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On: 30 March 2012, At: 00:22

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/whum20>

### Domestic Violence against Men in India: A Perspective

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Available online: 29 Mar 2012

To cite this article: Anant Kumar (2012): Domestic Violence against Men in India: A Perspective, *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 22:3, 290-296

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2012.655988>

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## **Domestic Violence against Men in India: A Perspective**

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*In the absence of any systemic data, with more men coming up and reporting violence by women, it is important to understand and examine the issue of violence against men by women and associated factors. With changing gender roles and power relations, the author predicts that this will increase in the future, which will have far-reaching consequences and implications for the larger society and relationships between men and women. The paper attempts to understand the dynamics and factors that play or will play a crucial role in escalating violence against men by women. The paper is based on authors counseling sessions, discussion with men victims of violence, and other secondary sources.*

**KEYWORDS** *Domestic violence, violence against men, gender, norm, values*

### INTRODUCTION

Men do report and allege spousal violence in private, but they hardly report it in public. Violence against men by women is not a new phenomenon, and the author predicts that it will increase with changing power dynamics, economic independence, and control over economy and resources. This change in power dynamics will also affect relationships between men and women, where men are afraid of losing power and women are excited by their empowered position. In this context, situating “power” within men and women, husband-wife, and family is important in favor of the larger society.

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I am thankful to my colleagues, students, and friend for their comments and suggestions.

This paper raises the social concern and is not an attempt to undermine the movement to stop violence against women.

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Because of a power imbalance, women have suffered for centuries. Does this gradual change in power will lead to harmonized society in favor of the larger society, state or take a reverse direction such as violence against men by women.

Women's position, power, and status are changing. They are empowered and aware of their rights. These factors along with education, changing values and norms, and gender role empower women in realizing that they are not inferior to men and even at places stronger and more powerful than men. They are better positioned to understand this perceived difference in power. Much has been researched and reported on violence against women but not on violence against men.

### VIOLENCE: MEN AND WOMEN

Human beings are violent and aggressive. Women are not an exception to it (Maguire, 2010; Dobash & Dobash, 2004). Research in the field of domestic violence has shown that men and women act violently in relationships at about the same rate. Furthermore, men and women are equally likely to instigate violence against one another. The truth is surprisingly egalitarian: About half of all domestic violence occurs with both partners abusing each other (Corry, Fiebert, & Pizzey, 2002). Murray Straus<sup>1</sup> reports that 25% occurs with only men assaulting women, and the other 25% occurs with only women assaulting men. The bibliographic study by Fiebert (2007) has examined 209 studies (161 empirical studies, 48 reviews/analysis of approximate sample size of 201,500) that show that women are physically aggressive, in fact, more violent (Dobash & Dobash, 2004; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Morse, 1995; Moffitt, Robins, & Caspi, 2001) than men in their relationships with their spouses or male partners. Definitely, power-relations, gender roles, norms, values, and socio-cultural environment affect and influence expression of these behaviors. For centuries, it has been depicted in various mythologies, literature, and forms of expressions that women are inferior and men are superior. So men are powerful, aggressive, and oppressors, and women are on the receiving end as oppressed and silent sufferers of all forms of violence. These notions are mostly guided by gender roles and norms where women cannot be violent, aggressive, and oppressive because of their social positions. Power relations, gender roles, norms, and values are not static, and they change over time. It is widely assumed and believed that women are always the victims and men are always the perpetrators. There are many reasons behind this assumption that men are never victims. The idea that men could be victims of domestic abuse and violence is so unthinkable that many men do not even attempt to report the violence. Acceptance of violence by women on men is generally considered as a threat to men folk, their superiority and masculinity.

## STATISTICS, ESTIMATES, AND DYNAMICS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN

Although there is no systematic study or record on domestic violence against men in India, it is generally estimated that in 100 cases of domestic violence, approximately 40 cases involve violence against men.<sup>2</sup> There is little evidence available about the actual number of violent acts against men and underlying dynamics of violence. There are various reasons for under-reporting, but foremost among them are our social system and values attached to men, which stop them from sharing and reporting domestic violence and abuse. Even when men report domestic abuse and violence, most people do not believe them. When men try to narrate their problems, torture, struggle, and harassment within marriage and family, no one listens to them; instead, people laugh at them. Many men are ashamed of talking about and sharing that they are beaten by their wives (Sarkar, Dsouza, & Dasgupta, 2007). One needs to understand that dynamics of domestic violence and abuse among men and women are different, and reasons, purposes, and motives are often very different. There are various studies on dynamics of violence against women, but there are limited studies on the issue of domestic violence and abuse against men.

The study by Save Family Foundation (Sarkar et al., 2007), which interviewed 1,650 husbands between the ages of 15 and 49 years, selected through random sampling using a schedule adapted from the WHO multi-country study on husband's health and domestic violence, reports that economical violence (32.8%) is common, followed by emotional violence (22.2%), physical violence (25.2%), and sexual violence (17.7%). The study shows that the probability of violence increased significantly with the duration of marriage, particularly if it was more than 7 years old. It also shows that husbands who experienced some form of violence during their first year of marriage continued to experience the same for the rest of their lives. It is not something that just goes away. The study shows that domestic violence is a public health issue with far-reaching health consequences, such as mental illness and stress disorders, that need to be addressed. The study also shows that domestic violence is perpetrated across all socioeconomic classes (see Table 1). The study reports that a high proportion of husbands who experienced domestic violence were well educated and earning good money.

Men tolerate and stay in abusive and violent relationship for many reasons. Some of the reasons "why men tolerate domestic violence and abuse" are the belief and hope that things would get better, fear of losing social respect and position, protection, and love toward their children and family. Many abused men feel that they have to make their marriages work. They are afraid that if things fall apart, they will be blamed. Many abused men also believe that it is their fault and feel that they deserve the treatment they receive. Another reason is increasing economic and other dependency on

**TABLE 1** Domestic Violence against Men: Types of Violence Reported (All India)

Physical violence	Verbal and emotional violence	Economic violence	Sexual abuse	No violence	Total
416 (25.21%)	366 (22.18%)	541 (32.79%)	294 (17.82%)	33 (2.00%)	1,650
Profession of people interviewed					
Marketing/media	Doctors/engineers	Business/self-employed	Govt. job	Unemployed	Total
326 (19.76%)	635 (38.48%)	399 (24.18%)	262 (15.88%)	28 (1.70%)	1,650

*Note.* Study duration: 10/04/05–30/03/06; 1,650 husbands (ages 15–49).

*Source:* Sarkar, S., Dsouza, R., & Dasgupta, A. (2007). Domestic violence against men—a study report by Save family Foundation. Retrieved from [www.savefamily.org](http://www.savefamily.org)

women. The Labor and Employment Ministry data for 2001–2005 reports that the number of women getting employment is higher than for men. The report (Sarkar et al., 2007) also shows that the number of employed men dropped by 14 lakh, from 228.4 lakh in 2001 to 214.4 lakh in 2005. In cases where an abused man is mentally, emotionally, or financially dependent on the woman, the idea of leaving the relationship generates feeling of depression and anxiety.

Violence against men is not considered serious because of its different manifestation. In most cases of violence against men, women use more mental, verbal, and emotional violence<sup>3</sup> and abuse and are involved less in physical violence. The impact of violence against men is less apparent and is less likely to come to the attention of others. A significant number of men are over sensitive to emotional and psychological abuse. In some cases, humiliating a man emotionally in front of others can be more devastating than physical abuse. Mental and emotional abuse can be an area where women are often more brutal than men. However, what hurts a man mentally and emotionally can in some cases be very different from what hurts a woman. For some men, being called a coward, impotent, or a failure can have a very different psychological impact than it would have on a woman. Unkind and cruel words hurt in different ways and linger in different ways. In most cases, men are more deeply affected by emotional abuse than physical abuse.

#### VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN BY WOMEN: NATURE AND FORM

Many men have reported that when they come home, usually their wife starts grumbling, murmuring, and cursing. Many men reported that women withhold sex without reason, as generally men in India do not enjoy sex

outside marriage. It was also reported by many men that sex is a bargaining tool for women. Many men reported that they are scared of their wives and their in-laws. Many men are threatened by their in-laws to act as their wives said. The study also shows that mostly women involved in violence against men are verbally abusive. They insult men, even insult their aged parents. Women find faults and harass through different ways. These faults are related to profession, attitude, day-to-day work, and sexual life, as not all men are capable of satisfying the needs of a wife after a certain age or have some physical problem. Mostly physical disability in the bedroom occurs because of sarcasm by the wife. This verbal abuse leads to mental torture. Generally, society considers that women cannot be verbally or mentally abusive or harass men. In some cases, it was also found and reported that when things go wrong or when husband is not following what his wife is demanding, her family and in-laws start to threaten to charge him with false cases such as anti-dowry (498a) or the Domestic Violence Act.

#### WHY VIOLENCE AGAINST MALES IS NOT REPORTED

The word *man* is gender-biased, denoting power, embedded with masculine behavior, appearance, and control of emotion (it is generally believed that men have less emotions than women, although no scientific evidence is available). It is common belief and perception that separates male and female in terms of expression of their feelings. It can be a matter of shame for men to disclose their suffering in a men-dominated society, as it can be perceived as “feminine behavior.” If a married man discloses his suffering to his friend or his family, he fears loneliness and has fear of loss of patriarchy and divorce from his wife or dominating behavior of his wife. It also has ill effects on his family and children and responsibility toward them. Because of this, men start living in distress and cannot disclose their feelings to anybody. Unavailability of a strong support system (counseling services, institutional support, help line, family support, etc.) is another factor.

#### HEALTH CONSEQUENCES RELATED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN

Assuming that men are undergoing violence in all forms and women are becoming relatively more powerful, it is important to understand and focus on consequences of such acts on individual health and behavior. It may have different manifestation in individuals' health such as physical, psychological, social, and economic. If inadequate attention is given, it may lead to prolonged habits of alcoholism, increased homosexuality, stress, frustration, suicide, and the like.

## DYNAMICS RELATED TO VIOLENCE AGAINST MALES

The word *violence* is generally referred in terms of cognitive interpretation. It basically relates to power dynamics: Male violence is basically the interpretation of analysis of power: "Who is more powerful?" It can be in terms of economic empowerment at the level of addressing insecurity, who feels more insecure of leaving whom. For example, if a male earns less than a female and his wife starts analyzing the situation and feels more empowered and powerful, the male develops insecurity and can even be a victim of violence thereafter. This is true even for work: if the workplace is headed by active, socially strong women in status, physical robustness, mental strength, and psychological power.

There are no absolute principles for understanding the emotional differences between men and women and the dynamics of violence. However, there are principles that provide interpretation of individual situations. Norm-violation theory by DeRidder and Tripathi (1992) is one such principle that can be used to explore violent reactions and the underlying factors. Norm-violation theory looks at the cycle of conflict-dynamics and predicts whether it is going to follow the cycle of escalation or de-escalation. The precipitating factor is taken as a norm violation. It is in this context that norm-violation theory can be used to understand how a certain action on the part of the male/female may be seen as malevolent and lead to a violent (retributive or tit-for-tat) reaction by the partner.

## CONCLUSION

Society and its power relations, norms, and values are changing. Men have started sharing their agony, torture, and harassment by women/spouses. It is time to recognize their problem as a social and public health issue and develop appropriate strategies and interventions. They are no longer stronger than women. They need help in crisis and family violence: Particularly violence by spouse is a crisis. Male victims of violence can be saved/helped through appropriate intervention such as recognition of violence against men by women as a public health issue; helpline for the male victims of violence; and education, awareness, and legal safeguards.

## NOTES

1. See the interview with Murray Straus of the UNH Family Research Lab. ([www.vortexweb.net/gorgias/mens\\_issues/straus\\_interview.html](http://www.vortexweb.net/gorgias/mens_issues/straus_interview.html))
2. About domestic violence against men (Mentor Research Institute, 2007).

3. Verbal and emotional violence includes insult, name calling, accusations on character and conduct, preventing from taking up a job, forcing to leave job, preventing men from meeting any person in the normal course of events, threat to commit suicide, and any other verbal or emotional abuse.

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