

Present Scenario of Domestic Violence in India: A Sociological Study

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Abstract:-Domestic violence in India includes any form of violence suffered by a person from a biological relative, but typically is the violence suffered by a woman by male members of her family or relatives. Domestic violence is one of the crimes against women which is linked to their disadvantageous position in the society. Domestic violence refers to violence against women especially in matrimonial homes. Therefore domestic violence is recognized as the significant barriers of the empowerment of women, with consequences of women's health, their health-seeking behaviour and their adoption of small family norm. However an attempt has been made to study whether ever married women of reproductive age group in India view wife-beating as justified. In addition, the prevalence of beatings and physical mistreatment since age 15 and also in last one year are used as the dependent variables. The National Family Health Survey which covered 90,303 ever married women is used in the analysis. Background characteristics such as education, age, marital duration, place of residence, caste, religion, sex of the head of the household, standard of living, work status of women, exposure to mass media and the autonomy of women with respect to decision making, freedom of movement and access to money are linked to domestic violence. An autonomy index is computed to understand the relationship of women's autonomy with domestic violence.

Keywords:-Domestic violence, matrimonial homes, Crime, Women Empowerment.

Introduction:-Domestic violence that is any act of physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, or the threat of such abuse, inflicted against a woman by a person intimately connected to her through marriage, family relation, or acquaintanceship is universal and has its root in the socio-cultural set up of the society. The perpetrators of domestic violence have often been found to be the males and the victims, their sexual partners. Internationally, one in three women have been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in their

lifetime by a member of her own family. Looking at the domestic front, staring from Vedic age to twenty first century, women in India perhaps have never experienced equal rights and freedom compared to their male counterparts. The concept of 'Ardhangini' seems to be restricted only in literatures and have never implemented in practical life. In addition to this, extracts from Ramcharitamanas of Tulsidas like 'Dhol, Gauwnaar, Shudra, Pashu aur Nari; Sakal Tadan ka Adhikari' [drums, uncivilized illiterates, lower castes, animals and women are all fit to be beaten] besides other indicators like Pardaha system [hiding the face in veils], Sati system [self immersion of the lady in husband's pyre] that are subject to women only; is a reflection of the history of women's subordinate status. In short, it is always the women who have to be in the tight rope, subject to inequality and looked down as an inferior sex. Staring from childhood to the end of her life she has to be under the control of father or husband or the son. The subordinate status of women combined with socio cultural norms that are inclined towards patriarchy and masculinity can be considered as an important factor determining the domestic violence.

In view of the prevalence as well as the pervasiveness of domestic violence, many researchers in the past have attempted to assess the situation besides exploring its possible cause and subsequent consequences for society in general and women in particular.

In order to develop effective intervention programme and policy, it is vital to know the attitude and perception of the women towards the issue in-depth. Most of the studies conducted in the past are small in nature and reflects the regional picture that might not be a true picture of the whole country. In view of the above discussion, it seems essential to understand the women's viewpoint besides the assessment of the problem and its correlates at national level. Further, in the present world, where gender equality and justice have become the buzz words, examining the domestic violence in the largest democracy of the world appears worthy for the betterment of half of its citizens.

In the present paper, an attempt has been made to study whether ever-married women of reproductive age group in India view wife beating justified on certain situations. In addition, emphasis is there to examine the prevalence of beatings or physical mistreatment since age 15 and in last one year, regionally and also by background characteristics.

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Objectives of the present paper are as follows:

1. To study the regional variations of women's view about wife beating as justified, with specific reasons.
2. To examine the differentials of women's view about wife beating as justified with specific reasons by background characteristics.
3. To understand the regional variations of the prevalence of beatings or physical mistreatment since age 15 and the person who beat or physically mistreated and also the prevalence of beatings or physical mistreatment in the last one year (12 months) preceding the survey.
4. To examine the prevalence of beating or physical mistreatment since age 15 and also in the last one year by selected background characteristics.
5. To investigate the determinants of women's view about wife beating as justified and also the determinants of prevalence of beatings or physical mistreatment since age 15 and in the last one year.

Looking at the prevalence of beating or physical mistreatment in the last 12 months preceding the survey, it is clear that one out of every 10 women have reportedly experienced it. Age of the women, education of the women, age at marriage of the women, autonomy of the women and standard of living of the household shows an inverse relationship with occurrence of beating as with increase in the above mentioned indicators shows a decreasing trend in the beating or physical mistreatment. Again, as expected, the prevalence is found less in female-headed households and women residing in urban areas than their respective counterparts.

After controlling the effect of other variables women in the older age group (40-49) are 9 percent less likely to agree with at least one reason for justifying a husband beating his wife compared to the youngest age group of 15-19 years. Higher the educational level leads to lower the probability for justifying at least one reason. This is clear from the result that women with higher secondary and above educational level are 45 percent less likely for justifying at least one reason compared to illiterate women. Therefore, educational level of women is one of the main determinants of justifying at least one reason for husband beating his wife. Women engaged in agricultural activities are more likely for justifying one or more reason of wife beating. Lower the age at first marriage, higher is the probability of justifying at least one reason.

With regard to the sex composition of living children, those women having only daughter and both son and daughter are 13 and 15 percent

more likely for justifying at least one reason of husband beating his wife compared to those who do not have any child. Further, controlling the effect of other variables, women who are not exposed to mass media are 22 percent more likely for justifying at least one reason. With respect to women's autonomy, medium and higher category are 11 percent and 37 percent less likely to justify at least one reason compared to low category of women. Similarly, the result also consistent with respect to the ethnicity and religious categories of women. It is again found that women with higher standard of living are less likely to justify at least one reason for beating than those of low standard of living. Again, rural women are 16 percent more likely for justifying at least one reason than their urban counterparts. This may be due to the fact that urban women are more aware about their rights and duties compared to rural women.

With respect to beaten or physically mistreated since age 15, it is clear that women marrying between 19-24 years are 6 percent less likely of being beaten or physically mistreated since age 15 compared to those who marrying below 18 years of age. Longer the marital duration leads to greater the probability of being mistreated. It is noticeable that women who are not currently married (divorced, separated, deserted or widowed) are more likely than currently married women to have been beaten since age 15. After controlling the effect of other variables, rural women are 10 percent less likely of being beaten since age 15 compared to urban women. Educational level of women seems to have a negative effect on domestic violence in India. Similarly, women from scheduled caste, Muslim community is more likely of being beaten than their respective counterparts.

Women with lower autonomy are more likely of being beaten compared to women of higher autonomy. Those who are not exposed to mass media are 18 percent more likely of being beaten than those who have exposed. Households headed by female members are about 15 percent less likely of being beaten since age 15 compared to those household headed by male members. Workingwomen have a greater likelihood of being mistreated than the non-working women. Women from medium and high standard of living are about 34 percent and 60 percent respectively less likely of being beaten or physically mistreated compared to low standard of living. The similar trend also follows in case of women being beaten or physically mistreated in the last 12 months preceding the survey.

Conclusions: The foregoing analysis reveals not only widespread prevalence of domestic violence (21 percent, since age 15) in India but also the acceptance of majority of ever-married women (57 percent) to at least one reason for justifying a husband beating his wife. There are again large-scale interstate differences in the prevalence as well as acceptance of violence among women. In addition to this, it is noteworthy to mention that a lot of variables like age, education of women, age at first marriage, ethnic and religious categories, women's autonomy, exposure to mass media, work status of women and standard of living besides place of residence contribute significantly to the prevalence of domestic violence. Nevertheless, it is the husbands who are reportedly the perpetrators of violence showing one reason or another.

The experience of violence undermines the empowerment women and certainly is a barrier to the socio-economic and demographic development of the country. In view of the prevalence of the problem, it is suggested to have programmes that take into account involvement of the community and especially the males for effective as well as fruitful amelioration of the issue. It can again be suggested that education of the girls should be encouraged, which will undoubtedly work as deterrent to domestic violence. Again, though the present findings are silent about the legal side of the issue, stringent laws against the perpetrators of the violence, laws giving more rights to the women will always be beneficial to curb the issue. As it is found to be deep rooted in the socio-cultural practices and both the perpetrator as well as victim take it granted, there is need of major transformation in the socio cultural milieu. In order to address the problem, social norms and values towards gender roles should be transformed to facilitate the implementation of appropriate and meaningful responses to domestic violence and ultimately to prevent it from happening altogether.

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