

Women Empowerment- the factors of social evils leading to the disempowerment

Dr.Haseena V.A

Assistant Professor Post Graduate Department of Economics M.E.S Kalladi College, Mannarkkad, Kerala,
India

Abstract

There is a close association between social circumstances and health. In India, there is a significant burden of both communicable and non communicable diseases. Risk factors responsible for these conditions are underweight, unsafe sex, unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene, indoor smoke pollution, zinc, iron and vitamin A deficiency, tobacco use, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. All these risk factors are influenced by social factors and in India the more important factors are poverty and illiteracy. Changing lifestyles as a result of rising incomes are significant risk factors for non communicable diseases. The social evils that influence poverty and health are macro level national and regional issues such as physical geography, governance patterns and failures, geopolitics, economic policy, natural resources decline, population growth, the demographic trap and the fiscal trap. Household and micro level factors include the poverty trap, cultural barriers, lack of innovation and saving, absence of trade or business, unemployment, technological reversal, adverse productivity shock, social issues related to females, and adolescent social issues. Social determinants important for non communicable diseases, defined by the World Health Organization include the social gradient, stress, early life events, social exclusion, improper work conditions, unemployment, lack of social support, addiction, food scarcity or excess and uneven distribution, lack of proper transport, and illiteracy or low educational status. There are multiple pathways through which social factors influence health, and patho physiological mechanisms involve homeostatic and allostatic changes in response to stress, neuroendocrine changes and altered autonomic functions, and abnormal inflammatory and immune responses. A concerted action to eradicate these social evils shall have to focus on reducing poverty.

Key words: Women empowerment, social exclusion, poverty trap

In every society, we find that women and men have some status. In the pure sociological sense, status of gender does not imply rank or hierarchy but denotes only position vis-à-vis condition in terms of rights and obligations of women and men. However, social, cultural, historical religious practices and values are the important determinants of women and men's status in the society. Then another factor that we call, as "Gender" is also an important factor in determining the status of Women and Men. Further, classes or caste, ethnicity and race also influence the status of women and men. Therefore, it is difficult to view emerging trends of society in isolation from them. Many social structures or hierarchies thus influence "gender Ideology" giving birth to various structures giving particular view to gender status and position in terms of superiority and inferiority; (i.e. in terms of power, privileges, advantages and disadvantages). As the notion of status involves comparison and grading therefore while you assess the status of people in a given society, you normally make comparison between the status of women and men. However, in case of women it is believed that women do not have an independent status of their own and this comparison becomes difficult. This is due to certain assumptions, which are underneath:

Assumptions in the Status of Women

1. The family is the unit in the stratification system i.e. family is the basic structure of the society and status ideally starts from the family.
2. The social position of the family is determined by the status of the male head of the household
3. Females live in families; therefore, males to whom they are attached determine their status
4. The female's status is equal to that of her husband/ father, at least in terms of her position in the class structure, because the family is a unit of equivalent evaluation
5. Women determine their own social status only when not attached to a man
6. Women are unequal to men in many ways, are differentially evaluated on the basis of gender ideology and duality, but this is outside to the structure of stratification systems

It is the first assumption that the family is the unit in stratification, is basic to the other five. To put it in another way family as a unit determines the composite social position of all members of the family living in it.

The second assumption makes you to understand that status of the male head of the family/household determines the fate of the family. If family income is an indicator of status, then you invariably use the occupation of male head of household to show the status of women.

The third assumption leads you to determine that the women live in the families as a part in the unit therefore they do not possess their own status. As men are breadwinners, owners and managers of property, therefore they act as the heads of households. They are also active in politics, religion, business and many other professions. Women, on the other hand are expected and trained to bear and look after children, to nurse the infirm and old, do all household work and so on. Even if in a family, woman has full time occupation of breadwinner, it does not become an indicator of higher status of family/man.

The fourth assumption is that women have no basis for determining their own status as female's status is equal to that of her husband, at least in terms of her position in the class structure, because the family is a unit of equivalent evaluation

The fifth assumption is that, to some extent, you can determine women's own social status when they are not part of a family and not attached to a man. Status of women, who do not marry, is again determined from the status of male relative; he can be father, brother or other male relative. Women have some status only in women headed household but in this category, percentage is very low.

The sixth assumption about women is that women are not equal to men in many ways due to following gender ideologies and dualities:

Body Mind

Nature Culture

Passive Aggressive

Domestic Public

Emotion Reason

All the above characteristics on the left are associated with women, while all the qualities on the right are associated with men. All characteristics associated with men show the presence of higher ability, aggression and higher evolution. Men also gain dividend from patriarchy in terms of honor, prestige and the right to command. Since the evolution, man has been able to make himself strong having power of control in his hand. This is true in the following picture by making comparison of evolution of woman and man

Benchmark of Women's Status

Traditionally, India had seen a woman as a member of the family or a group and not as an individual with an identity or right of her own. The principle of equality of women and men has been basic to traditional Indian thinking and the Hindu religious philosophy. The story of Indian woman is best conceptualized in terms of India's ancient history and mythology going back about 4000 years. In modern times, its subjugation as a colony and regeneration since 1945 as a free and democratic secular country.

Historically Indian women are equal to men. The concept of woman as Shakti, the primal energy force, finds expression in the famous epic Mahabaratha. In this epic woman is glorified as a "light of the house, mother of the universe and supporter of the earth and all its forests". The Mahabaratha further says that there is no guru like the mother. In earlier Vedic, age a woman held higher and honored situation in gender relationship. Manu in his Manusmriti, who was the first to codify the laws in India, also writes about this, "Where women are verily honored, there the gods rejoice. Where, however, they are not honored, there all sacred rites prove useless." In addition, he further declared: "In whatever house a woman is not duly honored, that house, with all that belongs to it shall utterly perish."

Another evidence of equality of women at par with men in gender relations was that a woman enjoyed freedom of movement and had the same rights and access to reading Vedas, getting education and having a say in the choice of her marriage partner. Thus, during the Vedic periods women actively played in the intellectual and social life of the country.

Codification of Laws

The honored status that women enjoyed in the family and society began to undergo radical changes, particularly since the pronouncement by Manu the Hindu law-giver, regarding a woman's changing position through her life cycle: In childhood subject to her father, in youth to her husband and when her husband is dead to her sons, she should never enjoy independence. This subordinate position of a woman suited to the man also. In this way, the images of woman created by the Hindu lore thus became paradoxical and contradictory to the earlier vedic Mahabharata and Ramayana days. She became as an essentially weak and dependent creature needing the constant guardianship and protection of man. Marriage, Motherhood and service to the husband were the most valuable attributes of the woman. Later Vedic age denied to her reading Vedas and getting education. The codification of laws of society declared woman as an outcaste and one to be beaten as a drum and as an animal. In order to avoid cruelty towards her, she accepted whatever was told to her without any reasoning. Thus, the status of woman began to decline.

Violence against Women

During the last two decades there is a growing awareness of violence against women and its adverse effect on the development and empowerment of women. There is a controversy raging about the violence against the women. Some argue that the violence is growing; others express doubts and submit that the appearance of alleged growth is because more and more cases are being reported in the Press. One thing is certain; not a day passes without the news about atrocities and violence against the women being read or heard.

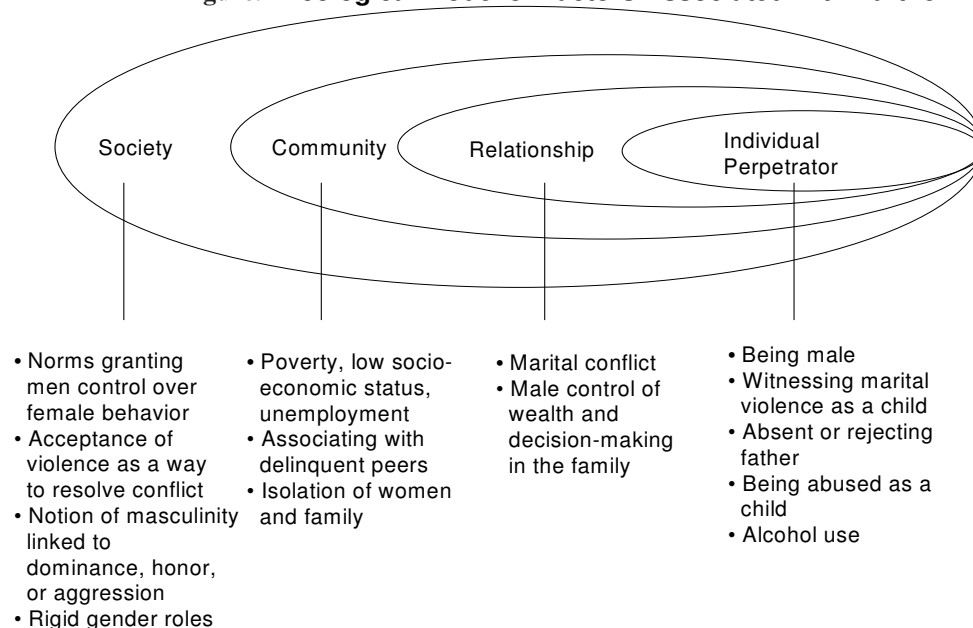
According to statistics, crimes against women are rising at a very fast rate. There is an increase in various types of crimes against women, such as rape, kidnapping and abduction, molestation, torture and sexual harassment. The percentage of crime against women out of total crime has risen from 4.3 percent in 1990 to 5.6 percent in 1997. More than 80 per cent of rape victims are women under 30 years of age. At the all India level, there has been an increase of 74% in the crimes against women between 1980 and 1990. The National Crime Records Bureau reported in 1998 that by 2010 the rate of increase in crime against women would be higher than the population growth rate. However, this rise in violence and crime against women has not rung any alarm bells in Indian society. The increase in crime rates shows that women are not safe and women's freedom is restricted within both the family and outside in their community or public life. Below mentioned is the graph showing crimes against women in 1990 and 1994.

Poverty is one of the most important social evils and a major determinant of ill health. From time immemorial it is known that poor social status is a major determinant of disease and reduces longevity. The Charaka Samhita recognized that community structure and functioning was an important cause of disease in an individual. The association of individual illness causing community disturbances and poverty and vice versa. Health status is strongly determined by socio-economic position and a large body of literature from developed countries demonstrates that most causes of deaths occur at greater rate in groups with lower socio-economic status. In this article we enumerate social circumstances and evils leading to poverty that is a major social evil. Mechanistic pathways from adverse social circumstances to ill health are then discussed and some suggestions are made for ameliorating the social evils.

Social evils

A social problem is defined as a situation confronting a group or a section of society which inflicts injurious consequences that can be handled only collectively. There are a number of social problems in India. These have been identified as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, population explosion, communalism, secularism, and regionalization, youth unrest and agitation, child abuse and child labour, violence against women, urbanization, crime and criminals, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, drug abuse and drug dependence, HIV-AIDS, terrorism, corruption, bonded labour, black money and more recently overweight/obesity in the urban subjects coupled with changing lifestyles. Multiple efforts to accurately identify social determinants of health have been performed and some efforts have evolved recently. Social determinants of health were enumerated by Marmot and others at the Solid Facts Program of the World Health Organization (WHO). The factors identified were social organization, early life events, life course social gradient, high unemployment rates, psychosocial work environment, transport, social support and cohesion, food, poverty and social exclusion, and individual health behaviours.

Figure.1 Ecological Model of Factors Associated with Partner Abuse



Culture as a basis of Violence

Many cultures hold that men have the right to control their wives and children behavior. Women who challenge that right could be punished. India is one such country where these ideas are widely prevalent. Violence, in India is often viewed as physical chastisement of the wife, or the husband's right to correct the erring wife. Small incidents such as not obeying her husband, talking back, not having food ready on time, failure to care for children or questioning him about money and girl friends "triggers" violence. All these constitute the transgression of cultural norms. Cultural norms undermine women's autonomy and contribution to gender-based violence. In recent years, dowry has become an expected part of the marriage transaction. Future husbands are demanding an ever-increasing amount of dowry both before and after marriage. Dowry demands can escalate into harassment threats and abuse; and in extreme cases, the woman is killed or driven to suicide, freeing the husband to pursue another marriage and dowry. Such cultural traditions undermine the ability of women to escape from abusive relationships.

Cultural attitudes towards female chastity and male honor also provide justification for violence against women. Family honor is linked to the sexual purity of women in the household (especially that of unmarried daughters and sisters). If a woman gets "defiled" sexually, she is supposed to have disgraced family honor. Therefore violence, even death is meted out to the defiled woman to protect the family honor and chastise other women. Violence against groups and communities acts as a hindrance in the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace in a society. Although violence is experienced by all sections of society but violence against women deprives them of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is also a crucial social mechanism for their subordination.

The above situational analysis of Violence highlights the following Women Issues:

- 1) Violence is an all-pervasive phenomenon that is common to all societies and to all sections of the community.
- 2) Women most commonly experience gender violence and it deprives by women and it deprives them of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- 3) Violence against women is directly related to their social subordination and is socially sanctioned. Cultural norms provide the justification for the practice of violence against women.
- 4) Violence against women has been rising during the last two to three decades and new forms of violence have been added to the already long list of different types or violence that women experience.

5) Confronting the ideology of patriarchy and removing different forms of inequality are not the only moral imperatives that we face, our foremost priority today must be the devising of ways and means to lift almost half our population from the depths of degradation and make way for a more humane social order.

What is Violence

Violence represents a physical act of aggression of one individual or group against another or others. Women experience violence in their both private and public lives. In their private family life women experience violence in the form of battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, marital rape, bride- burning and other dowry related violence. It also includes threats of such acts of coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in private or public life. In public life, the violence experienced by women includes rape, sexual abuse and sexual harassment at the work place or in educational institutions, trafficking, forced prostitution and violation of human rights of women in armed conflicts.

Table. 6 The Socio-Economic Costs of Violence

<p>Direct costs: value of goods and services used in treating or prevention of violence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical • Police • Criminal justice system • Housing • Social services
<p>Non-monetary costs: pain and suffering</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased morbidity • Increased mortality via homicide and suicide • Abuse of alcohol and drugs • Depressive disorders
<p>Economic multiplier effects: macro economic, labour market, inter-generational productivity impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased labour market participation • Reduced productivity on the job • Lower earnings • Increased absenteeism • Intergenerational productivity impacts via grade repetition and lower educational attainment of children • Decreased investment and saving • Capital flight
<p>Social multiplier effects: impact on interpersonal relations and quality of life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergenerational transmission of violence • Reduced quality of life • Erosion of social capital • Reduced participation in democratic processes

Source: UNICEF (2000) Domestic Violence against women and girls, Innocent Digest)

Nature of Violence

There are following types of violence:

- Physical violence
- Psychological violence,
- Combination of both types of violence

Physical violence

If men and women involve themselves in rioting, they receive blows and injuries

Psychological Violence. In case of women they face, abuse, neglect, nagging, degradation and taunting
 Combination of both types of Violence

Sexual harassment, rape and burning the person alive

In the case of Physical Violence, an individual gets physical injuries whereas in case of other two types of violence the concerned person becomes dispirited because of the mental agony to which one is subjected.

**Table 1
 Forms of violence experienced by women throughout their lifespan**

Phase	Type of Violence Present
Pre-birth	Sex-selective abortion; battering during pregnancy; coerced pregnancy.
Infancy	Female infanticide; emotional and physical abuse; differential access to food and medical care.
Girlhood	Child marriage; genital mutilation; sexual abuse by family members and strangers; differential access to food, medical care and education
Adolescence	Violence during courtship; economically coerced sex (e.g. for school fees); sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; arranged marriage; trafficking.
Reproductive age	Physical, psychological and sexual abuse by intimate male partners and relatives; forced pregnancies by partner; sexual abuse in the workplace; sexual harassment; rape; abuse of widows, including property grabbing and sexual cleansing practices.
Elderly	Abuse of widows, including property grabbing; accusations of witchcraft; physical and psychological violence by younger family members; differential access to food and medical care.

Source: Adapted from Heise)

Conclusion

Women empowerment is a term of the all round development of the women. The social, economic, cultural, emotional and personality empowerment are needed for the total growth. Women experienced domestic violence

across all strata almost equally, and in fact women with a university degree reported a slightly higher level of violence than others with any education. A greater proportion of women working as labourers had experienced any violence in their lifetime than other workers and even homemakers. There was not a perceptible difference across age groups in lifetime experience of violence, suggesting that for those experiencing violence, this experience may start early in their lives. Having been subjected to dowry demand before and after marriage, and having no say in matters related to contraception and sex within marriage emerged as factors most significantly associated with lifetime experience of violence. This belief results in the issue of violence against women inside the house being rarely discussed. And it is only when the acts of violence results in a crisis or acute emergency or manifests as other health problems requiring either physical and/or psychological treatment the women approach the health system.

References

1. Leon D, Watt G. Poverty, inequality and health: An international perspective: Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2001.
2. Valiathan MS. The legacy of Caraka. Hyderabad: Orient Longman; 2003. p. i-xvi.
3. Berkman LF, Kawachi I. Social epidemiology. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2000.
4. Ezzati M, Lopez AD, Rodgers A, Murray CJL. Comparative quantification of health risks: Global and regional burden attributable to selected major risk factors. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2004.
5. Gupta R, Misra A, Pais P, Rastogi P, Gupta VP. Correlation of regional cardiovascular disease mortality in India with lifestyle and nutritional factors. *Int J Cardiol* 2006; 108 : 291-300.
6. Jha P, Gajalakshmi V, Gupta PC, Kumar R, Mony P, Dhingra N, et al. for RGI-CGHR Prospective Study Collaborators. Prospective study of one million deaths in India: rationale, design, and validation results. *PLoS Med* 2006; 3:e18.
7. Safaei J. Is democracy good for health? *Int J Health Serv* 2006; 36 : 767-86.
8. Navarro V, Muntaner C, Borrell C, Benach J, Quiroga A, Rodriguez-Sanz M, et al. Politics and health outcomes. *Lancet*, 2006; 368 : 1033-7.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Academic conference: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

