

Domestic Violence in Indian Society: A Comprehensive Study of Risk Factors and Implications Through A Feminist Lens

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Abstract

Domestic violence is the most pervasive issue that people seldom discussed very open. This kind of attitudes are increasing day by day covering a large population worldwide. It is widely threatening the value of human rights and identities. This issue has a complex meaning deeply rooted in socio-cultural as well as political and economic factor. The article aims to explore the impact of domestic violence in the lives of common people especially the women and girls. As a movement, feminism has started its career in 1960 and later it has popularly highlighted the problems related to social issues. The main objective of this paper is to understand the risk factors associated with domestic violence against women through a feminist lens. Here the researcher has used Qualitative Research Design followed by descriptive methodology by depending on secondary data collected from books and journal articles, reports, Government reports, online sources etc. Through feminist theory and its explanation, the researcher has focused on a few related elements like patriarchy, gender-based violence, intersectionality, policies and practices etc. The result has come up with some findings related to domestic violence like its prevalence, its impacts on individual as well as on society, cultural and social norms that plays a significant role in shaping violence or boosting the occurrence of domestic violence etc. Moreover, the unequal power distribution can result in forming different violence which results might be sometimes life-shattering, including mental, physical, psychological, economic as well as reproductive issues with a long-term effect. Lastly, the researcher also underscores some of the suggestions that may be helpful for diminishing violence related issues and to introduce useful preventive measures.

Keyword: patriarchy, women's struggle, domestic violence, feminism, power control

INTRODUCTION:

Violence Against Women is a deep-rooted complex issue about which people rarely makes an open discussion. Domestic violence or family violence is one of those, encounters a compound parameter that threaten the concept of basic human rights. According to United States Department of Justice, "Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner." ((OVW), 2023) According to World Health Organization, an estimated number of 1 in 3 of women (30%) have been either physically or sexually harassed by intimate partner or non-partner globally. (Organization, 2024) In India, the topic of Domestic Violence becomes a more prevalent issue from which we cannot escape without giving a proper

importance to this subject as it impend fundamental as well as human rights issue to anyone especially the women. The manner of domestic violence can be seen through the lens of various forms of abuse and each variation is equally devastating and life-shattering, more specific to the women, girls, children as well as to the society itself. Factually, in India domestic violence is entrenched with patriarchal norms and socio-religious believers of Indian people. According to National Health Survey, 2005, shows that generally 39% of married women between the age group of 15-49 have experienced domestic spousal violence and slapping is the most common form of domestic physical violence. (Kishor & Gupta, 2009)

Domestic Violence is a substantial as well as sensitive issue which rectangles not only individual's lives but also impacts family and society. It affects countless of women across the globe irrespective of caste, class and religion. India, nuanced with its diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. From a feminist perspective, domestic violence is not an act of aggression, but an indicator of deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and inequal power distribution. It displays a picture of violence influenced by male to female, showing masculinity and inequal gender distribution by giving importance to patriarchy, hierarchy and intersectionality. It acts as a keystone to make envisage domestic violence as a social issue shedding light on emotional support for the victims, assessing shelter homes, raising voice for legal response etc. (Nichols, 2013) The concept of feminism is to speak for the rights of women. Through a lens of a social worker, feminism explains multiple practices and provides a framework to look around the critical social structures and discourses that influences on the lives of men and women. This theory focuses on gender and power inequality between male and females in their relationships. It highlights patriarchal tradition that society follows by granting male as the dominant character having power and female as the victim and weaker section of the society. Feminism looks at the cause of having domestic violence as the cruellest act condoned by society and men. Society used to teach women to be silent rather violent towards their partner or other family members. Feminism theory argues on this type of intersectionality that cause real trouble to the women and girls. (Amaral, 2011) This perspective displays a picture where social norms easily make violences as a normal one. Moreover, understanding domestic violence through the feminist lens examines how gender and power dynamics contributes to the existence of violence in this regard. Some key points are given below-



Figure: 1: Types of Domestic Violence

Here the researcher has given a flowchart for a better understanding of various forms of Domestic violences prevalent in some parts of India. (Mahapatro, Gupta, & Gupta, 2012) Hitting, Kicking, beating, slapping are some of the common form of Physical violence; abusing physically, threatening, manipulation are included in emotional or psychological abuse; then non-consensual or forced sex, rape are categorized into sexual abuse; moreover financial suppression, restriction in resources, money, employment are

included in financial abuse; cultural believes, social ill practices, power discrimination are categorized under cultural or religious abuse. Therefore, the consequence of domestic violence is quite long term that affects individual's physical, mental, overall well-being and quality of life.

Objectives of the study:

The researcher has selected two different objectives, they are-

- To examine the risk factors of domestic violence and its impact on victims.
- To understand gender dynamics in Indian societal system through feminist perspectives.

Rational of the Study:

The significance of studying domestic violence and its associated evils cannot be exaggerated. To create a safer environment for the survivors, preventing future violence are some essential key elements relating to violence against women in societies. The study highlights the gap in existing literature or knowledge that the researcher is going to fulfil. The study practically aims to promote awareness and diminish humiliation allied with domestic violence and to create a caring environment for the survivors. According to United Nations Women, an approximately 736 million women either physically or sexually harassed by their intimate partner or non-partner. (United Nation Women, 2023) More research and study must need to cover up the issue and work for the betterment of women and girls. Gender equality, financial independence or women's empowerment are variety in the same goal. The Government should focus on to promote gender equality and provide employment and do safeguard the lives of women and girls.

Domestic violence itself is a burning issue across all region and seeing through a feminist lens has some profound and significant key points that may consider. Firstly, it helps the readers and intellectuals in understanding power dynamics that indulge domestic as well as intimate partner violence and more especially patriarchal tradition and the role of gender that contributes to make violence as normalize as other norms of the society. Next, the feminist theory helps in understanding multifaceted identities of intersectionality, i.e., race, class, sex discrimination etc., of marginalized women. Thirdly, it helps the researchers to understand the significance of policies and programmes associated for the empowerment of women and it also focuses on holistic development through providing physical, emotional, and psychological needs of the survivors. Moreover, feminism works for the recognition of domestic violence as a global issue so that more people aware about its root, cause and could take preventive measures in order to combat violence against women. Therefore, we can see feminism has profound impact on domestic violence and the lives of women as it helps in safeguarding women and girls as well as aims to dismantle gender-based violence.

Importance of Studying Violence Against Women:

Importance of studying violence against women has several reasons. Firstly, the violence related issues are closely related to the issue regarding fundamental human rights. Any violence against any person recognizes the violation of human's safety, equality and dignity to live their life freely and securely. (Podder, 2022) Next, it helps in understanding that it triggers people's especially women's physical as well as psychological damage that might lead to a long-term health related issues and disorders. Thirdly, it creates obstacle in usual socialization process as well as perpetuate violence and poverty. It creates an environment of hostility where women have to suffer a lot. Fourthly, more research and study increase the level of information and awareness regarding violence against women. Next, it will be beneficial for creating awareness about necessity of education, empowerment and equality.

Methodology:

The researcher has used Qualitative Research Design followed by descriptive methodology to fulfil the objectives. The researcher has focused on secondary data collected from books and journal articles, government reports, other reports, online data sources etc.

For a better understanding, the researcher highlights theoretical gaps in existing literatures or knowledge on domestic violence. Additionally, the researcher also tried to provide analysis based on feminist phenomenological approach in order to substantiate the study. Followings are some of the key points that leverage this approach-

- **Inequal power distribution-** This theory emphasizes that the process of socialization is associated with the occurrence of domestic violence against women as society is deeply rooted in inequality of power distribution in families and societies. (Amaral, 2011) Socio-cultural norms as well as religious beliefs are responsible for domination of male over female and power control in the society. It is not just only the domination of power, yet encompasses economic or financial control too that strengthen gender inequality. (Capdevila & Zurbriggen, 2023)
- **Patriarchal tradition-** The radical feminism focuses on displaying the picture of collective oppression against women which is being shaped by gender norms that put men in the upper hierarchical position of the society. (Ward, 1995)
- **Intersectionality-** It basically attempts to show a clear picture of patriarchy is closely relates with domestic violence that highlights the issues which develops the practices correlates with race, class, sex, ethnicity and power inequality. (Nichols, 2013) This tactic helps to understand the miscellaneous and complex nature of domestic violence by acknowledging the issues like gender, race, class and disability that shows various experiences of different individuals. (Ali, McGarry, & Jones, 2020)
- **Gender and power dynamics-** Feminist theory speculates that patriarchal norms and beliefs spread domestic violence and help men in attaining superiority over women. Inequal power distribution shows how societal norms and beliefs helps in attaining nature of abuse. (Mcphail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Gail, 2007)
- **Types of abuse-** Feminist theory basically makes various forms of abuse and categories them depending on their nature, like- physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, economic etc.
- **Critiques and evolution-** Though feminist theory is influential, yet it faces criticism, e.g., being criticized for not adequately addressing the desires of marginalized group of people even it has been working for safeguarding lives of destitute women. (Mcphail, Busch, Kulkarni, & Gail, 2007)
- **Policy and research methodology-** Feminist theory advocates for policy programmes in order to make reform in the existing policy programmes as well as shelters for the victims. Additionally, this theory raise voice for those who seeks for empowerment and for those affected by intimate partner violence or domestic violence. It basically carries qualitative research design by working on interviews and focused group discussion. (Dixon, 2018)

For a clear vision of domestic violence, Feminism theory helps in better understanding about power relation, how it works and makes a balance between violence and its effective interventions.

Limitation of the Study:

The study has been carried out depending on secondary data, therefore, it might not be generalizable to all the victims that face violence related issues or domestic violence.

Literature Review:

Singh, A., Chokhandre, P., Singh A.K., Barker, K.M., Kumar, K., McDougal, L., James, K. S., and Raj, A., in their article Development of the India Patriarchy Index: Validation and Testing of Temporal and Spatial Patterning, gives an overview of the development of patriarchal tradition in Indian societies by using family structure and gender role. The researchers focus on the role of seniors in the families and their roles became norms pass through generation to generation. The study shows how power relation plays a crucial role and establishes in multiple social spheres. The Gender Development Index of India discloses that girls or women's education, health, survival, safety all are deeply rooted to the patriarchal tradition of India and this shows the right of women associated with patriarchal norms. The researchers have used the reports of National Family Health Survey (1,2,3,4) and Demographic and health Surveys of India to get the accurate data about national and state level quality of family welfare, family planning, reproductive health, child care services, health and welfare services etc. to validate the study. The result shows that the national level of Patriarchy index have been changed between NFHS-1 to NFHS-3, but remain constant in the report 3 and 4. The lowest followers of patriarchy is Meghalaya district and highest is Rajasthan, India.

Kaur, R., and Garg, S., in their article Addressing Domestic Violence Against Women: An Unfinished Agenda, talked about the problem of domestic violence that affects women globally and its effects are long term. The researcher talked about the cause and consequences of domestic violence and more specifically, its effects could be seen in the reproductive and other health problems to the women and children. Rape, sexual harassment, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, dowry death, Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, Dowry Prohibition Act, Molestation, Kidnapping and Abduction, and Cruelty by husband and his relatives are some of the categories that the researcher had made for a better understanding of domestic violence. Furthermore, the study shows the impact of domestic violence on the lives of children.

Kumari, U., in her article Exploring the Role of NGOs in Addressing Gender-Based Violence Against Women, the role of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in addressing Gender-based violence in India. The researcher has focused on Case Studies and the role of Shakti Shalini, an NGO in Delhi. The researcher has used Mixed Method Research Design and carried out Participation Observation Method by using both structured and unstructured interviews of the respondents. The result shows that the NGOs makes community outreach programmes to aware women and make them strong. The study also helps to understand that structural violence affects women differently rather than men. The study also shows the path that Government and societies may collaborate in order to diminish gender-based violence.

Babu, B., and Kar, S., in their article Domestic violence against women in eastern India: a population-based study on prevalence and related issues, covered four states of eastern India, namely- Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar and Jharkhand and conducted a cross-sectional study. The data were collected from the victims of domestic violence under community level and individual level. The result shows that women of Jharkhand have reported highest number of facing domestic violence during their lifetime in comparison to the other 3 states. around 56% of women from eastern India have reported of having any form of violence. Dowry was also reported as a factor of domestic violence in these regions.

Lanchimba, C., Díaz-Sánchez, J., and Velasco, F., in their article Exploring factors influencing domestic violence: a comprehensive study on intrafamily dynamics, focuses on variables and levels of violence within households. The researchers have categorized some risk factors like- religion, education, employment, occupation etc. The result suggests that policymakers and practitioners should make

interventions in promoting religious interpretations in order to alleviate violence. The findings shows that awareness of mental health, mutually understand household chores, improve household situations, positive role of religious beliefs are some of the importance key points in order to reduce violences against women.

Research Gap:

Identification of research gap is more important to more deeply understand about domestic violence. Here are some research gaps that the researcher has listed down-

- **Theoretical gap-** The researcher must include theoretical framework to give a significance in the analysis part as well as to validate the study. Most of the studies were based on feminist theory, but researchers should try to accumulate more theories in order to create new knowledge as well as to understand the context of risk factors of domestic violence and proper preventive measures.
- **Technical knowledge gap-** The upgradation of technology increases the number of cybercrimes and other technical related violence, i.e., pornography, online fraud, cyber stalking, fraud identity, fake data and so on. The researcher must try to upgrade the existing theory in order to address these issues to aware women and girls and the society as well.
- **Knowledge gap regarding policy implementation-** Though various policies and programmes initiated for the victims of violence, yet its proper implementation and knowledge regarding its implementation must be improve to fill the gap between policies and its effective application.
- **Gap in understanding the correlation between health and domestic violence-** The researcher must understand and needful study to explore how health related issues can be consider as a contributor to any violence specially to the domestic one. In this regard, domestic violence is a significant contributor to physical as well as psychological trauma.
- **Perpetrators' therapy-** There must be an important discussion regarding perpetrators of domestic violence and their rehabilitation programmes to make change in their abusive behaviour and manner. The researchers must discuss about this matter through their work to help the perpetrators as well as their family.

Domestic Violence: Nature and Risk Factors:

Domestic violence is a complex issue identified by various forms and influenced by variety of factors. Here are some most common risk factors affecting domestic violence are given below-

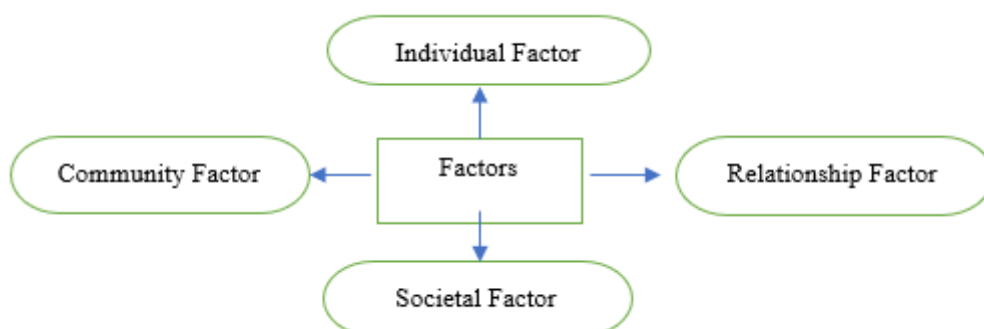


Figure: 2: Factors influencing Domestic Violence

Individual or private factors: Low self-esteem, low education and low income may sometimes cause family violence depending on the situation of a family; then mental health issues like feeling of alone, depression, anxiety; next frequent use of substances like alcohol, drugs etc.; then the past history of the perpetrators may be the drivers of domestic violence. (Capaldi, Knoble, & Kim, 2012) Men being the head of the family if unable to fulfil the demands of his family, it causes frustration and might cause spousal violence. Similarly, women owing head in the family by achieving education and good income source might create imbalance in the family which can influence domestic violence. (Lanchimba, Diaz-Sanchez, & Velasco, 2023)

Relationship factors: Sometimes the feeling of jealousy, conflict or possessiveness doesn't work well to continue relationships. The key points are like-

- **Power distribution:** In Indian societies, the distribution of power is unequal in most of families as we can observed. Men are the uppermost of the family and society whereas women have to be dependent on them.
- **Negligence:** Lack of proper physical and mental care, emotional negligence are also the cause of occurring domestic violence within families. (Lanchimba, Diaz-Sanchez, & Velasco, 2023)
- **Financial cause:** it has been observed that lack of proper economic support or financial difficulties lead to domestic violence more often. (Capaldi, Knoble, & Kim, 2012)

Social and Cultural Factors: Domestic violence is a global issue influenced by social and cultural elements and beliefs. The key points are like-

- **Cultural Norms:** In most of the study or researchers, it has been found that the socio-cultural norms have a great significance over domestic violence, more specifically-
- Patriarchal tradition of Indian societies has given the authority to men to dominate women and recognize them as the subordinate of the family and society as well. (Gupta, 2023)
- **Acceptance of violence:** More conflicts arise because of the acceptance of violence. Due to social norms and regulations most of the women tolerate or accept violence in order to keep the integrity within family.
- **Religious beliefs:** Rigid religious beliefs have a strong impact in shaping violence related issues within home environment. Different societies and communities may carry their religious beliefs and teachings that can support violence and obstacles for women. (Fortune & Enger, 2005) The following key elements can lighten up this point-
 - Religious teachings- Some religious rules and teachings might provide influence on violence related issues by not giving proper justifications due to strong religious dependence on holy books and doctrines. This can also mis-guide and mislead community's people as well. (Fortune & Enger, 2005)
 - Role of leaders- Leaders and priests has some crucial role in shaping the community by philanthropical guidance, support and showing the proper path. But in some cases, it's been observed that due to lack of proper guidance and strong decision-making power, they were unable to give appropriate suggestion to the victims and at the end the victims might have to suffer. (Lanchimba, Diaz-Sanchez, & Velasco, 2023)

Domestic violence: it's Consequences:

It has a profound impact on people's healthy relationships by intervening physical as well as mental well-being. Some notable consequences of domestic violence are given below-

- **Women's health-** Domestic violence has a significant impact on women's health which effects

physical, mental as well as social well-being. (Pedersen, Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence, 2024)

- Physical health issues- Due to violence, women can face serious physical injuries, pain, fractures etc.
- Mental health issues- It may include depression and anxiety, Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), low coping mechanism etc.
- Reproductive health issue- Domestic Violence may increase the risk of unwanted pregnancies, complication during pregnancy period, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) etc.
- **On Children-** Domestic violence can be responsible for low self-esteem, introducing anxiety and fear, sleep disturbance, behavioural changes, long term mental health problems to the children. Domestic violence may also cause social isolation, and physical health issues like chronic health issues etc. (Edwards, 2019)
 - **Health related issues-** Domestic Violence can leads to severe physical injuries like- long-term disabilities, heart related issues, sleeping disorder, gastrointestinal disorders etc. (Pedersen, Understanding the Effects of Domestic Violence, 2024)
 - **Mental health issues-** Those children might face depression and anxiety who are a regular observer of domestic violence or any violence occurring in the family. (Violence Against Women, 2024) This practice can also influence post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
 - **Behavioural change-** The children witnessing domestic violence can have serious behavioural issues like- socialization process, frequent anger, social isolation, school drop-out, difficulty in carrying relationships, escape from family etc.
- **On older people-** Domestic Violence may also cause negligence to the older people of the family, lack of support, frustration, anxiety and fear of lose. Long term family problem can cause serious physical and mental injuries to the older person as well like- isolation, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, chronic health problems etc. (Shepperd, 2021)
- **On Society-** Domestic Violence has a significant and far-reaching impact on society, affecting various communities, aspects and well-being of people's lives. Its remarkable key points are like-
 - Economic impact
 - Social impact
 - Community and cultural impact
 - Legal and criminal justice impact

There are several other risk factors associated with domestic violence and its consequences are devastating and life-shattering. Understanding domestic violence from the perspective of feminism helps to realize the readers as well as the other persons about the actual cause behind occurring domestic violence and it helps the survivors as well as the policy makers to take preventive measure and promote fruitful data plan for the women and the survivors of violence.

Result:

The researcher has partially fulfilled the objectives taken for the study. The study highlights some research gaps that might become an obstacle for understanding the problem of domestic violence from different perspectives. Working on theory-based learning will help the readers to make better understand about these social issues as well as promote awareness regarding social inequality and discrimination. Additionally, the researcher also highlights the risk factors of domestic violence, its consequence, and long-term effects in multiple fields. The study aims to provide comprehensive understanding of domestic

violence through feminist perspectives. According to World Health Organization, approximately 30% women (nearly 1 in 3) have suffered physical or intimate partner or non-partner violence in their lifetime. (Organization, 2024) It is one of the most complex issues that threatens individual's fundamental rights and displays unequal power distribution of our Indian families and societies. Violence might occur in different forms like- physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, economic abuse etc. The findings have shown domestic violence through the lens of feminism can be discussed in several ways-

- **Gender dynamics in Indian societies through feminist perspective:** Gender dynamics evaluates critical interplay of socio-cultural factors associated with gender inequality and violence. In this context, feminism focuses on exploring the role of gender dynamics and intersectionality in intimate as well as familial relationships. Some core values of this practices are as follows-
- **Patriarchal tradition-** Patriarchal ideologies plays a significant role in disseminating domestic violence. It influences socio-cultural as well as structural distribution of power that perpetuate gender discrimination and promote different behaviours and attitudes towards women in the society. Indian society (some Indian societies) is well equipped with the practice of patriarchal tradition and culture. Dowry practices, rigid cultural practices, preference of son, discrimination for female child are some of the notable practices of Indian patriarchal societies. (Satyen, Bourke-Ibbs, & Rowland, 2024)
- **Socialization process-** It has been observed that teaching or practicing rigid gender roles encourages young generation as being socialized to learn gender discrimination or power inequality. Feminism helps to understand the common concept of usual Indian social system that patriarchy helps to develop the belief that men have the supreme right to control women and treat women as a subordinate or weaker section of the society. (Satyen, Bourke-Ibbs, & Rowland, 2024)
- **Education and Financial dependence-** Low education, not accessing education, limited educational opportunity, unemployment, dependency on men or other person of the family are some of the core factors that influence domestic violence
- **Intersectionality-** This word emphasizes the effects and importance of various discriminative approach created by people of their own society, they are race, gender, sexuality, class etc. In the midst of these values, following are some of the interventions laid by feminism approach-
- **Education and awareness-** Domestic violence is one of the most burning issues that mostly people tried to hide it instead of taking preventive measure to diminish it from the family and society as well. Promoting awareness about violence related issues and education can make more people educated and aware about such social practices.
- **Community based practices-** It helps in supporting the survivors by understanding their problems and play the role as a mediator between client and the services of which they are in need (Legal Aid, counselling, police assistance, medical etc.) (Vindhya, 2013)
- **Feminist counselling-** In general, feminist counselling questions regarding abuse and puts the blame on the abuser rather than those victims. The feminist counsellors are thrilled to put their focus on individuals by proving a clear picture of the problems related to the clients, their fear, insecurities, negativity, role of patriarchy, social norms etc. Feminist tries to create a friendly environment to the clients where they can get respect in their decisions, support in their feelings, explore their identities, diminish their negative thought and inferiority etc. (Bhate-Deosthali, Rege, & Prakash, 2013)
- **Women's shelters and crisis centres-** Feminist movements and thinkers have been working for introducing safe spaces for the victims of domestic violence. (Geffner, White, & Vieth, 2021)

- **Legal reform and empowerment programmes-** Feminism wants to make a balance between the male and female characters by providing endless support and advocacy for a real change in the lives of those victims of domestic violence. Reforms that must include strict law and policies against domestic violence, strong enforcement power, more training of the enforcement and coordination between Government and the organizations working for safe-guarding the lives of victims. (Change, 2017) Similarly, feminist interventions often aimed at economic empowerment programmes by promoting vocational training, literary education, other training programmes etc. (Heywood & Mulveen, 2021)

Conclusion:

To combat domestic violence, people must aware about the basic concept of any violence and its implications. Violence can happen to anyone at any place. The basic concept of domestic violence is that it affects individuals, families and communities worldwide by manifesting various forms like physical, mental, emotional, sexual, social, economic, legal and so on. It may bring short term as well as long term and even life- shattering impacts on people's lives and mostly to the women. Therefore, encouraging education and promoting awareness about legal, political, employment, financial independence as well as vocational training are some of the core values to disseminate violence occur against women. Moreover, rehabilitation for the perpetrators, counselling for both the survivors and perpetrators, giving assistance to the children and elderly person are some of the significant key elements which must be notified for a better society. Furthermore, the role of Social Workers has significant value in negotiating and advocating for the rights of those victims of violence by addressing their problems and make a collaboration between Government and the Nonprofit organizations who work for the betterment of women and children to create a society free from violence and atrocities. Despite much policies and programmes initiated by government and non-government organizations, the irony is that a significant section of Indian women still facing violence in any forms. Therefore, more awareness generation programmes along with education policies must be introduced. The researcher suggests to promote more collaboration between government and non-government organizations along with continuous monitoring of the central government must be needed to fulfil the policy programmes and to combat any violence against women.

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