
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THEORIES

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ABSTRACT

In spite of various attempts to study and define the phenomenon of the term, 'Domestic Violence' it has neither any precise definition nor universally accepted definitions. In fact its definition changes from country to country and region to region. So, it has almost various definitions and views which have been given by different scholars and sources. Therefore, the various definitions of domestic violence help to understand the very nature of crime/violence, and the thorough understanding of these definitions is greatly required to understand the severity of the phenomenon. However, most of theories explaining violence against women, in fact, focus on violence in general. Though many of them are applicable in case of domestic violence against women, but there is no single theory explaining the entire 'political economy' of domestic violence against women. Therefore, the various theories of violence/domestic violence against women given by a number of scholars, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists and miscellaneous investigators play a major role to reveal social, economic, psychological, religious or environmental causes/ factors of violence against women etc. Various theories of violence against women give the different notions regarding this act. Some theories believe violence against women occurs due to the social arrangement and patriarchal structure of the society which value the masculine and devalue the feminine. A society in which men hold the positions of respect and power, and plays a dominant role over women, is more fertile for domestic violence. Some theories consider the cultural factor as the cause for crime against women which includes gender specific socialization of women in which they take their victimization very natural, as a part of their lives.

INTRODUCTION

Therefore to explain the concept of violence, different definitions of violence have been given at different sources. To sum up, the definitions of domestic violence have undergone lots of changes both in terms of acts/forms of domestic violence to actors/perpetrators of domestic violence. The broadened definition of domestic violence, its nature and impact compelled the global community to acknowledge it as a crime, something that destroys the dignity and violates the rights of women who are worst and most common target of domestic violence. Though domestic violence is still not accepted as a crime, both by the victim as well as perpetrator, Infact it adversely effects the gender equation and negatively affects the wellbeing of family, society and the economy. The acknowledgement of domestic violence has destroyed many myths like man is not a protector rather a perpetrator/destroyer of the rights, dignity and wellbeing of women; regarding 'home' as 'poor mans' castle' is no more absolutely correct as it is equally a site of gender based opposition, exploitation and dis crimination. Lastly domestic violence is a product of human cruelty and the urge to maintain male dominance and chauvinism and not a natural, religious or cultural practice since time immemorial.

Thus domestic violence according to various theories means the following:

- ❖ Domestic violence is a kind of male coercion largely a product of patriarchy. It persists in a society governed and dominated by males that values male power due to its control over economic resources.
- ❖ The patriarchal structure of family creates and sustains the domestic violence.
- ❖ Domestic violence is a behavioral problem as a result of male hormones like testosterone.
- ❖ Violence often has roots in psychological reasons.
- ❖ Stressful situations in family and society lead to frustrations that manifest itself in form of violence.
- ❖ People with low esteem in most of the cases take recourse to violence in order.
- ❖ Domestic violence against women is most of the time a cultural practice.
- ❖ The economic and physical weakness make women helpless and vulnerable to violence.
- ❖ Many time stress and tension creates frustration resulting in aggressive behaviour particular in intra-family relations.

Similarly cultural definition of appropriate sex roles, expectation of roles within relationships, belief in inherent superiority of males, values that give men priorities, notion of family as a private sphere under the total control of men are also considered major factors for women's victimization. Other theories focus more on poor economic condition of offenders, which compels them to commit crime against women. It includes persons living in absolute poverty, lack of job opportunities, unfavorable frustrating

working condition. And bad housing. Similarly members of slum areas living a disorganized family life in absolute poverty can also be the potential victimizer. Thus women become the soft target of alienated and frustrated individual.

Feminist Theory: The social problem approach

This approach emerged during the decade of 1970s when women's movement was on its heights. The theory looks upon 'violence' as male coercion of women. The forms of violence may vary from each other like various forms of violence are rape, sexual assault, female infanticide, marital rape, and female circumcision etc. This theory believes that domestic violence prevails due to unequal power relations of men and women in the society and the family.^ Feminist theorists never use the term such as 'family violence' 'spousal abuse' 'marital violence' and 'conjugal violence' rather they advocate terms such as 'wife beating' 'domestic violence' 'battered women' and 'women abuse' to depict the phenomenon of domestic violence.^ The theory is critical of patriarchal structure that facilitates and supports male dominance in society, violence is a means to maintain male hegemony in the family. The consequent social structure, based on patriarchal values, male power and status, and devalues of the feminine, ultimately lead to the victimization of women. Also women's economic dependence is identified as the major cause of subordination as well as violence against them.

The Family System Theory:

This theory emerged during the decade of 1960s to 1980s when more and more scholars and researchers began to understand and analyse domestic violence from a sociological perspective which maintains that domestic violence or spousal abuse is one form of family violence. Other forms of domestic violence include child abuse, sibling abuse and parent abuse. This theoretical perspective asserts that the cause of spouse abuse lies in the structure of the contemporary family institution which is a fertile ground for violence. Though family is a private place so it hides violence which is due to lack of control on behaviour.^

Physiological Theory:

This theory focuses on nature of evolution and the genetic reasons which are responsible for violent male behaviour. It also emphasizes on brain structures, chemical imbalances, dietary deficiencies, and hormonal factors such as testosterone, for violence committed by males. Genetic and hormonal factors explain the reasons for the greater pre-disposition towards violence in men than in women. There are also some identified theories which have same relevance for understanding violence committed by an individual. These theories can be classified on the basis of three theoretical level of analysis.

- Psychiatric or psycho-pathological analysis.
- Socio-psychological analysis and
- Sociological or socio-cultural analysis

Psycho-Pathological Theory":

The psycho-pathological model focuses on the personality characteristics of offenders and victims as chief determinants of criminal violence. This model includes analysis that links mental illness, alcohol and other intra individual phenomenon to acts of violence. So, according to this theory causes of violence against women arise from the offender's psychological problem like depression, impulsiveness, uncontrolled emotions. This theory also urges that violence against women arises out of psychological problems of victims. This theory defines the characteristics of Perpetrators as weak pathologically jealous men with low self-esteem and experiencing insecurity about their masculinity.

Socio-psychological theories:

This model examines the types of everyday interactions, stressful situations or family interactional patterns which lead to violence. Whenever there is failure to achieve certain goal or end, frustrated perpetrator and his frustration turn into aggression. According to this theory aggression is always directed towards the source of frustration.

Frustration-Aggration Theory: This theory is stated by Dollard in 1939 to explain how frustration is linked to aggression. Whenever there is failure to achieve certain goal or end, perpetrator is frustrated and frustration turns into aggression. According to this theory aggression is always directed towards the source of frustration.^^

Perversion Theory:

According to Freud's early theory, 1949 perversion means essentially the persistence in the adult of infantile behaviour instead of adult behaviour. Infantile traits fail to undergo the normal process of integration during puberty but are not converted into neurotic symptoms. Violence can be the product of strong inborn drives or of pathological experiences in infancy or early childhood,"

Self-Attitude Theory:

This theory maintains that in a society culture or group that value violence, persons of low self-esteem performs the act of violence to maintain their images in the eyes of others and themselves too.'

Motive Attribution Theory:

This theory specifies the process used by actors to impute the motivations (dispositional state) of others. It explains how the structure of relations is such that there is a high probability of male violent intent being attributed to the actions of other individuals thereby setting in motion an escalating cycle of resentment and aggression.'

The Cycle Theory of Violence and Psycho-social theory of Learned

Helplessness:

Both of the theories are developed by Lenore Walker's. The cycle theory defines three distinct cycle or phase of violence like tension building stage, the acute battering incident and kindness/living behaviour. According to this theory in first stage when minor battering occur the women adapts, rationalizes and externalizes the problem. In second phase actual battering physically, emotionally and psychologically starts, whereas third phase includes love, affection, and promises by the husband never to repeat the incidents again. This phenomenon keeps on repeating in all battered women. The psycho-socio theory of learned helplessness focuses on the factors which reinforce battered women's victimizations. According to this theory the 'helplessness' of battered women compels them to accept the exploitative situations.'

Socio-cultural Theories:

This model provides a macro level analysis of criminal violence. It also examines criminal violence in terms of socially structured inequality and social and cultural attitudes and norms regarding anti-social behaviour and interpersonal relations.

Structural Theory:

This theory is developed to represent those social groups, which have typical levels of stress, deprivation and frustration and the sources of their disposal. According to this theory, individuals who have high stress with low resources would be more aggressive. The main cause of stress is being regarded as 'economic conditions', 'bad housing', 'poverty', lack of job opportunities and unfavorable and frustrating work conditions.

System Tension and Feedback System Theory:

This theory is developed by Straus in 1973 to explain intra-family violence. According to this theory violence is precipitated by factors such as stress and inter-individual conflict and is followed by consequences which maintain violence in family and in society.

Anomie Theory:

This theory is developed by Robert Merton in 1938. According to this theory, some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in

non-conformist rather than conformist conduct. When there is a tendency to overemphasize the goals without sufficient attention to institutional means, it leads to a willingness to use any means to achieve the goal, regardless of their legality. The theory delineates the relationship between one's social position, the strain which accompanies that position and the resulting deviant and non-deviant adaptations.'

Theory of subcultures of violence:

This theory explains the life circumstances of certain groups which compel them to commit violence. Infact violence is hidden in the values and norms of such people. The group living in such conditions quickly use force in inter personal relations. Those people are basically the members of slum areas, living a disorganized family life in absolute poverty, suspicion of other difficulty from police and fellow citizen etc. Therefore, this theory suggests that the situations of those people compel them to commit the act of violence.

Resource Theory:

This theory is developed by Goode in 1971 as the first theoretical approach to apply family violence. Goode states that all social systems rest to some degree of force or threat of violence, is used as a last resort when all the resources are exhausted to maintain or advance their interests. By applying this set of assumption to the family Goode explain that a husband who wants to be the dominant family member but had little education, job prestige or income and lacks interpersonal skills may be likely to resort to violence to be the dominant persons.

Patriarchy Theory:

This theory is developed by Dobash and Dobash in 1979 maintains that throughout the history violence has been systematically directed towards women. Economic and social process operate directly and indirectly to support a patriarchal social order, and family structure. According to this theory patriarchy leads to the subordination of women, supports a systematic violence against wives.

Social Learning Theory:

This theory which is developed by Albert Bandura asserts that human aggression and violence are learned conduct through direct experience by observing the behaviours of others and through imitation. Individual pick up such behavioral pattern, and act like the same."Therefore, Steele and Pollock (1974) and Bennie and Clare (1969) have maintained that abusive male adults are likely to have been raised in abusive homes. Being abused or ill treated as a child produces a personality disorder which socializes an individual a life pattern of violence and aggression."

Conflict and control Theories:

Scholars like Foucault (1975), Thompson (1977) and Rothman (1980) have presented a domination model of deviance. They highlighted the rules imposed on the powerless by the powerful. Radical and conflict sociologists like Quinney (1977) have argued that this attitude is to protect the interests of the dominant classes and to prevent them from pursuing their interests to monopolize it by the powerful. Similarly imposing various restrictions on women and compelling them to remain dependent on men economically, socially and emotionally is to make them realize that they are weak, powerless and 'others' in all respects stand as an example of this argument."

Exchange Theory:

This theory integrates the key elements of the diverse theories of human violence. This theory explains the growth of resentment, anger, hostility and violence when the principle of distributive justice is violated while applying the principle of exchange theory to explain violence in family (wife-beating, dowry death, and rape by a family member) Goode suggests that force is used more by those in the poorer classes partly because they have less alternative resources and partly because their socialization experiences lead them to depend more on force."

Interactionist Deviance Theory:

This theory exemplified by theorists such as Erikson (1964) Becker (1963), Chur (1971) and Lemert (1978) explains family violence in terms of sex role or gender norms, i.e. differential expectation for values, attitudes and behaviours as a function of one's gender. According to this prevalent sex role norms, a husband expects a 'good wife' to run the household smoothly, ensure children's well-mannered behaviour, avoid assertiveness and remain submissive to elders in the family. When women do not behave like male's ideal of wife, husbands use violence against them to make them conform to norms."

Multi-factor Theory:

An attempt has been made by Dr. Ram Ahuja (1998) to develop a theoretical model which would explain all types of violence against women. This model concentrates on the sociological analysis of social structural conditions. According to this model, the important condition which leads a person to women's victimization are status, frustrations, life stresses, career crisis and structural opportunities. Therefore, the man who assaults a woman physically or mentally is often the man who either feels at a disadvantage with women or who feels at an advantageous position in demanding a specific thing from a woman. He further maintains that violence is used by the people who are either frustrated or develop a superiority ego due to lack of adjustment, attachment and commitment under specific circumstances.

Some theories consider the psychological problem of the victim as the

major cause for the act of violence. According to these theories violence against women occurs due to the psychological problems of the offender like depression, impulsiveness, uncontrolled emotions, stresses, deprivation, frustration, career crises, and failure in achievement of goal/rewards. Similarly other characteristics of the offender like physically weak, pathological jealous and low self-esteem are also considered as the cause for committing violence. Some theories argue that genetic characteristics of men like brain structure, chemical imbalances, dietary deficiencies and hormonal factors sometimes also encourage them to commit crime against women. Though, undoubtedly these theories are helpful in understanding the causes of violence against women but at the same time many other related factors like legal and political have not been covered by any theory. Legal status of women either by written law and/or by practice, law regarding divorce, child custody, maintenance and inheritance, legal definition of rape and domestic abuse insensitive treatment of women and girls by police and judiciary and the low level of legal literacy should also be taken as the major cause of violence against women. There are also some political reasons, ignored by the investigators of the causes of crime against women like under representation of women in legislatures and decision making. Similarly, the theories which consider the psychological problems of the victim as a cause of violence seem to sympathize with the offender/ perpetrator who in majority of cases happen to be men not the victim. If poor economic condition is a cause for violence against women then economically poor women are the most backward section. Rather contrary economic status/weakness is more a cause of their victimization. So, if poor economic condition is taken as a cause of violence then theoretically women should be more aggressive and violent to men than, the vive-versa.

CONCLUTION

It seems as if different theories regarding violence against women wanted to make it conform that it is not the offender himself rather his social, economic, physical, cultural and environmental condition which compel him to commit crime against women. Thus, largely it is the unlimited/unrestricted power and authority of man that encourages him to keep 'his' woman in such a manner as he pleases to. Therefore, committing violence against women is nothing but a matter of honour to preserve the cultural and traditional stereotypes against women. The study of violence/domestic violence against women is a very complex issue. Therefore, any acceptable theory on violence/domestic violence should be comprehensive enough, to include both the psychological as well as the social aspects of the problem. To understand domestic violence one requires multidimensional approach in the light of psychological, cultural, social, economic and ethical aspects of the offender as well as the victims' life. No theory can be exhaustive or universal to the extent of being applicable to all cases, in all countries and in all cultural setups.

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