

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AS REPORTED BY MEN IN INDIA: EXPLORING PATHWAYS WITH CHILDHOOD GENDER INEQUITY AND VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES OF PERPETRATORS

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Abstract: At a time when perpetration of violence within intimate relations shows unprecedented recrudescence in India, it is essential to address the question “why some men show susceptibility to perpetrate violence on women while others do not?” This study, which presents a man-centric perspective of intimate partner violence, was conceptualized as an initial attempt to encapsulate the pathways of perpetration of intimate partner violence with perpetrators childhood gender inequity and violence experiences found that those husbands who have either experienced or witnessed violence during childhood have a higher propensity towards spouse violence. Similarly husbands grown up with childhood gender inequity experiences are more prone to perpetrate violence on their spouses. The results suggest the need of designing, implementing and influencing policies for active governmental intervention to correct gender imbalances and promote proper gender socialization among boys and girls.

Key Words: Intimate partner violence, men, gender inequity, childhood, violence experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Women around the world experience staggering levels of all types of violence by their spouses or intimate partners. This leads to complete devastation in their lives and blocks their overall development. Yet a general understanding about the underlying precipitating factors for intimate partner violence remains limited and significant knowledge about its root causes is lacking in the society even though some studies found that the factors which lead violence against women are unequal power relations, demographic diversities, gender hierarchies and power imbalance in family itself. It is only recently researchers started trying to find out the reasons behind this human rights violation inflicted upon women by their own husbands (Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain, & Mozumder, 2003). Even though there is evidence that the main perpetrators of intimate partner violence in almost all developing country settings are men, most of the relevant research has been mainly focused on the perspectives of women respondents.

Violence against women is one of the most extreme manifestations of gender power inequalities used by many men to exert control and dominance over women (International Centre for Research on Women, 2012). Any physical, psycho-social or sexual cruelty metes out to individuals within an intimate relationship is

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considered as intimate partner violence. It includes physical assault, psychological ill-treatment, forced sexual intercourse or any other dominant behaviour” (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2015). It may embody one act of violence, or a series of acts that make a pattern of abuse. This can have serious-and sometimes fatal-consequences for victims and for those who see or hear the violence (Department of Justice, Canada 2017).

Available literature suggests various reasons behind violence against women. While Heise, Pitanguy, & Germaine (1994) argues that hierarchical gender relations, perpetuated through gender socialization and socio-economic inequities, are the root causes of violence against women, a multi-country study in Chile, India, Egypt and Philippines identified regular alcohol consumption by the husband or partner as a risk factor for any life time intimate partner violence across all four study countries (WHO, 2015).

UNDERSTANDING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE: DIFFERENT THEORIES

There are many theories that have tried to explain perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence. No one theory can explain why every perpetrator becomes abusive. Correlation between perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence and childhood violence experiences of abusers have been endorsed by theory of cycle of violence since long while feminist theorists presume that an entrenched patriarchal societal configuration and an inbuilt asymmetrical power distribution among men and women are the main culprits of transmission of intimate partner violence. At the same time socio- cultural theorists suggest that the traditions and norms which sanction violence and its tolerability aggravated by attitude of humanity towards gender inequity since childhood exacerbate the situation.

Children who grow up in families where IPV was present are more likely to become involved in relationships that are affected by IPV. According to Marilyn (2010) abusers are more likely to have witnessed abuse as children than those who engage in situational couple violence. Saenger (2000) asserts from infancy to adolescence, family violence interfered with the children’s growth and development. For them violence is an integral part of normal life and it is a mean of every day survival.

Feminist theory explains that transmission of IPV is maintained by a normative patriarchal social structure, based on gender-related power differentials. Intimate partner violence and abuse is ingrained in a power disparity between gender, within families, culture and in society. It is been proved by many studies that when the belief of men that they are superior to women is shattered by the way their partners talk, behave or act, they try to put them down usually with violence.

Intimate partner violence in India is prevalent in all socioeconomic classes, religious groups and regions. Societies where gender inequitable practices are

accepted as normal chances are more to inflict violence upon women on deviations from these practices. An indissoluble relation is apparent with culture-attitude-belief and practice followed in a society and the prevalence of IPV perpetuated by men on their women in that society. Many societies believe that the said duties of women according to their perceived roles are supposed to be done by them, and failing to complete them, they are deserved to be punished including physical, emotional and sexual violence. Shockingly some women too sanction this attitude and carry forward this belief to their off springs.

METHODOLOGY

This paper addresses the central question as to “why some men show susceptibility to perpetrate violence on their partners while others do not” and attempts to assess and compare the correlations between men’s childhood gender inequity & violence experiences and their perpetration of intimate partner violence.

Descriptive research design is used in this study where 1600 men in the age group of 18 to 50 years from Gujarat state were surveyed and studied with the help of multistage proportionate random sampling method. In his working paper titled “Reporting and incidence of violence against women in India, Aashish Gupta (as cited by Thomas, 2017) accounted that Gujarat has a comparatively higher incidence of both physical and sexual violence of women by their husbands than many other states in India.

Intimate Partner Violence Scale (Straus, 1979) & Margolin, Burman, John, & Brien, 1990), Men’s Childhood experience of gender equity scale and Men’s Childhood experience of Violence scale [MCE-V] were used to assess men’s perpetration of violence and their childhood violence and gender inequality experiences respectively.

RESULTS

Overall, more than three-fourth of respondents admitted being violent towards intimate partners and findings suggest evidence of high prevalence of intimate partner violence from all study sites. While a little less than one-fourth of the respondents reported perpetration of high level IPV, around half of them admitted moderate level IPV.

Occurrence of all forms of violence was evident from the findings as more than 85.3 percent reported being physically violent; 71.5 percent emotionally violent; 63.8 percent economically violent; and 45.3 percent sexually violent either at moderate or high levels towards their spouses. This finding corroborated what Gupta (2014) reported that when compared with many other states in India, Gujarat has a comparatively higher incidence of both physical and sexual violence of women by their husbands.

Research has long been confirmed the pervasiveness of intimate partner violence around the world. According to Devries et al. (2013) 30% of women aged

15 years or older have experienced sexual/physical intimate partner violence in their life time. Nearly a fourth of the male survey respondents in India reported perpetrating sexualized violence at some point, a majority of them against an intimate partner- a girl friend or a wife (Priyali, 2015). At the same time between 6 and 59 percent of ever-partnered women experience sexual violence (whether by a partner or non-partner) in their lifetimes (García-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, (2005). A recent international data show that one in three women worldwide experience physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner in their lifetimes (World Health Organisation, 2013).

Chi-square tests proved strong associations between educational qualification, occupation, income, type of family and area of living of perpetrators and their level of perpetration of IPV. Burazeri, Roshi, & Tavanxhi (2005) also reported that less-powerful men (less educated and unemployed) and men who came from rural areas, especially those who had lived in rural areas longer, were more likely to be violent. Odd ratios calculated with logistic regression analysis [odd ratios of dependent variable (level of IPV: low level-0, high level-1) and associated factors] presented in table 1.2 with significance levels reinforced the chi-square results and found that men with high level education as well as high income were less likely to inflict violence on partners while area of living, age of marriage and age of partner are found to be strong and significant predictive factors for high level intimate partner violence.

At the same time level of men's childhood gender inequity and violence experiences were also found to be a strong predictors of IPV. Men with moderate level childhood gender inequity experiences were 1.01 times more likely to perpetrate IPV while those with high level childhood gender inequity experiences were far more likely [4.313 times] than those with low level MCE-GE [childhood gender inequity experiences]. Similarly while men with moderate level MCE-V were 1.91 times more likely to perpetrate IPV than those with low level MCE-V [childhood violence experiences], this likelihood was far higher [4.62 times] if their level of childhood violence experiences was high.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND MEN'S CHILDHOOD VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES

Much research recognizes the association between having childhood violence experiences and perpetrating intimate partner violence as an adult, as it is proved to be statistically significant in each of the six surveyed countries, says an international study conducted in Chile, Croatia, India, Rwanda, Brazil and Mexico (Heilman, Hebert, & Paul-Gera, 2014) . The same study also found that adult men who are victims and witnesses of violence as children may accept violence as a conflict resolving tactic and reported that the most consistent influence on ever having perpetrated violence on spouse is having witnessed one's mother being hit by her husband or partner.

Findings of the present study reiterated the correlations with IPV and childhood violence experiences of perpetrators as results found that men with moderate or high level childhood violence experiences were more likely to perpetrate IPV than those with low level MCE-V. Available literature supports this theory of cycle of violence as Coker *et al.* (2002) found that men were 2.5 times more likely to report exposure to IPV as adults if they had reported being physically assaulted as children.

Research in intimate partner violence established evidence that adults who were victims and spectators of violence in their childhood had increased probability of becoming batterer themselves. A cross sectional study by Gil-González, Vives-Cases, Ruiz, Carrasco-Portiño & Alvarez-Dardet (2007) suggest if an individual is being exposed to violence during their childhood, it is the risk factor for spousal violence and partner violence can be a consequence of patriarchal ideology and consequence of learned violence behavior.

Research evidence showed that having experienced abuse and neglect individuals tend to engage in antisocial activities. Individual being sexually abused or assaulted as a child would further result into similar type of offending behavior and individuals having experienced of physical abuse or neglect would have higher risk factor of perpetrating violence against children and spouse.

A United Nations Multi Country Study on Men and Violence found that there is a strong relationship between men perpetrating violence against women and childhood experiences of any kind of violence. Importantly, the findings show the pathways through which experiences of childhood trauma contribute to violence against women and further child maltreatment (Emma Fulu *et al.* 2017). Present study strongly asserts the validity of the theory of cycle of violence as it undoubtedly proves that men's experiences of childhood trauma contribute to violence against their spouses in later life. It reinforces the already established finding of many other researches that childhood violence experiences of men are associated with their perpetration of IPV and childhood experiences control and outline men's outlooks and deeds enormously. Research by Priya *et al.* (2014) reported that men who had often witnessed some violent acts or discrimination against their sisters or mothers in their childhood are more rigidly masculine because they internalize this experience. They also found that men who experienced discrimination as children were more likely to be rigidly masculine than those who did not, in most states.

Correlation results clearly indicated the strong propensity of respondents with violence experiences to inflict IPV upon their spouses in adulthood. International Men and Gender Equity Survey [IMAGES] data also show that childhood experiences of violence can increase adult men's likelihood to resort to violent means of conflict resolution, both within and outside of their intimate partnerships (Contreras, M., *et al.*, 2012).

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND MEN'S CHILDHOOD GENDER INEQUITY EXPERIENCES

Results of this study also underlined links between men's gender inequity experiences during childhood and their propensity to perpetrate violence towards intimate partners. Overall, the findings highlighted the strong and deeply rooted patriarchal as well as male dominated gender attitudes internalised within men in the study sites as proximate factors of IPV.

It is an undisputed fact that what children witness or learn or experience during childhood can have an impact on their adult attitude, perception and behavior. Intimate partner violence by men are inextricably grounded and intertwined with their attitudes towards gender equality including the roles and responsibilities of males and females, mainly learned and developed from their childhood gender equality or inequality experiences. In other words, attitudes of sanctioning of men's violence on their partners are formed through the norms of gender roles they have ingrained in childhood from their own families. How a father behaves with mother, is what the son learns from his father, how his mother behaves and what all she does are what he expects from his spouse.

Unfortunately, in many societies the existing notions sanctions the dominance of males in families and their aggressiveness in intimate relations and endorses subordinate role of women in all aspects including right on her own body that men can impose their power through dominance too. Such beliefs have a long history in western and other cultures and have been enshrined in western legal systems (Straton, 2002) and social norms (Berkel et al., 2004) too. For example, if women victims of intimate partner violence are bold enough to question the injustices or discrimination lashed out at them, they are judged more harshly and may be painted as problem invitees (Hillier & Foddy, 1993; Pavlou & Knowles, 2001). Early childhood experiences of gender inequality have been found in many studies to shape people's views and behaviors in their later life (Heise, Pitanguy, & Germaine, 1998 and Gil-Gonzales et al. 2007). Overall men who experienced violence as children are more likely to subscribe to inequitable attitudes about gender roles (Contreras, M., *et al.*, 2012).

Perpetration of violence by men on their intimate partners is taking place around the world and one of the important factors responsible for due to which women end up being victims some way or the other is the childhood gender inequity experience of perpetrators of violence. The special attention, privileges, power and care boys and men enjoy compared to girls and women in their families from childhood due to their gender, for example- served food, washed clothes, more say, more freedom etc, play a vital role in forming gender inequity attitude as well as a sense of superiority in them over women. In several cultures, boys and girls are socialized differently as their socialization goals and child rearing practices are dissimilar. For instance, while in almost all communities being outgoing, noisy

and “naughtiness” etc in boys are expected and condoned”, girls must “be taught to be obedient “, “should not laugh loudly”, and “conservative and serve others”.

Research has long recognised the unswerving connections between adherence to traditional patriarchal gender norms and sanctioning for violence among males in a wide variety of communities and countries, both Western and non-Western, including Arab and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Israel (Haj-Yahia, 2003; and adult men and young men in Australia (De Judicibus & McCabe, 2001). IMAGES study (as cited in Thomas, 2017) reported clear significant correlation between men’s high level childhood gender equality experiences and high level perpetration of intimate partner violence.

Conversely, the more that people maintain egalitarian gender attitudes, the better are their attitudes towards violence against women. They are more likely to see violence against women as unacceptable, to define a wider variety of acts as violence or abuse, to reject victim-blaming and to support the victim. This egalitarian attitude would get ingrained in a boy’s mind only if he had the experience of his father respecting his mother with dignity and he himself was not given undue importance in own house compared to his sisters.

Attitudes towards gender roles, that is, perceptions regarding appropriate roles for men and women is documented as the most reliable predictor of attitudes supporting the use of violence against women (Good, Heppner, Hillenbrand-Gunn, & Wang, 1995; Simonson & Subich, 1999; Berkel, Vandiver, & Bahner, 2004). Pearson’s correlation test undoubtedly indicates that those husbands having more inequitable gender experiences during childhood perpetrated more violence upon their spouses.

Traditionally it is been believed that a house should be within the complete and unquestionable command of the head of the family, usually a male member and all violence acts by him against the family members, including wife and children, used to be considered as disciplinary actions, needed to maintain discipline within family. Men in this study also held these attitudes even today and reported having experienced and learned the same from their own families during childhood. So, many do not find anything wrong in beating, shouting or threatening their wives but see as a “must act” to uphold discipline within the family and honour within community.

CONCLUSION

One of the important objectives of this study was to recognize those elements explain violence on spouses by husbands and whether their childhood gender inequity and violence experiences bear any impact on the prevalence of intimate partner violence. The findings demonstrate significant insights into strong links between perpetration of IPV against women in adulthood and childhood violence experiences as well as gender inequity experiences of perpetrators. In other words

this study indicate that those husbands who have either experienced or witnessed violence during childhood have a higher likelihood of internalizing violence as a normal act and therefore show more propensity towards spouse violence. Similarly husbands grown up with childhood gender inequity experiences in families where rigid gender roles were strictly followed have a higher probability of developing male dominated attitude and consequently perpetrate more violence on their spouses.

It is therefore undoubtedly clear that young boys who experience violence at home, neighborhood or school tend to inflict violence on their intimate partner too. Youngsters who used to get discriminated importance due to their gender in their families also are prone to act violence on their partners. These findings strongly point towards importance of creating violence free and gender friendly family environments to our small children so that coming generations will respect their partners. Complete prevention of all types of abuses of children can, to some extent, ensure a mentally healthy generation.

At the same time eradication of age old discriminatory practices and beliefs prevailing in society in favour of boys will help them to grow up without any such self- proclaimed importance. Efforts should be taken to incorporate lessons of respect, equality, dignity of labour including household work from early childhood so that they can shed away the wrong beliefs they used to acquire from the society.

The present study has tried to further substantiate the pernicious theory of cycle of violence and to provide new insights into the complex links connecting childhood incidents of gender inequity experiences with adult behaviour and attitudes and the analysis holds true this theory and proved that children who are victims or witnesses of violence within family are more likely to inflict violence on their intimate partners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Acknowledgement Findings of this study highlighted several complex linkages between perpetration of intimate partner violence and its causes. Violence on intimate partners, for many in this study, is a way to ensure sense of identity and power within their family, to establish complete authority on their spouses. It is their way of accomplishment of their learned idea of being a “man”. The gender inequity attitude of men under this study, as findings suggested, is the result of their childhood violence and gender inequity experiences. It also pointed out strong correlations between IPV and childhood gender inequitable as well as violence experiences. Hence it is imperative to ensure that every child is brought up in a violent-free and gender democratic environment to break the intergenerational transmission of violence.

As findings strongly suggested low level education as a predictive factor of IPV, augmenting awareness about gender equality with its importance and implications in attaining societal developmental goals among children especially

those who have experienced violence and gender inequity should be considered as an intervention strategy. Thomas & Mishra (2012) reported that an important prerequisite for achieving gender equality is changing men's attitude towards gender norms that they internalize and that influence their behaviors. Towards gender sensitization of children, the following methods can be included in their curriculum.

Modules which help children to form and maintain gender equitable attitude towards gender roles, sexuality and reproduction should be included in their curriculum. Similarly, children should be taught about gender based best practices, right and wrong practices and discriminatory practices. Discussions, debates, poster exhibitions, acts, skits, street plays, puppet shows etc glorifying gender equality should be part of school life – to make children able to appreciate respecting girls and women and recognize them as equal partners but subordinates. Educational campaigns with focus on equal division of labour within families or need of redefining roles of men.

Wrong notions about masculinity like – tough, controlling, powerful, authoritarian, commanding etc should not be allowed to be learned and glorified by boys. Instead they should be taught that being soft, helpful, emotional, participative and obedient will not snatch manhood from them and they can be more good husbands, fathers, sons and brothers etc with these traits than being tough, arrogant or authoritarian.

Recently the reported cases of all types of abuses, especially physical and sexual, upon children including boys are on rampant from all over India. Necessary steps towards protection of children should be given priority as findings of this study too clearly indicate that boys are also vulnerable to sexual abuses. Children should be taught about types of abuses, how to realise that they are being abused, good and bad touch, whom to report about their concerns as well as help line numbers, counselling services and other resilience opportunities.

Strict, transparent and compulsory social audits in schools, homes for children and communities should be conducted with governmental and trustworthy non-governmental organisations. Public awareness programmes regarding overall welfare of children can be encouraged where local bodies, elected representatives of local governments and representatives of citizen groups and NGOs could be the nodal officers. Responsible parenting should be part of the curriculum in colleges and universities.

In every society there are men with attitude of gender equality. Identifying and engaging these men in our efforts towards inculcating gender equality attitude in young and elder minds could be attempted. Similarly training sessions can be organised, where these men could act as mentors, for boys and youngsters where their concerns, apprehensions and anxieties about masculinity, doubts about marriage, sex and family etc can be discussed and clarified. According to Nanda Priya *et al.* (2012) it is critical to bring men and women together in a strategic

manner across different types of programs and sectors to create platforms and avenues where traditional gender roles are confronted and challenged.

A culture of “healthy debate and discussions” highlighting the negative impact of pseudo- traditional patriarchal attitudes of our people upon girls and women must be made a part of our curriculum in our schools and universities. It is high time religion should play its role by redefining and reinterpreting their doctrines which directly or indirectly support, justify or normalise violence upon women or restrict women from certain rights and privileges which are unconstitutional.

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