

DOMESTIC VOILENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN BHUTAN

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Abbreviations

NCWC: National Commission for Women and Children

RENEW: Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women

UN: United Nation

DVPA: Domestic Violence Prevention Act

DV: Domestic Violence

WHO: World Health Organization

MOH: Ministry Of Health

GBV: Gender Based Violence

VAW: Violence against Women

1: Background

As of 31st May 2017, Bhutan had a population of 7,35,553 people, with 52.3% male and 47.7% female and the sex ratio is 1.09% (statistical yearbook of Bhutan 2018). Bhutan is a male dominated patriarchal society with no female decision-making power. For the Bhutanese women it has been challenging to support male authority with male dominant along with strict social and cultural norms. Nevertheless, article 7 of the constitution of the kingdom of Bhutan, assures the right to life, liberty and security with the goal to realize happiness for the entire citizen irrespective of its gender (constitution of kingdom of Bhutan).

As a small nation with less population there are only few organizations that helps and support women and their rights. The national commission for women and children (NCWC) was established in 2004 to support women and children in the country. Moreover, NCWC works on the issue of violence against women in order to safeguard the rights of women. In addition, An NGO RENEW(respect, educate, nurture and empower women) and United nations (UN) remains to be biggest partner for developing and supporting the women.

These organizations create awareness to the public and provides help and support to the victim of domestic violence. However, the number of cases reported has been increasing thus it is very important and necessary to research this topic. The violence against women by their husband has been the major problem for the women which makes them less confident. In Bhutan, 1/3 of the women experience some form of domestic violence (NCWC 2019). Therefore, this paper will be focusing on the domestic violence in Bhutan.

2: Research Aims

The whole aim of this research paper is to analyze, investigate and determine the socio-demographic correlations of domestic violence particularly in urban communities based on the current scenario of domestic violence against women. It is also aimed to study the cause of domestic violence around the world with similar social structure to understand the central cause of domestic violence in Bhutan.

3: Methodology

A literature review as a research method is more relevant in carrying out this research project. Therefore, a qualitative literature review will be applied to identify all practical evidence that can help build this research paper. The finding from qualitative studies on domestic violence against women will be studied to know the various causes of domestic violence in Bhutan.

4: Literature review

4.1: Introduction

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 private life”(WHO 2020). A different form of domestic violence exists in all the countries and communities. However, while physical violence is widely reported in the media, another form of domestic violence which is very common, pervasive and which may last whole lifetime remains unreported and unrecognized inside the closed doors. The consequences of domestic violence are a major burden on the health sector as well as economic and social development.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan 2013 (DVPA) defines domestic violence as "violence against a person by another person with whom that person is or has been in a domestic relationship". 'Violence' is further defined as "any act, omission or behavior towards a person which results in physical, sexual, emotional or economic abuse". Gender biases and inequalities in terms of legislation, policies, and cultural traditions are free in Bhutan. However, in almost all societies, gender inequalities exist in families and communities. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan guarantees equality for women and men in all spheres of life and the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) is a competent government authority for protection and promotion of the rights of women and children in Bhutan. Domestic violence in the Bhutan often happens in a family home, hidden from neighbors, friends, and the authorities. Thus, gathering reliable and comparable evidence and data on such topics is challenging in Bhutan.

4.2: Determinant of the cause of Domestic Violence from the studies carried out

Outside Bhutan.

Domestic violence against women committed by intimate partners is a worldwide concern, especially in developing countries. Knowing the causes of domestic violence could be the key to the elimination of domestic violence from our society. A research carried out by Saffari et al. (2017) in Iran found that the prevalence of domestic violence among participants was emotional (64%), physical (28%), and sexual (18%), and unemployment, substance abuse, and

lower socioeconomic status increased the risk of domestic violence. In similar research carried out by Guclu and Can (2018) to assess the prevalence and risk factor of domestic violence in a multicultural region of Turkey, it was found that alcohol use of the husband and ethnic origin were significant independent variables predicting any domestic violence. It was also found that one-year domestic violence prevalence ranged from 12% of sexual violence to 50.5% of psychological violence. A study conducted by Rishal et al. (2018) to assess the prevalence of domestic violence and its associated factors among pregnant women in Nepal found that women with a low socio-economic position i.e. no education, no income, having income with no autonomy to use their income or a member of a disadvantaged ethnic group were more likely to report domestic violence (DV) compared to women with a higher socioeconomic position. Also research study done in dar-ul-aman district Multan, Pakistan by Ishfaq et al. (2018) to know the prevalence and types of domestic violence and to identify the root causes of domestic violence found that majority of the respondents agreed that women education and economic empowerment could overcome the violence against women.

A study by Vandello and Cohen (2008) finds that research on cultural beliefs and expectations about gender and romantic relationships that are related to male intimate partner violence. Beliefs about men and masculinity that - manhood is tenuous and must be proven, men must protect women, and his honor must be defended, etc. beliefs about women that - good women tolerates and puts sacrifices family loyalty first, good women are morally and sexually pure, etc. and beliefs about relationships that - jealousy is a sign of passionate love creates cultural context in which intimate partner violence is tolerated, accepted, or rejected. They too like Bent and Goodley (2005); Sokoloff and Pratt (2005) and Raj and Silverman (2002) argues for future research to incorporate expansive approach that enables to examine culture and its attributes in influencing on intimate partner violence.

A research was carried out to study the consequences of the conditional cash transfer programs, a government payment that families receive upon fulfilling requirements on schooling and health status checks in Uruguay. It was found that the welfare payment given to woman significantly decreases domestic violence and their findings suggest that fostering women economic independence contribute to reducing domestic violence (Borraz and Munyo 2020).

Further Papacek (2018) states that violence against women which happens in the families is a reflection of the imbalance between men and women and nature, the most notable imbalance could be seen in the economic, human rights, or intimate sphere. He states that the belief that a man must be strong, stable in decisions, and successful in any case often leads to the emergence of risk factors of domestic violence. A similar study conducted on women referring to family court in Rasht, Iran found that many of the examined women (47.3%) mentioned economic problems as the main cause of domestic violence by their husbands while alcohol/drugs abuse and family interference were the minor factors for the cause of domestic violence (Mona et al. 2017). The study also indicated that psychological violence is the most prevalent form of domestic violence in Iran. Likewise, data on intimate partner violence from the British Crime Survey and locally disaggregated labor market data from the UK's Annual Population Survey found that high female unemployment leads to an elevated risk of intimate partner violence (Anderberg et. al 2015). In a study carried out to determine the risk factors of domestic violence and to estimate the prevalence of domestic violence among women in the age group of 15–49 years in Kaniyambadi, Tamil Nadu. It was found that the prevalence of physical violence was 65.8%, sexual abuse was 17.5%, and emotional abuse was 54.2% where alcohol consumption by husband, controlling behavior by a family member, and woman's employment were statistically significant determinants of domestic violence (Ram et al 2019).

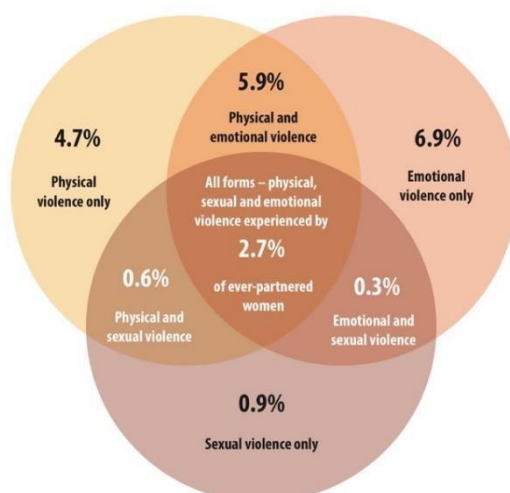
The above-stated findings can be justified by the study conducted by Rai and Choi (2018) to determine the socio-cultural risk factors impacting domestic violence among South Asian women. It was found that more conservative gender role attitudes led to higher support of intimate partner violence supporting attitudes. Patriarchy though was not a significant predictor of abuse, but it forced women to continue being in abusive relationships because South Asian women did not perceive it as abuse as the culture taught them to condone patriarchy and dominance by their husbands (Rai and Choi 2018). In 2013, WHO with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the South African Medical Research Council, using existing data from over 80 countries, estimated that globally 35% of women have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (WHO 2019). As per the same research, it is identified that women's lack of employment and holding attitudes and norms that accept violence and gender inequality were among the risk factors for both women's experience and men's perpetration of inmate partner violence. Rai and Silverman

(2002) finds that women's culture, context and vulnerability are used by perpetrator to abuse women.

4.3: Determinant of the cause of Domestic Violence from the studies carried out in Bhutan

A case analysis report 2019 of NCWC shows that women face a higher proportion of issues related to physical abuse and emotional abuse compared to other forms of violence. Although the trend in the number of cases being reported to relevant agencies is increasing, cases are still under-reported due to socio-cultural perceptions and lack of awareness (NCWC, 2019). It is because of social stigma and victims would report only when they cannot bear the violence and abuse any longer thus, it plays a major factor for the under-reporting and perpetuation of gender-based violence in Bhutan. As per the national survey on women's health and life experiences in 2017, it was found that emotional violence is the highest compared to other forms of violence in Bhutan (NCWC, 2017).

Figure 1 Combination of lifetime physical, sexual and/or emotional partner violence (NCWC 2017)



Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW) (2007) conducted the first study on violence against women and girls in Bhutan. The study, which focused on rural and urban areas of Thimphu, found that 77% of the female respondents thought that a man was justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (RENEW 2007). In 2010, the National Statistics Bureau conducted the Multiple indicator Cluster Survey which reported that nationally, 68.4% of women aged 15-49, thought a man was justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances (NSC 2010). In 2012, the Ministry of Health conducted the

National Health Survey and found that 74% of women thought that a man beating his wife could be justified under certain circumstances (MOH 2012). Similarly, a study of violence against women conducted by NCWC in 2012 found that 32.9% of ever-partnered women experienced at least one form of domestic violence in their lifetime.

4.4: Summary

The research mainly focused on the studies and researches undertaken in developing countries and more focused on Asian countries. It is very difficult to determine the exact cause of domestic violence as it happens within the personal boundary of the relationship. However, the researches carried out mostly points out the unemployment status of the women and strong beliefs in attitudes and norms that accept violence and gender inequality of social norms as a prevalent cause of domestic violence.

Although the body of literature is growing globally, most of the research conducted employed a simplistic analysis (Bent & Goodley, 2005). Future directions for research points towards uncovering the structural diversity of the society and cultures. Cultural diversities and attributes are recommended by Rai and Choi (2018); Scholoff and Pratt (2005) and many others to be used for studies employing gender-based violence and domestic violence specifically. However, the choice of study in Bhutan and India still does not employ these recommended methods.

The research on domestic violence conducted in Bhutan was mainly to study women's health, to understand the effect of the policies implemented, and to identify challenges that require improvement. There are no researches conducted to understand the prevalent cause of domestic violence. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that a larger group of female respondents agree that a man was justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances. A huge percentage of women accepting or justifying violence by a male as a result of failure of women to fit in the existing social norms is a scary finding in the domestic violence studies of Bhutan (NCWC, 2012 & 2017).

5: Analysis

The incidence of violence is lower in Bhutan for all types – physical, sexual and emotional violence. The acceptance of violence is higher for India – 77 percent of the victims have not shared about violence to anyone as compared to 42 percent for Bhutan. This may be due to traditional and cultural norms. India is predominantly Hindu dominated society with strong patriarchal and male dominance. Bhutan although has female dominated inheritance right and considered egalitarian, the social and political sphere is male dominated (Chhoden & Lhamu, 2020).

The traditional norms, beliefs and agreement to already existing norms are higher in Bhutan. Education as a silver bullet should reduce violence, this is evidenced in global experience of combatting United Nation's Millennium Development Goal according to study correlating Education and violence against women (World Bank, 2015). The intergenerational violence is reported to reduce in India. There is a causal relation that can be established both through acceptance to violence and also the effect of education to reduce violence against women.

At the state level, prevalence of violence is lower in states with larger metropolitan such as Delhi and Maharashtra; and higher than the national average in less developed states like Odisha, Jharkhand and the North Eastern States for India. In Bhutan, although Dzongkhag¹ level analysis has not been conducted to retentiveness of the data at the regional level, the sample study shows higher prevalence of violence amongst the rural community. Urban centers like Thimphu and Phuntsholing towns reported lower prevalence than the national average.

The Main cause of violence are reported as difficulty at work, financial difficulties, drinking habits, jealousy and disobedience in relationship. Acceptance of status, controlling behaviors, dependence for livelihood are reported as confounding factors or situations where likelihood for violence increases. Correlational Analysis in the studies shows that women and girls from higher wealth index are associated with lower prevalence of violence. Women from tribal communities in India such as those from Schedule Tribe, Scheduled Caste and other backward communities are linked to higher incidence of violence. Although there is no such categorization in Bhutan, rural women are reported greater tolerance to violence. This shows that lower

1 Dzongkhags in Bhutan are Districts. Bhutan has 20 districts

education and information, greater respect to cultural norms and beliefs all cause tolerance and acceptance of the male dominance and therefore violence.

5.1: Findings and prevalence of violence against women

Gender based violence (GBV) or Violence against Women (VAW) and girls are most discussed social issues today. Bhutan and India are both known to be predominantly patriarchal societies where all social spheres including the decision making are dominated by men.

Although serious injuries as estimated by the World Health Organization are not reported, the incidence of violence against women in all forms, physical, emotional and sexual are predominant in the developed and developing countries alike. The scenario is no different in India and in Bhutan. Realizing the need for evidence Bhutan have instituted governmental and non-governmental organizations to spearhead and sensitize the issues, give policy feedback and implement development incorporating holistic gender-based decisions.

The prevalence of the incidence of violence is lower in Bhutan compared to India. Acceptance of violence is 77 percent compared to 42 percent for Bhutan as measured by whether the victims have not shared about violence to anyone. Traditional, religious and cultural norms may be playing a role in the acceptance and tolerance to violence. India is predominantly Hindu dominated society with strong patriarchal and male dominance. Bhutan although is considered egalitarian, the social and political decision making at all levels are male dominated.

Education has always exposed people and society for better and holistic developments. Evidences shows that education plays a vital part in combatting social issues and reducing the differences – violence against women is also shown to reduce. This effect is shown to be effective in the light of educating both male and female members of the society. The cultural and traditional gender differences and perception of such differences also dwindle with higher level of education. Although in-depth studies of cultural attributes and the study of how these attributes effect violence is recommended in the growing literature, the research conducted in Bhutan and in India does not employ these into the study design.

Both in Bhutan and in India, the national representative studies show that prevalence of violence is higher in rural and less developed parts of the country. Urban population have greater access to information, facilities and institutions to combat violence as well as higher literacy rate. This

is evident from the distribution, proximity and better access of social institutions in the urban area.

5.2: Causes of violence against women

The predominant cause of violence is reported to be arising out of workplace difficulties, financial challenges, drinking habits, jealousy, relationship problems, etc. Cultural and traditional norms of acceptance of status of men leading to controlling behaviors, dependence of women for livelihood are also found to be causing violence. Although there are multi-cultural causal studies establishing ethnicity, origin of male, socio-economic positions as reasons for incidences of violence, the cultural predominance of men in India and Bhutan overshadows all these factors. The evidence of association of wealth with prevalence of violence; women from higher wealth associated with lower incidence of violence, women scheduled castes and tribes are associated with higher incidence of violence.

Tolerance to violence and acceptance are also associated with the development status of women. Women coming from rural areas reported greater tolerance to violence. Dependence on men for livelihood is understood as the cause for tolerance and acceptance and therefore prevalence of violence against women.

6: Conclusion

World Health Organization estimates that one in five women and girls faces some form of violence during their lifetime. Violence against women are not only detrimental to the physical and emotional health of the victims, it also is detriment to the overall development based on equality of the society. The issues of violence against women are found to be more prevalent in the developing countries. Within these countries the incidence is again found to be more amongst the patriarchal societies; and in underdeveloped communities, specifically higher in rural compared to urban centers.

The study reviewed the role of cultural and gender norms as the cause of violence. Proper understanding of the causes of violence against women and girls will help government and other organizations to provide policy formulation and implement development strategies incorporating gender sensitive decisions.

The prevalence of the incidence of violence is lower in Bhutan compared to India. Acceptance of violence is 77 percent compared to 42 percent for Bhutan as measured by whether the victims have not shared about violence to anyone. Traditional, religious and cultural norms may be playing a role in the acceptance and tolerance to violence. India is predominantly Hindu dominated society with strong patriarchal and male dominance. Bhutan although is considered egalitarian, the social and political decision making at all levels are male dominated.

Although there are numerous causes of violence against women, studies from Bhutan and India found financial and work place difficulties, spouse's drinking habits and relationship problems as the catalysts or triggering factors for violence. The cultural norms and belief systems also played a role in the tolerance of violence by women and girls. The link between the existence of violence and particular cultural and religious characteristics as the cause is missing in the current literature. Proper causal studies with appropriate research design methods for causal analysis is another reason for the lack of appropriate scholarly works.

Better education, greater involvement of women and girls in the decision making, proper information and sensitization reach to rural and backward communities will help in providing a safer environment for women in the developing countries. These will also have to work together based on national systems creating enabling environment and also by improving the awareness, behavioral change and providing economic and entrepreneurial opportunities for

women. Without these, all other enabling services might reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls; but so long as women and girls depend for male partners for livelihood, the violence will continue to remain. Stronger and stricter criminal charges will deter prevalence of violence against women and help for a more holistic development of the society.

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