



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK IN SUPPORTING INDIAN WOMEN

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Abstract:

Domestic violence is a significant issue affecting millions of women in India, causing physical, emotional, and psychological harm. Despite legal provisions and social awareness campaigns, many women continue to endure violence due to cultural norms, economic dependency, and fear of social stigma. This research paper examines the role of social work in supporting women affected by domestic violence in India, focusing on interventions such as counseling, legal advocacy, shelter provisions, and community mobilization. The paper also discusses the challenges faced by social workers in addressing domestic violence, such as cultural resistance, limited resources, and institutional barriers. Despite these challenges, social work interventions have led to positive outcomes, helping women regain autonomy, secure legal protections, and overcome abusive situations. The paper calls for further efforts to strengthen legal protections, expand social work resources, and address societal attitudes towards domestic violence.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence, Social Work, Indian Women, Empowerment, Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), Gender Equality, Legal Advocacy*

Introduction:

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive and destructive forms of violence against women in India. Despite significant progress in women's rights and legal frameworks, millions of women across the country continue to face abuse within their homes, often in silence. Domestic violence in India manifests in various forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse, and affects women from all socio-economic backgrounds, including rural and urban settings. Cultural norms, societal expectations, and economic dependency often prevent women from seeking help or reporting abuse. This creates a cycle of violence, where women endure physical and psychological harm without the means or support to escape.

In response to this crisis, social work has played a pivotal role in supporting women who are victims of domestic violence. Social workers engage with victims on multiple levels—offering emotional support, legal advocacy, shelter, and facilitating access to social services. They work closely with women to help them regain their autonomy, make informed decisions, and ultimately escape abusive situations. One of the most significant legal advancements in India in recent years has been the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), passed in 2005. This legislation aims to protect women from all forms of domestic violence and provides them with legal recourse for securing their safety and well-being. Social workers have played an instrumental



role in educating women about this Act and helping them navigate the legal system to seek protection.

This paper aims to examine the role of social work in addressing domestic violence and supporting Indian women, with a focus on interventions. It will explore the various strategies employed by social workers, including counseling, legal aid, shelter services, and community outreach, to help women break free from abusive relationships. Additionally, the paper will examine the legal and societal challenges that continue to impede the effectiveness of social work interventions, despite the positive changes brought about by the PWDVA. By reviewing the evolution of social work practices and their impact on the lives of domestic violence survivors, this paper seeks to underscore the crucial role of social workers in advocating for gender equality and women's rights in India.

Objective of Research:

- 1) To examine the role of social work in supporting Indian women who are victims of domestic violence.
- 2) To explore the nature and prevalence of domestic violence in India, with an emphasis on its various forms, causes, and consequences for women's physical, emotional, and social well-being.
- 3) To analyze the impact of the legal framework, particularly the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), in providing legal protection and support for women affected by domestic violence.
- 4) To evaluate the role of social work professionals in offering practical interventions, including counseling, legal aid, shelter services, and advocacy for women in abusive relationships.
- 5) To examine the effectiveness of social work interventions, such as community-based support programs, awareness campaigns, and empowerment initiatives, in helping women recover from violence and regain autonomy.

Literature Review:

This literature review delves into the multifaceted issue of domestic violence in India and the pivotal role of social work in addressing it. Beginning with Desai's (2005) analysis of rural challenges, the works span several years, highlighting the growing awareness and response frameworks. Mohan and Tiwari (2006), Vaid (2006), and Chaudhary and Patel (2007) emphasize legal support and empowerment, pointing out the cultural and logistical hurdles faced by victims. Agnihotri and Sharma (2007) and Bhatia (2008) underline the importance of holistic approaches, incorporating legal, social, and psychological support. Kumari (2008) and Kaur and Gupta (2009) explore empowerment strategies, while Singh and Gupta (2009) address ongoing challenges. Across these studies, a consensus emerges: social workers play a transformative role in supporting victims through legal aid, counseling, and advocacy, despite persistent barriers like stigma and resource scarcity. The review underscores the need for enhanced interventions to empower women and combat domestic violence effectively.

Research Methodology:

This study explores the role of social work in assisting Indian women affected by domestic violence. Using a descriptive research design, it collected data on the prevalence, nature,



and impact of domestic violence, as well as the effectiveness of existing strategies and legal frameworks.

Domestic Violence and the Role of Social Work in Supporting Indian Women:

Domestic violence is a significant issue in India, affecting millions of women, with the majority being victims of physical, sexual, emotional, or economic abuse. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3, 2005-06) revealed that around 37% of women aged 15-49 experienced physical violence, while 42% reported emotional violence. However, many cases remain unreported due to societal stigma and fear of retribution.

The causes of domestic violence are multifaceted, often rooted in patriarchal attitudes, economic dependency, lack of education, and the normalization of violence within the home. Women in rural and semi-urban areas, especially those with lower levels of education and financial resources, are particularly vulnerable.

India has taken steps toward addressing domestic violence through the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), which recognizes domestic violence as a human rights violation and provides civil remedies such as protection orders, residence orders, and compensation for victims. However, the law's implementation has been hindered by a lack of awareness, insufficient training for law enforcement, and socio-cultural barriers.

Social workers play a crucial role in supporting Indian women by engaging in direct practice, advocacy, and community mobilization. They provide direct services to women who have experienced domestic violence, including counseling, crisis intervention, and offering emotional support. They assist women in navigating legal systems, helping them understand their rights under the PWDVA and other related laws. They connect women to vital resources, including shelters, healthcare, and financial aid.

Community education and awareness campaigns are often engaged in by social workers to raise awareness about domestic violence and the rights of women. Empowerment and skill development are long-term goals of social work intervention, helping women build self-esteem, assertiveness, and decision-making skills. Collaboration with other professionals helps create a multi-faceted support system for women.

Challenges faced by social workers include cultural resistance, underreporting, limited resources, and legal and institutional barriers. Addressing these issues requires continued advocacy, improved resource allocation, and community-based interventions to combat domestic violence effectively.

Domestic Violence in India:

Domestic violence in India is a multifaceted issue influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors. It involves physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, with physical abuse often resulting in marital rape. Psychological abuse involves verbal abuse, humiliation, threats, emotional manipulation, and controlling behaviors, leading to long-term mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Economic abuse restricts a woman's access to money, denying her financial independence, and forcing her to hand over earnings or property.

Causes of domestic violence in India include deeply entrenched gender inequalities, economic stress, alcohol dependence, family conflicts, cultural norms and social stigma, fear of retaliation, and legal barriers. The patriarchal structure often places women in subordinate roles,



leading to abuse. Economic pressures, particularly in low-income households, can exacerbate domestic violence. Alcoholism and substance abuse are often linked to increased domestic violence, with the loss of control accompanied by excessive drinking often escalating instances of abuse.

Challenges in addressing domestic violence include underreporting, limited legal support, economic dependency, and cultural and social constraints. Many women are reluctant to report abuse due to fear of shame, retaliation, or disbelief by authorities, especially in rural areas where access to resources is limited. Law enforcement's enforcement of laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the Dowry Prohibition Act remains weak, and many women lack awareness of their legal rights. Economic dependency on the abuser restricts their ability to seek help or leave the abusive relationship.

The Legal Framework:

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, is a landmark legislation in India aimed at addressing the widespread issue of domestic violence. Prior to this, domestic violence was primarily addressed under existing laws related to cruelty and dowry-related violence. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) - Section 498A criminalized cruelty by a husband or his family towards a wife, but it was often criticized for its narrow scope, which focused mainly on physical violence and emotional cruelty in the context of marital relationships. It did not extend to other forms of abuse such as sexual, economic, or psychological abuse, and did not offer a clear framework for protecting women who were not married but cohabiting with an abuser.

The PWDVA was passed to provide a more comprehensive approach to domestic violence, recognizing the multifaceted nature of abuse. Key provisions of the PWDVA include the right to residence, protection orders, financial relief, counseling and shelter homes, and a comprehensive definition of domestic violence. These provisions ensure that women facing a variety of forms of abuse can seek legal protection and support.

The Prevention of Women's Violence against Women (PWDVA) in India faces several challenges, including cultural resistance, lack of awareness, reluctance to report abuse, inefficient implementation, and legal delays. Cultural attitudes, particularly in rural areas, discourage women from reporting abuse or seeking legal help due to patriarchal attitudes and the stigma surrounding divorce and separation. Lack of awareness, particularly in rural areas, makes it difficult for victims to take action and access necessary resources. Social stigma, fear of retaliation, and economic dependency on abusers also discourage women from reporting abuse. Delays in the legal process can lead to prolonged suffering and discourage women from pursuing justice. Additionally, there is a shortage of shelters and counseling centers, particularly in rural areas, which limits the effectiveness of the Act in providing comprehensive support to victims. These factors contribute to the challenges faced by the PWDVA in India.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 represents a significant step forward in addressing the issue of domestic violence in India. However, its successful implementation is hindered by cultural attitudes, lack of awareness, legal delays, and inadequate resources. To ensure the effectiveness of the Act, it is crucial to focus on raising awareness, improving law enforcement training, providing better support systems, and changing societal attitudes toward gender-based violence.



The Role of Social Work in Supporting Victims of Domestic Violence:

Social workers play a crucial role in addressing domestic violence by providing practical and emotional support to victims. Their interventions span various aspects of recovery, empowerment, and systemic change.

Social workers offer counseling and emotional support to women affected by domestic violence, helping them process their trauma, understand the dynamics of abuse, and work through the emotional and psychological effects of violence. They help women recognize the cycle of abuse, build self-esteem and confidence, and improve coping mechanisms to manage emotional distress caused by abuse.

Social workers are vital in bridging the gap between victims and the legal system, ensuring they have access to their legal rights and protections under the law. They inform victims about their legal rights, assist in legal procedures, seek protection orders and compensation, and advocate on behalf of victims.

Social workers also help victims find resources to rebuild their lives, such as shelter services, rehabilitation and reintegration, and social reintegration. They facilitate the process of rehabilitation by connecting women to vocational training programs, educational opportunities, and employment services, which are critical for financial independence and long-term security.

Community-based interventions are another area where social workers facilitate change. They collaborate with local organizations, women's groups, and panchayats to raise awareness about domestic violence and challenge systemic issues that perpetuate abuse. They also educate communities about the signs of abuse, available support systems, and the legal rights of women.

Social workers advocate for policy change at the grassroots level, pushing for more robust legal frameworks, stronger law enforcement training, and better support systems for women facing abuse. They empower women through collective action by organizing women into support groups and fostering a sense of solidarity.

However, social workers face significant challenges, such as cultural and social resistance, limited resources, and underreporting and reluctance to seek help. To address these challenges and enhance the support systems available to victims of domestic violence, ongoing efforts are required. Overall, social workers are integral to the fight against domestic violence in India, providing essential support to empower victims, improve access to justice, and provide necessary support for rebuilding their lives.

Challenges Faced by Social Workers:

Social workers play a crucial role in supporting victims of domestic violence, but they face numerous challenges due to cultural, systemic, and resource-related issues. These include patriarchal norms, lack of resources, victim-blaming attitudes, and institutional barriers.

Patriarchal norms in both rural and urban communities create resistance to acknowledging domestic violence, leading to shame, guilt, and social stigma for women who experience it. The pressure to maintain family honor also complicates the situation, especially in rural areas where it is prioritized over women's safety.

Lack of funding and infrastructure for social work interventions makes it difficult to establish and maintain essential support systems, such as shelter homes, legal aid services, and psychological support programs. Limited access in remote areas limits the reach of social work



interventions and makes it difficult for social workers to provide comprehensive and consistent support.

Victim-blaming attitudes suggest that women "deserve" abuse due to their behavior, dress, or failure to fulfill societal expectations. Fear of retaliation from the community places more responsibility on the victim to maintain relationships than on the abuser to stop the violence.

Legal and institutional barriers, such as inconsistent implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, delays in legal proceedings, lack of awareness among law enforcement, and inadequate training for judicial personnel, further complicate the work of social workers.

Effectiveness of Social Work Interventions:

Social work interventions have significantly impacted the lives of women affected by domestic violence, raising awareness, securing better legal outcomes, and empowering them to regain their independence. These interventions include raising public consciousness, encouraging women to speak out against abuse, challenging traditional patriarchal norms, providing legal aid and advocacy, helping women navigate the legal system, supporting in filing complaints, securing financial relief, and improving legal literacy. Empowered women also benefit from counseling, emotional support, and vocational training, helping them overcome the psychological and emotional toll of abuse, rebuild their self-worth and confidence, and prevent them from returning to their abusers out of financial necessity. Social workers also assist in reintegrating women into their communities, helping them overcome social stigma and isolation.

However, the sustainability of these interventions depends on addressing the root causes of domestic violence, such as challenging patriarchy, addressing gender inequality, addressing economic dependency, and strengthening institutional and legal support. Patriarchal systems place women in subordinate roles within families and society, which can be addressed through broader efforts to challenge and dismantle these norms. Empowering women economically, socially, and politically is essential for preventing domestic violence and enabling long-term change. Systemic change, including changes in labor market policies and access to education and training, is necessary.

Conclusion:

Domestic violence in India is a pervasive issue influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. Despite legal advancements like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and social workers' efforts, it remains underreported, especially in rural areas. Social workers have played a crucial role in supporting victims, offering counseling, legal aid, shelter, and advocacy. Their efforts have increased awareness, challenged social norms, and empowered women to break free from abusive situations. However, challenges such as cultural resistance, victim-blaming, limited resources, and institutional barriers persist. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act's inconsistent implementation highlights the need for better enforcement, education, and training. The sustainability of social work interventions depends on broader societal changes, including dismantling patriarchal structures, addressing gender inequality, and promoting economic empowerment for women. Addressing the root causes of domestic violence and creating a more equitable society for women is essential for lasting change.



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