

**THE DOMESTIC ABUSES AND GENDERED POWER RELATIONS:
RURAL WOMEN EXPERIENCES IN
PATRIARCHAL FAMILIES**

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ABSTRACT

Family plays an important role in creating a hierarchical system as it not only mirrors the order in the State and educates its children but also creates and constantly reinforces that order. As a basic institution the family develops a human ecology by providing a setting where a human being receives his or her first crucial, practical and intellectual motions and learns how to relate to his her natural, social and physical environment. He or she learns how to love and what being loved means and therefore concretely what it means to be a human person. But researches evidences that organisational, institutional patriarchal structures in society maintain unequal power relationships between men and women that tacitly or directly support domestic oppression and violence against women. Domestic violence is not just about physical violence. It takes many forms—physical, sexual, verbal, financial and emotional. These forms of abusive and manipulative behaviours are about maintaining power and control of women by male abusers. The key component of the dynamics of domestic violence is the concepts of gender and power. Men as a social group have greater power than women and violence is an important way by which men maintain their dominant position.

Keywords: Domestic abuses. Gendered power relations, Patriarchy, Rural women

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence against women is an age old phenomenon. Women were always considered weak, vulnerable and in a position to be exploited. Violence has long been accepted as something that happens to women. Cultural mores, religious practices, economic and political conditions may set the precedence for initiating and perpetuating domestic violence, but ultimately committing an act of violence is a choice that the individual makes out of a range of options.

The gender imbalance in domestic violence is partly related to differences in physical strength and size. Moreover, women are socialized into their gender roles in different societies throughout the world. In societies with a patriarchal power structure and with rigid gender

roles, women are often poorly equipped to protect themselves. However, much of the disparity relates to how men-dependence and fearfulness amount to a cultural disarmament. Husbands who batter wives typically feel that they are exercising a right, maintaining good order in the family and punishing their wives' delinquency - especially the wives' failure to keep their proper place.

Family plays an important role in creating a hierarchical system as it not only mirrors the order in the State and educates its children but also creates and constantly reinforces that order(Lerner,1986).As a basic institutions the family develops a human ecology by providing a setting where a human being receives his or her first crucial, practical and intellectual motions and learns how to relate to his her natural , social and physical environment. He or she learns how to love and what being loved means and therefore concretely what is means to be a human person (Commission for social development, 2001). But researches evidences that organisational, institutional patriarchal structures in society maintain unequal power relationships between men and women that tacitly or directly support domestic oppression and violence against women.

Domestic violence, to many, is an issue of men harming women or attempting to have power over women. It is men who most often are perpetrators of domestic violence (Gloria Steinen 2007) .She argues that men are not innately more violent creatures as evidenced by the behaviour of other species , whose females tend to be more violent than males in protecting their young. Rather men taught to be violent by a society, a “cult masculinity” which tells them that in order to be properly masculine and thus really have any worth or identity, they need to be in some degree of control. Thus male favoured patriarchal norms granting men control over femal behaviour. Altering the structure of patriarchy is not well accepted by the male folk. But, when the modernised women tend to question the existing patriarchal structure at home, eventually they face violence.

The well-documented determinants of violence against girls and women can be found in gender norms and gender relations. Whether at individual, community, or societal levels, there are relationships between how gender is organized and violence against women. One key factor here is men’s gender-role attitudes and beliefs. Men’s agreement with sexist, patriarchal, or sexually hostile attitudes is an important predictor of their use of violence against women. Men who do not hold patriarchal and hostile gender norms are less likely than other men to use violence against an intimate partner (Flood, www.awe.asn.au)

Domestic Abuses

Domestic violence/abuses has emerged as one of the world’s most pressing problems. The United Nations estimates that between 20% and 50% of all women worldwide have experienced physical violence at the hands of intimate partners or family members .(Leeman, 2000).Domestic

violence can be described as the power misused by one adult in a relationship to control another. It is the establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse. This violence can take the form of physical assault, psychological abuse, social abuse, financial abuse, or sexual assault. The frequency of the violence can be on and off, occasional or chronic.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 says that any act, conduct, omission or commission that harms or injures or has the potential to harm or injure will be considered domestic violence by the law. Even a single act of omission or commission may constitute domestic violence - in other words, women do not have to suffer a prolonged period of abuse before taking recourse to law. The law covers children also. Domestic violence is perpetrated by, and on, both men and women. However, most commonly, the victims are women, especially in our country. Even in the United States, it has been reported that 85% of all violent crime experienced by women are cases of intimate partner violence, compared to 3% of violent crimes experienced by men. Thus, domestic violence in Indian context mostly refers to domestic violence against women.

Gendered Power

Gender is a socio-cultural construct of female and male identity that shapes how individuals live and interpret the world around them. Gender is not natural; it is learned in society through direct and indirect means. Although some may think that gender mainly applies to women, gender refers equally to ideas about females and males. The attitude and expectations surrounding gender roles are not typically based on any inherent or natural gender differences, but on gender stereotypes or over-simplified notions about the attitudes, traits, or behavior patterns of women or men. Gender thus refers to the social attributes, opportunities, and relationships that are associated with being feminine and masculine. It also determines what behaviors are valued, expected, and allowed of men and women in a given context.

Power has been defined as potential influence due to external factors; with the effect of getting another person to do something she or he might not have otherwise done (French & Raven, 1959; Johnson, 1976, 1978). Power and gender are inextricably linked in our society to the extent that men tend to have greater access to concrete resources and other sources of external power (Johnson, 1976, 1978). The relationship between gendered power relation and domestic violence is complex. Evidence suggests that gender inequalities increase the risk of domestic violence. It has been established that the violence against is related to traditional gender role expectations and masculine ideologies. (White and Chen, 2012) In addition, men tend to occupy higher status roles than women. However, the choice of influence strategies is likely to be affected not only by power, but by gender.

Family power is important to those who want to understand how families function as a unit to

make decisions about how to manage money, about where to live, about occupational and educational choices, about parenting practices, about where to go on a vacation, and so on. Family scientists define power in terms of who is able to influence others to get their way in the family, and who is able to block others from getting their way.

Patriarchy

The term “patriarchy” came to be widely used in the 1970s, especially in England and the United States of America. Patriarchy, which pre-supposes the natural superiority of male over female, shamelessly upholds women’s dependence on, and subordination to, man in all spheres of life. Consequently, all the power and authority within the family, the society and the state remain entirely in the hands of men. So, due to patriarchy, women were deprived of their legal rights and opportunities patriarchal values restrict women’s mobility, reject their freedom over themselves as well as their property. Subordination means, “something else is less important than the other thing” (Cobuild 2010:1559). According to Advanced Learners Dictionary, “subordination means having less power or authority than somebody else in a group or an organization” (Hornby 2003:1296).

Patriarchal ideology to keep women away the power systems has been attempted through the construction of private and public realms for women and men respectively. Theories of patriarchy by Walby shows “two distinct forms of patriarchy – private and public patriarchy” (Walby 1990:24). Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women’s oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state. Thus, patriarchy is called the sum of the kind of male domination we see around women all the time. In this ideology, men are superior to women and women are part of men’s property, so women should be controlled by men and this produces women’s subordination.

Subordination is the situation in which one is forced to stay under the control of other. So women’s subordination means the social situation in which women are forced to stay under the control of men. In this way to keep women under men’s control, patriarchy operates some social customs, traditions and social roles by socialization process. To preserve the male supremacy, patriarchy created ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics, private-public realms by gendered socialization process. Socialization is considered to take place primarily during childhood, when boys and girls learn the appropriate behaviour for their sex. All agents of socialization process such as the family, religion, the legal system, the economic system and political system, the educational institutions and the media are the pillars of a patriarchal system and structure. The use of the term “social structure” is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every women in a subordinate one. “In this system women’s labour power, women’s reproduction, women’s sexuality, women’s mobility and property and other

economic resources are under patriarchal control” (Walby 1990).

Michel Foucault-Gender and power

Foucault he insists that power relations produce and regulate everyday practices. He argues the ways of living, the mode of sexual repression or the prohibition against abortion are explicitly political. (Foucault, 1973). Both his books “Discipline and Punish” and the “History of Sexuality” “describes these dispositive power that reach in to cross over bodies (Foucault, 1975). He he continue to argue that power establishes regulated dispositions and courses of action. In this productive dimension of power, the individual becomes a “subjected” subject. Foucaultian analysis of power can be applied to analyse the hegemonic patriarchal system that constantly perpetuate dominance over women. Sherin Ebadii, the Nobel Peace Prize winner of 2003 shares to the world that women are the victims of this patriarchal culture, but also they are also its carriers. She continues that every oppressive man was raised in the confines of his mother’s home. What Foucault argument is that power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. The strategic patriarchal system is planning, organizing and implementing norms and regulations and thus logically structuring hegemonic culture.

He introduces the concept of “biopower,” which combines disciplinary power as discussed in *Discipline and Punish*, with a “biopolitics” that invests people’s live at a biological level, “making” us live according to norms, in order to regulate humanity at the level of the population. Foucault’s concerns with sexuality, bodies, and norms form a potent mix that has, via the work of Judith Butler in particular, been one of the main influences on contemporary feminist thought, as well as influential in diverse areas of the humanities and social sciences.

Review of Literature

Michael Johnson calls gendered domestic violence “patriarchal terrorism”. This represents some husbands’ practice of a terroristic control of their wives. It involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation and other control tactics [Johnson, 1995: 284]. (He calls it patriarchal because he sees it as based in patriarchal ideas of male ownership of their female partners. Patriarchal terrorism is motivated by more general desire among some men to control “their” wives. E.g., so such men escalate the violence when and if they face resistance to subdue that resistance, and escalate the violence to display that control. As cited by Flood)

One of the most consistent findings to emerge from studies of attitudes toward violence against women is a gender gap. Gender is a consistent predictor of attitudes that support use of

violence against women. A wide range of international studies find a gender gap in attitudes toward domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of violence against women. In general, men are more likely than women to agree with myths and beliefs supportive of violence against women, perceive a narrower range of behaviors as violent, blame and show less empathy for the victim, minimize the harms associated with physical and sexual assault, and see behaviors constituting violence against women as less serious, inappropriate, or damaging (Flood,&Bob,2009)

Walby (1990) states that the control over and exploitation of areas of women's lives mean that men benefit materially from patriarchy, they derive concrete economic gains from the subordination of women. In what Walby calls the "patriarchal mode of production" (Ibid), women's labour is expropriated by their husbands and others who live there. She says housewives are the producing class, while husbands are the expropriating class, their back-breaking, endless and repetitive labour is not considered work at all and housewives are seen to be dependent on their husbands. So, there is a material basis for patriarchy. Most property and other productive resources are controlled by men and they pass from one man to another, usually from father to son. Even where women have the legal right to inherit such assets, a whole array of customary practices, emotional pressures, social sanctions and sometimes, plain violence, prevent them from acquitting actual control over them. In other cases, personal laws curtail their rights, rather than enhance them. In all cases, they are disadvantaged. So the material base of patriarchy, then, does not rest solely on child bearing in the family but on all the social structures that enable men to control women's labour.

Hartmann (1981) argues that both house work and wage labour are important sites of women's exploitation by men. Within the field of paid work occupational segregation is used by organized men to keep access to the best paid jobs for themselves at the expense of women. Within the household women do more labour than men, even if they also have paid employment (Hartmann, 1981). These two forms of expropriation also act to reinforce each other, since women's disadvantaged position in paid work makes them vulnerable in making marriage arrangements, and their position in the family disadvantages them in paid work.

According to Lim (1997:220), patriarchy is the system of male domination and female subordination in economy, society and culture that has characterized much of human history to the present day. Patriarchal institutions and social relations are responsible for the inferior or secondary status of women in the capitalist wagelabour market. The primacy of the sexual division of labour within the family has several consequences for the women who seek wage employment Domestic violence is not just about physical violence. It takes many forms—physical, sexual, verbal, financial and emotional. These forms of abusive and manipulative behaviours are about maintaining power and control of women by male abusers. (Mullender and Morley, 1994).The key component of the dynamics of domestic violence are the concepts of

gender and power. Men as a social group have greater power than women and violence is an important way by which men maintain their dominant position. (Laing,2003).

Forms of Domestic Abuses

Families are constructed around relationships that involve obligations and responsibilities, but also status and power. According to Hattery & Smith (2012,) when “masculinity and femininity are constructed, to generate these rigid and narrow gender roles, it contributes to a culture of violence against women”. From the case study analysis the researcher identified many forms of domestic abuses which may vary from physical, sexual, emotional, and financial. The study revealed a very shocking picture about rural women with regard to their gender roles in family .

Physical Abuse

The victims faced very provoking gender abuses at their in laws families .One of the women furiously saying that she had denied physical health when she needed a very physical treatment. She also revealed that at many times she was deprived of getting healthy food while the others were accessing it. She was no voice to complain at her parents because she belonged to a poor family. It was very heart touching experience she shared that when she complained at her husband, he tortured. From this case it is revealed that the poverty is a major factor of women’s oppression in the family.

The hegemonic masculinity is striving to impose a structure of disciplinary norms on women in the patriarchal family is very evident. When there is discrepancy between the expectations of masculine folk and the feminine roles with regard to domestic duties there happens all forms of abuses. Denying or neglecting the physical health of the victims, Denying and interfering in eating and sleeping ,making physical harm like hitting, beating, choking, pushing, slapping, kicking, pulling hair, biting et.. are common physical abuses among the rural women.

Sexual Abuses

Sexual abuse is any forced or coerced sexual act or behavior motivated to acquire power and control over the partner. Power is an underlying dimension of every family relationship and virtually every family activity and its importance lies in the fact that having a sense of control over one’s life is necessary for the health and happiness of humans, including children, adults and the elderly. But in patriarchal rural family where dominant male group use power over women, can have negative effects for everyone in the family. The sexuality of women is unique to her personality and it would not be surrendered under the patriarchal force.

This study reveals that women are objects to be sexually exploited. Minimization of sexual

needs, forcing sex without consent, refusing safe sex, keeping sexual alliance with others without knowing the partner etc.. were some of the sexual abuses faced by rural women. One of the women exposed that the her health is less valued and if she denounced the matter no reflections was felt. She continued that all these ballgames were taken for granted for males under the patriarchal system.

Emotional Abuses

Emotional abuse is any use of words, voice, action or lack of action meant to control, hurt or demean another person. Emotional abuse typically includes ridicule, intimidation or coercion. Verbal abuse usually is included in this category. Emotional abuse, however, is repeated hurtful exchanges with disregard for the partner's feelings aimed at gaining power and/or exerting control over the partner. One of the devorcee disclosed that it was very difficult for her to cope up with her educational life and married life. Every morning She had to get up early and had to do all the house hold activities. My mother-in-law was just an ordering agent. My sister-in-laws were also not helping me. Whenever she failed to complete the domestic chores, they humiliated a lot. After suffering bitter experiences she divorced her husband. Constant criticism, use of abusive languages, undermining abilities and competencies etc were the patriarchal disciplinary mechanism of dominating women.

Conclusion

The gender gap in attitudes towards violence against women is shaped by attitudes towards gender. Traditional gender-role attitudes, whether held by women or men, are associated with greater acceptance of violence against women, while egalitarian attitudes are associated with less acceptance of violence. The principal characteristic of gender-based violence is that it occurs against women precisely because of their gender. Gender-based violence involves power imbalances where, most often, men are the perpetrators and women the victims. While women are usually the immediate victims of gender violence, the consequences of gender violence extend beyond the victim to the society as a whole. According to Begal a nation does not prosper only on fertile soil, dense forests and overflowing rivers. It is the healthy people who make a nation (Bagal, 2009:256). Women constitute half of our population and play a vital role in the development of the family, community and nation. It has been widely recognized that unless women's potential is properly developed, no social transformation and economic development are possible. Power and freedom, irrespective of gender, with mutual responsibilities are necessary for smooth functioning of a society.

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