

Violence against Women: An Unending Social Scourge

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Abstract

Violence against women is globally a stark reality. Women are affected in so many ways because of the violence perpetrated primarily by men and also, in many cases, by the women themselves. Violence against women takes place in each section of the population irrespective of their class, religion, ethnicity or any other social identity. Some legislation has been enacted in almost every country to deal with this violence committed against women. Although perpetrators of violence are sometimes punished based on the law of a particular country, it has not decreased substantially. Instead, it has taken multiple forms in different countries. This editorial aims to depict the manifold types of violence frequently occurring in different parts of the world. It investigates the significant reasons that are responsible for committing violence against women and also tries to find out the consequences of this violence at the individual, familial, and societal levels. This editorial piece is based on secondary data extracted from relevant literature like journal articles, books, research reports, periodicals, working papers, etc. Relevant literature has been detected and downloaded using internet search engines such as Google Scholar, Microsoft Academic Search, JSTOR, etc. Some words like violence against women, domestic violence, family violence, and couple conflicts have been used to identify relevant literature. Papers or research reports published between 2000 and 2024 have only been considered for writing this editorial. Findings show that patriarchal norms that still dominate one way or the other in many of the countries across the globe are, to a great extent, responsible for violence against women.

Keywords: Violence Against Women; Patriarchal Norms; Caste; Class; Creed; Age; Religion; Ethnicity; Other Social Identity; Unending Social Scourge

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Introduction

It is heart-wrenching that despite efforts undertaken in different countries throughout the world, violence against women is a common practice almost everywhere (Caman & Skott, 2024; Das et al., 2015; Das et al., 2016; Gallo-Rivera et al., 2024; UNWOMEN, 2020). The rate, severity, and frequency of violence against women may differ from society to society. However, it is always primarily the women who become the victim of violence irrespective of their class, caste, creed, religion, age and so on (Chawiyah et al., 2024; Francis-Tan, 2024). Perhaps the women of developed countries are comparatively lesser abused or physically and psychologically lesser tortured than those of developing and least developed countries. Patriarchal norms generally push the males of developing and least developed nations to abuse their female counterparts whenever these women are found not complying with societal rules and regulations that restrict them from exercising absolute freedom (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018; Heise & Kotsadam, 2016; Murshid & Critelli, 2020). The dominance of patriarchy has been taking a critical turn in the face of globalisation, digitalisation, and internet revolution challenging age-old traditional values and norms which have been institutionalised generation after generation based on the patriarchal mindset of the people (Afyonoglu, 2021; Fulu & Miedema, 2015). Gender inequality is essentially related to violence against women across the globe (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Das et al., 2015). World Health Organization (WHO) (2019) reports that one-third of women face violence one way or the other in their lifetime because of perceived gender inequality (Das et al., 2016). Violence perpetrated against women by their partners, or the relatives of the partner could be of various types— physical, psychological, sexual, and financial (Alhabib et al., 2010; UN, 2006). The human rights of women are directly violated while committing any violence against them, and it is also a public health issue (Caman & Skott, 2024; Coll et al., 2020; Das et al., 2020). Emphasising the importance of dealing with the

violence against women, the Committee of The United Nations on Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommends that the State itself should come forward to protect women from all sorts of violence that generally take place within the premises of the family (Mandal, 2023). Different countries have taken different steps like enacting, changing, and improving laws, introducing policies for better interventions, providing training to the professionals working with the victims, educating community people to deal with the problems relating to violence against women, etc. (UNODC, 2019). Though violence has been reduced against women, mostly in developed countries (Caman & Skott, 2024), it has not been uprooted entirely. Thus, violence against women remains persistent in many countries, especially in developing and least-developed nations (Das et al., 2015). This editorial briefly focuses on types of violence against women, causes of violence and the consequences of violence worldwide. It is still essential to know that violence against women is common in most societies, and the sufferings of the victims, especially women and girls, are multi-dimensional and multifarious, which should be brought to the attention of policymakers based on the context of a particular society. Despite the policy formulated to address the problem of violence against women in different societies, its menace goes on in different forms all over the world. Thus, we need to revisit violence against women, focusing on fresh policies and strategies that may be adopted targeting the elimination of violence against women throughout the world, considering its unique ramifications from society to society.

Nature of Violence

According to WHO (2022), violence against women may be described as a kind of behaviour of a current male partner or ex-partner that harms a woman physically, psychologically or sexually. It exhibits physical aggressiveness, psychological abuse and sexual cruelty, often aiming to control the behaviour of the female

partner. The male partner commits violence against women to ensure power and control over the female partner (Shah & Mufeed, 2023). Like elsewhere in Kenya too, different sorts of violence against women are generally common. For instance, Chawiyah et al., (2024) show in their study that 52% of women encounter economic abuse and 47.5% face psychological or emotional exploitation. On the other hand, 46.6% of women experience their behaviour being controlled by their male partners, and 43.1% of women are victims of physical violence. These scholars conducted their study on 200 women who willingly completed the research questionnaires. Similarly, refugee women living in Australia frequently experience domestic violence by their family members. Husband, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law generally indulge in violence against them. It has been found that a woman is regularly physically, emotionally and verbally abused by her mother-in-law. It means not only the husband who abuses his wife but many other family members, especially the mother and the sister of the husband, also perpetrate violence among the refugee families in Australia. The study finds that emotional, financial, sexual, and extreme forms of physical violence against women are common among refugee families settled in Australia (Caspersz et al., 2023). In a similar setting, another qualitative study conducted on 30 international female students studying in Australia from 16 different countries finds that all of them faced severe sexual, physical, and intimate partner violence, leaving them in a state of helplessness and hopelessness (Tran et al., 2024).

Around 19% of women experience physical and or sexual violence throughout their lifetime in Portugal (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Almost a decade ago, about 40% of South Asian Women living in the US experienced domestic violence, which is extremely high compared to the lifetime occurrence of violence against women in the US, which is shown as 20% (Devries et al., 2013). Seemingly, a decade after, the study by Bhandari & Millner (2022) shows that among South Asian American women, 46.7% women regularly face

physical violence or aggression, 87.5% of them are emotionally abused, 54.2% are threatened or intimidated, 33.3% are financially abused and controlled, 20.8% face sexual abuse, 31.25% are socially isolated, 6.3% are often injured and need medical interventions, 2.1% suffer from loss of pregnancy because of fights and emotional abuse, and another 2.1% are verbally abused. However, in another study, Smith et al. (2017) find that in the United States, 1 woman out of 4 and 1 man out of 7 frequently experience different sorts of violence, such as physical, psychological, sexual, stalking, coercion, etc. According to this study, 45 million (37.3%) American women have experienced violence one way or the other by their male partner in their lifetime. Another study on Korean immigrants in the US reports that Korean women often experience intimate partner violence. Although both Korean men and women become victims of domestic violence, Korean immigrant women are most vulnerable as they frequently experience physical violence by their male counterparts. Korean women sustain physical injury on trivial matters by their male intimate partner. They also face verbal aggression and psychological abuse by their partner, leaving them in a state of depression (Cho et al., 2024).

Now, moving on to a study conducted in Cameroon, both men and women regularly experience different types of domestic violence. An estimate shows that 22% of men and 32% of women faced emotional, physical or sexual violence in a year among the general population in Cameroon. However, the actual figure of the victims of domestic violence is expected to be higher there. The study indeed shows that 46% of men and 59% of women in its sample generally experience emotional, physical and or sexual violence each year in Cameroon (Grimes et al., 2024). Swedish women, especially the young and adolescents are no exception. They, too experience different forms of violence, like physical and controlling behaviour, in their romantic relationship with their male partner. The findings of the study suggest that although adult women face a bit less violence than before, violence against young females has not gone

down yet. Even young women, in many cases, become the victims of gun violence by their male partners, which is often lethal in Sweden (Caman & Skott, 2024). In the same way, in Canada too, 3 out of 10 women experience sexual assault at least once after the age of 15 years, and 4 out of 10 women become the victim of intimate partner violence in their lifetime. In their study, Mercier et al. (2024) demonstrates that 50% of women face sexual, 60% face physical and 30% face verbal assault among its sample in Canada.

Violence against women is widespread in rural Bangladesh. Around 68% of rural households reported violence committed against women at least once in their lifetime, which is commonly verbal and physical. Among the rural women, 67.6% experience verbal and 22.4% often experience physical violence. A recent study reports that the number of women facing verbal violence has been increasing over time in Bangladesh (Francis-Tan, 2024). Previous studies (Das et al., 2016; Dalal et al., al. 2009) find that 79% of women face verbal and 74% face psychological abuse, while 54% of women are intimidated by divorce, 41% are driven out of home, and 28% are isolated from their parents.

In Iran, it has been reported that 22.9% of Iranian women frequently experience domestic violence, and Tehran, the capital city of Iran, has the highest number of women who are the victims of domestic violence among all other cities (Adineh et al., 2016). This is, perhaps, because of the increased number of reported cases of violence against women in Tehran when compared to other towns and cities in Iran. However, further studies in this regard are required. A study (Fakari et al., 2022) conducted on 420 samples shows that 55.7% of the women experienced physical, 66.7% faced psychological, and 47.1% had to concede sexual violence in Tehran during COVID-19.

Syrian women refugees living currently in Egypt were studied, showing 90.3% of women experienced psychological control, 91.3% experienced emotional abuse, 39.4% faced physical violence, and 27% encountered sexual abuse among 289 samples selected for the study (Elbarazi, 2024). Thus, these reviews reveal that

the nature of violence against women across the globe is more or less familiar.

Causes and Consequences

Patriarchy or patriarchal mindset could be mostly held responsible for perpetrating violence against women throughout the world. Gender inequality deeply entrenched in the male-dominated society causes power imbalance between men and women, leading to violence against women (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Das et al., 2016). Along with gender inequality, toxic masculinity, and supporting rapists force males to perpetrate violence against females (Gallo-Rivera et al., 2024; Hayes et al., 2024; Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Tran et al., 2024). Women are generally financially dependent on men in most countries. Because of this, men tend to indulge in violence against women, and women also helplessly accept it. On the contrary, women job holders are likely to face violence by their life partners when they challenge the authority of their husbands (Gohari et al., 2023). Gender-based hate discourses emerged from gender discrimination attitudes cherished in the hearts and minds of the people to help perpetuate violence against women in many societies (Afyonoglu, 2021; Shah & Mufeed, 2023). In South Asian culture, women are expected to be submissive and tolerant, and they should take care of the children and elderly persons in the family along with the charge of household chores. Women are abused in multiple ways if they are found not performing these duties and responsibilities according to the demands of the family in particular and society in general (Bhattacharyya et al., 2018; Das et al., 2015;2016; 2020; Rani & Bonu, 2009). In many Asian societies, the wife is physically and psychologically tortured and abused by the husband and in-laws because of the unfulfillment of their dowry demands to the wife and her parents. Sometimes, dowry demands lead to the wife's killing, or the wife feels terribly hopeless and finds no alternative, so she commits suicide to protect her from further humiliation (Nasrin, 2011). Extramarital affairs of the husband or his suspicion over the extramarital affairs of his wife or the husband's

attempt to marry more than once also trigger violence against the wife (Johnson & Das, 2009). Adverse social environment, alcohol consumption, and damaging peer pressure are potential reasons for men to be involved in committing violence against women in many developed countries (Bonar et al., 2022). In African countries, the absence of measures to address violence against women, prevalent patriarchal norms, discriminatory attitudes towards women, early marriage of girls, lack of employment, low level of education, etc., push men to perpetrate violence against women (Hayes et al., 2024).

Violence against women causes severe physical, psychological, sexual, and reproductive health problems for the women who become the victim of it. Children of the families riddled with domestic violence are also affected in many ways. It often leads to physical injury as 42% of women experiencing violence report injury worldwide, and in an extreme case, it causes homicide or suicide (WHO, 2024; Chawiyah, 2024; Gonzalez-Lienres, 2023). Sexual violence against women leads to unwanted pregnancies, abortions, gynaecological complications, sexually transmitted diseases like HIV and so on. Victims sometimes suffer from miscarriage, give birth to premature babies or low-weight babies or deliver stillbirth. Violence against women deteriorates the mental health of the victim as she suffers from depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety disorder, sleeping difficulties, and eating disorders (Chawiyah, 2024; Gonzalez-Lienres, 2023). It also causes headaches and different types of pain like abdominal pain, back pain, chronic pelvic pain and gastrointestinal pain. Victims generally confine themselves to avoiding interactions with other family members, which leads to poor mental and physical health. In some cases, childhood experience of violence against adolescent girls causes developing a smoking habit, resorting to substance use and indulging in distorted sexual behaviours (WHO, 2024; Hajnasiri et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Perhaps there is no society where violence against women does not happen. It has been happening for a time immemorial in human society. It is indeed an unending social scourge. This editorial has simply redrawn the attention of the research community about violence against women, which never came to an end in any society despite efforts undertaken in different forms like legislation passed to eliminate or reduce violence against women, policies and programs formulated and implemented to stop it, interventions of different sorts made to address this problem based on the findings of researches conducted on violence against women. Then, what went wrong? We need to retrospect our all efforts and re-energise ourselves to revisit violence against women in each and every society across the globe. It is not to be forgotten that the social and economic cost of violence against women is massive as it hurts the potential of individuals, destroys family life and brings about a kind of normlessness situation at the societal level. Although types, causes, and consequences of violence against women vary from society to society depending on multifaceted factors, there are lots of commonalities in relation to types, causes, and consequences of violence against women across societies. This editorial has presented some of these commonalities with robust evidence collected from the research findings of selected scholars. There is no doubt that structural issues like patriarchy and gender inequality could be described as significant reasons associated with violence against women and its consequences. Efforts made in multifarious ways targeting patriarchy and gender inequality for elimination have not been successful yet. These structural issues need to be redressed with new weapons to be applied on the basis of fresh research findings on violence against women. It needs to be noted that women of all sections of a population become victims of violence, not only limited to a particular section of people. Both male domination and gender discrimination still exist in highly advanced societies, resulting in the power imbalance between males and females,

causing, in most cases, male aggressiveness towards females. Future researchers in the field of violence against women should adopt a holistic approach, prioritising issues like patriarchy and violence against women or gender inequality, gender discrimination, and male domination while planning to research violence against women. A paradigm shift to study violence against women appears to be urgent in the 21st Century.

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