

Violence and Women: An Indian Perspective

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Introduction :

Domestic violence on women is very common in our society and it is a very important issue to be discussed. Violence can be defined as any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering. This includes threats of such acts and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. But it is more complicated than the parameters of this basic definition.

It may be of different types starting from using abusive words to physical violence. It has serious impact on women's mental and physical health. Impact of domestic violence may be for short time or for longer period. Women living in an abusive relationship may have low self-esteem, low health status and lower quality of life. A recent article in a medical journal found that "the stress of being in an abusive relationship may cause the women to be more susceptible to disease" (Leibschultz 2000).

Domestic Violence and Physical Health of Women :

According to Guth and Pachter (2000), abuse of women by intimate partner is the most common cause of injury to women. It comprises 21 percent of traumatic injuries. Injuries ranging from cuts, bruises, and black eyes to miscarriage, bone injuries, splenic and liver trauma, partial loss of hearing or vision, and scars from burn or knife wounds. Injuries to the breast, chest and abdomen are more common in battered women. Defensive injuries are also common. For example, fractures, dislocations, and contusions of the wrist and lower arms result from attempts to defend off blows to the chest or face. (Guth & Pachter 2000). Sutherland, Bybee and Sullivan (2002) studied a community sample of women who had experienced assault by a partner in the previous six months, observed that, on an average, women sustained three different types of injuries. Ninety two per cent of the women reported cuts, scrapes and bruises; 11 per cent broken bones and fractures; and 3 per cent gunshot or knife wounds.

Domestic Violence and Mental Health of Women :

An abused woman always lives in fear because at any moment the next attack may come. She wants to be isolated from friends and family, and increasingly dependent on her abuser. Over time her self-esteem may even go down. She may blame herself for the abuse that is taking place and start to believe her abuser's insults. Abused women can develop post-traumatic stress which includes a range of symptoms: agitation and anxiety, depression, panic attacks, trouble sleeping or relaxing, numbness, sense of isolation, nightmares. Panic disorders, phobias, anxieties and depression of abuse survivors is markedly different than ordinary phobias, anxieties and panic disorders which are not based in fact or traumatic experience, as they are in abuse survivors (Herman 1992). "The stress of being in an abusive relationship often has a physiological impact. It often increases one's vulnerability to illness." (Hagion-Rzepka 2000).

Status of Women in India :

It is said that during ancient India women enjoyed the equivalent status and rights like their male counterparts. They were properly educated in the early Vedic period. The status of women in India deteriorated during the medieval period with the entrance of the Mughals. Several evil practices such as female infanticide, sati and child marriage were practiced during that period. "Purdah" was also introduced to the society during that period. But still some great women rulers like Razia Sultana, Gond Queen Durgavati etc. were there in that time.

In modern India, the status of women has developed a little. In the modern times, women in India are given freedom and right such as freedom of expression and equality and as well as the right to be educated. Various prestigious positions at this period are held by women. However some problems like dowry, female infanticide, sex selective abortion, domestic violence etc. are still prevalent in the country.

Though the status of women in modern India is somewhat higher than the medieval period but available data show that violence against women in India is still common and high, while not the highest in the world (UN Women 2011). In interviews in the National Family Health Survey-3 (NFHS -3), every third Indian woman aged between 15 and 49 years said that she had experienced sexual or physical violence in her lifetime. These statistics reveal the extent of female disadvantage in Indian society.

Table 1 shows the proportion of women who have experienced (a) sexual violence by their intimate partner, (b) physical violence by their intimate partner, and (c) sexual and/or physical violence by anyone (which includes intimate partners) during women's lifetime for selected countries in the world. The data was collected by UN Women (2011) from different surveys of violence around the world and may suffer from issues of comparability and survey underreporting. However, it does suggest that violence against women is common in rich as well as poor countries.

Table 1: Violence against women in a comparative perspective

Country	Proportion of women (%) who have experienced, within their lifetime,		
	Sexual violence by intimate partner	Physical violence by intimate partner	Sexual and/or physical violence by anyone
Australia	8.0	25.0	57.0
Bangladesh	17.8	48.7	n/a
China	n/a	15.4	n/a
Denmark	6.0	20.0	50.0
Egypt	21.7	33.2	n/a
Finland	4.3	17.6	43.5
Germany	7.0	23.0	40.0
India	10.0	35.1	35.4
Kenya	17.2	37.0	45.1
Poland	5.0	15.0	17.0
South Africa	4.4	12.5	n/a
United Kingdom	3.8	18.9	n/a
United States	7.7	22.1	55.0
Vietnam	9.9	32.0	38.5

A recent survey ranked India as the worst place to be a woman (Baldwin 2012). Female foeticide, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence constitute the reality of most girls' and women's lives in India.

According to the report of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for the year 2013, a crime against women is recorded every 1.7 minutes in India. Every 16 minutes a rape case is recorded in this country and every 4.4 minutes a girl is subjected to domestic violence. Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal earned the dubious distinction of leading a list of states where crime against women in 2013 was the highest. The figures show that Andhra Pradesh, accounting for 7.26 per cent of the country's population, recorded 10.60 per cent of total crime against women with 32, 809 cases. The rate of crime per lakh of female population was also high at 76.25. Andhra Pradesh has also reported 37.35 per

cent (4,702 cases) of sexual harassment cases followed by Maharashtra with 29.91 per cent (2,632 cases) of total incidences during 2013. Similarly, Uttar Pradesh accounting for 16.68 percent of the country's population recorded 10.51 percent of total crime against women with 32,546 cases. With 7.5 per cent share of the country's women population, West Bengal accounted for nearly 9.64 per cent of total crime against women by reporting 29,826 cases. (http://www.asfi.in/webpage.php?p_type=1&parent=71&catid=75).

Madhya Pradesh reported the highest number of rape cases (4,335) accounting for 12.1 per cent of total such cases reported in the country followed by Rajasthan (3,285 cases, 9.78%) and Maharashtra (3,063 cases, 5.52%). Among the cities however, Delhi reported the largest no of rape cases at 1,441 in 2013. Among 53 cities, Delhi (11449 cases) has accounted for 21.41 per cent of total crime against women followed by Mumbai (2946 cases; 5.51 per cent), Bengaluru (2608 cases; 4.88 per cent), Ahmedabad (2449 cases; 4.58 per cent) and Kolkata (2399 cases; 4.49 per cent).

Cases of torture on women by husbands and relatives (commonly known as domestic violence) also went up by 11.6 per cent in the year 2013 than the previous year (7.5 per cent during 2012). In West Bengal 15.24 per cent of such cases were reported (18,116 cases). The crime rate reported from Assam was of 56.39 per lakh of women population (as compared to the national rate of 20.1 per cent).

Incidents of molestation in the country jumped by nearly 56 percent during 2013 (5.5 per cent in 2012). Madhya Pradesh continued to report the highest incidence (8,252 cases) accounting to 11.67 per cent of total such cases in the country. 28.9 per cent of dowry cases were reported from Uttar Pradesh (2,335 cases) followed by Bihar (1,182 cases) accounting for 14.6 percent of total cases (http://www.asfi.in/webpage.php?p_type=1&parent=71&catid=75).

Status of Women in Assam :

The status of women in north-eastern region of India is slightly different in comparison to those living in the rest of the country. In Assam, the status of women is high in comparison to some other states of India. This may be due to the factors like absence of purdah, a long standing influence of tribal work pattern etc. This however does not mean that women in Assam are on an equal footing with men. One salient feature in the Assamese society is the absence of the dowry system. But in the post-independence era, the evil of dowry system has quietly been invading the Assamese society with the result that some dowry death cases have been reported. The "State of Indian Women Report 2001-02" released by the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development, revealed that the crime rate against women is even higher than the all-India average. In 1999, crimes against women including rape, molestation, sexual harassment, abduction, dowry deaths and cruelty at home were 127 cases per million persons at the all-India level. In contrast, in Assam it was 138 cases per

million persons. The statistics are mind-boggling. Moreover, incidents of molestation, trafficking, murder and domestic violence have also gone up, indicating that all is not well with women in Assam in the present times. A more tragic matter in Assam is that people of some parts of the state still believe in witch-craft. Many innocent people including women are treated as witch and killed very cruelly which is not acceptable in a cultured society.

According to the NFHS II, women in Assam have limited access to health care services. The percentage of women in Assam receiving antenatal checkups is 5% behind the rest of India and 8% behind the other North Eastern states. The number of deliveries assisted by healthcare professionals in Assam is half of that in the rest of India. The percentage of women suffering from anaemia is also very high. Maternal mortality in Assam is amongst the highest in the country.

Sex ratio is a very important indicator that reflects the status of women in society. It reflects whether she enjoys those rights to survival, protection and development. In 2001, the male-female ratio in Assam was 1000: 932 which was lower than the all India average of 1000: 933. The imbalance in the male female ratio is due to blind faith as well as the result of illiteracy which have resulted in destruction of the baby girl at prenatal stage due to sex determination test, results in deliberate malnutrition and neglect of the girl child which results in this imbalance.

In the field of education, women in Assam are in a better position than the all-India average. As per 2001 census the literacy rate for Assam is 64.28 per cent as against 65.38 per cent for India. While male literacy is 71.93 per cent (India-75.85 per cent), female literacy stands at 56.03 per cent (India-54.60 per cent). Attainment of a higher literacy rate alone does not make a community educationally advanced. Completion of primary stage of education and continuation of school up to 15 years of age, etc. are taken as indicators of educational attainment. The phenomenon of school drop-out is a negative indicator of educational attainment. The dropout rates of both boys and girls in Assam remained higher than all-India average from 1981 to 2001 (www.ukessays.com).

The age of marriage of girl child is an important issue as it has direct consequences on her health and reproductivity. Assam had the system of 'Baalyo Bibaah' and girls were married before attaining puberty. However things have changed a lot. It was reported that in 1991, 1992 and 1993, age of females for marriage though showed a little variation, remained almost the same at 20.5, 21.3 and 20.9 respectively in Assam. It was higher than the all India effective age of marriage in the respective years at 19.5, 19.5 and 19.6 respectively.

Assam has a high maternal mortality rate (MMR) and there has been an increase in the rate over time. Presently it is 480 compared to all India MMR of 254. The situation is worrisome and insurgency has been accounted as one of the major factors. The workers at tea plantations also have high MMR (www.ukessays.com).

It is reported that during the last fifteen years, 21 thousand rape cases and 91 thousand cases of molestation were reported in Assam. In 2014, crime cases reported against women were 19139, highest among all the north eastern states. Assam stands in the second position among all the states in India where most of the crime cases are not investigated (*Asomia Pratidin*, Feb 5, 2016).

Conclusion :

Women are an important element of our society. They have tremendous will power and can contribute enormously for the betterment of the society. We cannot think for a complete and healthy society without considering them at par their male counterparts. Even the abused women are not weak because it takes huge strength to live with an abusive partner. They have to be strong and resourceful, adopting all kinds of coping strategies to survive each day. The society should support women and their children every step of the way. They should be empowered to rebuild their lives - free from fear. Let them live a peaceful life.

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