

Domestic Violence: A Psychological Perspective

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To understand the violent behaviour of a person one needs to study the root cause/ causes of such behaviour. Though it is an individual problem, and each individual differs in exhibiting it, yet it is a common problem in the world. Domestic violence is considered as one of the aspects of personality problems and diminished interpersonal relationships. Hence instead of violent behavior, its causes are to be identified and treated. The perpetrator has to be viewed as a sick person who needs to be healed.

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It includes physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, and it cuts across boundaries of age, race, culture, wealth and geography. It takes place in the home, on the streets, in schools, the workplace, in farm fields, refugee camps, during conflicts and crises. A World Health Organization study of 24,000 women in 10 countries found the prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence by a partner. Violence against women and girls has far-reaching consequences, harming families and communities.

Edward W. Gondolf a Professor of Sociology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in his book on *Batterer Intervention Systems: Issues, Outcomes and Recommendations* (2002) discusses on one of the most burning debates in the field of domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a broad and encompassing term of course. It can include child abuse, sibling abuse, spousal abuse and elder abuse. It can refer to any emotional or physical harm inflicted on one family member by another. But the aspect of domestic violence receiving most attention in recent years is men's violence against their female partners (i.e., wives and lovers)- *woman battering*. This is particularly pernicious because of its broader social and political implications. For one, men's violence against their partners threatens the bond between men and women- the bond that strengthens the family and supports the individuals. It happens where we most expect love, care and respect. Men's violence against

women also controls and subjects women in a society that although changing, is still largely dominated by men and masculine values. The violence perpetuates and enforces this order and dominance. (3)

Garda Ghista an American non-fiction writer in her book on *Wife Abuse*, (2009) focuses on various types of violence against women. Garda Ghista has thoroughly researched the subject she is dealing with. She clearly declares that "... the term "domestic violence" is simply a euphemism for "wife abuse" (2). The writer draws the attention of the readers with as serious importance that, "Due to visible wounds, physical abuse is easily identifiable. But emotional, verbal and psychological abuse are much harder to pinpoint, especially as many women hide it or do not even realize that what is happening to them should never happen"(2). The root cause for the violence or abuse may be perceived as the control and dominance by man over woman. And unquestionably this domination or power has a severe ramification on a woman's life. The main traits that enslave a human being are indisputably, domination, oppression, control etc. The authors Lou Brown, Francois Dubau and Merritt McKeon, Jr in their work *Stop Domestic Violence*, rightly remark that "Before any physical violence is ever employed, the power imbalance and control are established. The situation "creeps up" on the woman, so she simply doesn't see how she is coming under tighter and tighter controls and more and more abuse" (Lou 13).

Domestic violence is often neglected and denied and not considered a serious crime. Domestic violence is an epidemic that affects individuals in every community, without any discrimination- race, religion, caste, economic status, nationality and educational background. In majority of the cases violence is connected with controlling behaviour. The only objective of domestic violence is to establish and maintain a total control on the victim.

It cannot be decided that all men who are violent have grown up in violent homes, although some have. But

men who abuse their partners do have certain characteristics in common. These characteristics are:

- a lack of self-esteem
- an urge to control
- a lack of respect
- a desire to restrict the women closest to them

According to Gilchrist (2003), 73% of questioned perpetrators admitted drinking alcohol before violent action. A quarter of perpetrators are dependent on alcohol but at the same time one in five interviewed claimed that they do not drink at all. Gilchrist and others in their study in 2003 link certain types of perpetrators with certain violent behaviour: The antisocial/ narcissistic type in general uses intimidation and coercion as well as psychological violence and male privileges. The more antisocial type (47% of cases) shows lack of empathy for the victim, behaves more “macho”-like and has already been convicted of criminal offences. He “neutralizes” his violent behaviour by minimizing it and blaming the victim. The more narcissistic type shows a tendency to narcissism and paranoia. They do not show overt “macho” behaviour but at the same time try to answer the desired way. In Gilchrist’s research, this type of perpetrator occurred in 13% of the cases. The borderline/emotional dependent type tries more to isolate the partner and threatens to hurt or kill her. This type further shows a high degree of interpersonal dependency and anger; he suffers from depression and anxiety states and blames others for his situation. Further, there is a high probability of the experience of physical or sexual abuse in childhood. 28% of the examined perpetrators of domestic violence belong to this personality type. Reasons for violent behaviour were jealousy, separation and themes around the children.

The hideous act of domestic violence gender bias is the major prevalent issue that raises the great majority of male offenders and female victims and societal background of the perpetrator’s attitude toward their violent actions. This approach was studied by Walker (1979), Sonkin/Martin/Walker (1985) Walker (1990), Godenzi (1996), Hageman White (1997) and Brückner (2002). In this gender biased approach, battering is viewed as part of broader societal norms and practices that subordinate and oppress women within institutions and individual relationships. Therefore, according to Godenzi (1996) battering is a social

problem and not an individual one. Men and women are ‘performing’ gender: violent behaviour is acquired and interweaved with presentations of masculinity and femininity for men and women respectively.

Further, men’s aggression is rarely negatively sanctioned. This weakness strengthens their attitude towards battering as a positive demonstration of virility. In this model, the position of women is described as a) victims and b) supporting a complementary structure, meaning men and women are mutually strengthening “the transgressing, uncontrolled and at the same time controlling behaviour of the man and the acquiescing, paralyzed behaviour of the woman” (Brückner2002).

The gender biased approach is based on the cognitive-behavioural theory, stating that violent behaviour is acquired and encouraged by societal values and norms. Domestic violence is analysed as a complex combination of thought and attitudinal processes and overt behaviours that are acquired and serve particular psychosocial functions for the perpetrator, e.g. confirming his virility and male privileges.

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence need not be always physical. It can also be psychological, sexual and financial. Domestic violence is a threatening behaviour, i.e violence or abuse between adults of a family or who are, or have been, in an intimate relationship. The usual pattern of domestic violence is of a man who is abusive towards his girlfriend or wife, but there are other types of domestic violence also.

To bring change in the social norms and attitudes that contribute to domestic violence is one of the essential solutions. Hence programmes based on the entire coordinated community have to be planned with the focus on to give protection to victims(women). Training programmes for perpetrators have to be developed, combining a cognitive behavioural approach with feminist analysis of gender bias of society.

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