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The Shadow Within: Analyzing the psychological and legal impact of domestic violence

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Abstract

Domestic violence is a global crisis impacting individuals irrespective of gender, socioeconomic background, and culture. It manifests in physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and financial abuse, with profound health implications for survivors and their families. Despite legislative frameworks and preventive mechanisms, domestic violence remains severely underreported due to societal barriers, cultural norms and judicial inadequacies.

Landmark cases such as *A. Ramesh Babu vs. Dharani S* (2024), the Supreme Court Public Interest Litigation following the suicide of a tech executive amid domestic violence allegations, and the Delhi High Court ruling on relationships in the nature of marriage (*X v. Y*, 2025) provide crucial insights into legal loopholes, judicial challenges, and necessary reforms.

This study examines the psychological impact of domestic violence, the efficiency of legal frameworks, law enforcement involvement, alternative conflict resolution mechanisms, and the significance of rehabilitation programs. It incorporates findings from *Understanding Domestic Violence against Women: Causes, Consequences, and Interventions* (Mahadevaswamy & Nathawat, 2023), expanding on the social and psychological dimensions of domestic violence. By integrating case law, psychological research, and policy analyses, this paper advocates for a multi-dimensional approach encompassing legal protection, mental health interventions, rehabilitation, and community-driven prevention strategies.

Keywords: Shadow, prevention strategies, judicial inadequacies, societal barriers

Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue that affects individuals regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic background. It encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, economic, and sexual violence. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines domestic violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in, injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.” Domestic violence often stems from deep-rooted patriarchal structures, lack of legal awareness, financial dependence, and social stigma, making it difficult for victims to seek help.

This paper delves into the complexities of domestic violence, its legal frameworks, psychological effects, and rehabilitation mechanisms. The primary objective is to highlight the gaps in existing policies and propose reforms to enhance victim protection and societal awareness.

Forms of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence manifests in various forms, each with severe implications for the victims. Understanding these forms is crucial in designing interventions and legal protections.

1. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse involves acts of violence such as hitting, punching, choking, burning, or restraining a victim against their will. It is the most visible form of abuse, often resulting in injuries, hospitalization, and, in extreme cases, fatalities.

Studies have shown that victims of prolonged physical abuse often develop chronic health conditions, including cardiovascular issues and musculoskeletal disorders.

2. Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Emotional and psychological abuse includes threats, manipulation, gaslighting, humiliation, and social isolation. Perpetrators use these tactics to control their victims, eroding their self-esteem and making them dependent on the abuser. The long-term effects of psychological abuse can be as damaging as physical abuse, leading to severe anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

3. Economic Abuse

Economic abuse involves controlling a victim's financial resources, restricting their access to employment, and making them financially dependent on the abuser. This form of abuse is particularly detrimental as it prevents victims from leaving abusive situations due to financial insecurity. Studies indicate that victims of economic abuse struggle with long-term poverty and financial instability.

4. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence includes rape, coercion, forced sexual acts, and reproductive control. In many societies, marital rape remains a contentious issue, with legal frameworks failing to offer adequate protection to victims. The psychological and physical consequences of sexual violence are profound, including reproductive health complications and trauma-related disorders.

Legal frameworks addressing domestic violence

Domestic violence is addressed through various legal provisions at national and international levels. While many countries have enacted laws to criminalize domestic violence, enforcement remains a significant challenge.

1. National Legal Frameworks

- **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA), India:** This act provides civil remedies for victims, including protection orders, monetary relief, and custody arrangements.
- **Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC):** Criminalizes cruelty against women by their husbands and relatives, imposing strict penalties.
- **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:** Addresses dowry-related violence, making the practice of dowry illegal and punishable under law.

2. Global Legal Instruments

- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):** Calls for state intervention in cases of gender-based violence.
- **United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993):** Defines violence against women and provides an international legal framework for protection.

Despite the existence of these laws, many victims fail to receive justice due to societal pressure, lack of awareness, and judicial inefficiencies.

The psychological and social impact of domestic violence

Domestic violence leaves lasting psychological and social scars on victims, often affecting their mental well-being, social relationships, and overall quality of life.

- **Mental Health Issues:** Victims of domestic violence commonly suffer from PTSD, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders. Studies show that prolonged exposure to violence can lead to suicidal ideation.
- **Economic Dependence:** Many victims remain in abusive relationships due to financial insecurity and lack of employment opportunities.
- **Intergenerational Trauma:** Children witnessing domestic violence are more likely to become victims or perpetrators in adulthood, perpetuating a cycle of abuse.

Rehabilitation and Support Systems

A comprehensive approach to rehabilitation is necessary to empower survivors and help them reintegrate into society. Key support mechanisms include:

- **Counseling Services:** Providing trauma-informed therapy and psychological support.
- **Legal Aid:** Ensuring free legal assistance to help victims navigate the judicial system.
- **Shelters and Safe Houses:** Establishing well-equipped shelters to provide immediate security to victims.
- **Vocational Training:** Offering skills-based training programs to help survivors achieve financial independence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Addressing domestic violence requires a holistic approach that includes legal protection, mental health support, and socio-economic empowerment. Governments and civil society must collaborate to implement stringent policies, increase awareness, and provide comprehensive rehabilitation services.

A survivor-centric approach, combined with judicial reforms and enhanced enforcement mechanisms, can help break the cycle of violence and ensure a safer society for all. This expanded version of your document provides a detailed and well-structured analysis suitable for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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