

Status of women in India: A framework and some key strategies

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ABSTRACT

From the origin of social life in the country various centuries came and gone, time has changed people's mind and environment a lot, however violence against women is not seems to change a little bit. Time is the real eyewitness of all the sufferings (like sex discrimination, exploitation, oppression, aggression, degradation, humiliation, etc.) bear by the helpless women. Women are so helpless in the Indian society where many female goddess are worshiped. In the Vedas, women are glorified as mother means one who can create and nourish a life. On the other hand, they have found themselves suppressed and subjugated by the men in the patriarchal society. Violence against women can be domestic as well as public, Physical, emotional or mental. Women have fear of violence in their mind which causes the lack of participation in various areas of life. Fear of violence in the women mind has been so deep which cannot be out easily even after complete removal of violence against women in the society. Violence against women has long been a problem, in times of peace and war. This violence ranges from very mild teasing to rape and murder, and takes place at home, in the streets, at work places, jails, in short everywhere. Few crimes against women are reported, fewer still prosecuted, and a negligent number of accused are actually punished. In the absence of detailed studies on incidence, it is difficult to come up with suggestions to reduce if not abolish such violence. There is an urgent need for more studies on this violence so that the psychology of the violators is better understood. Instances of violence need to be thoroughly investigated, and ways and means devised to reduce their incidence. There is need for quick and severe punishment for the accused, which would act as a deterrent too. Any society, in which half the population is not assured of safety, needs to reconsider its claim to being civilized.

Key Words : Women, Violence

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women in India is going side by side to the technological improvement in modern world in the country. Violence to the women is of various types and can happen at any place like home, public place or office. It is the big issue related to the women which

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cannot be ignored as it is hindering almost one half growth of the country. Women in the Indian society have always been considered as the things of enjoyment from the ancient time. They have been victims of the humiliation, exploitation and torture by the men from the time of social organization and family life. Women in India have been victims of violence from many years in almost all the societies, regions, cultures and religious communities. Women have to bear variety of violence such as domestic, public, physical, social, emotional and mental. Violence against women is clearly seen in the history to a large extent which is still getting practiced without any positive change. Women in India were enjoying a quite comfortable position all through the Vedic period however, the condition got declined gradually because of the practice of violence against women all through the country. On the other hand, with the increasing level of violence against women, they started losing their educational, social, political, economic, and cultural opportunities in the society (Panda and Agarwal, 2005).

Available data on the incidence of violence against women show that violence against women in India is common and high, while not the highest in the world (UN Women, 2011). In interviews in the 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, especially when seen with other gender related indicators for India, such as sex-ratio or female labour force participation rate.

Facts and Figures (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2014) :

- It is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Women who have been physically or sexually abused by their partners are more than twice as likely to have an abortion, almost twice as likely to experience depression, and in some regions, 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV, as compared to women who have not experienced partner violence.
- Although little data is available-and great variation in how psychological violence is measured across countries and cultures-existing evidence shows high prevalence rates. Forty-three per cent of women in the 28 European Union Member States have experienced some form of psychological violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- It is estimated that of all women who were the victims of homicide globally in 2012, almost half were killed by intimate partners or family members, compared to less than six per cent of men killed in the same year.
- In 2012, a study conducted in New Delhi found that 92 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces in their lifetime, and 88 per cent of women reported having experienced some form of verbal sexual harassment (including unwelcome comments of a sexual nature, whistling, leering or making obscene gestures) in their lifetime.
- Worldwide, more than 700 million women alive today were married as children (below 18 years of age). Of those women, more than 1 in 3—or some 250 million—were

married before 15. Child brides are often unable to effectively negotiate safe sex, leaving them vulnerable to early pregnancy as well as sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

- Around 120 million girls worldwide (slightly more than 1 in 10) have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives. By far the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against girls are current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends.

- At least 200 million women and girls alive today have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting in 30 countries, according to new estimates published on the United Nations' International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation in 2016. In most of these countries, the majority of girls were cut before age 5.

- Adult women account for almost half of all human trafficking victims detected globally. Women and girls together account for about 70 per cent, with girls representing two out of every three child trafficking victims.

- One in 10 women in the European Union report having experienced cyber-harassment since the age of 15 (including having received unwanted, offensive sexually explicit emails or SMS messages, or offensive, inappropriate advances on social networking sites). The risk is highest among young women between 18 and 29 years of age.

- An estimated 246 million girls and boys experience school-related violence every year and one in four girls say that they never feel comfortable using school latrines, according to a survey on youth conducted across four regions. The extent and forms of school-related violence that girls and boys experience differ, but evidence suggests that girls are at greater risk of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation. In addition to the resulting adverse psychological, sexual and reproductive health consequences, school-related gender-based violence is a major obstacle to universal schooling and the right to education for girls.

Key strategies :

At the level of Government :

- A free national 24-hour hotline/helpline to report abuse and life-threatening situations, staffed by trained counselors who can provide the appropriate service referrals.

- Quality 'frontline' services: free medical and psychosocial support, security/police responses and judicial/legal aid – which represent a basic package of support for survivors.

- Initiatives to increase demand for services and encourage abused women to come forward

- Shelters or safe spaces available in urban and rural areas and accessible to all women (and their children).

- Women's support and self-help groups, and counseling services

- Tax and other incentives to enhance women's empowerment, including involvement of the private sector, etc. Examples of Nepal with regard to property rights and Norway in promoting gender parity in employment

- Promotion of property rights, including land rights and control over financial and economic assets, access to credit and support for entrepreneurship development.

- Strengthen opportunities for post primary education for girls

At the level of society :

- Gender Sensitization in the society
- Regulate Violence and sexualization of women and girls in Media
- Participation and leadership of women in religious and faith-based community groups and legal systems is critical in stimulating a gender-sensitive and just interpretation of religious and cultural texts, customs and norms.
- Encourage women and girls to enter into traditionally male-dominated fields of education and professions like armed forces, pilots, sciences, engineering, etc.
- Awareness campaigns and educational curriculum development.
- Ensure all schools and Workplaces have effective policies, sanctions and redress for all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Promote the establishment of school counsellors and service referral networks, and develop policies and protocols for responding to violence in schools.
- Establish protection units in schools, telephone “help lines”, and other means by which children can report abuse.

At the level of family:

- Promote alternative secure masculine identities that do not devalue women
- Respectful and equitable gender relations
- Improved connections between women/families and resources and sources of economic and social support
- Healthy, non-violent gender role identity development
- Improved attitudes toward gender equity, gender roles and violence/violence against women
- Improved skills in nonviolent means of resolving interpersonal conflict
- Responsible alcohol use
- Transform gender stereotypes through education and public awareness
- Re-value daughters
- Promotion of shared domestic responsibilities between women and men, for example on parenting, care giving, etc.

Conclusion :

A sensitive topic of “Violence against women in India”, establishes the importance of discussion of such a topic. The varying causes which can spark the violence within the four walls of homes need to be analyzed carefully and a wise study of the factors causing the violence may prevent a family to suffer from the menace of domestic violence. The domestic violence may have a far wider and deeper impact in real life than what has been covered in this essay. What is required is to see closely the association of the factors provoking a particular form of domestic violence. If these factors can be controlled then more than one form of violence can be prevented from harming an individual or our society and India would be a much better place to live in.

Violence against girls and women is pervasive, and grounded in widespread social norms and gender inequalities. Yet it can be prevented. Strategies for reducing levels of violence are increasingly well documented and tested. Preventing violence will require sustained and

systematic efforts, by students, teachers, and schools, and more widely, in families, communities, and nations. Progress has been made, and there is much more to do.

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