

## BREAKING THE CYCLE: RETHINKING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND PATHWAYS TO JUSTICE IN INDIA

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### Abstract

This research paper examines the ongoing problem of violence against women in India by exploring its different forms and social consequences. It discusses the difficulty of clearly defining such violence and the challenges this creates for research due to the sensitive nature of the issue. The study explains how factors such as patriarchy, unequal power relations, and social norms contribute to sexual violence. Although laws and programs exist, violence often remains underreported. The study stresses the need for stronger laws and better research to address the problem effectively.

**Keywords:** *Gender-based violence, domestic violence, sexual harassment, societal norms, women's rights, India*

### INTRODUCTION:

Throughout history, violence against women has persisted as a societal challenge, occurring in times of peace and war. The term encompasses gender-based acts causing physical, sexual, or psychological harm, irrespective of age, race, culture, wealth, or geography. India, often portrayed as a rapidly growing economy with progressive human development indicators, faces a growing concern regarding increased sexual harassment, challenging initial definitions.

### DEFINING VIOLENCE

The diversity in defining violence, whether broad or focused, holds significance as it shapes societal responses. The World Health Organization characterizes violence as the deliberate use of physical strength or power, real or threatened, resulting in harm to oneself, others, or society. Domestic violence, as per the 2005 Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse within a common family. The legal implications of these definitions contribute to societal norms and expectations. Various forms of violence against women were examined, all sharing a common purpose: gaining and maintaining control over the victim.

1. **Physical Abuse:** Intentional contact abuse causing intimidation, pain, or injury, encompassing actions like kicking, scratching, punching, choking, dragging, and burning.
2. **Marital Rape:** Involves coercion or intimidation for unwanted sexual activity, extending aggression and violence even within marital relationships.
3. **Domestic Violence:** Characterized by the misuse of power to control another within a relationship, encompassing physical assault, psychological abuse, social abuse, financial abuse, or sexual assault.
4. **Rape:** Pressuring someone into sexual activity against their will, including sexual contact with individuals with mental disabilities or unconscious persons, ranking as the fourth most commonly reported crime against women in India.

5. **Prostitution:** Prostituted women endure intimate partner abuse by pimps and clients, involving manipulation, control, economic exploitation, social alienation, verbal harassment, threats, intimidation, physical aggression, sexual assault, and captivity.

### **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The challenge in formulating effective and sustainable strategies to address violence against women lies in achieving a comprehensive understanding of all its dimensions. This necessitates the recognition of victims and offenders, understanding apparent risk and protective factors, delineating the specific consequences of abuse, and identifying the real needs of survivors. Equally crucial is the documentation of implemented responses to discern weaknesses in current approaches and distill potential lessons for the future. However, any endeavour to address violence must initially grapple with a set of methodological issues concerning ethics and health. This involves assessing a judicious combination of research methods and identifying instances of household abuse. The sensitivity of the subject poses a hurdle in obtaining candid opinions from participants, who fear that their responses may adversely affect their credibility and that of their families. Additionally, participants may inadvertently associate certain behaviours with their cultural context, potentially introducing biases into the research. Overcoming these methodological challenges is imperative for a nuanced and accurate understanding of the complex issue of violence against women.

### **HYPOTHESIS:**

This research proposes that attempts have been undertaken to eliminate domestic violence and its related consequences. However, some programs have demonstrated less success. It is further suggested that knowledge about domestic violence issues can empower victims, enabling them to recognize their rights and contributing to a reduction in the overall prevalence of the problem.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The research paper relies on secondary sources, predominantly drawing from books and academic articles, to formulate a reasonably accurate opinion in support of the hypothesis. This study employs a comprehensive desk analysis, gathering data from current studies on sexual harassment against women in both domestic and public spaces.

### **RESULTS;**

The findings highlight a complex interplay of factors contributing to the increased reports of sexual violence against women in India. Factors such as patriarchy, women's education and employment, and disparities in gendered power dynamics are identified as underlying reasons. These issues are perceived as being influenced by 'traditional' standards and ideals conflicting with the forces of 'modernity,' thereby contributing to violence.

Sexual violence against women is contextualized within a broader economic, political, and societal framework. The results indicate that despite efforts, violence persists in Indian society, and women exhibit limited awareness of laws and organizations addressing domestic violence. Across diverse cultures and times, a common thread is identified, emphasizing the enduring nature of certain aspects of humanity.

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:**

Based on the findings, it is acknowledged that understanding sexual violence in India requires recognizing the dynamic interplay of forces at different community levels, influencing individual actions. Sexual harassment against women is situated within a broader context of the economy, politics, and culture, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these factors. Despite societal changes and the women's movement fostering increased confidence, the common perception of abuse being ingrained in women's daily lives persists. The reluctance of women to report violence is noted, attributed to a normalization of such incidents in Indian society. The normalization of violence complicates assessing actual increases, particularly considering factors like population growth. Historically rooted gender roles and the expectation of women's obedience to husbands have contributed to a subordinate status. While changes have occurred post-women's movements in the 1970s, patriarchal norms still weaken, and evolving gender roles lead to confusion about new opportunities. Inadequate legal frameworks, exemplified by gaps in laws protecting women from violence, contribute to the persistence of sexual violence against women, challenging the notion of a straightforward relation to the modernization process. The analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of the issue, influenced by contextual factors, intermediate factors, and effects. Therefore, an exclusive focus on a single cause is deemed unlikely and simplistic.

### **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, the prevalence of various forms of violence against women across socio-economic contexts in India is undeniable. While existing laws demonstrate efficiency in maintaining law and order, adapting to the changing socio-economic fabric requires enhancements in legal frameworks to align with modern times. The need for improved legislation is highlighted to address the complex and pervasive issue of violence against women effectively.

### **CHALLENGES FACED**

1. **Ambiguity:** The study encounters challenges in defining violence against women, as there is uncertainty about what should be considered violence. Distinguishing between harmless appreciation and severe crimes poses a dilemma, as perceptions vary among individuals, making it difficult to establish clear boundaries.
2. **Under-reporting:** WHO reports indicate that less than 40 percent of abused women seek support, with a preference for approaching family and friends over established institutions like the police and health services. Additionally, less than 10 percent of women seeking help involve the police, contributing to a lack of comprehensive research and hindering recommendations to minimize or eliminate aggression.
3. **Eve-Teasing Misrepresentation:** The term 'eve-teasing' misleadingly portrays a milder form of violence as entertainment. This term, prevalent in novels, movies, and songs, downplays aggressive and harmful actions. The extent to which repetitive eve-teasing leads to more severe offenses, such as rape, remains unclear and undocumented.
4. **Time-Consuming Research:** Extensive pursuit of research objectives necessitates more time and fieldwork to interact with the populace, gather information on various cases, their types, intensity, and public perspectives on violence against women.
5. **Inadequate Laws:** Women's health policies and regulations are often ignored or inadequately enforced, deviating from international standards. Existing violence-related laws pose significant obstacles to achieving justice for women, necessitating reform and stricter enforcement.
6. **Perpetrators from Close Circles:** Recognized individuals, including neighbours or relatives, are identified as perpetrators. This highlights the vulnerability of women even among those they know well, emphasizing the need for safeguarding measures within close relationships.

### **INFERENCE**

Violence against women is a serious global health problem that affects millions of women around the world. Despite its widespread presence, it often remains hidden because it is considered a sensitive and taboo topic in many societies. Many women do not report their experiences due to fear, shame, social pressure, or lack of support. As a result, the true extent of this problem is often underestimated. Recent research has shown that violence against women is very common and occurs in different forms, such as physical abuse, sexual violence, emotional harm, and economic control. These forms of violence have serious consequences for women's physical and mental health. They can lead to injuries, long-term health problems, psychological trauma, and in some cases even death. Because of these serious impacts, violence against women is now recognized as an important public health and human rights issue. Researchers and scholars stress the need for more detailed studies to better understand the causes, patterns, and effects of gender-based violence. Greater research can help governments, organizations, and communities design better policies, support systems, and prevention programs. By improving knowledge and awareness about this issue, societies can take stronger steps to protect women, promote gender equality, and create safer environments where women can live with dignity and security.

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Dr. Shabir Ahmad Lone **et al**

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