**RESEARCH PAPER**

# Domestic Violence Among Urban and Rural Women in Kerala and Its Impacts

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**ABSTRACT**

Domestic violence continues to be a pervasive social issue in Kerala affecting women across both urban and rural settings. It remains hidden from public discourse and is also a fruit of the traditional patriarchal framework. Due to this normalisation, it cannot be uprooted easily, which poses a significant challenge to the social structure. There is a difference in the prevalence of violence in urban and rural areas. NFHS surveys reveal that rural women face more violence from domestic spheres than urban women. This difference may be attributed to factors like limited accessibility to education, lack of legal awareness and economic dependency. Women must be aware of their rights and stand firmly to overcome such injustices. Proper awareness must begin from childhood, through family, educational institutions and community programmes for eradicating the cycle of violence. Only through education and legal literacy can violence be identified, reported and thereby reduced in both urban and rural Kerala.

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Abuse, Patriarchy, Spousal Violence

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## INTRODUCTION

Indian women enjoyed freedom and equality with men during the Vedic period .She enjoyed a status equal to men or even superior in some situations and was a part of religious ceremonies and rituals .But after the Vedic period, her status started to decline .And later , a kind of slave-master relationship emerged between husband and wife, husband was always considered as the lord and master . From ancient times our culture and literature have stereotyped women as weak and incompetent making them dependent on men for safety and food .Indian patriarchal society always sought to imprison women with in the four walls of a house ,with no regard for her emotions ,abilities or capabilities .Yet ,a few among them stepped forward, fought alone, against the system and proved their greatness.

Even in this modern period majority of women silently bear abuse as part of life and are afraid to speak out against unjust practices .Most Indian women are trapped by societal expectations ,and even educated and employed women are no exception . ,After the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act,2005 many are aware of the legal provisions ,yet silently accept or endure hardships for the sake of family , children and for maintaining social status quo..

The media also labels women as weak ,compelling them to obey and accept the norms of a patriarchal society and normalizes the mistreatment, she faces, including physical, verbal, emotional, economic and sexual abuse as part of family life .Domestic violence includes harms or injuries which endanger her life, health ,safety or well- being. Exposure to violence from childhood makes her accept practices like female foeticide ,infanticide ,medical neglect ,child marriage ,deprivation of educational opportunities etc. as normal .The increasing crimes against women show that women are not safe and secure anywhere. It not only affects the victim but also the society as whole.

According to NFHS -5 ,29.3% of ever-married women between the age group of18-49 experienced violence within the domestic sphere in our country ,which indicates domestic violence still remains a major issue in India .Whereas NFHS-6 shows a decline of violence to 22.3%, Domestic violence is a misbehaviour in which one person dominates or controls another through physical

,emotional ,economic or sexual abuse. To safeguard women from such exploitation many laws were implemented .The Domestic Violence Act of 2005 was the latest among them. Legal illiteracy ,patriarchal societal attitudes and the fear of being thrown out of the house make women hesitant to seek legal aid .Prevalence of violence is higher among rural Indian women while comparing with their urban counterparts.ie 31.6% in rural India and 24.2% among urban women and only 14% of the victims avail legal support as per NFHS -5 data.NFHS-6 shows decline in rural areas to 24.4% and 17.5% in urban area .

The statistics of Kerala show both urban and rural women face abuse from their partners. Education ,social status ,exposure to violence from childhood are decisive in this regard. As per NFHS-5, 9.8% of women in Kerala are victims of violence. With 0.5% physical violence during pregnancy, physical violence by husband 10%,sexual violence2%,emotional violence7%.

According to NFHS 6 the overall percentage of women experiencing violence in Kerala is 17.7%.Spousal violence is higher in rural areas ie. 19.7% while it is 15.6% in urban Kerala, which shows a difference of 4.1%.This fact raises an important question despite high literacy rate ,health care systems and achievements in women's education ,the state failed to ensure gender equality within the household .Another fact to be considered is that the statistics show only the reported cases; unreported cases still exist because of the patriarchal power relations within marriage.

In both surveys rural women face more violence than urban women .While the violence declined nationally from 29.2% in NFHS-5 to 22.3% in NFHS-6 Kerala the national trend with a hype from 9.8% to 17.7% raises a serious threat to gender equality inspite of high literacy and education.

**CAUSES**

- People with patriarchal views often seek to control women ,reinforcing male dominance
- Lack of education can lead to lack of awareness about human rights, justice and equality ,contributing to domestic violence
- Past trauma can contribute to someone becoming an abuser
- Power imbalance in society can lead to abuse and in establishing supremacy
- Financial dependence of the victim can trap them in abusive situations ,making it harder to leave.
- Economic factors like unemployment,financial stress,dependency on husband,dowry demands
- Social factors like early marriage,joint family conflicts,caste issues
- Aggressive nature of the partner contribute to violence
- Normalization of violence as a means of disciplining women
- Substance abuse can increase aggression and lead to violent behaviour .Use of drugs or alcohol lowers the ability to deal with problems in a healthy way

**IMPACTS**

1. Physical harm;-Including injuries and other health issues
2. Low self esteem;- Can lead to isolation and loneliness in people affected by domestic violence
3. Emotional Trauma;-Affects mental health leads to anxiety and depression
4. Social isolation;- The affected persons often withdraws ,isolating themselves from society.
5. Develops Skeptical nature
6. Uncertainty and vulnerability
7. Affected children;- Often exhibit behavioural changes and emotional difficulties

**IMPACT ON CHILDREN**

Violence causes physical and mental harm to children exposed to such a violent environment .Parents often vent their emotions on children. Children exposed to violence may become violent ,sadistic nature and become abusers in the future .They may lose confidence ,become introverted and struggle academically .Also affect physically with diabetes ,obesity ,heart disease etc. and develops narcissistic attitude .There is also chances for addiction to drugs and alcohol.

**IMPACT ON WOMEN IN GENERAL**

Women may stay in abusive relationships due to financial dependence, cultural or religious pressures and the hope that their partner will change .But continuous victimization can affect the ability to work or study.

**IMPACT ON WOMEN AS MOTHERS**

Being a victim of ongoing violence can affect the ability to provide emotional support to her children, such insecurity may cause emotional and behavioural problems in children .Domestic violence may affect parenting styles like over protectiveness ,emotional distance, difficulty setting boundaries and creates emotional struggles and attachment issues in children.

**IMPACT ON WORKING WOMEN**

- Domestic violence impacts work efficacy and makes maintaining a work-life balance challenging
- It reduces work productivity and focus.
- It affects performance and career growth
- It increases bsenteeism
- Abuser's interference and child care responsibilities also affect their performance
- It hinders career advancement

- Emotional stress and other burdens increase absences

**CONCLUSION**

Individuals affected by D V need support and consideration from others. For this,they should be handled with empathy .Strategies include Providing a confidential space to discuss their issues ,flexible work arrangements ,access to counselling ,Connectivity with D V helplines and service providers. Educating colleagues on D V support is utmost important in helping them get back to a normal life .Special attention should be given for the empowerment of rural women ,who are more vulnerable to exploitation. Provide them Legal literacy and awareness about the legal aid and procedures .Also utilise the activities of Kudumbashree which is formed for promoting self sufficiency of rural women. A society's progress is reflected in how it protects it's female population .It's our duty to eradicate these evils from our society and make our country a welfare state.

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