

A STUDY ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND WOMEN IN THE STATE OF ASSAM

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi, while defining empowerment of women, had described it as a situation "when women whom we call abala become sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful."

Domestic violence can be described as a situation when an adult in a relationship misuses power to control another. It is an establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse. The violence may involve physical abuse, sexual assault and threats. Sometimes it's more subtle, like making someone feel worthless, not letting them have any money, or not allowing them to leave home. Social isolation and emotional abuse can have long lasting effects as well as physical violence.

In a state like Assam, where Shakti is worshipped for power and wellbeing of the family, where Lakshmi is worshipped for prosperity, it is ironical that in such a state, women are subjected to domestic violence every day. They are made to suffer and are socially ostracised. It is worth mentioning that domestic violence committed on women are by women themselves viz, the mother-in-law setting the daughter-in-law ablaze for bringing insufficient dowry or not giving birth to a male child. Cases of such incidents are rising in Assam, though the incidents of domestic violence in Assam are much lower than the national average, "but she is also not totally free from such incidents, it's a question of few percentage points..."

Key words: Domestic violence, empowerment., physical abuse, woman.

Introduction: Domestic violence can be described as a situation when an adult in a relationship misuses power to control another. It is an establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse. The violence may involve physical abuse, sexual assault and threats. Sometimes it's more subtle, like making someone feel worthless, not letting them have any money, or not allowing them to leave home. Social isolation and emotional abuse can have long lasting effects as well as physical violence.

Domestic violence isn't just hitting or fighting or an occasional argument. It is an abuse of power. The abuser tortures and controls the victim by threats, intimidation and physical violence. More than 40% of married women in India are tortured by their husbands for silly reasons like being kicked, slapped or sexually abused for reasons such as not cooking a tasty meal, cleaning, jealousy or other motives. According to the United Nations, as many as 70% of married women in India between the age group of 15 and 49 years are victims of beating, rape and coerced sex. Among other "popular" reasons for wife bashing, besides insufficient dowry, include reasons as varied as a wife going out without informing her husband and showing disrespect to her in-laws. Mahatma Gandhi, while defining empowerment of women, had described it as a situation "when women whom we call abala becomes abala, all those who are helpless will become powerful."

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ostracised. It is worth mentioning that domestic violence committed on women are by women themselves viz, the mother-in-law setting the daughter-in-law ablaze for bringing insufficient dowry or not giving birth to a male child. Cases of such incidents are rising in Assam, though the incidents of domestic violence in Assam are much lower than the national average, "but she is also not totally free from such incidents, it's a question of few percentage points..."

In a bid to protect women against incidents of domestic violence, the Government of India has introduced a new bill providing stringent penal measures against abusers including husbands and relatives. The protection of women from domestic violence defined as an expression "domestic violence" to include actual abuse or threat of abuse- physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic violence.

The phenomenon of domestic violence is widely prevalent but has remained largely invisible in public domain. It is a matter of concern that men are far more violent than women in many respects. And so men commit most reported acts of violent crimes. Presently, where a woman is subjected to cruelty by husband and other relatives, it is an offence under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code. Passed by the Parliament, IPC 498A has a penalty provision of a three year jail term and a fine. Though Section 498A is supposed to bring respite to a woman from domestic violence, but on several occasions it is women who are misusing the section bringing misery to the opposite sex.

Though women contribute nearly half of the human resource of the world, violence and crime against them are increasing every year.

YEAR/HEADWISE CRIME AGAINST WOMEN IN ASSAM (2006-2013)

| Sl. No. | Year | Domestic Violence Act | Cruelty by Husband | Dowry Death | Dowry Prohibition Act. | Sexual Harassment |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2006 | 1 | 2548 | 105 | 31 | 10 |
| 2 | 2007 | 3 | 3000 | 100 | 16 | 10 |
| 3 | 2008 | 1 | 3478 | 103 | 11 | 2 |
| 4 | 2009 | 2 | 4398 | 170 | 40 | 10 |
| 5 | 2010 | 1 | 5410 | 175 | 37 | 20 |
| 6 | 2011 | - | 5246 | 121 | 19 | 8 |
| 7 | 2012 | - | 6407 | 140 | 41 | 5 |
| 8 | 2013 (up to May) | | 2929 | 56 | - | - |
| Total | | 8 | 33416 | 970 | 195 | 65 |

Assam Police Headquarters, Guwahati

The Domestic Violence Act of 2006 defines all forms of physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or economic abuse as domestic violence. It attempts to ensure that it has the ability to implement the process which at the same time allows enough flexibility to allow greater levels of manoeuvrability both for the victim as well as the law enforcing body.

Objectives of the study:The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore whether married women are subjected to domestic violence.
2. To examine the kind of abuse the women have been subjected to everyday.
3. To suggest various possibilities with regard to the empowerment of women facing domestic violence.

Research Methodology:In the present study the investigator has employed the Survey Method to gather various facts and information regarding women suffering domestic violence at home. Data collecting tools like interview schedule and questionnaire have been used by the investigator. A sample of 50 married women was taken by purposive sampling around Guwahati. The study is delimited to Guwahati, Assam to explore the various kinds of domestic violence that the homemakers and working women are subjected to everyday. The idea is to make the women aware of the laws for safeguarding their rights and help them live their lives with dignity and self-respect. So far the collection of data on violence

against women has been restricted to the cases of physical aggression because of failure of the investigator to take into account the other facets of violence. Even the figures on physical violence hardly reflect the enormity of the scale of aggression based as the police data which depend on complaints registered and not on the number of incidents.

Findings and discussion:The data collected using tools brings to light that psychological and emotional violence against women begins very early in life sometimes even before birth as the growing cases of female foeticide are on the rise.

- The data revealed that 35% of the women have been subjected to abuse right from childhood as young girls are routinely given less to eat, made to do all the household chores and deprived of education. After marriage 65% of women, have been at the receiving end. In a bid to control the sexuality of women, many insensitive husbands have been known to indulge in barbaric forms of abuse both physical and emotional.
- 70% of the women interviewed were housewives. They had to do all household chores. Moreover right from childhood, 30% women revealed that they have been taught to be submissive and obedient.
- 25% of the women said that they suffered domestic violence every day. 13% refused to reply. Analysis showed that most of the women suffered abuse everyday because of the threat of being thrown

out of her home or to be separated from her children.

- The survey revealed 56% of the women were educated which lessens the chances of her putting up with violence. The survey showed that only 16% of women studied till 10th standard while the other 28% had no education at all.
- In Guwahati, more than 30% of the married women are tortured by their husbands for silly reasons such as not cooking a tasty meal, cleaning, jealousy and other reasons. The forms of abuse being kicked, slapped, twisting of arms, verbal abuse or hair pulling. 23% suffered severe beatings, 20% said that they nearly got killed, 5% reported emotional and psychological abuse while 17% of the victims revealed that their husbands had extramarital affair.
- Nowadays, women have chosen to express their voice against domestic violence. But few of them have taken to legal recourse and most counselling centres also prefer settling things through mutual understanding. Only 3-4% of those who talk about their plight actually go to the court. Others wish to save their marriages. Lack of knowledge about existing laws or fear of harassment in court play a part behind this. In most cases, parents also suggest their daughter to make up and reconcile with the abuser due to financial constraints or because they fear their 'honour' will be at stake.
- Analysis of the data showed that only 35% of the women had a job or were doing some business and were financially independent. The other 80% did not have the requisite qualification to get a job. They had taken the physical torture and abuse as their fate.
- Domestic violence in home is truly universal. At least 30% of women have been physically and sexually assaulted by her partners. 45% of the women interviewed revealed that they could not give their opinion on any important matter concerning their family issues and the rest 25% did not comment. If a wife is beaten and humiliated it's only a domestic matter and she is advised usually by her parents and siblings to keep her misery under wraps. The social pressure on the hapless victim is crippling. Among the semi-literate, there is actually an attitude that sound thrashing by the husband connotes healthy lust for the wife and the devoted wife always welcomes this perverted sign of desire of man. The educated citizens give her little support for they see her martyrdom as part of the cultural tradition.
- The data also revealed that 86% of the women wanted their daughters to be educated so that they are financially independent. The remaining 14% were of the view that along with education, they should also undergo a vocational training so

that they can earn money at any point of their lives and be empowered.

In Guwahati, though dowry related cases are gaining momentum slowly, still many girls tend to remain silent for the fear of being thrown out of the house. Women, who are financially dependent on their husbands, generally tend to remain submissive. The district of Kamrup, Assam registered the highest percentage share of crime against women among all the other districts. A mad rat race for money, a craving for comfortable life often leads the husband to pressurise the wife for dowry.

A FEW CASE STUDIES:

- A day in the life of Sabita, a homemaker in Guwahati, begins with providing tea and breakfast to her husband, in laws and her four kids followed by sweeping, washing clothes and cooking. Evenings are spent waiting for her husband (her mother used to do the same as her). Sometimes Sabita's husband beats her, especially when he is drunk. When the investigator asked her what she did then, she answered "Nothing". Obviously, Sabita's story is Padma's, Bharti's, Meena's and Rita's story also. These are strong, silent and valiant women who form the bulk of Assam "second sex" and have to do with the women liberation movement.
- It comes as a surprise that working women too are not exempted from this indignity. A friend of mine uses make-up to disguise the discolouration and scarred tissues of her face, wears her dark glasses on certain days to hide her blackened eyes and wears long sleeve blouse to conceal her welts and lacerations on her arms. Yes, she is a battered wife. She even gives her entire salary to her husband.
- Due to constant nagging and physical torture, a home-maker was driven to insanity by her husband. Vandana is now undergoing treatment in a mental asylum. Her two young sons are growing without a mother while her husband is looking out for a new wife. This case is still lying with All Women Police Station, Guwahati.

Suggestions:

- The need of the hour is to make women realise their rights and lead their lives with dignity and respect. "When women are empowered to lead full and productive lives, children and families prosper"- (Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director, UNICEF).
- The entire education system, need to be geared up to play a positive and interventionist role so that the goal of empowerment of women becomes attainable.
 - Educational institutions should be encouraged to launch women development programmes. Such an effort would not only enhance a woman's

status in the society, but also lead to women's development in all segments of society.

- Women's access to vocational, technical and professional education needs to be widened at all levels and given a new dimension by breaking the gender stereotypes.
- A dynamic management structure with an over-riding priority of changing the basic status and empowerment of women should be created so that it can respond to the challenges posed by the new mandate and carry the orientation programme to their logical conclusion. Obviously, the women's self-esteem and self-confidence has to be enhanced which will form a part of the orientation programme.

It is likely that gripped as they are in most cases by ignorance and illiteracy and confined to an area of darkness within the four walls of their domestic chores, a legion of obstacles would tend to close their way to the destination. So, every educational institution must therefore take up active programme of women's educational development at different levels. Teachers and instructors must be trained and made to understand that they are to act in keeping with the aims of National Policy of Education, 1986, as the agents of women's empowerment. Foundation courses should be designed and introduced so as to promote the objectives of empowerment of women.

Conclusion: In a civil society, each individual can utilise his or her own thoughts and ideas and that is considered to be the basic human right of an individual. But it is a matter of irony that in reality each one of us hardly gets an opportunity to display our own individual ideas. Especially the women which are the most vulnerable section of the society are being side-lined from taking any important decisions. Another important aspect of this point is

that women themselves are ignorant about their rights and policies formulated especially for them. Children are the worst sufferers of domestic violence. After witnessing scenes of domestic violence at home, children are affected physically, psychologically and emotionally. If children are considered to be the citizens of tomorrow, then they should have a healthy home environment and a secured future. Although woman is usually the prime target, violence is sometimes directed towards children, family members and friends.

"Personal insecurity shadows women from cradle to grave" (UNDP). At home they are last to eat. At school they are last to be educated. At work they are last to be hired and first to be fired. And from childhood they are abused because of their gender.

If we care about the health and wellbeing of children today and into the future, we must work now to ensure that women and girls have equal opportunities to be educated, to participate in government, to achieve economic self-sufficiency and to be protected from violence and discrimination.

The modern concept of empowerment of women as a whole also means sensitising all sections of the society which includes men too. But the reality is quite different and thus there is a need to awaken the women folk in particular and make them aware of their genuine rights so that they can realise the worth of their existence as women and also can participate with the men folk in any field of decision making of the society. Thus, women need to shed off the mantle of the ever sacrificing their soul. They should have a goal and an ambition of their own. According to Bilkiz Alladin, writer and historian, "Education and economic independence are rarely hers. All that she needs now is some 'spine'. For self-realisation, she needs self-respect and for self-respect she needs her 'spine'..... which means, she now needs to stand up and confront".

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