Research Note

Unveiling the Pathologies of Domestic Violence: Exploring the Correlation between Economic Determinants and Intimate Partner Violence

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The pursuit of justice constitutes a noble and exalted exercise, and is the cornerstone of human dignity and social harmony. An urge to help a suffering victim and address social problems forms a significant moral axiom upon which the human beings premise their existence and activities in relation to one another as well as the broader externality. Conversely, overwhelming desires to be and perform charity can actually lead to an uncertain appraisal of an intensely complex problem. What can be stated unequivocally is that social problems and issues are by nature extremely complex and multifaceted. The issue of Domestic Violence has caused untold trauma to victims and has in equal measure, vexed Policymakers. Reflexivity in finding redressal mechanisms have only resulted in further complexities, and even deepening of the crisis. This Intellectual–cum–Praxeological Project undertaken under the leadership of Activism Foundation for Social Research and Action sought to desegregate cause and action, and holistically understand the problem of domestic violence affecting the residents of Maniktala Slum Area. Through the study conducted, radical insights were generated which shed light on how knee–jerk reactions to a problem such as Domestic Violence fail to truly uphold justice on an everyday basis.

Keywords : intimate partner violence, economic determinism, policy reductionism, everyday violence

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The phenomenon of domestic violence, as a malaise in society, generally involves acts of physical altercation directed individual towards his or her intimate partner. At first glance, the issue is a fairly common occurrence, ubiquitous enough to constitute a formidable sample size that compels decision-makers and policy apparatchiks to recognise its validity and adopt measures to redress its damage. Conversely, exploring the genealogy of the problem devolves into a self-replicating loop where facets of space, caste and class intersect with gender, creating a very complex reality for the victims. This reality also has a distinctive 'everydayness' to it, manifesting most perniciously within the domestic sphere, often termed as Intimate Partner Violence with no point of origination and conclusion. Additionally, while the lived experiences of victims are indicative of the fungible nature of the crisis, most governments attempt to remedy this issue as an isolated problem, almost akin to a disease. Enduring commitments to this disease prevention appear laudable, but are in substance little more than ostentatious and virtue-signaling exercises. This, however, is not because of intent or lack thereof; in any case, political intent is difficult to pontificate and act upon in the first place. It is more of a function of how domestic violence is configured and categorised, as a gestaltian subject or as a separate condition that can be 'medicated', how the interplay of antecedent variables and intervening variables determines the quantum of Intimate Partner Violence, and how socio-cultural representations involve the perpetrator and victims. The role of gender, caste and class in understanding domestic violence in its total pathology has often been understated and overlooked by decision-makers in the pursuit of prompt solutions. Reductionist understandings of Intimate Partner Violence often attempt to establish correlational, if not directly causal, relationships between the act of violence as well as what are considered its causes. Issues like alcoholism and economic distress have long been highlighted as the causative agents driving violence and/or abuse against women. In the context of India, the association between alcohol and intimate partner violence has morphed into a political football. For example, the state of Bihar has long grappled with the twin problems of alcohol abuse and crimes against women. The government of Bihar implemented a total ban

on alcohol, which covers its manufacture, sale and consumption in 2016 (Reddy, 2019). Ostensibly, the policy was aimed at striking one of the 'root causes' of domestic violence. Auxiliary goals included restricting the misuse of earnings by men on alcohol and intoxicants, which were attributed to a decline in household income and adversely affecting women's health. At the outset, the stated purpose of this policy seemed noble and unquestionable. The underlying logic was also fairly easy to discern. A simple cause-and-effect relationship had been established between alcohol use and domestic violence, whereby alcohol was identified as an independent variable while domestic violence was conceptualised as the dependent variable. The simplicity of understanding was intoxicating, especially to Policy Makers who were eager to 'solve' the problem of domestic violence. However, consequent reports have only pointed to marginal declines in the number of registered 498A cases (Reddy, 2019), but a concomitant increase in dowry-related violence among Bihar's women. Multiple conclusions, and in this case, all equally valid, can be drawn from this. Firstly, policy has second-order and third-order effects on the populace. A knee-jerk reaction to a social evil can augur unintended consequences, leading to a completely new set of problems. The issue of establishing correlation or causation is fraught with intellectual blind spots and the recurrent tendency to manipulate facts to suit narratives. Economic privation has often been associated with domestic violence, with many attributing economic pressure on a household as the main factor behind the prevalence of domestic violence. The association in this case is pointed to the redirection of stress caused by poverty and unemployment into domestic violence perpetrated on the intimate partner. The sociological underpinnings of this stress are quite complex and need to be aggregately incorporated into a coherent causal inference model which can sufficiently establish the relationship between economic stress and domestic violence.

The literature on Research methodology pertaining to the social sciences points to the influence of antecedent and intervening variables along with dependent and independent variables. This effectively contextualizes the issue of cause and effect

within a broader framework of socially embedded actors and contingencies, and as Chomsky states (Chomsky, 1981), the linguistic configurations that are employed in order to explain and expound upon social phenomena are not fixed structures. Language, or how it is constitutively displayed, allows for multiplicity of meaning (Gottdiener, 1993) and unveiling of hitherto untapped complexities. This foregrounds the basis of the research project undertaken at Maniktala Slums, with the ultimate goal to probe a given premise of whether economic distress leads to domestic violence.

The Rationale behind the Space and the Methodological Thrust

The objective for choosing Maniktala has the place for conducting this research, which has to do with the confluence of structural inequalities and spatial compression (Gottdiener, 1993), which considerably influences intimate partner violence. Causalities are often so deeply intertwined with one another that it becomes almost impossible to separate the victim from the agent within this setting. It is precisely this challenge that the Activism Foundation for Social Research and Action sought to address while collecting data and coming up with a socially embedded research project. The activism foundation extensively deployed its human resources to first survey the space and the co-constitutive relation (Westlund, 1999) that space enjoyed in relation to the people inhabiting that space. Following the survey, the process of data collection was decided upon, with a specific focus on using questionnaires for the slum members who would record their experiences. The key factor here is localising the violence within a proper social context. An almost reflexive (ill-informed) response to domestic violence is Why do the victims choose to stay in abusive relationships. Extensive research conducted on this topic conducted by Lenore Walker has revealed the phenomenon of battered women (Walker, 1979), where it had been argued that almost half the number of women in any given social setting (Murray, 1988) were victims of violence. The Maniktala slum area also featured a high incidence of poverty. Additionally, the domesticity of domestic violence affects a large proportion of unmarried women. The objective behind collecting data from

unmarried women was specifically served by this exercise. As foregrounded theoretically, the nature of domestic violence is proliferative and affects women irrespective of their marital position and/or status.

Though mainly Bengali Hindu live here, a few from Bihar, who work in Kolkata also live in this slum. Majority of males are engaged in informal or private sector jobs, a few work as government employee. Some also have small business, having small shops in the locality. A few are also unemployed. Some females are house-wife but a good number of females work as cook or maid servant in nearby locality. Few females, who are educated like, higher secondary or graduate level also work in formal sector like bank etc.

The responses from the members are presented in the form of a table below-

Table 1. Relation between economic problems and conflict within family on the basis of marital status

Gender	Status	Respondents	Q. On which issues conflict often take place in your family? [Economic problems]					Total
			Never	Frequently	Occasionally	Mostly	NA	
Male	Married	32(35.56%)	11(12.22%)	8(8.89%)	4(4.44%)	5(5.56%)	4(4.44%)	32(35.56%)
	Unmarried	11(12.22%)	10(11.11%)		1(1.11%)			11(12.22%)
	Widower	1(1.11%)				1(1.11%)		1(1.11%)
	Divorcee	1(1.11%)		1(1.11%)				1(1.11%)
	Total	45 (50%)	21(23.33%)	9(10%)	5(5.56%)	6(6.67%)	4(4.44%)	45 (50%)
Female	Married	32(35.56%)	12(13.33%)	9(10%)	2(2.22%)	9(10%)		32(35.56%)
	Unmarried	5(5.56%)	3(3.33%)	1(1.11%)	1(1.11%)			5(5.56%)
	Widow	7(7.78%)	3(3.33%)	1(1.11%)	2(2.22%)		1(1.11%)	7(7.78%)
	Divorcee	1(1.11%)				1(1.11%)		1(1.11%)

	Total	45(50%)	18(20%)	11(12.22%)	5(5.56%)	10(11.11%)	1(1.11%)	45(50%)
	Grand Total	90 (100%)	39(43.33%)	20(22.22%)	10(11.11%)	16(17.78%)	5(5.56%)	90 (100%)

Source: Field Study by Activism

The respondents particularly the married males and females focused on the economic aspect for conflict within family.

Table 2. Relation between inability to repay loans and conflict within family on the basis of monthly income

GENDER	MONTHLY INCOME	RESPONDENT	Q. On which issues conflict often take place in your family? (for unable to repay loan)					
			Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Mostly	NA	Grand total
MALE 45 (50%)	Below 5000	4(4.44%)	4(4.44%)	0	0	0	0	4(4.44%)
	5000 -10000	13(14.44%)	8(8.88%)	0	0	0	5(5.55%)	13(14.44%)
	10000-15000	7(7.77%)	5(5.55%)	0	0	0	2(2.22%)	7(7.77%)
	15000-20000	6(6.66%)	4(4.44%)	0	0	0	2(2.22%)	6(6.66%)
	20000-30000	10(11.11%)	7(7.77%)	0	0	0	3(3.33%)	10(11.11%)
	Above 30000	5(5.55%)	3(3.33%)	0	0	0	2(2.22%)	5(5.55%)
Total		45(50%)	31(34.44%)	0	0	0	14(15.56%)	45(50%)
FEMALE 45 (50%)	Below 5000	6(6.66%)	3(3.33%)	0	0	0	3(3.33%)	6(6.66%)
	5000-10000	17(18.88%)	12(13.33%)	2(2.22%)	0	1(1.11%)	2(2.22%)	17(18.88%)
	10000-15000	10(11.11%)	9(10%)	0	0	1(1.11%)	0	10(11.11%)
	15000-20000	6(6.66%)	6(6.66%)	0	0	0	0	6(6.66%)

20000-30000	2(2.22%)	2(2.22%)	0	0	0	0	2(2.22%)
Above 30000	4(4.44%)	4(4.44%)	0	0	0	0	4(4.44%)
Total	**45(50%)**	**36(40%)**	**2(2.22%)**	**0**	**2(2.22%)**	**5(5.56%)**	**45(50%)**
GRAND TOTAL	**90(100%)**	**67(74.44%)**	**2(2.22%)**	**0**	**2(2.22%)**	**19(21.11%)**	**90(100%)**

Source: Field Study by Activism

Table 3. Relation between economic problems and conflict within family on the basis of income

GENDER	MONTHLY INCOME	RESPONDENT	Q. On which issues conflict often take place in your family? (economic problem)					
			Never	Occasionally	Frequently	Mostly	NA	Grand total
MALE **45** **(50%)**	Below 5000	**4(4.44%)**	3(3.33%)	0	1(1.11%)	0	0	**4(4.44%)**
	5000-10000	**13(14.44%)**	5(5.55%)	2(2.22%)	4(4.44%)	1(1.11%)	1(1.11%)	**13(14.44%)**
	10000-15000	**7(7.77%)**	2(2.22%)	1(1.11%)	1(1.11%)	3(3.33%)	0	**7(7.78%)**
	15000-20000	**6(6.66%)**	2(2.22%)	2(2.22%)	1(1.11%)	0	1(1.11%)	**6(6.67%)**
	20000-30000	**10(11.11%)**	7(7.77%)	0	1(1.11%)	2(2.22%)	0	**10(11.11%)**
	Above 30000	**5(5.55%)**	3(3.33%)	0	0	0	2(2.22%)	**5(5.55%)**
Total		**45(50%)**	**22(24.44%)**	**5(5.56%)**	**8(8.89%)**	**6(6.67%)**	**4(4.44%)**	**45(50%)**
FEMALE **45** **(50%)**	Below 5000	**6(6.66%)**	2(2.22%)	0	2(2.22%)	2(2.22%)	0	**6(6.67%)**
	5000-10000	**17(18.88%)**	6(6.66%)	4(4.44%)	2(2.22%)	4(4.44%)	1(1.11%)	**17(18.89%)**
	10000-15000	**10(11.11%)**	3(3.33%)	1(1.11%)	3(3.33%)	3(3.33%)	0	**10(11.11%)**
	15000-20000	**6(6.66%)**	2(2.22%)	0	3(3.33%)	1(1.11%)	0	**6(6.66%)**
	20000-30000	**2(2.22%)**	1(1.11%)	1(1.11%)	0	0	0	**2(2.22%)**

	Above 30000	4(4.44%)	4(4.44%)	0	0	0	0	4(4.44%)
	Total	45(50%)	18(20%)	6(6.67%)	10(11.11%)	10(11.11%)	1(1.11%)	45(50%)
	GRAND TOTAL=	90(100%)	40(44.44%)	11(12.22%)	18(20%)	16(17.78%)	5(5.56%)	90(100%)

Source: Field Study by Activism

A majority of participants responded that the economic problems did not lead to conflict.

Table 4. Relation between economic problems and conflict within family on the basis of economic status

Gender	Earner-Dependent	Respondents	Q. On which issues conflict often take place in your family? [Economic problems].					Total
			Never	Frequently	Occasionally	Mostly	NA	
Male 45	Earner	39(43.33%)	17(18.89%)	9(10%)	5(5.55%)	6(6.67%)	2(2.22%)	39(43.33%)
	Dependent	6(6.67%)	4(4.44%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	2(2.22%)	6(6.67%)
	Total	**45(50%)**	**21(33.33%)**	**9(10%)**	**5(5.55%)**	**6(6.67%)**	**4(4.44%)**	**45(50%)**
Female 45	Earner	24(26.67%)	7(7.78%)	6(6.67%)	3(3.33%)	7(7.78%)	1(1.11%)	24(26.67%)
	Dependent	21(23.33%)	11(12.22%)	4(4.44%)	3(3.33%)	3(3.33%)	0(0%)	21(23.33%)
	Total	**45 (50%)**	**18(20%)**	**10(11.11%)**	**6(6.67%)**	**10(11.11%)**	**1(1.11%)**	**45 (50%)**
Grand Total -90(100%)			**39(43.3%)**	**19(21.1%)**	**11(12.2%)**	**16(17.8%)**	**5(5.6%)**	**90(100%)**

Source: Field Study by Activism

Here again a majority of participants responded stating that economic distress did not cause conflict. Please find it in the Table 5 below :

Table 5. Relation between inability to repay loans and conflict within family on the basis of economic status

Gender	Earner-Dependent	Respondents	Q. On which issues conflict often take place in your family? [Unable to repay loan]					Total
			Never	Frequently	Occasionally	Mostly	NA	
Male **45**	Earner	39(43.33%)	27(30%)	0	0	0	12(13.33%)	**39(43.33%)**
	Dependent	6(6.67%)	4(4.44%)	0	0	0	2(2.22%)	**6(6.67%)**
	Total	45 (50%)	31(34.44%)	**0**	**0**	**0**	14(15.56%)	**45 (50%)**
Female **45**	Earner	24(26.67%)	19(21.11%)	1(1.11%)	0	1(1.11%)	3(3.33%)	**24(26.67%)**
	Dependent	21(23.33%)	17(18.89%)	0	1(1.11%)	1(1.11%)	2(2.22%)	**21(23.33%)**
	Total	45 (50%)	36 (40%)	1(1.11%)	1(1.11%)	2(2.22%)	5(5.56%)	**45 (50%)**
Grand Total - 90(100%)		90(100%)	67(74.4%)	**1(1.11%)**	**1(1.11%)**	**2(2.22%)**	**19(21.11%)**	**90(100%)**

Source: Field Study by Activism

An overwhelming number of participants stated that inability to repay loans did not lead to conflict.

Discussion of the findings

The findings clearly indicate that there is no direct correlation between economic distress and domestic violence. Conversely, sufficient literature (Hassan, 2021) that using economic development as the sole yardstick for addressing domestic violence (Matjasko, 2012) could actually lead to an increase in domestic violence. To conclude, the tool of economic development is best suited to be utilized as a part of a larger, more comprehensive mechanism (Roy, 2024), not as a sole preventer.

Conclusion

The ontological effects of trivializing the consequences of domestic violence can have larger effects on society, affecting family systems, social cohesion and bonding. The study conducted by Activism sought to avoid the extremes of theorization and reductionist generalization. In spite of the rigour attempted in and through the project,

the respondents may not have been able to provide a holistic account of their experiences. Due to the resulting gap in objectivity, further, more detailed studies have to be conducted in order to overcome research gaps and arrive at the nuanced truth. Solutions emerge from the redefinition of the relationship between the self and the larger processes within which the self is embedded. Short-term empathy is attractive, but it is fundamentally unviable in addressing the full range of challenges faced on a daily basis by victims. Hence, a more integrative, non-reductionist and self-oriented approach is key to navigating the challenge.

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