

## A Study On Psycho-Social Impact of Domestic Violence Against Women in Dhaka City

Silvia Christina Gomes<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Domestic violence is a powerful tool of oppression against women that is supported and reinforced by gender based socio-cultural norms and practices. The present study was an attempt to explore the psycho-social impact of domestic violence against women in Dhaka city of Bangladesh. Qualitative research method was adopted for this study. The findings revealed that domestic violence against women is perpetuated by traditional gender norms and values. The study further revealed that psychological tortures are far more devastating than the physical incidents and it disrupts women's interpersonal relations and quality of life. Although there are different government and non-government activities those are available to help and support domestic violence victims, but it is observed that abused women are less knowledgeable concerning their legal rights as well as such existing services. However, it is an urgent need to raise critical awareness on the seriousness of domestic violence against women and also community as a means of effecting behavior change.*

**Keywords:** *Domestic violence, Women, Socio-cultural practices, Discriminations, and Psycho-social impact.*

### 1. Introduction

Women's vulnerability to violence is pervasive and endemic in Bangladesh, driven by an age old patriarchal social structure and by conditions of poverty and social inequality. Male domination permeates all segments of society, irrespective of ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status, creating a context in which domestic violence and discrimination against women and girls are accepted [1]. Many Bangladeshi women endure daily beatings, harassment for dowry, verbal abuse and acid attacks for refusing to comply with male demands. For many, home is not a haven but a place of pain and humiliation, where violence is an integral part of everyday life hidden behind closed doors and avoided in public discussion [2].

Domestic violence accrues both direct (injury, financial costs) and indirect (psychological damage) costs on a multitude of levels [3]. While the impact of physical abuse may be more 'visible' than psychological scarring, repeated humiliation and insults, forced isolation, limitations on social mobility, constant threats of violence and injury, and denial of economic resources are more subtle and insidious forms of violence. The intangible nature of psycho-social abuse makes it harder to define and report, leaving the woman in a situation where she is often made to feel mentally and socially destabilized and powerless.

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<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of Social Work, UITS. E-mail: silviagomes.du@gmail.com

A number of initiatives have been implemented in Bangladesh to combat violence against women, with most interventions focused on supporting survivors or raising community awareness of violence [1]. The state has enacted several laws to safeguard the rights of women and to bring socio-economic change to their status. For example, the Family Court Ordinance 1985, the Cruelty to Women (Deterrent Punishment) Ordinance 1983, the Dowry Prohibition Act 1980, the Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act 2000, etcetera [4].

In spite of all the legal provisions and development programs, women still remain in many ways in a structurally disadvantaged position in the country. According to the Gender Gap Index, the success of Bangladesh has thus far failed to translate into social development and equity to the extent we could expect from other developing Asian countries [5].

So, in this connection, there is an immense interest for the researcher to sketch out an in-depth representation of the psycho-social impact of domestic violence against women and to address this problem with efforts needed from policy makers, government and non-government organizations, and others through effective outcome of the study.

## **2. Objectives Of The Study**

The prime objective of the study is, 'to understand the psycho-social impact of domestic violence against women in Dhaka city.' Towards attaining the broad objective the study focuses on some pertinent objectives such as, to gather information about the socio-demographic situation of domestic violence survivors, to identify the nature, causes, psycho-social problems faced by the victims and to incorporate the recommendations and suggestions to minimize domestic violence against women.

## **3. Methodology Of The Study**

The study has been carried out in Dhaka city. Thus, the areas under Dhaka City Corporation has been considered as area of the study. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been collected to cover every aspect of the present study. The secondary sources included previous research, official statistics, government reports, daily newspapers and various kinds of journals and books, which have published news about violence against women. On the other hand, primary sources consisted of case studies from five (05) women between the ages of 15-49 years those are victim of domestic violence living in Dhaka city. In the study non-probability purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents. In this qualitative research interview and observation techniques were used in conducting the study and data was collected by using semi-structured interview guide.

## **4. Findings Of The Study**

In recent decades violence against women has emerged as one of the most pressing and intractable social problems across regional and cultural boundaries [6]. The present research shows that women are at the greatest risk in the home where injuries, aggression, psychological, and verbal abuse are mainly perpetrated by the family members, husbands, and in-laws or outside people in the context of domestic violence. However, the findings of the study are portrayed below:

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### **4.1 Gender based socio-cultural practices**

It is well established that in Bangladesh women or girl are everyday targets of discrimination within their household. However, women are not only discriminated in their household but also in the wider society in the name of religious beliefs. Discrimination against women is rationalized by the fact that they are seen as an economic burden. Respondent (B) said that....

*"My father sold me to another person at the age of five as I am a girl. He thought that I am a burden in the family and would never be able to support the family financially. He is a greedy person. For him money is much more important than me. He has never accepted me as a daughter."*

But respondent (A) asserted slightly different statement that....

*"My father sent me and my sister in Dhaka to work as domestic servants and earn money. I wish I was born as a boy because I know then he would have never done this."*

The constitution of Bangladesh provides equal rights to both men and women of the country. The study found that socio-cultural practices makes women the subordinate group in the family. At the very beginning of her life, a girl may be the target of sex-selective discrimination in cultures where son preference is prevalent. From the findings it is noticeable that mostly domestic violence against women is perpetuated in the name of gender based socio-cultural practices.

### **4.2 Relatively less knowledge of domestic violence**

In conducting the study respondents were questioned with a view to find out the familiarity and insight about domestic violence. Quite a heterogeneous understanding was noticed although some common observations were also noted. Respondent (A) a fifteen years old girl mentioned that....

*"I couldn't understand what you are saying. I just know that I was tortured by the owner during my work as a domestic servant. I have no idea about domestic violence. What is meant by this?"*

Eighteen years old respondent (B) shared her own perception regarding domestic violence and said that....

*"I was illiterate. I didn't have enough knowledge about it. But after my rehabilitation and counseling now I know a lot about the issue. Even now I share my thoughts and feelings regarding it's negative effects to other girls. We should not tolerate such violence at any cost."*

Women in Bangladesh face violence for very trivial matters. A research found that more than 40% women face domestic violence in our country [7]. But the study figured out that maximum victims of domestic violence are less sensitive and knowledgeable about the issue and it's harmful aspects.

### **4.3 Extra marital affair is responsible to fuel domestic violence**

Marriage is commonly understood as a relatively enduring relationship between a male and a female as husband and wife. It is a bond by which a male and a female gain the religious, social and legal recognition to live together. A husband's extramarital affair is something that results in negligence of the wife, causes domestic violence and

affects their relationship. This may also result in a second marriage, putting the first marriage in jeopardy of ending in divorce. Respondent (D) stated that....

*“At first when I came to Dhaka at my husband’s place along with my child I didn’t know about his extra marital affair. I came to know about his other relationship from my neighbours. It was really hard to believe. Because no woman can share her husband with another woman. I questioned him several time why you are doing this to me? Am I so bad that you had to go to the other women? It was one kind of mental torture for me.”*

Respondent (E) mentioned that....

*“After marriage it was difficult for me to accept my husband’s first wife and children. I was cheated by him and it slowly ruined my entire life. Especially it has affected my daughters future.”*

A relationship outside marriage has devastating consequences besides being one of the leading causes for domestic violence. No religion permits to fulfill the biological need without being married. According to a report of Dhaka City Corporation, from 2006 to 2011 the figure of divorce in Dhaka city is 43,007 and most of them are due to extra-marital affairs [8].

#### **4.4 Psychological torture is unbearable**

Physical violence is not, however, the sole weapon of the batterer. Psychological abuses resulting from the spoken word, limitations on and control of social mobility and deprivation of economic resources generally accompany physical battering. The mere existence of violence against women in general and domestic violence in particular spreads fear among women, often restricting the way in which they lead their lives.

Respondent (E) asserted that....

*“My husband has never beaten me or abused me physically rather the torture was psychological. I used to think that death was only way out. I wanted to die but I could not kill myself because of my daughter.... What would happen to my child if I was dead... my husband and his first wife would never take her responsibility....she would remain hungry and uncared.”*

Another respondent (C) mentioned some similar statement....

*“My husband has never supported me. He has always taken his mother’s side over me. As mother-in-law does not like me because of less dowry from my maternal home and less support from my husband I feel very helpless. Sometimes I feel like leave everything.”*

Domestic violence can cause enormous psychological suffering to victims, most often seen in the form of anxiety and depression. It can also severely restrict their capacity and desire to participate in social and economic life. Maximum victim-survivors reported that the psychological violence is worse than the physical brutality.

#### **4.5 Domestic violence affects interpersonal relations and quality of life**

Domestic violence has severe emotional and physical implications for women. Emotional health consequences of abuse include depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, both of which fundamentally affect the quality of a woman’s daily life. Moreover, long-term effects of abuse have a continuing impact on the quality of life and daily functioning of abuse survivors. Respondent (A) said that....

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*"My employer has never treated me as a human being. She used to lock me inside the house whenever go outside. I used to sleep in the heat at the kitchen. Even there was no bed for me. She has never allowed me to play outside like her own children."*

A result of abuse, transcend to other areas of a victim's life, affecting her sense of self-worth and her ability to manage her day-to-day life. Feelings of sheer worthlessness and helplessness often prevent women from seeking help or from telling others about their experience. Respondent (E) stated that....

*"I am helpless. It is not easy for me to lead a healthy life along with my daughter. There is accomodation problem, daily expenses, and other problems too. But still I tell my neighbours that my husband is a nice person. How can I reveal the truth?"*

From the findings it is visible that domestic violence not only cause pain, suffering to the abused women but also has a tremendous impact on the livelihood pattern of these women.

#### **4.6 Governmental and Non-Governmental service related knowledges are not well enough**

A number of government programs and non-government organization partnerships are in place to increase public awareness on violence against women and provide support to victims of violence. But lack of knowledge about these services for victims stand as barriers to successfully redressing domestic violence against women in Bangladesh. Respondent (D) mentioned that.....

*"I have heard about some services but never experienced them. Actually there was no one to advice or guide me. So, I have never thought to go there. If I knew may be I could seek some help."*

Expressing a similar feeling, respondent (C) stated that....

*"I don't know a lot about such services. Though I have filed a case against my mother-in-law for her illegal dowry demads and assaults as my family has suggested me to do so."*

Dealing with issues of domestic violence against women requires coordinated effort by various governmental departments and agencies. A 2011 study of CARE Bangladesh provided a list of sixty-four organizations that were known to it as working on issues pertaining to Violence against women, either through direct services or advocacy [1]. However, the present study found that despite having such good structure the victims of domestic violence are deprived of these services. Moreover, most of the abused women do not know the existence of these services.

#### **4.7 Need to strengthen family support and consciousness**

In a male dominated society, women grow up bearing the feelings that they have to sacrifice their own benefits, interests for the relaxations and benefits of men. They also believe that they need to be patient and strained. In our society, it is a very common belief of women that their parent house is not their house rather their husband's house is their original shelter. Due to having such kinds of feelings or beliefs our women bear all types of tortures occurring within family settings. They want to remain in their husband's shelter at any cost. Respondent (D) asserted that.....

*"My family members especially my step mother has never looked for me. They are unknown of my conjugal condition. As a result often I have to tolerate my husband's abusive behavior. I guess things could be changed if they were aware about this fact."*

Many parents and community members also have the attitude that educating girls is a waste of time and money, because they will eventually be married off and their education would therefore only benefit their husbands and the families they marry into.

Respondent (B) argued that after sending girls' at work parents should not forget their responsibilities toward their daughters. She also stated that...

*"Family support is the first requirement. Family should look for their daughters as girls like me have to live away from their parents and their homes. Domestic violence can't occur in any household if family regularly investigate about their daughters. So, parents consciousness is necessary."*

It has been found that family support and concern has the most influence on women's ability to cope in a positive way. Furthermore, women who have support from family and friends are found to suffer fewer negative effects on their mental health and are able to cope more successfully with violence. However, it is observed in the study that majority of abused women are deprived of family support.

#### **4.8 Education is needed for building a culture of non-violence**

Women education is still optional within the family in the context of Bangladesh. Though the girls have the opportunity to education but they became irregular for poverty, early marriage, religious, social, and cultural norms, insecurity, unawareness of parents, etcetera. It is observed that uneducated women become more victim of violence than the educated women and educated women can establish mutual understanding in the family more than the uneducated women. So educating women can both empower them and ensure their safety from violence. Respondent (D) asserted that....

*"Women should be provided with educational facilities. Everything is possible for educated women, they can control their husband's activities. According to me it will be beneficial for women if they are provided with education."*

Likewise, respondent (C) mentioned that....

*"Equal access to education for both men and women must be ensured. Even husband's should support their wives in terms of family conflict or marital unrest. It will help women to combat against violence."*

Education is the key to addressing entrenched discrimination and violence against women. Research suggests that the presence of more educated children in the household and community acts as a restraint on violence against women. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 63% of men aged over 15 are literate, compared with 55% of women [9]. The present study found that maximum domestic violence survivors believe education can be a tool for building a culture of non violence as it can make women independent as men.

#### **5. Conclusion And Recommendations**

According to the results of the study, it appears that women, who are victims of violence in marriage and the family, usually have some features that are more or less

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identical. Usually it comes to women, women who live in problematic marriages, where there are contradictions and disagreements between spouses, between parents and children, between family members, so are women or women who suffer from early childhood trauma, have also been previously victimized, etcetera. Starting from psychological violence, emotional, physical, sexual and even in some cases violence manifests with some other forms, such as food restriction, limitation of freedom of movement, restriction of health care, the economic and financial tools, as well as other forms of violence.

Domestic violence is responsible for the death, injury, and unhappiness of women in our country, and in an age when human rights are sacred, such a situation is not acceptable. Domestic violence, and the associated gender inequalities, must be given the utmost priority in the development of a national agenda in order to protect the safety of our women, economy and nation. However, based on findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made to prevent and control the domestic violence.

- The law should be made precise for legal interpretation in the hierarchy of tribunals and courts, and provision for adequate punishment of the offenders. It is important to promote mechanisms to monitor and protect human rights of women as well as support legislative efforts that seek to redress gender-based power imbalances and civil rights. NGOs and civil societies may be mobilized to come forward to address this issue. The organizations involved with implementation of laws like police can be monitored for effective implementation of laws against perpetrators.
- Some form of efforts for men is needed to raise their awareness on human rights. Men should be motivated to consider that gender is not an issue of conflict but an issue of immense importance that merits mutual understanding and respect for men and women who complement each other as partner, in their efforts to live a life of dignity and self worth.
- Effective counseling services by competent counselors and health professionals need to be introduced for domestic violence victims, offenders and both parties together. It will help to create space for women to heal their wounds and will allow them to reintegrate and rebuild their lives in peace.
- Community groups and government institutions should be trained to identify women and girls, at risk of domestic violence, and to refer them to confidential and accessible services. Where such services are not available, communities must be helped to establish local culturally appropriate mechanisms to support women.
- The media plays a pivotal role in both influencing and changing social norms and behavior. In the area of domestic violence, media campaigns can help to reverse social attitudes that tolerate violence against women by questioning patterns of violent behavior accepted by families and societies. Collaboration with the media needs to focus on creating new messages and new responses to reduce domestic violence.

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