Surviving Gender Based Violence

The Problem
Gender disparities within the context of psycho-social health is significant. Research has shown that women are in greater risk of developing mental illnesses. Nonetheless, gender inequality and gender-based violence prevail in the home, workplace, and community (UN Women, 2016). Violence has been shown to be a leading risk factor to mental illness and poor mental health among females (Capaldi et al. 2012). When considering victims who continue in abusive relationships and survivors who are unable to reach a positive mental health, the roles of risk and resilience must be taken into account.

Risk Factors
Particular risk factors may increase the likelihood of an individual’s continuance in an abusive cycle or a survivor’s inability to attain long-term positive mental health. Risk factors include factors related to the person’s social world and factors related to the individual self. Social risk factors may include an absence of family support, poverty, a lack of community resources, and/or stigma related to cultural or ethnic beliefs. Risk factors related to the individual self often include previous exposure to violence, economic dependence, low-self-esteem, emotional inhibition, isolation, and/or depression. These risk factors of violence against women (VAW) are correlated with the traditional gender norm—women are the submissive sex while males are the dominant sex - a societal risk factor of violence that transpires in all cultures, ethnicities, and countries (CDC, 2016).

Resilience & Protective Factors
Resiliency is defined as the typical development under unhealthy or atypical circumstances (Rutter, 1990) and the human ability to confront, conquer, and eventually prevail by life’s problems and adversities (Masten, 2004). Resiliency in the situations of abuse, trauma, and violence is often due to protective factors - personal and social aspects that contributed to the individual self before experiencing the abuse or trauma. Resiliency can be composed by the person’s characteristics, aspirations and goals, secure attachment with parents during childhood, talents, coping strategies, culture, religious beliefs, and/or the psychological capability to separate herself from the stressful situation. Resiliency can be developed during or after the experience of abuse or trauma by protective factors such as community resources, economic independence, family support, and/or a supportive social network (Friedli, 2009).

Surviving Violence
Mental health, family, and community resources are essential to reduce risk factors and advance protective factors for survivors across cultures, ethnicities, and countries.