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## Impact of violence on reproductive health

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### Abstract

Violence against women is an act that result, or are likely to result, in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such an act, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.

This action against women in any form is a crime, regardless of who committed the violent act. It is always wrong, even if the abuser is a very close family member; a current or past spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend; an acquaintance or a stranger. Such negative action affects the lives of millions of women belonging to all socio-economic and educational classes. It cuts across cultural and religious barriers, impeding the right of women to participate fully in society. This takes a dismaying variety of forms, from domestic abuse and rape to child marriages and female circumcision. All are violations of the most fundamental human rights.

Problems faced by the girls / married women of adolescent group have become the rising concern of the society. This phase of life, which has been recognized as a special period in the life cycle requires specific and special attention. Adolescents are subject to many types of abuse including sexual exploitation due to their vulnerable nature and little knowledge they are acquiring by the time. As a result of this, they are not only at high risk for earlier pregnancy but also for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Even in developed countries, increasing violence results into unmarried adolescent mothers. Domestic violence doesn't stay home when its victims go to work. It can follow them, resulting in violence in the workplace. This type of violence is affecting employees especially both married and unmarried women. Violence in all its forms causes immense damage to the reproductive health and well being of women and girls throughout the world, in direct and indirect ways.

This study has focussed on finding out whether the adolescent married women are victims of violence; what are the types of violence and to find out whether violence affects the reproductive health of women.

The study reveals that 66.90 % of the respondents are facing ill treatment from their life partners. It is also noted that most of their partners are illiterate and drunkards. Abuse of women is very common in the rural areas especially in the tribal settlements. Analysis shows that, majority of the women who are facing sexual assault, beating by their male partners are suffering from reproductive health problems.

**Keywords:** Violence coercion sexual harassment homicide acquaintance rape depression

### Introduction

Violence against women is an act that result, or are likely to result, in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such an act, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life. This action against women in any form is a crime, regardless of who committed the violent act. It is always wrong, even if the abuser is a very close family member; a current or past spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend; an acquaintance; or a stranger. Such negative action affects the lives of millions of women belonging to all socio-economic and educational classes. It cuts across cultural and religious barriers, impeding the right of women to participate fully in society. This takes a dismaying variety of forms, from domestic abuse and rape to child marriages and female circumcision. All are violations of the most fundamental human rights.

Sexual harassment is one such violence against women that is increasing in a dangerous manner. It affects women in some form or the other. Even workingwomen are no exception. Sexual harassment at work is an extension of violence in everyday life and is discriminatory, exploitative, thriving in atmosphere of threat, terror and reprisal. In other words it is all about expression of male power over women that sustain patriarchal relations. It reminds women of their vulnerability and subjugated status. In a society where violence against women, both subtle and direct, is borne out of the patriarchal values operating in society, force women's

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conformity to gendered roles. These patriarchal values and attitudes of both men and women pose the greatest challenge in resolution and prevention of sexual harassment. This being a sensitive matter, all over the world, many studies are being conducted with a view to frame a permanent solution for such issues through eliminating gender inequality. As a result of increasing violence against women irrespective of their age, many groups are being formed with an objective of ensuring safety to the life of women. However due to unwanted political interference, most of the groups formed for the sake of women will later become nuisance to the society. As a result of this sexual violence could not eliminate completely from the society. Studies also show that sexual harassment is still endemic, often hidden, and present in all kinds of organisations. Yet it is still not always viewed as a problem, which has to be systematically tackled.

Thus, fight against sexual harassment involves developing understanding of what is sexual harassment and change of attitudes in all - be it employees, colleagues, friends, administrators, employers or the lawmakers.

### **The Objectives of the study**

1. To find out whether the adolescent married women are victims of violence.
2. To find out the type of violence.
3. To find out whether violence affect the reproductive health of women.

### **Types of violence and outcome**

Broad category of violence against women include homicide, intimate partner abuse, psychological abuse, dating violence, same-sex violence, elder abuse, sexual assault, date rape, acquaintance rape, marital rape, stranger rape and economic abuse. The effects of this violence can negatively affect a woman's reproductive health, as well as other aspects of her physical and mental well-being. Long-term risks include chronic pain, physical disability, drug and alcohol abuse and depression. Women with a history of physical or sexual abuse also have an increased risk for unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and adverse pregnancy outcomes. The vast majority of violence against females is perpetrated by males.

Violence can shatter life in many ways. Being a victim of violence is widely recognized as a cause for mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Being abused also plays a strong role in developing or worsening substance abuse problems. For many women affected, their first abuse occurred when they were children or adolescents. Women victimized as children frequently end up losing custody of their own children due to allegations of abuse or neglect. In most of the cases it is clearly seen the involvement of parental alcohol and drug abuse.

Women who are abused or afraid to raise the issue of family planning with their partners are at risk of repeated unwanted pregnancies. Many abused women seek abortions.

### **Violence against women and resultant health problems**

Violence in all its forms causes immense damage to the reproductive health and well-being of women and girls throughout the world, in direct and indirect ways and some of them are:

- Unwanted pregnancies and restricted access to family planning information and contraceptives;

- Unsafe abortion or injuries sustained during a legal abortion after an unwanted pregnancy;
- Complications from frequent, high-risk pregnancies and lack of follow-up care;
- Sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;
- Persistent gynaecological problems;
- Psychological problems, including fear of sex and loss of pleasure.

### **Psychological problems**

Violence distorts the emotional lives of women and families. Irrespective of the awareness gained through the counselling of health workers, women in rural area often hide their contraceptive pills because they are terrified of the consequences their husbands discover that they no longer control their wives' fertility. Similarly, abused women who participated in classes conducted by NGOs in the rural area expressed their inability to discuss contraceptive use with their husbands out of fear that the men would turn violent.

While conducting survey in rural areas of Trivandrum district including tribal settlements it is seen that, women are facing issues not only from their partners but also from the other male members of their society. But they are not willing to reveal the entire issues either due to the fear of existence in the society or existence of their family relations. Problems faced by the girls / married women of adolescent group have become the rising concern of the society. This phase of life, which has been recognized as a special period in the life cycle requires specific and special attention. Adolescents are subject to many types of abuse including sexual exploitation due to their vulnerable nature and little knowledge they are acquiring by the time. As a result of this, they are not only at high risk for earlier pregnancy but also for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Even in developed countries increasing violence results into unmarried adolescent mothers. Domestic violence doesn't stay home when its victims go to work. It can follow them, resulting in violence in the workplace. This type of violence is affecting employees especially both married and unmarried women.

This study was conducted among women of tribal settlement colony of the Kottur forest, Panacode, Mannorkonan, etc. Altogether one hundred and thirty adolescent married women were interviewed for the study.

### **Demographic profile of adolescent married women**

Majority of the girls fall under 19 years of age. Only 2.31% of the girls are of 16 years of age, while majority (93.61 %) are in the age groups of 18 and 19 years. Mean age of the women is 18.5 years. Age plays an important role in the married life. A small percentage (6.1%) of the husband is of age 20 years. Even though the legal age at marriage of men is 21, the study reveals that a small percentage of the men got married before 21 years. Slightly more than 50% of the men are in the age group 26-30 years. A small percentage is in the 31-34 age group. Mean age of the husband is 26.5 years.

The study reveals that age at marriage starts at the age of 15 years in the rural area that is 34.62% of the girls got married at the age of 17 years. Majority of the girls got married at the age of 18 years. Mean age at marriage is 17.2 years. Majority of the respondents are Hindus followed by Muslims and Christians with a very minimum percentage.

A small proportion of the married girls are illiterate. While majority are school educated. Girls with SSLC qualification forms 31.54%. Slightly more than one fourth of the husbands are illiterate. Majority of the husbands have SSLC qualification. It is very clear that 90% of the girls have their family monthly income lower than 1000.

**Problems of menstruation of the adolescent married women**

The problems of menstruation are dysmenorrhoea (painful menses), menorrhagia (heavy menses), metrorrhagia (irregular menses), abnormal bleeding. Among some girls these problems may be severe but mild in some others. These severe problems if not treated may affect the reproductive health.

Distribution of women by the problems of menstruation

Problems	Rural
Stomach pain	4.62
Headache	10.00
Backache	47.69
Loss of appetite	5.38
Tiredness	6.92
Leg pain	11.54
Weakness	1.54
Abdominal pain	57.69

It is seen that abdominal pain is the most severe problem seen among rural women followed by backache.

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) includes both physical and emotional symptoms that many girls and women get right before their periods, such as fatigue, backaches, sore breasts, headaches, constipations, diarrhoea, depressions, irritability, cramps etc.

In the case of premenstrual syndrome, it is seen that 88.5% of the girls suffer from backache. 73% of the girls complaints about head ache.

Distribution of women by type of violence

Violence	Percent
Sexual assault	24.60
Beating	9.20
Abuse	33.10
No response	33.10
Total	100.00

It is seen from the table that 24.6% of the women suffers from sexual assault. Of the total 130 respondents, 33.1% of the women complaints about abuse. And only 9.2% of them

Distribution of women by menstrual problems and violence

Menstrual problems→ Violence	Stomach ache	Head ache	Back ache	Loss of appetite	Leg pain	Tiredness	Weakness	Abdominal pain
	Sexual Assault	33.33	18.18	56.86	-	15.38	44.44	50.00
Beating	16.67	27.27	21.57	71.43	23.08	55.56	50.00	19.15
Abuse	16.67	27.27	13.73	14.29	46.15	-	-	6.38
No response	33.33	27.27	7.84	14.29	15.38	-	-	6.38
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

**Relationship with Violence and Premenstrual syndrome**

Pre-menstrual syndromes are usually seen only for few years after menarche. After marriage PMS completely vanishes. Pre-menstrual syndrome among married cases is less when compared to that of unmarried cases. But in this

study it is seen that, among women in the study area PMS is seen higher. Physical abuse may be one of the major reasons for such problems as this results into psychological problems.

**Relationship with Reproductive health problems and violence**

While conducting the survey, women were asked about their problems that they are facing in their married life. Out of 130 respondents, 66.90 % has reported about the ill treatment they are facing from their life partners. It is also noted that most of their partners are illiterate and drunkards. The women are not getting any support from other family members. Abuse of women is very common in the tribal settlements.

Males are not aware of the health related issues consequent to the sexual harassment. Because of shyness and fear of society women could not express their problems to others.

Analysis shows that, majority of the women who are facing sexual assault, beating by their male partners have reproductive health issues. Similarly women who have reported that they have no reproductive health problems seem to experience less violence (except abuse) than the other groups. Details are in the table shown below.

Distribution of women by reproductive health problems and violence

Rep. Health problems	Violence			Total
	Sexual Assault	Beating	Abuse	
No	17.53	4.12	38.14	100.00
Yes	45.45	24.24	18.18	100.00
Total	24.62	9.23	33.08	100.00

**Relationship with Violence and menstrual problems**

Table given below explains the relationship of violence with problems of menstruation. The analysis clearly shows the presence of problems during menstruation like stomachache, headache and loss of appetite are not the outcomes of any kind of physical abuse. There are many other reasons for such problems. However; the problems that affect the women very badly like backache, tiredness, weakness and abdominal pain are certainly the outcomes of sexual assault and beating, a kind of common physical abuse in rural areas. Studies show that menstrual problems are seen higher among unmarried girls. These problems are not very common among married. But among some married women these problems are seen very negligible and may be due to various other reasons. But in this study it is seen that a comparatively higher percentage of women have menstrual problems, which may the result of violence.

Distribution of women by pre-menstrual syndrome and violence

Pre-menstrual syndrome→	Backache	Headache	Diarrhoea
<b>Violence</b>			
Sexual Assault	21.74	10.53	14.29
Beating	21.74	15.79	-
Abuse	26.09	31.58	57.14
No response	30.43	42.11	28.57
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

### Conclusion

The study reveals that, majority of the girls got married at younger ages. Therefore the younger age at marriage may be the main reason for violence in the families. Because of physical immaturity the girls do not react to the abuse and other activities done by the husbands and in-laws. It is very clear that reproductive problems like abdominal pain and backache are seen among women. Premenstrual syndrome is seen only a few years after menarche. After marriage PMS completely disappears. But this study shows a higher percentage of PMS like backache and headache among the married women. Also problems like fatigue, diarrhoea etc are common among these women. This shows the existence of violence like sexual assault, wife beating etc among these families.

Therefore it is clear that violence is a major factor affecting women's health and well-being. Such unhealthy behaviour is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women that varies according to the culture and society. This has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. It is a fact that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. This act against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality.

What is the solution?

Coordination between governmental and non-governmental organizations will have to be strengthened for design a practically feasible packages / systems for conducting seminars especially with reference to groups of women particularly vulnerable to violence. This may help to bring systemic changes and the development of alternative, long-term prevention strategies to such issues.

Regional wise core groups in which social workers and known political leaders as the members will have to be set up with elimination of violence against women as their sole mandate. They will have to cooperate with non-governmental organizations in addressing the issue of violence against women and ensure proper investigation by police of all acts of violence against women – without exception. Real support and protection by the Government for frontline workers and groups that help women live free from violence and that promote women's rights may be ensured.

Social and economic reforms that are essential to women and girls shall be planned at the policy level itself.

Health workers alone cannot transform the cultural, social, and legal environment that gives rise to and condones widespread violence against women. Ending physical and sexual violence requires long-term commitment and strategies involving all parts of society. Many governments have committed themselves to overcome violence against women by passing and enforcing laws that ensure women's legal rights and punish abusers. In addition, community-

based strategies can focus on empowering women, reaching out to men, and changing the beliefs and attitudes that permit abusive behaviour.

In the words of human rights activist Charlotte Bunch, "Only when women and girls gain their place as strong and equal members of society will violence against women no longer be an invisible norm, but instead a shocking aberration"

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