



Restoring Balance: Traditional Native Practices for Healing from Domestic Violence and Reclaiming Safety

Dr. Philip Akinmurele

Ph.D, United States Institute of Diplomacy and Human Rights, United States

* Corresponding Author: **Dr. Philip Akinmurele**

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Abstract

This paper addresses the pervasive issue of domestic violence within native communities, emphasizing its detrimental effects across physical, emotional, verbal, and spiritual dimensions. It proposes a holistic healing approach through traditional native practices such as ceremony, meditation, storytelling, and a comprehensive healing framework. These practices are examined for their potential to foster healing by reclaiming power, promoting emotional release, enhancing self-awareness, and building community support. The paper also discusses grassroots preventive measures, clinical interventions, and victim empowerment strategies, integrating social determinants of health to combat domestic violence effectively. It concludes with recommendations to mainstream these traditional practices into support services, advocating for a culturally sensitive, community-based approach to healing and prevention.

Keywords: Domestic Violence Traditional Native Practices Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Holistic Framework Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive and critical issue affecting native community, causing verbal, emotional, physical, and spiritual harm. Not only that, the domestic violence against women has been so alarming and common in various communities. In order to curtail this and offer solution, traditional native practices and solution offer a unique approach to healing with a view to reclaiming healing. This paper explores the application of traditional native practices, such as ceremony, storytelling and meditation in healing from domestic violence.

Domestic violence continues to be a significant public health and social concern, impacting millions worldwide. A mix of societal norms, systemic inequalities, and structural challenges drives its ongoing prevalence. Key factors such as economic instability, unequal access to education, limited healthcare, and community conditions—referred to as Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)—are central in influencing both the frequency of domestic violence and the success of prevention efforts (Ellsberg *et al.*, 2020). It requires addressing domestic violence with an integrated approach to grassroots prevention, clinical intervention, and empowerment of the victim, with innovation in solutions appropriate to the particular needs of vulnerable populations.

Consequently, a holistic framework is presented, incorporating the physical, incorporating the physical, verbal, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of well-being. The paper is grounded in a holistic framework recognizing the interconnectedness of physical, mental, verbal, emotional and spiritual well-being, and the fact that Traditional Native practices are approached with respect and sensitivity, acknowledging the diversity of Native cultures and experiences. It also recognized and prioritizes the voice, expertise and knowledge of Native survivors of domestic violence towards bringing their experience and expertise to bear on healing process.

The paper however concludes with recommendations for the need to integrate and inculcate the traditional Native practices into mainstream support services for survivors of domestic violence.

A. An Overview

1. Violence

There is no way we can talk about Domestic Violence without first delving into what is Violence? The understanding of what Violence is will educate us and provides an impetus to the real meaning of Domestic Violence. To this end, Violence can be seen as the use of physical force or power to harm, abuse or intimidate someone, often resulted in physical or emotional injury. It can also be seen as the use of physical power or force, actual or threatened, against oneself, another person, or a group that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (WHO, 2018)

There is the need to itemize various forms of violence to provide a basis for this study. We have the following forms of violence:

- Physical Violence – It is the intentional use of physical force against another person, such as hitting, kicking, or using a weapon. (Bushman *et al*, 2018) ^[2].
- Sexual Violence – It is any sexual acts that are not consensual i.e., any sex that is not based on consent, typical of rape, sexual assault or harassment (Baslie *et al*, 2016) ^[1].
- Emotional or Psychological Violence – It is the various behaviors that caused emotional harm such as threats, intimidation or manipulations (Karakurt & Silver, 2013) ^[18].
- Structural Violence – It is a form of harm caused by social, economic or political structures such as poverty, racism or sexism (Galtung, 1969) ^[11].

2. Domestic Violence – it is also known and addressed as intimate partner violence (IPV)

Which is an abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner (National Coalition against Domestic Violence, 2020) ^[24]. It is pertinent to point out that Domestic Violence has evolved significantly over time and is recognized as a serious issue globally. The World Health Organization has estimated that one out of three in women experience Domestic Violence at some point in their lives. It is based on this that concerted efforts should be put in place to bring succor to the victims as well as providing cure to Domestic Violence using the Native healing process.

Like that of Violence generally, it is the same form that takes place like the physical abuse, emotional or psychological abuse as well as sexual abuse. Others are financial abuse which has to do with the motive of controlling or exploiting one's partner's financial resources (Postmus *et al*, 2018) ^[25] and digital abuse which has to do with using technology to monitor, control or harass a partner (Dimond *et al*, 2017) ^[5]. The issue of Domestic violence deserves our attention to bring it down to the barest minimum if it cannot be totally eradicated. Statistics shows that one out of four women and one out of seven men experiencing physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime while one out of three women and one out of six men experiencing some form of physical violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020, World

Health Organization, 2017) ^[33].

B. Traditional native healing practices

In order to provide a cure and healing for Domestic Violence, there is the need to embrace the Traditional Native Healing practices which will provides an impetus to ameliorate the suffering, provide succor for the victims as well as provide healing for them. It is based on this premise that Traditional Native practices of healing encompass a broad range of spiritual, ceremonial and cultural practices that have been used for centuries by indigenous people to promote physical, emotional, verbal and spiritual well-being.

1. Basic principles of traditional native healing practices

- Holistic Approach- Traditional Native healing practices consider the interconnectedness of physical, mental and spiritual aspects of a person's being (Duran, 2006) ^[7]. There is the need to tackle physical, mental and spiritual dimensions of human being since they all lead to the same thing as whatever affected the physical will manifest in the mental and spiritual well-being of man. +
- Spiritual foundation – Many of the Traditional Native healing practices are rooted in spiritual beliefs and ceremonies, which ultimately recognizing the importance of spiritual balance and harmony (Cohen, 2013) ^[4]. Some of our socio-cultural norms are rooted in our spiritual beliefs and ceremonies where we celebrate one thing or the other with ourselves thereby ensuring healing.
- Community –based - Traditional Native healing practices often involve the community and family members, emphasizing the importance of social and collective healing (Westley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004) ^[32]. Healing by this method involves the conglomerate of family members and community and the implication of this is the powerful impact of the gathering in fostering stability, companionship, care and concerns and in all ramifications for the victims.
- Natural and plant-based remedies- Traditional Native healing practices frequently incorporate natural remedies, such as herbs, plants, and animals to promote healing and balance (Kuhnlein & Murray, 2017) ^[20]. It is the combination of these remedies of the usage of herbs and the likes that makes the healing process natural and traditional towards achieving total cure and healing.

2. The cure to domestic violence through the traditional native healing can now be categorized under these four cardinal solutions thus:

- i. Ceremony and Healing
- ii. Meditation and Mindfulness
- iii. Storytelling and Narrative Healing
- iv. Holistic Framework for Healing.

i. Ceremony and healing- It refers to the use of traditional spiritual ceremonies and rituals to support the healing and recovery of survivors of domestic violence. It is pertinent to state that these ceremonies and rituals are rooted in indigenous cultures and spiritual practices which can be adapted and modified to be inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Ceremony and healings play a crucial role in enhancing cure for the survivors of domestic violence. Some of the goals of ceremony healings: are as follows:

- Reclaiming power and control – Ceremony healings empower survivors of domestic violence to reclaim their power and control over their lives, helping them break free from the trauma and abuse (Freeman, 2014) ^[10]. By celebrating with people through one ceremony or the other, the survivor can reclaim his or her power and control appropriately.
- Honoring and validating experience – Ceremony healings acknowledge and validate survivors' experiences, helping them feel seen, heard, and believed (Walker, 2017) ^[31].
- Emotional release and catharsis – Ceremonies provide a safe space for survivors to process and release emotions related to their traumatic experiences (Herman, 2015) ^[16].
- Community building and support – Ceremonies bring survivors together. Thereby creating a sense of belonging as well as community support, which is essential for healing and recovery (Lamb, 2017) ^[21].
- Fostering Resilience and post-traumatic growth – Ceremonies support survivors in developing resilience and finding ways to grow and heal in the aftermath of trauma (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) ^[29].

In all, ceremony healing has proved to be beneficial to the survivors in reducing symptoms of trauma, improve emotional regulation, enhanced spiritual well-being as well as increase sense of control and empowerment (Duran, 2006, Freeman, 2014, Herman 2015, & Walker, 2017) ^[7, 10, 16, 31].

ii. Meditation and Mindfulness- Just like ceremony that has been seen to be effective in restoring and ensure the healing of survivors of Domestic Violence, Meditation and Mindfulness has also proved to be effective in the healing process. Meditation and Mindfulness are two interconnected practices of healing. Meditation has to do with focusing your attention on a specific object, thought or activity in achieving a mentally clear and emotional state which involves letting go of tension and relaxing the body and mind, developing a non-judgmental awareness of your thoughts, emotions and physical sensations while Mindfulness has to do with the practices of being present in the moment, paying attention to your thoughts, feelings, and sensations which implies that you focusing on the current moment rather than thinking and reflecting on the past or worrying about the future and approaching experiences with a sense of curiosity and openness rather than with preconceptions and assumptions. In this vein, Meditation and Mindfulness plays a crucial role in healing the survivors of the Domestic Violence.

The benefits of it are as follows:

- Fosters self-compassion and self-care- Meditation and Mindfulness practices promotes self-compassion and self-care that is essential for survivors' healing and recovery (Neff, 2011).
- It reduces stress and anxiety- It has been proved to reduce stress and anxiety in survivors of Domestic Violence since survivors have refrained from thinking about the past experiences but focusing on the present moment (Streeter, *et al*, 2011).
- Supports trauma recovery- Mindfulness has helped survivors of Domestic Violence in the healing process

and integrates traumatic memories, reducing symptoms of post- traumatic stress disorder (Foliette *et al*, 2015).

- Improves emotional regulations – Mindfulness practices can help survivors better manage their emotions, reducing emotional deregulations. (Herman, 2015) ^[16]. Once the survivor had made up his /her mind to concentrate on the present moment and refrain from troubling him/herself on the future, the emotional stability will be regulated.
- Enhanced self-awareness- Meditation and mindfulness practices can increase self- awareness by helping survivors develops a greater understanding of their thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) ^[17]

In all, Meditation and Mindfulness has been an effective and efficient solution in solving the problem of Domestic Violence. It has been beneficial in the healing process as survivors will focus on the breath, calm down their nervous system and reduce stress, releasing tension and relaxation and develop a more positive relationship with themselves (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, Hofmann *et al*, 2011) ^[3].

iii. Storytelling and narrative healing- Story telling and Narrative healing are another Traditional Native way of healing the victims and or survivors of Domestic Violence. It involves the process of sharing and re-authoring one's story which allows an individual to reframe their experiences, reclaim their voices and rebuild their sense of identity and purpose (Freeman, 2014) ^[10].

Other tools of healing the survivor of Domestic Violence are storytelling and narrative healing which provided an impetus in providing restoration through sharing of experience as a result of the fact that they are once a victim who has been liberated and restored now. The benefits of storytelling and Narrative healing are as follows:

- Reclaiming power and control- Storytelling and Narrative healing provided healing for survivors as it empowers individuals to reclaim their power and control over their lives by helping them to break free from the bondage of trauma and abuse (Lamb, 2017) ^[21].
- Building resilience and post-traumatic growth – Storytelling and Narrative healing goes a long way in fostering resilience and post-traumatic growth with a view to helping individuals find meaning, relevance and purpose in their experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) ^[29].
- Emotional release and catharsis – Story telling and Narrative healing involves sharing one's story that can facilitate emotional release and catharsis which resulted into reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression (Herman, 2015) ^[16].
- Reframing experiences and re-authority identity – Narrative healing allows individuals to reframe their experiences, re-author their identity and develop a more positive and empowered sense of self (McAdams, 2015) ^[23].

Storytelling and Narrative healing have been very effective in restoration and providing a succor and building confidence to Survivors of Domestic Violence. A situation where one can tell his/her story and how he/she was able to overcome goes a long way in building confidence, stability and hope to the victims of Domestic Violence. It is powerful tools as it creates a safe place of sharing one's story as well as offer emotional support to the survivors (Herman, 2015, Lamb,

2017) [16, 21].

iv. Holistic framework for healing—The holistic framework for healing has to do with an approach that considers the wholeness of the survivor- the whole person; Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual in the healing process. The aim of this, among others, is to address the root causes of illness or trauma, rather than just treating symptoms. It is one of the best treatments of Traditional Native healing which takes into cognizance the need to explore all areas to ensure a complete healing and or restoration.

The holistic framework of healing is beneficial to the survivor which can be attributed to him/her as follows:

- Improved patients' satisfaction: The benefits of holistic frameworks focus on environmental aesthetics, personalization, technology, mobility, and flexibility leads to increased patient's satisfactions and increased healthcare design (Hamilton & Watkins, 2020) [14].
- Emotional Healing - Holistic healing is derived by considering the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of an individual as this framework promotes emotional release, catharsis and a sense of control over one's life. (Kessler & Bedford, 2017) [19].
- Better Physical Health Outcome- By giving consideration for the interplay between physical and emotional health, the holistic framework can lead to improved physical health outcomes, which includes reduced pains, stress and inflammation. (Sarris & Wardle, 2019) [26].
- Enhanced Well-being - By implementing the holistic method of healing, addressing the physical and the emotional needs of individuals by this method can enhanced overall well- being, including that of improving mental health and quality of life (Wahbeh & Oken, 2019) [30].
- Increase Sense of Control - The holistic healing process places emphasis on personalization and flexibility which allows individual to take control of their healing process thereby promoting autonomy and self-efficacy (Hagen & Nilsen, 2020) [13].

In all, the Holistic Frameworks for Healing highlighting the importance of considering the whole person in the healing process. It identifying and addressing the underlying pattern and beliefs contributing to illness or trauma, resolves the internal emotional conflicts and physical imbalances through daily routine as well as transforming and flourishing as a person, discovering his/her purpose in life and cultivating the well-being and fulfillment (Seligman, 2011, Levine, 2015 and Dossey & Keegan, 2016) [27, 22, 6].

C. Grassroots preventive measures for domestic violence

Community-level prevention of domestic violence requires mitigating the root SDOH that creates vulnerability. The poverty, unemployment, and lack of educational opportunities common in economically deprived areas often combine to foster an environment in which domestic violence can quickly occur. Grassroots initiatives, particularly in underprivileged nations, should prioritize economic empowerment programs, such as microfinance schemes, which can alleviate financial dependency—a significant risk factor for domestic violence (Heise & McCallum, 2023) [15]. Additionally, literacy campaigns and community-based educational programs tailored to local cultural contexts can

challenge harmful norms and promote gender equality, directly addressing cultural factors that perpetuate domestic violence (Garcia-Moreno *et al.*, 2022) [12].

Community leaders, such as religious, tribal, and civic leaders, hold strategic positions that are especially important for shaping local attitudes toward domestic violence. Training such leaders in recognizing the signs of abuse and how to intervene appropriately guarantees culturally sensitive interventions that will more likely resonate with local populations (Ellsberg *et al.*, 2020). In this respect, a real enhancement of grassroots organizations can lead to effective and informed advocacy that can ensure survivors' access to comprehensive support services.

Integrating SDOH into these grassroots interventions builds a society where community members are better positioned to prevent the occurrence of violence and hold offenders accountable, which in turn reduces the prevalence of domestic violence.

D. Interventional prevention of domestic violence

1. Clinical measures for domestic violence

Healthcare settings provide important opportunities for the detection and treatment of domestic violence, particularly in developing nations with limited healthcare access. Universal screening protocols in community health centers and hospitals are essential for early identification and intervention (Black & Breiding, 2021) [3]. Tools such as the HITS (Hurt, Insult, Threaten, Scream) screening instrument and the WAST (Woman Abuse Screening Tool) provide clinicians with reliable methods for detecting abuse, even in resource-limited settings (Black & Breiding, 2021) [3]. However, clinical care requires more than identifying victims; it involves addressing survivors' broader social and economic problems.

Trauma-informed care became one of the fundamental principles of clinical practice, mainly when working with vulnerable populations. Health professionals are trained to identify abuse and understand the psychologic and physical consequences of trauma. In fact, by integrating services such as housing assistance, food security programs, and transportation support, Clinicians are able to offer more comprehensive care that encompasses the full spectrum of SDOH (Black & Breiding, 2021) [3]. Telemedicine offers a confidential and efficient way to reach individuals in need, offering crucial support and ensuring that survivors are not further isolated by distance or lack of local resources in geographic locations with limited in-person healthcare services.

2. Empowering victims of domestic violence

Empowerment of victims of domestic violence includes addressing the structural inequalities that heighten their vulnerability. Strategies for victim empowerment must include SDOH, such as disparities in education, health care access, and economic opportunities (Ellsberg *et al.*, 2020). Programs that provide vocational training, financial literacy education, and small business grants can help victims achieve financial independence and reduce their reliance on abusive partners (Garcia-Moreno *et al.*, 2022) [12]. Furthermore, legal empowerment programs, including workshops and free legal aid services, are very instrumental in making the victims aware of their rights and how to navigate through the judicial system effectively (Heise & McCallum, 2023) [15].

Shelters and transitional housing programs provide critical

support to survivors, offering a safe place where victims may receive a full range of services, including counseling, health care, legal aid, and child care (Ellsberg *et al.*, 2020). In remote areas, mobile outreach teams may bring these services to the victims themselves, reducing the barriers to access common in rural settings. Furthermore, mental health support is provided through services such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and group counseling in order to help survivors heal from the psychological wounds of abuse and build resilience (Ellsberg *et al.*, 2020). It is these empowerment-based practices—meeting both the short-term and long-term needs of the victim—that have been instrumental in breaking the cycle of violence.

3. Existing and potential preventive measures for domestic violence

Although existing measures to prevent domestic violence have made considerable progress in addressing the issue, there is still much to be done. Legal protections, such as restraining orders and reporting mandates, have protected countless numbers of people.

However, these must be buttressed by efforts at addressing economic and social disparities, as these are often the lubricants that allow domestic violence to persist, as Heise and McCallum (2023) ^[15] point out. For example, strengthening local leadership and court systems in underdeveloped areas can help ensure that laws protecting victims are enforced.

Conclusion

Domestic violence requires a multilayered, holistic approach to its prevention and management, from the highest policy formulation right down to the grassroots level, in which SDOH plays an intervening role. The grassroots efforts assure economic empowerment for long-term prevention, challenge cultural norms, and build accountability within the community.

It is pervasive issues that affect Native communities, causing physical, emotional, verbal and spiritual harm. The rate at which women in particular has experience this is alarming and need to be checked. Traditional Native Practices offer a unique and holistic approach to healing of the survivors focusing on restoring balance and reclaiming safety. Meditation, Mindfulness, Storytelling, Narrative Healings and Ceremony Healings are essential components of this laudable and effective approach as these practices promote emotional release, self-awareness and empowerment, allowing survivors to reclaim their voices, integrity, lives and identities.

Empowerment through education, legal aid, and mental health ultimately enables survivors to be in a place where they can support themselves with dignity and autonomy. Building from existing measures, innovative solutions, mobile technology, and school-based prevention programs actually enhance this overall strategy to combat domestic violence. Ultimately, cross sector collaboration and commitment to address SDOH will yield a society where domestic violence is not only unacceptable but preventable.

A holistic framework for healing which have to do with the whole person, mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually comprising rooting, balancing and expansion provides a comprehensive structure in tackling the root of the problems and to offer appropriate healing process for the needs of the survivors. This framework acknowledges the

interconnectedness of the whole person well-being, promoting a balanced and harmonious approach to healing. As emphasized by Duran (2006) ^[7], “healing is not just about individual recovery, but also about the community healing and transformation”, therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of community and cultural revitalization in the healing process.

In conclusion, restoring balance and reclaiming balance and reclaiming safety required a comprehensive and holistic approach that incorporates Traditional Native Practices and acknowledges the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, spiritual and mental well-being. It is when this are incorporated and embraced that we can have an effective and efficient perfect healing for the survivors of Domestic Violence in our communities.

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