

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA THROUGH THE LENS OF LIFE CYCLE APPROACH

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Abstract: This paper uses the life cycle approach to visibilize the rampant infliction of violence on women in India throughout the life cycle through overt and covert means.

Violence experienced by women in India can occur within and outside the safe space of the family, which can take multiple forms, like physical violence, sexual violence, and psychological violence. The secure space of the home is questioned by revealing the numerous violent practices that women endure as daughters, wives, and elderly women in the family. The community and the State inflict violence on women by creating unsafe spaces outside homes and by regularly condoning such practices that undermine women's safety and well-being. The role of international women's organizations and NGOs in resisting violence against women has been highlighted.

Keywords: Domestic violence, International Organizations, life cycle, NGOs, violence against women.

Introduction:

"Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women...."

The family is often equated with sanctuary, where individuals seek love, safety, security, and shelter. But the evidence shows that it is also a place that imperils lives and breeds some of the most drastic forms of violence perpetrated against women and girls. Violence in the domestic sphere is usually perpetrated by males who are or have been, in positions of trust, intimacy and power - husbands, boyfriends, fathers, fathers-in-law, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, sons, or other relatives. Domestic violence is, in most cases, violence perpetrated by men against women. Women can also be violent, but their actions account for a small percentage of domestic violence. Violence against women is often a cycle of abuse that manifests itself in many forms throughout their lives.

The term violence against women signifies any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Accordingly, violence against women encompasses but is not limited to the following:

- a. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.
- b. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- c. Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Violence is an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of physically hurting another person.

Domestic violence has been defined as all actions by the family against one of its members that threaten the member's life, body, psychological integrity or liberty.

Types of Violence against Women:

Even at the very beginning of her life, a girl may be the target of sex-selective abortion or female infanticide in cultures where son preference is prevalent. During childhood, violence against girls may include enforced malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and education, incest, female genital mutilation, early marriage, and forced prostitution or bonded labour. Some go on to suffer throughout their adult lives - battered, raped, and even murdered at the hands of intimate partners. Other crimes of violence against women include forced pregnancy, abortion or sterilization, and harmful traditional practices such as dowry-related violence, sati (the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), and killings in the name of honour. And in later life, widows and elderly women may also experience abuse. While the impact of physical abuse may be more 'visible' than psychological scarring, repeated humiliation and insults, forced isolation, limitations on social mobility, constant threats of violence and injury, and denial of economic resources are more subtle and insidious forms of violence. The intangible nature of psychological abuse makes it harder to define and report, leaving the woman in a situation where she is often made to feel mentally destabilized and powerless. Jurists, human rights experts, and activists have argued that the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, sometimes with fatal outcomes, inflicted on women is comparable to torture in both its nature and severity. It can be perpetrated intentionally and committed for the specific purposes of punishment, intimidation, and control of the woman's identity and behaviour. It takes place in situations where a woman may seem free to leave. Still, it is held prisoner by fear of further violence against herself and her children or by lack of resources, family, legal or community support.

Examples of Violence against Women Throughout the Life Cycle	
Phase	Types of violence
Pre-birth Sex Determination	Selective abortion results in battering during pregnancy on birth outcomes.
Infancy	Female infanticide; physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.
Girlhood	Child marriage; female genital mutilation; physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; incest; child prostitution and pornography.
Adolescence and Adulthood	Dating and courtship violence (e.g., acid throwing and date rape) economically coerced sex (e.g., schoolgirls having sex with “sugar daddies” in return for school fees); incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape. dowry abuse and murders; partner homicide; psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities; forced pregnancy
Elderly	Forced “suicide” or homicide of widows for economic reasons; sexual, physical, and psychological abuse.
(Source: “Violence Against Women”, WHO, FRH/WHO/97.8)	

Factors responsible for violence against women:

- a. **Son Preference:** women in India are subject to all forms of violence due to society's strong affinity towards the male child. Female infanticide is quite common in Haryana and Punjab because there is a preference for sons because male children carry on the family linkage. The education of sons is also considered much more important in these two states the sex ratio is lower than the national average.
- b. **Discrimination within the household:** within the household, there exists gender discrimination which determines the intra-house-hold distribution of food. Because women and girls are given less food than men, malnutrition among adolescent girls and women is quite prevalent in India.
- c. **Lack of opportunity to work:** Due to lower educational levels, the capacity of to earn. Women from upper castes are seldom allowed to work outside the home. However, the work participation rate among low cast women is better than that of upper caste women.

- d. **Honour Killings**: Honour killings are quite common in Haryana and Tamil Nādu when young girls marry somebody outside their caste and clan against her family's wishes.
- e. **Women as Property**: Dowry is demanded by the husband's family (in-laws) when younger women get married. In many cases, newly married women become subject to verbal and physical abuse; young brides are burnt to death by their in-laws if the parents fail to meet the requisite dowry demanded.
- f. **Data on violence against women**: In India, it is difficult to find data pertaining to rape cases. The data may show that such crimes being committed may increase or decrease in the records, but that does not lead to an increase or decrease in reporting crimes against women. Women remain afraid of lodging FIR's (First Information Reports) against the crime and the perpetrator in Police stations despite being raped or sexually harassed. The judiciary and legal system are biased in favour of men. This is one of the prime reasons for cases of violence against women being underreported.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2007, a total of 1,85,312 incidents of crime against women (both under the Indian Penal Code -IPC and Special and Local Laws-S.L.L.) were reported in the country during 2007 as compared to 1,64,765 during 2006, thus recording an increase of 12.5% during 2007. These crimes have continuously increased during 2003-2007, with 1,40,601 cases in 2003, 1,54,333 cases in 2004, 1,55,553 in 2005, 1,64,765 cases in 2006 and 1,85,312 cases in 2007.

The total number of sexual harassment cases was 10,950 in 2007. The total number of cases pertaining to cruelty by husbands and relatives was 75 930. There were 61 cases of importation of girls. Altogether there were 38 734 cases of molestation in 2007.

The number of rape cases has increased by nearly tenfold from 2,487 in 1953 to 20737 in 2007. Young girls also become victims of child abuse at the hands of their closest male relatives, which they are unable to protest when women protest their exploitation; many try to silence them. The experience of Bhanvari Devi, the 'Sathin' from Rajasthan, is a case in point. She was gang raped for working against child marriage practise was gang raped for working against child marriage practiced by the upper castes in her village.

According to the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau, 2008), respect for women seems to be the worst in Andhra Pradesh, which accounted for 83.5 per cent of cases under the indecent representation of women (Prohibition) Act of total cases across the country. Out of a total of 1,200, Andhra had registered 1,500 incidents in his regard. The NCRB data clearly points to the

profile of the average rapist. Over 75% were known to the victims. In fact, nearly 10% were relatives. Another disturbing aspect was that about a quarter of the rape victims were minors.

During the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995, the United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said that violence against women is a universal problem that must be universally condemned. The United Nations has termed violence against women a gross human rights violation. In India, a survey showed that for each incidence of violence, women lost an average of 7 working days.

- a. **Critical Areas of Concern:** The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society. Empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples.

According to the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995, Governments, the international community and civil society, including nongovernmental organizations and the private sector, are called upon to take strategic action in the following critical areas of concern:

- a. The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women.
- b. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training
- c. Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to health care and related services
- d. Violence against women
- e. The effects of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation.
- f. Inequality in economic structures and policies, in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources
- g. Inequality between men and women in sharing power and decision-making at all Levels. Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women
- h. Lack of respect for and inadequate promotion and protection of the human rights of Women
- i. Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all Communication systems, especially in the media
- j. Gender inequalities in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment

- **Strategic Actions:** In each critical area of concern, the problem is diagnosed and strategic objectives is proposed with concrete Actions to be taken by various actors in order to achieve those objectives. Violence against women is an obstacle to achieving equality, development, and peace objectives. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women is a matter of concern to all States and should be addressed. Knowledge about its causes and consequences, as well as its incidence and measures to combat it, has been greatly expanded since the Nairobi Conference. In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse that cuts across income, class and culture lines. Women's low social and economic status can be both a cause and a consequence of violence against women.
- According to the Fourth World Conference on Women -The actions that were to be taken to stop violence against women have been listed below.

a. By Governments:

1. Condemn violence against women and refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination as set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

2. Refrain from engaging in violence against women and exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons;

3. Enact and/or reinforce penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions in domestic legislation to punish and redress the wrongs done to women and girls who are subjected to any form of violence, whether in the home, the workplace, the community or society;

4. Adopt and/or implement and periodically review and analyze legislation to ensure its effectiveness in eliminating violence against women, emphasizing the prevention of violence and the prosecution of offenders; take measures to ensure the protection of women subjected to violence, access to just and effective remedies, including compensation and indemnification and healing of victims, and rehabilitation of perpetrators.

5. Work actively to ratify and/or implement international human rights norms and instruments as they relate to violence against women, including those contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,²¹ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

6. Implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, considering general recommendation 19 adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its eleventh session.

7. Promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes related to violence against women and actively encourage, support and implement measures and programmes aimed at increasing the knowledge and understanding of the causes, consequences and mechanisms of violence against women among those responsible for implementing these policies, such as law enforcement officers, police personnel and judicial, medical and social workers, as well as those who deal with minority, migration and refugee issues, and develop strategies to ensure that their victimization of women victims of violence does not occur because of gender-insensitive laws or judicial or enforcement practices;

8. Provide women who are subjected to violence with access to the mechanisms of justice and, as provided for by national legislation, to just and effective remedies for the harm they have suffered and inform women of their rights in seeking redress through such mechanisms.

9. Enact and enforce legislation against the perpetrators of practices and acts of violence against women, such as female genital mutilation, prenatal sex selection, infanticide and dowry-related violence and give vigorous support to the efforts of non-governmental and community organizations to eliminate such practices;

10. Formulate and implement, at all appropriate levels, plans of action to eliminate violence against women.

11. Adopt all appropriate measures, especially in the field of education, to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women and to eliminate prejudices, customary practices and all other practices based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes and on stereotyped roles for men and women.

12. Create or strengthen institutional mechanisms so that women and girls can report acts of violence against them in a safe and confidential environment, free from the fear of penalties or retaliation, and file charges.

13. Ensure that women with disabilities have access to information and services in the field of violence against women:

14. Create, improve or develop as appropriate, and fund the training programs for judicial, legal, medical, social, educational and police and immigrant personnel in order to avoid the abuse of power leading to violence against women and sensitize such personnel to the nature of gender-based acts and threats of violence, so that fair treatment of female victims can be assured.

14. Adopt laws, where necessary, and reinforce existing laws that punish police, security forces or any other agents of the State who engage in acts of violence against women in the course of the performance of their duties, review existing legislation and take effective measures against the perpetrators of such violence;

15. Allocate adequate resources within the government budget and mobilize community resources for activities related to the elimination of violence against women, including resources for the implementation of plans of action at all appropriate levels.

b. By Governments, including local governments, and community organizations, nongovernmental organizations, educational institutions, the public and private sectors, particularly enterprises, and the mass media, as appropriate:

1. Provide well-funded shelters and relief support for girls and women subjected to violence, as well as medical, psychological, and other counselling services and free or low-cost legal aid, where it is needed, as well as appropriate assistance to enable them to find a means of subsistence.

2. Establish linguistically and culturally accessible services for migrant women and girls, including women migrant workers, who are victims of gender-based violence;

3. Recognize the vulnerability to violence, and other forms of abuse of women migrants, including women migrant workers, whose legal status in the host country depends on employers who may exploit their situation;

4. Support initiatives of women's organizations and non-governmental organizations all over the world to raise awareness on the issue of violence against women and to contribute to its elimination;

5. Organize, support and fund community-based education and training campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women as a violation of women's enjoyment of their human rights and mobilize local communities to use appropriate gender-sensitive traditional and innovative methods of conflict resolution;

6. Recognize, support and promote the fundamental role of intermediate institutions, such as primary-health-care centres, family-planning centres, existing school health services, mother and baby protection services, centres for migrant families and so forth in the field of information and education related to abuse;

7. Organize and fund information campaigns and educational and training programs in order to sensitize girls and boys and women and men to the personal and social detrimental effects of violence in the family, community and society; teach them how to communicate without

violence; promote training for victims and potential victims so that they can protect themselves and others against such violence.

c. By Governments, employers, trade unions, community and youth organizations and non-governmental organizations, as appropriate:

a. Develop programs and procedures to eliminate sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women in all educational institutions, workplaces and elsewhere.

b. Develop programs and procedures to educate and raise awareness of acts of violence against women that constitute a crime and a violation of the human rights of women; young

c. Develop counselling, healing and support programs for girls, adolescents and women who have been or are involved in abusive relationships, particularly those who live in homes or institutions where abuse occurs.

d. Take special measures to eliminate violence against women, particularly those in vulnerable situations, such as young women, refugees, displaced and internally displaced women, women with disabilities and women migrant workers, including enforcing any existing legislation and developing, as appropriate, new legislation for women migrant workers in both sending and receiving countries.

d. By the Secretary-General of the United Nations: Provide the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women with all necessary assistance, in particular staff and resources required to perform all mandated functions, especially in carrying out and following up on missions undertaken either separately or jointly with other special Rapporteur and working groups, and adequate assistance for periodic consultations with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and all treaty bodies.

e. By Governments, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations: Encourage the dissemination and implementation of the UNHCR Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women and the UNHCR Guidelines on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence against Refugees.

Despite prosperity, globalization and education, we have failed to eliminate the violence against women. We worship women in the form of Goddesses, regard them as a mother, love them as a wife, and she is most affectionate to us as a daughter, but still, we commit violence against them. Everywhere in the world, violence against women is reported barring a few countries. As per the statistics available, every 3rd minute, a case of violence against women is registered in India. Every day 50 cases of dowry-related violence are reported, and every 29th minutes a woman is raped. Even though there are laws to prevent violence against woman, there is police to keep a check on these events, and there are seminars and symposiums being organised to analyze the matter and make recommendations. However, on the ground level nothing seems to be working.

The above cases discussed are just a reflection of the violence against women. There are incidences of outstripping women in Nandigram and Guwahati. However, these incidences are not reflective of a developing economy and growing society but a decadent society which is not bothered about human dignity, as stated by Dr Ranjana Kumari, President of Women Power Connect, an NGO in India. She has rightly suggested the observation of a "National Shame Day every year to highlight the atrocities committed against women.

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