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# Sheer Brutality: Domestic Violence against Women & Children

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## ABSTRACT

*Domestic violence is a very common practice which is prevalent in India and the most common victims of domestic violence are the women and the children in the country. Domestic violence against women is considered normal by the society due to the gender norms and values the society which place women in a subordinate position to men. How many of the people like us can imagine living 24×7 in the same house as one's abuser, too with the constant fear of what the abuser might next do to hurt us and in what way and with what intensity. We can never have the clue of what mind be going in the mind of the abuser and what the victim must be going through all the time. The pain, the fear, the agony of the victim is beyond ones understanding. Domestic violence is a pattern of a specific behaviour in a relationship which is used to gain or even maintain and control in a relationship. An interview was prepared to assess the prevalence and practice of domestic violence and 50 women of Lucknow were interviewed to get an adequate result. The study showed that alcoholism of husbands is one of the major reasons behind domestic violence against women the result also made it clear that Domestic violence is very much present in the Indian society and children and women who are the victims are not aware of the laws regarding domestic violence and about the various institutions that might be able to provide them help. How would it feel if even just coughing resulted in beatings, or even being kicked out of the house on suspicion of having COVID-19 symptoms rather than paying attention to the problem beating the victim mercilessly, or one subjected their partner to constant verbal abuse or mental torture, or starved one to death, or did not let one even use the toilet at all? In order to slow down the spread of the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19), actions such as social-distancing, restricted travel, sheltering in-place and closure of public places and transport are suggested by the government guidelines and these have led to a drastic increase in family violence around the globe. In fact many of the affected countries have indicated a dramatic increase in reported cases of domestic violence hence improving the cooperation between human welfare and animal welfare agencies also increasing community partnerships and informing the public to report any concerns and problems of abuse are all vital and critical at this moment. Although female public participation is increasing and many*

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*laws have been amended accordingly, India still hasn't succeeded in making Indian women equal citizens of their own country. In the Indian society a huge number of women are treated violently by their intimate partners and they continue to suffer in silence. In some extreme cases, domestic violence even leads to the death of the victims. It is on this premise that this paper deliberates the meaning, types of domestic violence, their causes and also the after-effects of domestic violence on women and children. In addition, this paper also discusses the management of this crime against women and also examines the role of the social workers, professionals and other organisations in providing support and help to the affected individuals.*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

'Women are the only exploited group in history to have been idealised into powerlessness'<sup>2</sup>. Domestic violence has several different names such as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), and is explained as the pattern of abusive behaviours by one partner against another partner in any intimate relationships like marriage, dating, family, or cohabitation. Domestic violence has different modes that could be physical aggression and various types of assaults like hitting, kicking, shoving, slapping, sexual abuse, or intimidation, passive/covert abuse and even economic deprivation.

Alcohol consumption and mental illness are complimentary to the problem of domestic violence and add to the problem of the victim. Domestic violence is not a new concept but rather existed in our society since olden times. Domestic violence occurs in all the countries around the world, irrespective of social, economic, religious or cultural aspects. Although even women can be violent in their relationships with men and violence is also sometimes identified in same-sex marriages, but in the most of the cases it has been found that it is women who have borne violence at the hand of men. The fact is that a large number of women are dependent on their partners emotionally and economically which has major implications. Domestic violence can also be explained as the power misused by one individual in a relationship to control or dominate the other. It is the establishing of control and fear in a relationship with the use of violence and other forms of abuse. Violence can be in the form of physical assault, psychological trauma, social abuse, financial abuse, or even sexual assault. The frequency of the violence may not be constant but can be on and off, inconsistent, occasional or chronic. Domestic violence is not simply just any argument. It is a specific pattern of coercive behaviour that one person exercises over the other person.

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx: domestic violence- finding solution

Abusers use physical and sexual violence, threats as a way of dominating their victims and get their way through.<sup>3</sup>

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 states that any act, conduct, omission or commission that harms or injures or has the potential to harm or injure will be considered domestic violence by the law. Even one single act of omission or commission may establish domestic violence - in other words, women need not suffer for a long period of abuse before taking any recourse to law. The law also cover children its its ambit. Domestic violence is done by, and on, all men, women and also children. However, most number of the victims are women, especially in context of our country. Even in USA, it had been reported that about 85% of all violent crimes done on women are cases of intimate partner violence, in comparison to 3% of the violent crimes that are experienced by men. Therefore, domestic violence in the context of India mostly refers to domestic violence against women. In the 1980s the rate of dowry deaths in India had risen to very high numbers and it resulted in violation os the human rights which led to the addition of Sec- 498-A for cruelty against women under the IPC. With greater developments in research it is now recognised as a major public health issue firstly due to the countless number of health issues associated to it and secondly that the prevention strategies lie in the hands of the practitioners of public health.

## **II. DEFINITIONS**

Violence against women: The United Nations 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 psychological harm or suffering to women. The act of violence may occur in any family, general community, or even being perpetrated and condoned by state.

Intimate partner violence : "Intimate partner violence" is described as physical, sexual, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse.

## **III. TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

UNICEF Reports on Progress of Nations that was released jointly with the Indian Government and UNICEF claims that more than 60 million women, that should've been alive at the present time, are missing. Factors that are responsible are female foeticide to domestic violence even dowry deaths and includes physical assaults. Injustice starts even before a girl is born and continues till she dies.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Scheter, Visionary leader in the movement to end family violence.

All the types of domestic violence boil down to one single purpose that is to gain and to maintain control over the victim of the same. The abusers use ways to exert power over their partner to establish dominance, isolation, threats, blame etc.

#### ***A. Physical Abuse***

Physical abuse is the kind of abuse which requires physical contact of some sort which is intended to cause pain, injury, hurt or the bodily harm. It may comprise hitting, slapping, throwing objects, choking, pushing, and other kinds of contacts that may directly or indirectly cause injury to the victim.

Physical abuse also comprises of behaviours like denial of medical health and support to the victim and also depriving the victim of sleep, food, water or any other form of basic necessities or even compelling the victim to consume alcohol and drugs against their will and consent. If a person is suffering any physical injury then they are suffering from physical abuse. Injury could also mean that causing pain to the other relatives of the victim like their children or their pets.

#### ***B. Sexual Abuse and Marital Rape***

Sexual abuse means a situation where a person is forced by another to participate in sexual activity against the will or the consent of the victim. This can be achieved by applying force and pressure on the victim. The victim can also be a spouse or intimate partner or children or close relative of the abuser. Even a person with whom prior consensual sex has occurred may also face sexual abuse by the act of violence, aggression and abuse. Marital rape is not recognised in India yet but is a crime in many other countries which means marriage doesn't mean implied consent to rape.

#### ***C. Emotional Abuse***

Emotional abuse is also referred to as psychological or even as mental abuse means humiliating the victim in public or in private or doing acts that make the victim feel embarrassed or diminished or using words that are extremely hurtful or derogatory and demeaning. It also includes controlling or limiting the acts of the victim also forcing the victim to isolate themselves from their family and peers or by blackmailing them or even harassing others that are related to the victim to hurt her mentally. It also constitutes denying the victim from accessing money or any other basic amenities or resources. Degradation of any such kind leads to emotional and mental abuse which leaves the victim completely helpless and vulnerable.

Emotional abuse comprise of conflicting actions and statements which are made to basically confuse and create insecurity and dilemma in an individual. Such harmful and toxic acts make the victim absolutely weak and at times even lead them to the belief that whatever is happening to them is by their own very fault. Such emotional turmoil lead to depression and anxiety and other psychological disorders such as PTSD, insomnia etc. and all this may lead to suicidal thoughts, eating disorders alcohol and substance abuse. This also leads to the deprivation of the self esteem and confidence in the victim. Emotional abuse comprises of verbal abuse and use of obscene language, threatening to harm the victim in any way that might cause fear in them are all part of emotional abuse.

#### ***D. Economic Abuse***

Economic abuse is very much prevalent in India since most of the Indian women are dependent on their partners for financial support their spouse might exploit them in such a way by depriving them of money for even the most basic and bare minimum things is a form of abuse. This can also be done by exploring the resources of the victim against her will. The motive of the user behind limiting the resources of the victim I stop diminish the victim's capacity to support herself independently and so as to she is majorly dependent on the abuser and by this the abuser takes advantage of the victim. This will also encompass preventing the victim from obtaining education or to get employment or acquiring assets etc. so as to have control over her.

#### ***E. Foeticide***

Some new forms of violence have appeared in this era of technological advancement as we can see in the case of female foeticide leading to unequal sex ratio and social bias in the favour of the male child leads to abortion. From 8000 cases of abortions following the test of sex determination 7999 were female foetuses. Except Kerala the sex ratio in all other parts of India is declining. The political parties also have failed to stop the sex ratio from falling.

#### ***F. Infanticide***

A large number of newly born baby girls die due to the overdose of substances such as opium and hence they get abandoned and are also thrown into the rivers or even in dust bins to die and 90% of these abandoned children are girls only.

#### ***G. Health hazards***

According to the official numbers , the infant mortality rate due to mal- nutrition is 10% higher for girls than for boys during childhood. 10% higher mortality rate for girls than boys

due to mal-nutrition in infancy and childhood.

### ***H. Rapes/gang-rapes/molestations***

According to a Report, there is at least one reported case of rape in every 54 minutes and at least one case of molestation reported in every 26 minutes and one case of cruelty reported in every 33 minutes. According to the statistics of National Crime Bureau (NCRB) in every 20 minutes a woman somewhere in India is raped and this does not include the countless number of cases of molestation and are that go unreported also the cases of child rape have witnesses a significant increase by 336% in the past ten years also as per the government data crimes by juveniles such as rape and abduction of women have had significant rise in the past 10 years that is from 48.7% to 66.5%.

### ***I. Victims of materialistic culture***

The consumerist culture has led to the rise in the domestic violence triggered off increased atrocities, domestic violence and also assault on women. Uncountable number of women live under the persistent threat of violence on them.

### ***J. Female literacy rate***

There exists a very huge disparity between the literacy rate of male and female which is 82.14% to 65.46% according to 2011 report. Also there is a clear inequality in the organised and unorganised sectors pertaining to availability of jobs in the market for women.

## **IV. EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### ***A. Physical***

Cuts, bruises, injuries, internal bleeding, fractures, broken bones, muscle and ligament tears, major head injuries, memory loss etc. are some the acute effects of domestic violence. Whereas chronic health problems may include arthritis, chronic pain, ulcers, migraine, heart diseases etc. acute or chronic both type of injuries require immediate and serious medical attention and the care of the doctors at the hospital. The pregnant victims might suffer greater risks of miscarriage, injury to the foetus, pre- term labour and other various complications.

### ***B. Psychological***

Among victims who due to whatever reason have to continuously live their perpetrator may also develop many psychological illnesses such as high levels of stress, blood pressure, anxiety, depression, insomnia, PTSD, fear, schizophrenia and other psychological problems and they may become mentally unstable. Out of these depression is the most common of all

and the victim is made to feel that the caused the provocation for the abuse and the victims are also made to feel guilty for something which they are absolutely not at fault. These victims are subject to extreme criticism that kills their confidence and they sense of self worth. It is also reported that about 60% of the victims meet diagnostic criteria of depression and have great amount of suicidal tendencies.<sup>4</sup> the sufferer also has panic attacks and long-term anxiety which they themselves are unaware of. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is extremely common for the sufferers. PTSD is marked by flashbacks, exaggerated startle response, nightmares and avoidance of situation that triggers them. These symptoms are mostly experienced for over a long duration even after span the victim has left the dangerous situation and sometime the last for a lifetime. PTSD cause extreme trauma to the victims of the abuse.

### ***C. Financial***

Once victims are able to escape their perpetrator, they are exposed to the harsh reality which leads them to the realisation of their dependence on the perpetrator that they have no autonomy of themes left anymore. Due to the economic or financial deficiency the victim has no support sometimes the parents of the victim also refuse to accept her back in their family after her separation from the perpetrator as the feel that its is against their social values and the victim is left absolutely forsaken. This is the strongest factor that lead the victim to tolerate the abuse being done on her.

## **V. WHAT LEADS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?**

Domestic violence against women is not a recent concept but is rather ages old and existed from the very dawn of civilisation. Women since the olden times have been suppressed by men who have always considered women as weak, vulnerable and men have always been able to exploit women by placing them in a position lower to themselves and violence has been viewed as a very normalised phenomenon that practiced on women very generally. Culture, mores, religious practices, economic and political conditions have all helped in the on going practice of domestic violence but the truth is that committing this heinous crime is a choice that every person makes very consciously by themselves out of a range of options. Such behaviour does not come in an individual since birth but its is something one learns from their society and their parents. From very small age the kids see their parents behaviour towards each other and they learn and grab the same habits from their father of disrespecting

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<sup>4</sup> Vitanza S., Vogel L. C., Marshall, L. L. "Distress and symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder in abused women". *Violence and victims* 10 (1): 1995; 23–34.



their mother that that is exactly what they do as they grow up also the peers of the child influence their behaviour pattern and hence cause them to act a certain way which is extremely derogatory towards the women all these lead to the violent behaviour of the child. The imbalance is also related to the differences in the physical strength and difference in their sizes. Males feel they are stronger than women and that is why they have the size advantage over them. Women are given certain specific gender based roles in all societies and in the patriarchal societies the gender roles are very rigid and women are mostly poorly provided to be able to protect themselves if their partners become violent. The husbands who batter their wives and the fathers who beat their children think it is a birth right that they hold to maintain their dominance and order in the family so as to punish their wives and kids for not obeying properly what is expected of them.

## **VI. DETERMINANTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

From available published reports, we know that there are marked regional differences in the context of domestic violence. There are various determinants of domestic violence at the different levels such as individual level and also the factors that modify its existence at societal and community levels. According to the World Report on Violence and Health<sup>5</sup>, [2] the factors that are related to a woman's chances of being abused by her partner can be based on individual factors that are young age, drinking habit, personality disorders, depression, poor academic level, etc. Relationship factors include marital conflict, male dominance, infidelity, economic stress, etc. Community factors combine weak community stand against domestic violence, poverty. Whereas societal factors may include gender, social and cultural norms that are in support of violence.

Different socioeconomic conditions, like the wealth of the husband and his lower education, poverty and bad economic condition, alcoholic husband, women who grew up witnessing domestic violence since young age are conditioned to believe it as normal also it was reported that women that are more stable financially and have better jobs and good earning as compared to their husbands face more domestic violence and several studies that were conducted in cities in India such as Delhi, Nagpur, Lucknow, Bhopal, Chennai and Vellore showed that gender gap in employment status is a major factor behind domestic violence.

As per the relationship factor infidelity of husband, and families with multiple kids are more vulnerable to domestic violence. Even dowry system and women who participate in

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<sup>5</sup> WHO. Geneva: World report on violence and health. Available from: [http://www.who.int/entity/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/world\\_report/en/introduction.pdf](http://www.who.int/entity/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/introduction.pdf).

vocational training and also social groups are also prone to domestic violence. Other factors include the place of residence, age of marriage and age of the patterns are also relevant. If the couple live in areas that have high crime rates etc. also act as a catalyst. Getting married at small age also increases the chances of domestic violence, large age gap also increase the chances of domestic violence.

## **VII. IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN**

Children who witness domestic violence at the early ages have greater chances of developing serious emotional, behavioural, developmental, academic and growth related problems.

According to studies children and teens who grow up witnessing domestic violence in their household are:

- more likely to be violent and aggressive at school or community in response to small or big threats.
- more likely to develop suicidal tendencies in them.
- more likely to consume alcohol and drugs.
- more likely to commit or attempt crimes, and especially crimes like sexual assaults.
- more likely to resort to violent behaviour in order to enhance their reputation and self esteem and status.
- more prone to become abusers themselves in their later lives.

## **VIII. WHY DO WOMEN CHOOSE TO STAY?**

Economic and financial dependence on their partners has been considered to be the main issue. Without the ability to sustain themselves and provide for themselves economically, women are left with no choice but to stay in abusive relationships and are not able to be free themselves from violence. Women fail to get support of their in laws and also their own parents as for them separation from husband is directly linked to mockery in the society and there they cannot even resort to their close family for help. Due to such hollow values and cultural practices women do not prefer to adopt the option of separation or divorce from their abusive partners as they believe they have nowhere else to go. They also fear the consequences of being recognised as battered women. Lack of proper knowledge and information about choices and options also causes these women to suffer silently within their homes. Some women even believe that they deserve the beatings because of they way the society has conditioned them. The also fair to retaliate as they believe that it would lead to

even more beatings. This is the violation of the basic human rights that each person has ever since they are born into the world. It is highly sinful for all the states that fail to prevent this flagrant issue from our society.

## **IX. HEALTH CONSEQUENCES**

### ***A. Physical effects***

Apart from the obvious effects of violence like physical trauma, fractures and major injuries, researches have also linked violence with multiple somatic syndromes, pelvic pain, several surgeries. According to a research from Nagpur, the mean number of days of which a woman could not work for wages was 6.88 days; it was 9.84 days for the man. And considering the loss of income from waged work only, the average cost per household was ₹759.30 per incident, which is a fairly significant proportion of monthly income for labourer's household in the area of slum and rural communities. If the cost of women being unable to complete housework was added, the loss per incident comes to ₹974.10. The average cost per incident was ₹1084.50, with a range of ₹10,000-20,000 for medical care.

### ***B. Psychological hazards***

Studies have shown that women that experience violence have higher probability of suffering from anxiety, depression, PTSD, suicidal tendencies and even phobias. Such women also start consuming alcohol, tobacco and drugs.

### ***C. Gynaecological***

Women whose partners employ in physical and sexual abuse have greater chances of reporting gynaecological problems such as the Urinary Tract Infection or the UTIs, bleeding after intercourse, vaginal discharge, burning and inflammation, pain during intercourse, lower abdominal pain, and vaginal itching or irritation. This maybe caused by coercive sexual relations also forced sex may lead to vaginal trauma. Another reason could be underlying depression or mental distress.

## **X. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING COVID-19**

Across the world, a dramatic rise in incidents of domestic violence are being reported since lockdowns were internationally implemented in most of the countries of the world. From USA to Germany, Italy to China, a steep rise in abuse cases can be noted. Even in India, the National Commission for Women (NCW), which gets complaints of domestic violence from across the country, has witnessed more than a twofold increase in gender-based violence

during this period of the lockdown<sup>6</sup>. The UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka has said that this rise in violence against women and girls is a ‘shadow’ pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

Several researches have shown a rather positive relationship between exposure to extreme events and rates of domestic violence.<sup>8</sup> During such situations the rate of domestic violence often increases as perpetrators have constant access to wife and kids and can easily as access to the outside world is very limited. Violence may not necessarily be physical there are other modes of it as isolation from friends and family, constant surveillance and stalking, strict rules of conduct and behaviour, and several restrictions. Though isolation is pretty much the only choice left considering the situation now. There were over 92,000 SOS calls recorded to the child helpline India asking for protection from abuse of the children from the perpetrators.<sup>9</sup> The rate of incest, rape and child sexual abuse are also expected to rise at a very drastic rate during these hard times.

The men have a traditional role of the breadwinner of the family and during this time they’ve lost their jobs and are unable to do much which leads to frustration in them and since women and children seem to be the easy targets to them to vent out they attempt violence on them. If for instance a hungry child asks his mother for food, and she in turn asks her husband to buy some, he resorts to violence to vent out his frustration as he is now out of work, and is ashamed of not being able to provide to his family. The absence of domestic help has led to the increase in the burden of work on women and If they ask their husband to help them out, the ego of the men get hurt and results in them causing violence and beatings.

## **XI. CURBING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DURING LOCKDOWN**

With keeping in mind the increase in domestic violence cases, António Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations, has suggested that all governments should make the prevention and redressal of violence against women as a crucial part of their national response plans for Covid-19. and to increase investment in providing support and services online to the needy and affected people so as to help them<sup>10</sup>.

A great example was set by the government of France, when the number of cases rose in France during the first week of the lockdown the French government announced that they would pay for hotel rooms for victims of domestic violence and also would start pop-up counselling centres for the victims. In Spain, the victims were asked to head to the medical

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<sup>6</sup> The Economic Times, 2020

<sup>7</sup> UN Women, 2020

<sup>8</sup> Jeltsen, 2020

<sup>9</sup> The Economic Times, 2020b

<sup>10</sup> UN News, 2020

stores to get help using the codeword 'mask 19' if they're unable to talk freely. People also suggest that its the abuser who should leave the home and not the victim. The response of the Indian government's not been very significant till now. Many NGOs have that helping women in need should be listed as an 'essential service'. Sensitisation towards this issue is expected by the government officials. It is suggested that the government should add the safety of women to their nationwide announcements on the pandemic so that there is fear in perpetrators and the women feel at ease. whereas an advertisement U.P. Police Department stated 'Suppress corona, not your voice.'<sup>11</sup>Also improving the helpline services is of vital importance right now. Also celebrities like cricketers and actors should advertise on individual and greater levels to abstain from domestic violence as their followers tend to follow them and this might help in reduction of such crime.

## **XII. CONCLUSION**

Public health should be given utmost priority when it comes to the role of the government. It is extremely important for the government to realise that the well-being of the citizens comes before anything and everything else. Just the way in which the Indian government was hilt applause by the Un and the WHO and other countries for its fast response towards the COVID- 19 and its effective strategies that prevented the virus from spreading at a faster pace in the same way the government should take vital and broad steps to cover within its ambit all sorts of violences that are taking place at this extreme time of hardship and also should take several steps to prevent such crimes from taking place. This can be done by many ways such as including this very issue in the announcement that the prime minister delivers throughout the nation with respect to the virus. Steps should be taken to give the police more active role in solving this problem. More advertisements should be printed and circulated around the television, radio, social media to increase awareness. There should be more helplines and online help to which the victims can easily reach. There should be online awareness programmes held that explain the laws and recourse avail to the sufferer. There should the more online counselling options available to all. The police should also make a code word which the victim can use if they go out or if they seek help online by use of which they can be assisted and they can use such code word if they are in a tough position and cannot talk openly. And when a crime has been reported immediate assistance should be provided to the victim.

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<sup>11</sup> Bose, 2020

The most vital element of a public health approach to prevention is the ability to recognise and identify the causes and determinants. All this requires the development of uniform organisations at all levels throughout the country. There should be made an addition on global calendar, as the International Day for the Elimination of Domestic Violence Against Women and Children.

Many of the factors responsible for domestic violence can be prevented by development in the socioeconomic pattern by promoting female literacy, employment, and by making gender equitable rules and laws and by imposing heavy punishments to the violators. There should be programmes and classes at schools and colleges and even at offices that teach about gender equality and provide awareness about domestic violence. The government should also aim at providing safe shelter to the victims of violence.

The public health sector must share the knowledge by raising awareness about the various issues related to domestic violence via several campaigns. Support groups and men's groups should be promoted in order to free the society from such evils.

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