Impact of Gender-based Violence on Education

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When we think of Gender-Based Violence, we think of conflict zones where rape is used as a weapon of war, and women are children are most affected, but statistics suggest the fight is closer home. According to the National Family Health Survey (NHFS-4); Every third woman, since the age of 15, has faced domestic violence of various forms in the country in India, around the world, in what is described as a “Shadow Pandemic”, Woman have to face violence, sexual assault and worse, at home, at the hands of their family. It is known that India doesn’t have a law against marital rape, the violation of consent, or forcing a sexual act with threats or coercion by the victim’s husband is only a crime in India if the victim, the woman, is below 15 years of age[[1]](#footnote-1). When women face sexual violence, and the perpetrator is their spouse, the only legal recourse they have is Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 (PWDVA), which outlaws marital rape, however, it only offers a civil remedy, meaning forced sex in marriage is not treated as a criminal offence. As women continue facing this brutality, and deal with sexual and physical violence, the violation of their bodily autonomy and basic respect as their daily reality, we seek to examine the severe impact domestic violence has on the right to education of women and girls.

Take into account, the fact that a retired judge in Hyderabad, his wife and his son, violently and emotionally abused their daughter-in-law/wife. They savagely beat her, in front of her children. You can see that here, (Trigger Warning: Domestic Abuse, Violence). I have met Sindhu Sharma, and her lawyer, at Barkha Dutt’s We the Women Foundation, where we were both speakers on different panels, I spoke about the effect of Instagram on modern-day activism, she spoke about the brutal violence she had to face, the pain and desperation were clearly visible in her voice. It inspired the entire audience to stand up to show support to Sindhu Sharma. It is time all of us take a stand against domestic violence.

Domestic violence is not the only factor that affects education, however intimate partner violence does have a significant impact on the development and potential of children, the co-occurrence of Domestic Violence with other traumatic events is termed as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

In children, Domestic Violence or Intimate partner causes separation anxiety, for the victim of the abused, leading to a distracted and highly anxious approach to attending school, and other institutions, there are several other impacts of domestic violence on the fragile and developing mind, it can cause attention and concentration difficulties, sleep disturbance, withdrawal, insecurity, guilt, depression and low self-esteem. Behaviorally, the impact might result in a change in conduct, unpredictable behaviour, aggression, anger, and hyperactivity. The physical impacts of observing domestic violence include injury, eating problems, and stress-related conditions such as asthma and bronchitis, to name a few. The impact of Intimate Partner Violence on adolescents is slightly different, commonly observed effects are self-blame, depression, self-harm, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, risk-taking behaviour, criminal behaviour, poor social networks, disaffection with education, and eating disorders. These may go unnoticed, or without proper psychological analysis or empathy might be construed as problematic aspects of the children’s personalities, and not the effect of their traumatic experiences. It is also important to note that some children will turn to schoolwork and assessments as an escape and achieve excellent grades, but the mental health of such students is equally important, making a great case for the introduction of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).

Despite the fact that the education of children is highly affected by Inter Parental Violence, it plays a key role in breaking this cycle of abuse, because of the presence of widespread abuse, every school will probably have multiple children that are suffering from the traumatic effects of domestic violence. Teachers are well placed to play a pivotal role in identifying and responding to domestic violence since they have contact with children more than any other service. However, research suggests that teachers are having to curtail their individual interactions with disadvantaged students to address their needs, as they have to ensure a high level of competence in all students in today’s highly competitive job markets. Infact, their own stress is affecting the quality of their interactions with their students.

What can we do? We need a cultural reset, and systemic reforrms. As a society we must stop representing domestic violence as the victim’s, predominantly women’s fault, and must start reaching out to the victims, and those affected by it, breaking this generational cycle of abuse, will need us to recognize this shadow pandemic, instead of masking it.

We need more accessible systems to address the violence women have to face, and it’s effect on children and we have to start respecting women’s bodily autonomy, radically.

1. Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)