

## **Domestic Violence and its Effect on Empowered Woman**

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**Abstract:** Throughout the world the age old gender norms lead to bitter suppression of women. It is widely acknowledged that violence against women is fundamentally a result of gender based discriminations. It has been found that the root cause behind such kind of situation is linked with the economic disparity in many ways. It has been agreed by a large number of social thinkers that empowering women economically can heavily work on the problems of domestic violence. Hence, the fact cannot be ignored that domestic violence has a traumatic effect creating psychological turmoil. The condition gets worse for the women who work outside as she fights desperately to cope up with the outside world; and at the same time, she suffers incessantly with her inner mental traumas. However, the question naturally arises in this point whether women empowerment has actually changed this traumatic condition of women.

**Keyword:** discriminations, empowerment, suppression, turmoil, traumatic.

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Date of Submission: 26-03-2022

Date of Acceptance: 06-04-2022

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### **I. Introduction**

When we think of domestic violence the portrait of a helpless woman, with visible physical wounds outside and invisible mental wounds inside, floats in front of our eyes. Although we boast of the advancement in society, the frequent use of the term, 'domestic violence' in newspapers and media is a burning proof that our material advancement is not yet confirmed the security of a stable and healthy family life which is the basis of a sound society. Not only in Indian but throughout the world the age old gender norms have been resulting in bitter suppression of women. Domestic violence, no doubt, is an offshoot of such patriarchal biases. The question which arises in this point is whether women empowerment has actually changed the traumatic condition of the woman-folk. The economic stability of women, now a days, may lead us to think that women who are empowered are more able to stand up for their rights. As a consequence they are expected to experience less domestic violence. However, this conclusion may not be necessarily true. More empowered women may stray out from the traditional gender roles in the household. Men, who feel threatened by this, may use domestic violence as a way to restore the male dominance in the household. Sometimes men, who are less compatible in the professional world, suffer from inferiority complex and their spouses become the immediate victim of it. Whatever the cause is there is no doubt that domestic violence renders a traumatic effect on its victim. The condition gets worse for the women who work outside because she fights desperately to balance her professional expectations and her inner conflicts. What she does in this situation is to wear a mask which ultimately affects her mental stability and personality in the long run. In most of the cases the victim does not get the courage to become outspoken because of the social stigmas; in most of the cases people laugh or makes fun at her situation and it is the affected woman only who is blamed on.

### **II. Domestic Violence and Gender Stereotyping**

Domestic violence against women can be explained as a situation supported and reinforced by age old gender norms and values that place women in a subordinate position in relation to men. It is widely acknowledged that violence against women is fundamentally a result of gender-based inequalities more than any other individual or social factor. Therefore, violence against women is more common in societies like India where gender roles are strictly defined where men control the wealth and the decision-making process. In India amongst different types of gender based disequilibrium domestic violence is the most affected one. Due to a wide range of factors like typical patriarchal mind set up, gender biased socialization, lack of awareness about legal rights, lack of community support mechanisms, privacy and stigma attached to domestic violence etc. women facing domestic violence continue to suffer in silence. The social thinkers and benefactors of the society have been analyzing to demolish the root cause of such kind of suppression women face; and while analyzing it has been found that the root cause is linked with the economic disparity more than any other factor. It has been agreed by a large number of social thinkers that empowering women economically can heavily minimize the

problem of domestic violence. Women's empowerment in this context is understood as the supportive method to defy and change such gender inequalities and uneven distribution of power associated with women suppression. Empowerment not only gives women economic stability but also makes them able to access and control over necessary resources so that they can make firm decisions and regulate their lives safely and properly.

### **III. Effects of Domestic Violence**

Women who have experienced domestic violence are affected both physically and emotionally from multiple traumas. These traumas can have manifold effects on the mind, body and spirit. It is unfortunate to experience domestic violence but acknowledging its effect can be the first step towards the process of restoration and healing. Women who are exposed to domestic violence often experience physical, mental or spiritual shifts that can be worsen if they are not addressed on time. Although most of the victims experience similar types of abuse, the response to it vary from person to person. Many factors influence the ways how a person responds to the effects of the abuse such as the degree or frequency of the abuse, the supportive strength of the woman after the abusive incident, the environment she moves around and people's reaction towards her. However, the fact cannot be ignored that the overall impact of domestic violence entirely depends on the individual's natural stamina to withstand stress and manage stressful situations. Domestic violence is something which totally disrupts the inner peace of mind and the overall mental stability in such a way that all the materialistic comforters like power, wealth, the glaze of the outer world etc. become meaningless. Life becomes null and void for the victim. Ultimately, domestic violence robs victims of their stability to control their own lives. Victims live in continuous fear and isolation seeking for a place where there will be no outsider to stare on her wounds. With tremendous courage and strength they struggle each and every day to keep themselves and their children safe. There are instances where many famous, successful and well empowered woman celebrities committed suicide or chosen a life of seclusion or got addicted to drugs or alcohol after having an abusive relationship. Increased anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression become too heavy for the victims to bear with. Here a bird's eye view can be taken to the various physical and psychological conditions the victim faces:

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental unhealthy condition that is initiated by a terrifying event. Some common symptoms associated with PTSD are flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety and uncontrollable thoughts of the event. Many people who go through such traumatic situations have difficulty in adjusting and coping up with the immediate environment for a long period. However, with time and proper support system such traumatic reactions usually get better.

Depression is the most common symptom exhibited by victims of domestic violence. Depression in the beginning leads to temporary sadness. If not addressed it leads to symptoms such as prolonged sadness, feelings of hopelessness, unexplained crying and changes in appetite with significant weight loss, loss of energy or loss of interest and pleasure in activities previously enjoyed. Depression changes the sound thought process and a person's outlook, which impacts the ability to make decisions, gets changed. In extreme cases of depression, people may even think of suicide and attempt it too.

Dissociation is another mental illness to be noticed in the victims. It usually refers to feeling like one is out of the world or is not present emotionally. Moreover, people may find themselves daydreaming. Hence, when dissociation is chronic and complex it may block an individual's normal ability to cope up with the real world such as being unable to focus on work, duties or responsibilities.

The condition gets worse when all the efforts of the victim to overcome with the situation are washed away because of the perpetrator's dominance. Being in a situation where a person is controlled by another creates feelings of absurdity. The victim starts questioning the meaning of her existence, develops a negative outlook and ultimately feels damaged or unworthy of a better life. Moreover, in some cases, a perpetrator hits at the person's self-esteem with constant criticism or insults which makes the victim question her identity altogether. A faulty belief system contributes to feeling of dejection and the victim becomes apprehensive of the future. Domestic violence also takes away the person's sense of safety and security influencing her ability to trust others. When all these things happen it is found that engaging in self-injurious behavior brings a sense of control and serves as a relief agent on the part of the victim. Although such actions are not performed always with suicidal intent, but occasionally, it can result in severe detriment even death.

### **IV. The Victimized Woman in the Social Scenario**

Being the victim of all these critical conditions, a woman cannot actually get out of the situation as many factors such emotional attachment with the family, sense of becoming a social outcast being rejected by husband, legal custody of the children, economic insecurity etc. pull her back. The battered woman even face the danger of losing her job because of absenteeism due to mental or physical illness as a result of the violence. The affected woman cannot work efficiently in her workplace and constantly remains under the threat of termination. The women may also have to move many times to avoid violence. Moving is costly and it may

interfere with the continuity of employment. In many situations women lose family and friends as a result of maltreatment. As the victim isolates her from family and friends, she feels embarrassed to ask for support from others. Many such women compromise their financial security during divorce proceedings to avoid further abuse. As a result they become impoverished in the long run.

Children growing up in abusive homes automatically become disturbed and delinquent. Children from abusive parents may adjust with the outside world but inside they suffer terrible pain. The child feel physically, emotionally and psychologically abandoned. One-third of the children who witness the battering of their mothers demonstrate significant behavioral problems including psychosomatic disorders, stuttering, anxiety and fears, sleep disruption, excessive crying and school adjustment problems etc.

In our society woman's own values and priorities which place her family's wellbeing above everything results in the limitations to take care of the self. For instance, the immediate reaction against domestic violence should involve actions such as consulting family members, engaging police or visiting a counselor. Hence, the victim is often afraid of engaging in these affairs with fear of losing reputation of herself and her child. In actuality actions of protest are not feasible for many women including the empowered ones. Sometimes, the family of the victim does not support the woman due to lack of financial resource. Sometimes, the police could not be trusted to assist in such cases. Counselors could do nothing to change the overall circumstances. In simple words, to act, to stand and to fight for right even on the part of an empowered woman becomes a tough challenge to deal with.

### **V. Domestic Violence and Women Empowerment**

In India the unsuccessful implementation of women's empowerment projects is beckoned by many factors such as geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Violence against women is largely the outcome of the patriarchal edifice that governs maximum households in India. The impact of the patriarchal subjugation can be seen not only in rural India but also in urban areas where women empowerment is more visible than rural areas. Rural women, as opposed to urban women, face inequality at much higher rates and in all spheres of life. Naturally, an urban educated woman enjoys relatively higher access to economic opportunities, health and education and enjoys better support systems to protest against domestic violence. Education enables women, whether urban or rural, with higher decision-making power both in the household and community.

Due to rapid urbanization and lack of economic opportunities cities are rambling with slum areas that lack basic needs such as clean water, sanitation, and health facilities. Women and children in slums are most vulnerable to violence, abuse and deprived of their basic human rights. The women in slum areas mostly work in unorganized and informal sectors which make them more vulnerable to abuse by employers and they remain under constant threat of danger.

In our society women empowerment only is not sufficient to minimize the effect of domestic violence. Several researchers have raised concerns for providing a positive and supportive ambience to the women workers so that instead of suffering the stare and scorn of the people, she actually gets enough courage and motivation to fight with her situation with dignity. Through awareness campaigning it is necessary to sensitize our society that domestic violence is not acceptable at any cost; if committed it will be strongly protested and the community will support the victim. It is also necessary to create awareness about progressive legislations like Protection of Women Act which provides effective remedies and supportive services to women suffering violence. In addition, several counseling sessions or motivational seminars can be organized to provide the woman with courage to come forward and fight any injustice done to her.

### **VI. Conclusion:**

Domestic violence is a crime. This crime cannot be wiped out from our society all of a sudden because several other variables such as education, status, class, gender stereotyping etc. are correlated with it inextricably. However, women, earning or non-earning, rural or urban, can be saved from being a victim of violence through proper implementation of Acts and awareness. The belief system should be administered that domestic violence is possible to overcome and it is equally possible to break the cycle of violence. With quality time spent for healing, developing positive mechanisms and taking care of self, the traumatic effects of violence become less severe; and it is possible to regain a positive and productive relationship with oneself and the others. It should be remembered that being a victim of violence is not an end rather it is a beginning to entail and discover new arenas of strengths and potentials.

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Dr. PAPAI PAL. "Domestic Violence and its Effect on Empowered Woman." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 27(04), 2022, pp. 11-14.