

## **Impact of domestic violence on children: causes and preventive space measures**

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### **Abstract:**

Domestic violence is a global problem of enormous proportions. It can also be called as intimate partner violence which occurs between people in any intimate relationship. It takes different forms including emotional, sexual, physical abuse and threats of abuse. An imbalance of power and control will always be involved in an abusive relationship. Global estimates published by WHO indicates that 1 in 3(35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence. Children who are exposed to violence in their homes will also become victims of physical abuse which will lead them to serious risk of long term physical and mental health problems (OWH – Office of women’s health). The biggest victims of domestic violence are the smallest. As many as 275million children worldwide are exposed to violence in their homes (UNICEF). Children are a vulnerable group who can be exploited and abused in different forms. The most shocking of these is that they can be abused within their own home environment by a close relative of theirs. The care and support extended to children takes different forms based on the family system available to children in different cultures.

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For example – nuclear family, joint family, single parent, adopted children and children brought up by their step parents. The article highlight definitions of related concepts, causes of domestic violence, preventive measures and how to create a safe and secure home environment for children.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, child abuse, children, family systems and preventive measures

### **Introduction:**

Domestic violence is one of the most serious violence of all basic rights, a woman suffers in her own home by the members of her family. It is an issue which can be sorted out within the four walls of the house and some violence are considered as part of normal ‘wear and tear of marriage’. (Emery et.al, 1998)). Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive tactics which can include physical, psychological, sexual, economic and emotional abuse perpetrated by one person against an intimate relationship including married couples, people who are dating and people who were formally in a relationship with the person abusing them. Abusive behaviours are not symptoms that someone is angry but rather showing their exert power and control over his or her partner. Abusive behaviours include physical, emotional, sexual, social and financial abuse (Rhoades, 1981). Domestic violence is an act of human rights violation which may occur in homes or aftercare institutions where the victims can be women and children. It is a problem of individuals attitude towards the other which can cause far reaching consequences for individual victims. Domestic violence can result in death, serious injuries and chronic medical and mental health issues for victims, their children, the perpetrators and others. There are reports through the media that describe steady streams of homicides against victims, their children, family and friends, and those who try to protect them (Ganley, 1985). The U.S government statistics shows that 95% of domestic violence cases involve women victims of male partners. The children of these women often witness domestic violence. The emotional responses of children who witness domestic violence may include fear, guilt, shame, sadness, depression and anger. Children who grow up observing their mothers abused

by their father grow up with a role model of intimate relationship where one person uses violence over the other person to get their way.

It is believed that children raised in an abusive home learn that violence is an effective way to solve conflict and problems. They may replicate the violence they witnessed as children in their teen and adult relationship (Margolin, 1998). In 1993, the United Nations Declarations on the elimination of violence against women recognized domestic violence as one of the three contexts in which violence against women occurs. It is described as: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non- spousal and violence related to exploitation. In India domestic violence is one of the serious problems faced by Indian women, it has a serious economic, social and health consequences not only for women and children but also for the wider society. National Family Health Survey(NFHS) data indicate that over 30 % of Indian women have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused by their husbands at some point in their lives (Sreeparna Chattopadhyay, 2019).

### **Definitions**

**Domestic violence:** According to the United States Department of Justice Office on violence Against women. The definition of domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain control over another intimate partner.

Violence is defined by the World Health Organization in the WRVH (World Report on Violence and Health), as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.

Child – United Nations Convention on Right of Child defines a ‘child’ as a

person below the age of 18, unless the laws of a particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger.

### **Causes of domestic violence**

Domestic violence is suffered by persons who are in biological relationship where the perpetrator is a member of the victim's family or a relative. Children who are exposed to violence are more likely to suffer severe effects which includes

- Poor mental health
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Risky sexual behaviour
- Criminality
- Neglectful and abusive parenting (National Research Foundation, 1999- 2019)

One of the reasons of domestic violence which is being so prevalent is the orthodox mindset of the society which says women are weaker than men though women have proved themselves in almost every field of life affirming that they are no less than man. The reasons for domestic violence are many and they are diversified over the length and breadth of the country. The United Nations Population Fund Report says that there are around two- third of married Indian women who are victims of domestic violence and as many as 70 per cent of married women in India between the age of 15 and 49 are victims of beating, rape or forced sex. In Bihar, U.P, M.P and other northern states more than 55 per cent of the women suffer from domestic violence.

The most common cause for domestic violence includes dissatisfaction with the dowry and exploiting women for more of it, arguing with the partner, neglecting children, refusing to have sex with him, going out without telling the partner, not cooking properly, indulging in extramarital affairs, not looking after in-laws etc. In rural background infertility in female also leads

to their assault by the family members. The desire for dowry, male child and alcoholism of spouse are major factors of domestic violence. There have been gruesome reports where young bride who are burnt alive or subjected to continuous harassment for not bringing with them the demanded dowry. Other prevalent causes for domestic violence includes income of a working women more than her partner, her absence in the house till late night, abusing and neglecting in-laws, being more forward socially etc (Ankur Kumar,2010).

### **Effects of domestic violence**

Domestic violence has significant health and public health consequences where 25 – 50 per cent of homeless families have lost their homes as a result of domestic violence. It has a higher form of discrimination in securing any form of insurance, including health, life, disability and property insurances. The victims of domestic violence are more likely to suffer from raising their children and suffer family disruption. Though psychological abuse can be harder to define than physical abuse, it has been found to cause much damage. Victims of domestic violence are likely to develop depression, anxiety and substance abuse disorders. Domestic violence affects the children by having less intellectual functioning, being victims of child abuse as children and of intimate partner violence as adults. This also leads the children of having emotional problems and engaging them in drug abuse. The presence of intimate partner violence should be an important consideration in child custody issues. Domestic violence also results in homicide. People who live in a house where weapons and drugs are used have a greater risk of being killed by the abuser (Medicine Net, Roxanne Dryden – Edwards, MD, 2019). Children who witness domestic violence in their own homes may see the abuser threatening the adult victim and though they are not physically present during the violence, they are often exposed to repercussion – broken furniture, smashed pictures etc. Such children often become isolated, fearful and vulnerable. Such fearful situation make the children feel insignificant and defenceless(Disari Roy, 2015)

### **Effects of violence on children by age in utero**

The unborn child may be injured in the womb due to the violence aimed at the mother's abdomen or suffer from exposure to drugs or alcohol that a mother may have used to cope up with the stress.

#### **Babies**

An infant exposed to violence may have difficulty in developing an attachment with the caregivers and some extreme cases suffer from failure to thrive.

#### **Toddler**

A toddler at this age will be disturbed at his preschool which may affect them badly and result in eating and sleep disturbances.

#### **Child**

A school going child may struggle with a peer relationship, academic performance and emotional stability.

#### **Teenager**

An adolescent who is exposed to violence may be at higher risk of substance misuse or either becoming a victim of dating violence. (NSW Government, 2019)

### **Biggest victims of domestic violence are the smallest**

Children who are exposed to violence in their home may have difficulty learning and have limited social skills, exhibit violent, risky or delinquent behaviour or suffer from severe anxiety. As children are more vulnerable in their earliest years domestic violence is also more prevalent in homes with younger children than those with older children.

### **Impact of domestic violence on children**

Infant or small children who are exposed to violence in their homes undergo emotional stress which can harm the development of their brains and impair cognitive and sensory growth. Behaviour changes can include sleep problems, emotional distress, fear of being alone and immature behaviour.

Personality and behavioural problems among children exposed to violence in the home can take forms of psychosomatic illnesses, depression, suicidal tendencies and bed-wetting. These children are at a greater risk of substance abuse, juvenile pregnancy and criminal behaviour than those raised in homes without violence. (UNICEF, 2006)

Children who grow up with abuse are expected to keep the family secret, not talking to each other about the abuse. Children from abusive homes can look fine to the outside world but inside they might be facing terrible pain where their families are chaotic and crazy. Though children are physically abused or not the emotional effects of witnessing the violence is similar to the psychological trauma associated with a victim of child abuse. Every year around 3.3 million children are witnessing domestic violence. There are several reactions of a child to portray from a violent home and that same reaction can be acted out differently according to the child's age. (Tomison, A. M. 2000)

### **Feeling responsible for the abuser**

Most often the child feels responsible for the abuse, the child always stays in a constant anxiety though things might go well and thinks when the next fight will start.

### **Guilt for not stopping the abuse**

Children can experience guilt feeling over the good feelings they have about the abuser

### **Grief:**

Children who are separated from the abuser can be in the process of grieving over the loss. They may grieve over the positive image of the abuser they had before the violence could began.

### **Fear of abandonment:**

Children who are moved away from one parent as a result of violent acts may have a strong fear that the other parent might also leave them or abandon

them. Thus, a child may refuse to leave the mother for a short time period. (Hornor G, 2005)

Another important ill impact is that children who are raised in abusive homes may tend to believe that violence is an effective means to settle any kind of disagreement as well as to dominate one's partner. The worst impact is that children in their future replicate the violence they witnessed as children. Boys who were exposed towards their mother's abuse are more likely to batter their female partners as adults than boys brought up in a normal healthy environment. Girls who witness their mother's abuse are more likely to believe that threats and violence are the norm in relationships. An additional issue that the impact of the child of the meaninglessness of the violence they witness or experience. No one talks about what has happened and the mother's sense of helplessness leads her to disassociate from the violence so that when it is not happening, she may act as if there's nothing wrong. Due to this the child's thoughts and feelings about the experience becomes fragmented, disorganized and they are unable to make sense of it. Therefore, witnessing violence affects children view of the world and of themselves, their ideas about the meaning and purpose in life, their expectations for future happiness and their moral development (Sethi, 2015)

### **Preventive measures**

Every woman around should know how to prevent the domestic violence and know what are the various measures which can be taken.

### **Understanding Domestic Violence**

Sociologist Michael Johnson has identified typologies of intimates' violence over the past decade, labelling coercive control or domestic violence behaviours as "intimate terrorism". The root cause of what prompts someone to use violence, threats and coercion to gain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner. The most common threat in addition to gender equality is the intergenerational effect of domestic violence, children in house-



hold experience and witness domestic violence. Most of the study reveals that individuals who batter their adult intimate partners also abuse their children. Thus, children who experience these kinds of violence and child abuse are approximately nine times likely to become involved in criminal activity.

### **Violence prevention**

One of the biggest challenges in family violence prevention is to address child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and elder abuse have different histories and sometimes competing agendas. Women need to be empowered to prevent violence at home, they should affirm their rights first in their families and bring in peace and consensus between their spouse and children through dialogue. The family social support system should be established that relatives, friends and neighbours should play an important role in controlling domestic violence at home. Self help groups in rural communities and urban neighbourhood should be empowered to educate migrant women on gender sensitisation so that better understanding among men and women prevail in families. The local leaders especially in villages should play a role of a catalyst to solve problems in families belonging to a community (Jane K. Stoeber, 2014)

The role of Non- Governmental organisations is important in controlling domestic violence. They work towards providing services ranging from counselling, education and outreach, giving provisions, and mobilising them to gain self-confidence. NGOs also spread awareness among people regarding their legal rights to fight against atrocities they are subjected to. The police play a major role in handling domestic violence cases. They should be sensitized to treat domestic violence cases as seriously as any other crime. Gender training should be mandatory to police officers. Crises support cell should be established in Government and private hospital with trained Medical Social worker to provide appropriate services. Health provisions in hospital should be trained to develop the skill to train abused people. A nodal agency comprising of Government departments, health care institutions, NGOs and counsel-

ling centres for documentation and publicity on domestic violence among the masses or increasing awareness (Ankur Kumar,2010)

### **Conclusion:**

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour by one on their partners who are in intimate relationship. Domestic violence happening in home environment has its negative effects of the physical and mental development of children who are continuously exposed to traumatic experience which retards their psychological development. There should be sufficient education through the social media to educate the members of society to treat one another with respect and dignity. The control of the domestic violence at home could lead to productive progress within the family and to society at large. Children from such families can be prevented from running away from their homes, taking to drug abuse, getting into suicidal tendencies and promote better education in children. Though domestic violence is a family problem the Act on prevention of domestic violence 2005 should be implemented strictly to protect not only the women but also children, the elderly and in some cases even the men folk

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