

Journal of Political Science

(A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access International Journal)

ISSN 2362-1273 (Print); ISSN 2773-8132 (Online)

Volume 21, February 2021, pp. 75-85

<https://www.ejournalofpncampus.edu.np/journals/ips/>

Domestic Violence and Its Impact among Married Dalit Women: A Study of Kalika 28, Pokhara Metropolitan City

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v21i0.35265>

Received 12 December, 2020, Reviewed 15 December 2020, Published 1 February 2021

Abstract

A study was carried out the domestic violence against Dalit women of Kalika, of Pokhara Metropolitan City, Gandaki Province, Nepal. Domestic violence is a social issue of inquiry. In this context, this study was made a comprehensive effort to explore the forms, factors and consequences of married Dalit women in the study area. Twenty victim women were chosen as respondents for this study. Using different tools for data collection like in-depth interview, observation as well as different sources of secondary data. this study was more guided by Marxist feminism and more qualitative. There are so many incidences of domestic violence against Dalit and vulnerable married women that blocked the progress and prosperity. Unfortunately, women are even neglected by their husbands and in-laws and their families. Study found that majority of husbands' alcoholic habit, their feeling of superiority, patriarchal social structure, re-marriage and extramarital affair were the main reasons that kept women as victims of the society. Physical, psychological and unwanted sexual abuse of husband, along with unproductive engagement of women in household activities, unwanted pregnancy and deprivation of various needs are major areas of women's subordination among the Dalit married women.

Keywords: *Gynecological, mental torture, qualitative, psychological violence, victim*

Introduction

The term violence against women refers to a violence of one's personhood, mental, physical, psychological and sexual harm or freedom of movement. It includes any kind of mental, physical, dignity or human rights operation. There is an unfair power relation between men and women, in the society. Violence is an act that shows cruel identification of human beings that has been happening in many parts of the society. Even though our civilization and development has been rapidly flourishing, we have not yet eliminated violence physically and mentally. This process has been happening frequently on different levels and

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symbolizes the disharmony in a society. Violence against women or gender based violence is a very complex, widespread issue (Ortoleva, & Lewis, 2012).

Women are often in great danger in the place where they should be safest: within families. For many, home is where they face a regime of terror and violence at the hands of somebody they should be able to trust. Those victimized suffer physically and psychologically. They are unable to make their own decisions, voice their own opinions. Their human rights are denied and their lives are stolen from them by the ever-present threat of violence (Richie, 2012). Violence in the domestic sphere is usually perpetrated by males who are or who have been, in position of trust and intimacy and power, husbands, boyfriends, fathers, fathers-in-law, brothers, uncles, sons or other relations. Domestic violence is in most cases violence perpetrated by men against women. Women can also be perpetrators, but their actions account for a small percentage of domestic violence (Panda, 2014).

Violence against women (VAW) is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women. Violence is a universal scourge that threatens the life, health and happiness of all human beings. This includes threats, coercion and the arbitrary deprivation of resources (True, 2012).

Nepal consists of diverse ecological, ethnic, cultural and multi-lingual societies. Most of the people are in rural areas who have their own cultures and values regarding the status of women and men which are unequal. Women are considered as second class citizens in this patriarchal society. Thus, most of the families are men-headed and treat the women as commodities and child producing machines (Choudhary, Brewis, Wutich, & Udas, 2020). Some of the common forms of violence against women in Nepal identified are: traditional violence (*Deuki, Jhuma, Badi, Chaupadi*); violence based on misbelieve (torture given for allegedly practicing witchcraft); sexual violence (trafficking, forced intercourse and sexual harassment); family violence (domestic violence, polygamy, childhood marriage); dowry related violence (mental and physical torture) (Adhikari, & Tamang, 2010).

Dalit women are most susceptible to domestic violence, which is the most marginalized among marginalized groups in rural areas of Nepal. They suffer from multiple forms of discrimination as Dalits, as members of a poor underclass and as women. The endemic gender and caste discrimination that Dalit women face is the outcome of severely imbalanced social, economic and political power equations. Dalit women in Nepal constitute seven percent of the total population of the country. They are excluded in state mechanisms, governing structures and the political sphere. The literacy rate of Dalit women is 34.8% and their access to higher education is only 11.8% as compared to 54.5% of the total population of women in Nepal. They are victims of severe violence as about 49.1% of Dalit women encounter violence and only of 4.4% of the incidents are reported to the police (FEDO, 2013).

Feminism

Feminist perspective is related to social, cultural and political movements, theories and concerned with gender inequalities and equal rights for women. According to some, the history of feminism consists of three waves. The first wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s, and the third extends from the

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1990s to the present. Feminist Theory developed from the feminist movement. It takes a number of forms in a variety of disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history and feminist literary criticism (Pande, 2018). Feminist discourse is an addition of feminism interested in academic or theoretical fields. It encompasses work in a diversity of disciplines, as well as anthropology, sociology, economics, women's studies; literary etc. Feminist theory aims to recognize gender disparity and focuses on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Whereas provided that an analysis of these social and political relationships, much of feminist theory also focuses on the endorsement of women's rights and wellbeing. Themes explored in feminist theory include discrimination, stereotype, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy (Abbott, Tyler, & Wallace, 2006).

Methodology

This study aims to explore the experience of domestic violence by Married Dalit women in Kalika village of Pokhara Metropolitan city, Gandaki Province, Nepal. This research is more qualitative nature and mainly guided by the Marxist feminism. Study focused on understanding of the live of domestic violence and its impacts in the study area and population. Twenty victim women with experiences of violence were selected for in-depth interview and observation in the Kalika. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents. The structured interview checklist was used as a research instrument. The checklist dealt with demographic and qualitative data of the respondents which include caste, gender, age, class, number of children, education of victim and husband, causes and impact experience by victim women etc. To ensure that the collected data are valid and trustworthy, the observation tool was tested for face and content validity by a researcher in its capacity and evaluation. Based on the field work one month 2019 may essential modifications were made in the preparation of the concluding paper.

Results and discussion

This section analyzes and discusses the prevalence of domestic violence against Dalit married women of Kalika Village. The main causes and consequences, main types and coping strategy and impact of domestic violence against women are reviewed. The case studies that may be closely linked with domestic violence against married Dalit women are presented and explained in detail. This is closely related to gather information with the research questions and objectives.

Types of Domestic Violence

Physical Violence

Physical violence can be defined by the following behaviors: slapping, kicking, beating, pushing, attacking with weapons or other similar activities. It is the abuse involving contact intended to cause feelings of intimidation, hurt, damage, or other physical suffering or bodily harm (Pande, 2018). Physical abuse can also include behaviors such as denying the victim of medical care when needed, depriving the victim of sleep or other functions

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necessary to live, or forcing the victim to engage in drug/alcohol use against his/her will. If a person is suffering from any physical harm, then they are experiencing physical abuse.

Nearly all of the respondents

"My husband went to work in Malaysia and for some months did not send me money. At that time, I sold my earring for money without asking him. When he returned, he got wind of it, and pushed me. My head collided with the wall and I was injured. Since then, I get frequent headaches and cannot work outside. I have been taking medicines since then." (Name Changed-Sabina).

In one of the case studies Rima (name changed) narrated her experiences on physical violence.

"I am 27 years old now, I have two sons. The elder one is 7 years and younger is 5 years old. I married 9 years ago when I was 16. My husband is my father's elder sister's (Phupu's) son. We had a love marriage, and when I was young; I gave birth to my first son after one year of my marriage. After some months, when I was pregnant, my husband went to foreign country for income. He had to return back after two years. When he came home, after few months he started to beat me. I could find no reason except that he would be drunk and quarrel with me each evening. Without any reason he was always beat me, and again, I got pregnant with my second son. We were both not happy, but I gave birth to him. My husband would sometimes weep uncontrollably. One day he pushed me and I collided with the wall. I became unconscious and have not been able to do physical work since. I regularly feel dizzy and have to take medicines. I live only for my children now"

In this case, unemployment, poverty and alcoholism can be seen as the main causes. Even in cases of love marriage, domestic violence can be seen to arise. Physical violence is also prevalent in this case. Long-term effect of the physical violence has been caused to the victim. Patriarchy is the root cause of all this violence against women. It is essential that we recognize legitimate feminist findings. While patriarchy may not be overarching cause of all abuse, it is an enormously significant factor, because in traditional patriarchy males have a disproportionate share of power. At its core domestic violence is the abuse of male physical and often social/religious power.

Psychological Violence

Intimidating and threatening actions, abandonment, confinement, persecution, surveillance, verbal abuse and mental torture generally fall under psychological abuse (Leray, & Vila, 2018). These actions directly or indirectly harm the emotional state of the victim and may lead to other severe things.

Many of the women interviewed have experienced different forms of psychological abuse. Some have been persecuted due to lack of birth of sons. Some reported that their mothers-in-law were responsible for violence done against them, because they didn't bring much dowry. Some respondents indicated that if their maternal home was rich, they would face less abuse. When asking for money for supplies, many faced the remark to bring money from their maternal home.

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One respondent Kali (Name changed) stated

“I experienced psychological violence from my husband at different stages of our life together. It happened quite frequently. As soon as he got disturbed, he immediately became aggressive to me. And it has been lasting for a long time, nearly 14 years. In my case, the main cause was dowries. My husband’s family members provoked him. My father-in-law was less responsible for this, mainly mother-in-law influenced my husband.”

In one of the case studies, one respondent Sita (Name changed) stated her experiences on dowry related psychological violence:

“I am 25 years old. I was arranged to marry and lived in Kalika, when I was 20. I have one daughter now. I live in my maternal home nowadays. After a few months of marriage, my mother-in-law commented about fewer dowries. My husband started to listen to his mother. One and a half years after my marriage, I gave birth to a daughter. After a few months, my mother-in-law and husband began to scold me. My husband also started to beat me, with the consent of his mother. My husband was unemployed and he has gone to foreign country just one year ago. After that my mother-in-law and brother-in-law both started to scold me. I complained to my maternal home and my mother called to me stay there. But my family members still try to torture me over the phone”.

This case depicts that the Dalit community also has dowry system like in Brahmin and Chhetri communities. The women who bring fewer dowries from maternal homes are sometimes tortured and neglected by their new families. This case is such an example. The mother-in-law and other family members are also seen as perpetrators. It also shows that traditional practices are thriving even in the younger generation.

Sexual Violence

Being physically forced to have sexual intercourse against will, having intercourse because of fear or being forced to do something degrading or humiliating are all forms of sexual violence. It is a type of violence that women have more trouble reporting to other people than physical or emotional.

Most of the respondents initially hesitated to talk about this matter. After some persuasion, some revealed that when their husband came drunk to home and tried to have intercourse, and they denied it, they were forced or sometimes beaten. Some husbands would be interested in sex even when their wives were pregnant, had small babies or were sick. None of the women knew about marital rape and did not know that the act is illegal.

25 years old Damanti (Name changed) said:

"When my husband got drunk then he started to have romance with me, at the time of pregnancy which I really did not want and was physically unable, but he wouldn't stop. And the more I refused, the more I faced physical abuse.

Factors of Domestic violence

Patriarchy

The social relation of power between the members of the society on the basis of gender is called patriarchy. It relies on different means such as violence or indirectly, laws to

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perpetuate inequality. Patriarchy influences power relation, whether they are abusive or not. It is a social system that transfers power from the father to the eldest male child. The main causes of women's rights abuse in patriarchal societies are a lack of awareness and education. Educated women become more aware of what is right and what is wrong. Patriarchal societies are traditional and limit women of their power to realize their full potential.

The preference for son was described by respondents as one of the things present in their society. According to religious beliefs, sons are the ones who give funeral rites and open the doors to heaven. Also, males are the ones who carry on the lineage while daughters are seen as temporary guests who will go to other households. So, at the time of birth, extra importance was placed even by the mothers on their baby being a son. This is an example of patriarchy prevalent in the Nepali society. This case study portrays incidents of violence related to son preference.

“I got married when I was 15 years old to a 27-year-old man. His first wife had given birth to five daughters but no son. So, my husband had married me to get a son. At first, I did not have any such idea. I also gave birth to a daughter four years after my marriage. I was also abused after this like his first wife. So, I returned to my maternal home. Later, he apologized and convinced my parents to return me to my home. Again he repeated that kind of behaviour with me. Then I gave birth to a son, and my tortures stopped. I had already begun to heavily drink and smoke by then. This was in the past. Due to our age difference, I am an early widow now” - Madhu.

In the case of this victim due to preference for son over daughter, the husband of the woman remarried. After she faced abuse, she coped by adopting negative health behaviors such as drinking and smoking. Large age difference between the husband and the wife also caused the victim to face widowhood at an early age.

Poverty

Poverty affects all members of Dalit households, but because of gender discrimination, poverty affects women and men differently: because of traditional property ownership practices which favor sons and husbands over wives and daughters, or because of the preference for educating boys. In poor families, extreme dependence of women upon men to fulfill their financial needs is present. This is especially true of the Dalit community as described by the respondents. Poverty acts as a factor to cause more power imbalance between men and women in the society.

As described by the respondents, their financial status is very poor. There is lack of property, education, skill and employment. This further deepens them into poverty. Most respondents are limited to household chores and rearing children. A few have performed wage labor. So, they are economically dependent upon males. Due to low income, it is hard to fulfill all the needs of the family. And, arguments become common related to money.

Cultural tradition

Traditional norms and values play a vital role in the family life. Cultural practices and frequent alcohol abuse by men are seen as one of the major factors for violence.

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Traditionally, violence is justified on the grounds that the husband has the right to discipline his wife. When a woman thinks that her husband is cheating on her, she is not allowed, according to culture to ask him about it.

It was found in the study area that many cultures and traditions present have affected violence. Preference for sons, cultural dominance of males, inheritance of property and lineage by males, gender discrimination, marriage system, rituals like wearing of white clothes by widows, dowry system, are some cultures that seem to be factors affecting domestic violence. Two of the women interviewed were widows who expressed that they felt especially insecure in the society after their widowhood.

Rita who has passed grade twelve stated:

“Traditions have been mentioned and traditionally it is part of our mentality that man should be violent to women. Woman is raised to be dependent on man. The inheritance of property also passes to men and that causes violence”.

Unplanned pregnancy

Unplanned pregnancy is widely present in rural communities, especially where women are uneducated and have a low standard of living. This affects reproductive health. Most of the respondents replied that they had to give birth to children unwillingly. This is because of their lack of awareness and understanding, and superiority of male decision. Also, due to the preference of male child, more pregnancies are present. The perception that permanent family planning measures are potentially harmful also increases the chance of pregnancy. Their use of contraceptives is also limited due to unwillingness and shyness in the society.

Manisha said:

"I have been married for seven years. I have two sons, of ages 4 and 6. Then I did not want to have any more children and said to my husband that he should do permanent family planning. But he disagreed, saying that he would be physically weak due to operation and I again gave birth to a son."

In-laws Supporting Violence

The Nepalese society is traditionally a society with joint family system. So, mothers-in-law can also be supporters or even perpetrators. They dominate the daughters-in-law and try to exert control over them.

Some respondents who stay with their mothers-in-law reported that their mothers-in-law would try to exert power over them, scolding them and sometimes talk trash about them to their husbands. This, in turn, leads to the husbands abusing them physically and verbally. For example, some mothers-in-law convince their sons that the dowry brought by their wives is very less and they overspend and overindulge.

Muna (name changed) said:

"I am a single now; I have four children. One is daughter and the others are sons. My husband passed away three years ago in a bus accident and I got some money from

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insurance. But I have no land or shelter for earning and caring for my children. I have spent that money for my children but my mother-in-law always tortured me for money which I didn't give her".

Unemployment

Many of the respondents and their husbands are unemployed. The study has found out that some of the respondents' husbands are engaged in foreign employment in Gulf countries. Some perform daily wage labor. Few are involved in agriculture due to the lack of own agricultural land in Dalit community. Unemployment leads to poverty, and alcohol abuse, which in turn lead to abuse of women. Feminist perspective of class is closely related to economic status and the findings of this study support this logic where unemployment has played a vital role in augmenting domestic violence.

Jealousy

The evidence linking jealousy to violence is reviewed. The violence of jealousy is predominantly vented on the partner rather than the actual or supposed rival. Men are responsible for the serious injuries resulting from jealousy; this may reflect less a quality of male jealousy and more the qualities of male aggression.

Many respondents stated that their husbands and mothers-in-law get jealous when they go out, talk in mobiles, or spend money. When they talk with other males, their husbands get angry, and abuse them. This is especially true for young women.

Alcohol Use

Alcohol harm is experienced not only by the drinkers but also by those around them. There is a strong relationship between alcohol and domestic abuse, violence and sexual assault.

Nearly all of the respondents' drink alcohol. When drunk, they come to their homes and start to quarrel or abuse their wives. They try to force their wives into unwanted sex, and when their wives refuse, arguments ensue. Much money is also spent in drink, which increases poverty.

The Perpetrators

The husband is seen as the main perpetrator by most of the respondents and in-laws are other perpetrators in the family. It is necessary to review the social, educational and financial status of the perpetrators to gain valuable insight into domestic violence. Most husbands have low financial status, are barely literate and have low social and occupational status. Perpetrators are those people who inflict violence upon the victims. The violence against Dalit married woman may be inflicted by their husband, in-laws or other people. Victims are reluctant to file a case and talk against the perpetrators as they feel threat and shame if the perpetrators are their own husbands. They are also afraid of their future as they

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depend upon their family. Mother-in-laws also are seen as perpetrators in the Dalit community.

Impact of Domestic Violence

Physical Health Problems

Physical violence may cause different bodily problems to the victims. Notably, if the scale of physical harm done by perpetrators is large, lasting health impacts could be present upon them.

Some respondents have had serious injuries that lasted for a long time due to beating by their husbands. Most were harmed physically. Women were seem malnourished and aren't strong enough to earn. One woman was pushed by her husband, and she hit her head. This caused frequent dizziness and headaches, and forced her to take medications.

Mental Health Problems

The mental health of victims of violence is generally affected, whatever be the mode of violence. Many respondents seem to have mental health problems. They suffer from loneliness, depression, hopelessness, fear from their perpetrators, weird behavior, incessant anger, etc. Some of these effects further incite violence upon the women. This may also harm the children and other family members.

Reproductive Health Problems

All the forms of violence can lead to different reproductive health problems. Physical and sexual violence may cause health problems directly, whereas emotional violence can cause problems indirectly. Three of the women reported that they had miscarriage a child. Unwanted pregnancies are seen in many of the women due to not using contraceptives or family planning measures. Some had premature birth and gave birth to low weight baby. One respondent suffered from pelvic inflammatory disease. The old respondents had prolapsed.

Negative Health Behavior

Such negative health behaviors could be observed in most respondents too. Nearly all consume tobacco related products. Some victims are the older women, regularly intake alcohol. Some neglect their basic health problems too.

Babita (name changed) said:

"I am suffering from psychological torture by husband. Because he got married to me second, his previous wife gave him only daughters, so he married to me. I also gave birth to a daughter, so I started being abused."

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Problems Passed Down to Children

The children who witness domestic violence in their families may be affected in different ways. They generally develop mental health problems and psychological defects. Some may grow up with the notion that violence is normal and expected whereas other may suffer from depression or anger.

Some respondents felt that their children were affected by the violence they were facing. They fear that the future of the children may be hampered by the situation that they are forced to grow up in. Some of the women also acknowledged that they had, at times, scolded or mistreated their own children due to the violence they were facing.

Discussion

The main factors responsible for domestic violence as seen in this study are patriarchal social structure and socialization, poverty, lack of awareness, low education, cultural norms and values and traditional practices. Economic status can be seen as an important cause for perpetration of violence. Due to poverty, the Dalit women have little education, lack technical skills and are dependent upon males for money. Also, due to cultural norms and values such as the marriage system, dowry system, widow system, and different rituals and so on, the women are exploited. The older women tend to accept this supremacy of males whereas the younger are unable to act against it. Most women feel that they need to be good homemakers, so they cannot be independent of their families. Additionally, when the women, especially younger ones, were seen talking with other people and in mobile phones, their husbands have shown aggression. The husbands are also said to inflict violence when intoxicated. The main perpetrator is definitely the husband, and mother-in-laws in some cases.

Many consequences result due to domestic violence. Some women have developed negative health behaviors like intake of alcohol and tobacco, negligence of basic health problems, etc. as a result of violence. Sometimes, the children in the families have also been affected and have developed symptoms such as irrational fear, isolation, and moodiness and so on. Violence has also resulted in depression, loneliness, hopelessness and fear in the victims. Miscarriages, unwanted pregnancies, premature birth and low weight babies are also some effects. One respondent reported having pelvic inflammatory disease. Many older women had prolapsed. Such consequences could be found out due to the influence of domestic violence.

Conclusion

This study envisages patriarchy and power imbalance were the major causes of domestic violence against Dalit married women in Kalika 28, Pokhara Metropolitan City. Due to cultural norms and traditions, women have been historically oppressed in the Dalit community. Married Dalit women are suffering from physical, psychological, and sexual violence. Majority of the perpetrator was found husband along with mother-in-law and in-laws' families. There is no other alternative for these women to escape from torture, tension, depression, and other mental problems as a domestic violence.

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The findings of this study is in line with the Marxist feminist theory as it supports the power imbalances between husbands and wives, is one of the prime components of domestic violence. The study also confirms the feminist socialization theory in which gender roles defined by society and their childhood rearing are assumed to be the main reason for being husband as a powerful and treated as breadwinners in the patriarchal family. Thus usually majority of the Dalit husband exercise the rights of drinking alcohol, which automatically puts their wives at high risk of facing domestic violence.

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