



Violence Against Women

Why in News?

National Crime Record Bureau report shows stark increase in violence against women in India in the forms of dowry deaths, acts of sexual harassment, torture, rapes and domestic violence.

Violence against Women

- **The United Nations** defines **violence against women** as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."
- Violence against women is a social, economic, developmental, legal, educational, human right, and health (physical and mental) issue.
- It is a preventable cause of **morbidity and mortality in women**.

Violence against women occurs throughout the life cycle from prebirth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood to old age.

Facts and Findings

- As per **World Health Organization (WHO)** findings about **1 in 3 (35%) women** worldwide have experienced either **physical or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence** in their lifetime.
- Violence against women - particularly **intimate partner violence and sexual violence** - is a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights.
- Globally, **38% of murders of women** are committed by a **male intimate partner**.
- Violence can negatively affect women's **physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health**, and may increase the risk of acquiring HIV in some settings.

Predisposing Factors

- Men are more likely to perpetrate violence if they have **low education, a history of child maltreatment, exposure to domestic violence against their mothers, harmful use of alcohol, unequal gender norms** including attitudes accepting of violence, and a sense of entitlement over women.
- Women are more likely to experience intimate partner violence if they have **low education, exposure to mothers being abused by a partner, abuse during childhood, and attitudes accepting violence, male privilege, and women's subordinate status**.
- There is evidence that **advocacy and empowerment counselling interventions**, as well as home visitation are promising in preventing or reducing intimate partner violence against women.
- **Situations of conflict, post conflict and displacement may exacerbate existing violence**, such as by intimate partners, as well as non-partner sexual violence, and may also lead to new forms of violence against women.

Causes

- **Gender Disparity:** is one of the **deep rooted cause** of violence against women that put women at risk of several forms of violence.
 - **Discriminatory gender norms and gender stereotypes** results into structural inequality.
- **Psychiatric Morbidity:** Generally refers to the incidence of both **physical and psychological deterioration** as a result of a mental or psychological condition, generally caused due to the consumption of alcohol.
 - **Regular consumption of alcohol** by the husband has been strongly associated with poor mental health of women.
 - **Alcohol operates as a situational factor**, increasing the likelihood of violence by reducing inhibitions, clouding judgment and impairing an individual's ability to interpret cues.
- **Sociodemographic factors: Patriarchy** has been cited as the main cause of violence against women. Where women have a higher economic status than their husbands and are seen as having sufficient power to change traditional gender roles, risk for violence is high.
- **Family factors:** Exposure to harsh physical discipline during childhood and witnessing the father beating the mother during childhood is a predictor of victimization and perpetration of violence against wife in adulthood.
- **Traditional and cultural practices:**
 - **Female genital mutilation:** Can lead to death, infertility, and long-term psychological trauma combined with increased physical suffering.
 - **Acid attacks:** Acid attacks have emerged as a cheap and readily accessible weapon to disfigure and sometimes kill women and girls for reasons as varied as family feuds, inability to meet dowry demands, and rejection of marriage proposals.
 - **Killing in the name of family honour:** In several countries of the world including Bangladesh, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan, Turkey, and India, women are killed to uphold the honour of the family due to varied reasons such as-alleged adultery, premarital relationship (with or without sexual relations), rape, falling in love with a person the family disapproves, which justify a male member of the family to kill the woman concerned.
 - **Early marriages:** Early marriage with or without the consent of the girl, constitutes a form of violence as it undermines the health and autonomy of millions of girls.
- **Judiciary and law enforcement machinery:** An insensitive, inefficient, corrupt and unaccountable judicial system and law enforcement machinery fails to deter against various forms of crimes.
- **Sociocultural factors disfavouring women: Stereotypes of gender roles** have continued over the ages.
 - The primary roles for women have been **marriage and motherhood**.
 - Women must marry because an unmarried, separated or divorced status is a stigma.
 - The **custom of dowry** is still prevalent in Indian marriages.

Consequences

- **Health Issue:** Violence in any form affects not only physical mental sexual and reproductive health of women but also adversely affects their **self esteem, ability to work and make decisions about fertility**.
- **Economic Issue:** violence against women can have serious impact on economy of the household as well as of the nation.
 - **Direct cost:** loss of income, productivity, healthcare and cost of social services.
 - **Indirect cost:** Impact on child well being, female and child mortality, intergenerational social and psychological cost.
- **Development Issue:** Violence obstructs participation of women in development and planning programs both at micro and macro level.
 - Violence prevents women from experiencing or accessing the benefits of development by

restricting their ability to act or move freely.

- Violence against women is an obstruction to poverty alleviation programs as it impedes equitable distribution of resources.
- **Rights Issue:** Any form of Violence against women hinders their realization of fundamental rights under article 14, 21, 19 and 32 of the Indian constitution.

Concerns

- **Underreporting:** According to WHO estimates less than 40 percent of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort.
 - Among women who seek help, tend to approach family and friends and very few look to formal institutions and mechanisms, such as police and health services.
 - Less than 10 percent of those women seeking help for experience of violence sought help by appealing to the police.
- **Erring Laws:** Most of the times laws and legislations for women safety are either not in compliance with the International standards or not implemented properly.
 - Laws relating to violence themselves constitute greater barrier against justice for women.
- **Dearth of Data and Statistics:** on crime against women.
 - There is a need of a **comprehensive and systematic research and analysis on crime against women** at Central, State, district and block level.
- **Accused are known persons:** from the family or neighbourhood. Women are not safe among the people they know well and may be unsafe with dear and near ones.
- **Improper implementation:** Although many laws and legislations are existing but their full implementation in terms of legal literacy, training officials responsible for administering legislation, legal support services is not upto the mark.

Way Forward

- **Gender based legislation:** It is important to enact and enforce legislation and develop and implement policies that promote gender equality by ending discrimination against women in marriage, divorce and custody laws, inheritance laws and ownership of assets.
- **Financial Independence:** Improving women's access to paid employment.
- **Developing and resourcing national plans and policies** to address violence against women.
- Improve system of collecting crime surveillance data on violence against women.
- **Capacity building and training** to service providers and law enforcement officers to handle cases of violence against women.
- **Male Mediated Initiatives:** Ensure **male involvement** in devising program for abusers.
- **Prevent recurrence of violence:** Through early identification of women and children who are experiencing violence and providing appropriate referral and support
- **Promote egalitarian gender norms** as part of life skills and comprehensive sexuality education curricula taught to young people.
- **Gender based surveys:** Generate evidence on what works and on the magnitude of the problem by carrying out **population-based surveys, or including violence against women in population-based demographic and health surveys**, as well as in surveillance and health information systems.

Legal Insights

[Crime Against Women](#)

