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Intimate partner violence in India: Patterns, causes and way forward

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that can occur between intimate partners or spouse. 1 out of 4 women globally estimated to experience some kind of violence and in this context IPV is a major issue, especially for women. This paper tries to explore the different forms IPV including physical violence to emotional manipulation and controlling behaviors. It examines the cyclical nature of abuse related to IPV and the key factors that increase IPV risk, such as relationship conflicts, poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues, and societal gender norms around power dynamics. With special reference to India, the paper analyzes national survey data showing high rates of domestic violence across many states. While laws like the Domestic Violence Act exist, social stigma and power imbalances prevent many victims from reporting abuse. The paper emphasizes on the basis of the analysis of the literature that addressing IPV requires a multi-faceted approach which must include- promoting gender equality, strict law enforcement, providing mental health support, and crucially, changing mindsets through community engagement to remove stigma around this issue and create mass level awareness among people. Only a concerted effort from all sectors of society can prevent IPV effectively.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV); Domestic Violence; Gender-Based Violence; Spousal Abuse; Controlling Behavior; Gender Norms; Stigma; India

1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a complex issue that affects millions of people worldwide. It refers to physical, sexual, or psychological violence experienced within an intimate relationship. Intimate partner Violence is one of the most common forms of Violence against women and includes physical, Mental and emotional abuse and controlling behavior by Intimate partner (WHO, n.d.). It refers to any form of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse that happens between two people in a close, romantic relationship. This could be violence by husbands against wives, or between boyfriends and girlfriends, fiances, or live-in partners. According to WHO Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2021 report 26% of women have experienced physical or sexual abuse at least once in their lives at the hands of current or past male partners. IPV is a huge problem globally, with 1 in 4 women estimated to face it sometime in their lives. In India too, IPV is very common though often underreported.

Various factors contribute to this problem, including cultural, socioeconomic, and educational influences. Notably, IPV is more prevalent in developing nations (Yonfa et al., 2021). Childhood experiences also play a role in the development of IPV.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a significant public health issue in India. 29.3% of married women between the ages of 18 and 49 reported having experienced domestic violence at least once, according to the National Family Health Survey-5. Even though it is common, victims rarely ask for assistance. Research has shown that India has low levels of IPV reporting (Goodson & Hayes, 2021). Women who lack financial empowerment or have lower levels of education are

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more susceptible; marginalised, least resourced, and disabled women are particularly at danger. Unfortunately, only a few studies focus on empirically validated interventions to address IPV. However, well-implemented cultural change strategies appear promising in combating this issue (Yonfa et al., 2021).

1.1. Objective

The major aim of the paper is to discuss the nature and its impact of IPV on women's conditions and society at large. The study aims to achieve following goals:

- To analyze the different types and forms of IPV being reported globally.
- To explore the cultural, economic and social factors that increase the risk of IPV for women in the Indian context
- To explore empirical evidence through review of national surveys, reports, and specific case studies.

2. Methodology

The study is based on primarily on secondary data sources available online, the methodology involves literature review and analysis of existing reports, articles, and statistical data. The researcher has used the search engines such as Google Scholar, PubMed and others to find relevant information related to the study. The terms "intimate partner violence," "domestic violence in India," "forms of IPV," "factors contributing to IPV," "IPV preventive measures India," and "IPV case studies India" were among the search phrases and keywords that were used to find relevant literatures related to IPV. The selection of sources was based on their relevance to the research issue, with a particular emphasis on literature that has been published in the recent ten years to ensure current relevance.

2.1. Types of Intimate Partner Violence

IPV refer to any behavior in an intimate relationship that harms the other person physically, psychologically, or sexually is referred to as IPV. The following is a list of examples of various forms of IPV.

- *Physically violent crimes* include beatings, kickings, slappings, and hits.
- *Sexual violence*, which includes coerced sexual relations and other types of forced sexual activity.
- *Emotional and psychological abuse*, which includes things like threats of assault or taking away children, continual humiliation, taunts, and demeaning.
- *Controlling behaviours*, such as keeping a person away from friends and family, keeping an eye on their whereabouts, and limiting their access to money, jobs, education, or healthcare.
- *Stalking* is a partner of repeated unwanted attention and contact via partner that across fair or concern for once own safety Are safety of someone close to the victim (Breiding, Matthew et al.,2015).

IPV encompasses a range of abusive actions that harm a partner in different ways, including physically, emotionally, sexually, and through controlling their personal freedoms and life experiences.

2.2. Cycle Of Intimate Partner Violence

Domestic violence between intimate partners frequently follows a kind of pattern which may involve the abuser act extremely nice most of the time, but they also alternate between acting violently, abusively, and apologizing. Walker proposed the idea of cyclic abuse with the hypothesis that abusive relationships, once formed, are characterised by a predictable repeating pattern of abuse. This theory was based on social cycle theory and Seligman's phenomena of learned helplessness. She made the suggestion that victims who experience this loop over time may develop learned helplessness. The Abuse Cycle, sometimes referred to as the Battered Women Syndrome, is characterised by the following symptoms: reliving the abuse as though it were happening again even though it isn't; making an effort to avoid the psychological effects of the abuse by avoiding situations, people, and feelings; hypervigilance or arousal; strained interpersonal relationships; distortion of one's body image or other somatic concerns; problems with intimacy and sexuality (Walker, 1999).

The cycle of intimate partner violence (IPV) typically involves several stages (Walker, 2016):

2.2.1. Tension Building

- Relationship tension is a result of outside stressor. The abuser feels like they are losing control, which makes them more angry and frustrated.
- Minor conflicts and arguments escalate.

- Communication breaks down.
- Victim feels anxious and tries to avoid triggering the abuser.
- Abuser becomes increasingly controlling and aggressive.

2.2.2. Explosion

- When the strain becomes unbearable, an abusive event takes place. This could show up as emotional abuse, sexual assault, physical violence, or psychological manipulation.
- The tension reaches a breaking point.
- The abuser becomes physically, emotionally, or sexually violent.
- The victim experiences harm, fear, and trauma.

2.2.3. Reconciliation

- The relationship may experience a time of quiet if the abuser expresses regret, apologises, or makes a commitment to change.
- The abuser may apologize, promise change, or show remorse.
- Victim hopes for improvement and believes the relationship can be salvaged.
- Abuser may shower the victim with affection.

2.2.4. Honeymoon Phase

- At this stage, attempts are made to make things right, such as giving gifts, making pledges to change, or expressing affection. The victim can have optimism for the relationship and think the abuse won't occur again.
- The relationship appears stable.
- Both partners may try to forget the abuse.
- However, tension starts building again, leading back to the cycle.

2.2.5. Repeat

This cycle then repeats itself, with tension gradually rising once again until an explosive incident occurs. Unless assistance or intervention interrupts the pattern, this cycle may persist.

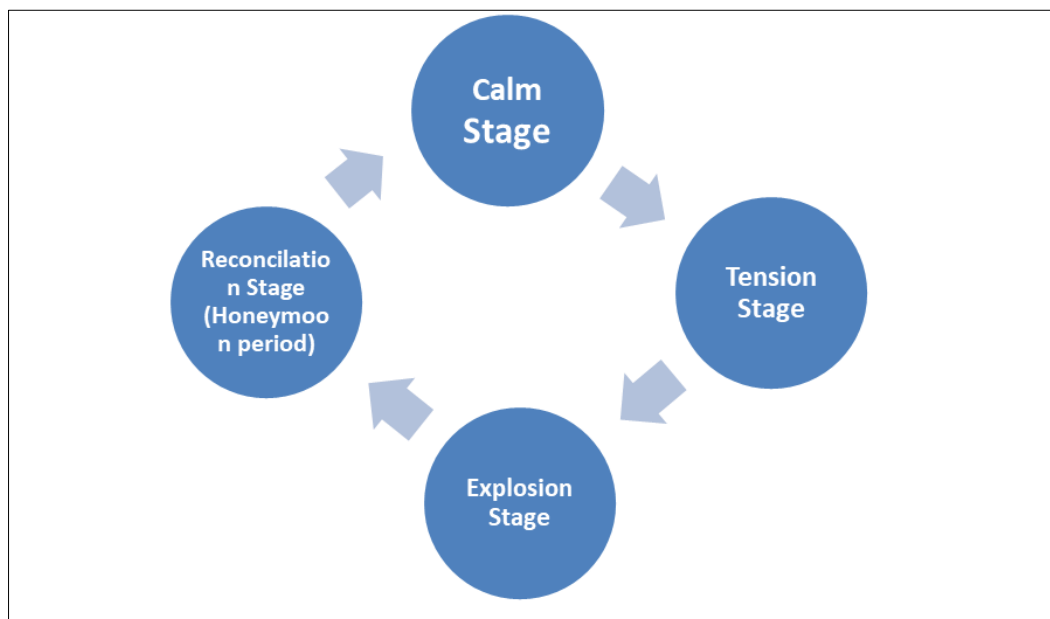


Figure 1 Cycle of Intimate Partner Violence

3. Theoretical Models of Intimate Partner Violence

A lot of research has gone into trying to understand what exactly causes intimate partner violence and why it persists across cultures and societies. Over the years, social scientists and psychologists have developed different theoretical

frameworks to explain the root factors behind IPV. While no single theory can fully capture the complex reasons for such violent behavior between partners, these models do offer important insights. The study has gone through some of the key theoretical models that are relevant to analyzing and addressing intimate partner violence, especially in the Indian context.

I provides a concise introduction that sets up the theoretical models section and assume that IPV has multiple complex drivers, and that these theories aim to shed light on the underlying factors from different perspectives.

3.1. Sociocultural Model

From a sociocultural perspective, the sociocultural model looks at how institutional norms, society, and cultural factors influence the likelihood of intimate partner violence. According to the various studies, intimate partner violence (IPV) is a tactic used by men against women to instill fear and maintain power in order to uphold the patriarchal social order in social institutions such as marriage.

The sociocultural model places a strong emphasis on feminist theory and power theory, which hold that gender inequality and power are the primary causes of intimate partner violence (IPV). In the power dynamics that prevail in patriarchal countries, where men tend to hold more authority and use violence to keep their female partners under control.

According to the power theory, family dynamics and culture both contribute to violence. The power theory assume that people learn from their families that using violence to resolve disputes within the family as well as between partners is normal. They may have grown up in situations where using violence against their female partners to resolve disputes is the only option.

The sociocultural model looks at the impact of institutional dynamics, cultural elements, and society norms to create a thorough framework for understanding intimate partner violence (IPV). The model highlights how men frequently use IPV as a purposeful strategy to preserve control and generate fear, which serves to uphold the patriarchal social order in institutions like marriage. The sociocultural model emphasises gender inequality and power imbalances as primary drivers of IPV by drawing on feminist theory and power theory. Men usually have more power and use violence to control their female companions in patriarchal societies. Furthermore, power theory contends that cultural norms and family dynamics have a role in the persistence of violence since people frequently pick up the idea that using violence to settle disputes from their families.

3.2. Interpersonal Model

The interpersonal model highlights how a person's internal characteristics can also raise their risk of engaging in intimate partner violence. It does this by explaining how personality, social learning, and cognitive behavioural aspects relate to IPV. The Interpersonal Model maintains that people develop tendencies, including the perpetration of IPV, through a variety of learning experiences. Additionally, this model suggests that individuals display characteristics that set perpetrators apart from non-perpetrators, such as high levels of neuroticism and negative emotionality, which are associated with a higher level of IPV. This approach also emphasises clinical theory, which links psychological problems to heightened risk of intimate partner violence as a means of explaining it. Sexual IPV is more common in persons with significant levels of psychopathology.

The model explains how learnt behaviours and intrinsic characteristics like personality can raise the likelihood of intimate partner violence (IPV). According to this paradigm, a partner's shift in unfavourable emotional behaviours is what leads to interpersonal conflict. It clarifies that if one spouse acts violently or aggressively towards another, it's likely that the other partner is acting aggressively in the same way. It emphasises that IPV is more common among those who exhibit significant degrees of neuroticism and negative emotions. The model also notes that sexual IPV is more common in those with considerable psychopathology, and it ties psychological issues to a higher likelihood of IPV.

3.3. The General Aggressive Model

One comprehensive and integrative paradigm for studying aggressiveness is the General aggressiveness Model (GAM). It takes into account how aggression is influenced by social, cognitive, psychological, developmental, and biological aspects. The proximate processes of GAM explain how circumstances and people affect perceptions, emotions, and arousal, which in turn impact judgement and decision-making processes, which ultimately impact the consequences of aggressive or nonaggressive behaviour (Allen et al., 2018).

It takes into account how violent behaviour is shaped by social, cognitive, psychological, developmental, and biological factors (Allen et al., 2018). Proximate and distal processes are the two primary parts of the model.

Proximate Processes: These processes explain how circumstances and people affect perceptions, emotions, and arousal, which in turn impact judgement and decision-making. In the end, these mechanisms affect a person's propensity for aggressive or nonaggressive behaviour. Each cycle of proximate processes acts as a trial for learning, influencing how aggressive knowledge structures form and become accessible.

Distal Processes: These processes explain how alterations in knowledge structures might affect personality as a result of biological and enduring environmental variables.

The GAM has been used to study aggression in a variety of settings, such as the consequences of media violence, interpersonal and intergroup violence, pain, temperature, and even the implications of global climate change (Allen et al., 2018).

3.4. I3 Model

According to the I3 Model, a metatheory that is pronounced "I-cubed model," all behaviour is the result of three orthogonal processes working together (Finkel, 2014).

3.4.1. Instigation

The term "instigation" describes the results of being exposed to a particular target object in a given situation. A particular behaviour is normatively permitted in this scenario. In other words, instigation refers to the signals or catalysts that cause an individual to contemplate taking a specific action.

3.4.2. Impellance

Impellance refers to contextual or stable elements that heighten the probability (or degree) of a person's inclination to respond in a certain way when they come into contact with the target object in that particular setting. In essence, impellance determines the degree to which an individual feels driven to respond to the provocation.

3.4.3. Inhibition

Inhibition is the result of situational or steady circumstances that make it more likely (or more difficult) for people to suppress their inclination to act in a certain way. As a result, enactment is either decreased or removed. A lack of inhibition increases the likelihood of behaviour.

The I3 Model has been used in a number of situations, such as eating disorders, hostility, and violence. It offers a thorough framework for comprehending how people behave (Finkel, 2014). The I3 Model recognises that couples are part of larger social contexts and that both individual characteristics and societal issues should be taken into account during interventions (Eckhardt & Massa, 2022). Even while this model helps us better understand IPV though there is still need to do more work in incorporating its knowledge into practical solutions in the issues related to IPV.

3.5. Causes of Intimate Partner Violence

Socioeconomic factors significantly contribute to intimate partner violence (IPV) as follows

3.5.1. Relationship conflict

Frequent verbal disagreements and high levels of conflict in relationships often correlate with the occurrence of physical violence. Violence can be used as a strategy during relationship conflict and can also result in frustration or anger. It is not surprising that times of marital instability where one partner considers living the marriage pose the highest risk of violence. When women decide to end a relationship, they may be forced to commit stalking or attempted murder. The types of conflicts most likely to lead to violence often revolve around situations where women challenge traditional gender traits, questions are made about privilege, and financial matters can also be sources of conflict.

3.5.2. Poverty & Income Inequality

While violence is a part of life in all social categories, it is more common and severe in lower socioeconomic groups in a variety of situations including the USA, Nicaragua, and India (Martin et al., 1999). Economic disparities are identified as

a significant factor as there is a correlation between higher income inequality and increased IPV rates (Chaurasia et al., 2021).

3.5.3. Alcohol

According to studies, "problem" drinking is a strong predictor of intimate relationship violence over time, and abuse of alcohol is prevalent among those who commit intimate partner violence. It has been discovered that those who drink heavily are more likely to become victims of violence against intimate partners. Many women who have been victimised later struggle with alcoholism. Overall, the results of the research point to the likelihood that alcohol misuse plays a number of roles in the development of intimate partner violence. These include "person" factors—relating to people's reactions, expectations, and beliefs about alcohol—pharmacological factors—relating to the psycho-pharmacological properties of alcohol—and "context" factors—relating to the social and physical contexts in which alcohol is consumed. Cultural factors also pertain to how society views alcohol and its association with violence (Finney, 2004). According to research, partner alcohol consumption is a strong predictor of intimate partner violence (IPV) in Sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, drinking norms may have an independent link with IPV and complicate the relationship between partner alcohol use and IPV (Greene et al., 2017).

3.5.4 Mental Health Issues

Violence and mental illness have a complicated relationship that affects individuals, families, communities, and mental health providers. Pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy are two effective ways to treat changeable factors in mental health care, together with risk management. According to this review, people with mental illnesses do not have a higher risk of violence than the general population when they receive the right therapy. Violence, however, is more common in people who suffer from drug abuse and personality disorders. Individuals with untreated mental health problems such as depression or anger management issues maybe more prone to engage in violent behaviors against women. Comprehending these relationships is crucial, as it highlights the significance of suitable therapy and contests the stigma associated with mental illness and aggression. This knowledge is especially important when treating intimate partner violence (IPV), as substance misuse and mental health disorders can play major roles (Rueve & Welton, 2008).

3.5.5 Social Norms

Strong societal norms hinder women who are victims of intimate partner violence from reporting it. Results of this review show that women with collectivist backgrounds—where people are expected to let the group's interests take priority over their own—remain firmly connected within organisations (Van Hoorn, 2015, p. 270).

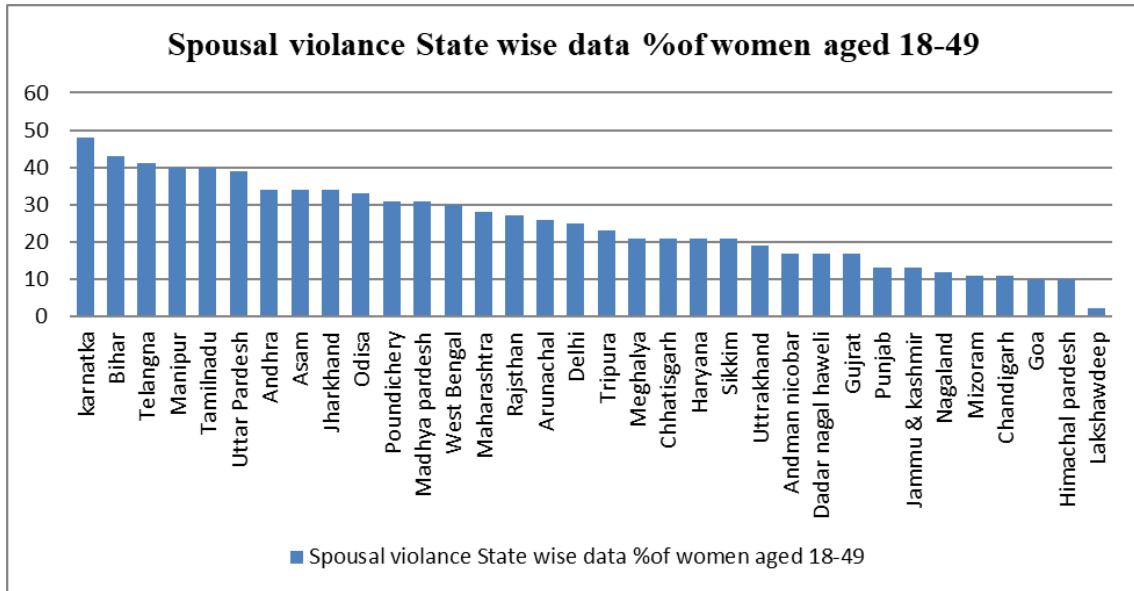
The promotion of gender inequity and accepted traditional gender roles through sociocultural norms poses significant obstacles to the disclosure of intimate partner violence (IPV) in diverse cultural contexts, particularly in collectivist settings. The following four major categories emerged and were consistent with the body of knowledge: (1) the stigma associated with disclosure, victimisation, and divorce of intimate partner violence; (2) gender roles; (3) upholding family honour; and (4) the future and well-being of children (Güler et al., 2023).

Researches shows there are numerous factors that increase the risk of intimate partner violence happening in a relationship. Economic factors like poverty and income inequality seem to play a major role. Alcohol and substance abuse by the perpetrator is another major driver. But in India's cultural context, we also have to look at factors like the existence of very regressive gender norms, the premium placed on patriarchal "honor", the pressure to stay in abusive marriages for the sake of children, the stigma around divorced/separated women and more.

3.6. Status Of IPV In India

About 31.4% of Indian women between the ages of 18 and 49 report having at least once experienced domestic abuse, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), which was performed between 2019 and 21. This rate is lower than the statistics from NFHS-3 but slightly higher than the results of the previous survey (NFHS-4), which was conducted in 2015–16.

The below graph show the percentage of women who have experienced spousal violence at least once since the age of 15, according to NFHS Report.



Source - NFHS - 5 (Govt. of India)

Figure 2 Spousal violence State wise data %of women aged 18-49

Based on data from the NFHS-5 report, the graph shows the proportion of women who have at least once experienced domestic abuse since they were 15 years old. F

National Average: 32% is the average percentage of spousal violence nationwide.

Highest Rates: Karnataka (48%), Uttar Pradesh (39%), and other states have the highest rates of domestic violence. Compared to the national average, these rates are noticeably greater.

Lowest Rates: With 2.1%, the lowest rate of domestic violence in India is seen in Lakshadweep, well below the national average.

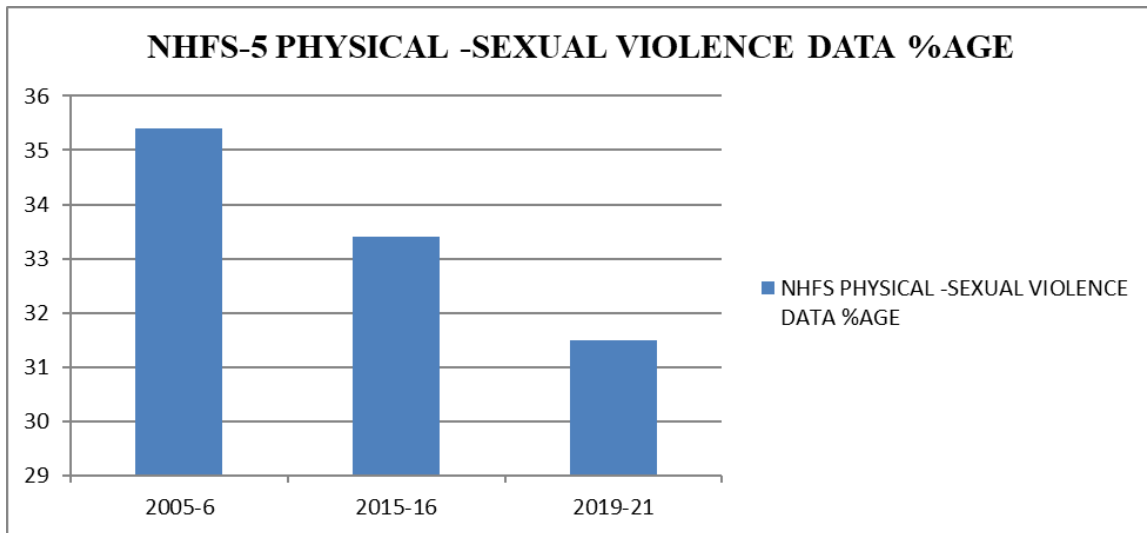


Figure 3 NHFS-5 PHYSICAL -SEXUAL VIOLENCE DATA %AGE

According to the NFHS-2005-06, 35.4% of women reported experiencing sexual violence before the age of 15. In NFHS-4, this percentage dropped to 33.4% in 2015-16. NFHS-5, on the other hand, shows a 1% rise in the rate of sexual violence, with a little increase to 31.5%.

According to NFHS report, there is a chronic problem of sexual and marital abuse of women in India, with notable geographical differences. The highest rates are reported in Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, while the lowest are reported in Lakshadweep. The overall rates are still alarming, notwithstanding a minor decline in certain places over time. This emphasises the necessity of ongoing efforts to confront and lessen violence against women.

The latest National Family Health Survey shows alarmingly high rates of IPV in India. At the national level, 31% of women have faced domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands. But there is variation across states, with Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka unfortunately reporting some of the highest levels. These numbers are quite disturbing but they may not even capture the full picture as many cases likely go unreported due to stigma. We need to analyze if the IPV rates correlate with factors like women's education levels, income status, and exposure to gender regressive attitudes than what would be the real picture of IPV in India.

3.7. Existing Legal Provision In India To Address IPV

Indian laws have historically mostly addressed IPV, or domestic abuse between married spouses. The Indian Penal Code was amended in 1983 by the Parliament to include Section 498-A, which penalises husbands who abuse their spouses. Indian courts have broadened the definition of domestic violence throughout time to encompass all types of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Interestingly, though, Indian law still does not consider forced sexual activities on a woman or marital rape to be crimes (Mohan, 2023).

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (DV Act): The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (DV Act) was passed by the parliament in 2005. For the first time, this act recognized other types of romantic relationships, like those involving two individuals who are married or who have lived together in a shared home.

Section- 3 of the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 says that what comprises Domestic Violence as indicated by which Domestic Violence will include: -

- Threats to Life, Health & Safety etc., whether Physical or Mental, incorporating Sexual Abuse, Physical Abuse, Verbal and Emotional Abuse and Economic Abuse, or
- Harassment through any forms such as injuries, harms to the aggrieved person by coercing her or any other person related to any unlawful demand for dowry or other property or valuable security; or
- Otherwise injuring or causing harm, through Mental or Physical means to the Aggrieved Person.

But women in casual relationships, alone and not living with their partners, or victims of violence from ex-partners do not have the same protections from assault under Indian law. If they are abused, their only options are the general provisions of the Indian Penal Code and other statutes like:

The Indian Penal Code, Section 498A: This is a criminal law that targets husbands or members of their families that abuse women. Husband-family members' or the husband's own harassment for dowry is illegal under Section 498A of the IPC. Any form of harassment, whether mental and physical, is possible. Forced sex with one's wife can be seen as cruelty under this section even if marital rape is not a crime in India. Section 498A is rather broad. It also covers all deliberate acts against women that put them at risk of serious injury, death, limb loss, or poor health in general or cause them to try suicide. Here, women's physical and mental well-being are included in the definition of health.

The 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act: This is a Criminal Law that punishes the giving and taking of Dowry. The tradition of dowry itself is banned under the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. This law stipulates that anyone who offers, receives, or even asks dowry faces a maximum fine of five thousand rupees or a half-year in jail (Kumari, 2020).

India does have specific laws in place to protect women from intimate partner violence, like the Domestic Violence Act and Section 498A of the IPC. However, legal experts argue that these laws face issues with poor implementation and enforcement. There are also gaps - for example, marital rape is still not considered a crime in India. Given societal mindsets that stigmatize rather than support IPV victims, access to legal justice remains a challenge.

4. Conclusion

Intimate partner violence is a major issue that impacts millions of women across India and the world. It's a complex problem with no single cause, but rooted in societal norms around gender roles, power imbalances, economic factors like poverty, and individual behaviors like alcohol abuse and mental health issues. The cycle of abuse, with its patterns of tension building, violent explosions, and temporary honeymoon periods, can trap victims in a repeated nightmare.

While India has laws like the Domestic Violence Act and Section 498A of the IPC that aim to protect women from abuse by husbands and in-laws, the statistics from surveys like the NFHS show that violence in relationships remains alarmingly common. Legal protections can only do so much.

To truly combat intimate partner violence, we need a multi-pronged approach that addresses the root cultural, economic and psychological underpinnings of this behavior. Promoting true gender equality, ensuring strict enforcement of laws against domestic abuse, and providing accessible mental health support for both victims and perpetrators have to be priorities.

But just as importantly, we have to tackle the stigma around this issue head-on. Too many women suffer in silence, trapped by society's prejudices against divorced or separated women, and by the overriding pressure to stay in abusive marriages for the sake of family honor or their children's futures. We have to make it safe for victims to speak up and get help without facing societal consequences.

Ending intimate partner violence will require all parts of society - government, law enforcement, healthcare, educational institutions, community leaders, and families - to get on board. But if we remain committed to changing mindsets, norms and behaviors through a sustained effort, we can make this a violence-free reality for future generations of women.

To conclude, intimate partner violence is a widespread and complex issue in India driven by patriarchal norms, economic factors, social stigma and regressive mindsets around gender roles. While laws exist, they have failed to make a dent due to poor enforcement and societal barriers. To make real progress, a multi-pronged strategy that combines legal reform, social awareness, gender-equitable policies in education/workplaces and accessible support services for survivors is the only way forward. Changing mindsets through open dialogue right from the school level should be a top priority. Unless we address this issue head-on as a society, the scourge of IPV will tragically continue to harm millions of Indian women and families.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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