

Gender Based Violence: A Paradoxical Analysis

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Abstract: In international discourse, gender based violence has clearly been placed in the realm of women's human rights over the past decade. This paradigm is however shifting. There are now calls for gender based violence prevention and response in humanitarian settings to focus on a wider range of gendered and sexualised violence, such as sexual violence directed at men in conflict. While all forms of gendered and sexualised violence must be addressed, humanitarian response must be grounded in a sound understanding of who this violence affects, how and why it happens and how it is best addressed. Many men when they come home, usually their wife starts grumbling, murmuring, and cursing. Many husbands are scared of their wives and their in-laws. Generally, society considers that women cannot be verbally or mentally abusive or harass men. There are various studies on dynamics of violence against women, but there are limited studies on the issue of domestic violence and abuse against men. Violence is not simply a gender issue and it is perpetrated by both men and women. Research in the field of domestic violence over the past years has generally shown that men and women act violent in relationships at about the same rate. In lessening the impact of gender based violence or abuse on men, women, and children, it is indispensable to be recognized that these are human relations problems and not a gender issue. It is in this backdrop that this paper attempts to analyse dynamics of gender based violence paradoxically.

Key Words: Gender, Violence, Dynamics, Paradox, and Analysis.

I. Introduction

International concern over gender based violence has increased considerably in recent years. The current debate about what constitutes GBV raises a number of issues and questions that needs to be considered if we are to promote theory-and-evidence based humanitarian practice in this area. Is it a good idea to have an all-encompassing definition of GBV? Where does the term come from in the first place, and what does it actually mean? Will a broad definition serve the needs, interests and rights of diverse groups affected by different forms of gendered and sexualised violence in humanitarian settings? Is there a risk of rolling back the hard-won gains made to have violence against women and girls in humanitarian settings recognised and prioritised by the international community? Is GBV still a useful term if it has so many different meanings? Since an approach has been the cornerstone of the feminist-based rape and domestic violence movements around the world for decades. Gender mainstreaming emerged in the 1980s as a strategy to further women's empowerment and to promote gender equality through ensuring that public policy reflects the needs and interests of women as well as those of men. Still for many humanitarian agencies and practitioners, gender-based violence remains synonymous with violence against women and girls. This paradigm is however shifting. There are now calls for GBV prevention and response in humanitarian settings to focus on a wider range of gendered and sexualised violence, such as sexual violence directed at men in conflict. While all forms of gendered and sexualised violence must be addressed, humanitarian response must be grounded in a sound understanding of who this violence affects, how and why it happens and how it is best addressed¹.

Violence against Females

In international discourse, gender based violence has clearly been placed in the realm of women's human rights over the past decade. Prior to 1993, most governments regarded violence against women largely as a private matter between individuals². Here, gender based violence experienced by women and girls refers to battering and other forms of intimate partner violence including marital rape, sexual violence, dowry-related violence, female infanticide, sexual abuse of female children in the household, honor crimes, early marriage, forced marriage, female genital cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women, sexual harassment in the workplace and educational institutions, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking of girls and women, and violence perpetrated against domestic workers³.

The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender based violence resulting in physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women. This may include verbal threats, coercion, economic abuse, or arbitrary deprivation of freedom in both the private and public spheres. Thus, violence against women has

many forms; it can be physical, sexual, or emotional, and may be caused by a husband, a partner, a family member, or another person⁴. Violence to wives, the central concern here, is found in all societies and across all economic and age groups. Any traditional custom that places women in subordinate positions within society or in the family has the potential to turn violent. The putative sacredness of a traditional marriage, rigid ideas of conjugalities, and patriarchal traditions of family structure take precedence over concerns for women and children. It has been observed that whenever male authority is threatened, the lives of women and children become redundant, and are considered dispensable. Prejudice towards women is entrenched in Indian culture. Women are devalued, subordinated, and mistreated as well⁵. Violence against women is present in every country, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity, and age. Even though most societies prescribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women's human rights are often sanctioned under the grab of cultural practices and norms⁶. The attitude of indifference and negligence can be attributed to factors like lack of awareness of seriousness of the problem, general acceptance of man's superiority over woman because of which violent act against women are not viewed as violent or deviant, and the denial violence by women themselves owing to their religious values and socio-cultural attitudes⁷.

Violence against women is a serious problem in India where slightly more than one third of women ages 15-49 report experiencing violence typically from an intimate partner or husband at some point in their lives. Yet, a culture of silence persists as Indian women are socialized to accept and tolerate GBV. Cultural practices, such as dowry, reinforce rigid patriarchal norms and beliefs often lead to deadly outcomes. In 2012, according to National Crime Records Bureau, 2013, 8,233 women in India died violent deaths, also referred to as 'kitchen accidents', at the hands of their husbands or in-laws because their families were unable to meet dowry demands. Sexual violence and rape have similarly become poignant and pressing issues in India, particularly after the highly publicized gang rape of a 23-year-old woman on a New Delhi bus in December 2012. The public outrage that followed greatly heightened the visibility and public awareness of the existence and frequency of rape nationwide. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 2013, 92 women are raped every day in India. Harassment is also a significant problem. In Delhi, 73 percent of women and girls face sexual aggression in their own neighbourhoods, 63 percent are fearful of going out after dark, and 05 percent do not feel safe at all⁸. Notwithstanding, the importance of changing the status of women, reducing gender inequality, and increasing respect for women is globally advocated in several researches. In this regard, several authors address the issue of adverse effects of patriarchal attitudes on women and girls. Education and empowerment often are recommendations to combat this global violence. If women are given their rightful place in society without fear of violence not only women but all people and societies will benefit⁹.

Violence against Males

Violence against men by women is not a new phenomenon and it will increase with changing power dynamics, economic independence, and control over economy and resources. This change in power dynamics will also affect relationships between men and women, where men are afraid of losing power and women are excited by their empowered position. In this context, situating 'power' within men and women, husband-wife, and family is important in favour of the larger society. Because of a power imbalance, women have suffered for centuries. The question arises as, will this gradual change in power lead to harmonize society in favour of the larger society, state or take a reverse direction such as violence against men by women. Women's position, power, and status are changing. They are empowered and aware of their rights. These factors along with education, changing values and norms, and gender role empower women in realizing that they are not inferior to men and even at places stronger and more powerful than men. They are better positioned to understand this perceived difference in power. Much has been researched and reported on violence against women but not on violence against men¹⁰.

Although there is no systematic study or record on domestic violence against men in India, it is generally estimated that in 100 cases of domestic violence, approximately 40 cases involve violence against men. There is little evidence available about the actual number of violent acts against men and underlying dynamics of violence. There are various reasons for under-reporting, but foremost among them are our social system and values attached to men, which stop them from sharing and reporting domestic violence and abuse. Even when men report domestic abuse and violence, most people do not believe them. When men try to narrate their problems, torture, struggle, and harassment within marriage and family, no one listens to them; instead, people laugh at them. Many men are ashamed of talking about and sharing that they are beaten by their wives. Many men when they come home, usually their wife starts grumbling, murmuring, and cursing. Women withhold sex without reason as generally men in India do not enjoy sex outside marriage and it is a bargaining tool for women. Many husbands are scared of their wives and their in-laws. They are threatened by their in-laws to act as their wives said. Mostly women involved in violence against men are verbally abusive. They insult men, even insult their aged parents. Women find faults and harass through different ways. These faults are related to profession, attitude, day-to-day work, and sexual life, as not all men are capable of satisfying the needs of a wife after a certain age or have some physical problem. Mostly physical disability in the bedroom

occurs because of sarcasm by the wife. This verbal abuse leads to mental torture. Generally, society considers that women cannot be verbally or mentally abusive or harass men. In some cases, it is also found and reported that when things go wrong or when husband is not following what his wife is demanding, her family and in-laws start to threaten to charge him with false cases such as anti-dowry (498a, IPC) or the Domestic Violence Act, 2005¹¹.

Violence against men is not considered serious because of its different manifestation. In most cases of violence against men, women use more mental, verbal, and emotional violence and abuse and are involved less in physical violence. The impact of violence against men is less apparent and is less likely to come to the attention of others. A significant number of men are over sensitive to emotional and psychological abuse. In some cases, humiliating a man emotionally in front of others can be more devastating than physical abuse. Mental and emotional abuse can be an area where women are often more brutal than men. However, what hurts a man mentally and emotionally can in some cases be very different from what hurts a woman. For some men, being called a coward, impotent, or a failure can have a very different psychological impact than it would have on a woman. Unkind and cruel words hurt in different ways and linger in different ways. In most cases, men are more deeply affected by emotional abuse than physical abuse¹². Police are much more likely to arrest a man than a woman when fielding a domestic dispute call, and lobbying by women's groups. Research shows that a gender-balanced approach to domestic violence is essential in order to reduce both the frequency and severity of such incidents for both men and women. In order to address these issues in an effective way, we must first recognise that domestic violence and abuse are human problems, not gender issues. Central to the solution is the restoration of civil liberties, notably due legal process and equality before the law, which provides the bedrock for any democratic nation¹³.

Men tolerate and stay in abusive and violent relationship for many reasons. Some of them are the belief and hope that things would get better, fear of losing social respect and position, protection, and love toward their children and family. Many abused men feel that they have to make their marriages work. They are afraid that if things fall apart, they will be blamed. Many abused men also believe that it is their fault and feel that they deserve the treatment they receive. Another reason is increasing economic and other dependency on women. In cases where an abused man is mentally, emotionally, or financially dependent on the woman, the idea of leaving the relationship generates feeling of depression and anxiety¹⁴.

Gender Based Violence

Gender is the term used to denote the *social characteristics* assigned to men and women. These social characteristics are constructed on the basis of different factors, such as age, religion, national, ethnic and social origin. They differ both within and between cultures and define identities, status, roles, responsibilities and power relations among the members of any society or culture. Gender is learned through socialisation. It is not static or innate, but evolves to respond to changes in the social, political and cultural environment. People are born female or male (sex); they learn how to be girls and boys, and then become women and men (gender). Gender refers to what it means to be a boy or girl, woman or man, in a particular society or culture. Society teaches expected attitudes, behaviours, roles and activities. Gender defines the roles, responsibilities, constraints, opportunities and privileges of men and women in any context¹⁵. While violence is a coercive mechanism to impose one's will over another in order to prove one's sense of power. Any individual or group facing the threat of coercion or being disciplined to act in a manner serving the interest of another individual or group can be said to be subject to violence. This is not necessarily confined to physical violence, but may be extended to the creation of an atmosphere of terror, a situation of threat and reprisal. Violence lies in the power of dynamics of social situation and it is more precisely the abuse of power¹⁶.

Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence are global health, human rights and developmental problems. These problems have profound, immediate and long-term consequences involving physical, psychological and social effects. Despite the various forms of domestic and sexual violence worldwide, there is one clear pattern in the occurrence. A growing body of international research examines the extent and patterns of gender based violence across a range of countries¹⁷. Gender based violence cuts across public and private spheres, including home, school and work, and takes place during peacetime and conflict. It includes violence that is perpetuated or condoned by the state. It is both a human rights and a development issue, with negative consequences for both women and men¹⁸.

Gender based violence is a global public health concern that has only relatively recently received significant research and policy attention. It is one of the most common forms of violence globally and includes physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. In India the issue has been highlighted with the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005¹⁹. Eliminating gender based violence (GBV) has long been a goal of the United States with United States Agency International Development USAID addressing GBV for nearly two decades. The equal participation of women in the political, economic and social spheres of societies across the world is a key ingredient for democratic development. Unless women fully enjoy their human rights to which freedom from violence is inextricably bound, progress toward development will continue to fall short.

Promoting women's rights and reducing gender based violence are necessary to increase the effectiveness of development globally. Gender based violence is manifested in many of the areas in which USAID works, cutting across both development and humanitarian assistance objectives²⁰.

Gender based violence is undoubtedly one of the most common forms of violence in the world. It includes physical violence, emotional violence, sexual violence and economic violence. Recent multi-country studies, using a common methodology and definitions, have found high prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women by intimate male partners. Gender based violence has devastating consequences not only for victims but also for society as a whole²¹. It results in physical, sexual and psychological harm to both men and women and includes any form of violence or abuse that targets men or women on the basis of their sex. Unequal power relations between men and women significantly contribute to gender violence. In fact, gender based violence is intended to maintain gender inequalities and reinforce traditional gender roles for both men and women. Although men and boys are also victims of GBV, especially in trafficking, conflict and educational settings, the majority of GBV victims worldwide are female²².

The United Nations adopted the first internationally accepted definition of violence against women in 1993, defining such violence to be 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women whether occurring in public or private life.' This definition hints that gender based violence is a broader category than violence against women, and that gender based violence at least theoretically could also include violence that affects men as long as it is conditioned upon or affected by men's gender roles²³. Human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interconnected and interdependent. Every individual, without regard to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or status, is entitled to the respect, protection, exercise and enjoyment of all the fundamental human rights and freedoms. States are obliged to ensure the equal enjoyment of all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights for women and men, girls and boys²⁴. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard. The Constitution not only grants equality to women, but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women. Within the framework of a democratic polity, our laws, development policies, Plans and programmes have aimed at women's advancement in different spheres. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instruments committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the ratification of the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993²⁵.

Hence, there prevail **three main** interpretations of gender based violence. Each of them includes different forms of violence and each with different theoretical roots. **The first** and most common interpretation of GBV is as primarily men's violence against women and girls. Thus, gender-based violence was used in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (UN DEVAW) in 1993 to underscore the structural nature of male violence against women across the lifespan, and to highlight the gendered power relations that cause and perpetuate it. Within a violence against women framework, which is informed by feminist theory, the gendered dimensions of violence against women are different from those of violence against men, because 'while men may certainly be exposed to violence as a result of their socially determined gender roles and norms, the violence they experience – or even perpetrate against other men – rarely if ever contributes to or confirms the overall subjugation of men as an entire subgroup of people'. **The second** major interpretation of GBV has emerged from the study of masculinity and sexuality. This sees GBV as violence primarily used by men against women, some males, and inclusive of sexual violence against children. In this interpretation, GBV is used to oppress some men as well as women and girls, and is a policing mechanism to enforce gender hierarchies in which men are privileged in relation to women, but also in relation to some groups of men. Homophobic violence and sexual exploitation and abuse of children are considered forms of GBV in this interpretation. **The third** and broadest interpretation of GBV refers to violence 'directed at an individual, male or female, based on his or her specific role in society'. In this interpretation, GBV is violence used against women, girls, men and boys to assert and reproduce gender roles and norms. According to this understanding, GBV can happen equally to a person of either sex and is used to reinforce conformity to gender roles. It includes violence against women and girls, sexual violence against men, and violence that is directed at girls because they are girls and boys because they are boys, for example the recruitment of boys as combatants into armed groups²⁶.

A Paradoxical Analysis

Gender based violence is one of the most widespread and human rights abuses, but least recognized in the world. It refers to any harm perpetrated against a person's will on the basis of gender, the socially ascribed differences between males and females²⁷. *Gender based violence is the general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society*²⁸. In this context, one

needs to understand that dynamics of domestic violence and abuse among men and women are different, and reasons, purposes, and motives are often very different. There are various studies on dynamics of violence against women, but there are limited studies on the issue of domestic violence and abuse against men. The word man is gender-biased, denoting power, embedded with masculine behavior, appearance, and control of emotion (it is generally believed that men have less emotions than women, although no scientific evidence is available). It is common belief and perception that separates male and female in terms of expression of their feelings. It can be a matter of shame for men to disclose their suffering in a men-dominated society, as it can be perceived as ‘feminine behavior.’ If a married man discloses his suffering to his friend or his family, he fears loneliness and has fear of loss of patriarchy and divorce from his wife or dominating behavior of his wife. It also has ill effects on his family and children and responsibility toward them. Because of this, men start living in distress and cannot disclose their feelings to anybody. Unavailability of a strong support system, as counselling services, institutional support, help line, family support, is another factor²⁹.

Research in the field of domestic violence has shown that men and women act violently in relationships at about the same rate. Furthermore, men and women are equally likely to instigate violence against one another. The truth is surprisingly egalitarian. About half of all domestic violence occurs with both partners abusing each other³⁰. No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they’re in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. It is believed that humanity needs research inspired by the moral agenda and perspective of those who focus on the oppression of women, regardless of whether the oppression is physical, sexual, psychological, or economic; and also research inspired by the moral agenda of those who focus on physical assault, regardless of whether the assault is by a man, woman or child³¹.

Responding to domestic violence effectively requires an analysis of domestic violence that incorporates gender. This has been essential to naming violence and being clear about the causes of violence and who is responsible for abuse largely targeted at women and their children. Much data have been collected that confirms that women, in the overwhelming majority of cases, are the victims of violence from a partner. An emerging question raised within the field is, ‘What about the men who are also victims of domestic violence’³²? Research in the field of domestic violence over the past years has generally shown that men and women act violent in relationships at about the same rate. Men and women are equally likely to instigate violence against one another. The truth is surprisingly egalitarian, and about half of all domestic violence occurs with both partners abusing each other, with 25% occurring only with men assaulting women, and the other 25% occurring with only women assaulting men. Both men and women tend to think of domestic abuse as a personal matter and not a crime, but with men this misperception is much stronger, especially since domestic violence campaigns have made women more aware of this problem as a crime³³.

Domestic violence and abuse are human problems, not gender issues. Marital quarrelling usually involves pushing, shoving, kicking or throwing things. These violent outbursts are largely ignored when they are perpetrated by women but are taken seriously when they are perpetrated by men. In many cases, women control what happens behind the front door, particularly where children are involved. Children find themselves enslaved by violence-prone women whose unpredictable and terrifying behaviour will dictate the children’s lives until they are old enough to escape, if they are lucky, or they are doomed to repeat the violence-prone pattern³⁴. Since society and its power relations, norms, and values are changing. Men have started sharing their agony, torture, and harassment by women/spouses. It is time to recognize their problem as a social and public health issue and develop appropriate strategies and interventions. They are no longer stronger than women. They need help in crisis and family violence. Male victims of violence can be saved/helped through appropriate intervention such as recognition of violence against men by women as a public health issue; helpline for the male victims of violence; and education, awareness, and legal safeguards³⁵.

While unequal gender relations are the root cause of violence, certain economic, social, and cultural factors may exacerbate the threat and reality of violence³⁶. The incredibly discussion of informed choice is still threatening to the society, particularly when we talk in terms of gender and sexuality. The violence promoted through various agents and their connections with the larger global processes also need to be considered. Discussion of research that throws light on such issues becomes useful to understand the nuances of the problem³⁷. The place of gender based violence is not confined to national parameters but also located within transitional .economic and political configurations³⁸. There is an urgent need to address violence in India; effective, evidence-based strategies are needed to challenge gender inequalities and improve health and gender outcomes related to GBV³⁹. Globalization, unemployment, poverty, political change and conflict have contributed to economic and social upheaval that have produced a toxic culture of violence in some parts of the world, affecting all aspects of everyday life⁴⁰.

Definitely, power-relations, gender roles, norms, values, and socio-cultural environment affect and influence expression of these behaviours. For centuries, it has been depicted in various mythologies, literature, and forms of expressions that women are inferior and men are superior. So men are powerful, aggressive, and oppressors and women are on the receiving end as oppressed and silent sufferers of all forms of violence. These

notions are mostly guided by gender roles and norms where women cannot be violent, aggressive, and oppressive because of their social positions. Power relations, gender roles, norms, and values are not static, and they change over time. It is widely assumed and believed that women are always the victims and men are always the perpetrators. There are many reasons behind this assumption that men are never victims. The idea that men could be victims of domestic abuse and violence is so unthinkable that many men do not even attempt to report the violence. Acceptance of violence by women on men is generally considered as a threat to men folk, their superiority and masculinity⁴¹. A parallel shift in the discourse on women in development has sought to change the perception of women from one of beneficiaries to one of active participants in development. This has involved redefining development to encompass a process that replaces constraints with choices. A factor clearly responsible for inhibiting the choices of women in development is domestic violence. Abuse has been observed to impede the public participation of women, undermine their economic efficiency, cause increased health burdens, and impose a drain on scarce national resources⁴².

Thus, one needs to understand that dynamics of domestic violence and abuse among men and women are different, and reasons, purposes, and motives are often very different. There are various studies on dynamics of violence against women, but there are limited studies on the issue of domestic violence and abuse against men. The study conducted by Save Family Foundation, Sarkar et al., 2007, which interviewed 1,650 husbands between the ages of 15 and 49 years, selected through random sampling using a schedule adapted from the WHO multicounty study on husband's health and domestic violence, reports that economical violence (32.8%) is common, followed by emotional violence (22.2%), physical violence (25.2%), and sexual violence (17.7%). The study shows that the probability of violence increased significantly with the duration of marriage, particularly if it was more than 7 years old. It also shows that husbands who experienced some form of violence during their first year of marriage continued to experience the same for the rest of their lives. It is not something that just goes away. The study shows that domestic violence is a public health issue with far-reaching health consequences, such as mental illness and stress disorders that need to be addressed. The study also shows that domestic violence is perpetrated across all socioeconomic classes. The study reports that a high proportion of husbands, experienced domestic violence was well educated and earning good money⁴³.

II. Conclusion

Hence, violence is not simply a gender issue and it is perpetrated by both men and women. In lessening the impact of gender based violence or abuse on men, women, and children, it is indispensable to be recognized that these are human relations problems and not a gender issue. Current practices of making arrests without a warrant often with little or no evidence of violence or probable cause, forcing men from their homes and children with nothing more than the clothes on their back, searches without a warrant, property seizures without legal redress, mandatory arrests based on nothing more than hearsay, assuming the accused is guilty until proven innocent, denial of the right to confront their accuser and obtain witnesses in one's defence, punishment and imprisonment that occurs before trial or without one, public censure for crimes men have not committed, and more, signal the emergence of a police state and an attack upon the very fabric of our freedoms. Consequently, such oppression has led to increased levels of violence being tolerated in society and a degradation of the family unit. To protect men and women their civil liberties must be restored, as free people are demonstrably intolerant of violence and abuse of anyone, be it perpetrated by domestic partners, state and national governments or foreign countries. Whatever actions are taken, it should be recognized that families are the cornerstone of our civilization, and that children want and need both parents⁴⁴.

End Notes

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