



## HEALTH PROBLEMS OF WOMEN FACING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

*Women abused by intimate partners suffer higher rates of a wide variety of doctor-diagnosed medical maladies compared to women who were never abused. Many of these health problems are not commonly understood as being associated with violence, such as abdominal pain, chest pain, headaches, acid reflux, urinary tract infections, and menstrual disorders. Domestic violence is one of the crimes against women which are linked to their disadvantageous position in the society. Domestic violence refers to violence against women especially in matrimonial homes. Therefore domestic violence is recognized as the significant barriers of the empowerment of women, with consequences of women's health, their health-seeking behavior and their adoption of small family norm. Women who survive domestic violence tend to have continual health problems. Even five years after violence has ceased, women victims need health care one-fifth more than other women. Studies also show that Women who have been victims of violence also use the health services much more than those who have not. Thus an attempt was made to find out the health problems of women facing Domestic violence with a total of 30 samples using snow-ball sampling from Coonoor, Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. The researcher adopted descriptive research design in order to describe the health problems of women facing domestic violence and data was collected through an interview schedule. This study would enable us to know the various health problems of women both physically and mentally who undergo domestic violence in silence.*

### Introduction

Women occupy a unique position in the society due to the importance in the procreation of the human race. However patriarchy and traditional patterns of life have neglected women to a position of insignificance. Women suffer this discrimination in silence. Women have always been a object of gross and severe violence at the hands of man. The biological weakness of a woman makes her an easy prey to all and sundry. Thus she is often a victim of physical and mental violence not only outside her home, but also inside it.

Due to domestic violence the conjugal home of a married woman which ought to have been a happy and heavenly home with full of joy and love and affection turned into a hell. Hence of all forms of violence against women, domestic violence is the worst form of violence because it is caused silently within the four walls of a house. Though traditionally domestic violence is viewed as a private family matter, the impact of it is so much that it has become a major public health hazard as serious as AIDS, tobacco drug abuse, alcoholism etc. The effects of violence can be devastating for women's physical health as well as an epidemic. It is a global phenomenon and has been on the rise constantly, spreading its tentacles far and wide.

### Domestic Violence and Women Health

Domestic violence is a serious public health problem which has a substantial impact on health and welfare of millions of women and families throughout the world. The wives are subjected to physical and psychological torture irrespective of economic status, religion, caste etc. Domestic violence is repetitive in nature and level of injuries of domestic violence is severe.

In addition to injuries sustained during violent episodes physical and psychological abuse are linked to a number of adverse physical health effects including arthritis, chronic neck or back pain, migraine and other frequent headaches, stammering, problems of sexually transmitted infections, chronic pelvic pain, stomach ulcers, spastic colon and frequent indigestion, diarrhea or constipation. Women who experience any partner violence are diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder. Also battered

women have symptoms of depression, anxiety disorders and experience post traumatic stress disorder. Homicides and injury, mental illness, substance abuse and repetition of violence across generations indicate the range of health problems related to domestic violence.

### Physical abuse and health problems

Physical violence which includes wife beating, pushing, biting – injuries, kicking cause serious injuries to the health of the women. The weapons used during physical violence may be stick, iron, stone, poisonous things, knife, chopper, axe etc. Women abused by their spouses may have gynecological problems including severe menstrual problems, endometriosis, HIV/AIDS, STD or urinary tract infection and also sexual dysfunction. Also there is an increased risk of pelvic pain and pelvic inflammatory disease among physically abused women. Physical violence may also affect maternal, prenatal and infant health. The most sites of injury among abused women are face, neck upper torso, breast or abdomen. The most severe consequences of intimate partner violence among women is homicide.

### Psychological abuse and health problems

Degrading or humiliating conduct that adversely affects or is likely to affect the psychological or mental state of the person aggrieved. Psychological abuse or mental emotional violence results in verbal or non verbal abuse. Verbal violence includes use of abusive and filthy language intended to cause hurt i.e. insults, attacks, put downs etc. Non verbal violence includes gestures, facial, body postures. Emotional violence may be intentional deprivation of love and affection, concern, sympathy and care.

Hence this research assesses the relationship between intimate partner violence and health problems faced by married women. This demonstrate the importance of protecting women from abuse – improving screening to identify abused women regarding health problems and improving women's status at social level.

### Review of Literature

A Study on "Domestic Violence and Role of Social Workers" by K. Surekha Rao and K. Suneetha were carried among 150 married women. The study reveals that majority of the respondents (72.5%) are living in Nuclear families and 90% of marriages are arranged. The causes for wife battering was expressed by majority of the respondents (62%) as alcoholism and gambling followed by 15% as demand for dowry, 7.5% extramarital conflicts, 2.5% expressed suspicious nature of husband and 12.5% expressed all causes as given earlier. Nari Samantha Manch is a Pune based organization, active on issue of "Domestic Violence" Conducted a study among 90 respondents and the study reveals that Alcoholism is a commonly state cause for violent behaviour of husband. A study by Campbell and Colleagues (2002) expanded the literature on the topic "Gynecological and sexual health" by showing that abused women in general population of women enrolled in health maintenance organization in multiple cities in US reported significantly with pain, headaches, digestive problems compared to non-abused women.

The 1996 National US Survey on "Violence against women" found that more severe injuries, including broken bones or fractures, burns and laceration recorded in relation to assaults by partners. (Gutherie 1998, MC Williams and MC Kiernan 1993, Williamson, 2000). In a study (Heise, Ellesberg and Gottemoella 1999) conducted by researchers at John's Hopkins University, it was reported that abused women are at higher risk of miscarriage, still birth, infant deaths and are more likely to give birth to low birth weight Infants. Violence against women during pregnancy has been associated with miscarriage, pre-mature birth, low birth weight, total injury and maternal death. (RCOG 2001, cited in Johnson et al 2003).

### Method and Materials

The researcher aimed to study the Health Problems of Women facing Domestic Violence. The nature of the study is to describe the health problems faced by married women due to domestic violence. Hence the researcher choose Descriptive Research design for the study. The researcher conducted the study in Coonoor. It is a town and a municipality in the Nilgiris district in the state of Tamil Nadu. Considering the sensitivity of the issue, the researcher adopted snow-ball sampling for data collection to find out the health problems of married women facing Domestic violence with a total of 30 samples. A self-structured Interview Schedule was used to collect primary data from the respondents for the study.

### Results and Discussion

The study is being undertaken to study the Health problems of women facing Domestic Violence. The study revealed that nearly half of the respondents (37%) are in the age group of 21-30 years, 30% of respondents are Illiterates. Violence is of more common occurrence in about 77% of nuclear families when compared to joint families. In 87% of the cases, the nature of harassment is both physical and emotional violence, in 3/4th of the respondents (73%), the perpetrator of violence is none other

than their husbands. The frequency of harassment takes place almost every day in more than half (60%) of respondents. Alcoholism is the root cause of violence against married women in 40 percent of respondents, which leads to physical and emotional problems. In almost 60% of respondents, the nature of physical violence is injury, pushing, beating, and kicking. The most sites of injury are in face in 40 percent of the physically abused respondent, 31% of the respondents had frequent headaches as a result of physical violence. In Majority (90%) of the respondents, the nature of emotional violence were both verbal threats as well as non- verbal threats. The Nature of Verbal threats were in the form of insults, put downs, abusive words and intimidation in nearly half (47%) of the respondents. Stress was the major health effect due to emotional violence in 40 percent of the respondents. Majority (73%) of the respondents have no Awareness about Domestic Violence Act.

### Suggestions

- The health care professional can play a major role in identification of individuals experiencing domestic violence when they seek treatment and they can provide health care and counseling for the victims.
- The law enforcing agencies should play a major role more effectively in the care of domestic violence problems and create awareness among the public regarding legal provisions for the victims of domestic violence.
- The supportive agencies such as family counseling centers, women protection cells and Mahila Mandals ,GO's and NGO's, press and media must work more on domestic violence at preventive level rather than curative level.
- Research studies need to be undertaken on Violence against Women on other uncovered areas.

### Conclusion

Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon. It has been hidden behind the walls of the home. It is a serious crime which has a substantial impact upon the health of women both physically and emotionally. The study reveals that women are suffering with domestic violence in a number of ways by their husbands like beating, injury, kicking and pushing. The causes behind the violence are alcoholism, demand for dowry, extra marital affair, poverty, marital mal adjustments and suspicion. The health consequences of domestic violence are extensive which effects the mental and physical health of women. A number of adverse health effects includes gynecological problems, weight loss, breathing problems, frequent headaches, indigestion and fractures due to physical violence. Complications of abused pregnant women results in low birth weight of the infant and miscarriage. Also women suffer emotionally with stress depression, anxiety, insomnia and seizures. It is evident from the study that women face a number of health problems both physically and emotionally due to domestic violence. Therefore, domestic violence is to be viewed not merely as a private problem but as a social problem. More so it is a public health hazard. This calls for urgent attention from the GO's and NGO's and human rights organizations.

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