



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND ITS EFFECT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Dr. Anshu Daud ¹

¹ Asso. Prof. & Head, Department of Psychology, Isabella Thoburn College, Lucknow.

ABSTRACT

Violence against women and girls is one of the world's most prevalent human rights violations, taking place every day, many times over, in every corner of the globe. It has serious short- and long-term physical, economic and psychological consequences on women and girls, preventing their full and equal participation in society. The magnitude of its impact, both in the lives of individuals and families and society as a whole, is immeasurable. Women in all countries, irrespective of status, class, age, caste or religion, experience violence in virtually all spheres of life, whether in the home, the school, at work, on the street, in government institutions, or in times of conflict or crisis. This article intends to highlight the psychological problems experienced by women after an experience of violence.

Keywords: Violence, Coercion, Deprivation, Sexual Harassment, Intimidation, Domestic Violence.

INTRODUCTION

Violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

The United Nations, Article 1 of the declaration of the elimination of violence against women defines it as *"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."*

Article 2 of the UN declaration clarifies the list of some of the forms of violence, *"violence against women encompasses, but not be limited to acts of physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family and the community. These acts include spousal battering, sexual abuse of female child, dowry related ferocity, rape including marital rape and practices harmful to women, such as female genital mutilation. They also include non – spousal violence, sexual harassment, intimidation at work and in educational institutions, forced prostitution and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, such as rape in war"*

In India crimes against women are increasing at an alarming rate. Some common forms of violence against women are rape, dowry deaths, female infanticide, forced child marriage, abduction, and cases of acid throwing on women. Reports show an increase of 26.35% of violence against women. Violence inside the house is mostly recorded under the legal name of "cruelty by husband and his relatives", which is an increase by 27% which breaks down to about one every four minutes. The situation in India with respect to VAW is alarming. The prevalence figures of India, during the year 2011, as reported by

National Crime Records Bureau are: Cruelty by husband and their relatives - 43.4%; molestation - 18.8%; rape - 10.6%; kidnapping and abduction - 15.6%; sexual harassment - 3.7%; dowry death - 3.8%; Immoral Traffic Act - 1.1%; Dowry Prohibition Act - 2.9%; and others - 0.2%

Domestic violence refers to "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.". Domestic violence (DV) against women is an all-pervasive phenomenon worldwide. Declared as a "public health epidemic" by the World Health Organization (WHO), it continues to afflict more than one-third of the women globally.

Forms of violence against women and girls include, witchcraft and dowry related violence and deaths; crimes committed in the name of so-called honour; femicide; domestic violence; harmful practices such as child, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation. It also includes sexual violence and its diverse forms such as forced sterilisation, forced nudity, forced abortions, sexual harassment, incest, rape, including marital rape and gang rape.

Women may be exposed to one or more forms of physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence within the family, sometimes even to all forms of violence (Zorrilla et al. 2010).

Physical violence is defined as the use of brute force as a tool of intimidation and sanctions. Sexual violence can be defined as the use of sexuality on the other person as a tool of threat, intimidation and control.

Psychological violence is a person's intimidation, control, and punishment with his/her behaviours and words against another person.

Economic violence is defined as the use of money and

economic resources as a means of sanction, threat and control over the other person (Coker et al. 2000, Watts and Zimmerman 2002).

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Violence against women is associated with a number of mental health problems including mood, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and somatoform disorders WHO. **Violence against women can cause long term physical and mental health problems.** Violence and abuse affect not just the women involved but also their children, families, and communities. A review of the international literature found high prevalence rates of intimate partner violence among men and women across all the diagnostic categories of the mental disorders. The prevalence of intimate partner violence was found to be 45.6% among patients suffering from depressive disorders, 27.6% in anxiety disorders, and 61% for PTSD. The same review also found that there was a high likelihood of experiencing intimate partner violence in women with mental illness as compared to the women who do not have any mental health problems. The severity and the duration of the physical intimate violence are associated with the frequency and the severity of the depressive symptoms. Similar evidence exists for PTSD which suggests that extent, severity, and duration of the abuse are directly associated with the intensity of the posttraumatic stress symptoms. Furthermore, it has been observed that women who experience multiple forms of abuse and/or revictimized are at increased risk of mental disorders. Thus, it can be stated that the patients with mental illness are more likely to suffer domestic abuse, and at the same time, people who undergo domestic abuse are more likely to develop psychiatric conditions as well as experience acute decompensation of pre-existing mental illnesses.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a common emotion when dealing with violence. Persistent, excessive, irrational violence affects a women's ability to function, then anxiety becomes a disorder. The symptoms experienced after violence are:

- Feeling restless, dizzy and fatigued
- Being irritable
- Having headaches, muscular aches and unexplained aches
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Having sleep problems
- Palpitation, sweating, trembling
- Difficulty breathing
- Feeling of derealisation and depersonalization

DEPRESSION

The likelihood of developing depression was 2.7 times greater in women who had experienced violence. Depression is a mood disorder with symptoms that affect a

person's thoughts, feelings, behaviours and daily functioning. The symptoms experienced after violence are:

- Feeling of low and sadness most of the time
- Loss of interest
- Difficulty in completing daily activities
- An inability to enjoy activities that were enjoyed before
- Difficulty in concentration, thinking and making decisions
- Loss of confidence and self esteem
- Negative thoughts about self, life and future
- Feeling guilty and self-blame
- Thoughts of self-harm and suicidal deaths (3.5% higher in women who experienced violence)

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder in person who was exposed to death, serious injury or actual or threatened sexual violence. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms may start within one month of a traumatic event, but sometimes symptoms may not appear until years after the event. The symptoms experienced after violence are:

- Recurrent, involuntary and intrusive memories of the traumatic event
- Recurrent distressing dreams
- Flashbacks
- Avoidance of or effort to avoid external reminders
- Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself
- Persistent negative emotions such as state of fear, horror, guilt or shame
- Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
- Anger outburst
- Self-destructive behaviour
- Hypervigilance
- Sleep disturbances
- Persistent inability to experience positive emotions, inability to experience happiness, satisfaction and loving feelings

CONCLUSION

Violence against women is a widespread social, human rights and public mental health problem. Increase of violence in families and communities could be a symptom of gender role change. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, and the immediate and long-term physical, sexual, and mental consequences for women and

girls can be devastating, including death. Therefore, while the causes of VAW are complex, the issue must be addressed at all levels - within mental health policy, programmes, sector reform and changes to social norms and cultural beliefs. One in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner. It is hoped and believed that with appropriate routine screening as well as a thorough assessment of physical, emotional, and sexual violence, mental health care professionals can identify the problem and provide solutions. Violence has immediate effects on women's health, which in some cases, is fatal. Physical, mental and behavioural health consequences can also persist long after the violence has stopped. With the recognition that VAW is a mental health and human rights concern, it is required that violence against women should be added in mental health policy and programmes. Apart from these, concerted and multi sector responses backed by strong political commitment towards ending violence against women are also required.

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