

Abuse of Women: Causes, Consequences & Prevention- A Survey of College Going Youth

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Even in the twenty first century, a significant number of women are abused in every corner of the globe. Both developed and developing countries are on the same boat regarding the treatment of their women. In India, women are still treated as commodities. Youth unemployment, poverty in general, use of drugs, dowry and economic dependence of women are found to be associated with the abuse of women and domestic violence. The consequences of abuse undermine women's freedom and human rights and it becomes the victim's nightmare throughout her life. Education, economic independence of women and exemplary/ quick punishment by the judicial system may bring positive change in the minds of people and society at large.

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Introduction

The abuse of women is widespread in India. This practice is historical in nature, but it was not highlighted as is being done today. People used to sweep it under the carpet to protect their social status. Nowadays, the widespread education of women and better government laws have given them the courage to voice it publicly and demand action against the culprits. Media is also playing a commendable role by highlighting the incidents and consequences of the events and forcing the country's lawmakers to take action against the abusers.

Gender-based violence was first recognized as a human rights violation in The World Human Rights conference in Vienna (1993). In the same year, United Nations (1993) declaration defined 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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". The ill-treatment of women and girls is a direct corollary of their subordinate status in society. Women generally accept their inferior status and

adopt the traditional values of submission and servility. The abuse of women not only causes health issues in women, but it also violates women's human rights, bodily integrity and their sexual as well as reproductive rights (Krantz, 2002).

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In India, religion is not just an institution of the past. Even today, it plays a very powerful role in society at large. It shapes the behavioral norms of a person. In Hindu religion, women have not enjoyed the same rights as men do. The norms assigned to them by male religious authorities have subjected them to various forms of marginalization in the society. Women may be abused throughout their life in different phases such as prenatal phase (sex-selective abortion, forced pregnancy etc.), infancy (differential treatment for girl infants, female infanticide etc.), childhood (genital mutilation, child marriage etc.), adolescence (rape and marital rape, trafficking, sexual abuse in the working place etc.), reproductive age (dowry abuse and murders, psychological abuse etc.) and old age (abuse and neglect). Modern technologies like amniocentesis and ultrasound are used in most parts of the world to detect foetus abnormalities but in India they are widely used to detect sex as well to aid female infanticide.

Review of Literature:

The ill-treatment of women is a global phenomenon. They experience vari-

ous forms of violence by close and extended family members, neighbors, and acquaintances and by men in position of power and authority. Max Clifford, UK's celebrity publicist guru, was found guilty because he sexually assaulted seven girls aged 14 to 19 between 1966 and 1984 (Millard, 2014). The prosecution mentioned that he used his power and celebrity contacts to prey on girls. Due to gender related violence 1.5 to 3 million girls and women are killed globally each year (Vlachova & Biason, 2005). Even in America, approximately 1,270,000 women are raped each year. Another 6,646,000 are the victims of other sexual crime (Department of Justice, 2010). A study (Goode, 2001) in the New York Times suggests that one in five adolescent girls in the United States becomes the victims of physical or sexual violence or both by their dating partner. In the same study, it was revealed that 20 percent school girls aged 14 to 18 were slapped, shoved or forced into sexual activity by a dating associate. It is not very uncommon in India of girls being sexually abused by their boyfriends and then breaking up the relationship. When a country or a state is in turmoil due to internal or external factors, ill-treatment of women is a common consequence. The abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Nigeria (Times of India, 2014) by the terrorist organization, Boko Haram, is an example of this kind. During the Bangladesh Independence War in 1971, between two and four hundred thousand women were raped (Najib, 2002; Mookerjee, 2012).

In India, where society is patriarchal in nature, the relative position of a son

and a daughter is reflected in the keen desire of male progeny. In the study of culture of the Indian people during the Vedic age, Apte (1996a) reveals that a daughter is a source of misery and a son alone can be the savior of the family. His study also reveals that women own neither themselves nor an inheritance. As a result of this domination, women are economically dependent on her father, husband or son. Her main responsibility lies to give birth to son(s). In the age of Upanishads and Sutras, the above sentiment is more vocal mentioning that the “males are the masters of women”. “Their father protects them in childhood, their husband protects them in youth and their sons protect them in old age, a woman is never fit for independence” (Apte, 1996b). In India, century after century, women were considered to be commodities. They are not welcomed in the family like a son. This fact in a way reflects the comparatively inferior position of women in the society.

If we take off the religious wrapper, ill-treatment of women can be traced in our great historical epics, Mahabharata and Ramanaya. Satyabati (Mathshagandha) was sexually abused by the famous saint Parasara. Vyasa, the famous epic writer of Mahabharata was their out-of-wedlock son. Ambika and Ambalika, the widows of Vichitravirya were forced to sleep with Vyasa to have sons who would later be the heir-apparent to run the Kuru kingdom. It was a practice during the Vedic age for a childless widow “to cohabit with her brother-in-law until the birth of a son. This *niyoga practice* was a kind of short-term

levirate” (Apte, 1996c). In disgust, Ambika closed her eyes and Ambalika, another queen became pale during the cohabitation. Dhritarashtra, the blind king, and Pandu, the impotent yuvaraj (prince) were the sons of the two queens respectively. In the same family, Kunti and Madri, the wives of the impotent Pandu, were forced to accept the *niyoga practice* with different Hindu Gods (accomplished men of the time) to have sons. Draupadi, the princess of Panchala was forced to marry the five sons of Pandu, an uncommon practice in the society. Polygamy was permitted but not polyandry (Apte, 1996c). She was molested in front of all the elder people in the court of the Kauravas. Madhri, the second wife of Pandu, became *sati* by self-immolation on the funeral pyre of her husband. *Sati* became the custom slowly in Indian Hindu society under the umbrella of religion. The custom of *sati* became so alarming that the British Government in India was forced to pass Regulation XVII on 4th December 1829, declaring it illegal and punishable by the courts (Bengal Sati Regulation, 1929).

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Crime against women in India has increased steadily since 2010. A total of 3, 37,922 cases of crime against women (under Indian penal code and Special and local laws) were reported in 2014 compared to 2, 13,585 in the year 2010, recording an increase of 58.21 percent. More specifically, rape, kidnapping and abduction and cruelty

by husband and relatives have increased by 65.68 percent, 92.35 percent and 30.66 percent respectively (National Crime Records Bureau, 2014). National Family Health Survey (2007) of India also reveals that 35 percent of women aged between 15 and 49 experience physical or sexual violence nationwide in their life time. Bihar tops the list of violence against women with the rate as high as 56 percent.

Dowry related death is still alarming. Thousands of married women commit suicide by burning themselves or are burnt by their in-laws and sometimes by their husbands due to their desire for more dowry in the form of flats, cars or cash, in return for marrying them.

The violence against women has many physical and psychological health consequences that can last long after the violence has ended. Physical health consequences may include biting, slapping, punching, acid throwing and sexually transmitted disease (WHO, 1997). Psychological health consequences may include anxiety, depression, trauma and extreme stress reactions such as sleep disorders, nightmares and suicidal tendency (Briere & Jordan, 2004).

Objectives of the Study

Every day, we come across the news of women being abused all over India, through newspapers and electronic media. It is increasing day by day, with every passing month and with every passing year. The trend is upward and alarming. The present research aims to investigate:

- i. The factors which are responsible for these types of crimes
- ii. The consequences of abuse
- iii. Preventive measures that can be taken to curb it.

Methodology

The data was collected randomly from graduate and postgraduate students of different institutes of higher learning in West Bengal. Students were chosen randomly from management, engineering, and other general degree courses. The questionnaire had three parts. The first part contained fourteen questions regarding the causes of abuse, the second part contained eight questions focusing on the consequences and the third part contained nine questions regarding the preventive measures that can be taken to curb it. Five point Likert scale was used in all the three cases with anchors using strongly agree, fairly agree, do not know, fairly disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire also included respondents' socio-biographical variables such as gender, age, education and residence. Out of the 375 questionnaires distributed, only 285 were complete and used for analysis. The statistical package SPSS (version 17) was used to analyze the data. Factor analysis was carried out to find out the factors that are responsible for the ill-treatment of women, consequences of abuse and preventive measure that can be taken to curb it. The form of factor analysis used was principal component analysis with varimax rotation. To justify the factor analysis, Kiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sam-

pling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity were used.

Socio-demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The percentage of male and female students was 63.51 and 36.49 re-

spectively. Majority of the students were in the age group of 18-22. Again, the majority of the students (77.19%) were pursuing graduation in different fields of engineering, management, and general degree courses. Only 22.81 percent of students came from different postgraduate courses. About one fifth of the students (20.35%) came from a rural background.

Table I Respondents’ Background Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	181	63.51
	Female	104	36.49
Age	18—22	239	83.86
	23—27	31	10.88
	28-32	15	5.26
Education	Pursuing graduation	220	77.19
	Pursuing post-graduation	65	22.81
Residence	Urban area	227	79.65
	Rural Area	58	20.35

Causes of Abuse

To find out the causes of women being abused, fourteen statements (Table 2) on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree were considered. The respondents were requested to mark where their opinions were more appropriate. To find out the factors which influence the offender more, factor analysis was carried out. Bartlett’s test was significant (Chi-square=297.168, $p < 0.000$) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was 0.552 which justified the factor analysis (Malhotra, 2007). It produces six factors/components from fourteen variables which are capable of explaining the observed variance. The Eigen values of all the components, the variance explained by each component and the cumulative variance were calculated by

SPSS and are presented in Table 2. To determine how many components to be retained, several procedures have been suggested such as Eigen values, Scree plot, percentage of variance (Malhotra, 2007). The Eigen value approach suggests that only components with Eigen value greater than one are retained. The present study indicates that only six components have Eigen value greater than one and together contribute 59.79 percent of the total variance. The first component accounts for 13.671 percent of variance, while the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth components interpret 10.917 percent, 9.636 percent, 9.412 percent, 8.222 percent and 7.932 percent respectively.

In the present study, variables three and four co-relate and combine with component one after rotation because of their

Table 2 Causes of Abuse (Rotated Component Matrix)

Description of the Variables	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Unemployment among the young generation is one of the major causes for ill-treatment of women					0.578	
2. Poverty and use of drugs are generally associated with domestic violence					0.791	
3. Abuse a woman gives men an opportunity to reaffirm their masculinity	0.595					
4. Women in our society are treated as commodities	0.792					
5. Women were not treated as per men in the society throughout the history of mankind		0.527				
6. 'No job-no marriage' frustrates young generation. Frustration leads them to commit antisocial activities against women			0.747			
7. Early marriage does not prevent abuse for women				0.721		
8. Sexual violence is not very uncommon even in free sex societies				0.634		
9. Family culture teaches the child to respect a woman			0.604			
10. Ill-treatments of women are very common during or any war or any major social unrest in all over the world.				0.599		
11. Women abusers are basically cowards, that's why they come in groups to attack women		0.786				
12. Economic dependence of women makes them easy victims to assaults which may be verbal, physical, physical, emotional and sexual						0.746
13. Do you agree women living in urban areas are more exposed to sexual abuse than that of rural areas						0.596
14. Dowry is one of the main causes for family violence, spouse murder and suicide in Indian society		0.724				
Eigen value	1.914	1.528	1.349	1.318	1.151	1.111
% of variance	13.671	10.917	9.636	9.412	8.222	7.932
Cumulative %	13.67	24.59	34.22	43.64	51.86	59.79

Component: 1 – Women in Indian society are treated as commodities. Component: 2 – Dowry is one of the main causes for family violence, spouse murder and women abusers generally work in groups. Component: 3 - 'No job-no marriage' (unemployment) frustrates young generations. It leads them to commit antisocial activities against women. Component: 4 - Early marriage does not prevent to abuse a women. Component: 5 – Poverty & use of drugs are associated with domestic violence. Component: 6 - Economic dependence of women makes them easy victims

common nature. This component may be labeled as 'women in Indian society are treated as commodities'. The way we like or dislike a particular commodity, women are treated in just the same way. In *Manu-Smriti* (Apte, 1996b) it was mentioned that, "a barren wife should be abandoned in the tenth year, one who bears daughters only in the twelfth, one whose children (all) die in the fifteenth, but she who is quarrelsome without delay". If we look at this statement of 'Manu' strictly, we can safely say that our attitudes towards women have not changed much yet, especially about the birth of a daughter.

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Even today, people are using ultrasound scanning to detect the sex of an unborn child. If the child is a female, then the mother is forced to abort the female child.

Component two is related with variables 11 and 14 and maybe labeled as 'dowry is one of the main causes for family violence, spouse murder and women abusers generally work in groups'. The practice of dowry is very common in Indian society. The behavior towards bride in her matrimonial home is often affected by the value of dowry. It is an onerous burden for the bride's family. Anti-dowry laws exist, but are largely ignored.

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Component three is related with variables five, six and nine and maybe named as 'no job-no-marriage (unemployment) frustrates young generations. It leads them to commit anti-social activities against women'. Prospective grooms and brides prefer that their spouse is employed. A study among the students of higher learning in India (Saha & Dey, 2014) reveals that they prefer their spouse should have a well paid job. They understand that a single individual's income is not sufficient to run a family smoothly. Unemployment is one of the main reasons to remain unmarried in Indian society. There is no social security system in India. If one does not get a proper job and parents are retired with no pension and sufficient savings, the question of marriage does not arise for the young man. This type of a situation is very common in Indian urban society. During 2010, 35.9 percent of the population remained unmarried in India. In Jammu and Kashmir, this figure was as high as 45.4 percent while in Andhra Pradesh it was as low as 30.4 percent (Sinha, 2012). Unemployment and lack of well paid and secure job are some of the few factors forced the young generation to remain unmarried.

Component four is related with variables seven, eight and ten and may be named as 'early marriage does not prevent to abuse a woman'. India has the highest rate (67%) of domestic violence among women who are married by 18 years of age (UNICEF, 2005). If the boy is also underaged, he is unable to protect his wife from abuse and indignity from the family members. In Rajasthan, if a

girl becomes widow before consummation, she becomes the common sexual victim by the men in the family (Saxena, 1999).

Component five is related with variables one and two and may be named as 'poverty and use of drug are associated with domestic violence'. When a man's income is not adequate enough to run a family smoothly, he becomes frustrated and it may lead to corruption, alcohol and drug addiction, and domestic violence. There is a strong association between domestic violence and low household income (Gerstein, 2000). Some other research findings also suggest that lifestyle choices of men such as smoking, alcoholism and drugs promote domestic violence (Leonard & Blane, 1992).

Economic dependence of women makes them easy victims.

Finally, component six is highly related with variable 12 and 13 and may be labeled as 'economic dependence of women makes them easy victims'. Significant numbers of women in Indian society are economically dependent on their parents, husband and sons for their basic needs in the course of their lifetimes. They are forced to tolerate domestic violence for themselves and their children's economic security. Even in Canada, economic dependence, poverty or fear of poverty keeps a woman trapped in a violent relationship (Tanis, 1995). Poverty is a curse but it is widespread among the Indian population. No matter how unhappy her marriage is or

how psychologically depressed she is, the wife tries her level best to stay married, because she is economically dependent on her husband. In most cases, she won't get parental support because it will embarrass them socially.

Consequences of Women Being Abused

To find out the consequences of ill-treatment, eight statements (Table 3) were used on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Factor analysis was used just like before. Bartlett's test was significant (Chi-square=211.544, $p < 0.000$) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.666 which justifies the factor analysis. It produces only three factors from eight variables, which are capable of explaining the observed variance. Here, variables six, seven, and eight correlate and combine with component one after rotation. This component may be named as 'discrimination and violence against women undermines their self-esteem, freedom and embarrass them socially'. In India, a vast majority of female children grow up with a constant sense of being weak. Uneducated and economically dependent women are still susceptible to tolerate all sorts of torture and ill behavior by the husband and his family. It is not only in India, domestic violence is also deeply rooted in the lives of many American families (English,

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Marshall & Stewart, 2003). Many women remain in abusive relationships to avoid retaliation towards them or their children (Murray, 2008).

Component two is related with variables three, four and five and may be named as ‘sexual violence will be the

victim’s nightmare throughout her life’. No woman on earth can forget an incident of sexual abuse throughout her life. It becomes her nightmare. If the victim is unmarried and the incident becomes known in the locality, it will be difficult for her family to arrange a marriage for her.

Table 3 Consequences of Being Abused (Rotated Component Matrix)

Description of the Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
1. Generally, sexual violence undermines the attitudes of the victim to form relationship and trust with others in the society			0.659
2. Indian society treats the victim very sympathetically			0.823
3. If the victim is unmarried, it will be difficult for her to get married due to the conservativeness of the society		0.617	
4. The victim won’t be able to forget the incident throughout her life. It will be her nightmare		0.843	
5. Now-a-days no parents feel comfortable, until the school going, college going or working daughters come back home safely in the evening		0.592	
6. Sexual harassment is embarrassing, humiliating & it undermines women freedom	0.624		
7. Discrimination & violence make women suffer from low self-esteem and psychological insecurity	0.753		
8. Indian women generally do not complain against husband’s behaviour, because of the self-sacrificing nature of marriage and it will embarrass them socially	0.707		
Eigen value	2.158	1.183	1.093
% variance	26.971	14.788	13.664
Cumulative %	26.971	41.758	55.422

Component:1-Discrimination & violence against women undermine their self-esteem, freedom and embarrass them socially Component:2-Sexual violence will be the victim’s nightmare throughout her life. Component:3-Indian society treats the victim sympathetically

Component three is highly related with variables one and two and may be labeled as ‘Indian society treats the victims sympathetically’. She may be treated sympathetically by the society but at the same time she would be criticized behind her back. It becomes a pleasant gossip among the ladies in her locality without giving a serious thought to the

fact that it could have also happened to them.

Preventive Measures

The students were asked to respond to nine statements on a five point Likert scale regarding prevention of women’s ill-treatment (Table 4). Factor analysis

was conducted just like before. Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (Chi-square = 575.295; $p < 0.000$) and Kiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) was 0.745, which justifies the factor analysis. It produces only three components. Here variables one, two and three co-relate and combine with component one after rotation. This component may be named as 'exemplary quick punishment will bring positive effect in the society'. To curb abuse, the Indian judicial system has to play an important role and pronounce judgments within a quick time frame. If the abusers get a signal that the government is serious about it, they will think twice before committing these types of offences. 'Justice delayed is justice denied', so goes the saying. Indian Government has to create more fast track courts and provide necessary manpower and financial resources to these courts to settle the cases as quick as possible.

To curb abuse, the Indian judicial system has to play an important role and pronounce judgments within a quick time frame.

Component two is related with variables five, six and seven and may be named as 'public and private organizations have responsibility to protect their women employees'. To prevent women employees from any physical violence and harassment in workplace, Government of India enacted its law on April 23, 2013. This law is applicable for both private and government organisations. It will build a sense of security among the women employees at the workplace

which will eventually improve their participation in work.

Component three is highly related with variables four, eight and nine and may be labeled as 'education, economic independence and participation in household decision making may reduce domestic violence'. Economic independence will give them a strong footing in the spouse's family and society at large. As long as girls and women remain economically dependent on her father, spouse and son, she cannot avoid her ill-treatment and exploitation fully. It is the economic independence which will give her courage, respect and position in society. The United Nations, in its Beijing declaration (1995), strongly recommended economic empowerment of women which will act as a protective factor for violence against women. Education of women will increase their knowledge, skills and abilities which will eventually enhance job opportunity and empower them to participate in decision making in the family and society at large.

Conclusion

Suppression of women is rooted in the very fabric of Indian society. It is practiced in traditions, religious doctrines and families. Though women in India are worshipped as 'Shakti, Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati', etc., the society by and large, does not respect women the way they should. Women are still treated as commodities in our societies with few exceptions. Unemployment is one of the main causes of social unrest and it leads to frustration among the young generation.

Table 4 Prevention of Abuse (Rotated Component Matrix)

Description of the Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
1. The justice should be given as quick as possible	0.815		
2. Court should take exemplary action against the sexual abuser which will have positive positive effect in the society	0.841		
3. Boys and girls should be treated equally in the family and society at large	0.669		
4. Economic independence of women will increase their social status which may reduce domestic violence			0.617
5. Govt. has social responsibility towards the safety of her women citizens		0.633	
6. Schools and Colleges should organize some special safety awareness programmes for their female students		0.720	
7. Public and private organizations have responsibility towards their women employees for protection from sexual harassment and molestation		0.792	
8. Education and cultural development may change the attitude of young generation towards the women in society			0.635
9. Women who can participate in household decision making with her husband has less chance to be abused			0.765
Eigen value	3.143	1.239	1.035
% variance	34.923	13.769	11.505
Cumulative %	39.923	48.692	60.197

Component: 1-Exemplary quick punishment will bring positive effect in the society. Component: 2 -Public & private organizations have responsibility to protect their women employees. Component: 3- Education, economic independence & participation in household decision making may reduce domestic violence

This frustration may lead them to do all sorts of anti-social activities including abuse of women. In all forms of ill-treatment, women are at the receiving end of the consequences.

Women in general feel insecure psychologically and all the violence against them undermines their freedom and basic human rights. It can be curbed when women will be considered as friends, partners, lovers, family and human beings. They have a right to live a dignified life as per men in a modern civilized society. Parents should educate their

daughters as equally as their sons. In school level, young children need to be taught that men and women are equal. This teaching should reflect at home as well as in the society at large. They should be encouraged to take up jobs and be allowed to choose their own spouses irrespective of their caste and creed. They should be allowed to remain unmarried if they wish to lead a single life. The existing laws should be enforced properly without bowing to the pressure from political powers and authorities. This will eventually bring security and social protection to women.

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