

EDUCATIONAL DISPARITY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN INDIA

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The Constitution of India has declared gender equality as a guiding principle but in practice the family emerges as a unit where subordination of women to men is a common feature. Despite all efforts, a woman in Indian society is considered so inferior that she does not have an individual identity (Khan and Singh, 1987). The patriarchal social system characterized by male dominance is quite often legitimized by religion and the prevailing traditions of the society. The patriarchal system tends to rationalize the gender inequality and women's subordination causing the evils of domestic violence or violent victimization of women within the boundaries of family, usually by men to whom they are married. The violence perpetrated by partners, generally male partners, in a marital union, refers to as spousal violence. Domestic violence against women has been acknowledged worldwide as a violation of basic human rights. Such violence has adverse effects on the economy of the country through increased disability of women, higher medical costs and loss of labor hours due to physical and psychological burdens (IIPS, 2006). A study by Ramasubban and Singh (1998) conducted in the slums of Mumbai, concluded that relatively large proportion of women who had experienced fetal loss, miscarriage or the still birth were associated with a violent assault their husbands inflicted upon them. The percentages of infant and child deaths have been found to be higher in India for women who had experienced physical violence by husbands or in-laws (Singh, Mahapatra and Dutta, 2008).

The spousal violence, including both physical and psychological abuse continues to be a global epidemic and the problem is growing fast in the developing countries including India. An attempt has been made in the present paper to analyze gender-based inequality in India in terms of literacy, educational attainment and gender development Index. In view of the current social and economic status of women, the paper further tries to assess the incidence of spousal violence in different socio-economic groups of the country. The paper also explores the impact of gender inequality and spousal violence on process and pace of women's empowerment. The analysis is mainly based on secondary data collected from Census of India, National Family Health Surveys conducted in India and various other national and international periodicals, journals and reports published by different official agencies.

A. Educational disparity in India

(i) level of Literacy:

Educational attainment is a significant indicator of a country's level of

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human capital development. One of the important indicators of women's status relative to men is the gender-gap in the levels of literacy and education. Education influences woman's chances of paid employment, her earning power, her age at marriage, her control over child bearing, her exercise of legal and political rights, and even her ability to care for herself and her children. Table 1 given below presents comparative census data about male-female literacy levels in the country.

TABLE-1 MALE AND FEMALE LITERACY RATES IN INDIA DURING DIFFERENT CENSUS YEARS

Census Year	Percentage of literates to total population		
	Females	Males	Persons
1951	8.86	27.16	18.33
1961	15.35	40.40	28.30
1971	21.97	45.96	34.45
1981	29.76	56.38	43.57
1991	39.29	64.13	52.21
2001	54.16	75.85	65.38
2011	65.46	82.14	74.04

Source: Census of India, Different Decadal Census Reports.

Note: Literacy rates for 1951, 1961 and 1971 relate to population aged five years and above. The rates for 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 census relate to population aged seven years and above.

Table 1 shows that the level of literacy among females has significantly increased in India during the previous decades (from 8.9% in 1951 to 54.2% in 2001), but men still have had higher literacy rates than women. During the year 2001, the percentage of literates among females aged 7 years and above was 54 percent as against 76 percent among males in the same age group. The data collected during the National Family Health Survey (2005-06) demonstrate that among the population aged 15 to 49 years, the literacy rate during 2005-06 was 55 percent among females as against 78 percent among males. During the same year, the proportion of the literate females had been found to be very low among women aged 15-49 years belonging to scheduled castes (43.8%) and scheduled tribes (33.4%) as compared to other castes (71%) (IIPS, 2006).

(ii) level of Education:

Table 2 given below demonstrates the differences in educational attainment of females and males aged six years and above. During the year 2005-06, 42 percent of the females in India had no education as against 22 percent of the males of the same age group. The proportion of those who were educated upto the level of 10 years or more of completed education had been found to be 14 percent among females as compared to 24 percent among the males. The table also shows that the median number of years of schooling completed was 1.9 years for females as

against 4.9 years for the males. The analysis further indicates that the proportion of those who had attained no education or who had never attended any school was significantly higher among the females than their male counterparts in 2005-06. In Indian society, girls' education is adversely affected because they are required to assist their mothers in daily household chores. The boys, on the other hand, are free from such responsibilities and are sent to schools (Roy and Niranjana, 2004).

TABLE-2- EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF FEMALE AND MALE POPULATION AGED SIX YEARS AND ABOVE (2005-06)

Years of Education	Female (Percent)	Male (Percent)
No Education (Never attended School)	41.5	21.9
Less than 5 Years	18.1	20.9
5 - 7 Years	15.7	18.4
8 - 9 Years	10.2	14.8
10 - 11 Years	6.7	10.6
12 or more years	7.6	13.2
Don't know	0.2	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0
Median number of years of schooling completed	1.9	4.9

Source: National Family Health Survey-3,(NFHS-3),2005-06,India, Vol.1

B. Domestic Violence and spousal violence

Domestic Violence, defined as violence by spouses as well as by other household members, has roots in lower socio-economic status of women and socio-cultural and psychological bases of Indian society. The popular image of a woman in Indian society is one lacking in courage and who is submissive and docile. Ideology of innate inferiority of women is often enforced by religious values and glorification of feminine virtues. The aggression and dominance as masculine virtues are emphasized in the families right from the very childhood, and in this process women start believing that it is 'right for them to be subordinate'. Against this background, a woman becomes an easy target for violence in the family. The tendencies for committing violence, atrocities and injustice against women are also rooted in greed for money, lack of trust, habits of drinking and gambling, criminal or unsound mind and a false sense of superiority of man over a woman (Ram, 2003).

Violence against women committed within the family, rarely arouses social concern which it deserves. In the domestic violence against women, the violence perpetrated by husband is most common in the country. Table-3 shows that most of the ever married women aged 15-49 years who had experienced physical violence since age 15, reported their husband (current or former) as the person who inflicted such violence. Under physical violence, a woman reported one or more types of violence such as : (1) Pushed her, shook her or threw something at her (2) slapped her (3) twisted her arm or pulled her hair (4) pushed her with his fist or with

something that could hurt her (5) kicked her, dragged her or beat her up (6) tried to choke her or burn, and (7) threatened her or attacked her with a knife, gun or any other weapon. The types of emotional violence are: (1) humiliating her in front of others (2) threatening to hurt or harm her or someone close to her, and (3) insulting her or making her feel bad about herself. The sexual violence included any sexual act by force when she did not want to.

TABLE-3 PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA AMONG EVER MARRIED WOMEN AGED 15-49 YEARS

Type of Violence (Percentage)	1998-99	2005-06
Women who experienced physical violence. (Among total ever married women aged 15-49 years).	21.0	33.5
Women whose husband committed physical violence. (Among those who experienced physical violence).	89.5*	92.6**
Women who experienced emotional violence committed by their husband.	-	15.8
Women who reported sexual violence by husband.	-	10.0
Women who experienced any form of physical and/or sexual violence and/or emotional violence by husband.	-	39.7

* Among total ever married women (aged 15-49), the percentage of those who experienced physical violence by husband was 18.8%.

** Physical violence by current husband or by former husband.

Source: (i) National Family Health Survey-2, India, 1998-99m

(ii) National Family Health Survey -3, India, Vol. 1, 2005-06.

The incidence of spousal violence by husband is very high in India as 40 percent of the ever married women aged 15-49 years reported during 2005-06 that they had experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence. Large differentials exist in different socio-economic categories in the proportion of women who experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence committed by their husband. Table-4 demonstrates that prevalence of physical, emotional or sexual violence had been higher in the rural areas (43 percent) than that in urban areas (33 percent). Differentials in the prevalence of such spousal violence are significantly large by education; with 49 percent of the women having no education had experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence as against 15 percent of those who had completed schooling of 12 years or more. Thus, educational attainment by women has positive impact on reduction of spousal and domestic violence. Employed women experienced more violence by their husband (46 percent) than those who were not employed (35 percent).

Due to low level of education, women have no power to resist violence by their husbands. If they are highly educated and employed in higher organised sector jobs, they may take necessary actions to prevent violence by their spouses. Prevalence of spousal violence by religion shows that the rates were the highest for

Buddhists (47%) followed by Muslims (43%) and the Hindus (40%). It had been moderate among the Sikhs and Christians and the lowest among Jains. The analysis further reveals that the proportion of women who experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence by their husbands had been significantly higher among scheduled castes (48%) and scheduled tribe women (47%) than the other castes (32%). The prevalence of spousal violence among the OBCs had also been quite high (40.4%). The level of spousal violence sharply declines with the improvement in economic conditions of the family. Among the women belonging to households with lowest wealth index, the proportion of those who experienced spousal violence was 52% as against 21% among the women with highest wealth index. Higher prevalence of violence against women among those belonging to lower class may be attributed to what Lewis calls 'the culture of poverty'. The data, thus, indicate that the prevalence of violence by husband had been more in the households with rural background, lower levels of education, belonging to the two religious majorities, and the lower castes/tribes. It also depicts that the higher the wealth index of the households, the lower the rate of prevalence of the domestic and spousal violence.

TABLE-5 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EVER MARRIED WOMEN (AGE 15-49 YEARS) WHO EXPERIENCED SPOUSEL VIOLENCE (2005-06)**

Characteristics	% of women who experienced spousal violence
(i) <u>Place of Residence:</u>	
Rural	42.9
Urban	32.7
(ii) <u>Level of Education:</u>	
No education	49.0
Less than 5 years	44.8
5-7 years	37.7
8-9 years	31.3
10-11 years	23.4
12 years or more	14.7
(iii) <u>Religious Background:</u>	
Hindu	39.7
Muslim	43.0
Christian	33.6
Sikh	25.3
Budhist	47.2
Jain	13.9
(iv) <u>Caste/Tribe:</u>	
Scheduled Caste	47.9
Scheduled Tribe	47.0
Other backward castes	40.4
Others	32.3

(v) <u>Women's Employment Status</u> .*	
Not employed	34.6
Employed for cash	46.3
(vi) <u>Wealth Index</u> :	
Lowest	52.0
Second	49.0
Middle	42.5
Fourth	35.1
Highest	20.9

*During past 12 months

** Spousal Violence includes emotional, physical or sexual violence.

Source: National Family Health Survey - 3 India, Vol. 1, 2005-06.

C. The Issue of Women's Empowerment in view of the Prevailing Gender Inequality and Violence:

Empowering women through improvement in their educational level and providing them better employment opportunities is not only a worthy goal in its own right, but also a key strategy for eliminating violence. Women will never escape violence as long as they are financially dependent on men and derive their social value exclusively from their role as wife and mother. Legal codes and customary practices in India still treat women as second-class citizens, denying them the right to own property, to travel freely, and to gain access to economic and productive resources. Women are underrepresented in positions of leadership, and their specific concerns are rarely reflected in public policy. As a result, women frequently lack the power necessary to take action against violence committed by their spouses.

Empowerment is generally viewed as a long-term process, occurring at the international, national, community and individual level. Its goals are to:

- I. Increase access to education for women and girls.
- II. Increase employment opportunities for women particularly in the organized, modern and formal sector.
- III. Increase women's access to and control over economic resources.
- IV. Strengthen women in leadership and decision making.
- V. Eliminate laws that discriminate against women and children.
- VI. Increase women's access to health, information and women's control over their own bodies.
- VII. Improve women's self-esteem and sense of personal power.
- VIII. Encourage non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to instill a greater sense of entitlement among women via human rights education, legal literacy programmes, gender training and skill improvement efforts etc.

Achievement of all these goals may result in a reduction in gender inequality and the prevalence of domestic violence. It may lead to an enhancement in women's self esteem, which is the first step towards their empowerment.

Conclusion:

The foregone analysis, thus, reveals that in a patriarchal society like India, gender bias, in its various forms, prevents large proportions of women from obtaining education, health care, employment and various other basic necessities of life. The gender gap in literacy, educational level and employment is indeed very large. Women are generally economically dependent on men. Male dominance over women generally prevails in the country and quite often this is legitimised by religion and traditional values. In the families, large proportion of women has been the targets of domestic violence. Women have to bear the health related and psychological burdens due to violent behaviour of their husband. The prevalence of physical, emotional or sexual violence by husbands has been found to be significantly higher among uneducated and poor women and those belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslim community. However, the analysis brings out that the families with the higher levels of educational and economic attainments tend to experience lesser spousal violence. Therefore, higher educational and economic attainments by the households may lead to substantial reduction in the prevalence of domestic and/or spousal violence.

The findings of the present study suggest that the position of women in the society can be significantly improved by raising their educational and employment status. In order to improve employability of women, provision of skill training opportunities assumes vital importance. The cruelty and violence against women from husbands may be sufficiently reduced if females are educated and made economically independent. Hence, more efforts are needed to provide better employment opportunities to women in organised and the formal sector. The government, social workers, women's organisations, other activist groups and the media may play a vital role in this regard. More efforts are needed to sensitise men and women on gender issues, particularly those who are illiterate and belong to weaker sections of the society. The law relating to domestic violence should be implemented properly to deliver justice to the suffering women.

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