

A Study on Traumatic Bonding and Intimate Partner Violence

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to investigate the causes for traumatic bonding in abusive marital relationships. It seeks to explain why abused women find it difficult to leave their abusive partner and the relationship with them. In the process, the study also touches upon the various strata of domestic abuse as a complex and multidimensional issue. To this end, semi-structured interviews with 11 married or ever-married abused women between the ages of 20-49 were conducted. Results obtained from them showed not specific and isolated reasons but an interplay of factors that often weigh married women down in abusive relationships.

Keywords: Spirituality, gratitude, demographic variables, students

“We all like to think that if we were the victims of domestic abuse, we would get up and leave - but it’s not always as easy or straightforward as that. Women stay with abusive partners for all kinds of reasons - they love them, they fear them, they have children with them, they believe they can change them, or they simply have nowhere else to go.” - Kate Thornton (“TOP 25 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE QUOTES (of 209) | A-Z Quotes”, 2022)

Domestic violence is one of the universal forms of violence, yet it largely remains a phantom issue – it happens, but people don’t want to speak about it or address it. No country or society can claim to be free from domestic violence, but the patterns and trends may vary across regions and countries. The problem of crime against women is not a new occurrence. Women’s safety always emerges as a crucial socio-political subject everywhere. Time and again, measures for women’s safety are devised in the public sphere. The impetus to gender sensitization, education, and feminism is being provided not only by the government of nations but also by organizations, institutions, and even the people themselves. But what about the women who don’t feel safe in their own homes? What about the women being subjected to crimes by their own spouses and in-laws?

Violence in nearly all forms is on the rise by the day, and domestic abuse is no exception. Among all forms of gender violence, domestic violence is the most common. It is the most serious violation of all the basic rights that a woman suffers. There is little knowledge of the fact that violence can begin at home and families can act as a menace to someone’s life. Domestic abuse is a more common occurrence than we recognize. However, that does not

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Received: February 27, 2023; Revision Received: April 11, 2023; Accepted: April 15, 2023

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mean that it should be normalized. Public conceptualization of domestic abuse is largely constricted, for the majority believes that only “wife-beating” qualifies as domestic abuse. Domestic abuse is rather a broader term.

Anyone can be a victim of domestic abuse irrespective of culture, age, race, class, caste, religion, community, gender, and sexual orientation. It does not discriminate. Additionally, abuse can come from one’s husband, wife, intimate partner, in-laws, relatives, or immediate family members like parents or siblings. Violence in dating relationships where partners live in or cohabit can also be categorized as domestic abuse. However, this study narrows down the focus on married or ever-married women in India who have experienced domestic abuse at the hands of their husbands or in-laws.

The **United Nations Organization (UNO)** defines domestic abuse as “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. It is also called “domestic violence” or “intimate partner violence.” This includes any behavior that frightens, intimidates, terrorizes, manipulates, hurts, humiliates, blames, injures, or wounds someone.” (2) (Nations, 2022)

Wikipedia defines domestic violence or domestic abuse “as intimate partner violence or other abuse that occurs in a domestic setting, such as in a marriage or cohabitation.” The website states that this form of violence can be found across all types of relationships, namely same-sex, heterosexual, or between former spouses or partners. It also focuses on the extent of the term and states that domestic violence also involves violence against children, parents, or the elderly.

It needs to be established that in an abusive relationship, violence is rarely an isolated episode. Domestic abuse is cyclical and may increase in frequency and intensity. Episodes may aggravate in severity over time and may alternate between violence and apologetic behavior or compensatory affection.

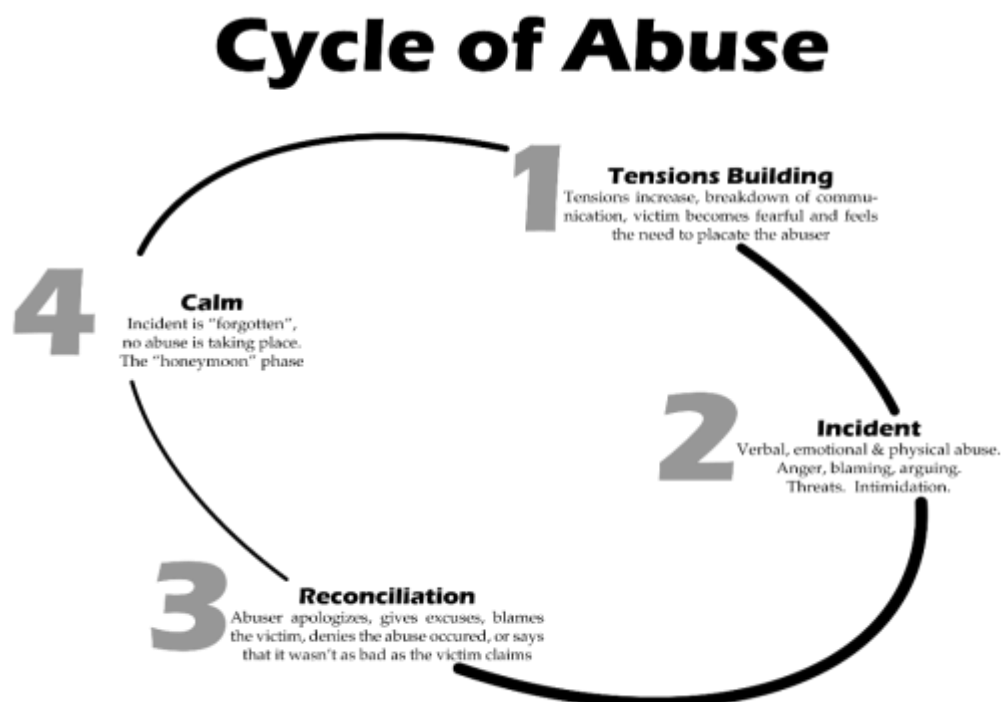
In India, domestic abuse is considered a “family matter.” It is hardly objected to by an external entity. They turn a blind eye to it as social stigma around domestic violence encourages people to “cover up the matter.” Expectations from women to comply and assume a subordinate position to their spouses is a common ideology. Domestic abuse is seen as a way of the world. Society believes that domestic violence has been in existence for centuries, so it cites its antiquity as a reason to sit in silence with it. With such collective attitudes and norms in place, women find it difficult to open up about their ordeal.

Theoretical background of research

The study of causes of domestic violence is relevant in light of the fact that it would aid in the prevention or prediction of the atrocity. But domestic abuse is a complicated subject. Hence, there is no one particular theory that can best explain it. Several theories have been proposed that aim to accomplish the same. This chapter is dedicated to delineating some of the popular theories that explain various aspects of domestic abuse.

Cycle of Violence Theory: This theory of intimate partner violence was proposed by psychologist Lenore Walker (1979). It seeks to explain the patterns of behavior in an abusive relationship and how difficult it is for a woman to break free from their situation. The model has often been a guiding light for many psychologists and thinkers in the process

of intervention and education of domestic violence cases. It lays out 4 phases in which abuse occurs:



Source: Wikipedia

1. Tension-building phase: This phase is marked by the implantation of stress, dissatisfaction, tension, frustration, and anger by outside forces in the abuser. These negative emotions brew within the abuser during this phase before being whipped out at the abused violently. The outside stressors can look like work problems, financial strain, fatigue, etc. The abused women find themselves anxious and hypervigilant of their partner's needs, making attempts to not incite them and going out of the way to support their partners. They do so in order to avoid an episode of abuse.
2. Incident: This is the phase in which the violent outburst of the abuser occurs. At the receiving end of the violence is the wife of the abuser. The violence can be physical or verbal, and emotional. The abuser may explain their reasons for acting out or simply place the blame on their partners for angering them. Nonetheless, abuse is a choice and can never be justified.
3. Reconciliation: Also known as the "honeymoon phase", this phase, as the name suggests, is marked by fading tension after an abusive episode occurs. The abuser will display feelings of immense guilt, sadness, and shame with lofty promises of doing better the next time. He will behave apologetically and affectionately, pretending to make amends for the violent episode. This might be the fear that his partner would leave him, call the cops on him, or simply an act of manipulation of the woman's emotions.
4. Calm: This phase is marked with love, care, and peace. The abuser acts in complete contrast to his abusive self, taking his wife on romantic dates, buying her gifts, and acting as pleasant as the husband she fell in love with. This phase reinforces women's faith in their abusive partners.

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However, things begin heating up again, and the cycle repeats.

The cyclical theory of violence gives an insight into the patterns of behavior one can look out for. However, abusive experiences vary for different people. The model has generalized its theory for every abusive relationship based on some instances. Even the relationships which are mirrored by this theory may not always show the same pattern. Another shortcoming is that the theory puts the onus on the women to groom and prepare themselves according to the pattern. This means that they have a responsibility to check their behavior to avoid a violent episode when they can “predict” it. Victim blaming, specifically in cases of abuse, is immensely misdirected as abuse can never be the fault of anyone but the abuser. Lastly, it absolves the abuser of the responsibility of violence.

Psychological or Psychopathological Theories

These perspectives explain male perpetration and women’s victimization both in terms of their psychology. They state that men who wield violence suffer from some psychological disorders. They focus on the interplay of factors like childhood history of abuse or trauma, shaming, dysfunctional parenting, insecure or disorganized attachment style, personality disorders, anger, depression, emotional difficulties, substance abuse, or low self-esteem that lead men to abuse their spouses (Hamburger & Hastings 1993, Dutton 1995, Cunningham et al. 1998, Heise 1998).

The early years of a child are the formative years. Experiences of these years are imprinted for life. Psychological theories suggest that men who show a greater disposition for violence also show greater signs of psychopathology, like personality disorders, anger control issues, and substance use problems, than those who don’t engage in violence against women. Psychologically, men have varying needs to feel powerful. When they feel powerless, they try to derive it by asserting dominance over women. Some abusive men may have had a history of witnessing or experiencing violence during their childhood (Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 1997). The same history seems to have an inverse effect on women who, on the other hand, become accepting of violence. The impact of environment and social attitudes towards women or violence may, in the growing years of women, also shape their belief system.

Therapies like cognitive-behavioral or insight-oriented psychotherapeutic approaches work well for abusive men. Such therapies can be provided both individually or in groups. These approaches are very helpful in emotional regulation and healthy coping with stressors. They also assist abusive men in resolving their childhood trauma and have an insight into their other unresolved issues. (Saunders 1993, Hamberger & Hastings 1993, Cunningham et al. 1998, Saunders 2001). These theories and perspectives are informative in terms of the psychology of abusive men. However, they steal the focus from cultural factors like patriarchy and other forms of stratification in society. Questions like “why do men who engage in violence beat their wives and not other people in authority outside the home if they suffer from mental disorders?” remain unanswered. (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2011). Interventions that take after the individual models have been criticized for excluding the role of interpersonal and socio-cultural along with men’s aggressive and controlling behavior itself. Such interventions may even exempt the instances and perpetrators of domestic violence on the grounds of their psychological problems and may render women responsible for their own victimization. (Joshi, 2019)

Social Learning Theories and perspectives

Social learning perspectives build on Bandura's theories and models. Explanations of domestic violence by these theories are that violence is learned in the early years of a child through imitation of a model's actions and influences of the child's environment, like cultural norms and attitudes towards violence. These theories also explain the victim's tolerance of the abuse by attributing it to their childhood history of witnessing or experiencing abuse in the family or environment (Lewis & Fremouw, 2001). In such cases, violence within a domestic setting is understood by the victims as a means of resolving familial conflicts. This is supported by various studies on intergenerational violence that have deduced links between early experiences of abuse and victimization.

Social learning perspectives focus on the role of a healthy environment for a child that is not only untouched by violence but also one that promotes appropriate attitudes against all forms of violence. It suggests the emphasis of education on new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving as a course of intervention. Interventions for men may include cognitive behavior therapy to work on fixing their distorted thought patterns around violence. Inculcation of other skills like anger and stress management, problem-solving, communication, conflict resolution, and active listening also form a part of an effective treatment plan. (Cunningham et al., 1998). Social learning theories have often been hailed for their doctrines. However, it falls short of explaining why only some men who have witnessed or experienced abuse during childhood go on to engage in violent behaviors during their adulthood. The model has also been criticized because it does not hold the abuser answerable for their behavior. Lastly, interventions based on social learning theories also do not address the power and control tactics used by the abuser. (Hamberger & Hastings 1993).

Learned Helplessness

Originally developed by Martin Seligman in 1975, this theory proposes that when an individual is at repeated exposure to an unpleasant and undesirable situation from which escape is not possible, they end up feeling helpless. While Seligman devised this theory as a study on clinical depression, it has extended its scope applicable to other situations.

Walker (1979) quoted this theory to formulate that women who are repeatedly abused by their spouses with no escape end up believing that they are completely helpless and have no power to change their situation. Hence, they stop making any attempts to leave the abuser and their abusive situation. They feel that they are fated for what they are going through, and all attempts to leave are futile.

Such beliefs are, in turn, consolidated by society's traditional gender roles. The feelings of helplessness and the perceived prospect of no way out make women sink lower into depressive disorders. This can be helped by providing support and resources to the women victims and instilling the belief in them that their situation can change.

This theory has been criticized for not taking into consideration the various other aspects of abusive relationships that bind women to it like concern for children, financial dependence, lack of social support, etc. Another criticism that comes up is against women's resilience in the face of abuse. It says that "survivors" do not emerge as a result of helplessness but because of making active attempts to combat the abuse and walk out of it. They may fight back or report the abuse to the concerned authorities. Helplessness may be enhanced if they

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do not receive the anticipated help, but this would not mean that women act as the passive absorbent of all the abuse.

Feminist perspectives

Feminism views society as a harbor and an enabler of patriarchy. The main aim of feminism is to achieve gender equality. This equality extends to all the social, political, economic, and personal aspects in which gender difference is often palpable. Feminists believe that social order favors male supremacy at the cost of the subordination of women. This ideology strips females of their basic human rights.

The role of power and control drives in men takes the nexus of this theory, which is taken as the base to highlight women's experiences of injustice and inequality. Patriarchy is all-pervasive in a society from its legal, healthcare, and education framework to the family as a unit. It affects not only how society treats women but also how they view them.

Feminists propose that patriarchy molds our knowledge, language, and definition of social issues. Feminism aims at uplifting women at par with men in terms of rights and opportunities. The goal of the feminist approach intervention is to put women and their security at the center stage. It also aims to go head-on against societal attitudes that impose victimization on women, educate women about their rights and the resources available to them and provide a supportive milieu that can empower abused women. Interventions focus on abused women's strengths so as to drive feelings of hopelessness and helplessness out of them.

Intervention for abusive men involves intensive gender education, including power and control dynamics and history and problems associated with patriarchy. Despite their women-oriented approach and contributions, feminist theories have been criticized for some reasons. For starters, it does not include the subjective experiences of an abusive relationship on the ends of both the abuser and the abused.

The other criticisms that surface are why some men and not all engage in the perpetration of violence against women and how feminist theory would explain domestic abuse in a same-sex relationship of women. (Dutton 1995, Mullender 1996, Healey et al. 1998, Heise 1998). Feminist explanations are therefore criticized as unidirectional and rigid, also exclusive of other crucial factors like culture, class, socio-economic status, educational qualification, and so on.

As evident, no one theory is applicable to the universe of domestic violence. Each case of abusive relationship brings with it its own set of complexities and requires tailor-made interventions. Cases cannot be fit into a specific theory but a theory has to be accommodative of a case. The following section consists of a model endorsed by the United Nations Organization to understand the power and control dynamics and the tactics used by abusive men to perpetrate violence against women.

The Power and Control Wheel

The Power and Control Wheel was created in the 1980s by the Domestic Abuser Intervention Programs as part of "The Duluth Model". It helps us understand the various techniques abusers use to perpetrate domestic abuse over their partners. Via these techniques, the abusers gain power, control, and dominance over their victims. (*Wheels - Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs*, n.d.) Hence, the wheel plays an important role in

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elucidating how abusers operate. It builds on the feminist theory, which puts abusive men at the nexus of violent behavior and views women as a vulnerable section of society.

The model hinges on the premise that abusive men abuse women to feel a sense of power and control. However, this has often been criticized as having a one-way radical standpoint on violence where only men are seen as perpetrators and women as victims. It has been called out for negating the abuse experiences of men victims, more so, with respect to the “male privilege” component of the model.

The wheel is made up of 8 types of abuse techniques in consonance with physical and sexual violence. These techniques aid the abusers in dominating a victim:

Physical and Sexual Violence (outer ring)

- Using Intimidation
- Using Emotional Abuse
- Using Isolation
- Minimizing, Denying, and Blaming
- Using Children
- Using Male Privilege
- Using Economic Abuse
- Using Coercion and Threats



Source: United Nations “Duluth Model”

Types of Domestic Abuse

In the traditional sense, domestic abuse almost exclusively connoted physical violence. However, such a viewpoint has proved to be conservative in nature. Over the years, attempts have been directed at making the term more inclusive. Domestic abuse can be of several types. One type might or might not be independent of some others or may co-exist or lead to other types of violence. The pattern of abuse in one intimate relationship might differ from that of another. There is no one standardized pattern of abuse that occurs across all abusive relationships.

Emotional/ Psychological/ Mental abuse: The pattern of hurting or harming a person's emotions, feelings, and self-concept is at the nexus of emotional abuse. It may look like constant criticism, picking on a person's flaws, mocking their parents/family, blaming, emotional manipulation, coercion, playing "mind games," a negation of their perspectives, opinions, and reality (gas lighting), insensitivity to their partners' emotional triggers, name-calling or other verbal abuse. Other signs of an emotionally abusive relationship can be:

- Abuser setting up rules for their partner.
- Abuser does not trust their partner and interrogates them.
- Abuser disparages their partner's abilities, worth, and sense of self.
- Abuser intimidates or threatens their partner of putting them, their children, family, loved ones, or even themselves at stake.
- Abuser expects their partner to take permission.
- Abuser not respecting their partner's personal space.
- Abuser humiliates their partner in private or public spaces.
- Abuser isolates their partner from their friends, family and society.
- Abused constantly trying to please the abuser or earn their approval.
- Abused constantly explaining their actions to the abuser.
- Abused stuck in a cycle of self-doubt, questioning all their choices and identity.
- Abused striving for perfection, and scared to make mistakes before the abuser.

Financial/ Economic abuse: A pattern of harming or controlling a person's finances, position, and independence is at the core of economic abuse. The aim is to make them dependent on the abuser by depriving them of their financial resources. This can look like restricting the access of their partner to money, savings, bank accounts, assets, properties, and deposits, keeping a tab on their expenditure, not letting them work, demanding a dowry, not giving them a monthly allowance, and so on.

Sexual abuse: Forcing a person to engage in sexual activities without their consent is sexual abuse. Imposing sex on or out of a person in marital relationships is known as **marital rape**, a concept discussed further in the study. It can look like the abuser copulating with their partner, demanding them to dress up erotically and sexually pleasure the abuser, all without consent. Other signs of a sexually abusive relationship are:

- During sex, abuser does certain things that are triggering, painful, uncomfortable, or unwanted for their partner.
- Abuser insensitive to their partner's feelings regarding sex.
- Abuser hurts their partner with weapons, tools, or objects during sex.
- Abuser demands sex even when their partner is unwell, tired, or after beating them.
- Abuser involves other people while having sex with their partner.
- Abuser insults their partner by calling them sexual names.

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- Abused withstands or gives in to the abuser's sexual demands/ impulses to please them, feel safe, protect their children, and so on.
- Abused fearful of inducing anger in the abuser.
- Abused feeling repulsed or disgusted by the abuser's touch.

Physical abuse: This type of abuse is the pattern of hurting or attempting to hurt a partner physically. This can include "hitting, kicking, burning, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hair-pulling, biting, denying medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use, or using other physical force," as stated by the United Nations Organization. Most forms of sexual abuse are physical in nature. Hence, they come under the category of physical abuse as well. Other signs of a physically abusive relationship are:

- Abuser displaces anger by throwing or breaking objects, punching into walls, kicking doors, etc.
- Abuser pushes, drags, twists their partners' hands, or strangles them.
- Abuser wields dangerous weapons, tools, or objects at them.
- Abuser drives their partner out of the house on a chilly night.
- Abuser presses on or hurts their partner's injured or ailing body parts.
- Abuser keeps their partner locked or tied up in the house.
- Abuser keeps their partner starved.
- Abuser asks the children to hit the abused.
- Abuser attempting or perpetrating an acid attack on their partner.
- Abused feeling scared of, repulsed, or disgusted by the abuser's presence or touch.
- Abused fearful of inducing anger in the abuser.

Religious/ Spiritual abuse: A pattern of hurting or harming someone's religious sentiments, inventory, or using religion as an instrument to hurt, harass or control them is called religious abuse. It can occur across all religions and faiths in relationships where either the abuser assumes a dominant religious position to abuse or their spouse have religious proclivities that are at the risk of being abused. It can look like manipulation in the name of religion, mocking someone's religious practices, humiliating someone for their lack of religiosity, making someone question their religious choices, etc. Other signs of religious abuse can look like:

- Abuser belittling or insulting the religion of their partner in interfaith marriages and intimate relationships.
- Abuser preventing their partner from practicing their religion.
- Abuser forcing their partner to raise their children in a specific faith.
- Abuser using religious texts and scriptures to make their partner feel bad about their choices.
- Abuser imposing their dogmatic religious beliefs on their partner.
- Abused in constant fear of having committed a sin.
- Abused fearful of practicing their religion around the abuser.

Technological abuse: The pattern of abuse that makes the use of technology to harm, control, and harass someone is called technology abuse. Although more prevalent among teenagers and young adults, this form of abuse can happen to anyone, irrespective of age or gender. It can look like stalking someone, hacking their social media accounts, forcing their accounts' passwords, etc. Other signs of technology abuse are:

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- Abuser using tracking software like spyware or suchlike apps on their partner's mobile phone to keep track of their location, call logs, or other forms of interactions.
- Abuser creating fake profiles on social media to harass their partner.
- Abuser forcing their partner to disable their social media accounts.
- Abuser threatening to post their partner's intimate pictures or information online.
- Abuser seizing the mobile phone of their partner.

Domestic abuse is a global public health care concern. According to a survey conducted by **WHO** in 2018 across 161 countries and areas, 1 in 3 women, or about 736 million women worldwide, are subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life. Of this estimate, the majority of cases are of intimate partner violence, as almost one-third (27%) of women aged 15-49 years report that they have been subjected to some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their partner. (3) (Violence against women, 2022). This was "the largest ever study of prevalence data from surveys and studies conducted between 2000 and 2018." ("Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence", 2022) (4) To emphasize the extent of the domestic abuse as a problem, WHO quoted "intimate partner violence is by far the most prevalent form of violence against women globally." (5) ("Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence", 2022)

In India, domestic abuse is a pandemic. According to the Crime in India Report of 2018 released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), every 4.4 minutes, a woman is subjected to domestic violence. One in three women is likely to have been subjected to intimate partner violence of a physical, emotional, or sexual nature, reveals research published online in the **Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health**. (*1 in 3 Women in India Is Likely to Have Been Subjected to Intimate Partner Violence | BMJ, n.d.*)

According to the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4)** conducted in 2015-16 by the **International Institute for Population Sciences** on a sample of 83,397 married or ever-married women, thirty-three percent of ever-married women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional spousal violence. The most common type of spousal violence is physical violence (30%), followed by emotional violence (14%). Seven percent of ever-married women have experienced spousal sexual violence.

It is worth mentioning that the precise number of wife abuse cases is difficult to be established as a large share of cases go underreported. The findings from the **Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health** show that one in 10 women victims of domestic violence formally reports the offense to the police or healthcare professionals. According to NFHS-5 data, 70% of women in the major States (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana, and West Bengal) who faced physical violence did not inform anyone about it. In the States listed, less than 20% of women who experienced physical violence sought help. (The Hindu, 2021) Underreporting of cases may be a result of several factors. Women might be afraid of their abuser, have no social support, have financial dependence on their husbands, accept their suffering, and so on.

The picture of domestic violence cases worsened manifolds during the lockdown situations of the Covid-19 pandemic. The **National Commission for Women (NCW)** claimed to have registered a hike of 94 percent in assault complaint cases by women in their homes at the hands of their spouses during the lockdown. The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns put

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nearly half a billion women at risk of domestic abuse in India. During the first lockdown in 2020, as we approached the end of May, the number of domestic violence complaints was the highest that it had been in a decade.

Causes of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse can be a result of one or several factors. One of the fundamental factors is **Patriarchy**. Patriarchy is a social construct that posits male domination and power over women. Historically, it described an elderly male or the father as the head of the family, holding authority over the family. It is a culturally backed ideology that places men into a position of privilege, dominion, and power which can often underlie the oppression of women. The concept implies that women are inferior to men. Several theories would attribute it to the natural biological differences between the two sexes.

Patriarchy runs deep into society, and its teachings are handed down from generation to generation. Most men and women grow up imitating and imbibing those learnings from their models and assuming their roles, respectively. Early patriarchal learnings can sound like "men should have the upper hand in a marriage" for males and "marriage is about settling and making compromises" for women. Men who abuse their spouses would often feel entitled to do so and show them "their place" so that they do not threaten men's position of authority.

On the other hand, women having internalized and normalized the belief system would not know that the dynamic is problematic. This divide in the early conceptualization of gender roles on both men's and women's part can lead to the idea of male supremacy and female susceptibility, respectively.

Patriarchy is not restrictive only in terms of marital relationship deconstruction. It affects the social, legal, political, economic, psychological, and other spheres of human life too. It is formative in nature, influencing nearly everything from self-concept to worldview. Society not only identifies patriarchy as an instrument of inequality but also promotes it. Sexism (prejudice, discrimination based on sex, typically against women, on the grounds that men are superior to women) and Misogyny (hatred, contempt, and dislike for women) branch out of patriarchy which often also underlies gender crimes.

As another cause, even **dowry demands** are a product of patriarchy. Women are expected to bring in cash and other luxury goods with them after marriage. Failure to do so leads to resentment among the husbands and the in-laws. Hence, consequences can involve emotional, physical, or sexual abuse or, in some cases, the murder of the women.

Dowry has been rendered illegal in India under The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961. This anti-dowry law prohibits any act of taking or giving dowry in India. The punishment for violating the law is imprisonment for up to 5 years and a fine of Rs. 15,000 or the value of dowry given, whichever is more. In reality, the law has been of little to no help in preventing the practices. Article 3 of the Dowry Prohibition Act specifies that the penalty for giving or taking dowry does not apply to presents that are given at the time of a marriage to the bride or groom when no demand for them from the groom's side has been made.

Factors like **alcohol or substance abuse** are common causes. Violence due to such factors becomes increasingly life-threatening when the abuser is experiencing withdrawal symptoms. **Anger issues** also play an important role in intimate partner violence. Even a

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minor conflict can bring with it an episode of violence specifically, as we see that abuse also results from **displacement of anger**. Displacement is a defense mechanism where a negative emotion is directed away from its real source to another, less threatening source. An example of this would be a man bashed by his boss at work, comes home and beats his wife.

Unemployment is one of the most common causes of domestic violence. Alcohol or drug addiction when a man is unemployed often forms a dangerous combination and precipitates domestic abuse cases.

Psychological factors may include the abuser's need to feel a **lost sense of control** in his otherwise failed life or the one that lacks self-esteem. In some cases, men diagnosed with erectile dysfunction find it a threat to their masculinity, so they regain their power and control by abusing their spouses sexually or physically. Men with faulty notions of "manhood", known as **toxic masculinity**, often become abusive. **Intergenerational violence**, which is when a man has learned to abuse someone after seeing his father beat his mother throughout his childhood, is very common.

Such a nuanced list of psychological factors is inexhaustible as it depends on a man's subjective life experiences, conditioning, environment, and so on.

Psychological pathologies like **bipolar disorder, depression, stress, antisocial personality disorder, schizophrenia**, etc., can also be present in some of the men who abuse their partners.

A disparity in education, socio-economic status, caste, religion, culture, or class can also cause a man to instigate abuse. Poverty, extramarital affair, lack of trust, paranoia, and over-possessiveness can also be major causes in some cases.

Younger couples and parents are also at an increased risk of spousal violence, possibly from the frustration of struggling to meet ends, lack of knowledge of parental responsibilities, and so on.

Why Women Struggle to Leave Abusive Partners?

A victim's reasons for staying with their abusers can be quite complex and convoluted. According to the Domestic Violence Prevention center, on average, a woman in an abusive relationship takes five to seven attempts to leave the relationship for good. *Chang et al. (2010) discovered that one of the deciding factors that drive women to successfully leave their abusers was the realization they had access to resources and support from others. Evidently, the availability of resources can be a deciding factor in pushing women to leave an abusive relationship, especially in cases where traumatic emotional attachment with the abuser is not involved.*

One of the most common reasons women don't leave abusive relationships is **fear**. There is a good deal of fear that shackles women in abusive relationships. The abuser might stalk their partner or her loved ones if she leaves. The fear of life is not extreme in such cases. The time of leaving an abusive partner is the most dangerous for a woman victim of domestic violence. A number of studies have found that women have 70 times more increased chances of being killed in the weeks after leaving their abusive partner than at any other time during the abusive relationship.

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In addition to this, India is one of the top-ranked countries for instances of vengeful acid attacks. It reports 250–300 acid attack incidents every year. The Acid Survivors' Trust International, United Kingdom, quotes that the "actual number could exceed 1,000". The fear is not for one's own life but also for the lives of the loved ones in close association with the woman, like her family, children, pets, and friends.

An abuser can harm the loved ones of a woman to damage her emotional composition, seek revenge or manipulate her back into his house. A study conducted on intimate partner homicides found that 20% of homicide victims were not domestic violence victims themselves but family members, friends, neighbors, persons who intervened, law enforcement responders, or bystanders. (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000)

Besides the fear of life, there is also a fear of lack of means to fall back upon after leaving. It can look like having nowhere to go and no door to knock on for help and resources. Having been isolated from one's support systems, like friends and family, women feel thwarted in their arrangements to leave. Financially dependent women find it difficult to find appropriate means for their children and themselves after leaving.

Children are the other frequently accounted reasons to stay in an abusive relationship. Society preaches to young women to stay in abusive relationships for the sake of their children. This belief is ingrained inside women's psyche as well. They are conditioned to put their family's needs before their own, so staying back is their natural instinct. They loom under the societal pressure of being a "good mother." In the quest to perform their ideal motherly duties, they endure persistent spousal abuse.

Children's schooling and a good future with financial stability remain recurring thoughts in the minds of women, among other concerns like the child's custody and their life with a single parent. They feel their children will be traumatized for life if they witness their parents' separation or are alienated from their father. They consider this adverse to their future, development, and so on. They vehemently emphasize the importance of a father in a family and the child's life. Women also fear that their partners might try to harm their children if they try to walk out of the relationship. They are often fearful of the effects that their leaving would have on their children – abruptly taking them out of school, removing them from an environment of a "family," financial stability, etc. They are also hesitant to face the difficult questions their children might ask about their father, their changed course of life, and so on.

Another reason is a **damaged self-concept**. After being constantly criticized, degraded, and disgraced, it becomes a reality for the victims of domestic abuse. Having internalized their partners' versions of themselves, they have a shredded sense of self-worth. They are not empowered enough to leave the relationship, and they feel they deserve what they go through. Battered women have distorted thought patterns and unhealthy coping mechanisms. They are so deeply traumatized that they feel a loss of sense of power and control over their own life. They feel that they have no autonomy to make decisions. Abused women confess to being shrouded with guilt, shame, confusion, helplessness, doubts, and self-blame.

Constant gaslighting in emotionally abusive relationships leaves them devoid of self-esteem, dignity, and sense of power, or the ability to trust their own decisions, memories, emotions, or senses. Gaslighting is a form of manipulation by an abuser that causes a person to doubt their reality, perception, feelings, or sanity. It is a form of targeted psychological abuse that

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is meant to convince a person of a disturbance in their mental health. This is done in order to create a sense of dependency of the abused on the abuser so that the latter hold power and control over their victim. The abused begin to sink deep into a loop of self-doubt in terms of their decisions, judgment, and senses. The abuser may use this tactic subtly or openly, both of which are equally difficult to be deciphered by a vulnerable victim.

Gaslighting is extremely dangerous. It often leads to a complete surrender of the abused to the abuser. It leads to anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, long-term psychological trauma, and isolation. Gaslighting makes it immensely difficult for a woman to leave their abusive spouse. Some common gaslighting techniques include:

- **Withholding:** This tactic involves the abuser refusing to listen to their target's, in this case, their spouse's, concern. Alternatively, they may pretend not to understand them. This refrains or withholds them from partaking in meaningful conversations with their wives.
- **Countering:** The abuser questions their spouse's memory of an event, incident, etc., despite the latter remembering them accurately. The abuser may do so by denying their partner's narrative, accusing them of lying, being forgetful, or concocting false details.
- **Forgetting/Denial:** An abuser uses this technique by pretending to forget something or denying it ever happened.
- **Blocking/Diversion:** This tactic involves an abuser changing the topic to divert their partner's attention from a legitimate topic to something of their convenience. This is frequently done by them to belittle their partner's concerns.
- **Trivializing:** This is an abuser's signature technique to invalidate their partner's concerns, feelings, or emotions or make them seem irrational or unimportant. It is quite dangerous as it can condition abused women into believing their emotions are exaggerated or uncalled for.

There is also a rampant issue of **lack of awareness** around the concept of domestic abuse. This is because most people still associate domestic abuse with physical violence only. They are not aware of the gravity of non-physical forms of violence. Hence, they don't find anything wrong with what they go through. In marital relationships, sexual abuse goes unnoticed despite the perceived difficulties of the women. Emotional abuse is rather internalized, and economic abuse is rationalized as husbands "looking out after them" or "everything that is mine is my husband's too."

During the course of the study, some of the women victims of emotional or economic abuse said that for a long time, they did not even realize that they were being abused. Even some of the sexually abused victims said they did not realize that they had been raped sometimes. One of them said she thought that husbands are entitled to a woman's body after marriage.

Responses like "at least he did not beat me" were common from some emotionally abused women who reported threats, forced isolation, and psychological manipulation. A widowed victim of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from the sample said that the process of the aggravation of abuse, from initial subtle offensive remarks to life-threatening violent assaults, did not happen overnight. It caught on gradually over a span of a few months, during which she was largely unaware that she had been undergoing abuse.

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The lack of awareness exists even in terms of access to safety and support. It is far from the truth to conclude that there is widespread knowledge of legal resources available to domestic abuse victims. Many women are unfamiliar with the laws against domestic abuse in the country and the procedures of pressing charges against their abusers. There are several national and state helplines specifically put in place for gender violence or other women's issues, which remain fairly alien to many women.

Commissions like National Commission for Women (NCW) have also been set up to service abused women but are not being accessed to their best. This lack of knowledge worsens as we move toward the marginalized women victims of abuse with lower education qualifications and poor socio-economic backgrounds.

Lack of social support is a very potent reason why women do not leave abusive relationships. As a crucial step of abuse, abusers cut their partners off from the world. By manipulation, they successfully isolate their partners, so they have nowhere to go if they consider leaving. Abusers isolate their partners with the view to having the latter completely dependent on them. With a support system by their side, women can have guidance, advice, encouragement, perspective on their toxic relationship, and a refuge if they decide to leave the relationship. They will feel empowered to leave and set out for a new and better life. But without such support, they feel they have no source of help. They feel they are alone.

There is also a lack of support among families who do not "accept" their married daughter to come back home after they leave their husbands. This is rooted in the age-old patriarchal belief system that a woman belongs only to her husband's house after marriage and that her husband's house is her only home. She can visit her natal home only as a "guest."

In the Indian family structure, it is a commonly held belief that a daughter is another's "property" ("*Paraya Dhan*"), and she must be a fulfilling wife and daughter-in-law. Husbands and their families hold a sacred position in this ideology, and women are subordinately placed at their disposal. Women are expected to look up to their husbands as Gods. The idea of a woman leaving her husband is looked down upon as a sin.

While speaking with the subjects of the study, quotations of such tightly held familial ideologies frequently came up which were also conditioned into the minds of those abused women. One woman said that her family had always taught her "*shadi ki doli uth jane ke baad ladki apne mayke sirf arthi me wapas aa sakti hai*" (after being wedded off in a palanquin, a daughter can only come back to her maiden home as a corpse on a bier). Women also quoted their parents who always instructed them that "*shaadi ke baad aurat ko sacrifices aur compromise karte rehna padta hai, usi se ghar chalta hai*" (a woman must always keep compromising and make sacrifices for a happy family).

The traditional Indian attitudes around married women are very stringent. They condition them to devote their lives to their husbands and in-laws without recognizing women's own identities. Such belief systems are rife with women objectification, sexism, and the evils of patriarchy. It is damaging for women who internalize it as the only truth at the cost of their own lives. For this reason, they cling to abusive relationships. They feel they would not be accepted in society and treated like outcasts if they left their husbands. The society maintains a silence around domestic abuse cases. There is a lack of support for women reeling under intimate partner violence as society normalizes abuse in a relationship. Hence, victims often crumble under this societal pressure and do not seek help.

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Women **financially dependent** on their spouses, either because of economic abuse or because the husband is the sole breadwinner of the house, find themselves straitjacketed in an abusive relationship. Financially abused women are not allowed to work or cannot access their earnings. Their partners hold complete control over their income, savings, or other financial resources (in cases where they are allowed to work). Financial dependence becomes an even more powerful factor when there are children involved. Women are concerned about how they would provide for their children if they left their earning partners. They believe financial stability is important for facilitating their child's overall development. They state that the prospect of recklessly leaving their partners to start life from scratch sounds feasible only in theory.

Research shows that although not the sole empowering factor, economic independence can be an important factor in motivating a woman to leave an abusive relationship (Dalal, 2011). Often women report failed attempts at leaving owing to the lack of adequate financial resources for themselves and their children. They also feel they may lose their child's custody as the courts favor the parent who can better provide for their children. Additionally, having been isolated from friends and family, they have no alternative to rely on.

Another reason women stay in abusive relationships is their **savior complex**. Also known as the Messiah complex or White Knight syndrome, savior complex is the need for a person to help, save or fix someone. A person with savior complex feels responsible for someone else and often makes sacrifices of personal needs to help someone else. Women especially feel responsible for the ones they love. They feel they can change someone for the better by enduring violence themselves. After an abusive episode, many women would say that their partners are just going through a rough phase, are good at heart, or "didn't mean it." They often rationalize and justify the actions of their partners. They believe they must always put their partners' needs before their own. Women feel they can change their husbands with the power of their love.

Often men show apologetic or affectionate behavior after each abusive episode. They will pretend to be the person their partner fell in love with in the first place. All these behaviors make a woman think that underneath some "bad habits," there is a loving and caring husband. Women think that they must love their partners unconditionally. They try to be a "good wife" by extending their loyalty and commitment to their abusive husbands.

In the same vein, **love bombing** also binds women to their abusive husbands. The concept, originally introduced by Psychology professor Margaret Singer in 1996 in her book, *Cults in Our Midst*, means the act of showering excessive affection and attention on a person to manipulate them. This concept forms a part of the **cycle of abuse** theory, a social cycle theory developed in 1979 by Lenore E. Walker to explain behavior patterns in an abusive relationship. This can come after every episode of abuse as a pattern. It leads women to believe that their partners actually love and care for them and put the blame on themselves. Hence, guilt, self-blame, and shame among women are very common in relationships where love bombing is cyclical. Love bombing is rife with deception and manipulation, and when women fall for them, they absolve their abusive partners of any real problematic behaviors.

Effects of Domestic Abuse on Women

Any form of violence cannot have any positive effects. Intimate partner violence has an array of short-term and long-term effects on a woman's overall health. To say that only

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physical or sexual violence damages a woman rules out the catastrophic effects of violence, coercion, and manipulation over her. Also exposed to risk are other members of the family like the children, pets, or loved ones of the women.

Between repeated episodes of violence, battered women often don't even get the time to heal. Their overall physical and psychological health is poor, with a compromised quality of life. Abused women are at a heightened direct and indirect risk of a range of health complications like grave injuries, chronic pain, disability, gynecological or reproductive disorders, excessive bleeding, miscarriages or pregnancy complications, kidney infections, organ failures, AIDS, or, in some cases, death. Murders in abusive relationships are not rare. Married women are often murdered for dowry, over-possessive husbands suspecting them of having an extramarital affair, and so on.

Women victims of spousal violence also report increased incidences of gastrointestinal problems. Arthritis or persistent joint and muscle pain and migraines or headaches are commonly reported. Urinary infections, weak pelvis or pelvic pains, and gynecological problems are one of the most common complaints that physically or sexually assaulted women present. Injuries from assault can often target victims' eyes, leaving them with black eye, bloodshot eyes, or eye infections.

Physical ramifications of violence occur not only out of physical abuse but also emotional or psychological abuse. Women who have undergone emotional abuse have reported severe distress that disrupts their occupational, social, and individual functioning. Cervical and back pains, migraines, distorted speech, vision problems, gut disorders, constipation, nausea, cardiovascular diseases, diarrhea, bladder regulation problems, and other bodily issues can come along with the psychological trauma of emotional abuse.

Emotional or mental abuse is also associated with problems with the individual psyche, like increased vulnerability to danger, helplessness, loss of power and control, and feeling trapped. This often leads to severe levels of stress, anxiety, depression, panic attacks, phobias, and delusions. Emotional abuse has been linked with distorted thoughts and coping mechanisms in its victims. Such women very commonly report suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, mental abuse is a gateway to poor self-concept, body dysmorphia, eating and sleep disorder, self-sabotage behavior, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), chain smoking, and substance abuse.

Domestic abuse leaves women traumatized for life. They develop behavioral problems, may become physically languished, and often isolate themselves from their support system. They might also indulge in unsafe sexual practices. There is a ripple effect of this trauma on the children witnessing the trauma as well. Children in abusive households show symptoms of strong and repeated visualizations of traumatic memories, trauma-specific phobias and fears, and altered attitudes and outlooks on people, life, the future, and the world. They show a predisposition to depression, anxiety, dissociation, aggressiveness, memory deficits, and speech problems and have reduced interest in social activities.

Trauma also evokes other common physical symptoms in the early phases of child development, like bed wetting, sleep disturbances, diarrhea, and vomiting. Existing literature points to the fact that children's social, psychological, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and physical development is adversely affected by their exposure to violence. Even as they grow up, they are susceptible to immaturity, regression as a defense mechanism, difficulty

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forming relationships, and trust issues. Children develop behavior based on what they have observed growing up. Children from violent homes are at high risk of becoming adult victims or abusers themselves.

Violence against women not only has health disadvantages but also prevents them from participating fully in the family, the workplace, and their community. This reduced ability to participate in community life is a vast waste of capacities, capabilities, talent, and education of one-half of the world's population. The inference to be drawn is that not only do women and their families suffer, but the community itself loses access to extremely valuable human resources.

Laws against Domestic violence in India

Crime against women is not limited to domestic abuse. Women constitute about one-half of the global population, but ironically, they are placed in various disadvantageous positions due to gender differences and bias. Called the “Weaker Sex,” they have been the target of violence for ages. It does not start after a woman gets married. It begins when she is in the womb and can continue till the end of her life. People dispose of a newborn on the grounds that she is a girl. This is when they do not already kill her in the womb.

Throughout their lives, women battle gender stereotypes and discrimination, harassment, living up to the gender roles meted out to them, and so on. They even have to fight for their education. Moreover, after marriage, they are expected to lead a life in service of their husbands, children, and in-laws. In a country with a celebrated history of the “Sati system,” married women’s lives are deeply intertwined with that of their husbands. This does not end here, as the dark shadow of objectification and abuse looms large over them.

For a very long time, domestic abuse was seen as one of the husband’s entitlements toward his wife. They used to do it with complete impunity. For a society that, as a unit, saw no real problems associated with domestic abuse, a law was to take long before coming into existence. The concept of gender equality was almost unheard of before the statute of the Constitution of India. The Preamble of the Constitution is the supreme law that seeks to safeguard and uphold all its citizens and rights.

A significant number of laws have been crafted to protect a married woman from violence by her husband and his family. India has also joined hands with various International conventions and human rights organizations with the vision to work for equal rights of women. One such body was the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993. The Constitution contains numerous measures in favor of women for equal access to socio-economic, educational, and political facilities as men. Fundamental Rights are human rights meant for all the citizens of India. These basic rights swear against discrimination on all grounds, including gender, and ensure equality before the law among all national citizens. These are best denoted in Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39 (a), 39 (b), and 42 of the Constitution.

Constitutional Privileges

- (I) Equality before the law for women (Article 14).
- (II) The State must not discriminate against any citizen on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, or origin (Article 15(i)).
- (III) The State must make special provisions in favor of women and children (Article 14 (3)).

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(IV) Equality of opportunity for all citizens with respect to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Article 16).

(V) The State must ensure the right to an adequate means of livelihood equally to men and women (Article 39(a)); and equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39 (d)).

(VI) Must promote justice based on equal opportunity and must provide free legal aid by suitable legislation, scheme, or in any other way to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities (Article 39 A).

(VII) The State must make provisions for securing just and humane work conditions and maternity relief (Article 42).

(VIII) The State must promote the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people with special care and protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Article 46).

(IX) Must promote harmony and the spirit of fraternity amongst all the people of India and renounce practices offending the dignity of women (Article 52(A) (e)).

Governments have also agreed that shelters, legal aid, and other services should be provided for at-risk girls and women, and counseling and rehabilitation for victims. Furthermore, they pledged to adopt 61 appropriate measures in the field of education to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, has been enforced from 26th October 2006 all over India. The main purpose of this Act was to provide civil remedies to the victims of domestic violence. The Act is like a civil law, which aims to safeguard women from being subjected to domestic violence. It intends to prevent the prevalence and occurrence of domestic violence in society. As per the Act, the state must provide education, sensitization, and awareness training to police officers, members of the judicial services, etc., to skilfully tackle the issue. The Act renders domestic violence a punishable offense and criminal. It applies not only to the legally married wife but also to live-in companions, anyone else living in the household, and children. In addition to punishing the man, the Act provides more effective protection for women guaranteed under the Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family. The Act includes the right of a woman to be free from abuse. She can claim custody of the child, compensation from her harassers, get a restraining order against them, and live in the house as at the time of the complaint.

Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code punishes the husband or his relatives who subject a married woman to cruelty. The Section was introduced by the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1983 to combat the menace of dowry deaths. By the same Act, Section 113A has been added to the Indian Evidence Act to the effect that when a married woman commits suicide within seven years from the date of her marriage, the Court may presume that the husband or his relatives abet such suicide. Thus, it raises a presumption regarding the abetment of suicide by a married woman. The burden of proof is on the husband or his relatives to prove it was not a dowry death.

Cruelty: The expression “cruelty” under Section 498A means any wilful conduct which is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to the life, limb, or health of the woman. Therefore, mere demand of dowry by the husband or his relatives amounts to cruelty under this Section.

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Similarly, where out of a sense of vindictiveness, the husband instituted vexatious litigations against his wife, and she was humiliated and tortured by reason of the execution of search warrants and seizure of personal property, it was held that the Section was wide enough to encompass cruelty committed through an abuse of the limitation process. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code states that if the husband or his family perpetrates violence or cruelty in all its forms toward his wife, they will be liable to imprisonment for up to three years as well as a fine. This applies to any act of cruelty or provocation of the woman to commit suicide or scourge grave injury upon herself (mental or physical).

An Act was passed in 1984 to set up Family Courts in the country to promote reconciliation and secure speedy settlement of disputes relating to marriage and family affairs and for matters connected therewith.

The Dowry Prohibition Act was first registered in 1961. It was amended in 1984 to make the offense cognizable to enhance the penalty of both fine and imprisonment and to widen the scope of the Act to make it more effective. The Act was further amended in 1980 to make the penal provisions more effective and stringent. The minimum punishment for taking or abetting the demand for dowry has been raised to five years and a fine of Rs. 15,000. Advertisements in newspapers, periodicals, etc., offering a share of the property as consideration for marriage are punishable. The amendment proposes the appointment of Dowry prohibition officers by the State Government. Offenses under the Act have been made non-bailable. A new offense of dowry death has been included in the Indian Penal Code, consequential to the amendment of the Act. A variety of laws framed from time to time seek to ensure that women are not discriminated against and exploited just because they are women.

Section 304 B of the Indian Penal Code deals with dowry deaths. It punishes a husband or his relatives if the married woman dies due to any burns or bodily injury under mysterious circumstances within seven years of her marriage and if it is shown that soon before her death, she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or his relatives in connection with any demand for dowry. (Sultana, 2015)

A law against domestic violence is necessary to prevent domestic violence crimes. It creates a fear of punishment in the offenders. Many women take the course of law to redress their domestic abuse concerns. For many, it has proved fruitful in giving abusive people their due. However, saying that the law is completely accessible and effective would be far from the truth. There are several limitations of the law:

1. According to the exception to Section 375, IPC sexual intercourse by the man with his own wife if she is not under the age of fifteen years does not amount to rape. Non-consensual sex within marriage is known as **marital rape**. In terms of sexual violence, the average Indian woman is 17 times more likely to face sexual violence from her husband than from anyone else. (National Family Health Survey 4, 2015) An essential ingredient to prove the crime of rape is to prove the lack of consent. In such instances, the thought of marital rape becomes hostile. India remains one of the few countries worldwide that does not treat non-consensual sex within marriage as rape.
2. Proper implementation of the Act needs great attention.
3. Indian society is a traditional society based on cultural ethics and morals. Because of this traditional conservative form of society, women are reluctant to move out of the four walls of their house and file complaints or register cases in the police stations

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and Courts, respectively, just for the sake of the prestige and reputation of their families in the society.

4. The victim avoids reporting the matter to the police on the pretext of being harassed by the police. Involvement of police may lead to embarrassment of family members.
5. The Criminal Justice System of our country has failed to develop confidence among the common people because of its slow and complicated procedures. As a result of which, victims of domestic violence avoid entrapment in the Criminal Justice system.
6. The police are also reluctant to record the matters of domestic violence in the police diary and generally ask the victims to settle the disputes at home.
7. Lack of awareness among women about the provisions of PWDVA and the safeguards it provides is also one of the main reasons why women are reluctant to complain about the menace of domestic violence.
8. The Police officers have not been given any special training regarding the Act's requirements and purpose. They also lack sensitivity toward the issue of domestic violence.

Rationale of the study

The global outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the face of the Earth. The loss in all aspects of the world as a global unit has been tremendous. The world was put on a stringent lockdown to curb the virus. It was a catastrophe that not only claimed millions of human lives worldwide but also broke down the global economy, stripped millions of people of their jobs, put public mental and physical health in shambles, and collapsed the healthcare systems worldwide. Nearly 3 years into the pandemic, its effects are here to stay.

Domestic violence cases in the covid-19 lockdowns skyrocketed across the world. It was a nightmare coming alive for women who found themselves locked up with their abusive husbands in their houses. For a period demanding isolation, abused women were absolutely cut off from the world with no help in sight. They could not seek refuge in government shelter homes or report to a police station. **The Print** reports that the National Commission for Women (NCW) in India registered double the number of usual complaints (an increase of 2.5 times) of intimate partner violence in April 2020 (Taskin, 2021). Organizations like Shakti Shalini that did report a lack in the number of cases attributed it to the confinement of women in their houses and constant monitoring by their abuser. The **United Nations** called this a “Shadow Pandemic” amidst the Covid-19 crisis. (*The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19* / UN Women – Headquarters, n.d.).

Thus, studying domestic violence in the context of India became imperative. Women finding it difficult to leave their abusive relationships in lockdowns makes sense. However, under otherwise non-pandemic situations, a baffling question remained – “why do women struggle or fail to leave their abusive relationships?” There is scarce existing literature on this question, so it was necessary to go on the ground and understand women’s own perspectives on the subject in question in their own words. The purpose of this is to get an insight into the abused women’s psychology behind staying in abusive relationships.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to review the recent and current research response to domestic abuse in all its forms, with a special focus on married or ever-married women. Hence, the initial part of the literature gives a general idea about the basic concepts of aging. The review is focused on the aging scenario, problems faced by the elderly, the experience of

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elder neglect and abuse, Risk factors of abuse and neglect, existing social security measures, and the role of social work in the field of aging.

A study by **Ruth Andina et al. (2020)** attempts to discuss the factors behind the phenomenon of rising domestic violence cases in several countries during the Covid-19 pandemic. It also investigates the phenomenon implications in the context of gender theories when domestic violence was on the rise globally, irrespective of the ranking of countries on the Gender Development Index. The paper closely examines how the governments of three countries- Australia, Indonesia, and India - approach this issue. Rankings in the order of high to low go as: Australia followed by Indonesia, with India ranked the lowest. A brief explanation and conclusion regarding this non-endemic issue will also be extracted from each country's individual variables.

Yadav (2019), through her culture-specific study, examines domestically abused women's perspectives on the efficacy of Indian laws against domestic abuse. To this end, the researcher also analyzed the legal provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. The results of the study reported that women emphasized more on change in societal attitude, awareness of rights, education and economic freedom than the law.

A qualitative study undertaken by **Joshi (2019)** attempted to bring to the attention a relatively unconventional subject: domestic violence counseling. It permeated not only the feminist view but also other ideologies surrounding domestic violence. The study presents a subtle comprehension of counselors' practices and framework for working with domestic violence issues. With their feminist analysis in place, she explores several other factors involved in domestic abuse. Lastly, including men in counseling setups would work well in order to understand the problems associated with toxic masculinity and manhood.

A study by **Herring (2018)** argues that domestic violence should not be dismissed as simply a conflict taking place in a family in their home. Instead, domestic violence is tainted with some distinct kinds of evils that set it apart from regular family conflicts. First, domestic abuse commonly involves coercive and manipulative control. Second, domestic abuse must be looked at as a serious abuse of trust. Third, it adversely impacts the children belonging to abusive homes. Fourth, it adds to and reflects the inequalities faced by women. This goes on to show that fighting the issue of domestic abuse should have the government's active involvement. Not only this, it must be among their top priorities.

In a study by **Kumar (2017)**, the experience, belief system, coping mechanisms, and self-esteem among domestically abused married women in Madurai District were at the core. The relationship among the said 4 variables was also to be identified. The sample was composed of 342 married women belonging to Madurai District, Tamil Nadu, aged between 20 and 60 years, and were either working or homemakers.

The findings were that there was an association between the said 4 variables. They were related to their educational qualification, number of years of marriage, employment status, organizations where they were employed, their income, family type, rural or urban residence, owned or rented house, number of children they had, and number of people at home.

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Furthermore, coping strategies adopted by the married women were linked to the form of abuse they experienced, i.e., physical, emotional, financial, or sexual. Lastly, the belief(s) married women hold in terms of their rights and the abuse had a negative association with the coping strategy, similar to their self-esteem.

Singh (2016) studied the existing socio-legal framework around wife battery and domestic violence. Her report has examined the legal problems and instruments with respect to domestic violence and wife battery nationally and internationally. It also looks at the said issues through the lens of human rights. The results stated that the women live in fear of the abuser and in-laws. The fear is of the consequences they will have to face if it comes to light that they are seeking legal redressal against the domestic abuse perpetrated on them. The majority of women in the study have little or no knowledge of women's commissions or the laws against domestic abuse.

The legal bodies and provisions frequently prove helpless, as reported by the responders citing the overload of cases on the lower courts and the increasing number of domestic violence complaints. Thus, the respondents feel defeated by both the social and legal ecology of the country.

A systematic review of 137 quantitative studies over a decade by Kalokhe, Rio, Dunkle, Stephenson, **Metheny, Paranjape and Sahay (2014)** revealed substantial inter-study variance in the estimate of prevalence of Domestic abuse. The study linked it partly with difference populations and settings and partly with the lack of standardization, validation, and cultural adaptation of DV survey instruments. The study identified the lacunae of existing literature by discovering that there was scarcity of studies assessing the abusive experiences of women over the age 50, living in cohabitating relationships, same-sex relationships, tribal villages, and of women from the northern regions of India. Additionally, the study highlights a chasm in researches assessing the impact of domestic abuse on physical health. The study calls for additional qualitative and longitudinal quantitative studies so as to explore the domestic violence correlates proposed by this quantitative literature. This is necessary for the development of a culturally customized domestic violence scale and prevention strategies.

In her sociological study on domestic violence against women, **Savita (2014)** has attempted to find out the causes, forms, and culprits of domestic violence prevalent in Bohar village in the Rohtak district of Haryana. Against the backdrop of the socio-economic status of women, the findings of the reports revealed that women with higher educational qualifications face less domestic violence than those with lower educational qualifications. Further, women in joint families face more violence than ones in nuclear families. Findings regarding the causes behind domestic violence revealed by most respondents were violence due to domestic work, patriarchy, dowry, alcohol abuse, unemployment, and poverty. Additionally, findings regarding reasons for tolerating domestic violence by the respondents were as follows: fear of parental family members, publicity, and economic dependency.

Sangeetha (2014) examines the Protection of Women's Human Rights in light of domestic violence. The study focuses on how the rights of battered women are violated in a domestic setting. Additionally, reasons for domestic violence, its various forms, the need for Special Legislation on Domestic Violence, and problems of Gender Justice are also put under the microscope. The findings reported that the Indian laws on the status of women came into force after the Independence of the country when the Constitution was formed. However, the

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legal setup in India is almost ineffective and inadequate in either uprooting or curbing domestic violence. This points to the fact that a stringent, enforceable, and special law is needed to tackle domestic violence in India.

Farooqui (2012) studied the role of gender inequality in domestic violence in India. Among other propositions of the study, one was that domestic abuse has adverse effects on women's political and civil rights. The results revealed that there had been a significant change in the public perception and attitudes toward gender discrimination. The majority of women who were surveyed held the belief that men and women are equal. It was also discovered that the awareness of rights and the law against domestic abuse (The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005) depended on certain factors like the socio-economic, cultural, and educational background of the respondents.

Findings also revealed that working respondents from the middle- and higher-income categories reported that violence is more in their category. Regarding education, the lesser educated respondents reported that violence is "equal if not more" among the uneducated compared to the educated families, as in the latter's case, everything bad happens behind "closed doors." Therefore, it is evident that women experience domestic violence irrespective of their class, caste, or country. The study also highlights the gross underreporting of domestic violence cases by women to the concerned authorities out of fear or compliance with the patriarchal culture.

According to **Mahapatro, Gupta, and Gupta (2012)**, women in India who have a lower socio-economic status, education qualification, belong to a lower caste, and have a partner with alcohol or gambling problems or addiction, etc., were discovered to be greater risk factors of spousal violence. Their paper aimed to examine the prevalence of physical, psychological, and sexual violence in domestic settings. Furthermore, by basing their study on women with different background characteristics such as age, religion, caste, education, occupation, and income and deriving their association, they have also outlined potential risk factors for domestic abuse among women.

A study by **Kimuna et al. (2012)** also examines the prevalence and risk factors of domestic violence in India. The study utilizes the 2005-2006 India National Family Health Survey-III (NFHS-III). Some of the most prominent findings of the study are that urban residence, household wealth, affiliation with (Christian) religious denominations, wife's age at marriage, and education are associated with a lower risk of physical and sexual violence. In contrast, working women married to alcohol-consuming (or addicted) men were at a higher risk of undergoing both physical and sexual violence. Domestic violence is more likely experienced by respondents who believed that physical violence or wife-beating was warranted under certain circumstances. These results pointed to the fact that both gender role conditioning and cultural beliefs add to domestic violence. Therefore, it suggested that interventions are not only required at the disposal of legal provisions but also on an interpersonal level.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

This study operationalizes under the broad area called 'trauma bond relationships.' This term was originally used by Dutton and Painter (1981) to describe the deep and intense emotional attachment that an abused person feels towards an abuser despite repeated cycles of abuse. This can happen over a span of time spent in close contact with the abuser. Trauma bond relationships are very unhealthy but difficult to walk out of at the same time. The term

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is used interchangeably with Stockholm syndrome; however, there is a minor difference between them. In Stockholm syndrome, a type of trauma bond, the emotional attachment goes both ways, i.e., the abuser is attached to the abused and vice versa. Stockholm syndrome derives its name from a bank robbery incident in 1973 in Stockholm, Sweden. After being held captive for six days, the Bank employees showed signs of sympathy and attachment toward the robbers. So much so that after being freed by the police, most of them refused to testify against the robbers in court. Interestingly, on the contrary, they started raising funds for their defense.

Trauma bonds (and Stockholm syndrome) have an abused sympathize with their abuser. This is presumably a coping mechanism to their situation of abuse so as to survive their traumatic and abusive relationship. A characteristic feature of traumatic bonds is that the abused persons may often react negatively to the ones who want to help them. This would mean a psychological affinity to their abuser but hostility to their well-wishers. This is a confusing dynamic but may result from being in an emotionally charged situation with the abuser for a long time.

1. To investigate the reasons why married women do not leave abusive relationships despite repeated cycles of abuse.
2. To understand married women's perspective on marriage and their relationship with their spousal partner.
3. To highlight the psychological and social resources available to married women crucial in facilitating their estrangement from their abusive partner.
4. To provide suggestions that can assist in minimizing instances of domestic abuse.

METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature. Subjects were chosen on the basis of the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where a subject of the study nominates other potential subjects for the study. Semi-structured interviews with 11 married or ever-married women were conducted in-person or telephonically, as and how they felt comfortable speaking. Women from different castes, religions, educational qualifications, and socio-economic backgrounds were emphasized equally. After initial rapport building with each one of them, informed consent was taken. They were also reassured that their information would be strictly confidential and used only for research purposes.

Based on their responses, the conclusion was drawn, and the result is prepared.

Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a group relevant to the purpose of the study from which data has to be collected. A sample is a part of the bigger population, thereby representative of the said population. The sampling for the study has been done on a non-random basis, also known as non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is a subjective method of sampling in which not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study, unlike probability sampling.

Eleven abused women from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, and New Delhi between the ages of 20 and 49 were selected based on the snowball sampling technique. No specific ineligibility factors based on caste, religion, class, origin, income, or education level were followed. The research idea was disseminated among peers along with the study's complete details and promise of confidentiality. Responses were tended to, and a sample of 10 abused women was selected. These women participated voluntarily in the study.

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Scope of the study

This study operates within the periphery of trauma bond relationships. It views enduring abusive relationships in domestic settings as forms of traumatic bonding. The study's purpose is to investigate the reasons for this traumatic bonding of abused women with their abusive spouses. The study explores the perspectives that married women have, or ever married women had with respect to their situation by interviewing them. This is demonstrated by a specimen of the questions asked to the participants during the interview:

1. What are your views on marriage?
2. How is your relationship with your husband? What do you think of him?
3. What stresses do you experience in your relationship with your husband?
4. What are the things that are holding your relationship together?

Several other questions aim at them to get an insight into the headspace of women who do not leave abusive relationships. However, the study does not focus on the domestic abuse men face or the reasons men have to perpetrate violence against their partners. The focus is also not on cohabitating persons, irrespective of gender, undergoing domestic violence. The study looms within the boundary of viewing domestic abuse in marital relationships as a gender violence.

Limitations of the study

Domestic abuse is not a unidimensional issue. It is layered with complexities and has several aspects to it. Due to time constraints, this study has been only able to focus on one such aspect of it – the reasons for the inability or difficulty women face to leave their abusive marital relationships. Touching upon other areas of this subject is essential in light of getting a profound knowledge of the issue of domestic abuse. For a subject like domestic abuse, there is lots of ground to cover to prove it inclusive and informative.

Owing to the same constraints, the study has based its findings on interviews with eleven abused women. Obtaining information from a bigger sample size broadens the horizon for more subjective experiences. In the same vein, the study has taken a detour from its quantitative analysis, which could make way for more meaningful and fascinating avenues in the study.

A subject like domestic abuse is a sensitive territory. Traumatized victims are intimidated, hesitant, or in denial of their experiences. Hence, sharing their story does not come naturally and easily, especially when interviews are involved. Some are unaware- that what they are going through is not normal or qualifies as a form of abuse. Women find themselves more at ease talking about their experiences anonymously through survey forms than in face-to-face interviews.

RESULTS

The results of a study have been derived from semi-structured interviews with 11 married or ever-married women between the ages of 20 and 49 years who have experienced intimate partner abuse. The women had the freedom not to answer the question(s) they did not want. They were promised confidentiality, i.e., non-disclosure of their personal information, and informed consent was obtained from them before the interviews. They were given the option to either talk face-to-face or telephonically. The questions in the interview explored the subjects of marriage, the position of a woman in marriage, problems or stressors in a marriage, problems with their spouses, and the presence of a support system. Background information like their age, educational qualification, religion, marital status (married,

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widowed, separated), working or non-working, income (if working), number of children, family type (joint or nuclear), and their husband's information was obtained. This information is useful in understanding the sample, drawing inferences, and finding patterns across the sample.

Interview 1

Age: 42 years

Educational qualifications: Postgraduate

Religion: Hindu

Marital status: Widow

Years of marriage: 19 years

Working/ Non-working: Non-working

Number of children: 2

Family type: Nuclear

Onset of abuse: Ever since marriage

Type of abuse: Physical, emotional, sexual

Respondent states that she loved her husband, but he disliked her as he was from an affluent familial background, and she belonged to a small, rural town. She reports that her husband was always too embarrassed by her and looked down upon her. She mentioned that he always had the reputation of being a "spoilt and aggressive" brat. He would beat her with different objects, yell derogatory curses, and rape her. Responder states that she always strived to be the "perfect wife", trying to adjust to her in-laws and abusive husband. Not just herself but her children were also subjected to physical, emotional, and sexual violence. He consumed alcohol and brought another woman home.

She also lacked any social support as her family married her off by instructing her that "*shadi ki doli uth jane ke baad ladki apne mayke sirf arthi me wapas aa sakti hai*" (after being wedded off in a palanquin, a daughter can only come back to her maiden home as a corpse on a bier). They also dismissed her when she took up her complaints to them. When asked how the respondent felt in the relationship, she reiterated the words "jailed," "bonded," and "depressed." Finally, when asked why she did not leave her husband, she said, "to protect the future of my children" and that she was financially dependent on her husband. She said she did not have the "strength" in her to work as she was too battered and felt very weak to work.

Interview 2

Age: 47 years

Educational qualifications: Postgraduate

Religion: Hindu

Marital status: Married

Years of marriage: 28 years

Working/ Non-working: Non-working

Number of children: 2

Family type: Joint

Onset of abuse: Ever since marriage

Type of abuse: Emotional

Respondent hails from an upper-middle-class family background and states that she was married off at the age of 21 into a rural family. She states the marriage was "marred with

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incompatibility ever since it happened.” She reports that she was emotionally tortured by her in-laws, who also isolated her from her family. Respondent says that despite bringing in a large amount of furniture, utensils, cash, and a vehicle in the dowry, her in-laws constantly demanded more. Her husband used to be “indifferent” to the psychological abuse perpetrated by his family upon her. She reports that with the continued emotional abuse during her first pregnancy, she went so deep into depression that she attempted suicide. She lacked social support as she was forced into isolation by her in-laws. Finally, when asked why she did not leave her husband, she said, “for my children and because I had nowhere else to go.”

Interview 3

Age: 25 years

Educational qualifications: Undergraduate

Religion: Christian

Marital status: Divorced

Years of marriage: 4 years

Working/ Non-working: Working

Number of children: 1

Family type: Nuclear

Onset of abuse: Before marriage; dating period

Type of abuse: Emotional, financial, and sexual

Respondent says that she was dating her husband from her college years and had a child out of wedlock with him. They got married after having the child. She said that he prevented her from working, took away her car, which she used to commute to and from work, did not pay her phone bill and used to throw objects near her to break them and threaten her, punched the walls, verbally threatened and coerced her to do things that she did not want to. She calls him a “dangerous man.” However, she did not realize that all this qualified for “domestic abuse” until her therapist educated her on her situation. She also reported not comprehending many of his sexual actions as rape.

When asked why she would find it so difficult to leave for good, she said she attempted to leave the relationship two times before successfully leaving on the third attempt. She reported that she once came back to her husband because she lost her job and had nowhere else to go, and the other time because he promised to “change for the better.” However, he repeated those behaviors, which is when she left for good. The respondent also stated that she did not try to leave the relationship for a long time because she was not aware that she was experiencing domestic abuse as she had “no real scars or bruises on her body to show for.” She stated that she had witnessed violence in her childhood when her father would batter her mother, so she thought she was in a “better off” position. All her friends were her husband’s friends, and after the divorce of her parents, she had no access to them. Hence, she did not have any real social support.

Interview 4

Age: 39 years

Educational qualifications: Undergraduate

Religion: Muslim

Marital status: Separated

Years of marriage: 12 years

Working/ Non-working: Working

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Number of children: 0
Family type: Nuclear
Onset of abuse: few months after the marriage
Type of abuse: Emotional, financial, and physical

Respondent said her husband had initially begun the abuse by subtle offensive remarks. He gradually increased the severity of the abuse to battering her. She reported that he would constantly tell her how worthless she was and scorn her profession as a hairdresser. She said it was “mentally destroying” her. She stated that at one point in the relationship, he forced her to leave her job, so she became financially dependent on him.

When she approached her social circle with her idea of leaving, they blamed her and made her feel terrible about her “selfish” decision. She did not get the support that she was anticipating. Finally, when asked why she would find it so difficult to leave for good, she attributed enduring the abuse for 12 long years because she internalized her husband’s opinion that she was worthless and did not deserve any better. She stated that she had become completely hopeless, powerless, and accepting of her situation.

Interview 5

Age: 22 years
Educational qualifications: Senior Secondary
Religion: Hindu
Marital status: Married
Years of marriage: 3 years
Working/ Non-working: Working
Number of children: 1
Family type: Nuclear
Onset of abuse: Ever since marriage
Type of abuse: Financial

The current relationship is not the first abusive relationship in the respondent’s life. A serious relationship before her marriage and in her college life, also had a history of violence (physical). The respondent reports that her husband keeps her earnings with himself for “safety purposes.” She states that he often forces her to leave her work, does not give access to her own income, keeps a tab on all her expenditures, and yells at her if she ever wants to make some necessary expenses.

On being asked what is stopping her from leaving her husband, she said that “Men are like that. My ex-boyfriend used to hit me. My husband is a better person as he does not hit me, at least.” Another fascinating point made by her as to why she is not leaving her abusive relationship was that “I attract such men.”

Interview 6

Age: 29 years
Educational qualifications: Undergraduate
Religion: Hindu
Marital status: Separated
Years of marriage: 3 years
Working/ Non-working: Non-working
Number of children: 0

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Family type: Nuclear
Onset of abuse: 2-3 months after marriage
Type of abuse: Psychological and physical

Respondent reported that 2-3 months into the marriage, her in-laws started demanding dowry from her. She complied and had her parents arrange some dowry, but “it was not enough for them; they wanted more.” The verbal abuse went on in demands of a car as part of the dowry. The respondent says she was pregnant when her in-laws spilled kerosene over her and set her on fire one day. She suffered 70% burns over her body alongside a miscarriage. She was hospitalized for a year.

The subject states that before the burning episode, she confided in her family regarding what she was going through. However, they said it was “normal” as “part of every relationship.” They encouraged her to tolerate it and comply with whatever her husband said to preserve the relationship. On being asked what was stopping her to leave her husband before, she states that she was always taught by her family to respect one’s in-laws and husband. She also said that she did not have any knowledge about measures against domestic violence.

Interview 7

Age: 22 years
Educational qualifications: Senior Secondary
Religion: Muslim
Marital status: Married
Years of marriage: 4 years
Working/ Non-working: Non-working
Number of children: 2
Family type: Nuclear
Onset of abuse: Ever since marriage
Type of abuse: Psychological and physical

Respondent states that she and her husband eloped and married right after their senior secondary exams. She says she belongs to a rich, upper class while he is a “son of an idol maker.” She reports that her husband has irrational beliefs that she is having an extramarital affair and is overly jealous. He always criticizes and humiliates her, especially for her outer appearance, as she is “dark-skinned and skinny.”

When asked what was stopping her to leave her husband, she states that her children are very small (one being 2.5 months old and the other 9 months old). She said she could not go to her family or friends as she eloped without telling anyone, so she has nowhere to go. She is also financially dependent on her husband.

Interview 8

Age: 27 years
Educational qualifications: Senior Secondary
Religion: Hindu
Marital status: Widow
Years of marriage: 8 years
Working/ Non-working: Working
Number of children: 2
Family type: Joint

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Onset of abuse: Two years after marriage

Type of abuse: Psychological, financial, and physical

Respondent says she was only 19 years old when she married her husband. She said her family did not second the marriage as it was an inter-caste marriage. Soon after the marriage, her husband ended up unemployed while she was working. She said he started doubting her for a love affair outside of marriage and became overly paranoid. He started physically and emotionally torturing her. She stated that she had his father take him to a psychiatrist, where he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. After his diagnosis, she decided to support him, but his behavior did not change. Following this, she got pregnant, and during this time also, she was brutally battered, so much so that she attempted suicide.

The subject states that her husband used to bring other women home. Even after their son was born, her husband would abuse her and not give her money for their everyday expenses. He would force her to leave work when she started working to provide for her newborn. He would also force her and their toddler out of the house on chilly winter nights. She also reported that he married another woman without divorcing her, after which the in-laws tortured her badly.

The respondent said that she tried to leave her husband five times before successfully leaving him for good. When asked what was making it so difficult for her to leave the relationship, she stated that she did not have her family's support in leaving her husband. Additionally, she was not aware of how to take legal recourse. She said that she came back sometimes out of poverty, for her newborn child, or other times at the promise of her husband changing for the better until her husband passed away during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Interview 9

Age: 37 years

Educational qualifications: Postgraduate

Religion: Christian

Marital status: Separated

Years of marriage: 14 years

Working/ Non-working: Working

Number of children: 2

Family type: Nuclear

Onset of abuse: 6 months after marriage

Type of abuse: Psychological, sexual, financial, and physical

Respondent states that initially, the abuse began as emotional manipulation and threats. She states that she worked as a successful publisher, and in the beginning, her husband was "the perfect man." As time passed, he grew "monstrous," quoted the woman, and began hitting her badly and raping her. She said he would also hurt her beloved pet dog, and one day the dog went missing, for which she blames her husband that he might have killed it. He also used to show up at her workplace and make a scene, so she lost her job. He also isolated her from her family and threatened them of harming them fatally. He also tried to strangle her once when she managed to escape.

When asked why she did not leave him for such a long time, she said that she was scared that if she left him, he would have hunted her to kill her or her family members. Also, after losing her job, she was financially dependent on him.

Interview 10

Age: 33 years
Educational qualifications: Postgraduate and higher
Religion: Hindu
Marital status: Separated
Years of marriage: 10 years
Working/ Non-working: Working
Number of children: 1
Family type: Nuclear
Onset of abuse: Few months after marriage
Type of abuse: Psychological, sexual, and physical

Respondent said she fell in love with her husband when she met him. She states he was very “charming and “soft mannered” when she met him. After they got married, a few months passed before he started bullying her for her weight, labeled her worthless, and stripped her of her power and self-confidence. She stated that she became depressed and had suicidal ideations. He also began sexually abusing her. She reported not informing any of her family because she was feeling ashamed and embarrassed and also because the family adored her husband too much. Eventually she was isolated from them by him. He monitored every move of the subject, as stated by her.

On being asked why she did not leave her abusive husband, she said she left him once, but he convinced her that he would change for the better and take therapy sessions and anger management classes, but he never did. She calls it all a “façade.” Her husband then strangled her and threatened her to never try to leave in the future. She was scared for her and her child’s life at the prospect of leaving, but she left him after 10 years.

Interview 11

Age: 21 years
Educational qualifications: Postgraduate
Religion: Hindu
Marital status: Divorced
Years of marriage: 2 years
Working/ Non-working: Non-working
Number of children: 1
Family type: Nuclear
Onset of abuse: Few months after marriage
Type of abuse: Psychological, sexual, financial, and physical

The respondent stated that her parents severely neglected her and emotionally and physically abused her from when she was 18 months old. This included being hit with items like shoes and dragged down the stairs by her hair. She said that her dad broke her arm twice. She reported that her first long-term intimate partner was very abusive as he raped and beat her and tried to kill her. He strangled her with a wire and threw her against a wall when she was pregnant with his child. After the baby’s birth, it continued, and he started sexually abusing her too. While living together, he also claimed financial benefits in her name without her consent or knowledge (forging her signature on the forms, pushing her into debt, etc.). He kept all the money from her and did not share his wages.

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When asked why she did not leave him, she stated that she and her child relied solely on him to feed them, keep a roof over their heads, etc. She said that once, she tried to escape, but he found out and stopped her. She tried another time by moving 250 miles away to safety, but she reports having spent those three years in poverty. She moved back to her old area three years later, and under the impression that it would then be safe, he tracked them down within three months. She also stated that at the time, she was young (18 years old) and hence, did not know about “women’s shelter” and other resources.

DISCUSSION

The results from the study have outlined several observations, patterns, and also the various reasons owing to which abused women cannot leave their abusive relationship at all or experience several failed attempts before leaving for good.

It was found that 90% of the women in the study acknowledged the lack of social support. This can vary as a primary reason where they do not leave due to the lack of backing of their family, friends, relatives, and other members of the society or a secondary reason where the major reason for not leaving is something else and the lack of social support is a supplement to the said reason. This lack of social support or support system can be forced on them by their partners as a form of abuse where they deliberately isolate them from other members of the society so that help is not sought or can be self-inflicted where the abused women isolate themselves because they feel that their family or friends would not support their decision to leave or blame them. It can also be perhaps out of learned helplessness where they feel attempts to escape are no good as they are bound to suffer.

This is in line with the findings of the study conducted by **Shukla (2010)**, who examined the role of social support in domestic violence dynamics. He found that it played a crucial role in either empowering women to leave or to pressure them to stay back.

The study also discovered that 90% of the sample reported multiple reasons for not leaving their abusive husbands. Their reasons were multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. This means they do not provide one solid reason independent of other reasons but report several intertwined considerations at the thought of leaving their husbands. Thus, proving the assumption that domestic violence is a complex subject. There is an interplay of various reasons why a woman does not leave an abusive relationship.

This is also supported by various studies done over the years in attempts to understand intimate partner violence. Studies like those conducted by **Kichloo and Chopra (2012)** and **Ramaswamy (2015)** have shown that women stay in abusive relationships for various reasons intertwined with each other.

It was observed that all the women showed symptoms of depression in their marital period when asked about the state of their health. They used words like “depressed,” “enslaved,” “maddening,” “dangerous,” “jailed,” “suicide,” “dead inside,” “torture,” “hell,” etc., to explain their conditions.

The study noted that women who married young, i.e., at, around, or before 18 years of age, have been observed to be at a higher risk of domestic violence. This increased vulnerability is because of the extrapolation of several faculties, like lack of financial resources, lack of knowledge about the laws against domestic violence and other legal resources, lack of social support, poor self-esteem, and so forth.

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This is supported by a study conducted by **Sarkar (2008)**, who found that women who married young due to familial pressure, elopement, and so on are at an increased risk of prolonged and frequent spousal abuse.

It was further discovered that 40% of the women from the sample have reported that their children were also subjected to some forms of abuse during the course of their marriage, of which physical abuse of the child was the most common, followed by emotional abuse and sexual abuse. This is not in consideration of the fact that all the women from the sample who had children also reported that their children had witnessed the abuse perpetrated on the women by their husbands.

It was noted that 30% of the women reported having been abused by their in-laws either in conjunction with spousal violence or without the spouses as accomplices, where they act as passive enablers of the abuse.

The study showed that 50% of the women did not leave or struggled to leave the abusive relationship because of the sake of their children among other reasons provided. This is diversely due to the protectiveness of the child or for their better and economically stable future or to not pull away the child from the idea of a “family” where the child is not alienated from their father or because of the financial dependence of the wife on the husband. This is supported by an array of studies done by researchers over the years.

Additionally, 60% of the women did not leave or struggled to leave because they were financially dependent on their husbands, among other reasons provided. This is diversely due to the husband being the sole breadwinner of the house or perpetrating financial abuse to keep the economic resources of his wife under his control. Thus, the women have no access to their own share of finances.

The results also indicate that 30% of the women did not leave or struggled to leave the abusive relationship because they fell for the idea that their husbands would change for the better. This has been seen to come after one or more attempts at leaving the abusive relationship.

40% of the women were observed to be tied in abusive relationships owing to a lack of knowledge. This lack of knowledge is broad in the sense that it can be about the redressal mechanisms, socio-legal resources available to them, or even about what they are going through as a form of abuse. In cases of non-physical violence like emotional, verbal, or psychological violence, religious and technological violence, women feel that there is no abuse as they have not been physically beaten. In instances of sexual abuse, they believe that their husbands are entitled to their bodies. Alternatively, sexual instance, by definition, is not restricted to a forceful act of penetration but can be any form of forceful sexual touch or act advanced at a victim without their consent. Women often lack this knowledge and do not address their sexual abuse if they have not been “raped.”

40% of the women did not leave or struggled to leave because of their ideological conditioning of patriarchy. This self-belief is reinforced when they try to reach out to their families, who normalize the abuse as an indispensable part of marital relationships. Women with a childhood history of abuse (either subjected to or witnessed) often grow up to internalize the experience, often viewing spousal abuse as “a part of every woman’s life.” For them, spousal violence is common in marriages. With a family structure entrenched in

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patriarchy, action is either not sought for this reason or is discouraged by the other family members.

The study also found that 20% of the women did not leave or struggled to leave because of low self-esteem and poor self-concept. They internalized their husbands' version of them and felt they did not deserve any better. Hence, this self-inflicted cycle of victimization is a result of issues with self-worth and learned helplessness.

Finally, 20% of the women endured abusive relationships for a long time because they were scared of the possible deadly outcomes of leaving their abusive partners. They reported being scared that on leaving their partners, either they or their loved ones were at risk of being harmed by their partner. They also did not rule out murders at the hands of their abusive partners. Thus, staying in the relationship was like a "protective response."

CONCLUSION

Domestic abuse is a more common occurrence than we might get to know. It often occurs behind closed doors and makes a person live in danger each day of their lives. Traumatic bonding in an abusive marital relationship is exceptionally harmful. An "outsider," for example, a neighbor or relative, who notices the signs of abuse in someone's marital relationship may also find it difficult to help the victim if the victim rationalizes the actions of their spouse or denies help. In this sense, traumatic bonding in an abusive relationship makes it difficult for someone to either voluntarily leave the relationship or accept help from someone else.

Implication

This study investigates the possible causes of traumatic bonding in intimate partner violence. It presents a comprehensive account of abused women's relationships in light of their personal and subjective experiences. It views women's decision to stay in their abusive marital relationship with their husbands despite repeated cycles of abuse as a traumatic bonding. The study aims to prevent the victimization of women in domestic violence cases and probe into the subject from their internal frame of reference. In this vein, it intends to add value by taking on a rather empathetic approach to interviewing abused women and understanding the prevalence of their situation from their perspective. Thus, in doing so, it takes into account a multifactorial stance where several other constructs that inevitably come into play are also explored. The study intends to further enrich the inventory of existing studies undertaken in the convoluted area of domestic abuse.

Suggestions

- Gender education from a young age, not only in terms of physical anatomy but also its social, political, and economic constructs interwoven with patriarchy, must be provided to males and females alike. This may include education about the evils of patriarchy, gender roles, fragile masculinity, toxic masculinity, male ego, sexism in occupational and socio-political spheres of society, gender violence, and the importance of consent in intimate relationships.
- Police, healthcare, and judicial personnel must be adequately trained and sensitized to handle domestic abuse cases empathetically without victim-blaming and entrapping women in red tape for redressal.
- Revision and strengthening of the laws against domestic violence. Revision of the law is necessary to make it inclusive, as marital rape is still legal in the country.

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Furthermore, there is no provision for compensation to abused women; only laws regarding the offender's punishment find their place in the Constitution. Reviewing such provisions can prove to be indiscriminate and empowering.

- Speedy trials and delivery of justice to women victims of domestic laws.
- Improving the accessibility and functioning of governmental and non-governmental organizations, helpline services, court systems, etc., working to help domestic abuse victims by equipping them with available resources.
- Free counseling of women victims of domestic abuse so as to improve their overall well-being and empower them with self-help skills so that they can maximize personal development and not be silent recipients of abuse.
- Unlearning rigid gender roles and beliefs and learning inclusiveness and compassion towards human experiences irrespective of gender. Collective attitudes of society towards domestic abuse can reform when change begins on an individual level. Social support can be a valuable asset for women in distress.
- Providing vocational skills to distressed women to mainstream them into the workforce. Financial independence, although not exclusively, can empower women to not endure violence for the sake of obtaining basic necessities for themselves and their children.

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Acknowledgement

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Raj, V. & Dandona, A. (2023). A Study on Traumatic Bonding and Intimate Partner Violence. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 11(2), 033-070. DIP:18.01.003.20231102, DOI:10.25215/1102.003