



## Domestic Violence and Atrocities Among Women: An Empirical Study

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Author

Shiksha Verma  
Research Scholar

Faculty of Legal Studies & Research  
Sainath University  
Ranchi, Jharkhand, INDIA

### Abstract

*Present study intended to understand the kind of domestic violence women face, ascertain the causes and consequences of domestic violence and examine the socio-economic status and wellbeing of the battered women. 100 women participants were randomly selected from four slums of a large city located in central India. Further, a comprehensive tool was adapted/developed for collecting information spread into five sections including 119 items, namely Socio-Economic Status, types of violence, perceived causes, consequences, measures for reducing battering, and wellbeing. The results indicated that lower the socio-economic status of women, more vulnerable women is towards domestic violence. Furthermore, women residing in joint family were more exposed to physical and psychological violence while women from nuclear family were found to be susceptible to sexual harassment. Potent reason behind domestic violence was found*

*to be inherited in financial difficulty, and social stigma and belief. The battered women were more affected psychologically. Wellbeing of women in nuclear family was better and was related negatively but significantly to psychological and sexual harassment. Thus, the study seems to indicate that domestic violence leads to psychological problems, which may develop into physical manifestation among affected women.*

### Key Words

*Domestic Violence, Battering, Violence and Wellbeing, Women.*

### Introduction

Domestic Violence against women is essentially a violence perpetuated by persons in intimate family relationship. It is the establishment of control and fear in a relationship through various forms of violence and abuse. Most often women are the soft targets of violence, which affects them psychologically, physically, and socially that may lead to broken relationship in the family. Furthermore, domestic violence includes not only inter-spousal violence, but also violence perpetrated by other family members. Generally, an important part of the power relationship between spouses and their families relates to dowry and its ramifications. Physical violence as well as explicit forms of aggression are used by the more the powerful in the household as methods to ensure obedience of the less powerful and therefore related to power dynamics in a oft household. At every stage in the life cycle, the female body is both the objects of desire and of control.

In Indian society the problem of violence against women in the family is not new. Women in our society have been the victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation from time immemorial irrespective of the fact that they were also worshiped as mentioned in the Vedas. In the recent years, incident of abuse against women in the family has been on the rise. In patriarchal society, such as India, women are not only socialized into being silent about their experience of violence but traditional norms teach them to accept, tolerate and even rationalize violence. Women are supposed to hide scars, physical as well as mental violence, as it will damage their own image in the family and society.

Domestic violence includes harassment, maltreatment, brutality or cruelty and even the threat of assault-intimidation. It includes physical injury, as well as willfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place a spouse in fear of injury and compelling the spouse by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse has a right to abstain, Confining or detaining the spouse against one's will or damaging property are also considered as acts of violence.

One of the commonest forms of violence. Although the scope and pattern of battering may vary from country to country and region-to-region the researchers have established that battering is kept silent and it continues to escalate. Battering produces emotional as well as physical scars. While the bruises or knife wounds fade, the emotional injuries slowly kill the spirit.

Several studies have been done using measures such as abusive behavior, education, income, age level etc. In identifying factors leading to wife beating. Visaria (1999) in one survey has tested the corelationship between wife beating and education and has reported statistically significant relationship between abusive behaviour and level of education. In contrast a study by Ahuja (1998) evinced that there is no significant relationship between beating and educational level of the couple and that educated women are beaten as much by their husbands as those who are illiterate or less educated.

Furthermore, several survey findings have reported that women, who experience domestic violence early in their marriage. continue to be subjected to it even with increase in age (e.g., Coomaraswamy, 1996; Visaria, 1999). These findings point out that family structure, the presence or absence of children, and the size of the family have little co-relation with wife battering and that family income, husband's occupation and employment of women are not corelated with wife battering.

A number of studies on the prevalence of physical violence against women in different countries show that almost 20 to 50% of the women have experienced domestic violence (UNICEF, 2000). Surveys in many countries have also shown that about 10 to 15% of women report of being forced to have sex with an intimate partner (UNICEF, 2000).

Psychological abuse is very difficult to capture in studies. It has been found that severe psychological stress and living under terror and the mental torture of violence can lead to self-destructive behaviour and fatal consequences such as suicides (Heise, Pitanguy and Germain, 1994, IPPF, 1998, Rao, 1997). However, there are only a couple of studies that point to the fatal consequences of gender-based violence against women.

With this background, present study intended to understand the kind of domestic violence women face, ascertain the causes and consequences of domestic violence and examine the socio-economic status and wellbeing of the battered women.

## **Method**

### **Sample**

100 women participants (43 from Joint and 57 from Nuclear Family) were randomly selected from four slums of a large city located in central India. The age range of the participants was 21 to 50 years. The average age of the participant was found to be 37.6 years. Furthermore, the respondents were free from any mental abnormality and were mentally normal at the time of data collection.

## Tools and Technique

For the purpose of collecting data both standardized as well as self-developed measures were used that was spread into five sections namely Socio-Economic Status Scale types of violence, perceived causes, consequences of domestic violence and PGI wellbeing scale

## Procedure

Before the commencement of the data collection a short pilot study was conducted on a small group of slum dwelling women (N = 25) so as to develop the tools for the study. After the development of the tool, as per the requirement of the study, four large slums situated in and around of a city situated in central India, were selected for the present study. Before the commencement of data collection participants were contacted individually in an informal situation for rapport building and after two weeks of rapport formation, the interview schedule administered on potential women participants who showed their interest and willingness for contributing to the study. The researcher administered measures individually All the participants willingly participated and were enthusiastic throughout the questionnaire administration period. When the participants had completed their responses, they were duly thanked for their cooperation and the confidentiality of the response was assured to them. After the data collection was over, the responses were coded, tabulated and put forth to statistical analysis.

## Results

The data collected was put to analysis using mean, standard deviation and Product moment correlation.

The results indicate that 39% of the respondents belonged to the income group of 2001-3001. Among them 23 belonged to joint family and 16 to nuclear family. Furthermore, 22% of the respondent's income was between Rs 3100-3500, out of which 16 respondents belong to joint family and 15 belong to nuclear family In the same line, out of the total 13% of respondents fall in the income range of Rs. 3501-4500, most of the participants belong to the nuclear family. The 26% of respondents indicated that their income was more than Rs. 4500. Out of the total 26 respondents, 34.62% were from joint family and 65.38% belonged to nuclear family.

The analysis of data revealed that out of 100 participants, 43% belonging to joint family were more prone to physical violence (M = 12.46) and psychological, emotional violence (M mental and 14.25) than the women from nuclear families (M = 13.35) There was not much variation on the measure of sexual harassment. However, members of nuclear families (M = 6.54) were more vulnerable to sexual harassment than their joint family (M = 6.46) counterparts.

It is clear that almost all SES group were exposed to psychological mental and emotional violence than any other form of violence Second most important version of violence faced by the women of all group was physical violence whereas sexual violence was the least experienced violence type by the respondents of all income group. More so, the figure also indicates that lower the socio-economic status higher vulnerability towards violence. is the

The mean scores on the measure of perceived cause of domestic violence depict that financial status of the family (M = 17.98) was one of the most prominent causes leading to domestic violence. It was found that Social Stigma, Belief and Stereotype (M = 14.33) was the second leading factor that causes domestic violence. As reported by the participants, behavioral aspects (M = 8.44) of the partner is another factor that accelerate domestic violence However, it was observed that effects of media (M = 2.82) contributed very little towards triggering of violence.

The results of study indicate that the participants who belonged to the joint family were more prone to domestic violence The respondents of joint family perceived financial crisis (M= 18.28) as the most potent cause for domestic violence. Furthermore, the result evinces that social stigma was perceived as the second most potent cause related to violence (M = 14.35) by nuclear family women. Husband's behavior was more

important for the joint family respondents ( $M = 8.62$ ) than their nuclear family ( $M = 8.29$ ) counterparts. Besides, media exposure was the least perceived cause of domestic violence by both the groups. Interestingly no statistically significant difference in the perception of joint and nuclear family participants on any of the causes were found. This seems to indicate that both the groups have perceived all causes equally contributing towards domestic violence.

The results of the study indicate that 20% of the respondents belonged to low SES, 55% to average SES and 25% belonged to higher SES group. As reported by the respondents it was found that participants belonging to poor SES group were more prone to domestic violence. The results, further, indicate that on all the measures of violence, psychological, mental and emotional violence ( $M = 14.45$ ) was faced by maximum number of times by the respondents, who were poor, followed by physical harassment ( $M = 12.2$ ) and sexual harassment ( $M = 6.55$ ). The participants belonging to average group were also observed to be affected by domestic violence like namely physical ( $M = 11.75$ ) Psychological, Mental and emotional ( $M = 13.89$ ), and Sexual harassment ( $M = 6.55$ ). One of the important and notable finding is that respondents belonging to higher SES are less prone to physical ( $M = 11.24$ ) Psychological, Mental and Emotional ( $M = 12.84$ ) and sexual harassment ( $M = 6.52$ ). There were no remarkable differences with regard to sexual harassment in all the three groups. The results indicate that poor socio-economic status may lead to higher degree of domestic violence.

The results further show that psychological effect of domestic violence ( $M = 14.01$ ) was experienced more by the victims. Further, all of them shared that they were frequently depressed, have poor self-image were disturbed, confused, and helpless, and got angry very quickly. Another consequence that was explored was low social status and acceptability in family ( $M = 12.25$ ). It was shared by the respondents that the society, in which they live, looks down upon women and it looks upon women as a property. The practice of society shows that women are dependent on men. This was indicated by the mean score ( $9.41$ ) which reveals poor status of the battered women in their family. The study, furthermore, shows that health of women ( $M = 7.89$ ) was also affected by domestic violence. Due to the effect of violence, they start having heart palpitations and shortness of breath thus was not able to perform household activities effectively further leading to deterioration in health. Physical consequences, however, were reported to be low ( $M = 7.51$ ) than any other consequences of violence in domestic premise faced by these women.

Looking at the importance of family type in violence study, the data were put to analysis so as to ascertain the effect of family on the consequences of violence. The results depict that participants belonging to nuclear family were affected more due to the effects of various forms of domestic violence. The result evinces that domestic violence had several consequences and most prominent effect was found to be psychological ( $M = 14.28$ ) in nature. Social status and acceptability ( $M = 12.98$ ) and status of victim women also suffered in their family ( $M = 10.06$ ). Health ( $M = 8.41$ ) and physical ( $M = 7.56$ ) effects were also reported by the respondents. However, joint families were more affected in terms of health deterioration whereas the nuclear family respondents reported physical torture more than their counterparts.

Results evince that the joint family members  $M = 6.061$  exhibited less wellbeing than the nuclear family members ( $M = 6.28$ ). This seems to indicate that nuclear family members have better wellbeing as compared to the joint family members. However no statistical difference was observed between the families on the measure of wellbeing. Further, it was also noted that high income group displayed better wellbeing than their counterparts.

The result reveals the relationship of types of violence with wellbeing as expected. Psychological, mental and emotional violence were negatively significant with wellbeing ( $r = -0.198$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This indicates that higher the wellbeing lower will be the psychological, mental and emotional violence. Similarly, sexual harassment was also found to exhibit a negatively significant relationship with wellbeing ( $r = -0.201$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). However, physical violence ( $r = 0.09$ ) did not reveal any significant relationship with wellbeing.

## Discussion

The major objective with which the present study dealt with was to examine the socio-economic conditions of battered women and to understand the nature of violence that dehumanizes battered women. Furthermore, interest was also into the effects of violence on battered women and to examine the level of wellbeing of women who are exposed to domestic violence

The results of the study have indicated that participants belonging to joint family are more prone to physical violence and psychological mental and emotional violence than the other types of violence. However, not much difference could be observed on the measure of sexual harassment between joint family and nuclear family members. It seems that nuclear family, where members are less, facilitates the path of sexual harassment, which may not be possible in joint family. Further, in int family, there is always an opportunity of interaction with more than one person who may be the leader of the house in contrast to the nuclear family. The fact that much interaction places the probability of different influence on the individual as well as exceeds the weight of demand on family members, especially the women, seems to facilitate the occurrence of psychological and physical harassment than nuclear family.

As reported by the respondents, participants belonging to the lowest income group, i.e., income of Rs. 2001-3000, were more vulnerable to physical, and psychological, mental and emotional violence. Interestingly, it was noticed during the study that occurrence of sexual harassment among high income group and in the nuclear family was more frequent than any other group. The media exposure factor seems to have intermediated this finding. The increased economic insecurity, unemployment and poverty in families, addiction to alcohol, lack of status and mutually satisfying relationship seems to be one of the cause leading to increase in violence. Furthermore, illiteracy among women can be one of the factors, which make them ignorant about normal sexual relation and forced sex.

Among the perceived causes of domestic violence such as financial, behavioral, social stigma/belief/stereotype, and media exposure, it was found during the study that financial factors were the leading factor among the prominent causes of domestic violence. However, in contrast to physical violence, respondents indicated that psychological effect of violence was more prominent among them and that seems to affect their social status and their acceptability in the society as well as in the family.

Out of the 100 participants included in the study participants who belonged to joint family reported financial causes as the most important factor responsible for domestic violence. Participants who belonged to the nuclear family also gave the same response.

Besides, it was noticed that the respondents of nuclear family experienced negative consequences of domestic violence more. Victims shared that injury, loss of weight and body aches were some of the physical impact of violence. Depression, poor self-image, powerlessness and helplessness were common among psychologically affected women. Being in joint family seems to provide a place where sharing of experience, sorrow and happiness is very frequent. However, the same is not possible in nuclear family thus giving the way to high level of noxious experience among the members of nuclear family.

An effort was made to analyse the impact of socio-economic status on types of violence: It was found that women belonging to low SES are more vulnerable to physical psychological/mental/emotional and sexual harassment. This finding may be the result of the financial difficulty these poor families face financially poor situation may lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. This, in turn, may elicit the desire to exert control, harass others and gain some satisfaction out of it.

The study has further indicated that if the women are facing different kinds of domestic violence there is a great chance that their wellbeing will be affected in negative manner.

The results have revealed the negative relationship between psychological violence and wellbeing and with sexual harassment and wellbeing. This seems to suggest that high exposure to violence that is related to mental, psychological and emotional harassment and sexual harassment will lead to a poor wellbeing among the affected women.

## Conclusión

Present study clearly indicates that majority of battered women belong to low socio-economic status and are part of joint families. The most important finding was the negative relationship between violence measure and wellbeing. The most potent cause for any kind of violence was finance and the woman's psychological wellbeing was most affected that their physical or social wellbeing. In the light of the present study it is suggested that women residing in slums be sensitized towards their human right. It is suggested that the government may take up the challenge towards empowering male members of the society to exert control on their families so that no male or female members is allowed to create a situation that may lead to violence. This also becomes important in the light efforts being made by different Civil Society Organizations and Government towards sensitizing only women on this issue.

## References

1. Ahuja, R. (1998) *Violence Against Women*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur and New Delhi .
2. Bedi, K. (1998) *It is Always Possible*, Sterling Publication Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.
3. Coomaraswamy (1996) Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women: Its causes and consequences. United Nations Economic and Social Council, United Nations.
4. Heise, Pitanguy and Germain (1994) *Violence against women the hidden healthburden*, World Bank, Discussion Paper, Washington, D.C.
5. IPPF (1998) *Gender based violence: An impediment to Sexual and Reproductive Health*, The Women's advocacy Session, IPPF Members Assembly, Prague. Downloaded from the website <http://www.ippf.org/resource/gbv/ma98>, Accessed on 10/10/2024.
6. Karlekar, M. (1995) Search for Women Voices, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29 April, 08-09.
7. Thapan, M. (1997) *Femininity and its Discontents: The women's body in intimate Relationships*, In M Thapan (Ed.), *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and identity* Delhi: Oxford University Press.
8. UNICEF (2000) *Domestic Violence against women and girls*. Innocenti Digest, No. 6.
9. Verma, S. K.; and Verma, A. (2000) *PGI Well-Being Manual*, Ankur Psychological Agency, Lucknow.
10. Visaria (1999) *Violence against women in India. Evidence from rural Gujarat* In *Domestic Violence in India: A Summary Report of Three Studies*. Washington DC, ICRW.

---==00==---