

CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

“Violence against women is not a small problem that only occurs in some pockets of society, but rather is a global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action”¹ reveals a WHO report. By far the most common form of violence experienced by women is domestic violence with various United Nations reports asserting that at least one in every three women have faced some form of domestic violence in their lives as seen in the preceding pages. A World Bank Report too reveals that, “...over 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. That is 818 million women—almost the total population of Sub-Saharan Africa.”²

India is no exception to this global pandemic, for the NFHS-IV survey reveals that almost every third woman in India has suffered from domestic violence at some time in their lives. Within India, the same survey reveals the small north-eastern state of Manipur to have the highest prevalence rate of domestic violence amongst the Indian States and Union Territories with every second woman having suffered from some form of domestic violence during her lives. This is particularly startling when one considers that Manipur is home to the famed *Nupi-Keithal* – the woman’s market as well as the *Meira Paibi* movement (Torch Bearer movement). Historically women have played a frontline role in the famous *Nupi-lan* movements against the British. Today, Manipur ranks better than most other Indian States so far as the status of women is concerned on a large number of demographic and health indicators, particularly sex ratio, female work participation rate and anemia among women and children. It is in this context and backdrop that the present study was undertaken to assess the causes and consequences of domestic violence in the State of Manipur.

The definition of domestic violence adopted for the present study is based upon the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act which includes physical,

¹ WHO, (2013), **Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence**, http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85239/9789241564625_eng.pdf?sequence=1, Accessed on March 28, 2018

² World Bank, (2014), **Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity**, http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/Voice_and_agency_LOWRES.pdf, Accessed on March 28, 2018

sexual, emotional, verbal and economic abuse within the purview of domestic violence³.

A number of theoretical perspectives have been employed by scholars to study the phenomenon of domestic violence. The present study was based upon a combination of theoretical methods which included patriarchy, concept of masculinity and gender. In addition social learning theory and learned helplessness were also used to assess the phenomenon of domestic violence in Manipur.

A brief literature review revealed that domestic violence was the focus of a large number of studies in India covering various aspects of domestic violence. These studies ranged from macro studies of the Indian scenario, to micro studies of one village or a part of a town. A large number of studies attempted to trace the factors impacting domestic violence. Other issues taken up included masculinity, marital rape and legal provisions for domestic violence. However, studies on domestic violence in Manipur were rare. The few studies which had been undertaken in the state were limited in scope and coverage. Considering the widespread nature of domestic violence in Manipur, a holistic study on domestic violence was the need of the hour. Hence the significance and relevance of the present study.

The study sought to assess the frequency of domestic violence in Manipur, the linkage between socio-economic status and domestic violence, identify the causative factors and assess the consequences. Apart from this, it sought to understand male perceptions of domestic violence. Furthermore, it attempted to analyse the ways in which women sought to cope with abuse and assess the functioning of other agencies which helped them in coping with the abuse including NGO's, Meira Paibis and Women's Cell. It also sought to analyse the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in Manipur.

Two districts of Manipur with the highest reported cases of domestic violence at the time of field study- viz. Imphal East and Imphal West were chosen for the study. These were also the districts which had the highest sex ratio and female literacy rate and the lowest female work participation rate in the state all of which impact the status of women. 200 women respondents (100 from each district) taking an equal

³ See Chapter 1, p. 10.

number from rural and urban areas, were chosen for the study. Apart from these women respondents, male perceptions were sought to be assessed through interviewing 50 male respondents (25 from each district). 25 representatives of NGO's, 100 Meira Paibi volunteers as well as the In-charge of the Women's Cell were also interviewed in order to arrive a holistic understanding of the issue.

Multiple methods approach was used to collect the data for the present study. An open-ended interview schedule was combined with focus group discussions. Narratives were collected wherever possible in the women's own voices.

The respondents and their partners were mostly young persons. Three-fourths of the respondents were below the age of 30 years and a similar proportion of their partners were below the age of 35 years. More than 80 per cent of the respondents were still married despite experiencing various forms of domestic violence. One of the factors identified in various studies as a risk factor for domestic violence is a younger age at marriage. In the present study, it was found that 20 per cent of the respondents were married before the age of twenty ears. However, even women married at relatively older ages continued to suffer from domestic violence. Significantly, more of the urban respondents from both districts revealed that they had got married before the age of 20 years. The difference was particularly striking in Imphal East. On the contrary 16 per cent of the respondents said their husbands had been married before the legal age at marriage, but a higher proportion of these were from rural areas.

More than half of the respondents and their partners were from General Castes with approximately 70 per cent professing Hinduism. It was also seen that most of the respondents were not well educated and very few of them had studied beyond graduation. Although only a miniscule proportion were illiterate or had primary education, more than three-fourths of the respondents had only studied upto higher – secondary school level. However, approximately forty per cent of the respondent's husbands had studied beyond high school level, revealing difference in educational status to be a significant factor in domestic violence.

The low levels of education were reflected in the employment and income status as approximately half of the respondents were either daily wagers or

agricultural labourers. More than half of the respondents earned less than Rs 5000 per month and three-fourths earned less than Rs 10,000 per month. This leads to a dependency situation in which the women are forced to be tolerant of domestic abuse by circumstances. In contrast, the income level of the husbands was higher. Most of the respondents had 2 to 5 children, which further added to the financial stress on the families. In addition, some of the respondents had no children which again were a risk factor for abuse.

The study reveals that son preference is very much in existence in Manipur, although female foeticide may not be rampant. Many of the respondents stated that they continued to give birth to children till a son was born. A majority of the respondents lived in a joint family, which also led to abuse by other members of the family apart from spousal abuse. It has already been noted that Manipur is a state where love marriages are very common and this pattern was clearly reflected in the data as almost 70 per cent of the respondents selected their own partners where the main reason for love marriage was mutual love and their parents acceptance of the marriage rather than looking out for more wealthy partners or choosing one with a better job.

The study reveals that all the respondents suffered from physical, emotional and economic abuse but only about one-fourth of the respondents admitted to sexual abuse. The physical violence varied from simply slapping to outright beating. Reported sexual abuse included forced sex as well as denial of sexual relations. The most common and frequent form of abuse was emotional abuse which included verbal abuse as well. This included acts of omission such as neglect of health care and so on. Economic abuse was primarily reported in the form of denial of personal needs or creating financial hardship. A little more than one-fourth of the respondents reported that the children too were subjected to abuse.

The most frequent form of abuse was emotional violence followed by physical violence, economic abuse and sexual abuse in that order. The husband was alleged to be the major perpetrator in each instance. Among the other perpetrators of abuse, abuse by mother-in-law was most common, followed by father-in-law. Some of the respondents also reported abuse by sister-in-law, brother-in-law and other relatives.

These, however, were not frequent. Significantly, all the respondents who reported sexual abuse alleged only the husband to be the perpetrator of such abuse.

For a large majority of the respondents, domestic violence began within six months of marriage; for some even within the first week of marriage. Incidentally a higher proportion of urban respondents reported that domestic violence started within one month of marriage as compared to rural respondents. Only a few respondents stated that it began after one year of marriage. The circumstances of such abuse varied from inadequate dowry, to pregnancy, to birth of a girl child or birth of successive girl children. Once begun, the violence only escalated or stayed the same; none of the respondents reported a decrease in violence over time.

Domestic violence is a multi-causal phenomenon and the present study revealed the veracity of this statement. It was found that no single cause could be ascribed for the initiation of domestic violence. In fact, sometimes domestic abuse occurs without any reason at all. At other times, various factors could be said to be the cause, which include economic factors such as lack of resources, lack of job or inequality between the spouses. Personal factors such as ego hassles, inequality in educational attainments of the spouses, mindset of superiority on the part of males, establishing control in the household and so on also play a major role in initiation of domestic violence. Socio-cultural factors and a patriarchal mind-set where males are supposed to dominate and women to be subservient, notions of masculinity and established gender roles were found to be equally significant factors in domestic violence. Generally, it has been found that women themselves justify wife beating under certain circumstances. However, in the present study none of the respondents justified wife beating under any circumstances. Last, but not the least, women were found to be particularly vulnerable to domestic violence after the consumption of alcohol and drugs by the male partner. Significantly, a higher proportion of the rural respondents held alcohol consumption to be the main culprit, while a higher proportion of the urban respondents held drugs to be the culprit in wife abuse.

The consequences of such abuse vary from physical and mental health outcomes to economic constraints. Physical injury and mental stress were found to be the most common consequences suffered by the victims of domestic violence. The injuries were severe enough to warrant medical attention and, in a few instances,

hospitalization. Stress caused other psycho-somatic problems such as stomach ulcers, hypertension, etc. A significant proportion of the respondents also reported suicidal tendencies. Significantly, physical and mental health problems also became a cause for further abuse as many a time the victims were denied appropriate medical attention when needed and were in fact blamed for bringing the violence upon themselves. Injury or no injury, the respondents had to fulfill their gender roles and continue with the housework. Help was available through the children or through the husband in only a few of the cases.

Domestic violence left its economic impact in the form of absenteeism from work for which the women had to forfeit their wages or in some cases even leave work. Moreover, injuries also resulted in unforeseen expenses which added to the economic woes of the already financially strained victims. Furthermore, the violence also negatively impacted the victim's work and other income-generating activities. Rural women's work was effected more often than urban women, probably because they had less access to medical facilities. The children also suffered in various ways. The most commonly reported were mental health problems, as they suffered from stress due to the violence.

Domestic violence is a social issue and is not only limited to the victim and perpetrators of domestic violence but affects the whole of society. The perception about this issue only from the victims narratives can give a partial understanding of the phenomena and hence looking into the perception of the rest of the society is equally important to get a holistic understanding of the root causes and consequences of domestic violence.

A multi-causal phenomenon like domestic violence also required multiple methods of dealing with it. The victims used various methods to handle the abusive persons. The methods adopted varied from time to time and person to person. The respondents reported that they at various times attempted to pacify the perpetrator, colluded with him or her, sought counseling, looked to friends and relatives for help, even minimized or denied the abuse hoping that it would stop. A majority of them continued to stay in the abusive relationship out of fear of being further abused if they left. Their dependent status as well as fear of social stigma equally contributed towards their remaining within the abusive relationship and continuing to suffer the

abuse. A slightly higher proportion of rural women continued to stay in the abusive relationship in both districts. A majority of the victims did attempt to protect themselves from the abuse. Notably more of the urban women attempted to do so. The victims attempted to get help from various agencies and friends in order to cope with the abuse. It was found that such support particularly from the natal family was mainly aimed at enabling them to continue to remain the relationship as their main focus was to maintain the family.

The women respondents gave valuable suggestions for combating domestic violence based upon their own experiences of the issue. Significant among these were employment generation, eliminating poverty and providing housing, which would enable them to get out of the dependent status and stand upon their own feet. Other suggestions were changing mindset, counseling and eliminating alcohol and drug abuse.

Significant support was provided to the victims of domestic violence by various NGO's working in the two districts. The working of five NGO's was assessed in order to evaluate their role in combating domestic violence. These were the Environment and Economic Management Association, Center for Women Development, Young Women Help Organization, Women Action for Development and Centre for Social Development. It was found that these NGO's attempt to combat the scourge of domestic violence through providing counseling, skill training, shelter, legal aid as well as medical aid. The representatives of these NGO's were well aware of the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and attempted to make the victims aware about these. The respondents were well aware about the functioning of these NGO's and did not hesitate to seek help from them.

One unique movement in Manipur, originally initiated with the objective of countering alcohol and drugs is also playing an influential role in combating domestic violence. This is the Meira Paibi movement. The present study sought to assess its role in combating domestic violence. All the respondents were aware about the activities of Meira Paibi and in fact many of them were themselves volunteers with the movement. Yet paradoxically, a large majority did not seek its help for countering their own problems, primarily because Meira Paibi consisted of women from their own locality and the women victims did not want other people in their locality to

know about their problems. A higher number of rural women sought its help as compared to urban women. Significantly, a large proportion of Meira Paibi volunteers were not aware of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.

Assessing the working of the above mentioned Act, it was found that most of the respondents were not aware about the existence of such an Act, thereby effectively nullifying the benefits of a highly progressive legislation. Likewise, the women victims did not even approach the Women's Cell as they were not aware of its role in handling issues of domestic violence.

Elimination of domestic violence is not possible without the partnership of men. Recognizing this, the United Nations has also launched programmes which include men, such as 'UNiTE to End Violence' and 'He for She' campaigns. As Ban-ki-Moon, UN Secretary General succinctly opined, "If we are united, between men and women, among government leaders, business communities and civil society leaders I think there will be nothing which we cannot overcome. There will be nothing which will stand in our way to achieve gender equality and gender empowerment. Particularly women can live without any fear of violence."⁴

However, inclusion of men in the battle to fight the scourge requires an understanding of male perceptions of domestic violence. The present study sought to do this through an analysis of the perceptions of a male control group. The control group consisted of educated, employed males of various age groups from rural as well as urban areas, who were in a relatively higher income category. It was found that domestic violence was generally equated with physical violence, although majority of the control group did also admit that economic, sexual and mental abuse also constituted domestic violence. However, majority of the control group felt that domestic violence is perpetuated by males against females and only a few admitted that males can also be victims of domestic violence.

The causes of domestic violence identified by the males were primarily maintain power and control in the family, poverty, extra-marital affairs of either

⁴Secretary-General's Remarks at Commemoration of United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, November 25, 2015, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2015-11-25/secretary-generals-remarks-commemoration-united-nations>, Accessed on March 28, 2018

partner, alcohol and drug abuse and gap in educational attainments in contrast to the multifarious causes identified by the female respondents. Moreover, the male control group was found to be primarily putting the blame for domestic violence at the doors of women and a significant proportion (although not the majority) did justify wife beating and also opined that women should always submit to the demands of their husbands. Ironically, the educated and high income males were not aware of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act with only about one-fourth having any familiarity with the Act. Yet they had significant suggestions to offer which included punishment for culprits, financial security and gender sensitization among other things.

The foregoing analysis of the frequency, causes, consequences and ways of combating domestic violence reveals that domestic violence is a complex problem; a kind of hydra-headed monster; if you cut off one head it sprouts another. No single and off the counter solution is possible for this complicated problem. It would require a holistic approach covering various aspects; an attempt would have to be made to attack it from all angles. Accordingly a few relevant and doable suggestions are put forth here, which could go a long way in dealing with the problem.

First and foremost is the attainment of gender equality. This requires gender sensitization at all levels and in all spheres. Sensitization needs to be done at the level of the home, the primary sphere of domestic violence; in the community which needs to recognize the scourge of domestic violence; as well as the State which needs to take action against the perpetrators. The major aim of this sensitization should be changing the patriarchal mindset, countering gender stereotypes of male superiority and female subordination and generating awareness about women's rights.

Such gender sensitization need not be limited to males only, but must include women within its ambit as women have been socialized into feelings of inferiority and expendability and must be re-socialized to realize their own importance. At the same time, gender sensitization is also essential to teach women and men that women can and must have rights over their own bodies. Reproductive and sexual rights are not mere platitudes but need to be effectively implemented which can be done only if both women and men are aware about these. Women's Studies Centres and Cells in Universities and Colleges have a significant role to play in this and must be roped in

to create awareness about women's rights and equality as well as about the impact of domestic violence.

Educating women and girls is a necessary pre-requisite to gender equality. Education does not mean mere literacy but opening of the minds as well as creating skills to enable women and girls to be self-dependent. It implies inculcating confidence in their self-worth and capabilities, two aspects which patriarchy attempts to negate and often succeeds, leaving women not only economically but mentally and emotionally dependent.

Increasing women's effective participation in decision-making within the family, community and the state would also be a critical effort at protecting women from domestic violence. This, of course, necessitates a combination of education, skills, economic empowerment and gender sensitization, all of which would enable women to have effective participation in decision-making. Here, the researcher would like to emphasise *effective*, for nominal participation with women acting as rubber-stamps for their male counter-parts would be more harmful than beneficial.

Creating capabilities must be combined with economic empowerment, if any difference is to be made. Financial security will not only protect women from domestic abuse, but also enable them to counter it more effectively as they will no longer be dependent upon others. Economic security must be a central focus of all efforts at eliminating violence against women. This is also a suggestion put forth by the respondents in the present study. A crucial aspect of this economic empowerment is effectualising women's rights to inheritance, (which although guaranteed by law are usually limited by socio-cultural constraints) and having shared or joint ownership of property and house. The Domestic Violence Act does provide right to residence, but as seen in the preceding pages, awareness about the provisions of the Act are limited.

Generating awareness about the provisions of the Act, hence, is a crucial aspect of any strategy to combat domestic violence. This necessitates sustained public awareness campaigns at all levels. One critical resource which can be used in this context is the media, particularly the audio-visual media. Advertisements along the lines of the anti-tobacco advertisements can be shown in cinema halls which would create awareness about the issue and about the provisions of the Act. Similar FM

Radio too can be used as it is being used for other Government sponsored campaigns such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* and *Swachtha Abhiyan*. Further, depiction of domestic violence in audio-visual media can be accompanied by a moving caption stating that this type of behavior is punishable under the law. Television, likewise, can be a key instrument in generating such awareness as its reach has penetrated even to the remote corners of the country. Further, as mentioned earlier, Panjab University's initiative of introducing a compulsory paper on violence against women, a major component of which is domestic violence, can be emulated by other States and Universities, which would go a long way in creating awareness among the younger generation.

While all these strategies are aimed at preventive action, it is essential to ensure protection and justice to the victimized woman. This necessitates sensitization at the level of various service agencies- NGO's involved in providing services, the police as well as the judiciary. The tendency to blame the victim must be avoided and a gender sensitive approach adopted in handling each case. There should be no impunity for the perpetrators. The offenders must be held accountable. This needs partnership between law enforcement agencies and the community. The Women's Cells too need to act as watchdogs in cases of domestic abuse.

Domestic violence can no longer be treated as a private matter and introduction of constitutional law within the household can no longer be regarded as a "bull in a china shop" as the Honourable Delhi High Court had stated in the case of *Harvinder Kaur vs Harmender Singh Choudhary* way back in 1983. Since then Indian law and Indian judiciary has come a long way, but at the community and society level, domestic violence still continues to be kept under wraps. Women, family and community need to speak up, make their voices heard, for silence will merely lead to a continuation of the exploitation. At the community level, it is also necessary to recognize the signs of domestic violence and be ready to take action.

Lastly, but most significantly women themselves need to stand as agents of change. As the UN Secretary General Ban-ki Moon pertinently remarked, "Women are victims – but much more than that, they are agents of change with potentially

enormous influence.”⁵ They must realize that they have to stop being tolerant of abuse and at the same time realize their rights within the family. They need to change their own notions of family, society and women’s roles and emerge triumphant in the battle against the scourge of domestic violence. As Gandhiji stated, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.”

⁵ibid.