

Research note

The development of a culturally responsive scale to measure abuse by in-laws among South Asian immigrants (SMILE): Considerations and implications

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Abstract

South Asian (SA) immigrants are one of the fastest growing immigrant groups in the U.S. Similar to other immigrant groups, domestic violence has become a cause of growing concern among this community. Owing to the multifaceted cultural nuances among SAs, domestic violence manifests in distinctive ways, including abuse by in-laws. To accurately understand the ways in which domestic violence is experienced in this community, it is essential to utilize culturally responsive instruments. Therefore, a culturally responsive instrument called SMILE (Scale to Measure In-Laws Exploitation & abuse) was developed to examine the items that were perceived to constitute in-laws abuse by SA men and women across the United States. Implications for social work research, practice and policy are discussed, nationally and globally.

Keywords: *culturally responsive, domestic violence, in-laws abuse, South Asians, immigrants*

1. Introduction

South Asians (SAs) are one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the United States (U.S.). A total of 5.4 million SAs live in the U.S. (South Asian Americans Leading Together, 2019). Similar to the U.S., SAs are spread across the world including countries like Canada and the United Kingdom. There are about 1.77 million SAs in the U.K. and close to 2 million SAs in Canada (Office of National Statistics, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2017). The SA-American community consists of individuals from many countries, including India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Mahapatra, 2012; Rai and Choi, 2018). Domestic violence (DV) is a pervasive and far-reaching problem that impacts the health and wellbeing of SAs. The prevalence rates of DV among SAs ranges from 18% (Hurwitz et al., 2006) to 48% (Mahapatra and Rai, 2019; Rai and Choi, 2021). Community agencies and researchers posit that the prevalence rates may be higher than what has been found in studies due to the use of small and unrepresentative samples as well as underreporting of DV (Murugan, 2017; Rai and Choi, 2021).

Prevalence rates of DV among SAs vary based on the type of abuse with rates as high as 40% for physical and sexual abuse, and 50% for emotional and psychological abuse (Mahapatra, 2012; Soglin et al., 2020). Minority communities are more prone to victimization as suggested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). Both men and women can experience DV, such that, 51.7% of American Indian/Alaska Native women versus 40.3% of American Indian/Alaska Native men; 29.7% for Hispanic women versus 27.1% for Hispanic men; 15.3% of Asian Pacific Islander women versus 11.5% for Asian Pacific Islander men reported experiencing physical DV victimization. Similar rates were noted for sexual abuse. Data about SAs, however, is unavailable in the CDC estimates. Furthermore, according to the report by the National Center for Victims of Crime, women even though more likely to experience overall DV, the proportion of individuals experiencing psychological DV is becoming comparable at about 47% for both men and women (NCVCRW, 2017). In the study by Rai and Choi (2021), with SAs it was seen that, 41% of men and 57% of women experienced physical DV; 35% of men and 43% of women experienced emotional DV; 29% of men and 42% of women experienced economic DV; 22% of men and 34% of women experienced verbal DV; 25% of men and 29% of women experienced immigration-related DV; 19% of men and 21% of women experienced in-laws abuse and finally 10% of men and 12% of women experienced sexual DV. This shows that

examining victimization among men and women is crucial and historically a missed opportunity among SA research.

Generally speaking, DV can be defined to include physical, sexual, or psychological harm perpetrated by a partner/spouse or other intimate partner (Black et al., 2011). However, owing to the multifaceted nature of the SA community and unique cultural nuances, such as, unequal power relations among couples and the involvement of the male partner's parents in decision-making; male dominance and power dynamics interplay when thinking about DV in the SA community (Goel, 2005; Yoshihama et al., 2012). Further, structural factors such as acculturation and immigration barriers due to visa regulations may also need to be accounted for when deliberating DV in the SA community (Balgamwalla, 2013; Yoshihama et al., 2012). Despite these nuances, DV research among SAs has been limited to examining physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse, leaving out other distinctive ways in which DV can be experienced by members of the SA community.

Because of cultural factors and a that large proportion of empirical evidence suggests that women are more prone to victimization compared to men, the perceptions of men and women may differ (Abraham, 2005). Presently, there is only one study that focuses specifically on perceptions of DV by examining the differences between men and women (Ahmad et al., 2017). The authors found similarities in perceptions concerning sexual abuse, but differences in the justification of violence in a marital relationship. In another study by Ahmad et al. (2004) concerning patriarchal beliefs, 53% of women approved patriarchal beliefs and did not acknowledge their own experiences of violence. In a study by Rai et al. (in press), authors found that women attributed more causes for DV compared to men, perhaps because they may have experienced a greater disadvantage given their gender, gender-role expectations, and abusive encounters. Therefore, because of a clear demarcation between the roles of men and women, violence is frequently justified within the SA culture, especially against women (Ahmad-Stout et al., 2021). Further, the patrilocal nature of SA marriages calls for women to often move in with in-laws potentially influencing their experiences of in-laws abuse (Mahapatra and Rai, 2019; Raj et al., 2006). These differences in expectations and experiences can account for varied perceptions of abuse.

2. South Asian culture, in-laws abuse and the need for culturally responsive measures

Given the complexity of the SA culture along with the structural impediments, DV can extend to abuse by in-laws in the SA community. SA immigrants may be living with their

in-laws and extended family members in the U.S. (Soglin et al., 2020; Rai, 2020b). Although, both men and women can experience victimization (Rai and Choi, 2021), the higher status occupied by the male partner's parents may jeopardize the position of the daughter-in-law in the family. Daughters-in-law are expected to be an ideal wife, caretaker, and subservient to the demands of their husband and in-laws (Goel, 2005; Rai and Choi, 2018). Additionally, due to the gender disparity and unequal power structure in SA families, the daughters-in-law are unfairly disadvantaged. Ultimately, "Izzat", or the family's reputation, is of priority to SA families, especially for women (Bhandari, 2018; Oxford learner's dictionaries, n.d.). Hence, women may continue to be victimized without the opportunity to disclose it because of their life-long socialization into protecting family honor. Similarly, due to the stigma attached to divorce especially for women, they may have few opportunities to escape their abusive relationships (Ahmad-Stout et al., 2021; Sabri, Simonet and Campbell 2018).

Direct involvement by in-laws can include physical, verbal, or mental abuse (Mirza, 2017). In-laws may engage in coercive control (Stark, 2007) through restricting the survivor's access to food, freedom, money, health care, and other resources (Ahmad-Stout et al., 2021). Indirect involvement can include domestic despotism or control, control over marital relations, ear-filling by turning the son against the daughter-in-law, or normalizing the abuse (Ahmad-Stout et al., 2021; Mirza, 2017). Scholars define control of marital relations as dictating how and when wives spend time with their husbands (Mirza, 2017; Ragavan and Iyengar, 2020). Ear filling can occur when the victim's in-laws degrade the victim to the victim's spouse, causing relationship strain and violence (Ahmad-Stout et al., 2021; Goel, 2005; Mirza, 2017).

Owing to the strong influence of in-laws in SA families, it is vital that in-depth investigation be conducted. To operationalize DV among SAs, globally, researchers have utilized various DV measures which reflect Western contexts, such as the Index of Spouse Abuse (Chandra et al., 2009) and the Revised-Conflict Tactics Scale (Mahapatra, 2012). The applicability and utility of a social science research study can be determined by how well it has been designed and the extent to which it reflects the culture and intersectional needs of its study participants (Agha and Rai, 2020; White et al., 2013). Cultural responsiveness incorporates an individual's culture, values, and norms (Agha and Rai, 2020; Huslage, Rai and Held, 2021) and can encourage or dissuade participants from engaging in the research study. By adopting this framework of prioritizing the culture of a community, scholars have the

opportunity to move away from relying on Western models or instruments that may be unresponsive to the multidimensional nuances of a minority community (Rai, 2020a; Rai, Grossman and Perkins, 2020).

Thus far, there have been two studies that have examined rates of in-laws abuse among SAs. Raj and colleagues (2006) utilized one item to examine in-law abuse and found that 6% (n=23) of 129 SA women reported victimization by in-laws. Raj and colleagues (2006) also investigated in-laws abuse qualitatively among the 23 women who shared the tactics of abuse by in-laws such as control and isolation, limiting phone usage, economic and verbal control, verbal degradation, dowry demand, domestic servitude, delayed access to food and physical abuse. In a study by Soglin et al. (2020), about 28.4% of 116 SA women reported experiencing non-physical abuse, including abuse by in-laws. Soglin and colleagues (2020), developed a culturally responsive 14-item screening tool called, "The South Asian Violence Screen (SAVS)" for DV screening, with three questions relating to partner or partner's family related abuse. Both studies utilized questions about in-laws abuse imbedded within their larger survey rather than an instrument specifically designed to measure abuse by in-laws, thus, limiting the ability of the items to be utilized as a stand-alone scale to measure abuse by in-laws. Presently, there is not a scale that exclusively focuses on in-laws abuse as a form of DV. Continuing to use instruments that are unresponsive can be oppressive to minority communities' cultures, and may also inaccurately represent the experiences of a minority community by overlooking salient cultural nuances (White et al., 2013; Rai et al., in press).

3. Study overview and framework

Owing to the cultural norms and practices in a community, DV can manifest distinctively across diverse immigrant communities. A culture of patriarchy, collectivism and gender-role stereotypes can contribute to DV, which the mainstream western definitions of DV can fail to include. Within immigrant communities, DV can include abuse by the partner, in-laws or extended family members (Rai and Choi, 2021; Goel, 2005; Sabri, Simonet and Campbell, 2018). Therefore, to understand the role and influence of in-laws in SA households, it is imperative to begin by examining the perceptions of in-laws abuse within this community. As a starting point to develop and test an instrument to measure in-laws abuse, this study examined the perceptions of abuse by in-laws among SA immigrants in the U.S. Through the development of a culturally responsive instrument (White et al., 2013; Agha and Rai, 2020) aimed at incorporating cultural nuances in the ways in which DV can surface in the SA

community, this study aimed to test potential items that could be used as an abuse victimization assessment tool.

To build context, the goals of the main study will now be explained. The overarching goal of the survey was threefold: (1) to examine the perceptions of DV among SA immigrants in the U.S., (2) to examine DV victimization among SAs in the U.S., and (3) to examine help-giving by SAs to friends and family experiencing DV and describe help-seeking preferences of SAs (Rai, 2020a). For the purposes of this study, we will focus on perceptions of DV among SAs, specifically looking at in-laws abuse.

3.1 Development of the SMILE

The construction of the **Scale to Measure In-Laws Exploitation & abuse (SMILE)** was done utilizing the tactics of DV elucidated in the Power and Control Wheel for immigrants (Futures Without Violence, n.d.), the lived experiences of the first author who has worked with SAs experiencing DV, and the feedback received from the pilot study (described later). The Power and Control Wheel for immigrants highlights the varied ways in which abuse can manifest among SA households such as isolation, emotional abuse, physical harm and financial control. Therefore, drawing from the Power and Control Wheel for immigrants and pulling in tactics that can also be perpetrated by in-laws and not just partners, the items of the scale were developed (Futures Without Violence, n.d.). Specifically, the abuse tactics, such as, isolation (keeping away friends and family incorporated as item 1 in the SMILE), economic abuse (financial control incorporated as item 2 in the SMILE), emotional abuse (calling names incorporated as item 3 in the SMILE) and physical abuse (using physical force incorporated as item 4 in the SMILE) were borrowed from the Power and Control Wheel and included in the SMILE. These tactics were selected for inclusion in the SMILE due to overlaps with previous works of SA scholars and the experiences of the first author. Some of the items in the SMILE have been described as tactics of in-laws abuse in the works of previous SA scholars (Ahmad-Stout et al., 2021; Bhandari and Hughes, 2017; Goel, 2005; Mirza, 2017; Mahapatra and Rai, 2019). These tactics especially relate to the items regarding emotional, financial, and physical abuse by in-laws.

Further, the SA identity and lived experiences of the first author along with positionality in the U.S. allowed her to closely decipher how attributes within the SA culture can allow for not just the partner/spouse to perpetrate abuse but for this to also extend to include in-laws. Of note is that there is no existing stand-alone instrument to either gauge the perceptions of in-laws abuse or record prevalence rates. Hence

utilizing an approach by coalescing the literature, soliciting feedback from the SA community and community agencies, as well as utilizing the Power and Control Wheel were pivotal in building this instrument. The items included in the SMILE were exploratory due to this being the first scale to investigate how in-laws abuse manifests in SA communities. Therefore, overlapping items in the works of previous scholars, the lived experiences of the first author, and the Power and Control Wheel were included in the scale. While these items may not be exhaustive, it is a start toward investigating in-laws abuse among immigrant communities.

The SMILE was developed as a stand-alone scale and was administered along with the Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Domestic Violence Questionnaire-Revised (PADV-R); specifically following the Definitions of Domestic Violence Scale. The PADV-R was originally created by Yick (1997) to measure DV perceptions among Chinese immigrants. This scale was subsequently tested and validated with Korean immigrants by Ahn (2002). The items in the PADV-R were measured on a Likert-type scale, where 1 indicates “strongly agree” and 6 indicates “strongly disagree.” Hence, to keep the scoring consistent with the items in the PADV-R, the items within the SMILE followed the same scoring format. The SMILE is a brief, 4-item instrument measuring the perceptions of in-laws exploitation and abuse among SA immigrants. It was copyrighted in 2020 by the first author. In the survey section prior to introducing the SMILE items, participants were asked to numerically express their opinions about what constituted violence between couples. It is imperative to state that the items included in this scale could be used in the future to establish in-laws abuse prevalence rates by using the items within an assessment tool.

The items included in the SMILE were developed to focus on how in-laws abuse can surface in SA cultures, (e.g., emotional, financial, verbal and physical harm by in-laws). To allow participants the opportunity to respond broadly to the coercive tactics perpetrated by in-laws, specific behaviors (e.g., publicly screaming, isolating from family as opposed to friends, or controlling bank transactions, etc.) were not included. Utilizing language that was representative of a type of abuse (physical, emotional, financial, verbal) rather than a specific coercive mechanism allowed us to elicit responses from participants which would probably not have been possible had we included specific tactics. Although the SA community shares some cultural similarities, the subgroups within the community have distinct culture and norms, therefore these tactics could vary among families and subgroups (Reddy, 2019).

The process of creating the SMILE began with the collection of data for a larger study that examined the perceptions and attitudes toward DV, experiences and help-seeking preferences among SA community members (Rai, 2020a). Data was collected utilizing a cross-sectional, 15-20 minute survey (Engel and Schutt, 2013). Prior to testing the scale among a larger sample, a pilot study with $n = 14$ participants was conducted, as recommended Aday and Cornelius (2006) and Martinez et al. (2008). Of the fourteen participants, nine identified as female and five identified as male. In terms of the participant country, five were from Canada, two from Australia, five from the United Kingdom and two from Poland. The majority of the participants ($n=12$) were Indians, one was Pakistani and one Maldivian. The religious composition of the participants indicated that eight practiced Hinduism, one practiced Sikhism, one Islam and four preferred not to answer the question. Pilot testing allowed testing the accuracy and cultural responsiveness of the survey with SA community members, potentially similar to the participant profile for the main survey. Although not all SA countries were represented, the information obtained in the pilot study was a helpful starting point.

To reserve SA immigrants in the U.S. for the actual study, immigrants from foreign countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and Poland were recruited via the personal networks of the first author and via snowball sampling (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007). The goal of the pilot study was to test the clarity of the content of the SMILE as well as other aspects of the modified PADV-R instrument. The main feedback received was to neutralize the language used in the survey by eliminating the use of any language that would insinuate blame on “men.” For example, the prompt “_____ causes a man to use violence on his wife” was changed to “_____ causes an individual to use violence on their spouse/partner” for an entire section of sub-questions. Subsequently, questions throughout the survey including the ones used in the SMILE were neutralized. For example, instead of the question, “interference about whereabouts by your husband’s parents” item, “interference about whereabouts by in-laws” was utilized. Utilizing neutral language was imperative to invite all study participants to take the survey alike, without preconceived notions about their status (abuser versus perpetrator). In addition to changing the language, some typos that were identified by study participants were corrected. Page breaks were added to make the survey more visually appealing. The pilot study was helpful in establishing the face validity and clarity of questions (Engel and Schutt, 2013). Through the pilot study, we were able to ensure that the language and content used was easily understood and accurately reflective of abuse. Informal

conversations with a few service providers, members of the SA community and DV experts were also sought to invite feedback on the items included in the SMILE. Feedback from service providers and DV experts, in addition to participants was vital due to the novelty of this instrument. South Asian service providers who engage with DV survivors; and experts who conduct research with survivors and SA communities, were able to offer insights into tactics that may translate into violence, due to the strong influence of in-laws in SA households. Utilizing their own lived experiences, members of the SA community contributed by helping clarify that the focus of the instrument needed to be on items focusing on physical, emotional and financial abuse as in the existing instrument. Seeking feedback on the items from service providers, DV experts and members of the SA community served as a point of instrument validation.

3.2 Study procedures and design of the main study

The main study survey was available in English and Hindi, however, none of the participants took the survey in Hindi. SMILE was translated into Hindi utilizing back translation methods by the first author and compared for congruence with a bilingual language expert. Further, most DV experts from whom feedback was sought were SA and provided language-related feedback. This process allowed for the linguistic equivalence to ensure that questions and the language used in the questions made sense across languages (Kamla and Komori, 2018). Since no specific idioms or phrases reflecting the culture or community were utilized, translation of idioms was not needed, which is often an area in which the lack of linguistic equivalence can be problematic (Dobrovolskij, 2011). Institutional Review Board approval from a Southern University was attained for this study. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be of South Asian origin, 18 or older, and residing in the U.S. at the time of conducting the study. Three sampling techniques were employed for recruitment: convenience sampling (to share the survey with individuals known to the first author through social media, posting information in culturally specific beauty salons, grocery stores, etc.), snowball sampling (to request participants to circulate the survey in their network) and through the use of Qualtrics research panels to ensure diversity in the sample. The first author who is of Indian origin was able to recruit participants in her networks utilizing the first two recruitment methods. Hence, the Qualtrics research panels facilitated the inclusion of participants who were from other SA groups. All participants received a \$5 Amazon gift card for participation. Those recruited via Qualtrics research panels, were compensated directly through Qualtrics using a points-based system. No statistically significant differences were found

between participants recruited via the research panels or through other efforts. Hence, the data were merged and analyzed. All demographic questions were measured by utilizing questions created by the research team.

In the present study, we report the frequencies of the four items of the SMILE, including separate frequencies for male and female participants. Further, we report the principal component analysis (PCA) results for the overall sample as well as for men and women separately. PCA with varimax rotation was used to examine the factor loadings and the structure of the scale (Naik, 2018). However, since the results yielded a single factor, no rotation could be applied. PCA was selected since the goal of this study was to confirm the factor structure and test the new scale (Child, 1990). Overall reliability using Cronbach's alpha to demonstrate internal consistency is reported. Split-half reliability (i.e., splitting the sample using gender) is also reported (Trochim and Donnelly, 2007). We also noted the relationship between a gender-role attitudes measure (Attitude Toward Women measure [Spence and Helmreich, 1978]) and the items of SMILE by comparing mean scores. The ATW measure will be not expanded upon since it was not part of this study. Since data on both gender-role attitudes and SMILE was collected at the same time, predictive validity in the true sense of the definition about predicting a future event cannot be upheld (Engel and Schutt, 2013), however still indicative of the relationship between these two constructs. Correlation between mean scores was statistically significant ($r=0.37$, $p<0.01$).

4. Findings

4.1 Sample description

The sample size for the larger study was $N=468$ SA men and women across all 50 States in the U.S. A total of 44% of the participants were male and 56% were female. Over a third (38.5%) of the participants were between the ages of 18-35 and 48.1% were 36 and older. Approximately 70% of the participants were 1st generation and 29.8% were 1.5+ or higher. 1st generation refers to individuals who came to the U.S. at or beyond age 13, while 1.5 or higher generation refers to those who were either born in the U.S. or moved here prior to the age of 13. The highest proportion of participants were from India (70.2%), followed by Pakistan (11.7%), Bangladesh (6.3%), Nepal (5.2%) and the remaining (6.6%) belonged to other SA countries such as, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives. This distribution corresponds to the overall distribution of 5.4 million SAs in the U.S. (Pew Research Center, 2019).

4.2 Findings of the SMILE scale

Given that a Likert-type scale was used to collect the perceptions of in-laws abuse, the frequencies for participant responses about perceptions of in-laws abuse ranging from 1-3 (strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree) were included (see Table 1). For the overall sample, the highest frequencies were for, "physical harm by in-laws" (men=64%, women=75%) and "demeaning tone used by in-laws" (men=59%, women=72%). The item with the third highest frequency among participants was, "interference over financial matters by in-laws" which was perceived as DV by 56% of men and 64% of women. "Interference about whereabouts by in-laws" was the least common type of in-laws abuse interpreted by 55% men and 58% women.

In a separate study by Rai and Choi (2021); utilizing the same data set, they found a prevalence rate of 19% for men and 21% for women in regard to in-laws abuse.

The results of the PCA analysis for the overall sample depicts that the four items collectively explained 80.87% of the variance with the factor loadings ranging from 0.83-0.94 (Table 2). Rotation could not be applied for the overall sample as well as separate PCA analysis for male and female participants, since there was a single factor as indicated by the scree plot (Appendix A). The PCA results for male participants, indicated that the four items collectively explained 79.70% of the variance with factor loadings ranging from 0.84-0.93 (Table 3). The PCA results for female participants, indicated that the four items collectively explained 80.58% of the variance with factor loadings ranging from 0.81-0.94 (Table 4, Appendix A). Based on the scree plot results, there was a single component for the overall PCA as well as the one for men and women separately. Reviewing, the rate of slope across components 2, 3, and 4 appeared to be almost similar for male and female participants (Figures 2 and 3). For both, the point above the scree only contained a single factor, confirming the unitary structure of the scale. We named this single factor, "in-laws abuse." The reliability of the SMILE for the overall sample was 0.92. For male participants only, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.90 and 0.91 for female participants only. The Cronbach's alpha values were deemed acceptable as they were greater than 0.7 as elucidated by Bland and Altman (1997).

Table 1. Frequencies for in-laws abuse (N=468)

Item	Overall Frequency (%)	Frequency for Male Participants (%)	Frequency for Female Participants (%)
Interference about whereabouts by in-laws	56.7	55.3	57.8
Interference over financial matters by in-laws	60.3	56.1	63.5
Demeaning tone used by in-laws	65.3	59.1	71.7
Physical harm by in-laws	69.1	63.6	74.8

*Total men in the sample= 198

*Total women in the sample= 252

*Number of male and female participants do not total 468 due to some missingness.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis results for the overall sample

Item	Overall Factor Loading
Interference about whereabouts by in-laws	0.90
Interference over financial matters by in-laws	0.92
Demeaning tone used by in-laws	0.94
Physical harm by in-laws	0.83

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis results for male participants

Item	Factor Loading
Interference about whereabouts by in-laws	0.87
Interference over financial matters by in-laws	0.91
Demeaning tone used by in-laws	0.93
Physical harm by in-laws	0.84

Table 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis results for female participants

Item	Factor Loading
Interference about whereabouts by in-laws	0.91
Interference over financial matters by in-laws	0.93
Demeaning tone used by in-laws	0.94
Physical harm by in-laws	0.81

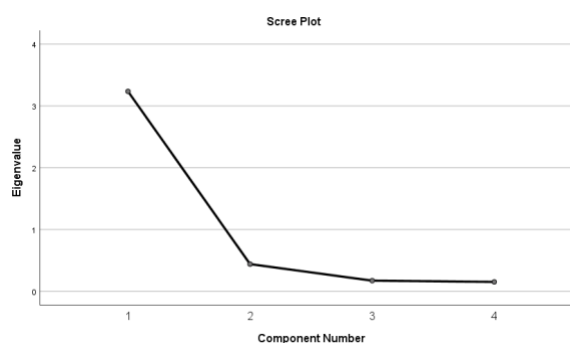
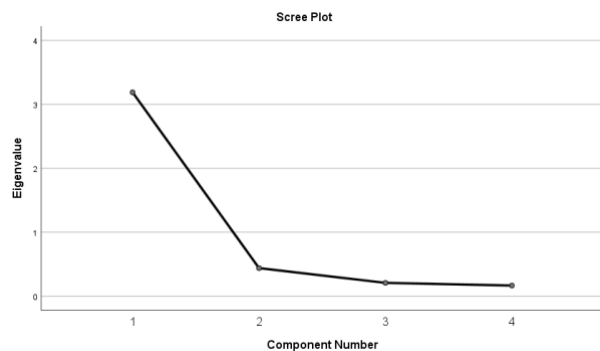
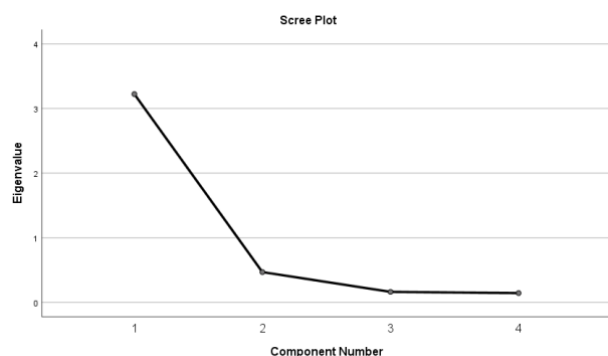
Figure 1. Scree plot for overall participants

Figure 2. *Scree plot for the male participants***Figure 3.** *Scree plot for the female participants*

5. Discussion of findings

The development and testing of the SMILE has facilitated the understanding of a distinct type of abuse, namely in-laws abuse among SA immigrants. This form of abuse can be characterized as a tactic of coercive control (Stark, 2007) exerted by in-laws. This nature of abuse is not included within the “Western” definition of DV (Black et al., 2011). To our knowledge, currently this is the only instrument that measures the perceptions of in-laws abuse among SAs as well as other immigrant communities (Rai, 2020a; Rai and Choi, 2021). Prior to delving into the implications of our work, we will highlight some of our main findings and note the strengths of the study.

Our study sample included both male and female participants across the U.S. Previously, empirical evidence has excluded men from research pertaining to DV within the SA community (Murugan, 2017; Rai and Choi, 2018; 2021), and few studies have relied on the use of multi-site samples (Mahapatra, 2012; Murugan, 2017). Because men have been excluded from DV research within the SA community, there is no prior understanding of male DV victimization. By involving both men and women, the goal of the overall study was to move away from the rhetoric of treating DV as an issue primarily confronting women and allowing men to participate

in sharing their view of in-laws abuse. Furthermore, including a sample of SAs across the diaspora strengthens the study, furthering disaggregation by not being grouped with other immigrant groups.

While examining the perceptions of in-laws abuse, the order of frequencies for the different items stand out. “Physical harm by in-laws” had the highest frequency both for men and women. This aligns with the definition of DV being physical (Black et al., 2011; CDC, 2020). It is possible that SA community members continued to deem physical abuse even in the context of in-laws abuse as the most salient form of abuse. We also saw that “demeaning tone used by in-laws” corresponding with psychological abuse in the definition of DV (Breiding et al., 2015) had the second highest frequencies. The third highest frequency “interference over financial matters by in-laws” is important. Some DV definitions include economic abuse, however there is a need for more focus on this form of abuse using validated measures, such as the Scale of Economic Abuse-Short in tandem with SMILE (NCADV, n.d.; Rai and Choi, 2021; Voth Schrag and Ravi, 2020).

Finally, “interference about whereabouts by in-laws” was the least common type of perceived in-laws abuse. It is still noteworthy to mention that more than half of the sample believed this type of violence to be construed as DV by in-laws in the SA community. The current definitions of DV may include this under psychological abuse (CDC, 2020). However, it is imperative to state that none of the current definitions of DV focuses on in-laws abuse relating to the SA community as well as the larger immigrant community. These tactics need to be added to the definitions of DV to make it more inclusive of DV tactics across diverse communities. Upon examining the factor structure of the SMILE, we observed that, the scale explained slightly higher variance among female participants, 81% compared to 80% for male participants. The range of factor loadings were somewhat wider for female participants as compared to male participants. Cronbach’s alpha indicated that the SMILE exhibited high reliability (Bland and Altman, 1997) indicating that this was a reliable measure to investigate perceptions of in-laws abuse among SA immigrants. The prevalence rates of in-laws abuse as disclosed in the study by Rai and Choi, 2021), 19% (male participants) versus 21% (female participants) calls for ongoing research for both male and female participants with regards to in-laws victimization in addition to examining other forms of abuse. Given that SA immigrants are spread across other countries outside of the U.S. such as, the United Kingdom and Canada among other countries, this instrument can be used with SAs as well as other immigrants in those regions.

5.1 Limitations of the scale

Despite the contributions of developing a culturally valid tool for SA immigrants, there were some limitations associated with the main study. Given the complicated nature of DV in the SA community as well as in other immigrant groups, survey research in general can be a limitation due to self-reported data. Furthermore, even though community-based strategies were used for recruitment, the taboo associated with DV conversations could have limited participation, and participants from honestly disclosing responses. Finally, despite the study's novel contribution in developing an instrument to examine the components of in-laws abuse, prevalence rates utilizing the items included in this scale still need to be established. Since in-laws abuse was not measured using SMILE in the present study, no concurrent validity with another instrument including items measuring in-laws could be established. Future scholars are encouraged to validate the SMILE with immigrants and establish concurrent validity with instruments that may have some items measuring in-laws abuse (see Soglin et al., 2020). However, the goal of the present study was to utilize the perceptions of the SA community to develop a scale which can be tested in the future to capture prevalence rates and be used for assessment. Study authors have reported a separate study where in-laws abuse was measured using a single item, however the prevalence of in-laws abuse utilizing SMILE still needs to be established. Detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this paper (see Rai and Choi, 2021). Ultimately, the online survey was conducted in English and Hindi, assuming some level of participant literacy and access to an electronic device. Future studies that utilize other means of data collection, such as in-person interviews need to be utilized to engage with those participants who are unable to take surveys using online platforms. Despite some shortcomings, this study is salient in highlighting and describing a new construct of DV, namely in-laws abuse among immigrants.

5.2 Implications for social work research, practice and policy

With large numbers of immigrants in Western countries, the development and use of DV assessment instruments that cohesively capture the cultural variations and sentiments of communities is essential (Budiman, 2020; White et al., 2013). The development of the SMILE furthers the contribution to social work research and practice by building a unique tool that can measure perceptions of abuse by in-laws, a commonly occurring form of abuse among SA immigrants (Raj and Silverman, 2002, Raj et al., 2006; Soglin et al., 2020; Rai, 2020a). Validating culturally responsive measures can be

done by incorporating the feedback of community members, experts and scholars which can often be missing from discussions concerning validation approaches. Through the present study, our goal was to highlight ways in which culturally responsive instruments can be validated, building empirical evidence in this area. Scholars validating culturally responsive instruments in the future may consider the approaches utilized in the present study.

Researchers and scholars can use the SMILE as a foundation and expand it further by adding more items, as well as testing it to establish prevalence rates across SA and non-SA communities. In the recently published report by Yoshihama et al. (2020), it was found that in-laws abuse was a form of abuse occurring in American as well as non-American immigrant minority communities. Hence, testing this scale with diverse populations and adapting it to suit the nuances of each community may be helpful in highlighting the pronounced nature of this form of abuse, and understanding the prevalence and impact of these experiences. The SMILE can be validated in the future using other forms of reliability such as test-retest, correlating it with instruments measuring theoretically related constructs concerning the role of in-laws, or in tandem with measures including items about in-laws abuse (Engel and Schut, 2013; Soglin et al., 2013). Further, exploring in-laws abuse across immigrant communities can help establish the extent to which in-laws abuse persists across communities and cultures. Scholars are encouraged to consider modifying the Power and Control Wheel for immigrants to include in-laws abuse and relevant tactics concerning this form of abuse.

Practitioners from helping professions come in frequent contact with victims of DV. Therefore, utilizing items from the SMILE as a screening tool can potentially allow them the opportunity to detect in-laws abuse and support client and community needs. Interventions and awareness programs that are designed by community-based agencies will also benefit from incorporating conversations and solutions focused on tackling in-laws abuse. This tool can be used in recording pre and post intervention participant perceptions relating to in-laws abuse. Incorporating this type of abuse into programs with immigrants will not only lead to an accurate understanding and detection of DV in immigrant communities, but also encourage reporting.

Providing a venue for conversations about in-laws abuse can help both male and female survivors in breaking their silence and moving past the stigma of reporting. Community agencies and policy advocates are also encouraged to make known the provisions of the Violence Against Women Act

(VAWA) to participants accessing DV services. Domestic abuse and in-laws abuse can impact both men and women (Rai and Choi, 2021; CDC, 2014), therefore, making the VAWA more inclusive for men is crucial. Furthermore, the 2005 reauthorization of the VAWA included the creation of grant programs to provide culturally responsive services to survivors (VAWA, 2005). This funding could provide an avenue for practitioners to create culturally responsive interventions for survivors that includes support for addressing in-laws abuse. Similarly, making the policies in other countries known to their immigrant communities, such as the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021 (Gov.uk, 2021) is pivotal. By integrating an additional stipulation for funding culturally responsive services within the Domestic Abuse Act of 2021, agencies can provide tailored services to immigrant communities.

6. Conclusion

This research brief highlights the importance of developing culturally responsive instruments for immigrants. The development of the SMILE is an integral contribution in investigating and understanding community perceptions of abuse by in-laws among SAs. The SMILE demonstrated that it is a reliable measure to investigate perceptions of in-laws abuse among SA immigrants. Social work scholars can test and build on this instrument with SAs and other immigrant groups, making the SMILE a useful assessment tool for survivors of DV. The findings of this study are crucial in dismantling the Western understanding of DV and in supporting immigrant communities (including those identifying either as men or women) across the world. It is time for us to collectively engage in decolonizing our assessment instruments, so minority communities are able to receive services that accurately capture their needs.

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