

## **Dowry and Alcoholism as Major Causes for Domestic Violence in Kerala**

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**Abstract:** Domestic violence has been defined in many lights by various strands of knowledge. Psychological explanations were the centre-staged, up until the feminist theoretical positions have started to question them. In-depth studies on Domestic Violence provide evidence that the causes behind the issue are multi-pronged. The factors that regulate the violent behavior and situations are aplenty. The study attempts to cross examine 150 cases that have been registered under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA, 2005) in the state of Kerala, India. The cases were brought to Women Protection Officers in three districts in the state, i.e., Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulum. In depth analysis of these purposively identified cases concludes and establishes that alcohol addiction of male partners and dowry related issues remain the major reasons for Domestic Violence in Kerala, surpassing all other causal factors. But property based issues were the main cause for violence against mothers in the age group of 50-90 years.

**Keywords-**Domestic Violence, PWDV Act, 2005, Alcoholism, Dowry Related Issues.

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### **I. Introduction**

United Nations on the Elimination of Violence Against Women(1993) has defined Violence Against Women as 'any act of gender- based 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 in private life'. This very definition recognizes violence against women as a crucial social mechanism that forces women into a subordinate position in both public and private spheres of life.

Domestic Violence can be defined as the power imposed by an adult in a domestic relationship, to control another. Through different forms of abuse, the control and fear are perpetually established in the relationship. Violence may involve physical abuse, sexual assault, verbal or emotional abuse and denial of economic needs. It may appear subtle at times, despite the fact that it can never be shriveled to the overtone of an occasional argument. Feminist researchers point out it as an 'abuse of power'.

Domestic Violence includes control by one partner over another in a dating, marital or live-in relationship. The means of control include physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse, threats and isolation. Studies show that Domestic Violence include more subtle activities like making a person feel worthless, or not allowing one to exercise their personal liberty and enjoy the human rights (Bhattacharya, 2004; Ghosh, 2004). As per the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, domestic violence is the actual abuse or threat of abuse that is physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic violence faced by a woman who is or has been in a domestic relationship with the accused person. The Lawyer's Collective Women's Rights Initiative(2002) defines domestic violence as 'any act or conduct which is of such a nature as to harm or injure or has the potential of harming or injuring the health, safety or well-being of the person aggrieved or any child in the domestic relationship and includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and mental abuse and economic abuse. The socially sanctioned rule of 'patriarchy' normalizes Domestic Violence as the common rule of the domestic space. Violence is internalized by the abused herself through the patriarchal socialization received. In a patriarchal social system, the secondary status of a woman is the norm and hence the control over women's lives gets internalized by the women community as a 'normal' thing. In the study on gender based violence in Kerala conducted by Sakhi Women's Resource Centre(2004), 35.8% of women respondents believe that husbands have the right to beat their wives. 61.9% opined that domestic violence is a private issue and the law cannot intervene in it. As Foucault(1975) explains, by observing that the disciplined individual "becomes the principle of his/her own subjection"; he or she begins to monitor own behavior and activities to make sure it conforms to 'the ruler' and thereby assumes roles viz., the prisoner and the jailer. Ho (2007), along with many other thinkers identifies domestic violence as a form of structural violence.

Fanon (1963) analyses colonization as a practice of colonizing settlers by using violence to break the community relations of the colonized natives. The destruction comes to an end by shattering the confidence and sense of self of the natives. Many thinkers find this theoretical expectation as a strong tool to explain the enforcement of violence on intimate partners. According to them, Domestic violence is perpetrated in such a system of patriarchal power that confines women's subjectivity to mere obedience.

Domestic Violence has numerous kinds of manifestations. Patriarchal values which consider women as inferior to men are promoted through the social sanctions of violence against women. Though it takes place in the inner spaces of households and families, domestic violence affects women's lives in multiple ways; the impacts of domestic violence include physical, emotional and reproductive health hazards of women as well as their children. The study on gender based violence in Kerala (2004) conducted by Sakhi Resource Centre for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, also find out that about 40

percent of the 900 housewives interviewed admitted that they were victims of domestic violence unleashed by their partners and a sizeable number of them were injured badly enough to be rushed to the casualty wing in hospitals.

## **II. FACTORS LEADING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Accounts of domestic violence by dominant branches of Psychology, consider batterers as ill, and violence as a specification of 'loss of control' (Vindhya, 2005). The 'learned helplessness of women' was also considered as a strong reason for violence against them. Another argument, known as the 'cycle of violence' (Walker, 1979), describes intimate partner violence as a cycle that is not consistent. It views domestic violence as a cyclical occurrence with ups and downs of violent actions followed or preceded by 'love' episodes. In his study on domestic violence in India, Barik (2011) says that religious and historical traditions in the past have sanctioned the beating of wives. Physical punishment of wives has particularly been sanctioned under the notion of men's ownership of women.

Heise (1994) classifies factors that perpetuate domestic violence into four sections, they are: cultural, economic, legal and political. Vindhya (2005) calls domestic violence as an array of physical, psychological and verbal acts used to achieve dominance and control over a partner. She points out the proximate causes of violence as illicit relationships and the conflict between their expectations of a 'good wife'. At all times, extra marital relationships of men were normalized by subsuming it as part of masculinity. Low education and low income were also pointed out as major causes behind violence. Studies on psychological factors indicate that low self-esteem of the perpetrator (as well as of the victim), suspicion, fear of abandonment, fear of intimacy, low frustration tolerance, dependency, obsessive compulsive disorder, paranoia and internalization of cultural beliefs and values, such as acceptance of physical chastisement of women, and the normalization of male dominance in the family are crucial catalysts that shape the context of domestic violence (Adams, 1988; Oats, 1979; Faulk, 1977). Feminist researchers like Yllo and Bograd (1988), Dobash and Dobash (1979) and Adams (1988) have made critiques of purely psychological approaches to domestic violence. According to them, analyzing the psychological factors without taking into consideration the patriarchal social context of unequal gender relationships would be incomplete.

Panda and Agarwal (2005) opine that women owning immovable property (land or a house) are found to face a significantly lower risk of marital violence than property less women. In his study on domestic violence, Panda (2004) concludes the major cause of domestic violence as the expectations about women's proper behavior and typical gender roles. According to him, women are being harassed largely for not cooking, for not performing household chores properly and the related issues. He points out the issue of dowry and sexual control over women as the consequent triggers of domestic violence. In the study named 'A Situational Analysis of Domestic Violence against Women in Kerala' conducted by the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences (2005), the main causative factors leading to domestic violence are mentioned as alcoholic nature of male partners, extra marital affairs, dowry, suspicion, sterility of either spouse, employment of female partner, mental disorders, job dissatisfaction of male partner and illness of the female partner.

Growing inequalities spawned by macro-economic policies play a vital role in the escalation of violence rates across the world. These factors indirectly enhance women's vulnerability by paving path to increased prevalence of alcoholism, drug abuse, breakdown of social support networks and eventually, to the economic dependence of women. The present study explores the underlying factors leading to domestic violence in Kerala, a state which is eulogized for its high women development indices.

## **III. DATA AND METHODS**

### **3.1 Sample of the study**

The study is an exploration into Domestic Violence as a social phenomenon in the context of Kerala. As a cross section of the state, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, and Thiruvananthapuram districts, representing north, middle and south regions of Kerala respectively, were selected as areas of the study. A sample of 150 women, based on the Domestic Incidence Reports prepared on the complaints before the concerned District Protection Officers under PWDV Act, 2005 (during the period from 2010 to 2014) was selected by random sampling method. From among the 150 women, forty five case studies were attempted to probe into the subjective feelings of women respondents by including 15 women from each of the three districts by employing purposive sampling.

### **3.2. Tool for data collection**

Data was collected according to the objectives of the study by analyzing the Domestic Incidence Reports of the selected cases, prepared by the District Women Protection Officers.

Case studies were attempted by using a semi structured interview guide, which is an effective instrument to elicit vivid responses from research participants. The respondents were asked open-ended questions so as to facilitate a candid sharing of experiences.

### **3.3. Techniques for Analysis**

The collected data was analyzed by both qualitative and quantitative methods.

## **IV. FINDINGS**

### **4.1. The Socio-economic profile of the sample**

Majority of the respondents (35.39%) belonged to the age group of 30-39 years. A subsequent 27.33% was in the age group of 20-29 years. One respondent was in the 80-89 age group. Respondents from all the major communities were included in the sample. This explains the presence of a soaring 57.33% of Hindu respondents in the sample. Respondents belonging to the Christian community constituted 22% of the sample and 20.67% of the sample belonged to the Muslim community.

Only ten respondents (6.67%) out of the entire sample possessed a regular job. A group corresponding to 28% of the sample had seasonal / irregular jobs. Retired persons from various service sectors constituted 3.33% of the sample. The largest shares, i.e., 62% of the sample were jobless/income less people.

TABLE 4.1  
Job Profile of the Sample

Type of Job	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Regular job	10	6.67%
Seasonal/Irregular Job	42	28%
Jobless /Income less	93	62%
Retired	5	3.33%

127 out of 150 complaints were against the male partners in conjugal relationships and their family members (84.67%). 11.33% petitions were filed by mothers against their children. There were complaints against parents (2.67%) and siblings (1.33%) also.

#### 4.2. Types of Marriages

Out of the 127 cases who have registered complaints against their partners and partners' family members, one couple was not legally married, but co-habitants. Of the remaining 126 cases, 97.62% marriages were held as customary functions. The percentage of special marriages is 2.38%. There was one inter religious marriage which was followed by some communal issues, but didn't explode to major problems, as the female partner converted her religion. The percentage of self-choice marriage is 7.14% and that of arranged marriages is 92.06%. By the term self-choice marriages, it is assumed that the couple selected each other as their partner. But the marriages were held by abiding all the customary practices including dowry. Only 2.38% marriages were exempted from the customary functions; but not dowry.

#### 4.3. Dowry transactions in marriages

All the 126 complaints which were against spouses the incidence of dowry transaction in marriages were 100%. Dowry was handed over either in the form of money, gold, vehicles and land. There were two special marriages, but they were not exempted from the practice of dowry. The worth of the dowry ranged from 5 to 100 gold sovereigns and from an amount of Rupees 5000 to 10 lakhs. Land as dowry, extended up to 1 acre from a few square meters. Dowry, at times, also took the form of cars, furniture or precious gifts. There were transactions of dowry even in the cases of employed partners.

TABLE 4.2  
Nature of Dowry Transactions in Marriages

Nature of Dowry	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gold	98	77.78%
Furniture and other Valuable Gifts	93	73.81%
Cash	80	63.49%
Land	35	27.78%
Vehicles	3	2.38%

#### 4.4. Assets with Women Complainants

Out of the 150 complainants, 16.67% had an immovable property (land) with them. All of their land assets though were small properties. 11.33% of respondents possessed some sort of gold jewelry, majority of them though were in nominal quantities. Only one respondent owned a car. 7.33% of respondents had a bank balance with them. According to Table 1, there were transactions of valuables in many forms and the rate of the present possessions of the respondents show huge disparities. The dowry, in any form, was given to the male partners, not to the women. They had no say even on their gold jewelry. When asked about the practice of dowry, 103 respondents viewed it as normal and common which was supposed to be given to the partners or spousal family on demand. The arguments which lead to violence started slowly with the queries on dowry and spread to other related issues. In the cases of economic violence, which has been lodged by mothers against their children, property based issues were the main problem. These mothers belong to the age group of 50-90 years.

#### 4.5. Major Reasons for Domestic Violence

The major reasons for domestic violence in the Kerala context is presented in TABLE 4.3

TABLE 4.3  
Reasons for Domestic Violence

1.	Dowry Related Issues	78.00%
2.	Alcoholic/Drug Addiction	72.67%
3.	Suspicion on character of the female partner	57.33%
4.	Overall Dissatisfaction with Life	48.67%
5.	Dissatisfaction with Sexual Life	45.33%
6.	Other Behavioral Abnormalities	42.00%
7.	Restrictions on mobility (Job, Education,	34.67%

	Visiting parents and Friends etc.)	
8.	Ownership rights on Property	32.66%
9.	Extra marital relationship of the male partner	30.00%
10.	Male Supremacy and egoism	29.33%

#### 4.5.1. Dowry Related Issues

A hefty share of 78% was facing violence attributable to dowry related problems. Women from poor families, who were not able to give dowry as per the demands of the male partner and his family, were abused in different ways. Dowry related arguments were found to end up in severe physical, emotional and economic violence. A share of 97.33% suffers economic violence and a majority of them are dowry related issues. Women were being compelled to give up their ornaments to the partners and their family members to meet many familial needs like meeting marriage expenses in the family. There were needs like finding money for getting a job to the partner or his relatives or to purchase home appliances. Women, who were concerned about the hard earned nature of money her parents have spent, naturally express their dissatisfaction and it kindles an explosion of violence against them. Hridya Kumari shared her experience that along with her partner, all of his family members were there in the chain to harass her. 'It began in the very night of our marriage. Even when I had excess bleeding followed by a miscarriage I was compelled to have sexual relationship with husband. Next day he forced me to have sex with his brother. I was hit and kicked brutally and no one in the house did anything to support me. All of them were enjoying the scene. Neighbors informed my parents by hearing me crying loudly' said Hridya Kumari. A share of 18% respondents recognized that their partners were planning of a second marriage because of their dissatisfaction with the dowry already received.

#### 4.5.2. Alcohol/ Drug Addiction of Male Partners

Alcoholism or drug addiction of the male partner is apparently the other major causative factor that fuels violence. 72.67% of the respondents pointed out alcohol/drug abuse as the reason for violence against them. Alcoholism is a cause of grave concern not only in cases of conjugal relationships but also in the relationship between parents and children, or many a time, between siblings. Many respondents expressed their experiences that, smaller issues and arguments become bigger and limitless in the presence of alcohol or drugs consumed by the perpetrators. It increased the magnitude of violence. Accordingly, women, the aged and children are subjected to severe physical violence, and of course, all other forms of violence. Jeena, a reputed government employee who was interviewed for case study was of the opinion that alcoholic addiction of her partner made her life too miserable.

'My husband slaps me severely when he is drunk. Before being harassed in many other ways I didn't talk about it much. If I protest loudly, I will be marked in the society and my child wouldn't be able to lead decent life. This helplessness compelled me to meet the Woman Protection Officer and lodge a complaint with no one's help. Sindhu remembers her sexual life which was full of threats and physical violence without a single act of love and affection. All the respondents, who pointed out alcoholism as the main reason of domestic violence, were of the opinion that alcoholism itself is a crime against them and their children. Children were in constant fear and insecurity because of the terror situation their fathers create after consuming alcohol. Not only they were denied enough care and affection from their fathers but also were not able to express their needs to fathers. 17 respondents said that they were helpless and dissatisfied with their sexual life, as the smell and followed mannerisms of their partners after consuming alcohol made them hesitant to sexual relationship. And this becomes a trigger of violence at many times. They were also not getting chances to share their different kinds of anxieties, expectations or happiness with their partners.

#### 4.5.3. Suspicion over character

Arguments begin with suspicion over the character and chastity of female partners often open doors to violence. A share of 57.33% indicated suspicion of their partners as the main cause of violence against them and in 14% cases; the husbands questioned their children's paternity. On the other side, extra marital affairs of male partners are recognized as a main cause of domestic violence. Habeeba Beevi, who is now living separated from her partner shared her fearful life experiences with the researcher and called her marital life a 'rat trap' in which she was trapped in and had no ways to get out. Her husband, who was a drunkard from the beginning of their married life, always used filthy language tarnishing her character. He used to do the same about her daughter's character also. This suspicion often comes out as severe physical violence and long lasting emotional violence. The respondents are prevented from getting out of the house, or enjoy their personal liberty and human rights.

#### 4.5.4. Dissatisfaction with the present life situations

48.67% women conveyed that their husbands often express their dissatisfaction with them, children, other family members and the overall life situation they have. Lack of financial stability (18%), joblessness, lack of self-worth, physical ailments all contribute to this dissatisfaction. This perceived dissatisfaction enhances the rate of consumption of alcohol which in turn induces dissatisfaction with physical appearance of the partner (22.67%), and the cycle goes on. Emotional and physical abuse seems high in such cases. This mentality towards the fellow members of the family often converges with the acts of severe violence and their family is not provided enough care.

#### 4.5.5. Dissatisfaction with Sexual Life

Out of the entire sample, 45.33% of the respondents indicated the problems related to their sexual life as one of the main reasons for the domestic violence they experienced. It included the sexual deviances like forced sex, addiction to pornography and sexual perversions. The respondents' hesitations to have sexual relationship because of their dislike to partners' alcoholic addiction or extra marital relationship also lead to related violence. Four respondents conveyed that their

partners compel them to have sex in the presence of children and were harassed for refusing the same. Sheela Kumari and Vijayaprabha shared their experiences of severe sexual violence. Lathika, who had filed a case about severe sexual violence, was pushed a ruler stick in her vagina by her partner, while she was carrying. Her partner was advised to do so by a notorious wizard. According to him, a 'big fortune' was waiting for them. It affected her health badly and led to mental trauma.

#### 4.5.6. Behavioral Abnormalities:

Behavioral problems of the male members work as a cause for domestic violence in 42% cases. This result in severe adverse effects on interpersonal relationships. Out of this 42%, a portion of 15.33% respondents recognized their partners' problem as paranoia. Three respondents said that their partners have undergone clinical treatment, but there were no specific changes and the husbands were not ready to continue the treatment. When they make any suggestion in this regard, the very thing came as the reason for beginning an argument. A portion of 11% respondents said that their partners do not allow them to sleep properly. One respondent shared the painful experience that her son closes the valve of water tank when she begins to use tap water. There were several such behavioral abnormalities which sustain the violent family atmosphere.

#### 4.5.7. Restrictions on mobility of female partner

Modes of economic violence included preventing women from enjoying personal liberties such as going out for employment, education or visiting parents and friends. High rates of economic violence (97.33%) within the sample are indicative of the male attitude towards women's personal liberty and human rights. In 34.67% cases; this is the main cause for violence. The women were restricted from even going out of the houses. A portion of 30% women were compelled to give up their jobs. 12% of respondents have discontinued their education due to pressure from the partners. This problem is also inter connected with the behavioral abnormalities and the supremacy of male partners. The same issue is mentioned in the case of cohabitant partners also.

#### 4.5.8. Issues related with Property:

Property related issues were seen as the main factor behind the violence in 32.66% cases. Although the possession of valuable properties such as land or gold was limited to a small percentage of respondents, majority among them were subjected to violence because of the very reason- their assets. They were being compelled to hand over it to the perpetrator who often is the husband himself, through many forms of violence. Quite often, this included severe physical assaults also.

All the aged women in the sample faced violence because of the property they owned. All of them are widows. They were being compelled to hand over the properties to their children. In one case, the perpetrators are daughter and son in law of the complainant. The respondents were subjected to brutal violence in the name of their property. The smaller quantities of land or other valuable are supposed to be handed over to the perpetrators.

#### 4.5.9. Other Major Reasons:

A comparatively smaller number of respondents pointed out the dissatisfaction with women's physical appearance (22.67%), financial difficulties (18%), extra marital relationships and subsequent arguments (20%), as the other major reasons leading to domestic violence. Physical ailments of women and superstitious beliefs were also recognized as causes of domestic violence in the Kerala Context.

## V. DISCUSSION

Domestic Violence, a phenomenon that impinges on the lives of countless women around the globe, has been explored by various strands of social and philosophical thoughts. Myriad of conceptual frameworks have been used to cross-examine and interpret the issue. Though the issue has been explored from the standpoints of dominant streams of knowledge such as Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology, the feminist research on domestic violence, places the lived experiences of women in the centre of discourses.

The present study reveals that there exists no singular reason for domestic violence. The issue of domestic violence is associated with several other issues in everyday human lives and exists as a tangled, intricate event. Women's lives are constantly shaped and socialized by various socializing agents, with the quest of shaping up women with attributed qualities. These qualities are supposed to create 'women with woman-ness'. Beauvoir (1948) has pointed out that 'a woman is not born, but becomes one'. The private domain of human life is reserved for women's actual living. The subservient position and roles define the so called 'womanness' and it is pronounced as their primary obligation. For this very reason, the study points out that domestic violence do exist in women's lives, though in varying degrees and severities. Fatal or less fatal, obvious or subtle, it prevails.

The study however enlists the major reasons of domestic violence as: dowry related issues, alcoholism, property issues, extra marital relationships and behavioral problems of male partners. The result of the study by Rajagiri College of Social Sciences (2005) is going in concurrence with the finding of the present study. Marriages, no matter customary or not, were performed along with dowry transactions. Marriage, which essentially is a contract between two individuals, does not warrant any financial transaction to occur. Women are made a cause for liability in such marriage and it puts woman as an object to be transferred from the parental family to the spousal family. Women's personal aspirations are not valued in such a social situation in which women are considered as 'the protected' and men as 'the protectors'. This situation never assures the safety of women; rather it closes the doors of personal freedom and the gratification of natural justice. The 'protector', acts as the owner of woman's body, her aspirations and even her movements. As many thinkers point out, domestic violence exercise the power of dominance over the subjugated group of women, aged and the children – to control and tame them according to the needs of the perpetrator. It is not an individual case; but it is the way of patriarchal

social system which always justifies male dominance and female oppression. Our traditional marriage system dwells on the strong pillars of male dominance and patriarchal social norms, which considers women as lesser human beings.

Aged women respondents, who had filed cases against their offspring, have been enduring grave forms of violence. Earlier, Panda and Agarwal (2005) have established that women who are in possession of immovable properties solely in their names are considerably less vulnerable to violence within the domestic space. However, the current study points out to a glaring difference to this finding. Out of the 150 respondents surveyed, a meager 16.67% were in possession of any share of immovable properties. Curiously enough, these women were experiencing severe forms of violence solely on account of the said share of property. All of the aged women, who constituted 11.33 % of the sample, had filed cases against their offspring and the violence experienced by them was related to the property. They were being coerced through severe forms of violence in order to exchange the property to the offspring.

Extra marital relationships were found to be another major cause. Alongwith alcoholism, suspicion about women's character creates a ruthlessly violent situation. Controlling women's sexuality had always been a means of attaining control over women's lives, all throughout the ages. Historians acknowledge that, it existed in pre modern societies, with the aim of conserving racial and caste purity. At the same time, male sexuality was not controlled or regulated. In these attempted cases of domestic violence, extra marital relationship of male partners and related arguments were found to be an important reason for domestic violence.

## VI. CONCLUSION

As the study reveals, dowry and alcoholism are the main causes of domestic violence in the context of the state of Kerala. Many other causes such as suspicion, behavioral abnormalities and property related issues trail behind. It is well known that Feminist movements have placed women's rights on the agenda of International Human Rights and the issue of Gender Based Violence has received an international visibility. The political nature of personal problems goes on to be widely debated, and legally addressed. It is also well established that women's sexuality continues to be tied to the notion of family honor, and is controlled in keeping with the dominant patriarchal social system, where domestic violence is viewed as a 'normal' occurrence. Regardless of the vigilantly devised laws and instruments to curb domestic violence in many countries including India, the problem remains strong and ubiquitous. The scope for revisiting the legal and social systems is boundless and it can potentially unwrap newer dimensions of the problem.

As alcoholism and dowry seem to be the main causes of domestic violence in Kerala, it invites a great attention from various sides. Kerala, besides its high development indicators, remains the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest alcohol consuming state of India. The problem should be addressed effectively by making awareness programs. The legal steps should be taken against the transactions of dowry in which the Jagratha Samities and Women's Commission can initiate preventive and proactive steps. Gender sensitization classes can make a drastic change if it is done by the experts. Women's rights should be upheld high through making right steps by the government and legal authorities. Women's education and employment should be encouraged through all possible ways to make them independent which would enable them to grow beyond victimhood to a dignified life. The magnitude of the problem should be an eye opener to the society which never allows it to ignore the agony of the fellow beings.

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