

# A Critical Review of the Effect of Domestic Violence on Mental Health in India

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## ABSTRACT

Domestic violence can be defined as the power and manipulation used by one adult in a relationship to control another. The current study focuses on the relevant literature and empirical studies to understand the effects of domestic violence on mental health among individual Indians. The perceptual cycle of violence is incited by some criteria such as traditional stereotypical culture, economic turmoil, dowry financial instability, substance abuse, lack of education, overuse of alcohol, poverty, and low social economic status. The critical review found that domestic violence has adverse psychological, emotional, and physical effects on individuals. Psychological wounds of domestic violence include depression, anxiety, withdrawal, social isolation, post-traumatic stress disorder, illicit drugs, dependence on substance abuse, and suicidal ideation. Rehabilitation, community service, and psychoeducation will help increase awareness among individuals about the effects of domestic violence on mental health

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, India, Mental Health.

**JEL Classifications:** P20; O41; C33

## 1. Introduction

Domestic abuse is an abusive and manipulative behavior in any relationship used to gain dominance and exert coercive power over the spouse. (United Nations, n.d.) Intentionally inflicted injury encompasses physical, psychological, sexual, and emotional abuse of a family member or an intimate partner. Gale Encyclopaedia of Medicine defined Abuse as “any action that intentionally harms or injures another person”. Domestic violence can take place in physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and harassment forms. Domestic abuse was referred to as “wife abuse” but later the definition was reframed to reflect that wives are not the only victims of domestic abuse. It can happen to any age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, social economic status, and ethnicity. This can happen within a range of relationships, including married couples, dating, and living together. Gender-based violence (GBV) is viewed as a global outbreak that affects one in every three women.

Globally 1 in 3 women, around 736 women are victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) at least once in their life. (World Health Organization, 2021). Gender-based norms lead to discrimination and violence against women and minorities. Women and girls are expected to be submissive and the norms set up by society contribute to intimate violence, rape, and other forms of abuse, which are the

most common form of violence against women and girls. (Ten Harmful Beliefs That Perpetuate Violence against Women and Girls | Oxfam International, 2022). In 2013 it was estimated that 38% of homicides of women are committed by a male partner while the corresponding figure for men is 6%. (Dash, 2014) According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime figures 137 women are killed by their partner or a family member every day. (BBC News, 2018b)

## 2. Literature Review

Intimate partner violence in India creates an interesting paradox. It is an omnipresent threat and it is least reported and discussed in our society. A crime against women is committed every three minutes (Scroll. in, 2015). Around 6,900 crimes of domestic violence were registered in the National Commission of Women, India. The complaints rose by 30% during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Pandit, 2023). According to the National family health survey (2019-2021), a report by the Ministry of Health and Family found that 29.3% of Indian married women of 18-49 years have experienced domestic violence. 3.1% of pregnant women between 18-49 have experienced physical violence during any pregnancy. (S, 2022). According to the NFHS-5 survey, domestic violence is highly prevalent in Karnataka (44%), Bihar (40%), Manipur (39%), Telangana (36%), and Tamil Nadu (38%). A study by

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Received: 31 March, 2023  
Available online: 15 May, 2023

Tripathi et al. (2022) findings suggested that economic turmoil during the COVID-19 pandemic and social norms inflated physical and psychological violence against women. The pandemic lockdown resulted in domestic violence which led them to suffer from Post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD, substance abuse, panic attacks, depression, hallucinations, eating disorders, and even self-harm.

Dowry-related violence and harassment repercussions on mental health. O'Connor (2017) did a case report and a literature review and it was illustrated that physical and emotional abuse and trauma inflicted by the male partner led to a serious impact on mental health. Women victimized by dowry-related aggression had significantly higher scores on anxiety, depression, Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and somatization. (Khan et al., 2020). Poverty marginalizes women leading to a risk of victimization and violence. Research studies suggest that poverty is a key driver of intimate partner violence (IPV). (Gibbs et al., 2018b). Due to this unsung predicament, many survivors return to their abusive partner because of their financial insecurity and need to take care of their children. Poverty has entrapped survivors to stay in abuse. Education can play a predominant factor in reducing domestic violence. Research studies have shown low academic achievement was one of the major threats in predicting physical abuse by intimate partners in New Zealand (Moffitt & Caspi, 1999). Education appears to be a benefit for women by maintaining a stable marriage and avoiding violence and harassment by an intimate partner. (Kreager et al., 2013)

Research evidence has shown that consistent alcohol usage by a partner can lead to domestic violence and harm to the partner. Stanesby et al. (2018) found that women are more likely to experience abuse and violence from those who had a close relationship with an alcoholic. An Australian study (Laslett, Jiang, and Room, 2017) found that women were more likely to experience harm from an intimate partner's drinking. Statistically, a strong link has been found between witnessing a father thrashing or physically hitting his mother during childhood and poor mental health. Women are diagnosed with low self-esteem, depression, and poor social competence and were exposed to and remember violence between their parents. (Silvern et al, 1995). Spousal violence is more prevalent in younger women, lower household income, less educated, belonging to a lower caste, and non-working women. (Babu BV, Kar SK, 2009)

### 3. Mental health consequences of Domestic Violence

Sharma et al. (2019) carried out a cross-sectional study to understand the association between domestic violence and mental health status in women in Delhi. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews which pooled 827 married women from Delhi

by cluster sampling followed by a random sampling method. The results portrayed that physical, psychological, and sexual violence was prevalently high. One-fourth of women participants reported unhealthy mental health. Women exposed to domestic violence reported poor mental health and suicidal ideations. It was concluded that domestic violence had an immense effect on women's mental health thus there is a need for strong psychological intervention. The study found that participants who had experienced DV in the past year were significantly linked to unhealthy mental status. In depth-interview reported mental effects such as depression, forgetfulness, and sadness. It even highlighted that domestic abuse not only affects the mental well-being of women but also crumbles their self-confidence.

Coker et al. (2002) analyzed data from the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAWS) of women and men aged 18 to 65 to understand the physical and psychological effects on men and women by intimate partner violence (IPV). It included a random-digit-dial telephone survey that included questions about violent victimization and health status indicators. The results demonstrated that out of 6790 women, 28.9%, and 7122 men, 22.9% had experienced physical, sexual, or psychological IPV during their lifetime. The analysis showed that women are likely to experience more domestic violence as compared to men from their intimate partners. Men reported verbal abuse. Physical abuse by IPV was associated with depressive symptoms, poor mental health, substance abuse, and chronic illness. In short, it was concluded that physical and psychological IPV is linked with significant physical and mental health consequences for both male and female victims.

Vachher and Sharma (2010) did community-based research to assess the experience of domestic violence on the mental health of women of the reproductive age group (15-49). 350 women were examined using stratified random sampling. The mental health status of these women was estimated by a self-reporting questionnaire. The results demonstrated that domestic violence is linked with mental illness. 34.9% of women reported either physical or sexual violence once in their life. The women who experienced domestic violence or abuse were more likely to report mental illness and suicidal tendencies as compared to women who didn't experience violence. Kumar et al. (2005) determined the association of domestic spousal violence with poor mental health. The sample included women of 15-49 from rural, urban non-slum, and urban slum areas from seven sites in India. Out of 9938 women participants, 40% reported poor mental health. They reported physical violence such as "slap", "hit", "kick" or "beat" were at risk of poor mental health. Findings indicated a strong association between domestic spousal abuse and poor mental health among the participants. Women who faced dowry harassment, harsh

punishment during childhood, witnessed father beating their mothers, alcoholic husbands, and who experienced physically violent behavior were at high risk of poor mental health.

Meekers et al. (2013c) examined the relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) and Bolivian women's mental health. The data was analyzed from the 2008 Bolivia Demographic and Health Survey which included 10,119 married women or women in living relationships from 15-49 years. Probit regression models are used to draw the association between intimate partner violence and the mental health of Bolivian women. Selected questions from SRQ- the 20 questionnaires to measure symptoms of mental health problems. The results demonstrated that 47% of women experienced some type of spousal abuse in the 12 months before the survey. Physical spousal violence in the past year is more likely to experience symptoms of depression, anxiety, psychogenic non-epileptic seizures, and psychotic disorders. This study demonstrates the urgent need for mental health services and research on the prevalence of psychological effects of domestic abuse. Ellsberg et al. (2008) did a standardized population-based survey of women between 2000-2003. Interviews were conducted with 24,097 women aged 15-49 years to understand the experience of physical and violent acts by their former male partner. The analysis found significant associations between partner violence and self-reported poor health. They reported physical effects such as pain, dizziness, vaginal discharge, and memory loss. Even participants significantly reported emotional distress, suicidal ideation, and suicidal attempts as compared to non-abused women.

Ferrari et al. (2016) tried to recognize the association between domestic violence and abuse and mental illness. Baseline data of 260 women survivors of domestic violence and abuse (DVA) enrolled in a randomized controlled trial of psychological intervention in the United Kingdom (UK) were analyzed. The tools used were Clinical outcomes in routine evaluation-outcome measure (CORE-OM), Patient Health Questionnaire, Generalized Anxiety Disorder Assessment, and the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale to measure post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and composite abuse measured abuse.

The results demonstrated survivors of DVA have undergone a high level of abuse, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The increase in domestic violence and abuse gradually increased symptoms of mental illness. Karystianis et al. (2020) aimed to present the prevalence of domestic violence in police records of the New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF). Text mining method was used in a large-scale dataset of 416,441 police records of domestic abuse where unstructured text is transformed into the structured format by identifying meaningful patterns and recognizing mental

illness mentioned by victims of domestic violence (DV) and persons of interest (POI). Mood disorders such as depression were the most common in both victims and POIs.

Malik and Nadda (2019) surveyed 1000 married men aged 21 to 49 years in rural Haryana. It was found that one in ten men aged 18 and above has experienced domestic violence or abuse. It shows that even men are victims of such violence. Hence, gender-neutral laws need to ensure human rights and gender equality for everyone. There is a prevalence of physical domestic violence against men and reported consequences of violence encompass minor physical injuries, weakened physical health, and mental health problems such as anxiety, a disruptive disorder, and substance abuse. (Kolbe & Büttner, 2020). Wolfe DA et al (2003) found that children experiencing domestic violence can face psychological and emotional difficulties in their subsequent life such as depression, anxiety, and externalizing behavior such as hostility and trauma. They would be likely to experience difficulty in academics, a high risk of sexual behaviors, and even substance abuse.

## **4. Data Analysis**

### **4.1 Methodology**

The present paper explores the mental health effects of domestic violence among Indians. The current study focuses on the relevant literature and empirical studies to understand the effects of domestic violence on mental health among individual Indians.

### **4.2 Results**

The review of the literature and empirical studies found that domestic violence has an adverse psychological, emotional, and physical effect on individuals. The association of mental health and intimate partner violence is bidirectional. Exposure to violence and abuse increases one's risk of such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, panic attack, substance abuse, exacerbation of psychotic symptoms, and suicidal ideations. The perceptual cycle of violence is incited by some criteria such as gender stereotypes, dowry financial instability, substance abuse, lack of education, overuse of alcohol, poverty, and low social economic status. Children who experienced domestic violence themselves are at serious risk for long-term physical and mental health effects such as repression and low self-worth. Various research studies have revealed that violence is more prevalent in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

## **5. Discussion**

Everything is fair in love and war and often individuals cling to false hopes that their relationship will change. The research aims not limited to understanding the psychological and emotional effects on the individual but also shedding light on the conditioning of individuals subjected to societal norms. Domestic violence may be

perpetuated by either sex but most of the time women are invariably the victims of the cases. Domestic violence seriously affects women, children, and their families. Majority of the time women considered abuse by their partners as a “normal” occurrence. They accept violence from their partner as their sealed fate. In Indian culture, women have always been seen as commodities and asked to sacrifice and adjust in their marriage. Domestic violence is a highly stigmatized issue as the community often blames women for the violence that they experience. (UNICEF Report Reveals Indian Men, Women Think Wife Beating Justified, 2012). Women are expected to confine themselves to stereotypical traditions and ill-fitting roles in marriage which makes them stay in an abusive relationship. It was found in a survey of UNICEF in Uttar Pradesh that 45% of married men confessed to beating up their wives. Domestic violence in the matrimonial relationship is viewed as fair and often women do not disclose abuse being perpetuated upon them by their partner. Domestic rape is an act of power used as a weapon wielded to terrorize women.

Mental health effects Domestic abuse and violence against individuals in India have detrimental effects which include psychological trauma, depression, anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders, post-traumatic disorder, Obsessive-compulsive disorder, poor self-esteem, and self-work, lack of confidence, self-harm, and substance abuse. Children who grow up in toxic and abusive environments have a strong inclination to become more hostile and develop psychiatric symptoms. Research studies have found a significant association between experience of domestic violence and unhealthy mental status. (International Centre for Research on Women, 2000).

In India, it is found that there is no implementation of laws to realm domestic violence. The act of domestic violence gives preference to women assuming that women are the only victims of domestic violence. As per law, women can only file a complaint which can even lead to misuse. The law at present is scant to tackle the problem of domestic abuse as it makes women superior to men. The law should offer equal protection to both men and women. Domestic violence today affects both men and women. (An Indian Perspective on Domestic Violence against Men, 2023). Research shows that LGBTQ members experience domestic abuse at equal or even higher as compared to heterosexual couples. (Brewer-Muse, n.d.)

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The literature review indicated that economic and community-based interventions are efficacious in reducing domestic violence. Couple counseling, including cognitive and behavioral sessions, would help reduce domestic violence (Karakurt et al., 2016). Media campaigns can help in targeting a larger population in increasing awareness about the effects of domestic

violence on mental health. Public awareness campaigns and psychoeducation on domestic violence can help in educating the prevalence of abuse and encouraging the community to promote social change. Healthcare professionals should be trained to treat the population suffering from mental issues due to domestic violence. It can help them to develop positive coping strategies and raise their voice against domestic violence.

Researchers can invest in research to understand the effects of domestic violence on men and LGBTQ. There can be more studies on understanding the other constructs such as the effect of domestic violence on happiness, life satisfaction, self-worth, etc. More research can be expanded on the Indian setup shedding light on culture. This process of research might be considered a leading for some upcoming studies in the future.

The available literature, thus, reveals that domestic violence in India is widespread but remains invisible in the public domain. Individuals who experience emotional, physical, or sexual violence committed by their partners have short-term and long-term effects on the individuals. The laws and provisions are unevenly executed, unavailable, and out of reach for most Indians. Gender roles, patriarchy, low economic status, low education, childhood experiences, and dowry exacerbated the problem. Studies have shown that social acceptance and support from families make the survivors develop positive coping styles and reduce psychological distress. Rehabilitation, community service, and psychoeducation will help increase awareness among individuals about the effects of domestic violence on mental health.

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