



**A White Paper: Abuse – An International Issue for Social Welfare Reform**

**By Gregg Tyler Milligan, Author & Abuse Prevention Advocate  
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<http://www.godmustbesleeping.com/>

Due to great strides made in collaborative efforts between countries, the issue of abuse has slowly gained visibility and has ultimately been accepted as an International Crisis. However, we have a long way to go. Allow me to lead off by addressing domestic violence within immigrant communities, with no reference to any particular geographical area in the world made here. I am using the example of immigrant communities in order to emphasize the necessity of an international-based approach to Social Welfare Reform in the fight against abuse of any kind. Trends have shown that immigrant populations of people, at any given location in the world, have increased rates of abuse when compared to indigenous populations. As one example, I have discovered through field and empirical research that often women within immigrant communities are very diverse, with different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, histories and biographies. At the same time, as immigrant women, they may share certain experiences and everyday realities. Combined, these differences and similarities among immigrant women pose challenges in addressing [domestic violence] in immigrant communities and highlight the importance of culturally-competent social welfare services to immigrant survivors.

Awareness of domestic violence in immigrant communities can be a useful guide in developing and implementing culturally-competent social welfare services. However, relatively little research exists on domestic violence in immigrant communities. The reasons vary; however, it seems that most methodological limitations are due to exclusion or uneven attention to certain groups, lack of interest in these groups, and limited data. Adding to the limitations pertaining to any findings is the fact most studies of domestic violence in immigrant communities are based on relatively on small samples of specific immigrant groups. In other words, a very small group is getting a larger part of the attention, while excluding the other groups.

As with any part of the world, what also poses a significant problem is that studies of domestic violence in immigrant communities have found that various aspects of immigrant survivors' lives intersect to make their domestic violence experiences somewhat different from that of non-immigrant survivors. A survivor's immigration status influences her access to legal protections, which in turn influences her risk for domestic violence (Crandall et al, 2005; Acevedo, 2000).

Again, using the example of domestic violence against women in immigrant communities helps to draw attention to the 'global' attention required when dealing with the issue of abuse.

Growing up poor, I have personal experience with regard to how my socioeconomic situation worsened the already terrible existence of abuse. I will further state that this personal experience, along with academic and field research, has proven financial independence can provide a means to escape violence. This is one of many reasons why I emphasize the importance of education. However, with this said, many who suffer abuse have limited access to educational opportunities. Therefore, many survivors in turn have limited financial resources.

The cultural aspects of 'learned-behavior' resulting in 'accepted-behavior' cannot be overlooked. Communities and extended families contribute to domestic violence by pressuring survivors to stay with the abuser, stigmatizing those who leave or report violence to police, and by participating in the abuse itself. Drawing from my own experience as a survivor, the pressure from my own family to stay with my abuser was tremendous. And later, the backlash of animosity after writing my books about the experience was abhorrent. I, along with many survivors, experience social isolation, which I believe is a deliberate strategy used

by both abusers and enablers of abuse. The common claim of, “This is just how it is,” isn’t acceptable. Clearly this statement exhibits a full submission to the problem of abuse and ignorance, along with a complete disregard for compassion.

*Survivors respond to domestic violence with various strategies, ranging from active resistance to passive acceptance of violence (Erez et al., 2009; Abraham, 2000b; Crandall et al., 2005).*

Internationally-speaking, research findings and written works highlight the need for several culturally-competent approaches to providing services to immigrant survivors. These approaches include increasing survivors’ access to information about domestic violence and services available, offering culturally-specific shelter and other services, helping survivors adapt to life and become functional members of society. An opportunity to implement this approach exists through the adaptation of international social work. Although social workers are now more frequently engaged in international activities than ever before (proof-positive I am currently collaborating with S.E. Asian universities and organizations), there is ambiguity which remains in the construction of Social Welfare Programs pertaining to the critical issue of abuse. Examples of areas that still require additional focus include: Establishing a definition of international social work; addressing the nature and impact of globalization on social work; balancing the proper role of remedial, activist and developmental practice; and finally the placement of values, cultural diversity and internationalism as ideological positions. Discussions have begun on a small-scale in an attempt to formulate proposals that can accommodate and resolve differences. This is great news...it all begins with one drop of water!

Speaking of a drop of water ... there are Social Welfare Organizations all over the world; however, I will return to a critical impediment to effective abuse prevention and treatment; which is lack of collaboration. Working together would allow cross-cultural applications of social reformations in the area of abuse. If abuse was seen as a kindred disease; such as, HIV/AIDS, this would add the appropriate emphasis on the issue. Both are debilitating diseases. Therefore, a good place to begin with regard to Abuse Prevention and Treatment Programs is in returning Social Welfare Services to their core values – those of saving and/or restoring the abuse survivor’s quality of life. This requires education (there’s that word again ...), theory-building, research, practice development and establishing standard settings.

As I delve further into a review of current knowledge about the international field social work, I found four main conclusions. First, an unresolved debate exists relating to the meaning of international social work (ISW). Second, various motives drive students, faculty and professionals to participate in ISW. Third, developing a curriculum for ISW presents unique challenges. Fourth, four competing models of international field placement exist: (1) Independent/one-time; (2) Neighbor-country; (3) Onsite group; and (4) Exchange/reciprocal. Based on the review, principles for effective ISW field placement, especially around a structure of intensive preparation and collaboration between sending and host schools, and directions for future research should be offered.

Globalization has become a catchword for the integration of local markets into world capitalism, but where is the emphasis on social responsibilities? Clearly, governments around the world are, at best, minimizing their social responsibilities for the care of those who are most vulnerable. I am referring to all of those in a position of power (a consistent view I discuss and support in other white papers).

By structuring Social Welfare Services based on the world as a global society where both local and global responses can interact to ameliorate the conditions of global citizens, tackling abuse would be made much simpler. It would finally be mainstream. We think globally when it comes to our financial interests – why not do the same when it comes to our social interests? Humans are at the core of our financial markets; unless of course we have been replaced with another species. It makes for an entertaining sci-fi movie, but it just isn’t the case.

For better or worse, we are going to remain as humans. Therefore, I am proposing a globalized approach to social work practice: thinking globally and acting locally. This supports the formation and growth of a global civil society, accompanied by the establishment of a global social policy system and sub-systems.

As per the ongoing theme in my books, message, and white papers ... “We are here to save one another.” We are a world disabled by ignorance, but we do not have to stay that way.

Therefore, I will see you on the other side of the ocean. I could really use the help.

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Gregg Tyler Milligan is an internationally-known author and child abuse prevention advocate. He has written two books, *A Beautiful World*, detailing his childhood and the horrific suffering Milligan endured at the hands of his mother and strangers. Milligan later completed the continuation to *A Beautiful World*, describing his next eleven years. Both books are published under the same volume, titled *God Must be Sleeping*. Milligan is a member of the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) Speakers Bureau and continues to spread his message of hope.

In his words, “Please remember, the reason we are here is to save one another – Break the cycle.” More information can be found at [godmustbesleeping.com/](http://godmustbesleeping.com/).