The Unseen Pain: Domestic Violence Against Men Unveiled

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ABSTRACT: India has been a predominantly masculine nation since ancient times; therefore, it is challenging to envisage a scenario in which a man becomes the victim and a woman is the culprit. Due to the scarcity of data and the frequent underreporting of incidents, domestic abuse is rarely discussed in society from a male victim's point of view. Abuse of one's spouse is a severe issue affecting both men and women. While dowry-related harassment and crimes against women are frequently emphasized in the media, an increasing number of men are experiencing harassment and abuse at the hands of their husbands on a physical and psychological level. Domestic abuse against men is not recognized under Indian law. It's a common misconception that men can't be victims of violence. Women are more likely to do it because of this. While domestic violence committed by women against men is mostly ignored, domestic violence committed by women against women is given a lot of attention. According to feminists and the government, domestic violence only affects women in India. However, a growing number of men are now claiming that they have experienced domestic violence. Despite being unnoticed, there is a large incidence of domestic abuse against men. Violence against intimate partners is a severe problem that impacts people all around the world. Although men are typically the perpetrators of this type of violence, they can also be the victims. This study offers insight into how domestic violence can affect men and why there are no provisions in the law for it. It also identifies and explores issues that are or may be pertinent to understanding the position of men in India who experience domestic abuse and focuses on making changes to the current system while upholding equality principles.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Victim Men, Lack of legal acts for men, Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

“Domestic Violence is a serious social issue, but men who face domestic violence in India have nowhere to go since neither the law nor the society accepts them as victims.”

-Dhulia, 2015

Domestic Violence has been accepted across the world as a form of violence that affects an individual's life in every way – physically, mentally, emotionally, and psychologically – and is a violation of basic human rights. Several countries have acknowledged it as a serious threat to a person’s overall well-being irrespective of gender hence providing relief in various forms. India has recognized domestic violence as a criminal offense and offers relief and protection to women, though the focus is primarily on women.

Domestic violence is a serious issue that affects individuals of all genders, including men. It's essential to recognize that anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of their gender. The societal perception that domestic violence primarily affects women is a harmful stereotype that can prevent male victims from seeking help and support.

DOMESTIC ABUSE

According to Section 3 of the Domestic Violence Act 2005, domestic violence is defined as “physical, psychological, sexual, verbal, emotional, or financial abuse ‘against a woman’ of a family by any other member of that family with whom the victim is, or has been, in a domestic relationship”. This definition ignores a man's status as a victim of domestic violence, which is in violation of Indian Constitutional Articles 14, 15(1), and 21. In India, it is against the law to abuse women and girls in the home. However, there is no corresponding legislation to protect the rights of men. The various forms of abuse include:

- Physical Abuse (assault and physical attack involving a range of behaviors)
- Sexual Abuse (acts that degrade and humiliate women and are perpetrated against their will, including rape)
- Mental and Emotional abuse (including isolation from family or friends, threats, verbal or physical abuse, racial or ethnic abuse, withholding of money, and other forms of control. (as gender-based abuse).

VARIETY OF MAN-HURTING ACTIVITIES

I. Physical Inhumanity: Besides instances involving lethal weapons, cases of physical abuse have been recorded where husbands or male partners have endured acts such as punching, scratching, biting, and having various objects thrown at them by their female partners. Due to the absence of a legal framework to safeguard males from such violence, these victims often receive minimal or no medical assistance, and they may find it challenging to report their physical injuries because of the lack of legal protections in place.
II. **Legal Inhumanity:** This refers to a form of manipulation where women exploit the legal system to compel their partner or spouse to meet their specific requirements. Often, this results in men experiencing mistreatment from a member of their wife’s family or relatives. Examples of this include the misuse of Section 498A of the Domestic Violence Act 2005, laws related to rape or molestation, the withholding of child custody following separation, and maintenance laws.

III. **Emotional Inhumanity:** This enters the picture when there are requests for a separate residence or threats of involving the police and legal consequences if the wife’s demands for separation from his relatives and parents are not met. Emotional abuse occurs when the wife’s demands are not satisfied.

IV. **Economical Inhumanity:** This pertains to the frequent and often irrational demands placed upon a husband by his wife or her family members. These demands can encompass items like jewelry, real estate purchases, high-end clothing, extravagant hospitality, beauty products, and lavish dining experiences. Even if a man is unable to meet his female partner’s financial expectations, he becomes susceptible to both mental and physical abuse.

Addressing domestic violence, regardless of the gender of the victim, should be a priority for any government committed to promoting the safety and well-being of its citizens. In many countries, including India, there has been an increasing awareness of the issue of domestic violence against men in recent years. However, progress in addressing this issue may vary from one place to another. In many countries worldwide, laws addressing domestic violence aim to protect both men and women. Men also have the option to obtain restraining orders from courts to prevent abusive partners or spouses from engaging in harmful behavior and contacting the victim. However, in India, the legal framework does not provide adequate protection for men who experience violence from their wives or other female family members, creating a significant gap in addressing family violence against men. There are uncountable cases where a husband has been abused, or tortured by his wife or female partner in connivance with her own family or relatives or even friends. Often, the violence is so severe that the spouse or other male partner sustains severe injuries and dies. This situation is mainly due to the so-called patriarchal thinking in society, that men are physically stronger than women. It’s high time for India to keep pace with the rest of the world and make the laws against domestic violence gender-neutral.

**RATIONALE**

Men are suffering a lot of challenges in their lives such as:

- Protection of their children
- Fear of cases
- Parental pressure
- Denial of justice
- Lack of legislation
- Stereotypes about men in general
- Fear of not being believed
- Denial of access to children

According to Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code 1860, only a man can be held liable for mistreating his wife. The law does not contain any language holding women accountable for domestic violence. Guys who attempt to open up and report the torture and physical violence they experience receive no attention, not even from the police (Farhana, 2022).

**Forum for Social Justice & Development (Registered NGO)** working on **Gender Equality**, for a few years have highlighted this grievous issue. The day may not be distant when a conflict could emerge between genders as they strive to assert their individual rights, potentially causing significant disruptions in society. A law for the protection of men from domestic violence by inclusion of men in Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA 2005) is an absolute need of hour which is long overdue.

**Theoretical framework**

The myth that “men don't cry” and “men don't feel pain” is untrue. With the increasing false cases of dowry harassment and domestic violence, there are growing number of men getting harassed by their wives and her relatives. Domestic violence can happen to anyone irrespective of gender, race, case, creed or culture. Many men are suffering in silence and if this issue is not taken seriously, then domestic abuse will continue with no end. This demands the future investigation and gender-neutral laws on domestic violence in India. (Naya2021). The study by Verena Colbe in 2020 yielded prevalence rates of 3.4% to 20.3% for domestic physical violence against men. According to Pleaders, Indian Penal Code in India, 52.4% of males aged 21 to 49 who are married and living in rural Haryana villages report having experienced gender-based violence. 51.5% of men report having been tortured or violently treated by their spouses or other close partners at some point in their lives. 10.5% of men report having been the victims of intimate partner or wife violence in the past 12 months. Emotional abuse is the most common type of marital or domestic violence against men, with physical abuse coming in second.
Anant Kumar in his study “Domestic Violence against Men in India: A Perspective” (2012) stated that recognizing and addressing domestic violence and abuse against men is indeed important. Anyone, regardless of gender, can be a victim of such violence, and it's essential to provide support and intervention. Initiatives focusing on raising awareness, providing resources, and offering counseling services can help male victims seek help and recovery. Public health efforts should aim to create a safe space for all individuals facing domestic violence.

Consequences men are facing -

Most of the abused men in India run away from their situation and abuser and apply for divorce, because-

1. **Fear of Losing Access to Children:** Custody battles can be a significant concern for both male and female victims of domestic violence. In many cases, the best interests of the children should be the primary consideration when determining custody arrangements. Legal should strive for fairness and impartiality in these matters to ensure that children maintain healthy relationships with both parents, as long as it's safe to do so.

2. **False Cases of Dowry Harassment:** False accusations can be a concern in divorce proceedings, and these should be dealt with through proper legal processes. It's crucial to ensure that the legal system thoroughly investigates and adjudicates such cases to prevent misuse of laws designed to protect individuals from harassment and abuse.

3. **Financial Concerns and Lengthy Litigation:** The financial and legal costs associated with divorce can be daunting for both men and women. Legal reforms and initiatives that promote faster and more affordable dispute resolution processes can help reduce the financial burden and lengthy litigation.

4. **Judicial Attitude:** It's important to acknowledge that perceptions of judicial attitudes can vary widely, and some individuals may feel that they do not receive fair treatment within the legal system. Promoting transparency, impartiality, and sensitivity within the judicial system is an ongoing challenge that requires constant vigilance and reform efforts.

5. **Impact of Violence on Men’s Health:** Considering that men are experiencing various forms of violence while women are gaining relatively more empowerment, it becomes essential to explore and emphasize the repercussions of such acts on individual well-being and behavior. These consequences can manifest in diverse aspects of individual health, including physical, psychological, social, and economic dimensions. Neglecting to address these issues adequately may result in persistent problems like alcoholism, heightened rates of homosexuality, increased stress, mounting frustration, a higher risk of suicide, and similar challenges.

**Discussion**

As there is a lot of social stigmas towards men abused by women. Many male victims often suffer in silence and hesitate to confide in their family, friends, or colleagues about their experiences of domestic violence. This is primarily due to the fear of being ridiculed and labelled as unmanly. Such attitudes are rooted in chauvinism and have detrimental consequences. Violence in men can range from anything like - physical violence including slapping, pushing, and hitting by wife, her parents or relatives; to emotional violence with wife threatening suicide to intimidate and control the husband; Verbal abuse can occur when a husband maintains contact with his parents or returns home late from work. This abuse may manifest as throwing objects, such as utensils, cell phones, and crockery at the husband. Additionally, it can extend to sexual abuse if the husband denies consent to engage in sexual activity. Mental abuse can also take the form of constant threats to falsely implicate the husband and his family in dowry and domestic violence cases.

A female partner has the same tendency as a male partner to bring the stress of the office home. One of the primary causes of domestic violence against men is related to issues like intolerance and anger stemming from unmet expectations. In some cases, violence can also result from a husband’s inability to meet the financial demands of his wife. While societal dynamics are evolving, traditional patriarchal norms from the 16th century often place the burden of household responsibilities on men, which can contribute to abuse. Introducing a legal framework that enables husbands to seek maintenance from an abusive wife could provide them with the opportunity to lead a dignified life, free from such abuse.

Male victims of family violence go through low self-esteem and their performance at the workplace suffers. Thousands of such men are approaching psychiatrists, who are not of much help when a law to provide protection to men and restrain women does not exist.

In many cases, the parents of women tend to place blame on the son-in-law for marital breakdowns, often overlooking the possibility that their daughter may have abusive tendencies or issues with anger management. There is sometimes an assumption that their
daughter can do no wrong, expecting the son-in-law to endure her behavior. Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon for these parents to become aggressive towards the son-in-law, either to teach him a lesson or as an act of revenge. Law enforcement authorities frequently show reluctance to acknowledge complaints lodged by husbands regarding the violence they endure, categorizing it as a family matter. This often leads to a lack of protective measures for the man in such situations. Sometimes, men are not able to take action against all the odds or problems they are facing because they are either afraid of losing access to their children or They are concerned about being linked to bogus dowry harassment cases. They also fear huge financial losses and long-drawn litigation in the process, given the insensible and lackadaisical attitude of the Indian Judiciary towards men. This could be the prime reason why male suicide rate is much higher than the female suicide rate 4966 for males and 4049 for females under the various age groups sharing in the category of marriage-related issues, love affairs, etc except dowry deaths as per the date published by the National Crime Record Bureau of India under Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. Apart from that the data also shockingly showed that male suicide rates are much higher with respect to their female counterparts which accounts for 86562 for males and 38039 for females under various societal and medical issues henceforth it is now an unquestionable fact that males are more inclined to end their lives in comparison to females but no protective measures are available in India. The most prevalent patriarchal belief, "Mard ko Dard nahi hota" (Men do not feel pain), glorifies and patronizes the emotional castration of males from an early age, teaching them to put up with abuse and feel proud of making sacrifices. Owing to this social structure, a vast majority of victimized men wear artificial smiles hide their scars and suffer in isolation. The system cannot change unless we challenge societal norms and encourage others to realize domestic abuse towards men is a problem that needs attention now. Hence, we believe that the inclusion of males under the Domestic Violence Act may neutralize the law with a good output while allowing only genuine victims of either gender to come forward and demand justice and subsequently minimize the misuse of legal provisions in India.

It’s essential for societies to work toward a more equitable and compassionate approach to addressing domestic violence and divorce, taking into account the needs and rights of all individuals involved, regardless of their gender. Supporting and improving the legal and support systems for victims is crucial in achieving this goal.

Ways to prevent violence against men:

1. **Raising Awareness:** Governments, NGOs, and civil society should work together to raise awareness about domestic violence against men. Public education campaigns can help dispel stereotypes and encourage victims to come forward.

2. **Support Services:** Establishing support services such as helplines, shelters, and counselling centres specifically for male victims of domestic violence is crucial. These services should be accessible and sensitive to the unique needs of male victims.

3. **Legal Protections:** Ensuring that the legal framework is gender-neutral and provides equal protection to all victims of domestic violence is essential. This includes revising laws, policies, and procedures to recognize male victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

4. **Training and Sensitization:** Police, healthcare professionals, and other front-line responders should receive training on recognizing and responding to domestic violence against men. Sensitizing these professionals to the issue can make it easier for male victims to seek help.

5. **Support Groups:** Encouraging the establishment of support groups for male victims can provide them with a safe space to share their experiences and seek emotional support from others who have faced similar situations.

6. **Research and Data Collection:** Gathering accurate data on domestic violence against men is essential for understanding the scope of the issue and developing effective strategies to address it.

Keynote:

*It's essential to emphasize that addressing domestic violence against men does not diminish the importance of addressing violence against women, which remains a significant and pervasive issue worldwide. Promoting gender equality and ensuring that all individuals are protected from domestic violence should be a fundamental goal of any society.*

**Appeal:**

*It is imperative to seek assistance from neighborhood support groups, hotlines, or law enforcement organizations if you are a male victim of domestic violence or know someone who is. Regardless of the victim's gender, domestic abuse is never acceptable, and assistance and support are available.*
References:


