



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2019; 5(1): 271-274
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 08-11-2018
Accepted: 14-12-2018

Dr. Neeta Varshney
Associate Professor,
Department of Home Science,
Shri Tikaram Kanya
Mahavidhyalaya, Aligarh,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Violence against women and girl child

Dr. Neeta Varshney

Abstract

Our constitution of 1950 gave fundamental rights and equality to women. As a result of the fight over a century for their basic rights, Articles 14, 15, 16 guarantee such fundamental rights. But even now in 2003 women and girl child are facing violence. Despite of the status of women in books, if we look outside, dowry death, rape cases and atrocity against women show a different picture of circumstances and long gap between theory and practice. Rights of women and girl child are being violated. Female foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution are still in practice. Violence against women, both physically and mentally is present at domestic or societal levels and includes those arising from customs, tradition or accepted practice. These include sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry.

Keywords: violence against women, girl child

Introduction

Now there is emergent need to eliminate incidences of violence against women and girl child. Screening of sperm to ensure a male baby and a high number of abortions practiced on female fetuses (pre-conceptual and prenatal sex selection) should be banned. Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 should be enforced. In the opinion of Indian Nobel laureate of Economy, Amartya Sen, India with its present population of one billion people has to account for some 25 million missing women and girls where many of these were not given a chance to even born.

Institutions and mechanisms / schemes for assistance in prevention of violence will be created and strengthened for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such violence. A special emphasis should be laid on programs and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

A Women is one of the greatest creation of god

She is the nucleus and the whole family revolves round her. She maintains a balanced emotional relationship and camaraderie amongst the various family members and friends. The test of any civilization is the measure of consideration and care, which it gives to its weaker members i.e., to women, children and old people. Gender equality continues to be a distant dream in most countries of the world. This is even true in care of developed nations where discrimination against women and the gulf between man and women relating to the distribution of socio-economic and political power exists. The people of India haven't recognized women's contribution in development of country. Equality of opportunities between the sexes is enshrined in India constitution but it is still a distant dream and not a reality as far as women are concerned. Even after the U.N. declaration of 1975 as a year of the women, momentum of her been gathering all over the world, demanding gender equality and push for equal representation is present.

The provisions of the constitution of India granting equality to women in various spheres of activity create a legal frame work for women's development. As motherhood of the nation, women should be strong, aware and alert.

It is our misfortune that in agricultural country India, women constitute 33.33% of agriculture labor force and 48% of employed farmers. Nearly 75 million women are engaged in dairying and 20 million in animal husbandry. Despite their importance to agricultural production, they face several handicaps like social security, inheritance law, customs, wage discrimination and violence.

Correspondence

Dr. Neeta Varshney
Associate Professor,
Department of Home Science,
Shri Tikaram Kanya
Mahavidhyalaya, Aligarh,
Uttar Pradesh, India

- Per 5 minutes --- 1 death
- 300 deaths in one day during delivery
- 40% death in UP
- Per 34 minutes --- raped one woman
- Per 93 minutes --- murdered one woman
- Per 42 minutes --- sex exploitation

The focus of the world population day i.e., July 11, 2001 was on gender imbalance in our society. Violence is a part of it. As the census 2002 has revealed, the steady decline in the number of women is a matter of grave concern. Apart from the traditional neglect of the health and nutritional needs of girl child, the use of modern technology for foeticide and incidence of female infanticide in various posting parts of the country are a major social problem with serious adverse implication to the growth of our society. Only we can restore the balance by caring for our daughters as much as we do for our sons.

Violence against women and girl child can be studied in following categories:

- Physical violence - rape, female infanticide
- Emotional & Mental torture at work place, house etc.
- Social violence
- Violence in political field

Among these, physical violence against women needs greatest concern today because it is evident everywhere in our country in form of decreasing sex ratio. It has been a matter of concern to the social workers, women's groups and various planners as to why is it that India has such an uneven composition of population.

Some of the important reasons commonly put forward are

- Neglect of the girl child resulting in their higher mortality at younger ages.
- Female infanticide.
- Male bias in the enumeration of population
- Sex selective female abortions

In order to check the sex selective female foeticide, Pre-natal diagnostic techniques (Regulation, Prevention and Misuse) Act, 1994, was enacted and came into operation from 1st January 1996. Rules have also been framed and promulgated under the Act in 1996 and 1998.

This act says abortion is legal when

- If it is done by registered doctor
- If continuing pregnancy is harmful for pregnant women
- If pregnancy effect a woman mentally or physically
- If there is risk of handicapped child
- If child to be born is a result of rape

Some question to be answered by Society

- Is female foeticide a measure of family planning?
- Is it better to kill girl child in womb than to suffer tortures of society?
- What are technical, social & legal aspect of this problem?
- Is decreasing number of girls helpful in raising social status?
- If violence against girl child or female foeticide is not stopped then what will happen in future?

- If number of females is less then will pressure for reproduction increase on women?
- Reproductive death & disease will increase
- Health of children will be affected
- Population of women will get lesser
- Gang rape will increase
- Polygamy will increase
- Girls will not be safe
- In course of violence girls will be unsafe outside & inside the home
- Dowry system will increase

Physical violence

Rape is an also a form of physical violence which affect women mentally, emotionally & physically. It is common in women of all ages, all socioeconomic levels and in all parts of world. Women are beaten at home by their husbands, in-laws etc.

Emotional violence

Emotional & mental torture at work place & house etc. In home women are tortured emotionally by husbands for various reasons like money matters, sexual matters, ego-problems etc. At work place boss tortures emotionally his female employers. Sometimes women employers are harassed sexually at work places.

Social violence

Dowry, *sati pratha*, different traditions and customs etc. are form of sexual violence.

Violence in political field

The famous *tandoor kand* is an example of violence in political field. Many women are forced for illegal relationships under political influences.

According to National Policy

The principal of gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution in its preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties and Directive Principles.

The Constitution not only grants rights to women but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women.

- From the fifth five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there has been a marked shift in the approach to women's issues from welfare to development. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as central issue in determining the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women.
- India has also ratified various international conventions and human right instruments committing to secure equal rights of women,
- Gender disparity manifests itself in various forms, the most obvious being the trend of continuously declining female ratio in the population in the last few decades. Social stereotyping and violence at the domestic and societal levels are some of the other manifestations. Discrimination against girl children, adolescent girl and women persists in parts of the country.
- The underlying causes of gender inequality are related to social and economic structure, which is based on informal and formal norms, and practices.

Judicial legal systems

Legal-judicial system will be made more responsive and gender sensitive to women's needs, especially in cases of domestic violence and personal assault. New laws will be enacted and existing laws reviewed to ensure that justice is quick and the punishment meted out to the culprits is commensurate with severity of the offence.

Violence against women

All form of against women, physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate its incidence. Institutions and mechanisms/schemes for assistance will be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective action against the perpetrators of such emphasis violence. A special will also be laid on programs and measures to deal with trafficking in women and girls.

Rights of the Girl child

All forms of discrimination against the girl child and violence of her rights shall be eliminated by undertaking strong measures; both preventive and punitive within and outside the family. These would relate specifically to strict enforcement of laws against prenatal-sex selection and practices of family foeticide, female infanticide, child marriage, child abuse and child prostitution etc. Removal of discrimination in the treatment of the girl child within the family outside and projection of a positive image of the girl child will be actively fostered. There will be special emphasis on the needs of girl child and earmarking of substantial investments in the areas relating to food and nutrition, health and education, and in vocational education. In implementing programs for eliminating child labor, there will be a special focus on girl children.

Legislation

The existing structure will be reviewed and additional legislation measures taken by identified departments to implement the policy. This will also involve a review of all existing laws including personal, customary and tribal laws, subordinate legislation, and related rules as well as executive and administrative regulations to eliminate all gender discriminatory references. The process will be planned over a time period 2000-2003. The specific measures required would be evolved through a consultation process involving civil society, national Commission for Women and department of Women and child Development. In appropriate cases the consultation process would be widened to include other stakeholders too.

- Effective implementation of legislation would be promoted by involving civil and society and community. Appropriate change in legislation will be undertaken, if necessary.
 - In addition, following other specific measures will be necessary to implement the legislation effectively.
- a) Strict enforcement of all relevant legal provisions and speedy redressal of grievances will be ensured, with a special focus on violence and gender related atrocities;
 - b) Measures to prevent and punish sexual harassment at the place of work, protection for women workers in the organization/unorganized sector and strict enforcement

of relevant laws such as Equal Remuneration Act will be undertaken.

- c) Crimes against women, their incidence, prevention, investigation, detection and prosecution will be regularly reviewed at all Crime Review fora and Conferences at the Central, State and District levels. Recognized, local and voluntary organizations will be authorized to lodge complaints and facilitate registration, investigations and legal proceeding related to violence and atrocities against girls and women.
- d) Women Police Stations including Women's Cell, family courts, *Mahila* Courts, Counselling Centers, Legal Aid Centers and *Nyaya Panchayats* will be strengthened and expanded to eliminate violence and atrocities against women.
- e) Widespread dissemination of information on all aspects of legal rights, human rights and other entitlements of women, through specially designed legal literacy programs and rights information programs will be done.

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