inside the support agency.

Male victims are revictimized at the investigation agency or in the process of counseling because they are male, and male and female sexual

minorities are received suspiciously and do not receive respect as victims. Thus, it is confirmed that they are victimized a second time, so it is necessary to strengthen counselors, investigation, related education, and court guidelines.

Most practitioners were aware that men can also be victims of sexual violence or domestic violence. It was perceived that in terms of types of sexual violence, males can be victims of sexual molestation, sexual harassment, and rape. In the case of wives being the offender, there was awareness that there could be emotional violence, economic violence, and physical violence, in that order. Practitioners were aware that men, like women, can also suffer severe aftereffects of violence, and the social atmosphere, which does not recognize male victims, prevents them from revealing the harm.

Of the practitioners, 72.6% responded that they had the experience of receiving a request for assistance from a male victim, so they were able to know about and confirm the existence of male victims. The most frequently provided services for male victims who requested help were providing information, telephone counseling service, and on-the-spot counseling, but it was found that only half of the respondents felt that the services were sufficient, while the others felt it was insufficient. Only 16% of respondents had experienced receiving education related to supporting male victims, but because there are differences between supporting male and female victims, it was emphasized that it is necessary to have a manual for supporting male victims and separate education for practitioners. As most of the practitioners and users of victims support agencies are female, practitioners have a feeling of difficulty when supporting male victims. The following problems were pointed out: uncomfortable environment; males cannot be smoothly

protected and supported because there is low social awareness about male victims; there is no male emergency refuge or shelter, and thus there is no support service for victims who need emergency protection.

Regarding the future direction of improving the support system, the majority of respondents replied that “existing support agencies should be prepared to support adult male victims.” There was discussion on how to install an exclusive agency to support adult male victims, as well as measures to designate specialized regional agencies among the existing support agencies to support adult male victims. There were also opinions on the need for male practitioners to support adult male victims.

VI. Measures to Improve Policy

1. Improvement of Awareness about Male Victims of Violence

A. Improvement of Social Awareness about Male Victims

Males can also suffer from sexual violence or domestic violence. As victims, they can suffer from hurt and pain as much as females, and they can request help and support when they are victimized, and in that case, social consensus should be formed that active support must be provided. The point that males, including children and youth, may be victims of sexual violence, has to be recognized. This content about males should be included in sexual violence prevention education in kindergartens and elementary and junior high schools. The point that both males and females should respect each other’s characters and communicate in a nonviolent manner should be emphasized.

B. Improvement of Male Victims' Awareness

Male victims of sexual violence also suffer from guilty consciences, and they have to be supported in trying to understand that they did not cause themselves to become victims of violence through their own mistakes. The low rate of male victims as compared to females in crime statistics is due to men's low reporting trend. The tendency to conceal violence against men increases the likelihood of secondary victimization. The first step in solving the problem of violence against men is to reveal the facts of the damage. For this purpose, it is necessary to recognize that it is possible for men to be victimized, to recognize the damage at the time of occurrence, and to actively give guidance through education on how to request help.

C. Improvement of Awareness of Support Agency Practitioners

Practitioner awareness of male victims of sexual violence is high, but this level of awareness does not seem to be seamlessly connected to the support of male victims of sexual violence. Most of the support services that practitioners give to male victims who request help are counseling and information provision, while medical support and support for investigation assistance form a part. The limitations of the present support system and lack of education and supplementary training for practitioners are also points to be improved.

D. Improvement in Police and Medical System Practitioners' Awareness

According to existing studies from other countries and this study, it was confirmed that male victims have a very low tendency to report to police. That is because as men, they risk humiliation by reporting, and they are revictimized by police or medical professionals. Male victims of domestic violence are ignored or even misidentified as perpetrators. Education is necessary to improve the ability of the police in charge of cases to empathize, and to cultivate a culture of high professionalism.

2. Improvement of Support Services for Male Victims of Violence

A. Improving Accessibility to Support Agencies for Male Victims of Violence

Out of all the places connected to the women's hotline 1336, not even half of them offer services for male victims. In addition to the women's hotline 1366, support agencies for victims of sexual violence and domestic violence are distributed throughout the country, and those agencies should prepare so they can provide services to all people, both men and women, in the stages of information provision and counseling. It is necessary to consider and seriously think about not excluding male victims in the names of agencies and in agency advertising and promotion.

B. Education for Practitioners at Support Agencies for Victims of Violence

Education targeted at practitioners who support victims is necessary so male victims are not treated with stereotypes and prejudice. It is

necessary to change gender stereotypes about victims of violence and to increase sensitivity to male victims of violence. Through education about the characteristics, psychological state, and after-effects of violence on adult male victims, raising understanding of them and providing appropriate support has to be made possible. It must be understood that male victims also suffer from shame and prejudice, and as opposed to women, they cannot quickly recognize that they have been harmed by violence, and they fear being perceived as homosexual when they ask for help after the damage. There is a need for education on how to approach male victims differently from female victims in terms of evidence collection, counseling techniques, and testimony for investigation. Workshops and the regular supervision of cases related to supporting male victims are necessary. It is necessary to distribute manuals, including content related to the special characteristics and support of male victims, to counseling centers and other support agencies.

C. Education for Police and Medical Agency Practitioners

Male victims of violence, like women, suffer severe aftereffects. Experts in charge of counseling, psychotherapy, and psychiatric treatment should receive education about male victims of violence. Even in the process of collecting evidence, efforts should be made to reduce the nervousness and reluctance of victims. Male victims of violence suffer from revictimization, such as police not empathizing with them or being mistaken for the perpetrator. In order to respond to sexual violence against men and domestic violence cases, training is necessary to strengthen police specialization.

D. Improvement of Support for Sexual Minority Victims of Violence

Police, prosecutors, and judges have a strong prejudice against sexual minorities, and thus, there are instances where they are not recognized as victims. Close cooperation with organizations protecting their human rights is needed when supporting sexual minorities who are victims of violence. Practitioners at victim support and criminal justice agencies, as well as medical experts, should increase their understanding for and ability to empathize with sexual minority clients, including transgender people. There is an absence of shelters for sexual minorities, and this also needs to be improved.

E. Accumulation of Data on Male Victims Who Requested Help from Support Agencies

It is necessary to secure data on male victims of violence through victim support agencies. Although there is statistical data on occurrences of male victims of violence, data is lacking on the cause of the violence, the characteristics of the victim, and the content or methods of support. Through this study, it was confirmed that at victim support agencies nationwide, male victims of violence are being supported according to their requests. It is necessary to accumulate data on cases related to male victims by collecting cases from nationwide that have been received at these agencies. This kind of data can increase the understanding of male victims and will be used as valuable materials for training and writing manuals.

F. Installation of Emergency Protective Shelters for Males

The survey of practitioners in agencies to support victims of violence showed a high demand for male shelters. It is said that in the absence of emergency shelters or protection facilities for men, shelters for homeless people are recommended. It is necessary to install one male shelter in each region.

G. Vitalization of Self-help Groups for Male Victims

Although male victims summon up their courage and ask for help, they are handled as perpetrators or suffer from prejudice. At the level of the support agencies, it is necessary to support the vitalization of victim self-help groups for men's recognition of their damage, the formation of empathy, and emotional support.

H. Development of Educational Programs for Female Offenders

It is necessary to have a specialized education program for female domestic violence offenders. A program that helps women correct their violent behavior against their spouses is needed. Effective communication, problem-solving ability, and social support improve the violent tendencies of females, and when positive relationships are formed, violence is prevented. The severity of the violent event is categorized, and if the degree of violence is weak, through couple's counseling, there is education for healthy relationship formation, conflict resolution, and anger control. However, in severe cases, psychological intervention is necessary.

3. Improvement of Support System for Male Victims of Violence

A. Existing Training for Practitioners at Support Agencies for Victims of Violence

According to this study, most support agencies for victims of violence have received requests from men for help. Practitioners who work at existing support agencies should be educated and trained so they can support male victims of violence. At least at the stage of providing information or counseling over the phone, the capacity to support males should be cultivated. After that, places that have difficulty in providing continuing counseling and services should link them to appropriate places that support male victims.

B. Installation of an Exclusive Support Agency for Male Victims of Violence

Approximately half of the practitioners agreed on the installation of an exclusive agency to support male victims of violence. It is desirable for the exclusive agency to have functions for both an emergency hotline and direct service provision. It would also be a place that would be linked to receive male victims' cases from nationwide. In connection with the collection of evidence and statement investigation, it is necessary to support the client in receiving services in connection with the Sunflower Center, and to provide continuous counseling, psychotherapy, and legal information. It is important to recruit practitioners who have experience in supporting victims of violence and who have received education about supporting male victims. Considering the preference of male service users, it is desirable to include male practitioners.

C. Designation of Specialized Support Agencies for Male Victims by Region

An exclusive agency for male victims of violence has the positive point of providing expert, specialized services for men. In spite of this positive point, the number of exclusive agencies is limited, so we think use would be expanded by designating an agency among existing regional agencies to specialize in the support of male victims. When designating agencies, it is necessary to provide additional staff and budget. It is also necessary to prioritize the recruitment of qualified male practitioners when placing additional personnel. It may be possible to push ahead with an exclusive agency and specialized agencies in each region.

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