



## EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR- A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT:

*A lesser amount of studies about the real living experience of women are available in Jammu and Kashmir for domestic violence victims. This present study attempts to redress the victim's stories, understanding their home-life situations. In this perspective a feminist, a qualitative approach was employed to explore the women victim's accounts in relation to impacts the domestic violence, barriers to violence disclosure, as well as useful resources for support of women victims in dealing with domestic violence. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 women who identified themselves as victims and survivors of domestic violence perpetrated by their family members, husband or in-laws. Six major themes were identified and studied as described by the participants, Which include in Family life Issues social, economic and gender gap and impacts include physical injuries, mental stress, a growing faith as well as adverse effects on the children and on the women's self-worth. The study also found that many of these abused women were reluctant to disclose abuse because they wanted to conceal it due to their perception on disclosing marital affairs, they were concerned about the children's well-being, lacking knowledge on the provisions of support available for domestic violence victims in the state. Further, the women's misunderstanding of Islamic concepts such as disobedience to the male partner has made disclosing violence experiences difficult. Over and above this, it was found that the mechanisms of domestic violence resource provisions are worthy of investigation.*

**KEYWORDS :** physical injuries, mental health, disobedience.

### INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a traumatic episode which is influenced by complex social, cultural, and psychological factors. It is often referred to as the violence between husband and wife or non-married partners. Domestic violence problem has been identified as occurring across all religions, ethnicities, cultures, ages and economic status. Despite a large number of studies having been conducted around the globe focusing on these abusive relationships, knowledge about victim women's experiences is lacking. Notably, the impact of such victimization experiences may have adverse consequences not only for the victims, but their children, families, friends as well as the whole of society. Domestic violence is significant social and public health problem in many states. Besides being a tremendous burden to social services, health care and the criminal justice system, the harm caused by domestic violence is more problematic in terms of the physical, emotional, psychological and behavioural damage. Thus, issues of domestic violence need to be considered as an urgent and important matter because of the negative effects they caused to society.

Domestic violence is often described as a family-centered problem and generally understood as patterns of abusive and coercive behaviour which may cause physical injuries, psychological and emotional disturbances, sexual intimidation as well as financial oppression of the victim. In fact, it is portrayed as the act of maltreatment of one's partner by the other in the context of an intimate relationship. A similar definition, described by Healey, Smith and O'Sullivan (1998), is that acts of violence and abusive behaviours are used by adults to control and dominate their intimate partners, and is thus classified as domestic violence. There are many definitions for domestic violence, which may differ from one another depending upon the perspective of the definer. Straus and Gelles (1990) argued that proper definitions of domestic violence are essential, since without accurate description the problems related to the occurrence of violent domestic incidents seem to get more severe.

World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation" (WHO, 2009).

Literature on violence against women confirms that the prevalence of violence includes various forms such as physical, psychological and emotional as well as sexual. Even though many states still do not consider forced sex in marriage as rape, in recent years some states have begun to legislate against marital rape and view it as a crime. These states include Delhi, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Assam, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Puducherry, Karnataka, Gujarat, Mizoram, Maharashtra etc. (National Crime Record Bureau 2016). Similarly, regarding the researched state, the magnitude of this social issue is huge and it has been put forward as part of the national agenda.

The paper presents a brief overview of facts and figures regarding domestic violence cases in Jammu and Kashmir in order to describe the current scale of the problem. The study includes investigating the impacts of domestic violence on women in terms of various dimensions (i.e. physical health and also the social, psychological and emotional aspects). It also presents the reasons that make some women reluctant to disclose the abuse.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of living in abusive relationships from the perspective of victim women in Jammu and Kashmir. In addition, the study aims to identify the needs and supports that would be helpful to the women in dealing with these traumatic episodes. This paper presents the results using descriptive data along with the demographical characteristics of the women. It discusses the nature of the family life and the impact of domestic violence on victims. The discussions were essentially meant to describe circumstances of this particular study within the context of the study. Therefore, the results of the study were not used in making generalizations about the violence experiences of state women as a whole. It is believed that the abusers used violence to control their female partners at every point in their marital relationships. There were no exceptions for the women, not even with the presence of the children in the households. The women's sense of powerlessness continually hampers the attempts to safeguard the children from the abuser. As the children grow up with the exposure to violence at home, many of those children have reflected their dissatisfaction, retaliation as well as self-rebelliousness in terms of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Therefore, young children living with domestic violence should benefit from the professionals and informal supports in the community so as to help families and children deal with these negative situations.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the perceptions of women victims of domestic violence.
2. To examine the impact of domestic violence on women victims.

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## Family Life in Jammu and Kashmir

### Social issues

Social life in Jammu and Kashmir is highly influenced by a diverse mix of ethnic origins as well as the several religious groups. The difference is also very much apparent between the lives of families in big cities and for those who live in the villages. In general, Jammu and Kashmir preserve the value of family and marriage institutions with strong ties among its kin. The common family unit is defined with the figure of a father, mother and children in a household. The extension of this structure may also include the presence of grandparents, uncles and aunts, cousins as well as other relatives. In relation to this, family members are addressed according to their position in the family to show seniority as well as the higher-ranking of an individual. For instance, the term 'brothers and 'sisters are used together with the person's name as a reflection of respect. The culture of 'ranking' in the State communities up to this present time has created a peaceful and harmonious state.

According to 2011 Census, the average marriage age for Jammu and Kashmir men is higher than the female (28.5 years and 25.5 years respectively). In tradition, married men and women are specified with gender roles in the family, for example men as the head of the family with the responsibility to earn money so as to support the family. Meanwhile, the women are expected to take charge of domestic responsibilities and be obedient to her husband as well as to the parents-in-law. Today, arranged marriage is not favoured by the younger generation. Many of those have met their partners at the workplace, at educational institutions, been introduced by friends or even met through social networking media such as Facebook and online dating sites. Nowadays, Jammu and Kashmir State is facing an elongated chain of social problems from juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, crime to family issues such as domestic violence. This array of problems has affected many of the people in relation to the social aspects of their lives as well as their psychological well-being. Many studies also have been carried out in Jammu and Kashmir State to investigate the subject matter (Bashir Ahmad Dabla, 2009; Aabid Husain, 2011; Sandeep K. Nayak, 2007, Sana Shafi, Shams Un Nisa, Touseef Rizvi, 2015) etc. It is believed that modernisation and economic development has also contributed to this disturbing phenomenon. Hence, the question of what is wrong with today's society is still awaiting sound explanation.

### Economic issues

Family income in Jammu and Kashmir society is based on social class which is divided into three categories, namely the upper class, the middle class and the lower class income group. According to the Household Income Survey (HIS) carried out by the department economics and statistics, Jammu and Kashmir (2016), the rising per capita income since 1990's in State has reflected the positive growth of the economy and indicates a higher standard of living among its people. In general, the lower classes usually receive a monthly income of less than 2000. The majority (58 per cent) of the Jammu and Kashmir State population is distributed under the middle class group with earnings around 5000 per calendar month and the upper social class group receives 10000 or more. The minimum wage of below 1000 indicates the current poverty line in Jammu and Kashmir (Department of Economics and Statistics, Jammu and Kashmir, 2016). As one of the countries strongly accustomed to a patriarchal social system, men as the leader will take the role as 'breadwinner' in the family. In fact, before the 1980's only a small number of the State women had a place in the job market. Thus, women were financially dependent on their men for household expenditures. However, nowadays, thanks to plenty of opportunities in the education field, the employment rate among the females has greatly improved.

Similarly, the 2011 Census indicated that the ratio for female workers in Jammu and Kashmir was almost as equal as men employees. Due to that trend, many financial responsibilities are shared between the husband as well as the wife in order to improve their economic condition. In the past, working women were mainly involved in traditional occupations with jobs in agriculture and the handicrafts sector. On the other hand now, women are more diversified with many engaged in teaching, in government service, as well

as private sector and even self owned businesses, both local and at the national levels. Unemployment rate in the state was reported at 57.7 per cent among females (Analysis of the Jammu and Kashmir budget 2017-2018) where the rate indicates a lower percentage compared to the 69.3 percent of a decade ago. At present, there is no allowance scheme or any other form of benefits that is given to an unemployed person in Jammu and Kashmir. Therefore, the issue of employment is vital as it relates to financial resources in regards to meeting the standard costs of living for everyone. In the context of domestic violence, family economic constraint is believed to be one of the possible factors in marital discord between couples, where constant arguments as well as a perpetual state of dispute may lead to aggressive behaviours in a relationship. Moreover, statistics from the Department of Social Welfare, Jammu and Kashmir in 2004 show that financial problems are the most common cause of violent acts between husbands and wives. Other causes cited in the same report include extra marital affairs, conflicts with in-laws and stress at the workplace as well as substance abuse.

### **Gender gap issues**

Jammu and Kashmir is a developing State in which urbanization is very important within the state's economic agenda. Therefore, the contribution of all Jammu and Kashmir, men and women, towards the states development is critical. However, to this present moment, the patriarchal structure is still strongly influential in Jammu and Kashmir society. This has meant that gender inequality issues have been continuously debated for decades. The social structure of patriarchy for instance in the family institution, the workforce and political empowerment has reflected the cultural belief of male dominance in Jammu and Kashmir. According to Jammu and Kashmir state commission for women, cultural perception is that, it is the men's role to be head of the family as opposed to women who were seen more as 'the caregiver'. The female in the house was fully in-charge of the child rearing as well as taking care of the domestic responsibilities. Evidence proves that even after 71 years of the country's independence, there are still gaps between the participation of male and female roles, from traditional gender tasks (i.e. household chores and child rearing) to the socio-economic-political context.

### **Impact of domestic violence on victims**

The impacts of domestic violence on abused women in Jammu and Kashmir is based on information provided by the participants during the interviews, Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 women who identified themselves as victims and survivors of domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands, in-laws and Family members. Further the impact of domestic violence on the victims is presented into three subcategories, namely; physical injuries, mental disturbances and effects on children.

### **Physical injuries**

The findings of this study indicate that 45 percentage of the women interviewed confirmed that they had been physically abused by their husbands, in-laws and family members. Some women reported minor injuries, for instance cuts and bruises, and some indicated long term physical health problems such as migraine and backache due to partner violence. Several women reported that they were having frequent headaches as the effect of the prolonged violence, while others described back pain, breathing problem. Further there was permanent body parts disability due to extreme violence, such as the arson attack and being punched on the eye that led to blindness. It was also found that spousal abuse escalates and worsens over a period of time. The abuse was initially started with small cuts and bruises and then escalates to more severe injuries. Thus, the effects of domestic violence to the women's physical health can be seen in short-term and long term damage. It is believed that minor injuries usually can heal by themselves within a short period of time. This finding supports previous research into this area which links domestic violence and pregnant women. This study also found that, in Jammu and Kashmir the prevalence of domestic violence

among pregnant women was low in percentage, other studies showed that this vulnerable 'mother-to-be' group somehow face violence with higher risks in comparison to the general female population.

Furthermore, findings indicate that many women do not feel the necessity of disclosing the abuse as the disclosure itself may make the situation even worse. However, most of the interviewees also reported that the decision of disclosing partner violence was very much dependant on the severity of the violence perpetrated by the abuser regardless of the duration they remained in that abusive relationship. Apart from discovering common immediate injuries reported by these women, the effects of domestic violence can occur even after the abuse had ended. It is believed that long term consequences of abuse may well limit the physical functioning of the women.

### **Mental stress**

Victim women who participated in this study talked about how the violence experience affected them not only in physical term but also emotionally and psychologically. For many of the women, it was a long period of time that they tried to endure their husband's abuse. More than half of the women interviewed admitted to be facing a great deal of stressful experience and feeling depressed following many years of living in the abusive relationship. It is believed that emotional disturbance is greatly associated with the exposure of domestic violence. It was also evident that living in the relationship with a violent partner has made the women psychologically distressed as well as having developed stress-related symptoms even years after the abuse. Thus, such violent experiences have led to deterioration of women's mental health and their well-being. Additionally, findings depict how spousal abuse had psychologically affected those women in the long term. The psychological and emotional impacts on abused women due to domestic violence were believed to be associated with social isolation as well as erosion of the women's identity. Results show that 37 per cent of participants in the study expressed a great deal of emotional disturbance and frustration as they were not only in a stressful situation due to the violent relationships, but further they also struggled with parenting at the very same time. It is worth noting that, a huge number of women's cases of this study reported that they had been abused psychologically by their men. Some have been threatened verbally and physically, while others have been experiencing name calling and swearing.

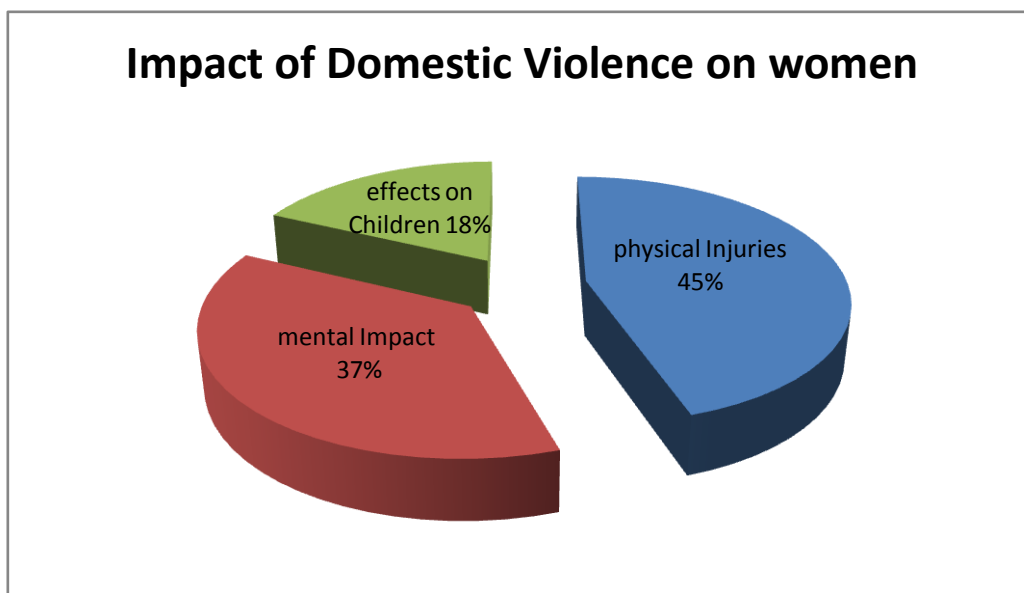
### **Effects on children**

The experience of domestic violence is believed to negatively affect the children. As a matter of fact, children involved in the violent relationships may also be directly and indirectly abused. Therefore, incidents of child abuse among families with domestic violence are a common subject and many behavioural problems have been evident among the children who are exposed to the abusive relationship. Findings reveal that 55 percentages of the women in the study explained the reactions of the children towards their abusive father. Some of these women said, the bonding between the father and the children should have been established at the point of the pregnancy itself. However, in most domestic violence relationship, this has never been the case. In fact, for some women the violence escalates over the period of the pregnancy trimesters.

It is reported that the husbands were insensitive towards the hormonal changes and seemed like they did not bother at all about women situation hence the beatings just continued. Domestic violence may cause the retaliation by the children. Many abused women in the study perceived there is a strong linkage between the children and negative behaviours such as physical aggression, delinquency and verbal abuse. Furthermore, the children also reported being involved in school truancy and cigarette smoking at a very young age. In relation to the outcomes of domestic violence on children, it was believed that the abusers used violence to control their female partners at every point in their marital relationships. There were no exceptions for the women, not even with the presence of the children in the households. Unfortunately, the children may also be at risk of harm since in the mother's womb. In this study, the abused women felt themselves to be powerless in protecting their unborn child. As per responses of the respondents interviewed 18 per cent of the children's are affected by the domestic violence.

Subsequently, the women’s sense of powerlessness continually hampers the attempts to safeguard the children from the abuser. As the children grow up with the exposure to violence at home, many of those children have reflected their dissatisfaction, retaliation as well as self-rebelliousness in terms of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Therefore, young children living with domestic violence should benefit from the professionals and informal supports in the community so as to help families and children deal with these negative situations. Several participants highlighted the negative effects of domestic violence on their children, particularly the young children.

The results of this study indicate that domestic violence affects paternal-child bonding. A number of negative reactions regarding the child-father relationships were described. Firstly, the children did not bother to ask about their father’s whereabouts even when the father was not around for quite some time. Secondly, the children just refused to have contact with the father. And thirdly, the relationships were lacking in feelings of love as a result of the children’s hatred and anger. However, these results have not previously been described. Almost half of those who were interviewed reported that they had been exposed to various kinds of violence including physical abuse during pregnancy.



**CONCLUSION**

The current study has presented an exploration of Jammu and Kashmir women’s experiences living in domestic violence relationships. It has uncovered how the women in Jammu and Kashmir suffer domestic violence in the context of their lives. The study was guided by principles of feminist research, aimed to identify the themes demonstrating the impacts, the barriers to the disclosing of violence, as well as the underlying issues pertinent to domestic violence resources in Jammu and Kashmir.

Results of this study show that the impact of domestic violence includes a deterioration of mental health well-being, physical impairment as well as social isolation of the victims. On a positive note, the consequence of violence experience has grown in faith among those women. Further, one of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that domestic violence not only affects the women who are battered, but also imposes negative effects on the growing children. This study has found that generally there were several reasons why Jammu and Kashmir women were reluctant to disclose and seek external assistance. These findings suggest that additional barriers of cultural beliefs and religious values also play an important role in influencing the women’s decisions. These findings enhance our understanding of the Jammu and Kashmir women who experienced domestic violence and subsequently add to a growing body of literature in Jammu and Kashmir about this particular subject matter. Nonetheless, a number of caveats

need to be noted regarding the present study. The most important limitation lies in the fact that victim women are not easily accessed and it is a common attitude within society that marital affairs should be treated as a private issue. On this basis, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be transferable to all domestic violence victims and survivors in the country. In conclusion, it can be said that this study has thrown up many questions in need of further investigation. It would be interesting to assess the perpetrator's point of view pertinent to this matter and future research might explore the efficiency of interventional programmes in the current situation, so as to align with such programmes with the customs of its people. A reasonable approach to tackle the domestic violence issue in Jammu and Kashmir could be through the upgrading of social policy development as well as involving education and information to address issues of violence against women; in particular the cases of domestic violence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study mostly concerns itself with the issue of domestic violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir. Some of the issues emerging from the research findings relate specifically to the current practices of domestic violence in Jammu and Kashmir. Conclusions pertaining to this study indicate that women had experienced unpleasant situations from their husbands and in-laws. Principally problems regarding lack of advice and guidance from the professionals, lack of enforcement, non-integration of services within the organizations and bureaucracy are matters that need to be addressed and over come in an effective way in order to assist abused women in receiving a better quality service. Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are given:

1. There should be an increase in the number of organizations (i.e. governmental and non-governmental) providing a wider range of appropriate services to women with domestic violence experiences. The services could include counselling based intervention, for example individual counselling, family and marriage counselling, career coaching, religious and spiritual guidance as well as crisis counselling.
2. Professionals who work with domestic violence victims and survivors should be equipped with knowledge relating to recent developments on domestic violence locally as well as at an international level, and be familiar with domestic violence information including policy reviews, legislative changes and the debate pertaining to the key problems of this subject. They should be trained with effective communication skills as well as attending training and cross-training between organizations for knowledge advancement on a periodic basis. This would include for instance the police, healthcare settings and the Islamic Religious Affairs Department.
3. The present study has important implications for developing rehabilitation and treatment services for domestic relation perpetrators. As noted from the accounts of some women substance who are victims of domestic violence, the Social Welfare Department and the police authorities. Nonetheless, despite focusing on providing rehabilitation for the offenders, the programme should also primarily remain accountable for the safety of battered women and their children.
4. Physical injury caused by domestic violence. Is one of the most It is, therefore, necessary to give proper training to our medical personnel in dealing with and treating the cases of domestic violence against women. The training should cover the collection and preservation of evidence, analysis, providing expert testimony and treatment.
5. Most of the victims of Domestic Violence are uneducated, backward and economically disadvantaged. The legal aid and advice should be made available to them without any cost and they should easily file against the perpetrator.
6. The Central and State Governments should develop, expand and strengthen social support services programmes for the women who are victims of domestic violence. They should have to develop the mentality of the women who are victims of domestic violence how to react against those who are committing such type of violence.

7. These results suggest that educating the community, especially female adults, as well as establishing specific guideline is among the various strategic plans proposed in the study.

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