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A cross-sectional study to explore causes of domestic violence among married women

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ABSTRACT

Background: Domestic violence, as with all forms of gender-based violence, represents a barrier to development due to its negative impact not only on women, but also on men, children and the wider community. Objective was to find out the causes of domestic violence. To trace the reasons for which abused women continue to stay in abusive relationship. To find out help-seeking behavior of abused women.

Methods: A community based cross-sectional study was carried out among 600 ever married women of 15-49 years of age. All the information was gathered based on self-administered questionnaire. Confidentiality was maintained strictly.

Results: Out of 600 respondents, 231 respondents were victims of domestic violence. Alcoholism of the husband was found the main cause of domestic violence as reported by a majority of about 29% of the respondents. Regarding reaction of victims to the violence, 168 of the respondents informed that they become silent. Total 159 respondents approached the informal or formal sources to seek help.

Conclusions: Alcoholism of the husband was found the main cause of domestic violence against women. Majority of the victims could not resist or fight back. A majority of women were unaware about the relief available to the victims of domestic violence.

Keywords: Cross-sectional, Domestic violence, Married women

INTRODUCTION

UNFPA recognizes that violence against women is inextricably linked to gender-based inequalities. Gender-based violence both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims. It also serves- by intention or effect- to perpetuate male power and control. It is sustained by a culture of silence and denial of the seriousness of the health consequences of abuse. In addition to the harm they exact on the individual level, these consequences also exact a social toll and place a heavy and unnecessary burden on health services.¹

To give the importance of women's empowerment for poverty reduction, improvements in the health of the

family and the achievement of inclusive and equal societies, addressing domestic violence is vital to achieving development throughout India.

METHODS

It was a cross sectional study including 600 married, divorced, separated, widowed women of 15-49 years of age. The present study was carried out in the urban and rural area of Surendranagar district of Gujarat, India. Non-cooperative women were excluded from the study. Permission from institutional ethical committee was taken prior to the data collection procedure.

Assuming the prevalence of domestic violence in India as 40%, and with allowable error of 10%, calculated sample

size was 600.^{2,3} For equal division, 300 women from rural area and 300 women from urban area of Surendranagar district were selected as study population.

The UHTC (Urban health Training Centre) area of medical college and PHC (Khodu village) area were selected for the study in urban and rural area respectively. Anganwadis of both areas were selected as interview place. From the survey registers of anganwadi workers, list of married women of 15-49 years of age was obtained. 20 participants from each of 15 anganwadis of UHTC area and 40 participants from 8 anganwadis of PHC area were randomly selected.

Potential participants were approached by trained anganwadi workers and ASHAs through personal visits. Data collection procedure was conducted at anganwadi centres/health centers of study area in absence of their family members. To build initial rapport, the purpose of the study was explained to them with the help of female community workers and they were taken into confidence.

A pre-designed, structured questionnaire made in local language (Gujarati) was used to collect the information. Names of participants were not recorded to maintain confidentiality. Data was entered and analyzed by using SPSS version-24.

Objectives

To find out the causes of domestic violence. To trace the reasons for which abused women continue to stay in abusive relationship. To find out help-seeking behavior of abused women.

RESULTS

The analysis of data collected indicates that out of 600 respondents, 38.5% respondents were victims of domestic violence in one form or the other.

Table 1: Causes of domestic violence as per women (n=231).

Causes	Respondents	
	Number	%
Neglect of household	39	16.88
Neglect of children	27	11.69
Expectation of dowry	16	6.93
Husband's alcoholism	68	29.44
Suspicious of wife's unfaithfulness	13	5.63
Wife showing disrespect to in-laws	34	14.72
Going out without informing	9	3.90
Not cooking properly	63	27.27
Not having male child	32	13.85
Other	18	7.79

(Other* includes husband had problems at work place, refusal to bring money from parents) (**Multiple answers)

The analysis of data presented in the above table discloses that the phenomenon of domestic violence is not the outcome of any single cause. The violence is caused due to different reasons in different types of families. Alcoholism of the husband was the main cause of domestic violence against women as reported by a majority of about 29% of the respondents. About 27% of the respondents had the opinion that not cooking properly was the reason for violence. Other principal causes of the violence were neglect of household and children, disrespect to in-laws and not having male child.

Table 2: Reaction to domestic violence (N==231).

Reaction	Number	Percentage
Ever tried/ want to leave	83	35.93
Comply with everything	92	39.82
Apologize	122	52.81
Become silent	168	72.73
Shout back	16	6.93
Fight back	11	4.76
Try to talk	89	38.53
Others	14	6.06

(Other* includes feeling of taking revenge or helplessness, feeling ashamed) (**Multiple answers)

Every action of violence results in immediate reaction. The data in the table indicates the reaction of different abusive action of the perpetrators on the respondents. About 73% of the respondents informed that they become silent. About 53% of the respondents apologize and about 40% of the respondents comply with everything. About 38% respondents tried to talk and about 36% of the respondents had tried or thought to leave. Only about 7% of the respondents shout back and only 5% of the respondents fought back.

Table 3: Intervention by family members (n=231).

Intervention	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Yes	109	47.19
No	122	52.81

The data presented in the above table clearly indicates that in the majority of the cases (52.81%), the family members of the respondents' families did not intervene when the respondents were being abused as against about 47% of the cases where there was intervention by the family members.

The data reveal that a majority of about 40% of the victims reported that they could not leave for the preservation of the family/children. About 27% who were willing to desert the abusive relationship but continued to live because they do not want to break married life. About 19% of victims had accepted it as a part of life. About 7% of victims reported that it was because of the fact that they had no alternative place to go.

Table 4: Reasons for living in abusive situation (n=231).

Reason	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Accepted as a part of life	46	19.91
Preservation of the family/children	92	39.83
Do not want to break married life	64	27.71
No other place to go	16	6.93
Other	13	5.62

(Other* includes under pressure of parents, hoped that situation will change in future)

Table 5: Reporting of harassment (n=231).

Reporting	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Yes	159	68.83
No	72	31.17

It is interesting to note that about 31% of the victims did not report the abusive situation in which they were living.

Table 6: Reporting to sources of help (n=231).

Sources of help	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Parents	96	60.38
Friends	24	15.09
Relatives	35	22.01
NGO	3	1.89
Health worker	2	1.25
Doctor	13	8.17
Advocate	6	3.77
Police	3	1.89

About 69 percent respondent approached the informal or formal sources with a view to seek their help. About 60 percent of the victims had reported their abusive situation to their parents and about 22 percent had reported to the relatives. About 15 percent of the victims shared this with friends. Only about 1-2 percent of the victims were directed to seek help from NGOs or health workers. About 8 percent of them had told to doctors. About 4 percent victims sought help from legal advisers and about 2 percent approached police.

Table 7: Awareness regarding laws related to women harassment (n=600).

Awareness	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
Yes	139	23.17
No	461	76.83

It is surprising to note that only 23.17% of the respondents were aware regarding laws related to women harassment as against about 77% were unaware.

Table 8: Belief about domestic violence (n=600).

Belief	Respondents	
	Number	Percentage
It is a private matter, community should not get involved	167	27.83
Victim should remain silent to maintain family honour	139	23.17
Women should raise their voice against violence	221	36.83
Social awareness should be created against violence	238	39.67
Strict legal action should be taken to prevent it	253	42.17
Others	37	6.16

(Others* include public defamation of abusers, social boycott of perpetrators and spiritual guidance by religious leaders etc.) (**Multiple answers)

The respondents were asked about their belief regarding domestic violence against women. A majority of about 42% of the respondents believed that strict legal action should be taken to prevent violence against women. About 39% of the respondents suggested that social awareness should be created. About 36% of the respondents believed that women should raise their voice against violence as against about 27% believed that it is a private matter and 23% had belief that women should remain silent to maintain family honour.

DISCUSSION

Causes of domestic violence

The analysis of data disclosed that the phenomenon of domestic violence is not the outcome of any single cause. The violence is caused due to different reasons in different types of families. Alcoholism of the husband was the main cause of domestic violence against women as reported by a majority of about 29 percent of the respondents. About 27 percent of the respondents had the opinion that not cooking properly was the reason for violence. Other causes of the violence were neglect of household (16.88%) and children (11.69%), disrespect to in-laws (14.72%), not having male child (13.85%), expectation of dowry (6.93%), suspicious of wife's unfaithfulness (5.63%) and going outside the home without informing (3.90%). Similar studies carried out by Mahapatro et al, Kumar et al, Sinha et al and Mitra et al also reported husband's addiction to alcohol or other psychoactive substances was the leading risk factor for domestic violence against women.⁴⁻⁷ NFHS III also reported that women married to men who get drunk frequently are more than twice as likely to experience

violence as women whose husbands do not drink alcohol at all.⁸ However, the high prevalence of spousal violence even among women whose husbands do not consume alcohol indicates that alcohol consumption is not only explanation for the high prevalence of spousal violence in India.⁹

Reaction to domestic violence

Every action of violence results in immediate reaction. The reaction to abuse may be sudden or instant, it may also culminate into long-term impact on the life of the victim, her children and family as a whole. The data indicates the reaction of different abusive action of the perpetrators on the respondents. About 73% of the respondents informed that they become silent. About 53% of the respondents apologize and about 40% of the respondents comply with everything. About 38% respondents tried to talk and about 36% of the respondents had tried or thought to leave. Only about 7% of the respondents shout back and only 5% of the respondents fought back. Similar result was reported by Bhattacharya et al. that majority of the victimized women preferred to be silent sufferers.¹⁰

Coping behaviour of victims

The victims of domestic violence adopt a number of strategies for dealing with the abusive situation. The strategies depend upon their perceptions of violent situation. The analysis of victims' immediate reactions to violence indicated that their reactions were either self-directed or directed to others. However, when the strategies bear no results the victim feels helpless and is compelled to seek some help from other sources.

The data clearly indicates that in the majority of the cases (52.81%), the family members of the respondents' families did not intervene when the respondents were being abused as against about 47% of the cases where there was intervention by the family members.

It is interesting to note that about 31 percent of the victims did not report the abusive situation in which they were living as against about 69 percent respondent approached the informal or formal sources with a view to seek their help. About 60 percent of the victims had reported their abusive situation to their parents and about 22 percent had reported to the relatives. About 15 percent of the victims shared this with friends. Only about 1-2 percent of the victims were directed to seek help from NGOs or health workers. About 8 percent of them had told to doctors. About 4 percent victims sought help from legal advisers and about 2 percent approached police. It is thus very clear that in spite of their best efforts, NGOs and health providers failed to attract victims for settlement of dispute at local level. This may be due to the fact that the relief provided by them is not legally binding on the abusers and moreover it may be of temporary nature. The NFHS III data also corroborated

with it, where only 36.7% sought help, 71% mentioned their own family as a source. Notably few women seek help from any institutional sources such as the police, medical personnel or social service organizations.⁸ In the five state study, among the respondents who sought help, 26.3% abused women had approached their parents, 15.6% to relatives and 57.9% to friends.¹¹ Goa study revealed that 31.1% talked to relatives or close friends and only 4.4% took legal help.¹² In the Bangalore study, nobody informed the police.¹³

The data reveal that a majority of about 40% of the victims reported that they could not leave for the preservation of the family/children. About 27% continued to live because they do not want to break married life. About 19% of victims had accepted it as a part of life. About 7% of victims reported that they had no alternative place to go. Yugantar Education Society's study revealed that they continued to stay because majority of them (43%) had no other place to go, about one-fourth had to do so for the sake of their children and nearly 16% of them were tolerating the abuse under pressure from their parents.¹¹

Awareness regarding laws related to women harassment

It is surprising to note that only 23.17% of the respondents were aware regarding laws related to women harassment as against about 77% were unaware about the relief available to the victims of domestic violence. Therefore, they were explained about the nature and sources of relief available under law and with the social organizations.

Belief about domestic violence

A majority of about 42% of the respondents believed that strict legal action should be taken to prevent VAW. About 39% of the respondents suggested that social awareness should be created. About 36% of the respondents believed that women should raise their voice against violence as against about 27% believed that it is a private matter and 23% had belief that women should remain silent to maintain family honour. Suggestions like public defamation of abusers, social boycott of perpetrators and spiritual guidance by religion leaders etc. were made by about 6% of them. Thus, majority of respondents point out to the lacuna in the present efforts on the part of social organizations and government policy regarding this issue.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of domestic violence is not the outcome of any single cause. Alcoholism of the husband was the main cause of domestic violence against women as reported by a majority of the respondents. Other causes of the violence were neglect of household and children, disrespect to in-laws, not having male child, expectation

of dowry, suspicious of wife's unfaithfulness and going outside the home without informing.

Majority of the victimized women preferred to be silent sufferers.

It is interesting to note that about 31 percent of the victims did not report the abusive situation in which they were living as against about 69 percent respondent approached the informal or formal sources with a view to seek their help. Majority of the victims had reported their abusive situation to their parents

NGOs and women's organizations working in the field of women's empowerment and welfare failed to attract the victims of violence in sufficient number. Moreover, the work of these organizations was limited to urban areas only in majority of the cases and hence women from rural areas were totally ignorant about the working of these organizations.

The data revealed that a majority of the victims continued to stay in abusive situation for the preservation of the family/children. Other major reasons were that they do not want to break married life, had accepted it as a part of life and had no alternative place to go.

A large number of respondents were not aware of the present relief available under law to the victims of violence.

A majority of the respondents believed that strict legal action should be taken to prevent VAW. Many of the respondents suggested that social awareness should be created and women should raise their voice against violence as against about one third of them believed that it is a private matter and women should remain silent to maintain family honour. Suggestions like public defamation of abusers, social boycott of perpetrators and spiritual guidance by religion leaders etc. were also made by some of them so that this evil could be reduced to some extent.

Recommendations

It is necessary to see that the legal provisions against perpetrators of domestic violence are strictly enforced and no one is left without punishment. Moreover, the entire gamut of laws related to abuse and harassment of women need to be comprehensive and through review in the light of the present trends and requirements.

Another deep concern of women is the tremendous physical, sexual and emotional violence which they experience when the men in their families are in inebriated state. Freedom of families from liquor is their first need. There is a strong need to enforce prohibition widely and in more stringent ways to minimize the incidence of domestic violence.

There is a need to develop, enlarge and strengthen social support services programmes for the women who are the victims of domestic violence.

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