

CHILDREN'S VULNERABILITY TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Abstract:

Family as an institution in the ancient India laid down certain principles, which regulate the relationship between husband, wife and their children in a nuclear family. The domestic violence causes a breach especially in the husband and wife relationship due to many reasons. The inmates, especially the children who are innocent in nature are greatly affected as they are in the formative & or developing stage of the life. Children who witness violence at home display emotional & behavioral disturbances as diverse as withdrawal, low self-esteem, nightmares and aggression against peers & family members. Those who have witnessed their parents' domestic violence are more likely to abuse their own wives than children of non-violent parents. The sons of the most violent parents are 1000 times more likely to become wife beaters. Adolescents, who have been exposed domestic violence, get so entrenched that they find it difficult to engage themselves in more positive ways of social interaction. It has been found that the level of inter parental conflict, parental domestic and gender of the adolescent were predictive of severe adolescent problems. Conflict between parents in combination with a dominant opposite sex parent was significantly predictive of major adolescent psychopathology.

In the light of above an attempt has been made to study the impact of domestic violence on 126 children aged 8 to 17 years living in a lower middle class family in a suburban of Mumbai. The median age of the children was found to be 12 years. Majority of them had studied up to STD IX. Parents were educated up to middle school level. The children opined that in most of the cases violence takes place when father is drunk and or mother does something not liked by the father. During the course of violence mother /children get beating and sometimes meals are not prepared or prepared meals are thrown out. Due to such incidents children drop out from the school, lag behind and lose concentration in studies. The children desire to have a violence free atmosphere in the family & wish not to indulge in such cases as & when they would acquire their families. The study indicates that the domestic violence acts as a hindrance in over all development of the children.

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Introduction

Domestic violence is as old as the Indian history. The nature and extent of domestic violence depends upon the quality of life and basic –social cultural milieu. Family as an institution in the ancient India laid down certain principles, which regulate the relationship between husband, wife and their children. The domestic violence causes a breach in the husband wife relationship due to many reasons. Primarily this violence can be categorized in two ways i.e. psychological & social. The psychological violence can be carried out with the help of psychological weapons (insult, abuse, humiliating treatment etc), that hurt the individual and the scar are deep rooted. The physical violence includes different types of aggressive /physical assaults i.e. husband beating wife or wife beating husband. This physical violence is quite common among people living in lower and lower middle strata of the society. The inmates living in the family are greatly affected by such incidents. But the adults such as parents, brother & sister, in laws are less affected by such acts compared to the innocent children who are in the formative phase and or developing stage.

Two Perspectives on Domestic Violence: First there is the "family violence perspective". It suggests that women and men learn from childhood experiences and from media portrays and societal norms that violence is an acceptable way to resolve disputes. Secondly, there is the feminist perspective. The belief that men and women do not have equal positions in society and men have had privileged positions in society for centuries and have acquired dominant status, forces women to tolerate violence to a great extent.

Domestic violence is a problem that affects many people in many countries now days. The victims are mostly women and children and the abusers are usually their husband/fathers. But the problem is not only the quantity, but the quality of violence: it usually happens at home, women of all cultures, races, occupations, income levels, and ages are battered- by husbands, boyfriends, lovers and partners. In addition, the violence does not occur in separate cases of loss of temper, but it is used in form of battering, intimidation, threats, psychological abuse, isolation etc, as a way to coerce and control the victim. Even if the violence does not happen often, it remains as a hidden and constant terrorizing factor. The worst is that mostly of the victims are afraid of looking for some help because they fear some reprisal, like more abuse or even death (women who leave their aggressive partner --boyfriend or husband-- are at 75% greater risk than those who stay). The causes of that kind of violence are dissatisfaction at work, economical problems and social pressure combined with the chauvinist culture that teaches children not to respect and not to get affectionate to kids of the opposite sex, making some people use violence to keep their position of "family-chief". The solution may lie in children's education. Schools should work harder to teach values of respect and sex equality and should also help children that suffer violence in their home, so as they do not make the same when they grow up.

Literature Review

Children who witness violence at home display emotional and behavioral disturbances as diverse as withdrawal, low self-esteem, nightmares, self-blame and aggression against peers, family members and property. (Peled, Inat, Jaffe, Peter G. & Edleson, Jeffrey L. (Eds.)

Men who have witnessed their parents' domestic violence are three times more likely to abuse their own wives than children of non violent parents, with the sons of the most violent parents being 1000 times more likely to become wife beaters. (Straus, M.A. Gelles, R. J. & Steinmetz, S. Behind closed Doors. Doubleday, Anchor. 1980). Child abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in families where domestic violence is present (2 Stacy, W. and Shupe, A. the Family Secret Boston, M. A. Beacon Press, 1983). Over 3 million children are at risk of exposure to parental violence each year (Carlson, B.E.).

Studies conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) and National Council for Education research and Training (NCERT) have shown that the basic emotional needs of a child get neglected if relations between parents are not smooth or if they fight too often. Prof Nirmal Gupta of NCERT after reviewing 6000 children cases observed that children from dysfunctional families have poor interpersonal relations and behavioral problems. A social counselor Lata Subaramanium explains that children of argumentative parents generally react badly to emotional situations in their own lives in fact boys in particular are more likely to become aggressive and get easily provoked by their friends.

While some other psychologists explain that although children do need to be exposed to some conflict to learn the important lessons of life the parents should try and argue out of sight and earshot of their children. Adolescents, who have been exposed to domestic violence, get so entrenched that they find it difficult to engage themselves in more positive ways of social interaction. A study concluded that growing up in a violent family increases the likelihood of becoming an violent person (Hughes and Barad 1983)

In his study, Hetherington & Anderson (1988) concluded that given the important developmental tasks associated with adolescence, it would be expected that an ongoing stress or such inter-parental conflict would have a profound influence on adolescent development. Indeed, several studies have revealed significant relationships between inter-parental conflict and anxiety, depression, stress, and/or hostility in adolescents. For instance, Forsstrom-Cohen and Rosenbaum's (1985) study among those who witnessed violence in the home revealed that adolescent females were significantly more depressed than their male counterparts. Additionally, adolescent females who witnessed parental violence were significantly more depressed and aggressive than females from non-violent homes, whereas no similar interactions were found

for males. Schwarz and Getter (1980) found that the level of inter-parental conflict, parental dominance and the gender of the adolescent were predictive of severe adolescent problems. In fact, conflict between parents in combination with a dominant opposite-sex parent was significantly predictive of major adolescent psychopathology.

Some other studies have revealed that exposure to continued violence was the strongest predictor of violent delinquent behavior (Widom 1989). Based on his research on other delinquent populations, Wexler (1990) estimates that 20 per cent to 40 per cent among chronically violent adolescents had witnessed extreme parental conflict. Kalmuss (1984) found that observing aggression and violence between parents was more strongly related to future involvement in severe marital violence than was being the victim of abuse. Furthermore, the problem of marital violence in adulthood increased dramatically when both types of family violence were experienced. Similarly, the study of Miller et al. (1991) indicated that a history of witnessing domestic violence is a very high risk factor for potential child abuse as well as being associated with increased psychological stress. Also, some adolescent boys handle their frustration with the behavior that has been most clearly modeled for them by assaulting their mother or siblings (Straus et al. 1980). A comparison of delinquent and no delinquent youth found that a history of family violence or abuse is the most significant difference between the two groups (Miller, G.).

Need for the study

Domestic violence leaves a long-term impact on the psychological growth of the children who consider their adults as their ideals. Child Psychologists for long period said that parents who quarrel in front of their children damage them for life. A study conducted by the Center of Research, University of Cambridge, conforms that watching parents fight constantly makes them more aggressive and thus less popular at school. Their self-esteem takes a battering too.

The domestic violence among Indian families is severely common and it is continuously increasing. Recently conducted National Family Health Survey (NFHS) -2 also included some questions on domestic violence. Very few studies have been carried out in India so far and among them mostly are related to gender violence. Only few scholars have tried to find out the effect of domestic violence on the development of children, especially on the adolescents. Therefore, there is a need to explore how the children of the family/society are affected by such acts.

Objectives

Keeping the above facts in view, an attempt has been made to find out the impact of domestic violence on children aged (8-17) year.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To find out causes of domestic violence
2. To find out life satisfaction of children
3. To explore the aspirations of children
4. To find out the health condition of children

Sample design /Size & Methodology

For collection of data both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. However, emphasis was laid on the qualitative methods. For meeting the requirement of quantitative methods an especially designed interview schedule comprising both structured and unstructured questions was administered. For the purpose of qualitative analysis of the data observation method and interview method were used. Besides these methods case studies were also conducted for acquiring the required data.

The sampling design adopted here was a purposive sample survey. Keeping in view the time and economical constraints, one hundred and twenty six children (Sixty three boys and sixty three girls) aged 8 to 17 years living in a lower middle class family of a suburban Mumbai were interviewed.

The children were contacted in the school and in the playground with the help of key informants such as teachers and/or old persons.

Discussion & Findings

Table-1 shows that 51 percent children belonged to 10-14 year age group. Only 16.7 percent children were aged 15 years and above. The median age of the children is 12 years. It is evident from Table-2 that maximum number (63.5 percent) of children are educated up to Standard VII-IX and Only lowest 8.7 percent of the children are educated up to Std X and above. Table-3 illustrates that 63.5 percent of the mothers are educated to less than middle Standard while only 11.9 percent of them are illiterate. As much as 80.0 percent of fathers are educated to above middle standard and only 1.6 percent of them are illiterate.

In case of occupational structure (Table-4) the highest of 43.7 percent of mothers are housewives and 36.5 percent of fathers are working as a laborer. Only 8.7 percent of mothers and 9.5 percent of fathers are engaged in other type of works. So far as income is concerned around half of the mothers earn less than Rs.1000/- per month and only 2.4 percent them Rs.5001/- & above. The monthly income of 46.0 percent fathers lies between Rs.3001/- to Rs.5000/-. Only 4.0 percent of father's monthly income is below Rs.1000/-. The average income of father and mother is Rs.3364/- and Rs.1696/- per month respectively. According to Table-6, 36.5 percent boys and 42.9 percent girls are of the opinion that father initiates domestic violence whenever he is drunk. Around 28.6 percent boys and 33.3 percent girls feel that mother initiates domestic violence due to other reasons. Around 43.0 percent boys and 52.0 percent girls say mother gets rebukes/beatings (Table-7) whenever domestic violence occurs in the family. Only 19.0 percent boys and 26.0 percent girls say cooked food thrown out. On studying the impact of domestic violence on children it is found that 40.0 percent boys and 48.0 percent girls find no aim of their lives. Thirty one percent of boys suffer other impact of domestic violence. In case of girls 36.0 percent say they lag behind in studies. It was aimed to know the perception of the society member about the families where domestic violence takes place. It was found that 41 percent boys and 49 percent girls feel that the society opines that there is no understanding between the husbands and the wives. Most of the boys (94.0 percent) and most of the girls (96 percent) are of the opinion that their parents should adjust with each other's in their family. Children's friends have varied opinion about their families. Four of every ten boys and half of the girl's friends say that they do not belong to a good family. Only some friends cut silly jokes on them.

Domestic Violence Affects Children

Domestic violence is a crime against all family members but its saddest victims are children. Children living in violent homes are themselves physically abused or seriously neglected. When children witness abuse or are abused, they are seeing, hearing and learning about violence. They learn that the people you love most may hurt you, that living in fear is normal and that violence is the way to resolve conflict. As they learn a generational cycle begins in which children grow up to be victims and abusers as adults.

For children the effects of domestic violence are devastating. Some of the major effects are the following. On the basis of present study it is found that domestic violence increases the risk of poor health, poor education, isolation, learned helplessness and decreased satisfaction in such family environment.

Health problem

Because of domestic violence, the children face poor physical and mental health. Among the three children two boys & a girl, one boy had 25% burned injury while another boy & a girl had problem of hearing due a slap from the father. Some times the children feel headache & giddiness because of tense environment in the house.

Emotional/Behavior Problems

Anxiety: children worry about when the next outbreak of violence will occur. Fear: children are afraid that one parent will die or be seriously injured. Guilt: Children think the abuse is their fault. Confused Feelings: Children are upset by their mixed feelings of love and hate for parents and of fearing though wanting to be with the abuser. Lack of Trust: Children have difficulty in forming positive relationships due to lack of parental nurturing. Poor Self-esteem: Children inherit low self-esteem from parents. Aggressiveness: Many children "act out" violence they witness at home. Passiveness: Some children are overly eager to please *any* adult. Role Reversal: Children are often placed in the parental or caretaker role, because the parents are too involved in the abusive situation to adequately address the family's needs. School Problems: Children want to stay home, because they think they can control the abuse. This results in truancy, poor attention span, grade failing and dropping out. Depression: Children feel overwhelmed by their inability to stop abuse, and in some cases children are suicidal.

Physical Problems

Developmental Delays: Developments of children often lag behind due to lack of parental nurturing and stress. In babies, it takes the form of failure to thrive.

Speech Disorders: Children develop speech disorders as a result of stress.

Stress-Related Ailments: Children often complain about headaches, stomach-aches and feeling bad. Children are accident-prone. Children may wet the bed.

Physical Abuse: Children are often themselves victims of physical abuse.

Education

Majority of the children is literate. Many parents are interested to further educate their children. The children in general say that because of tension in the family we are unable to concentrate on our studies.

Satisfaction & Aspiration level

Some children were partially satisfied and in some cases the children opined that they have no alternative to the present environment. In all the cases, society and children's friends' opinion about their family is not good. However, they do not appear confident to achieve their goals/aims.

Isolation & Learned helplessness

The study shows that majority of children suffer from isolation and learn helplessness, whenever the intensity of violence increases or domestic violence become a regular phenomenon. When the children are unable to do anything to stop domestic violence they feel helpless and because of that concept of learned helplessness is created in child's mind. The children also felt isolated and uncomfortable. This is a negative aspect for children personality and development.

Case Studies:

Case (1)

Kishore, a 12 years old student of ninth standard who's father is a shoes seller lives in a nuclear family. His parents who are not much educated have monthly income of Rs.4000/- approximately. Due to money problem domestic violence starts taking place in his family. His father spends large amount of money on drugs. His father gets angry when his mother demands money for household expenses. Whenever his father is drunk, he shouts, abuses, yells and beats his mother. Some times Kishore is also beaten by his father. Once he was seriously injured due to father's beating and he fell down in the hot water tub and was burned twenty five percent. He says I will never forget that day. He narrates that due to violence both his health and education has been affected. His friend's opinion about his family is not good. He is partially satisfied with his family. His aim of life is to become a teacher. However, he is not confident about achieving his goal of life. He is always afraid of domestic violence that takes place in his home. To get peace, to remove psychological tensions he prays to god. Kishore says that he will never indulge in domestic violence in his married life.

Case (2)

Anil, a student of standard eighth, is son of a driver. He is fourteen year old and lives in the joint family. His parents are educated up to primary level. Violence takes place in the family generally when the father is drunk. Father initiates violence by abusing, shouting, yelling and beats his mother. Some times Anil also becomes a victim during the domestic violence. During that time, he always takes care of siblings. He feels that because of the domestic violence both education and health are affected. His friend's opinion about his

family is not good. They make a fun of it. He feels shy. He is partially satisfied in this environment. Anil's aim of life is to become a military man to serve the nation. However, he is not sure about achieving his goals/aim. He is always worried about his family conditions. Anil opines that he will never indulge in domestic violence after getting married.

Case (3)

Sita, 15 years old, is a student of standard ninth. She is daughter of a tailor master and lives in nuclear family. Her father has primary level of education but mother is illiterate. Monthly income her family is Rs.3500/- approximately. Violence takes place in her family whenever mother does something against father's desire. During that time the whole house is under tension and no one can know what the father is going to do. This is a regular phenomenon. Generally, father initiates the violence. Sometimes she is also beaten because she supports her mother. She feels that because of violence her educational career is getting affected. Her friends pass ugly remarks about violence in her family. She is fed up of it but there is no alternative. She is now frustrated. She is partially satisfied with the environment prevailing in her family. She wants to become a teacher. However, she is not fully confident about achieving her goals/aim of life. She always prays to god that violence should not take place in her family. She wants a violent free married life.

Case (4)

Savita, 14 years old, is a student of standard eighth. Her father works in Mumbai Municipality. She lives in a nuclear family. Her father has secondary level of education but mother has only primary level of education. Her family income is Rs.5000 per month approximately. Domestic violence takes place in her family because her father has an affair with another woman. Mother does not like this. Whenever mother protests father for going to the other women, violence takes place. During that time father shouts, abuses and yells and sometimes beats her mother. This is a regular affair of her family. Generally, father initiates the violence. Whenever she favors mother, she gets beaten. She feels that because of domestic violence her life is being spoiled. Opinion of society and her friends about her family is not good. She also feels shy in meeting her friends. Sometimes, she sees bad dream about violence. She feels helpless. She is partially satisfied in her family environment. She wants to become a police inspector. But she is not fully confident about achieving her goals/aim of life. She does not pray to god because god is not listening to her and is completely indifferent towards her problem. She wants a violent free married life.

CONCLUDING REMARK

In the present study qualitative research supported quantitative research. Every case study is unique in its own ways. The case study shows children living in violent homes are themselves physically abused or seriously neglected. Children witness abuse, or are abused. They are seeing, hearing and learning about violence. They learn that the people you love most may hurt you, that living in fear is normal, and that violence is the way to handle conflict. As they learn, a generational cycle begins in which children grow up to be victims and abusers as adults. For children the effects of domestic violence are divesting. Some of the major effects are: On the basis of present study it is found that domestic violence increases the risk of poor health, poor education, isolation, learned helplessness and decreased satisfaction in such family environment. They do not appear confident in achieving their goals/aims. The children also feel isolated and uncomfortable. This is a negative aspect of personality and development of a child. This study suggests that there is strong need to create awareness about effect of domestic violence at the family and community level. Domestic violence leads to the imbalance in the child's personality.

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Table (1) Percent Distribution of Children by Age & Sex

Age (year)	Sex		
	Male	Female	Total
Less than 10	32.3	31.3	31.7
10-14	50.0	53.1	51.6
15 above	17.7	15.6	16.7
Total	49.2	50.8	100.0 (126)

Median age 12 years.

Table (2) Percent Distribution of Children by Sex & Level of Education

Level of education (Studied up to)	Sex		
	Male	Female	Total
Less than Std VII	27.4	28.1	27.8
Std. VII-IX	62.9	64.1	63.5
Std X & above	9.7	7.8	8.7
Total	49.2	50.8	100.0 (126)

Table (3) Percent Distribution of Education of Parents

Level of education of Mother	Level of education of father			
	Illiterate	Up to middle	Above middle	Total
Illiterate	13.3	40.0	46.7	11.9
Less than middle	-	17.5	82.5	63.5
Above middle	-	9.7	90.3	14.6
Total	1.6	18.3	80.1	100.0 (126)

Table (4) Percent Distribution of Occupation of Parents

Occupation of Mother	Occupation of Father				
	Laborer	Transport worker / Auto driver	Service (Peon, sweeper etc)	Others	Total
House wife	47.9	50.0	31.3	41.7	43.7
Maid servant	21.7	25.0	40.6	25.0	27.8
Petty Business	21.7	16.7	21.9	16.7	19.8
Others	8.7	8.3	6.2	16.6	8.7
Total	36.5	28.6	25.4	9.5	100.0 (126)

Table (5) Percent distribution of Monthly Income of Parents

Monthly Income of Mother (in Rs)	Monthly Income of father (in Rs)				
	Less than 1000	1000-3000	3001-5000	5001& above	Total
Less than 1000	60.0	46.8	48.3	43.8	47.6
1000 – 3000	20.0	46.8	43.1	31.3	42.1
3001-5000	20.0	6.4	5.2	18.7	7.9
5001 & above	-	-	3.4	6.2	2.4
Total	4.0	37.3	46.0	12.7	100.0 (126)

Av. income M 1696
F 3364

Table (6) Reasons for Domestic Violence and Who Initiates it

Reason for Domestic Violence When ...	Who initiates it / opinion of children			
	Father		Mother	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
(1)Father is drunken	36.5	42.9	27.0	32.5
(2)Food is not cooked properly	31.7	39.7	4.8	7.1
(3)Food is not accordingly to fathers choice	28.6	38.9	3.2	4.8
(4).... Father is in tension/not in good mood.	27.0	32.5	8.7	11.1
(5)Mother frequently demands money from father	27.0	32.5	23.8	31.7
(6)Mother does some thing not like by father	30.2	40.5	23.8	31.7
(7).... Father demands sex and mother refuses.	4.7	6.3	5.5	7.2
(8) Others	18.3	21.4	28.6	33.3

Table (7) Reasons for Domestic Violence and Impact on the Households

Impact on the household	Boys	Girls
(1) Mother gets rebukes / beating	43.0	52.0
(2) Children are scolded /beaten	28.0	33.0
(3) Food not cooked at that time	21.0	29.0
(4) Cooked food thrown out.	19.0	26.0
(5) Children do not do home work.	29.0	33.0
(6) Children abstain from school next day.	20.0	28.0
(7) Others	33.0	37.0

Table (8) Impact of Domestic Violence on Children

Impact	Boys	Girls
(1) Children drop out from school.	37.0	43.0
(2) Children lag behind in studies	33.0	36.0
(3) Loose concentration in studies	33.0	42.0
(4) Always feel ashamed in company of others.	32.0	41.0
(5) Get puzzled what to do next.	38.0	43.0
(6) No aim of life	40.0	48.0
(7) Others	31.0	40.0

Table (9) Perception of Society about the Family (Where domestic Violence takes place)

	Boys	Girls
(1) Bad couple/bad family.	39.0	77.0
(2) Quarrel some family	38.0	45.0
(3) No understanding between husband and wife.	41.0	49.0
(3) Husband is bad.	34.0	42.0
(4) Wife is bad.	33.0	36.0
(5) Feel pity for children.	40.0	48.0
(6) Others	41.0	43.0

Table (10) What do the Children feel when Domestic Violence takes place in their Family

	Boys	Girls
(1) Better it was had we not born in this family	77.0	72.0
(2) Father is not a nice person.	66.0	74.0
(3) Not in a position to show face to others.	57.0	63.0
(4) Parents should adjust with each other's.	94.0	96.0
(5) I should leave this house why to be in tension every day.	83.0	78.0
(6) Other	72.0	74.0

Table (11) Friends Remarks about the Child's Family

	Boys	Girls
(1) Not at all a good family.	40.0	48.0
(2) Others always make a fun of us.	39.0	43.0
(3) Children some times laugh at us.	34.0	42.0
(4) Cut silly jokes on us.	13.0	16.0
(5) Avoid messing with us.	30.0	33.0
(6) Try to over look us	28.0	38.0
(7) Others	27.0	31.0