
Domestic violence against child and its adverse effect on the mental health

¹Dr. Masroor Fatima

¹Assistant Teacher - Basic Shiksha Parishad

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Abstract

According to the survey and statistics around the world 33% of the women population experiences Domestic violence .In India the rate of violence against women, wives and girls is high. In 2005 for the first time, Indian law considered domestic violence as a punishable offence and passed PWDVA act. Domestic violence can happen to anyone irrespective of age, gender or caste. It is not only confined to women but can also befall children of age ranging from 2 to 15 years. The extent of this threatening act is comprehensive and vast and involves mental, sexual, economic and physical abuse. Domestic violence against children is less studied and the cases are constricted but children are vulnerable and need to be studied. The mothers or wives are victims and this baleful act not only effects them but to the children who witness such acts daily or experience domestic violence not only at home but sometimes at schools or the workplace . The paper briefly analyses the effect of witnessing and becoming victims to domestic violence on children. This study considers closely the impact of domestic violence on children who do not get the love, warmth and attention of their parents or guardians and thus leads to several severe mental, psychological problems faced by them. It also focuses on the laws made by the Indian laws for their protection.

Keywords:- Domestic violence, Family violence, substance abuse, children abuse.

Introduction

The term Domestic violence is not new to anyone as violence within the house is globally seen. It is considered as a disciplinary action necessary for maintaining rules and regulations made by the patriarchal family. Since the beginning of the society women have always been considered the weakest member of the family and the authorities of the family have all due rights to abuse and harass if she violated or didn't take the consent of his partner or his parents. According to the definition of domestic violence act "any act that causes bodily pain or endangers the victim's life, limb, health or development."UN defines domestic violence as "pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual,emotional,economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person."According to the data by WHO across161 countries 30% of women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Globally millions of women must have experience any form of gender based violence. The reports around the world states that incidents of violence have increased during the COVID -19 period. In India domestic violence is very common and is a serious threat to the women and the society. According to section 498a of IPC it is a crime and is punished. Some common form of domestic violence is dowry harassment, child sexual abuse, neglect, child pornography, emotional harassment, financial harassment, rape and physical violence. Domestic violence or violence abuse or relationship abuse is not confined to partners only but can happen to children, elderly people irrespective of socioeconomic background, education. Earlier news and studies show that mostly women were victims and very less was studied or known that children are

also victims of the violent act. The shocking part is that children sexual crime rate has increased to 33.6 % in 2021. The national crime report bureau (NCRB) data revealed that 1,49,404 cases of crime against children were registered in 2021 out of which 36.05% were under POCSO.

Children are affected by the violence abuse at home as sometime they are victims and in some cases they witness the act. In both the cases their mental health is damaged and ruptured. Children are fragile and they should be brought up by love affection and care. To better understand the children suffering from the mental trauma this study is conducted to know its effect on the mental peace of them.

I. Children encountering domestic violence- Mostly the victims of domestic violence are women but there are children who also experience the violence at home. The Child's mind is extremely sensitive in such a way that any condition or situations or acts affects and influence their mind easily. Domestic violence against a child is also known as violent discipline. It can be specified as the severe punishment which may be physical like slapping, hitting or beating severely and repeatedly and emotionally. In the abusive families where children are present and witnessing are at greater risk of mimicking the same act when they grow up as they think it is an approved behavior to suppress a woman. In some cases it is seen that the abusive person in the family abuses the child also in any form of violence. Studies have revealed that domestic violence in urban and rural areas are slightly different. For instance the domestic violence with children in urban areas can be severe punishment on disobeying, child labor which is common in urban cities where a minor girl or boy is brought from rural or disadvantaged family for working and is molested, physically abused, beaten or harassed by the owner. In rural areas girls' early marriage, stopping the education and making them do child labor, rape of minor, honor killing of minors for family traditions etc. There is a rise in rape cases of infants or girls who are pre matured which is done by a relative or neighbor or by any member of the family. The cases of paedophilia are also in news where the culprit is the nearest family member. According to UNICEF report 68 million children have experienced psychological aggression and 60 million children have experienced physical punishment globally. The psychological form of violence against a child in which parents, relatives, guardians or care takers or any other person from the family builds fear in the mind of the child with his harsh and hurtful verbal threats, aggressive behavior, playing with the emotions of child and not loving them giving them the care which they need. Such type of violence leaves an ugly scar not only on the body but on the psyche also. It is seen that children not only faces violence at home but also at school, home tuitions, their work place in the form of bullying, harsh punishment by teacher, molestation by teacher or classmate or school employee.

II. Grounds of violence - There are different theories giving reasons for the causes of Domestic violence

- ❖ **Abnormal behavior theory-** When a partner shows aberrant behavior in a relationship then the results is violence. This abnormal behavior shown may be by the use of alcohol, drugs or stress or anxiety where any situation or act triggers the person and end with violence.
- ❖ **Patriarchy theory-** This theory is given by Dobash and Dobash. Patriarchal system is prevalent from ancient times where male person dominates and becomes the head in the family. This system says women should be suppressed and for it violence is necessary it affects both the mother and children. In manu smriti it is mentioned that women should be punished.

- ❖ **Socio-Learning behavior theory-** This theory was given by a psychologist Albert Bandura. It's human tendency to do things by learning or experiencing. When a child witness in his childhood the violence done to his mother he thinks nothing is wrong and he develops the same mentality to use violence in situations where he wants to get control on his partner or his child and thus adopts their parents behavior in their future life continuing the cycle of violence.
- ❖ **Feminist theory-** Gender inequality is the root cause of domestic violence where women have to face the mindset of the society that men are better in doing certain jobs or work. They miss out the opportunities which are equal to both men and women but our society doesn't allow .Our beliefs and culture of patriarchy plays important role in gender disparity.
- ❖ **Frustration-Aggression theory-** This theory is given by Dollard.It states that frustration and aggression are inter related to each other and aggression is always directed towards the source of frustration. Any failure causes frustration and its outcome is aggression in the form of violence at home.
- ❖ **Resource theory-** This theory is developed by Goode .He states that when all means are depleted then violence is the last way for a man to be successful in his interest. For being dominant in the family if the man has no job, education then he uses violence as a weapon to maintain his position in the family.
- ❖ **Psychiatric theory-** This theory states that culprits psychological problems like low self esteem, inferiority, insecurity, uncontrolled emotions, depressions, jealousy leads towards violence against women or children.
- ❖ **Structural theory-** According to this theory the person who has high level of stress is headed towards aggression and its main cause is considered as economic conditions, poverty, frustrating conditions of home and work conditions. People who are job less and the spouse is working always remain in stress and frustration.

III. Research methodology

1. **Significance of the Research Problem-** The research problem is concerned with the findings how domestic violence adversely effect the mental health of the children in Indian context. Problem deals with how the children lives are effected if there is violence at home along with their mother. Parents are mature to handle or cope with the situations but serious threat is on children psychology, emotions and mental peace. It is they who suffer both as a victim and as witness. The research will try to find out how government helpline, laws, education and counseling can help a child in bringing back their mental peace.
2. **Research objective**
 - a. To analyze the impact of domestic violence on children.
 - b. To analyze the effect of domestic violence on partner.
 - c. To be acquainted with the laws and acts made by government for helping the children.
 - d. To inquire types of domestic violence.
3. **Method of Data collection-** The study is based on the secondary sources collected from websites, surveys, reports and review of literature.

IV. Forms of Domestic violence

To control the victims offenders use different forms of domestic violence

- **Physical abuse-** The most common form of domestic violence is physical abuse. Use of physical force against the will of another person causes severe injuries on the body and sometimes it is so serious that it is fatal. It involves kicking, slapping, forcibly pulling hair, burning, stabbing, beating, use of objects etc.
- **Emotional abuse-** It involves the dismantling of the self-esteem or confidence of the opponent. Children face such violence in schools like bullying, humiliation, and insults and at home when parents or other members criticize, compare with others, and verbally abuse by using harsh and hurtful words while addressing the child. This form of abuse is seen where there are unhealthy relations.
- **Sexual abuse-** It can take various forms such as rape, molestation and exploitation through explicit materials. There is a rise in cases where children ages 2 to 18 have been sexually assaulted. It is a deeply distressing and sensitive topic that must be handled with utmost care and sensitivity. It's a tragic and harmful situation where a child is subjected to sexual exploitation by a family member or close relative. This can have long-lasting effects on the child's emotional and physical well-being.

VI. Impact of domestic violence on the mental health of child- Domestic violence can have a profound and lasting impact on the mental health of a child. Children exposed to domestic violence often experience a range of emotional, psychological, and behavioral consequences. Here are some of the ways in which domestic violence can affect a child's mental health:

1. **Emotional Distress:** Children living in homes with domestic violence may feel fear, anxiety, and insecurity on a constant basis. Witnessing violence between caregivers can lead to a sense of helplessness and powerlessness, which can cause emotional distress.
2. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** Children who are exposed to domestic violence can develop symptoms of PTSD. These may include flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and hyper vigilance. The traumatic experiences they witness can continue to haunt them long after the violence has occurred.
3. **Depression:** The chronic stress and emotional turmoil of living in a violent home can contribute to the development of depression in children. They may feel sad, hopeless, and have a diminished interest in activities they once enjoyed.
4. **Anxiety Disorders:** Children exposed to domestic violence may develop various anxiety disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder, separation anxiety, or social anxiety. The constant fear and uncertainty they experience can contribute to these conditions.
5. **Behavioral Problems:** Some children may exhibit aggressive or delinquent behaviors as a way of coping with the trauma they witness. Others may become withdrawn and socially isolated. These behavioral problems can persist into adolescence and adulthood.
6. **Low Self-Esteem:** Witnessing violence between parents or caregivers can erode a child's self-esteem and self-worth. They may internalize blame or guilt for the violence, believing that they are somehow responsible for it.

7. **Difficulty in Relationships:** Growing up in an environment with domestic violence can lead to difficulties in forming healthy, trusting relationships in adulthood. Children may struggle with issues related to trust, intimacy, and communication.
8. **Academic Problems:** The emotional and psychological effects of domestic violence can interfere with a child's ability to focus and perform well in school. This can lead to academic underachievement and a reduced likelihood of pursuing higher education.
9. **Substance Abuse:** Some individuals who have experienced domestic violence as children may turn to substance abuse as a way to cope with their emotional pain and trauma.
10. **Physical Health Issues:** The chronic stress associated with living in a violent home can also impact a child's physical health. It may weaken their immune system and increase their susceptibility to various health problems.

It's important to note that the effects of domestic violence on a child's mental health can vary depending on several factors, including the severity and frequency of the violence, the child's age and developmental stage, and the presence of support systems. Early intervention, counseling, and support from trusted adults can help mitigate some of these negative effects and promote healing for children who have experienced domestic violence. Additionally, seeking professional help, such as therapy or counseling, is often crucial for both the child and the family to address the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic violence.

V. **Laws for prevention of domestic violence in Indian context-** Domestic violence is a significant issue in India, and there are several laws and legal provisions in place to prevent and address it. The primary legislation related to the prevention of domestic violence in India is the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. Here are the key aspects of this law and other related legal provisions:

- a. **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA)-** The PWDVA is a comprehensive law aimed at protecting women from domestic violence, regardless of their marital status. It defines domestic violence broadly to include physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse. The law provides for protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief orders to ensure the safety and financial support of victims. It establishes the role of Protection Officers and Service Providers to assist victims in accessing services and legal remedies. The PWDVA also recognizes the right of women to reside in their shared household, and it can be enforced against both married and unmarried partners.
- b. **Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) -** This section deals with cruelty to a married woman by her husband or his relatives. It is a criminal offense and covers both physical and mental cruelty. Complaints under this section can lead to the arrest and prosecution of the accused individuals.
- c. **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 -** While primarily focused on dowry-related issues, this law also addresses harassment and cruelty by the husband or his relatives for dowry demands. It is another important legal provision for the prevention of domestic violence against women.
- d. **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015-** In this law provisions have been made for the protection of children from violence and abuse within the family,

- e. **The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006-** This law prevents child marriages and protects the rights of children.
- f. **POSCO act,2012 -** This law provides protection against sexual offences or assaults giving severe punishment to the persons responsible.
- g. **IPC section373-** In this section if a person forces a minor girl for prostitution will be imprisoned for 10 years.
- h. **IPC Section 376AB -** In case of rape against girl under age of 12 years will be liable to life imprisonment or death penalty.

VI. Conclusion - Domestic violence can happen upon anyone irrespective of age, caste, and gender. The extent of this antagonistic or threatening act involves mental, sexual, economic and physical abuse leaving lifelong effect. Children show variety of psychological problems like anxiety, depression, isolation, escapism, social withdrawal, low self esteem etc. It is seen in several researches that children experiencing or witnessing domestic violence are likely to become delinquents or are addicted to drugs n alcohol. In recent years law making bodies have made several laws for the protection of victims of domestic violence.

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masroorfatima135@gmail.com