

Violence Within The Domestic Space And Depression Among The Youth ¹

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Domestic violence, far from being a single dimensional issue, often represents troubled family dynamics among its members. Very often, it is synonymously viewed as physical abuse of the victim, though reality is far from it. The victim, while admitting the occurrence of physical violence, often reports the incident as a resultant manifestation of ongoing trouble at the domestic sphere. This trouble involves not only physical torture, but also abuse in every possible front, including emotional and verbal. The present paper, aims to analyse the problem of domestic violence holistically, and not as a problem causing only physical damage to the victim. At the same time, it tried to bring into the fore the dysfunctional relationships existing in the family sphere causing violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, troubled family dynamics, youth depression, inter generational abuse

Domestic violence is abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one or multiple members of the household to assert power and control over another member of the same household. Domestic violence can be of various types— it can be physical, sexual, economic, psychological, emotional or technological actions or threats of actions or other types of forceful behaviour taking place within the, domestic sphere.

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This type of behaviour is usually done with one or many purposes— to intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone. Although a number of other terms have been used to describe the phenomenon of domestic violence, the underlying theme of power dynamics is always reflected in the description (Sagar and Hans; 2018).

Domestic violence is an important human right and public health problem which can have adverse effects both on physical and mental level (Sagar and Hans; 2018). Although the term domestic violence is often synonymously used as intimate partner violence i.e. spouse, it should be remembered that extremely abusive behaviour often starts early in life in one's family of origin, and thereby going beyond the common notion of partner violence. In the study by Carolin and Xavier (2020) it is discussed that children who are exposed to violence in their families are prone to suffer from serious long term physical and mental health problems (OWH – Office of women's health). It is also observed that the biggest victims of domestic violence are the smallest. According to UNICEF (2006), as many as 275 million children worldwide are exposed to violence in their own families. Children can be exploited and abused in different forms since they are a vulnerable group. It is also a quite shocking finding that they can be abused within their own home environment by a close relative of theirs. It is also believed that children raised in an abusive home learn that violence is an effective way to solve conflict and problems. They may replicate the violence they witnessed as children in their teen and adult relationship (Margolin, 1998). In order to protect women from becoming the victim of domestic violence, Government of India has taken legal measures. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to fulfil this purpose. On 26 October 2006, the law was implemented (<https://www.indiacode.nic.in/>).

Types of Domestic Violence

Slabbert and Green (2014) observed four different types of domestic violence in their study. All four types are discussed below:

Physical abuse

First, physical abuse consists of physical assaults causing various types of injuries—for example broken bones, cracked ribs, burning, bruising, stabbing and scalding. Now such assaults can be impulsive or controlled. Physical abuse also includes many other activities such as throwing things, kicking, slapping hitting, pushing, shoving, grabbing, choking, strangling and inflicting head injuries, to name but a few.

Emotional abuse

The emotional abuse was often described by the victim as worse than the physical abuse as it destroys the self-esteem and self-worth of the victim. By nature it is corrosive and persistent .Emotional abuse can be verbal or non-verbal including activities such as, the use of ridicule, accusations, infidelity, insults even ignoring one's partner. Authors such as Browne and Herbert (1997:83), Romito (2008:17) and Sanderson (2008:23) are of the opinion that emotional abuse is more frequent than physical abuse and more difficult to detect. These two types of violence are equally destructive. Emotional abuse varied between insults, shouting, name calling, and belittling in front of other people.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse refers to sexual activity without someone's consent. The victim can be person from any gender, at any age. According to Laird (2001:286), sexual abuse is often reinforced by an unspoken code of silence. Some women are just not in a position to talk about their sexual abuse and they live with the fear that their families might disintegrate and they keep silent about their victimhood due to shame and guilt. Views by Bollen et al. (1999:25) support this code of silence, stating that, of all four types of abuse, sexual abuse is the least reported, the reason for this code of silence being the social stigma attached to sexual abuse. It is observed everywhere that instead of the perpetrator, the victim is blamed and shamed in this type of abuse. It should also be noted that any form of forceful sexual liaison is considered as rape, even when a man does this with his wife.

Economic abuse

This type of abuse takes usually two forms, either it is keeping tight control over the family's economic resources such as money and transport or it implies the withholding of economic support. As a result, victims could not buy what they wanted to buy or could not spend money on things they want to spend money on.

Methodology

The data used here was collected as part of the doctoral research work by the author in 2015. The said research work was done with the title "Depression among young students: A sociological Analysis". In the course of that work, Undergraduate and Postgraduate students of Jadavpur University were taken as sample. Sample was collected using Snowball sampling method. The instrument for data collection was in depth face to face interview. A semi structured interview schedule was constructed using both close ended and open-ended questions. Responses were recorded with prior consent from respondents. A small part of those previously collected data is used in this present paper focusing on the problem of domestic violence and analysed in the context of the troubled family relationship related to it.

In order to measure depression among students Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) has been used. The Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression (CES-D) was originally published by L. S. Radloff in 1977. This is a self-report depression scale, a 20-item measure that asks participants to rate how often over the past week they experienced symptoms associated with depression, such as restless sleep, poor appetite, and feeling lonely etc. Response options range from 0 to 3 for each item (0 = Rarely or None of the Time, 1 = Some or Little of the Time, 2 = Moderately or Much of the time, 3 = Most or Almost All the Time). Scores range from 0 to 60, with high scores indicating greater depressive symptoms. The cut-off score for clinical depression is 16. Following this logic, students with score of 16 or higher have been considered as depressed. The CES-D has been used successfully across wide age ranges. In this study, respondents were given printed version of this scale and asked to fill it up.

Discussion

This paper presents four case-studies where each respondent experienced severe form of violence in their family-of origin. All names have been changed to protect identity. At the same time it aims to focus on troubled family dynamics in the context of which domestic violence took place. Domestic violence is the expression and outcome of the problem already exists in the household. Therefore instead of being viewed as a single incident it should be analysed as a result of ongoing troublesome family dynamics. Therefore each case has been discussed here from a holistic angle.

Case study 1 is about Amita a female respondent who lives with her parent in the south suburban area near Kolkata. Her father is a graduate and works in a private agency. Her mother could not finish college due to early marriage. Amita's family's monthly income is around Twenty thousand rupees.

Amita's problem involves her mother, elder sister and her brother-in-law. Amita is often described as a shameless, demanding person by her mother. She used to get beaten up by her mother till her elder sister got married. In her words "Since childhood I have been experiencing unequal treatment. Mother behaves softly with my didi, but I always got harsh words. Didi and I both went to the same school of our locality. Didi is six years older. Still Ma always escorted her to school and picked her up, but I used to go to school alone after class 4." Her mother used to take her sister to movies and hide it from her. But Amita came to know about it from the tickets. She often wondered the reason behind such unfair treatment and then came to know her mother wanted a boy as her second child.

At the beginning of adolescence Amita was sexually abused by someone residing at her neighbourhood. Her father took action against the offender, sent him to jail, but her mother blamed the girl for the whole incident. In her words, "When everyone came to know about the incident, I realized something around me, especially behaviour of male members, changed. In the guise of showing sympathy they started touching me. All of them knew I did not get much support from my mother. I think they tried to take advantage of it. Kakimas (Aunts) from our neighbourhood wanted to hear the detail of the incident, for example, which body parts that old man touched, whether I was still a

virgin etc. Ma became very upset and told me that was the reason why she never wanted another girl. Listening to this Baba became furious and scolded ma for telling me such a bad thing. But ma became more upset and cursed me saying I would never be happy in my life." Her mother also held her responsible for the incident of sexual abuse that the incumbent faced during her pre-teen years. Harsh words, such as, "Had I known my daughter would give me such shame, I would have killed her the day she was born—came out of her mouth causing deep bruises in the child's mind.

Amita described her elder sister as "Hitler" who always created problems for her. Although her sister did not perform well in examination much, her allegiance made her a good daughter in her mother's eyes. Amita always received negative response from elder sister if ever problems are shared with her. Rather Amita's Didi tortured her in every possible way, to the extent of hitting her in front of other people.

Amita's brother-in-law started abusing her sexually when she was a teenager. When she told her mother and sister about this, she was labelled as 'mental patient' who wanted to steal her sister's husband. Her sister went further and explained that the first abusive incident destabilized her mental condition. Amita helplessly said "Whenever I complained about my Jamaibabu (elder sister's husband), Didi slapped me. I did not get any support from my mother either. I knew I had no other option but to accept it (getting abused by Jamaibabu)." This abuse went to such an extent that he raped her. When the girl told her mother, she said "What can I do? I cannot destroy my elder daughter's home for protecting the younger one." Ma also told her to hide the incident from her father as he suffers from high blood pressure. Rather the girl was advised to take emergency contraceptive pill. The girl tried to run away from home twice and attempted suicide thrice. She also has a habit of hurting herself when she is upset which is evident from several cuts on her wrist. She says, "I try to hurt myself till the moment physical pain surpasses mental pain. Once it happens, I feel calm."

Case study 2 is about Arun, a male respondent, who lives with his family in southern part of the city. His father is a retired government employee and mother is a homemaker. Arun's father's pension, which is a little above thirty thousand rupees per month is the sole income of his family.

Arun experienced severe form of physical punishment while growing up. His father used to beat him with leather belt. Barun feels that his father never realized that the way he was brought up by his parents is not applicable any more. "Using cuss words, severe physical torture might be common to mode of parenting then", he argues, "But how many educated family apply this method to their children now?" His father fails to understand that. The boy tries to find justification for his father's behaviour when he says, "My grandfather was an alcoholic. He used to beat my father every day. So that is the only form of treating one's child known to him. Moreover, when I was growing up, my father was a junior employee who used to handle huge workload. He could not protest but used to release his anger on us." Arun further adds that his father harshly criticizes him for being impractical and irrational. The boy was forced to study mathematics at undergraduate level though he wanted to study literature. It was due his father pressure Arun he could not follow his own wish. His father made it clear that since he was paying for Arun's study, only he could take the decision. Studying a discipline against wish produced depressive symptom in him. Before the final examination he had a nervous breakdown. Then the boy started taking counselling for two months. In his words, "I expressed the desire to take counselling. Otherwise, no one would have taken me there. Although now I realize counselling does not help much. At least in my case it did not. The counsellor never asked the questions that mattered." The boy changed his course of study afterwards and left Mathematics for studying Comparative Literature. At the end of the interview the boy admitted that he could feel the return of depressive symptoms which troubled him few years back. But this time he was unwilling to visit a professional counsellor and decided to combat the disorder on his own.

Case study 3 is about Namita, a female respondent who is originally from a suburban area of North 24 Parganas. She presently stays as paying guest at Kolkata. Her father is a Bank Manager and Mother is a homemaker. Both parents are graduate. Her father earns around Eighty thousand rupees per month.

In spite of staying far from home, Namita never missed her home. When she was asked about the reason behind this, she shared an unfortunate incident. The girl at the last year of her school was being treated for polycystic ovarian syndrome and profuse

bleeding caused by the disease. While the treatment was on, the girl was asked by her doctor whether she had sexual intercourse followed by an unwanted pregnancy and abortion. Namita was shocked hearing such a question and informed her that such incident never took place. The doctor did not believe her and called her parents to tell him that her heavy bleeding was caused by abortion. Instead of believing their daughter, they believed the doctor. From then on, Namita's every movement was being monitored. Her parents escorted her everywhere. She could not meet her friends, even was not allowed to use phone. When she got admitted to the university, she was given the exact amount of money that was needed to pay the fare. She travelled by local train and continued to do so until she got molested by a co-passenger. After that she started living as a paying guest near university.

Namita still gets beaten up by her parents whenever she disobeys them. Recently she wanted to wear a sari for an occasion but her mother did not let her wear it saying it would make her look ugly as she was too thin to wear this traditional attire. When Namita did not listen to her mother and tried to wear the sari, she was beaten up. She further added, "My mother thinks I starve myself, but I never do that. Still, she does not believe me." Namita also informed that her mother suffers from psychological problems, even attempted suicide a year back.

Although Namita told she never missed her home and family, family problem affects her a lot. It was evident when she confessed that fight between parents made her depressed. In her own words, "I become hysterical and start crying when my parents fight."

Case study 4 is about Barun, a male respondent who has originally come from a district in North Bengal but now shifted to Kolkata with his family. Barun's mother is a school-teacher and father is an accountant, both of them having graduate level education. Earning of his family is somewhere between Rs. 20000-40000 per month.

Since childhood he hardly shared his experiences with his parents. In his words, "Both of them are really orthodox in their mindset, I hate the way they think." Being asked on the reason behind this hatred, Barun cited the discriminatory attitude his parents hold toward girls. "My mother believes a girl's skin should be covered and she should not

have much choice on clothes..” The boy, a staunch supporter of gender equality, hates the idea of women being treated as a commodity everywhere, even in the sphere of matchmaking. He holds that established women, like his mother who is a teacher should raise their voice against this system. For this reason, he feels disappointed and angry when he sees otherwise. Barun does not share a good rapport with his father either. If he gets low marks in examination, at first his father does not show any negative reaction and accepts it without saying much word. But afterwards, as the boy says, “he pinches every now and then. Sometimes he blames it on television watching, sometimes on something else. He always compares me with his colleagues’ children. His point is, why do I get a low score even if he spends the same amount of money that their fathers spend for them? He has made it clear that if I cannot make my own career I cannot stay at home. He won’t care even if I start begging.” When the boy felt too much pressure was given on him, he ran away from home twice.

Barun who criticises his father on so many points also labels him as a “stressed person” and explains the reason for being so stressed. “My father lost his father in childhood. He started selling milk pouches, paan (beetle leaf), worked as a newspaper vendor in order to make a living. At the same time, he continued study. After such struggle he got a decent job.” He understands that struggle for survival has made his father an anxious person. Every night his father takes medicine to combat that anxiety.

Barun also adds that he has seen two sides of his father’s personality. In front of his colleagues, he has a very pleasing personality. But whenever he comes to the house, he takes the role of an abusive father. In the words of the respondent, “I am a big foodie. My father says, he loses prestige everywhere due to this habit of mine. In all family gathering, be it a birthday party or wedding, he shouts at me in front of everyone so that I do not take much food. I feel so humiliated. They say I am irresponsible. They believe that one becomes a good parent if they misbehave with their children all time. I do not believe this and I will never do it with my own child.” Barun recollects memory of a family trip. “We were at the sea beach with two other families from my dad’s friend circle. Everybody was having fun. I walked towards the sea to touch the waves and probably went a bit deeper. My dad slapped me in front of everyone. Even my mother did not utter a single word against him.” These incidents of receiving negative treatment had hurt the boy so much that he could not control his

tears. Barun still gets beaten up by her father. He says, "I would not forgive my parents ever."

This lack of parental love and affection has led the boy to trust no one. Even in the time of crisis, Barun likes to manage things single-handedly rather than taking help from anyone. He sees college as an escape from home. He also claims to find joy in breaking rules or doing something prohibited.

Barun started having mental disorder since he was 13 years old. In his words, "I started doing weird things. This moment I was calm. At the next I started screaming and throwing things at other. In those moments I felt unbearable headache. I could not see a thing properly. The whole world seemed hazy. Doctors said that I had bi-polar disorder." Barun was diagnosed with convulsion and epilepsy and started taking medicine since then. He also visits counsellor twice or thrice a year.

The above case describes a situation where the child is being controlled and criticised at every step by both parents, directly by father and indirectly by mother. Barun, who is an adult, cannot accept such parental control anymore. He labelled both of the as 'strict and authoritarian'. Although he realizes some of the reasons behind his father's over reactive nature, continuous negative treatment has deterred him to form any bonding with him. The boy has not received emotional protection from his mother either. Thus Barun became detached from his whole parental unit and tries to find pleasure by doing things he is not allowed to do.

Findings

The problem of domestic violence is multidimensional and layered. It is impossible to focus on domestic violence without discussing the problematic family dynamics and /or the troubled behavioural pattern of its members. Therefore, careful observation was made on this aspect.

- I. It is noticed in all cases that one or both parents did not trust their child. They trusted other family member, even outsider more. This lack of trust damaged the self-esteem of the respondent in each case. It is also noticed that their disadvantageous position in the family was perceived by outsiders who took advantage of the situation and created more trouble.

- II. The parents did not have much high regard for the child at the first place. Regardless of their performance at school, the parents find one reason or another to label their child as not someone up to the standard.
- III. An interesting aspect of domestic violence is the process of normalising the abuse is always very active. If the victim protests or complaints, either it is said that the victim is overreacting as it is the ideal way of treating children. Or it is said that victim has done something terribly wrong to deserve the violent behaviour as the fitting punishment. Often shame and guilt are used as two powerful weapons to prevent the victim from complaining further.
- IV. It is also noticed that the violent behaviour is not an outcome of any direct action caused by the victim, rather the expression of frustration of the abuser, as reported by the respondent. An in-depth study of the life of the wrong doer might have revealed the factors causing such frustration.
- V. It is also observed that in domestic sphere, people face multiple types of abuse at the same time—physical, emotional, verbal, even economic—all were reported together by the victim.
- VI. In all cases, victims of the abuse perceived at least one parent as mentally unstable— suffering from mental health problem. Two respondents reported that their parents take medicine to cope with mental issues.
- VII. All of the victims were reported to have scores above 16, i.e. clinical depression, according to Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)

To conclude, the problem of domestic violence is difficult to address in the sense that more often than not the wrong doer and the receiver are not aware of the fact that any offensive behaviour is taking place. Even if the victim protests, s/he hardly gets any support in the home unit, or worse, outside it, on the ground of this violent behaviour being perceived as something normal. Such cases happen, especially when there is strong difference between the world-views of the parental generation and those held by their wards. The present paper focused on the aspect that this violence of indicates existence of problematic relationship in the family dynamics. However, more insights could have been developed on the said topic if the wrong-doer or any other family member of the victim had been interviewed.

In order to prevent the occurrence of such incidents, awareness programmes should be conducted at each level of academic institutions— schools, colleges, universities. At the same time, help for victims should be made available through formation of psychological counselling cell where students can go if they experience any adverse situations.

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