A Sociological Review of Gender based Violence Across the Globe

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ABSTRACT:

Gender-based violence is considered as a pervasive and widespread phenomenon which transcends into geographical, cultural and socio-economic boundaries and it affects individuals and communities worldwide. This paper tries to explores the intricate and multi-faceted nature of gender-based violence by delving into its prevalence, underlying causes and its wide-ranging consequences across the globe. At the outset, it is crucial to acknowledge that gender-based violence is not limited to any specific region or demography. The global scope and magnitude of this issue are staggering with millions of women experiencing violence or living with its consequences. Intimate partner violence, sexual abuse by non-intimate partners, trafficking, forced prostitution and exploitation of labor are some of the most common and severe forms of violence against women that are prevalent worldwide. Moreover, gender-based violence is not only found in the workplace since personal violence is deeply rooted in the very structure and power dimensions of the global economy. Underlying the pervasiveness of gender-based violence is the persistent gender inequality and power imbalances that exist within societies.

KEYWORDS: Gender based Violence, Abuse, Inequality, Women

INTRODUCTION:

Gender-based violence is one of the most prevalent form of human rights violence in the world. It is said to undermine the health, dignity, autonomy and security of survivors which is usually wrapped in the culture of silence as it is usually supported by cultural beliefs and values. According to WHO (2021), although gender-based violence is not confined to violence against women and children, almost 1 in 3 women or approximately 736 million people have been subjected to intimate partner violence, non-partner violence or both at least once in their lifetime. Violence is often believed to start early in the women's lives including non-partner sexual violence. As per the UNFPA data (2020), the highest prevalence of intimate partner violence in top ten countries include New Guinea, Afghanistan, Vanuatu, Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Timor-Leste and Liberia. In addition, violence is pervasive in every space occupied by women including digital spaces. Across the world, around 59.9 percent of women with access to internet have experienced some form of technology induced violence as revealed by the data from Centre for International Governance Innovation. Nearly 58 percent of women within the age group of 15 to 25 years have been subjected to online harassment as pointed out by some research. Gender-based violence in India is a complex and multi-faceted problem that has persisted for decades which in turn has devastating consequences for women and girls across the

country. It is often deep-rooted in societal norms and power imbalances which perpetuates the subordination of women. It can take the form of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse resulting in serious implications for a women's reproductive health. Violence and threats of violence can be experienced by every woman irrespective of age, skin, color, religion, economic and social status.

TECHNOLOGY INDUCED VIOLENCE:

The United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) has defined technology induced gender based violence as any act of violence perpetuated by one or more individuals which is assisted,   committed, amplified and aggravated partially or fully with the help of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender (UNFPA, 2021). Even though our lives have become more manageable and organised with the help of technology and digital world, it has, however, opened up spaces and means for perpetrating gender-based violence. There has been increasingly misuse of online spaces and technology against women of all ages based on their gender. This kind of violence invades their homes, their workplaces and their phones. It is likely to occur online but it may also manifest in public places including femicide. This type of digital violence also known as technology induced gender-based violence is committed and amplified through the application of information and communication, technologies or digital spaces. It is usually facilitated through the design and use of existing along with new and emerging technologies and thus it is evolving rapidly. Technology induced gender based violence usually comes in various forms including cyberstalking, online sexual assault, hacking accounts, sextortion (blackmailing by threatening to publish sexual information such as photographs or videos online), doxxing (publication of private personal information), image-based abuse (sharing intimate pictures without approval or consent), hate speech, online impersonation and the use of technology to identify survivors of abuse in order to inflict more violence. There are several significant health, safety, economic and political concerns for women and their families including societies due to the occurrence of technology induced gender based violence. In our present society, technology can act as a key in providing opportunities for economic growth, sustainable development, access to quality education and become a voice to those who are unheard for their genuine concerns. Thus, it is imperative to prevent technology from being misused as a tool of violence and subjugation in order to harness its power for the progress of women's human rights (UNFPA, 2021).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:

Domestic violence has been identified as the most common gender based violence against women. It has been defined as a form of physical, psychological or sexual abuse and it also includes intimate partner violence i.e physical, mental and sexual abuse by a current or former sex partners (Clifton, 2020). Domestic violence can take place among the educated and non-educated, among the rich and the poor, among people belonging to various religious, cultural and political backgrounds. It has negative consequences for the health, well-being, social and economic status of women and can result in major barrier in their empowerment (Mahajan, 2011). Moreover, the issue of domestic violence has gathered a greater focus during the COVID-19 pandemic as there were several reports highlighting a steady increase in the number of domestic violence incidents during the lockdown (Rani et al, 2021). In order to provide a comprehensive legal framework for addressing the issue of domestic violence and protection of women's rights, the Domestic Violence Act of 2005 was enacted in India. However, the effectiveness of this

legislation have been questioned with regard to adequately explaining all forms of domestic violence along with providing protection for victims and effective grievance redressal (Mahajan, 2011). Addressing the real causes of domestic violence is critical in making meaningful progress in combating this issue which are often associated with rigid gender norms and unequal power dynamics deeply rooted within the realm of society. Domestic violence is considered as a major hindrance towards the empowerment of women and it is regarded as a global phenomenon having far-reaching consequences. As indicated by WHO (World Health Organization), domestic violence can been understood as a hidden global epidemic having severe effects on the mental, physical, reproductive and sexual health of women and their families throughout the world. Domestic violence is encompassed with series of abusive behaviour which includes mental, physical, emotional, financial and verbal abuse that takes place within the four walls of the house (Nmadu et al., 2022). There has been an increased attention from policy-makers, media and the politicians due to the continuous prevalence of domestic violence against women and hence they have suggested that there is an dire need to address this issue at the earliest in order to avoid its far-reaching consequences on the individual, families and society (Gayathri, 2017). In addition to the physical harm inflicted on the victims of domestic violence, there can be long-term effects on victims due to the emotional abuse and social isolation associated with domestic violence. Moreover, domestic violence is a crime which is associated with the advantageous position of women in society by focusing on the unequal distribution of power dynamics and gender norms that results in this form of violence against women. Lastly, there has been a negative impact of domestic violence on women's health and their ability to take decisions freely which includes the adoption of family values and norms that further aggravates the inequalities which they face in their daily lives (Mahajan, 2011).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

A deep understanding of how gender based violence is connected to male dominated society i.e. patriarchy can be explained from a feminist perspective. In other words, feminism highlights conflict theory to observe gender with regard to power both at the level of face-to-face interaction and flexibility within social structures at large. According to Cockburn, the dynamic of every interaction in our society has been shaped by gender power. Men view themselves as real human beings while females consider themselves as second class citizens which in turn results in inequality, oppression and ill-treatment against women (Gayol & Kessler, 2015). Thus, legitimation of gender-based violence against women is considered as a normal phenomenon by patriarchal society. However, feminism is a philosophy and struggle against male dominance over female counterparts by emphasizing that all beings are created as equal and thereby should be treated equally. There are several forms of feminist theory but all of them are united on two common grounds i.e. Normative and Descriptive components. Normative aspect claims that all men and women are created equal and therefore should be treated with equal rights and respect. On the other hand, descriptive aspect refers to the present state of affairs with regard to respect and rights of women who are in disadvantage position in comparison to men, However, primary concern of all types of feminism is to change the social imbalance (Mcafee, 2018). It is due to the presence of this imbalance between men and women that has predicated on the patriarchal nature of our society which in turn has necessitated the rise in gender-based violence against women. The issue of gender-based violence has been a long-standing concern for feminists, who have consistently advocated for the recognition of this pressing social problem and the implementation of effective measures to address it. Gender-based violence encompasses a wide

range of abusive acts, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, that are disproportionately perpetrated against women and girls due to their subordinate status within patriarchal social structures (Johnson, 2010) (Banerjee, 2008). Feminist scholars have developed robust theoretical frameworks for understanding the root causes of gender-based violence, emphasizing the centrality of gendered power dynamics and the ways in which various social institutions, such as the family, the military, and the criminal justice system, serve to legitimise and perpetuate these dynamics (Vachuska, 2020). From this perspective, gender-based violence is not simply the result of individual pathology or isolated incidents, but rather a systemic issue rooted in the structural inequalities that characterise many societies (Viachova, 2005). Feminists have also been at the forefront of efforts to raise awareness about the prevalence and consequences of gender-based violence, which affects women across all cultures and socio-economic backgrounds (Viachova, 2005). Indeed, research suggests that the lifetime prevalence of gender-based violence among women in India is as high as 37 (Newberry et al., 2016) The devastating physical and psychological impacts of such violence, including increased risk of sexually transmitted infections, depression, and even maternal health complications, underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions and support services (Newberry et al., 2016). Recognising the limitations of traditional conceptualisations of power that equate it with coercion and domination, feminist theorists have sought to reimagine power in more emancipatory terms, envisioning it as a creative and transformative force that can be wielded in the service of collective liberation (Banerjee, 2008). This shift in perspective has significant implications on how we approach the challenge of gender-based violence, moving beyond a focus on individual perpetrators to address the systemic roots of the problem. Feminist approaches to addressing gender-based violence focused on the lived experiences and perspectives of those most impacted, particularly women and other marginalized groups, while also challenging the patriarchal structures, norms, and ideologies that perpetuate such violence. While mainstream interventions have often focused narrowly on legal reforms or survivor support services, feminist approaches recognise the need for a more holistic and intersectional approach that tackles the broader social, cultural, and political dimensions of gender-based violence. This may involve efforts to reform discriminatory laws, expand access to comprehensive services for survivors, and implement educational and media-based campaigns to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and promote non-violent conflict resolution (Heise, 1994). Ultimately, the feminist perspective on gender-based violence demands a fundamental reimagining of social, economic, and political systems in order to create a more just and equitable world where all people can live free from the threat of violence.

CONCLUSION:

Gender based violence is more likely to occur in the absence of legal consequences, in humanitarian emergencies or conflict and sexist and patriarchal cultural norms. Younger girls are more prone to violence along with girls who are born and brought up in abusive households. Women who marry at an early age are also at risk of experiencing violence as pointed out by World Bank, 2022. The severity of this issue is underscored by the alarming statistics which indicate that 37.2% of women in India have experienced gender-based violence over the course of their lifetime (Newberry et al., 2016). One of the key factors that contributes to the pervasiveness of gender-based violence in India is the intersectionality of gender and caste. Existing research has found that women from marginalized communities i.e women belonging to scheduled castes and the Muslim community are disproportionately exposed to domestic violence and

other forms of gender-based violence (Dey & Orton, 2016). The intersection of these various forms of identity-based discrimination including gender, caste, and religion tends to create a particularly burdensome set of challenges for women from these communities by rendering them more vulnerable to violence and abuse. Another critical factor that enables the persistence of gender-based violence is the lack of adequate support services and legal infrastructure to address this issue. Feminist political economy has highlighted the link between women's lack of access to resources such as income, employment, finance, property, and education and their vulnerability to gender-based violence. This lack of access to essential resources not only increases the risk of women experiencing violence but also significantly impairs their ability to escape thereby perpetuating the cycle of abuse (Sharma, 1997). Gender based violence can also be labelled as a violation of human dignity which is fundamental to human ethics. It involves degradation, humiliation and instrumentalisation which in turn is a violation of human dignity and can be considered as ethically wrong. In addition, any form of gender-based violence or maltreatment has serious long-term psychological, physical and socio-economic implications on the lives of the victims as discussed in several studies on gender-based violence. Even though several efforts have been made to tackle the violence against women and children by government agencies along with international institutions, however, these efforts have remained less effective due to poor funding, lack of awareness and other limitations.

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