

An Exploration of The Causes of Domestic Violence Against Married Women

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Abstract

Domestic violence takes place both urbanized and developing countries. The issue of domestic violence gained prominence in the wake of the women's movement of the 1970s, and from that time concerns about wives being beaten by their husbands took on greater importance. Crimes of domestic violence are underreported. Reasons for reluctance to report a case of domestic violence include lack of vigilance with the legal system, an inability to pay legal fees, and societal reaction when a woman decides to end a violent relationship. Violence against women and girls hurts and harms people physically, psychologically, financially and sexually. Domestic violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual, financial, emotional and verbal. Violence manifests itself in female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry death, abduction, eve teasing, and sexual harassment of women in the workplace. Focusing on victims and perpetrators, this paper attempts to examine what constitutes domestic violence, and provides an in-depth analysis of the factors that contribute to domestic violence against married women.

Keywords: *Domestic violence, Married women, Patriarchy, Gender Inequality, Cultural norms*

Introduction

Violence against women is a result of patriarchal interpretations of cultural norms. The concept of violence against women is both women's issue as well as a societal issue. The issue of domestic violence received attention in the wake of women's movement during 1970s, when concern about wives being beaten by their husbands gained attention. Emphasis has always been on women as the primary victims of domestic violence. The family is often believed to be a place of safety and security that is supposed to provide refuge from the tensions of the outer world. However, evidence shows that home is the breeding ground of all sorts of cruel and barbaric acts of violence and such violence are mostly perpetrated by the male members of the family and the easy targets are the female family members. It has been found that in majority of cases the violence is inflicted by men who happen to hold positions of power and intimacy — husbands, boyfriends, fathers, father in laws, uncles, sons, brothers or other male relatives. The crime of domestic violence is both under reported and under recorded. The reasons behind this reluctance to report incidents pertaining to domestic violence include

lack of awareness about the legal system, inability to bear the legal costs, feelings of fear and guilt as to how the society would respond when a woman decides to come out of a marriage by putting an end to the troublesome relationship. Violence against women and girls injures and damages a person physically, psychologically, economically and sexually. The violence manifests themselves in female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry deaths, abduction and kidnapping, eve teasing, sexual harassment of women at workplace. As crime against women like, rape, kidnapping, abduction, wife battering, wife abuse, dowry death, murder, eve teasing, molestation have been reported more frequently since late 1960s and early 1970s, the issue of violence against women has been transformed from a private issue into a public problem (Ahuja, 1998).

Defining Domestic Violence

Domestic violence occurs in both developed and developing countries alike. Earlier it was considered a private matter between individuals by the Governments. The issue of the growth of women's rights has concerned the United Nations since the organization's origin. However the issue of female targeted violence was not recognized by the international community until December 1993, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. In view of the alarming growth in the number of cases of violence against women globally, the Committee on Human Rights adopted resolution 1994/45 of March 1994, in which it decided to adopt the Special Rapporteurs on Violence against women. As a result the problem of violence against women has been getting ever-increasing attention. A preliminary report submitted by Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women in the year 1994, focused attention on three areas of concern where women are particularly vulnerable to violence. Women are susceptible to violence within the family (including domestic violence, female infanticide), within the community (including rape, sexual assault, trafficking in women, labour exploitation) and by the State (including violence against women in detention centres as well as in situations of armed conflict, violence against refugee women) (Singh, et.al. 2009). More precisely, in the United Nations' Special Report, 1996, on Violence Against Women, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy identified various kinds of violence committed against women, namely, a) physical, sexual and emotional violence occurring within the family, including wife battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, b) physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment at workplace, intimidation in educational institutions, trafficking in women and forced prostitution and c) physical sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs. In 1996, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy in her report to the Commission on Human Rights concentrating on domestic violence defined domestic violence as, "violence that occurs within the private sphere,

generally between individuals who are related through intimacy, blood or law and is perpetrated by both private and state actors... domestic violence exists as a powerful tool of oppression... and is used to control women in one space traditionally dominated by women, the home" (Misra, 2007,p.62).

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in its resolution on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. One plus point of this broad definition is that it establishes violence against women in a wider social perspective and facilitate the interested parties to take into account the majority of violations against women's human rights, categorizing them under the heading of gender based violence. Article 2 of the UN Declaration states that violence against women encompasses, but is not limited to, the following, a) physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; b) physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; c) physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs (Shukla & Phookan, 2015, p.5).

Major forms of abuse

Violence against women is a cycle of abuse that manifests itself in many forms throughout their lives (Figure 1). At the very beginning of her life, a girl may be the target of sex-selective abortion or female infanticide in cultures where son preference is prevalent. During childhood, violence against girls may include enforced malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and education, incest, female genital mutilation, early marriage, and forced prostitution or bonded labour. Some go on to suffer throughout their adult lives – battered, raped and even murdered at the hands of intimate partners. Other crimes of violence against women include forced pregnancy, abortion and harmful traditional practices such as dowry-related violence, sati, and killings in the name of honour. And in later life, widows and elderly women may also experience abuse.

Figure 1 (Mukhopadhyay, 2007, pp.26-27)
Examples of Violence against Women throughout the Life Cycle

Phase	Type of violence
Pre-birth	Sex-selective abortion; effects of battering during pregnancy on birthoutcomes.
Infancy	Female infanticide; physical, sexual and psychological abuse.
Girlhood	Child marriage; female genital mutilation; physical, sexual and Psychological abuse; incest; child prostitution and pornography.
Adolescence and Adulthood	Dating and courtship violence (e.g. acid throwing and date rape) economically coerced sex (e.g. school girls having sex with “sugar daddies” in return for school fees); incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape; dowry abuse and murders; partner homicide; psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities; forced pregnancy.
Elderly	Forced “suicide” or homicide of widows for economic reasons; sexual physical and psychological abuse.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. The World health Organization (WHO) in its research on violence against women categorised it as occurring through five stages of life cycle – pre-birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence & adulthood and elderly. Incidence of crimes against women is on the rise in India. For many women across the globe, home is a place of fear. The worst kind of violence happens at home and the wife suffers dishonour in silence accepting the violent episodes as her fortune. Sadly enough, the issue failed to gather attention that it deserves in the light of the devastating effects on women, children and society, as a whole. The reasons behind this neglect may be attributed to a huge range of factors like, lack of knowledge about the gravity of the issue, universal approval of man’s superiority over woman, denial of violence by women themselves owing to their societal concern, religious values and conservative upbringing. The most common form of harassment of a woman in her in-laws family, unfolds in the form of taunts, abuses and threats, which generally escalate into battering, abetment to suicide or even murder in some cases. Women suffer terrible psychological stress due to lack of economic, social and emotional security in a patriarchal world. The threat of violence and controlling behaviour by their spouses tends to lower women’s self-esteem. They are incapable to take their own decisions, voice their own opinions or protect themselves and their children for fear of further

consequences. Domestic violence can take a number of forms including physical, sexual, economic, emotional and verbal.

a. Physical abuse

Physical violence is the deliberate use of physical force with the potential for resulting in injury, harm, disability or death. Acts of physical violence by the husband against his wife includes pushing, shaking, slapping, arm twisting, hair pulling, punching, kicking, dragging, beating, trying to choke or burn her on purpose, and threatening her or attacking her with a weapon.

b. Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is forcefully compelling a woman to engage in sexual acts against her will. Acts of sexual violence by the husband include physically forcing the wife against her will to have sex or perform other sexual acts that she did not want to perform.

c. Economic abuse

Economic abuse takes place when the perpetrator has total control over the victims' money and other economic resources. Acts of economic abuse includes controlling access to money, withholding money at will, preventing the victim from finishing education or preventing the victim from taking up employment.

d. Emotional abuse or psychological abuse

Emotional abuse means intentionally humiliating the victim either privately or publicly, isolating the victim from family and friends, purposely detaching the victim from social contacts, threatening to harm someone of whom the victim is extremely fond of. Acts of emotional violence by the husband against the wife includes jealousy, anger, intimidation, controlling, neglect, humiliation, threats, isolation and verbal abuse.

e. Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse might involve threats, name-calling, blaming, ridicule, disrespect, and criticism.

Causes of domestic violence against married women

Gender is a system of social practices that produces differences between men and women. Research has made it evident that violence against women is related to traditional gender role expectations and masculine ideologies (White and Chen, 2002). The reason as to why women are repeatedly subjected to discrimination and abuse within the home may be ascribed to patriarchy and unequal power relations that exist between men and women. The general perception is that men are superior to women and the process of socialization helps both men and women internalise such views and gender role expectations. This is one of the principal reasons for which women silently endure the violence that is meted out towards them at home. Physical and other acts of violence are inflicted by the powerful men on the

less powerful women so as to ensure absolute obedience from them. The causes of domestic violence are multi - faceted. Multiple forces determine it at multiple levels; the individual (ontogenic factors), the family level (the micro system), the community level (the exo system) and the cultural level (the macro system) in which all the factors are linked with each other. The following figure 2 is indicative of the causes of domestic violence and it is based on Belsky's (1984) theory of maltreatment. The figure includes the emotional disturbances through which an abusive husband passes, provoking characteristics of the wife or children, dysfunctional forms of family interaction, stress factors and abuse promoting cultural norms. The figure also indicates that causes of maltreatment cannot be explained on the basis of a single factor. In fact it may be triggered by multiple factors (Pandey, 2008).

Figure 2
The causes of domestic violence

Ontogenic factors	Micro system factors	Exo system factors	Macro system factors
History of abuse	Marital discord, conflict	Inadequate health care facilities	Economic recession
Alcohol abuse	Single parenthood		Cultural acceptance of corporal punishment
Stressful experiences	Premature or unhealthy child	Social isolation Unsafe neighbourhood	View of females or children as possession
Low I.Q. Psychiatric and physical illness			Patriarchy

Traditionally women are considered to be the keystone of the family. A woman creates life and then nurtures, protects and strengthens life. If the foundation stone is not cautiously preserved the society is bound to get dissected. Violence against women within the four walls of the home is as old as the world in myths or legends. The rate of recurrence, intensity and kinds of violence differ from place to place. The social construction of the divide between public and private underlies the hidden nature of domestic violence. The domain of the household was believed to be under the control of male members of the family and much of the violence in the home was directed by the male members of the family against the female members of the family. The causes of domestic violence are manifold. Foremost among them are patriarchal system of society and male superiority complex. An issue relating to violence against women entails an analysis of gender and its centrality to the family where norms of gender disparity exist. Domestic violence, dowry deaths, marital rape are the materialization of gender inequality within the structure of family system. Research has shown that any social structure that considers women to be inferior in status and subservient to men provides

an environment that is conducive towards violence against women. Violence against women in marital home depends on the kind of relationship that a husband and a wife share with each other. The cultural factors relating to marriage, status of women and power structure relationship between men and women in the society are vital while analyzing violence against women in the family context. An abuser uses violence on his wife or partner in order to show his dominance and keep her under control. There is no denying the fact that poverty, addiction to alcohol and drugs, frustration owing to unemployment or lack of job opportunities can trigger violent behaviours. These factors have the potentiality to create emotional and economic stress and this may take a toll on the relationship where sometimes even small conflicts may escalate into violent crimes. However research has shown that domestic violence is perpetrated even by men belonging to well to do families as well as those who are non-alcoholics. Sometimes certain action on the part of the wives might trigger violence. Such actions include: refusal to obey the orders of the husband, disobeying the orders of the in-laws, questioning attitude regarding husband's whereabouts, raising suspicion about husband's sexual fidelity and also refusing to succumb to the pressure of marital family for dowry demands. The crime of domestic violence is often justified by both men and women on certain grounds. Certain extent of violence is considered common and accepted as is evident from the ensuing opinions and perception expressed by both men and women (Jejeebhoy, 1998, p.858).

A husband in a Brahmin household in Uttar Pradesh: "Beating is for the woman's own good, to make her understand when she misbehaves."

A wife in a Brahmin household in Uttar Pradesh: "It is a way a man shows his love for his wife. If he doesn't correct her who else is there?"

A Jat householder from Uttar Pradesh: "You should not beat your wife but if the food is not ready, if the rotis are not hot, what choice do you have?"

A woman from Gujarat: "One does sometimes feel like running away from it all. But where does one go? The only place is parental home but parents will always send you back....Also, when there are children, where does one go?"

A woman from Tamil Nadu: "Every day passes in fear. If I dare to talk back, I will get beaten more. I have now learnt to keep my mouth shut. Where will I go if he throws me out? Over the past few months I have gone close to taking poison three or four times. Then I think of the children. Who will take care of them if I die?"

Violence is inflicted against women as punishment in the name of correcting her wrong behaviour. It seems as if there is an informal and powerful system of jurisprudence that is followed by families, which is not accountable to formal systems of justice. For instance, in a study conducted in Gujarat, women commonly attributed an outburst against them owing to causes such as mistakes in running the household. Most frequently cited reasons include: failure to prepare meals on time, not cooking meals properly, not taking proper care of the

children and economic stress. Another study found that the most commonly stated reason behind wife abuse was disobeying husband's orders or failing to meet his requirements and expectations. So called disobedience may be failure in serving hot meals, quarrelling with the mother in law, drinking or behaving improperly with outside men. Disobedient behaviour on the part of a woman would result in punishment by the husband. Violence and cruelty due to dowry demands is another major factor of domestic violence in Indian society. Abusers rarely feel remorse for their act and instead put the blame on the innocent victims of violence. The abusers are rarely punished even after committing brutal acts on their partners. There is also the trend to ignore the offences committed by men on women by projecting the men as powerless victims of poverty or drinking or drug addiction. This indicates that men are prone to be pardoned from guiltiness and reprimand. Strangely enough the husband instead of being a defender of rights turns into a violent perpetrator who initiates all sorts of vindictive acts on his wife. For the wife, the home ceases to be the safest place and turns into a prison where she is just a sufferer of physical and mental torture. It is probable to see the marks of violence on a woman's body but what remains largely concealed is the mental scar and psychological harm that are the effects of violent episodes. This emotional distress takes a long time to mend and it also toll on a woman's health and overall well-being of the family. Violence emerges from the notions of ownership over a woman's body, sexuality, reproductive rights, mobility as well as level of autonomy. To put it simply, the unequal power relations between male and female in society is due to a range of factors: men's control over women's body and sexuality, belief in inherent superiority of males, cultural sanctions that uphold male supremacy over females and that deny both women and children an independent legal and social status. The crime of wife abuse has received social and religious sanction from the society. The state promotes the culture of violence by adopting the role of onlookers to the incidence of domestic violence. The Indian society views women as objects rather than subjects and accords women a low position in society. It is this society that accords men a higher status giving men the right to exercise dominance over women and even chastise and beat them, whenever necessity arises. Traditional society enforced the view that only men are capable of fulfilling the needs of women and only a man can provide identity to a woman. Women are conditioned to believe that after marriage, in laws place is their actual home and they are duty bound to serve their husband and in laws unconditionally. In other words, absolute obedience is demanded from the women. Cultural norms encouraged the belief that the failure of the marriage indicated the failure of the women as individuals. The result is that women try to save their marriage at all costs, and in the process gets trapped in the tumultuous relationship where the women are made to suffer all sorts of physical, psychological and even sexual abuse. In rural India girls are forced to get married much before reaching marriageable age. This can happen either with or without the consent of the girl. Early marriage undermines the health and autonomy of millions of young girls. Early marriage leads to teenage pregnancy and also has adverse impact on the health of the new born child, for example- low birth weight babies are born. Other ill effects include depriving

the young girls from getting education and employment opportunities. In India, women are always encouraged to sacrifice their own ambitions and needs for the needs of other members of the family including husband and children. The Indian culture glorifies the image of a woman who is tolerant, obedient, and submissive by nature and who looks upon her husband and in laws with reverence. If any woman attempts to leave her abusive husband's home and decides to live independently that would mean she is defying established customary standards and the woman might end up inviting society's wrath and dishonour. It is evident from the above discussion that there are various causes of violence against woman. Another area of concern is that an Indian middle class woman is seldom aware of her legal rights as a wife. Instead of making her legally aware, she is made to believe that marital family home is her only alternative (Epstein, 1996; Segal, 1999). Lack of awareness about legal rights is a disadvantage for women. The seriousness of the crime of domestic violence has not received the attention it deserved. This is mainly due to the fact that society tries to treat it as an acceptable for the purpose of maintaining harmony within homes. Another reason is, however, the non-availability of data to disclose the scale and frequency of such violence. This unreliability or unavailability of data is mainly due to under reporting and faulty statistics. This under reporting of crime is due to social and cultural factors, insensitive police force and an intimidating judicial process (Gangoli, 2007).

Violence against women is an allegory that exist the world over. In India the menace of violence against women is as old as Sita who was abducted by Ravana, or Draupadi who was publicly humiliated by the Kauravas or Ahalya who was turned into stone by her husband. Domestic violence as a human rights issue was recognized at key international conferences during the 1990s, including the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). In India it was only during the early 1980s, in the wake of dowry and related problems, those crimes against women came to be recognized as an important social problem.

In Indian society, a woman enters an already structured household as strangers where they are susceptible to abuse. This household is the breeding ground of domestic ideologies that distributes gender specific roles and accords the wife a low status in family. Karlekar differentiates between family and household. Family is seen as greater kinship alliances spread over time and space. The household can be viewed as a physical structure that is an assemblage of financial and emotional relationships among its members. The household may be referred to as functioning unit that may be looked upon as a platform for a working out of family ideologies around specific roles and expectations (Karlekar, 1998). Women are considered second class citizens and are seen as inferior to men. The Indian tradition and custom has never treated women equal to men. Women are well-regarded in Vedas and Puranas but in reality women are accorded low status in society. Women are assigned the role of child bearing, child rearing and home making and unconditional and lifelong service to male members of the family is expected from them. Women should never indulge in any act that

might have the potential of bringing shame to family prestige and women should always be governed by male family members. This tradition has its roots in the Laws of the Manu, whose author Manu is regarded by the Hindus as the supreme law giver. In India, rules and regulations for women which are laid down by Manusmriti are both discriminative and derogatory to the status of women. Laws of the Manu start with the dictum which states that women are created by God in order to bear children. The Laws of the Manu predetermined that a woman ought to be under the protection and control of her father in childhood, her husband in youth and her sons in her widowed old age, and furthermore that a woman does not deserve independence. In other words, starting from childhood to the end of her life a woman has to be under the control of father or husband or the son. It is evident from the violent acts committed against women that men have taken full advantage of Laws of the Manu to keep women under control. Manu is however kind enough to women for it ordered men to take care of them because women are needed to propagate the mankind. A well-known verse from the Laws of the Manu states that a righteous wife should continuously serve her husband like a God, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges in his lust and is devoid of any good qualities (Walsh, 2004). This implies the fact that in her in-law's home, a woman's husband was her God; her loyalty and dedication to him was unconditional, dependent on neither his character nor his behaviour.

Conclusion

It is a myth to think that domestic violence is restricted to women who belong to poor section of society. In reality, women of all classes are equally prone to violence at home. However, women belonging to middle class and upper class are subjected to abuse behind closed doors. Similarly it is a myth to think that violence is only perpetrated by men who belongs lower strata of society because in real life it is also practiced by successful men belonging to highly successful profession like medicine, engineering as well as corporate. It is often believed that victims of violence are helpless nonworking women. But the fact is that educated women and women holding responsible jobs as doctors, engineers or those who are doing government jobs are also subjected to abuse. Another myth is that women are themselves responsible for the beatings to which they are subjected in marital home. Many believe men tend to get violent only due to provocation. Women are always made to bear the brunt of guilt, shame and provocation. Another myth is that women do not leave their abusive husbands because they get accustomed to the beatings and assaults. The truth is that women fail to come out of the violent relationships owing to a number of factors, like, economic dependency on husband, lack of support from natal family and lack of education or absence of awareness about legal procedures. It is wrong to think that men who incite violence at home can change with the passage of time. The reality is violence continue to happen both in severity and frequency. And the victims continue to live with fear and insecurity because it is difficult to predict the onset of violence (Pandey, 2008).

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