

Saubhagyawati Bhava: Marriage as a License to Torture? Exploring the Mental Health Impact and Legal Lacunas faced by Women in India

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Abstract

Marriage, often portrayed as a sacred bond and a source of happiness, can tragically become a license for torment and suffering for many women in India. This paper explores the concept of "Saubhagyawati Bhava" (meaning "May you be blessed with good fortune as a wife"), traditionally associated with marital bliss, through a critical lens, questioning its validity in the face of widespread marital abuse and torture. Focusing on the mental health impact and legal lacunas faced by women in India, this study delves into the multifaceted challenges endured by women trapped in abusive marriages. Drawing upon empirical research, legal analyses, and societal perspectives, this paper delves into the psychological toll inflicted by marital abuse, as well as the systemic failures and loopholes in legal frameworks that perpetuate impunity for perpetrators. By shedding light on the stark realities of marital torture and its detrimental effects on women's well-being, this research highlights the crucial necessity for legislative reforms, social interventions, and assistance frameworks to protect and safeguard the rights and dignity of women within India's marital institutions. Ultimately, the paper calls for a re-evaluation of societal norms, cultural practices, and legal structures to ensure that marriage is not a license to torture, but rather a sanctuary of love, respect, and mutual empowerment for all individuals involved.

INTRODUCTION

"A life we live is a life dreamt by many"

Marriage has long been considered a sacred and cherished institution in many societies, including India. It is often seen as a life-changing event, a union between two individuals, and a foundation for building a family. In Indian Culture, the phrase "Saubhagyawati Bhava" is always used to bless a woman with happy and prosperous married life. This cultural expectation places immense pressure on women to fulfil their roles as dutiful wives, regardless of the hardships

they may face within their marriages. Regrettably, for some women, marriage becomes a license to endure emotional, physical, and psychological torture.¹ Violence against women is not a recent phenomenon; it has persisted throughout history as a pervasive social practice. According to Aristotle, “Women may be said to be an inferior man”². The Napoleonic Code also reflects the prevalence of violence against women, as it states that “Women are like walnut trees must be beaten every day.”³ These statements made by famous jurists shows that it is deeply ingrained in the societies worldwide that, “women have consistently been relegated to the status of second-class citizens, with their victimization often normalized and accepted as natural within societal norms.”

In the Indian context, traces can be drawn from the works of Tulsidas, he quotes, “Drums, donkey and women need to be beaten”⁴. Not just Tulsidas but in the ancient text, “*Manusmriti*” written by Manu, Manu defines “women” as false, insignificant and useless being. They are not given any form of freedom. According to Manu, “women are likened to property over which only the owner holds absolute authority.”⁵ He explicitly stated that, “women are akin to possessions, as neither through sale nor repudiation can a wife be freed from her husband.”⁶ In Manu’s legal code, women were equated with slaves or Shudras on numerous occasions. Manu strictly prohibited divorce or remarriage for women under any circumstances. Their only duty was to serve their male members. According to Manu, “it is the nature of women to pollute men in this

world.”⁷ He further states in *Manusmriti* that, “In the childhood a female would be under the care of her father, after marriage, she would be under her husband and after the death of her husband, she should be under her son.” This shows that women are not free and are always dependent on someone else.⁸ Manu’s views on women were archaic and oppressive, laden with numerous restrictions that deemed them inferior. He elevated the husband to a position akin to a supreme deity, stating that even if the husband lacked virtue, sought pleasure elsewhere, or lacked good qualities, the faithful wife must still worship him as a god.⁹

In today’s ostensibly civilized and democratic society, founded on principles of equality and freedom, gender discrimination is theoretically unacceptable. Various international human rights norms stress on the importance of eradication of all sort of discrimination against women and advocate for gender justice. Governments enact policies and initiatives aimed at advancing women’s status and ensuring the realization of their rights. However, despite these efforts, abuse within households against women remains a pervasive and alarming challenge. Women have been subjected to repeated victimization and oppression, aimed at asserting dominance and upholding patriarchal social structures.¹⁰ Such exploitation has tragically been normalized and culturally accepted, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and subjugation. In his classic work of 1869, “*The Subjection of Women*” John Stuart Mill famously argued that, “marriage ought to be regarded as a partnership of equals, akin to a business partnership. He emphasized that the family should not be seen as a place of tyranny, but rather as a realm where the virtues of freedom are cultivated.”¹¹ However, despite Mill’s progressive views, women, who comprise approximately half of the global population, continue to be subjected to significant levels of violence and exploitation

1 C.A. Ramsheena & Nagaraju Gundemeda, “*Youth and Marriage: A Study of Changing Marital Choices among University Students in India*,” *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2015), pp. 137-147.

2 Aristotle, “*Politics*,” Book 1, chapter 13

3 French Civil Code of 1804, Art. 213

4 Rahat Zamani, “Domestic Violence Against Women in India: A Case Study” (2009), Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (India), (accessed on 2nd September, 2024), available at <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/144526937.pdf>.

5 Puja Mondal, “*Manu’s Opinion on the Status of Women*” YourArticleLibrary, (accessed on 2nd September, 2024), <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/political-science/manus-opinion-on-the-status-of-women/40145>.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Manusmriti*, Chapter 2, Verse 213

8 *Manusmriti* Chapter 5, Verse 149

9 *Supra note. 5*

10 Becker, Mary. “*Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism*” University of Chicago Legal Forum, Vol. 1999, No. 1.

11 John Stuart Mill, “*The Subjection of Women*” (Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, London, 1869).

within their own homes. Domestic violence against women is omnipresent and is commonly viewed as a systemic issue ingrained within societal structures, with a specific focus on gender dynamics. Today, this problem has intensified to the extent that it is not only perpetrated by husbands or intimate partners but also by other familial figures, including fathers, mothers, brothers, and in-laws. The infliction of such torture upon a woman can result in alarming mental health conditions such as depression and low self-esteem. Moreover, beyond mental health implications, severe violence can result in bodily injuries such as visible wounds and bone dislocations. Although physical wounds may heal over time, the emotional and psychological trauma inflicted by domestic violence can endure indefinitely.

Definition of the word “Domestic Violence”

The phrase “domestic violence against women” encompasses any type of behaviour as well as actions with the potential to cause physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual harm to women within the confined four walls of their homes. Most importantly, these acts are typically perpetrated by individuals who are known to the victim such as spouse or in-laws, rather than strangers. It is often characterised as a repeated cycle of abusive behaviour by one partner towards the other in an intimate relationship, including acts of physical torture such as striking, slapping, kicking, biting, restraining, throwing objects, etc, as well as sexual and emotional mistreatment. Additionally, behaviours like manipulation, coercion, and exerting control are also forms of domestic abuse against a woman.

As per “The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women”, generally referred to as “CEDAW” (1993), violence directed at women includes “any form of gender-based violence causing or likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private settings.”¹²

¹² Ayush Kumar, and Dr. Manoj Kumar Singh. “*Understanding the Issue of Domestic Violence against Women*

According to Indira Jaising, in her article, “*Law of Domestic Violence*”¹³, she states that, “Domestic violence constitutes the violent victimization of women occurring within the confines of the family, typically perpetrated by men. In the majority of instances, it involves violence against women by household members, including husbands, parents, siblings, or other residents with the potential to inflict physical or mental suffering. Such abuse commonly takes place behind closed doors and is frequently denied by the women who have endured the violence.”

In India, matters related to domestic abuse towards a woman are governed by the “Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005”. Section 3 of the Act defines the word “domestic violence against a woman” as any act, omission, commission, or behaviour by the respondent which:

- A. Causes harm, injury, or endangerment to the health, safety, life, limb, or well-being—whether physical or mental—of the aggrieved person. This includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse.
- B. Harms, injures, or endangers the aggrieved person with the intent to coerce her or any other individual to fulfil unlawful demands for dowry, property, or other valuable security.
- C. Threatens the aggrieved person or any associated person through actions mentioned in clauses (a) or (b).
- D. Otherwise causes harm or injury—either physical or psychological—to the aggrieved person.

Importantly, the Act clarifies that the term “relatives” is not restricted to male relatives alone, but instead permits a complaint to be filed against “any relative” of the husband or male partner, which includes female relatives also under the purview of the “Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005”.¹⁴

in India: A Critical Analysis. The International Journal of Advanced Research in Multidisciplinary Sciences (IJARMS) 6, Special Issue 02 (September 3, 2023).

¹³ Indira Jaising, “*Law of Domestic Violence*”, 9-10. Delhi: Universal Law Pub. Co. Pvt. Ltd., 2001.

¹⁴ Sou. Sandhya Manoj Wankhade vs. Manoj Bhimrao Wankhade, (2011) 3 SCC 650

Reports on Domestic Violence

As per a study by the “World Health Organization” (WHO) conducted in 2020, 1 in every 3 women worldwide has experienced domestic or intimate partner violence which is shocking. Now believing the reports of National Commission for Women, in 2023, the NCW received a total of 28,811 complaints, with 6,304 of them related to domestic violence which was less than what they received in 2022 i.e. out of 30,957 complaints filed in 2022, 6,970 were associated with domestic violence. This data shows a decrease in the cases of domestic violence in 2023 compared to 2022.

As per the latest data from “The National Family Health Survey” (NFHS), a detailed study conducted across Indian households:

The NFHS-5 published in the year 2020 states, “Approximately 29.3% of married Indian women aged 18-49 have encountered domestic or sexual violence. Additionally, 3.1% of pregnant women in the same age group have faced physical violence during any pregnancy.”¹⁵ These figures represent only the cases which are reported by women, suggesting that a large number of incidents likely remain unreported to authorities. The NFHS data also indicates a decline compared to earlier findings, with domestic violence cases standing at 31.2% in the NFHS-4 (2015-2016) report.

The data provided by the “National Family Health Survey” (NFHS) and the “National Commission for Women” (NCW) suggests a decline in reported cases of cruelty against women. However, the most recent annual report from the “National Crime Records Bureau” (NCRB) reveals a concerning 4% increase in crimes against women across India in 2022. These offenses include cruelty by husbands and their relatives, abductions, assaults, and sexual violence. The NCRB report highlights a significant uptick in the number of reported crimes against women, with the total cases rising from 3,71,503 in 2020 to 4,45,256 in 2022. This marks an alarming increase

compared to 4,28,278 cases recorded in 2021. A key aspect of these crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is the category of “Cruelty by Husband or His Relatives,” which accounted for 31.4% of the total cases. In terms of crime rate per lakh women, there was a slight increase, rising from 64.5 in 2021 to 66.4 in 2022. The NCRB report also noted a concerning number of cases under the Dowry Prohibition Act, totalling 13,479 incidents. Additionally, over 1,40,000 cases were recorded under Section 498-A of the IPC, which deals specifically with cruelty by husbands or their relatives. This disturbing trend underscores the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address the growing violence against women in the country.¹⁶

These reports are concerning, as they reveal both significant dips and rises in cases of domestic abuse against a woman. However, the primary concern lingers: many cases still go unreported by victims, driven by the belief that “everything will be fine one day,” or out of fear of retaliation, including the possibility of being killed if they report the abuse. Additionally, some victims hesitate to report due to perceived leniency from law enforcement, especially if they belong to lower-income groups. In many instances, women internalize violence as a norm and perceive it as a distorted form of love from their husbands. Domestic violence can be regarded as an infringement of women’s fundamental human rights, including their right to live with dignity and equality before the law, as protected by the Indian constitution. Beyond its direct impact on victims’ health and well-being, it perpetuates their subordination within society. Sadly, even within the supposed safety of their own homes, women are not immune to victimization. They may face abuse from their husbands, in-laws, and, in some cases, even their own parents, leaving them with no to little room to speak out against the injustices inflicted upon them by those they love.

Literature Review

In the past, numerous studies have explored this pressing issue, shedding light on the various

¹⁵ National Family Health Survey 5, Phase 1 (2019-2020), published December 2020, available at <https://prsindia.org/policy/vital-stats/national-family-health-survey-5#:~:text=The%20first%20phase%20of%20the,were%20released%20in%20December%202020>. (Accessed on 10th September, 2024)

¹⁶ NewsClick Report, “Crime Against Women in India Up by 4%: NCRB Report 2023,” (published on December 5, 2023).



dimensions of the issue. Many authors have endeavoured to address this issue through articles, emphasizing its significance and raising awareness in the society. Some have even delved into the mental state of survivors of domestic violence. In my research, I have also reviewed several existing works on this topic. Some of them are:

Sanjeev Kumar and Kalpna Devi, "Domestic Violence Against Women: Indian Perspective."¹⁷

The article focuses on the factors contributing to domestic violence and the different forms of abuse faced by women in India. It further explores the legal framework for addressing domestic violence, with particular attention to the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. The authors provide a critical analysis of the complexities within this legislation, highlighting the need for its enhancement and strengthening.

"Domestic Violence in India: A Summary Report of Three Studies" by the International Centre for Research on Women¹⁸

This summary report published in the year 2000, multiple authors have contributed their studies on cases of domestic abuse against a woman from the rural areas of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. Their researches primarily focused on empirical data supported by interviews conducted in rural communities and in the slum areas, aligning with the preconceived notion that domestic violence is more prevalent in India's rural belts and in communities with lower income levels. Additionally, they collected data from hospital records, Police cells, and NGOs on the issue to show the gravity of the issue. The authors also highlighted the impact of such torture inflicted on a woman that how it can affect them mentally as well as physically. Also, they tried mentioning various initiatives undertaken by authorities to address this

¹⁷ South Asian Law Review Journal, vol. 5, 2019

¹⁸ "Domestic Violence in India: A Summary Report of Three Studies" by the International Centre for Research on Women, Washington, DC, September 1999. <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Domestic-Violence-in-India-1-Summary-Report-of-Three-Studies.pdf> (Accessed on 11th September, 2024)

pressing issue and the impact of such initiatives at the root level.

Ayush Kumar Shukla, "Understanding the Issue of Domestic Violence against Women in India: A Critical Analysis"¹⁹

The article begins by contextualizing domestic violence as a widespread societal issue, shedding light on its prevalence and impact on women's lives across the country. The author navigates on the factors contributing to domestic violence, including patriarchal norms, gender inequality, economic disparities, and cultural attitudes. Furthermore, the author evaluates the efficacy of existing legal mechanisms, emphasizing the need for more robust enforcement, accessible support services, and community-based interventions. Throughout the article, the author synthesizes statistical reports, scholarly insights, and policy perspectives to offer a nuanced understanding of domestic violence against women in India. He advocates for holistic approaches to combatting gender-based violence and promoting gender justice in Indian society.

Upon reviewing the existing literature, it is clear that most researchers have primarily concentrated on the causes of domestic violence and its impact on the mental and physical well-being of women. Survey reports which are available often present data that may not fully reflect the actual situation prevailing. Furthermore, previous researches tend to reinforce the preconceived notion that domestic violence is more prevalent in rural areas or among lower or middle-class families in India.

METHODOLOGY

The current study primarily relies on existing secondary sources and e-sources such as online articles, journals, newspaper reports, and survey findings from organizations like the "National Crime Records Bureau", "National Family Health Survey", and the "National Commission for Women". Additionally, testimonies from survivors of domestic

¹⁹ Published on October 28, 2023, available at ResearchGate.net, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375030073_Understanding_the_Issue_of_Domestic_Violence_against_Women_in_India_A_Critical_Analysis (Accessed on 23rd September, 2024)

violence sourced from YouTube have been collected for this study. In an effort to highlight the depth of the study, I have used random sampling approach for gathering testimonies.

Findings

Finding 1

The narratives gathered from survivors of domestic violence, sourced primarily from YouTube through random sampling, paint a harrowing picture of their ordeals. Predominantly hailing from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, these survivors often recount tales of horror marked by husbands engaged in menial jobs and plagued by alcohol addiction. Yet, it's notable that only a scant few testimonies emerge from affluent circles, where marriages are typically orchestrated within esteemed families. What unites these divergent narratives is the pervasive fear that stifles victims' voices. In lower-income households, domestic violence is no longer confined to the shadows; it unfolds brazenly, casting a grim shadow over daily life. On the flip side, within affluent realms, while physical abuse may be less overt, mental torment thrives behind closed doors.

Online testimonies predominantly spotlight violence within lower-income strata, perpetuating a narrative of class disparity. However, a closer examination reveals that affluence offers no immunity. Tales of abuse emerge from luxurious abodes, underscoring the universality of this scourge. Take, for instance, the survivor who, after an online match, found herself enduring a nightmare abroad. Her husband's infidelity spiralled into physical brutality, compelling her to seek refuge at the Indian embassy in the USA. Similarly, a business tycoon's wife grappled with the agony of domestic violence, her anguish hidden beneath a veneer of opulence. A few years back, a video emerged on social media depicting a retired judge and his family assaulting his daughter-in-law, who admitted that such incidents were a regular occurrence, displaying her visible wounds.

Reports affirm that despite societal assumptions, domestic violence spares no demographic; it merely adopts different guises. Domestic violence transcends financial, social, and educational

barriers.²⁰ While the triggers and manifestations of abuse may differ between classes, the prevalence of domestic violence is indisputable across all strata. Nevertheless, societal beliefs propagate a narrative of privilege, falsely suggesting that wealth shields against such atrocities. Top of Form

In affluent circles, the cases often go unreported due to a desire to uphold a pristine public image. Despite facing abuse, victims fear social stigma and believe that speaking about it will tarnish their reputation. Moreover, the nature of the violence, often verbal or psychological, makes it difficult to provide tangible evidence. On the contrary, in lower-income strata, many women accept abuse as their fate, influenced by societal norms and cultural conditioning. This normalization of violence perpetuates a cycle where victims internalize blame and justify mistreatment, echoing outdated beliefs that align with historical perspectives like those of Manu.

Finding 2

After thoroughly reviewing testimonies and examining the available reports, it becomes evident that women who survive domestic violence endure severe mental and physical health consequences. Numerous studies have shown that domestic violence is strongly associated with a range of adverse health effects, both mental and physical. Individuals who experience domestic violence are at an elevated risk of developing mental health conditions, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, diminished self-worth and suicidal thoughts or behaviours. Traumatic experiences can lead to feelings of stress, fear, and isolation, exacerbating mental health issues. Additionally, survivors may internalize blame or resentment, leading to difficulties in forming new relationships. Moreover, the adverse impact of domestic violence extends beyond mental health, manifesting in physical ailments such as

20 Anahita Mukherji, "A chilling video clip reminds Indians in Silicon Valley that domestic abuse is not uncommon." Published on April 29, 2017, on Scroll.in. (Accessed on 1st October, 2024). Available at: <https://scroll.in/article/835734/domestic-abuse-is-common-among-indians-in-silicon-valley-a-chilling-video-is-more-proof-of-this>

visible wounds, fractured limbs, malnutrition, and disruptions in menstrual cycles due to high stress levels. Research findings suggest a correlation between experiencing domestic violence and poorer overall health outcomes, including increased rates of suicides, among women who have experienced violence within the four walls of their house to those who have not experienced domestic abuse. Top of Form

In affluent households, where physical abuse may be less overt, victims often rationalize or downplay the severity of their experiences, attributing blame to themselves and striving to maintain the facade of a perfect family. This self-deception perpetuates a cycle of emotional abuse, wherein victims relinquish their power in attempts to keep the peace, ultimately leading to further emotional harm. As life goes on, they bury themselves in work, caring for the kids or even using numbing drugs to self-medicate, alcoholism, or in other form of addictions to numb the suffering. They may even start trauma bonding with their perpetrator. Now this is very clear that the adverse impact of domestic violence also impacts the classes differently. but the commonality in both the cases is that they accept it as their faith and try maintaining a balance with it.

As per a 2021 report by BBC India, among the total 153,052 suicides recorded in 2020, 14.6% were housewives. While this statistic does not necessarily imply that all housewives experienced domestic violence, it suggests that some may have resorted to suicide as a result of such abuse which is disturbing.²¹ Children who witness domestic abuse within their family are at a heightened risk of experiencing significant psychological and emotional distress. Exposure to parental violence can lead to fear, anxiety and emotional suppression, potentially impacting their ability to form healthy relationships and increasing the likelihood of exhibiting aggressive behaviours in the future. Hence, domestic violence can significantly impact the overall family dynamics, burdening each member with their share of pain and suffering.

Interestingly, according to the Divorce Index, India has one of the lowest divorce rates globally, standing

at only 1%.²² Low divorce rates in India, despite the pervasive impact of domestic violence on familial dynamics and individual well-being, hint at a system that lacks agency or autonomy, particularly for women. However, this statistic does not reflect happy marriages; instead, it underscores the social and economic barriers that prevent individuals, especially women, from seeking divorce. Many Indian women lack financial independence, limiting their options, while the social stigma associated with divorce (the tag of a “divorcee”) further discourages them from leaving unhappy marriages. Additionally, societal expectations of women as self-sacrificing figures reinforce this patriarchal system, trapping them in abusive or unsatisfactory relationships.

India has established a comprehensive legal framework focused on addressing the issue of violence against a woman in the domestic regime, including the “Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005” and provisions within the Indian Penal Code. However, despite these legal protections, many survivors of domestic violence hesitate to report their abuse or take action against their perpetrators. A practicing advocate at the High Court of Judicature, Madhya Pradesh, sheds light on this issue. He explains that, “survivors often fear further retaliation from their abusers if they speak out, worrying about intensified torment and abuse. Moreover, the fear of being thrown out of their homes and facing societal shame further discourages survivors from seeking help.” This reluctance to report abuse is often compounded by deeply ingrained patriarchal norms, which dictate that women must unquestioningly accept their husbands’ behaviour. Additionally, childhood experiences of witnessing domestic violence may normalize such behaviour, leading survivors to internalize the belief that they deserve the abuse. According to a report, some women may refrain from speaking out due to fear of reprisal or shame.²³ Further, The Social Norm theory, initially

22 Sameer Khan, “With lowest divorce rate, India tops world ranking in preserving relationships.” *Siasat Daily News*, 16th September 2023. (Accessed on 7th October, 2024), available at: <https://www.siasat.com/with-lowest-divorce-rate-india-tops-world-ranking-in-preserving-relationships-2697285/>

23 R Kaur, S Garg, “Addressing domestic violence against women: an unfinished agenda.”, *Indian J Community*

21 Geeta Pandey, “Why does a housewife in India take her life every 25 minutes?”, *BBC Hindi News*, 16 December 2021. (Accessed on 2nd October, 2024)

developed in Western contexts, allows for a deeper understanding of India's cultural norms surrounding domestic violence and reporting practices. This theory suggests that individual behaviour is influenced by perceptions of social norms. Referred to as "pluralistic ignorance," these misperceptions hold considerable sway over individual behaviour. The theory posits that behaviours are rooted in attitudes, and meaningful change can only occur when underlying beliefs are reshaped.²⁴Top of Form

Now, the question arises whether responsibility lies solely with the survivors or if the system itself is also culpable in certain cases. In India, historically the police force has been a male-dominated profession, with women often facing barriers to entry and facing assumptions about their ability to perform policing duties. The necessity for female officers became evident as police stations encountered more cases involving female and juvenile offenders. Women Police Stations (WPSs) were established to offer a secure environment for women seeking police assistance, addressing concerns about facing retaliation, social stigma, experiencing low conviction rates, and encountering mistreatment from male officers when reporting gender-based crimes. However, survivors often lack trust in the police's ability to protect them and prosecute crimes adequately. Factors influencing individuals' decisions to seek help include maintaining trust in institutions with sensitive information. Despite efforts to improve public trust in the, a recent survey revealed that only a third of households expressed "a great deal of confidence" in the police to enforce the law. Notably, this confidence was significantly lower among historically marginalized communities such as Scheduled Tribes and castes in India.²⁵

Med. 2008 Apr;33(2):73-6. doi:10.4103/0970-0218.40871. (Accessed on 10th October, 2024)

24 Portia Bajwa, Kelsey Foreman, & Charlotte Sall, "Exploring the Low Rates of Reporting Domestic Violence in Bihar, India.", *Advocates Forum*, The University of Chicago. (Accessed on 20th October, 2024). Available at: <https://crownschool.uchicago.edu/student-life/advocates-forum/exploring-low-rates-reporting-domestic-violence-bihar-india>Top of Form

25 Kanishka Sikri, Ayushi Thakur, Betelhem Araya Tadele & Daniel Cowen, "Why Women's Police Stations in India Fail to Mitigate Violence Against Women.", *Reach Alliance Report*, March 2021 (Accessed on 20th October, 2024)

During discussions with a Professor at Women's Christian College, Kolkata (West Bengal), who holds her Ph.D. in Police Systems, she highlights that, "the law enforcement officers sometimes refrain from registering cases due to resource constraints or excessive workloads, particularly when dealing with lower-income groups, as there is no additional compensation for solving such cases. Furthermore, instances occur where disputing couples reconcile, or the survivor withdraws their case. In affluent circles, there is a fear of social stigma, leading to underreporting. Moreover, the influence of the powerful often manipulates the system through bribery."

Hence, we can say that the fault lies in collateral, resulting in collateral damages. Therefore, there is a pressing need for police forces to raise awareness that they are allies of the public. Similarly, Survivors must take initiative to advocate for themselves, as their self-advocacy is essential for others to offer assistance.

CONCLUSION

The enduring practice of violence against women spans centuries, it has increasingly infiltrated our societal fabric often cloaked in the guise of religion, culture, societal norms, or patriarchal structures. In all societies regardless of income, social status, or cultural background, women face varying degrees of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Women encounter violence not only in public but also within the confines of the four walls of their home. Women are often pressured to adhere to submissive roles as wives and daughters-in-law, compelled to prioritize their husband's needs over their own well-being. This expectation leads to emotional distress and psychological trauma. Addressing domestic violence is vital for the collective well-being of society, as it not only harms the health and safety of women (the survivors) but also affects the entire family unit. Despite the government endeavours to safeguard women from domestic violence in India, it is disheartening that such maltreatment endures within homes. Women, marginalized within society, demand specific consideration, particularly in instances of domestic abuse, encompassing



dowry-related violence, physical and psychological harm, assaults, and various other forms of brutality. Intensifying the legal framework cannot entirely eliminate the scourge of domestic violence. The stricter the laws become, the secretive the methods of domestic violence are likely to become.

Eradicating domestic violence necessitates a comprehensive approach that leverages both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Urgent measures include sensitizing the police force and appointing trained female officers to effectively address cases of cruelty against women. Stringent and deterrent punishments should be meted out to perpetrators of domestic violence to serve as a deterrent to potential offenders. Additionally, the integration of legal education into the school curriculum, as outlined in the New Education Policy of 2020, is crucial. This initiative will raise awareness among boys and girls about their rights and responsibilities. A significant number of women who experience domestic violence are illiterate, leading to a lack of awareness about their rights and leaving them vulnerable to continued abuse and to endure silent suffering. Therefore, raising awareness among them about their rights is equally vital. There is also a pressing need for dedicated government schemes aiming at the holistic development of survivors of domestic violence, providing them support for their treatment and rehabilitation. Alternatively, fines levied on perpetrators as punishment should be allocated to survivors in order to aid in their recovery.

On societal level in order to achieve a lasting change a two-pronged approach is required. First, we need to foster social acceptance for survivors of domestic violence, current societal treatment often isolates and blames the victims, hindering their healing process. Second, programs focused on empowering women who have experienced abuse are crucial. These programs can help survivors regaining their self-esteem shattered by constant torture. The fight for gender equality and a safe home environment for women goes beyond just stopping individual acts of domestic violence. It requires a more complete solution that tackles the root causes, like the traditions and cultural norms that keep women unequal. We need to take a hard look at the ingrained societal attitudes that create

unfair rules for men and women. Think of breaking down the idea of the *Lakshman Rekha* (a boundary that limits women's freedoms). Real progress relies on men understanding and accepting that women are equal partners, not just at home, but in all aspects of life. At the end I want to conclude our research paper with a very famous quote of Sanskrit, i.e., Top of Form

“यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः ।”

(Wherever women are given their due respect, even the deities like to reside there.)

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