

The Dialectical Factor between Violence and Women- A Threatening Factor for the Empowerment

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Abstract

The existence of violence in the family and the consequent deprivation of women is a common phenomenon. Domestic violence though means violence in the family refers to violence against women in particular, as almost always the victims are women. Domestic violence means physical or mental assault of women by their male partners. The term wife abuse is also often used to mean the same. Masculine behaviour-aggression, risk taking, and the consumption of drugs and alcohol –is often believed to underlie male violence against women. Domestic violence is not only on the increase, but is also assuming subtler forms every day. Earlier victims of domestic violence did not lodge complaints, as they feared that such complaints might create a hostile home environment. Very often, women used to endure the violence towards them in silence for fear of repercussions.

"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life".

1. Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community, including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women;
2. Non-spousal violence;
3. Violence related to exploitation;
4. Sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere;
5. Trafficking in women;
6. Forced prostitution; and
7. Violence perpetrated or condoned by the State

A global phenomenon

Everywhere and in all ages, women have been victims of violence. They are and often have been raped, mutilated, battered and murdered. Slightly more than half of female victims of intimate violence live in house holds with children less than 12 year of age. Family violence is most likely to be perpetrated by those between the age of 18 and 30 year.(The child rearing years).50% of men who frequently assault their wives also frequently abused their children.

Gender-based violence has long been tolerated in most societies, letting the perpetrators go unpunished, their crime tacitly condoned. Based on the popular view that a wife is the property of her husband and that therefore he may do with her whatever he thinks fit, legal systems in some countries have recognized a husband's right to chastise or even kill his wife if she is considered disobedient or is thought to have committed adultery.

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993, 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 including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty; whether occurring in public or private life". Paragraph 117 of the Beijing Platform for Action quotes: "The fear of violence, including harassment is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. High social, health and economic costs to the individual and society are associated with violence against women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men".

Gender based violence is clearly based on unequal power relation between men and women. The status of women in India is not equal to the status of men in terms of access, participation and reward. It owes this situation to the patriarchal and feudalistic structure of the society. The issue of gender discrimination manifests itself as violence in the family, community and society. It takes the form of female foeticide, female infanticide, abuse of the girl child, social harassment, mental torture, physical violence and cruelty affecting the body and mind of the women.

Domestic Violence

Article 2 of the UN draft Declaration of Violence against women identifies three areas in which violence commonly takes place. They are a) violence occurring within the family b) violence occurring in the general

community and c) violence perpetrated or condoned by the state.

Violence occurring within the family, which is referred as Domestic violence, cuts across lines of race, nationality, language, culture, economics, sexual orientation, physical ability and religion to affect people from all walks of life. It is the most pervasive form of gender violence. Although men are victims of street violence, brawls, homicide and crime, violence directed at women is a distinctly different phenomenon. Men tend to be attacked and killed by strangers or casual acquaintances whereas women are most at risk at home from men whom they trust. Violence against them is often grounded in power imbalances between men and women and is caused and perpetuated by factors different than violence against men.

Violence is willful behaviour that is criminal and punishable by law. To define domestic violence against women, two areas need to be taken into account – physical violence (violence on the body) and emotional/Psychological violence (Violence on the mind).

The various forms of physical violence are:-

- ? Female foeticide and female infanticide.
- ? Incest, connivance, and collusion of family members to selfish, sexual abuse, rape within marriage.
- ? Physical torture like slapping punching, grabbing, murder.
- Overwork, lack of rest, Neglect of health care

Psychological violence takes different forms like:-

- ? Curbing freedom to associate with the natal family, neighbours friends etc.
- ? Curtailment of self-expression.
- ? Promiscuity of the husband, Accusing of unchaste behaviour
- ? Alcoholic and irresponsible husband, Scapegoatism and victim blaming
- ? Money related violence namely persuasion and coercion to get more money from the women's parents, denial of freedom to spend money, refusal to spend money to run the household.

Physically abused women live under constant fear, threats and humiliation. She is a potential candidate for personality disorder and psychosomatic problems. Indian women feel the entire responsibility of preserving the family as her duty; hence she makes all adjustments unilaterally in her husband's home. In spite of the extreme physical and psychological violence meted out on many women, they do not seek divorce, as they feel their trauma and that of their children is too great a price to be paid instead. Thus to a great extent she accepts domestic violence as part of her family life. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-2) findings released at the end of the year 2000 points out this fact. Although no direct link has been established, the survey reveals the extent to which women lack autonomy, even as more than 50percent justify, or accept violence within the home. Three out of every five women (56percent) said that they believed wife beating was justified on at least one of six grounds – neglecting the house or children, going out without telling the husband, showing disrespect to the in-laws, not cooking food properly, if he suspects her of unfaithfulness and if she does not bring enough money or goods home. However, a brighter picture seems to be emerging.

Women have broken their silence by coming out and complaining about violence and harassment. Though international covenants, human rights, constitutional and legal provisions to protect women already existed, most women were not aware of these. Even if they were aware, they lacked the resources in terms of money, skill, time, confidence, contacts and coverage to invoke these provisions. Thanks to legal literacy campaigns, social activists, social work institutions, government initiatives towards gender sensitization programme for all level of administration and the law enforcing machinery strengthening of existing legislation regarding violence against women, etc have made women more confident to register complaints against the atrocities meted out towards them by the family members.

One woman is physically abused every eight seconds and one is raped every six minutes

Intensity of Violence

Studies from a variety of countries show that one quarter to more than half of women report having been physically abused by a present or former partner. Far more are subjected to ongoing emotional and psychological abuse.

Sexual abuse is not only common but widespread in most countries. In Canada, a 1993 study based on 420 randomly selected women found that more than 54 per cent of them had experienced some form of unwanted or intrusive sexual experience before reaching the age of 16; 51 per cent reported being victims of rape or attempted rape. In 25 per cent of the cases, women who were physically assaulted reported that their partners explicitly threatened to kill them.

Rape during war is still common. According to a European Union fact-finding team, 20,000 women were raped in Bosnia in the first months of the war. Similarly, women have been raped in recent years in civil strife in Cambodia, Liberia, Peru, Somalia and Uganda.

Dowry-related abuse is common in some countries. In India, where "bride burning" is a known practice, official police records show 4,835 women were killed in 1990 due to the failure of their families to meet demands for money and goods. In greater Bombay, one of every five deaths among women aged 15 to 44 was reported to be a case of "accidental burns".

Violence during pregnancy is identified as a major reason for miscarriage and low-birth-weight children. Pregnancy is one of the highest risk times for domestic violence to a woman. In Mexico City, a survey of 342 randomly sampled women found that 20 per cent of those battered reported blows to the stomach. In Costa Rica, 49 per cent of a group of 80 battered women reported having been beaten during pregnancy; 7.5 per cent of them reported miscarriages.

Excessive use of alcohol and drugs has been identified as a factor behind gender abuse. Economic and social factors, such as unemployment, economic stress, overcrowding and unfavorable and frustrating work conditions, also lead to gender-based violence. Some researchers have also argued that violence is actually a learned behavior. Today's violent husbands are yesterday's children of violent parents, they say.

In fact, as one study in the US found, men who saw their parents attack each other, compared to those from non-violent families of origin, were three times more likely to hit their wives and ten times more likely to attack them with a weapon.

An obstacle to development

Women's participation in the development process especially in such areas as family planning, environmental protection and education is crucial. Yet when women are faced with violence, their ability to participate fully in these and other aspects of development is hampered. In many countries, husbands resist women's work outside the home, since they fear this may lead to women's empowerment. Men often use force or threats in order to divert or extort women's income.

The Women's Development Programme in Rajasthan, India, was sponsored by the Government, but their successes were due largely to the energy and drive of its leader, a young woman. One of the goals of the Programme was to reduce child marriage. The campaign, though popular among women and certain segments of society, angered many people, including some village elders.

A Platform for Action

"Violence against women derives essentially from the lower status accorded to women in the family and in society. It is abetted by ignorance, lack of laws to prohibit violence, inadequate efforts by public authorities to enforce existing laws, and absence of educational and other means to address its causes", says the Draft Platform for Action. Experience in a number of countries shows that women and men can be mobilized to fight against violence in all its forms and that effective public measures can be taken to address both the consequences and the causes of violence

Conclusion

The intensity of domestic violence has emerged as one of the most serious problem faced by women. They are experiencing physical and psychological violence not only from their in-laws but also often from their intimate partners. Major causes leading to domestic violence, its manifestations and subsequent consequences on the family and the society. The victims of Domestic violence are always in the threats of others in the family and in the society. Serious actions are needed to protect this section of women to make them empowered.

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