

A STUDY OF GENDER BASED VIOLATIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENTS

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Abstract: This empirical investigation looks into the challenges faced by urban women of upper middle class in the National Capital Region of Delhi. The sample size consisted of 74 women. The sample universe was women from upper middle class. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data was subjected to descriptive and inferential statistics and qualitative data was subjected to content analysis. The results indicate a significant negative correlation between experience of domestic violence and financial dependence to psychological empowerment. The paper has implications for psychologists as well as social policy makers.

*'Leti nahi dawai ma, jodey paayi paayi ma
dukh they parvat, rai ma, haari nahi ladai ma'*
(Indian text Translated- 'The mother neglects herself
to save for her family, her struggles are immense but
she never gives up')

These lines of an Indian poem reflect the struggles of the housewife. Her life is cloaked in a conspiracy of silence and it dare not voice its struggles. The patriarchal Indian society does not give the homemaker her due and to add to her woes the government policies too have not been very helpful. Her entire life goes into nurturing her family and when she realizes that she has wasted her potential and opportunities it is very late. It should be the prerogative of the State to work towards the betterment and empowerment of women through meaningful and effective policies (Rajivan & Anuradha, 1999). This Empirical investigation looks into the challenges faced by women of the upper middle class who are assumed to be better off. But Financial comforts do not accrue to or ensure happiness.

Women Studies & Women empowerment have been a popular subject with academicians, social activists and writers since long. Indians themselves are very interested in what is often termed there 'the woman question'. This interest received an impetus in 1975, because of International Women's Year, which was given a great deal of publicity in India. The *Report of the National Committee on the Status of Women in India*, set up by the government in 1971 'to suggest measures which would enable women to play their full and proper role in building the nation', was published in 1975, and makes essential reading on the topic.

Two other important works were also published in the same year-both excellent collections of articles by Indian and Western scholars working in a number of disciplines: they are *Indian Women*, edited by Devaki Jain (1975), and *Women in Contemporary India*, edited by Alfred De Souza (1975). These two volumes are complemented by another equally competent anthology, *Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity*

edited by B. R. Nanda, and published a year later (1976).

Pre independence writings have also addressed the concerns related to women. Scholars like Pandita Ramabai (1888) and Periyar E.V. Ramasami have looked at these problems as religion-supported evils. Pandita Ramabai refers to the Vedas and other apocryphal religious books that serve as canonical scriptures for most Hindus. She finds the male supremacy deep seated in these scriptures. Periyar Ramasami points out that 'women slavery' is tenacious, systematically entrenched and culturally embedded. His analysis of the root causes of the pervasive enslavement of women in modern Indian society and his surgery- like prescriptions for their emancipation, articulated more than three quarters of a century ago, would embarrass many a socialists & feminists today.

Noble Laurette Amartya Sen looks at the social structure of the society and hints at the poor bargaining power of women in families. The writings of Amartya Sen, in particular, have been key in turning the debate, and his capability approach provides the theoretical underpinnings of UNDP's Human Development Reports (HDRs) and Human Development Indices (HDIs). UNDP's programmes are addressing various types of challenges faced by women- financial, medical, domestic as well as emotional.

This article addresses some of the challenges

1.Domestic Violence: Reports reveal that domestic violence is the biggest woe that many hapless women endure. If development means the expansion of human capabilities, then freedom from domestic violence should be an integral part of any exercise for evaluating developmental progress (Panda & Agarwal, 2005). Even the occasional broadening, such as attempted in the formulation of the Gender Empowerment Measure (which seeks to capture women's participation in public institutions; UNDP, 1995), do not take into account some central aspects of human well-being, such as freedom from physical and mental abuse, and its implications for a country's

overall development (Panda & Agarwal, 2005).

Despite the rampant, spousal violence, 'taming of the shrew' is tacitly supported and often seen as a prerogative of the male patriarchs (Jejeebhoy, 1998). There are laws against domestic violence but it manages to conceal itself in the cloak of family 'Maryada' or family honour. What is alarming is the fact that it is widespread across classes, communities, and religions (Hasan & Menon, 2004). Psychological abuse is even more common, and often, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse overlap. Panda & Agarwal (2005) point out that marital violence against women ruptures the myth of the home as a protective space, exposing it as a chamber of terror for many. It is found to devastate the women who suffer it, scar the children who witness it, and dehumanize the men who perpetrate it. It has negative consequences for individuals, their families, as well as the wider society (Eddleson, 1999). To alleviate these problems the state needs to implement policies that empower women financially, socially and emotionally. Financial independence needs to be addressed first.

2. Financial dependence: Financial dependence is the bedrock of most marital woes of women. Increased awareness of the economic importance of unpaid household work, and of women's work in general, has led to the widespread acceptance that statistical measurements should be expanded to include unpaid work. Hiraway, (2003) points out that although this may seem to be a new perspective, it was developed long ago, particularly by the pioneering work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1898) and Margaret Reid (1934, 1947). The renewed interest in women's economic contribution is in part inspired by new feminist perspectives on economics like Marilyn Waring (1989), Marianne Ferber and Julie Nelson (1993) and Julie Nelson (1992).

Hiraway (2003) remarks that not only domestic work but many of the economic activities performed by the women of the house hold example agricultural work, thrashing, weeding, bundling of crop, selling, processing of jute fibers at home, pottery etc. gets excluded in the national statistical system as it fails to provide a proper data base for policy formulation as well as policy monitoring. Thus not only is it important to provide women with financial support commiserating to the amount of work they do at home but also include the activities that they do at home which contribute to the final market output. It is important therefore to devise ways and means of broadening the database to incorporate all the paid and unpaid activities within the purview of the database of national income. This would help chalk out social policies to help women and recognize their contribution.

3. Marital Rapes: Recent concerns of marital rapes

have brought forth a reality that has existed since time immemorial. It is being treated as a subject separate from domestic violence and the Indian government is seriously looking at social policy formulation related to this issue. The reluctance to criminalize and prosecute marital rape has been attributed to traditional views of marriage and cultural expectations of unquestioning subordination of a wife to her husband. Suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone singled out a woman's right to oppose marital rape as the core component of equality.

4. Nutritional and Medical Negligence towards women: Female fetuses are aborted and baby girls killed after birth, leading to an appallingly skewed sex ratio, Many of those who survive face discrimination, prejudice, violence and neglect all their lives. Trust Law a news service run by Thomson Reuters has ranked India as the worst G20 country in which to be a woman. Economists Siwan Anderson and Debraj Ray estimates that in India, more than 2m women are missing in a given year. They found that roughly 12% of the missing women disappear at birth, 25 % die in childhood due to nutritional negligence, 18 % at the reproductive ages due to medical negligence and 45% at older ages. They found that women died more from injuries in a given year than while giving birth injuries, which appears to be an indicator of violence against women. Clearly most Indian women face threats to life at every stage, violence, inadequate healthcare, inequality, neglect, bad diet, lack of attention to personal health and well being.

Psychological Empowerment of Women: Psychological Empowerment has its roots in early work on employee alienation and quality of work life. The psychological perspective is focused on how employees experience empowerment. This perspective refers to empowerment as the personal beliefs that people have about their role in relation to the context. Psychological empowerment has been defined by Spreitzer as "a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact" (Spreitzer, 1995: p.1444), when people feel empowered, they experience four dimensions including:

1. **Meaning:** Meaning involves a fit between the needs of one's role and one's beliefs, values and behaviors. Meaning is "the value of a goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards"... Meaning involves "a fit between the requirements of a role and beliefs, values and behaviors" (Spreitzer, 1995: p.1443).

2. **Competence:** Competence refers to self-efficacy specific to one's role requirements, or a belief in one's capability to perform activities with skill. Competence, or self-efficacy, is "an individual's belief

in her capability to perform role activities with skill” (Spreitzer, 1995: p.1443).

3. Self-determination: Self-determination is a sense of choice in initiating and regulating one’s actions. It reflects a sense of autonomy over the initiation and continuation of behavior and processes (e.g., making decisions about methods, pace and effort). Self-determination is “an individual’s sense of having choice in initiating and regulating action” (Spreitzer, 1995: p.1443).

4. Impact: Impact is “the degree to which one can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes in the context that he or she is operating”. (Spreitzer, 1995: p.1443-1444).

Together, these four cognitions reflect an active, rather than passive, orientation to one’s role. In other words, the experience of empowerment is manifest in all four dimensions – if any one dimension is missing, then the experience of empowerment will be limited. For example, if people have discretion to make decisions (i.e., self-determination) but they don’t care about the kinds of decisions they can make (i.e., they lack a sense of meaning), they will not feel empowered. Alternatively, if people believe they can make an impact but don’t feel like they have the skills and abilities to do their job well (i.e., they lack a sense of competence), they will not feel empowered as well. Hence according to Spreitzer empowerment, as a psychological state, is an ‘active orientation where an individual wishes and feels able to shape his/her role and context” (Spreitzer, 1995, p.1444).

Gap in Research: The review of literature presents an extensive account of research in the area of challenges faced by women as well as psychological empowerment felt by women at their workplace. There is a dearth of literature which can link the psychological empowerment of women in the context of their roles at home and the challenges faced by them. This leads to the following postulates

H1 : There is a significant correlation between experienced domestic violence and felt psychological empowerment

H2: There is a significant correlation between experienced financial dependence and felt psychological empowerment

H3: There is a significant correlation between experienced medical and nutritional neglect at home and felt psychological empowerment

Research Methodology: The study follows a causal survey design and collects quantitative data through standardized questionnaires. Qualitative data was also collected through structured interviews. The sample size was of 74 women (32 non working and 42 working women) from upper middle class families (where the family monthly income was between 1.5-2.5 lakhs). The sample universe was upper middle class as middle class is set to be cloaked in a

conspiracy of silence and the study intended to unearth various hidden issues.

The questionnaire on psychological empowerment was adapted from the questionnaire by Spreitzer (1995) and the reliability was 0.84 Cronbach alpha. The questionnaire was subjected to varimax rotation to ascertain the factors/dimensions which resulted in the same dimensions as that in the original questionnaire a) meaningfulness b) competence c) self-determination d) impact related to their life.

The questionnaire on challenges was constructed by the author. The validity was established by three experts. Factor analysis via varimax rotation resulted in three dimensions Domestic violence (Physical, verbal & emotional), financial dependence and health & nutritional negligence. The calculated reliability was 0.83 Cronbach Alpha

The quantitative data was subjected to univariate and multivariate analysis. Pearson correlation was calculated to find the correlation between different variables. A Z-test was conducted to find the difference between the variables amongst the working and non-working groups and also between women from service class families and business families.

The qualitative data was subjected to content analysis. The categories for the content analysis were constructed from grounded research. The categories emerged from the pilot study.

A pilot study of 18 women was conducted; who were interviewed in depth and the questionnaire also was administered on them.

Results and Discussion: The results point at the strong role of challenges faced by women in the context of their familial roles and responsibilities and their felt psychological empowerment.

Hypothesis1 : There is a significant correlation between experienced domestic violence and felt psychological empowerment was supported and there was a negative correlation found between experienced domestic violence and psychological empowerment. Results showed that 88.7 % (N=65) women had experienced domestic violence (physical, verbal, emotional or sexual). 22% of the women reported physical violence in addition to other forms, 86 % (N=56) reported verbal violence, 36 % reported emotional violence and 13 % reported sexual violence. Z test reported no significant difference in the working status of women and physical violence. Out of the women who had experienced physical violence (N=14) there were both working as well as non working women. Only 3 women had reported the violence to social agencies. The physical violence took place in front of children in-laws as well as servants. Edleson (1999) has pointed out the negative influence of domestic violence witnessed by children.

The Pearson correlation between domestic violence

and psychological empowerment was ($r = -.71, p < 0.01, N = 14$). The highest form of violence was verbal violence with 88.7 % reports linked to it. Qualitative interview revealed that it ranged from micro aggression like taunts, jeers, fault finding to verbal abuse and verbal threats. Verbal abuse was carried on by many family members who could range from young children to in laws. What was alarming was that 32 % reported verbal abuse by own children. Unmarried girls and ladies experienced verbal abuse from own blood relatives like brothers, parents and other close relatives. A widow reported that what was most 'disheartening' was that her young children were speaking the coloured language and repeating the taunts of her in-laws. Psychological abuse was experienced in terms of stonewalling (cold treatment) by husbands, boycott by husband's family and insinuations of worthlessness of the woman. Only 13 % women reported sexual abuse and did not open up easily in the interviews. One of the respondents reported repeated marital rape after three days of delivery of her child and with episiotomy stitches still on. Most of the psychological abuse is in the form of stonewalling by husband and boycott by family members. Researchers point out that this is the worst type of abuse as it leads to feelings of worthlessness and despair. This kind of passive abuse is most common and 93% women reported experiencing it at some point.

Hypothesis 2 : There is a significant correlation between experienced financial dependence and felt psychological empowerment was also supported. 68 % women reported financial dependence on husband or any other caretaker. 23% of employed or working women also reported financial dependence as they did not earn enough. Relational content analysis of interviews revealed that one of the reasons that women did not report domestic violence or leave the excruciating circumstances was financial dependence. There was a strong negative correlation between financial dependence and the dimension of self determination ($r = -.86, p < 0.01$). Amartya Sen points out that women lack the bargaining power at home. Most women in this study were not given the power to decide on financial matters related to things outside the home. 74% reported that they did not have the decision making power related to the money they earned. One of the teacher's reported that she was given a pocket money of only 1% of her salary per week by her husband though she earned more than him. She could not 'dare' to ask for more as her 'needs are taken care of'. Another government employee at a high post reported that she had not receive even a single penny by her husband in her 25 years of marriage and she could not ever ask for it as

she was told very early in her marriage that 'she will not get any money and she can go and sit on the road and somebody may just donate something to her'. That prompted her to pursue a career for which she is being psychologically punished since years.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant correlation between experienced medical and nutritional neglect at home and felt psychological empowerment was partially supported. 18 % women reported medical and nutritional neglect in this upper strata segment. Content analysis of interviews revealed a self imposed neglect and craving for attention than intentional nutritional deprivation by family members. Only 4 % of working women reported this kind of neglect. There was a correlation found between the self-determination dimension and psychological empowerment ($r = -.72, p < 0.01$). Women do not see themselves strong enough to be able to steer the course of their lives especially if they have undergone some chronic illness or debilitating disease. Research on cancer registry has shown that most cancer in women go undetected due to neglect by families. Most women come to the doctor in the advanced stage of disease. As pointed in the opening couplet of this paper, a mother would like to save money for her children or family than spend on her 'minor' ailments and nutritional requirements. High incidence of Osteoporosis in women is case in point.

Conclusion & Recommendations: Psychological empowerment of the better half of the nation would lead to the growth of the nation. Women are facing myriad atrocities out of which only some are highlighted in this paper. The results point at the challenges and their relationship with the felt psychological empowerment. This paper highlights the plight of women from the affluent section of society. It finds a strong reflection in the literature on women from the lower strata. Thus this is not a class specific phenomenon. It is all pervasive. Patriarchy and exploitation have existed since time immemorial and now social and governmental institutions need to intervene. Experts believe that these challenges and struggles of women that have existed since the inception of time cannot disappear without changing the deep rooted social attitudes. For this a strong commitment from the government with well-planned and well-implemented social policies are needed. Neglect of parents has gone down by 16% after the laws formulated against neglect of parents. Laws and social change programs together can help address these grave injustices against women which do not seem to be a priority for any of the governments. Enhancing human well-being is not just a means but also an end in itself.

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