



Theoretical Framework of Violence against Women

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women is one of the most widespread and entrenched human rights abuse on a global scale. It has an impact on women of all ages, classes, ethnicity, and socio-economic backgrounds. The paper examines the theoretical frameworks that attempt to give an explanation of the underlying causes and dynamics of violence against women. It uses psychological, sociological, biological, and feminist views to give a holistic view of the roles of individual, social and structural factors in the cause of gender-based violence. Theories such as Social Learning Theory, Feminist Theory, Interactionist Theory, Psycho-pathological Theory and Resource Theory bring to focus different aspects of violence-learned behavior, power, mental health and socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, the paper deals with legal, political, and cultural factors, which tend to be ignored but contribute to the reinforcement of male dominance and limiting the independence of women. It critiques one-dimensional explanations and emphasizes the necessity of the multidimensional approach, which puts into consideration psychological, cultural, economic, and ethical factors. By understanding the diverse theoretical opinions, policy makers, educators and communities can devise better ways of curbing violence and assisting survivors. The conclusion of the paper is that violence against women cannot be explained by any single theory and a holistic and intersectional approach is required to alter the situation in a real and lasting Change.

**Introduction:**

Women are entitled to honour and respect which she deserves being a human. She should get all recognition in the area of work which she is carrying out. However, this has not happened so far and some men who are worthless of anything also dictate the women only because she is women. The human rights crimes and violations which are inflicted on the women are so unimaginable that every time we hear the news, we are shocked that how can such brutality be inflicted. However, though such acts are inhumanly unimaginable still they are being faced by women. Women faces the violence in one or other way such as inequality i.e. gender bias, inequities in education, dowry deaths, gruesome rape, sexual abuse, domestic violence, bride burning, and many other violence. Most of women start their life facing troubles in many forms and their life is dominated by the patriarchal system which dominates and controls the women in respect of labour, reproductively, sexuality, right to choose the partner, mobility and property and other economic resources. Society does not recognize the women as an individual person in herself but since she is born as women, she is only recognized to do the household day to day work and give birth to a child and expected to deliver male child (Ahmad Seerat, 2021). Violence against women is a pervasive and deeply concerning issue that affects women of all ages, backgrounds, and socio-economic statuses. This form of violence can manifest in various ways, including physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse. It is often rooted in power imbalances, gender inequality, and harmful societal norms that perpetuate the subjugation of women. The consequences of violence against women are far-reaching and can have devastating impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Survivors of such violence may experience physical injuries, psychological trauma, and long-term emotional distress. Additionally, the cycle of violence can perpetuate intergenerational patterns of abuse and harm (King, et.al, 1994).

Efforts to address and prevent violence against women require a multi-faceted approach that includes raising awareness, providing support services for survivors, holding perpetrators accountable, and challenging harmful attitudes and behaviors that contribute to this issue. It is crucial for society to work towards creating a culture of respect, equality, and safety for all individuals, regardless of gender. The theoretical framework of violence against women encompasses various perspectives and theories that seek to understand the root causes and dynamics of violence directed towards women. Some common theoretical frameworks include feminist theory, social learning theory, ecological systems theory, and intersectionality theory. These frameworks help to analyze the complex interplay of individual, societal, and structural factors that contribute to violence against women. In order to explain theories of violence against women, one should know what a theory is. In the academic context, theory is a set of



explanations for any issue based on empirical evidence and profound thinking. It is given by the expert in the field based on his deep knowledge. Theories are used to explain complex phenomena and make predictions about future events. Since it is a theory, it could be proved wrong and is not 100 percent right. It might be modified after the passage of time or when the new event takes place (Bacharach, 1989).

The theories of violence against women refer to the set of ideas that try to explain why men use physical, emotional, and sexual violence against women. The theories of violence against women are mentioned below:

Social learning theory:

The violence against women is socially constructed. It is not naturally inherited in men but taught to him by society and culture. Social learning theory states that an individual will model behaviors that one has been exposed to as a child (Hines, D, 2005). As a child, it is through observation and imitating other people that we learn our behaviors and what are acceptable or normal behaviors. Violence is said to be a learned behavior which can be learned directly or indirectly through family members, friends, partners, etc. These learned behaviors are reinforced in childhood and can continue into adulthood through a term called operant conditioning. Bandura mentions that these behaviors that continue into adulthood typically act as a coping response to stress or as a method of conflict resolution. It is said that children who are mistreated by their parents and learned aggressive behaviors through social interaction went on to express these behaviors later in life and in their intimate relationships (Ehrensaft, 2003). There is no doubt that witnessing and experiencing violence firsthand can increase one's tolerance for violence and puts one at a greater risk for exhibiting the same behaviors as an adult. For instance, when a boy sees his father inflicting violence on his mother, he adopts the same behavior against his wife in the future. He learns the violence and considers it a method to solve problems and exert control over women. Since the violence is witnessed and learnt, there seems no taboo on carrying out it against women (Emily Lopez, 2018).

The Family System Theory:

This theory emerged during the decade of 1960s to 1980s when more and more scholars and researchers began to understand and analyse domestic violence from a sociological perspective which maintains that domestic violence or spousal abuse is one form of family violence. Other forms of domestic violence include child abuse, sibling abuse and parent abuse. This theoretical perspective asserts that the cause of spouse abuse lies in the structure of the contemporary family institution which is a fertile ground for



violence. Though family is a private place so it hides violence which is due to lack of control on behavior.

Physiological Theory:

This theory focuses on nature of evolution and the genetic reasons which are responsible for violent male behaviour. It also emphasizes on brain structures, chemical imbalances, dietary deficiencies, and hormonal factors such as testosterone, for violence committed by males. Genetic and hormonal factors explain the reasons for the greater pre-disposition towards violence in men than in women. There are also some identified theories which have same relevance for understanding violence committed by an individual. These theories can be classified on the basis of three theoretical level of analysis.

- Psychiatric or psycho-pathological analysis.
- Socio-psychological analysis and
- Sociological or socio-cultural analysis

Psycho-Pathological Theory:

The psycho-pathological model focuses on the personality characteristics of offenders and victims as chief determinants of criminal violence. This model includes analysis that links mental illness, alcohol and other intra individual phenomenon to acts of violence. So, according to this theory causes of violence against women arise from the offender's psychological problem like depression, impulsiveness, and uncontrolled emotions. This theory also urges that violence against women arises out of psychological problems of victims. This theory defines the characteristics of Perpetrators as weak pathologically jealous men with low self-esteem and experiencing insecurity about their masculinity.

Socio-Psychological Theories:

This model examines the types of everyday interactions, stressful situations or family interactional patterns which lead to violence. Whenever there is failure to achieve certain goal or end, frustrated perpetrator and his frustration turn into aggression. According to this theory aggression is always directed towards the source of frustration. Frustration-Aggration Theory: This theory is stated by Dollard in 1939 to explain how frustration is linked to aggression. Whenever there is failure to achieve certain goal or end, perpetrator is frustrated and frustration turns into aggression. According to this theory aggression is always directed towards the source of frustration (Buss, 2019).

**Biological Theory:**

The biological theory, violence against women is natural and caused by the biological difference between men and women. The theory suggests that men have high levels of the testosterone hormone, which makes them more rational and aggressive. On the other hand, women are naturally emotional. Besides, the chemistry of their brain is also different. Thus, it is a natural phenomenon for a man to inflict violence on a woman (**Goldberg, 1973**).

Feminist Theory:

Feminist perspectives focus on how broader social forces such as patriarchy contribute to violence against women. There are different definitions of patriarchy, but here it is referred to here as “a sexual system of power in which the male possesses superior power and economic privilege (Eisenstein, Z, 1980). In addition to paying much attention to the ways in which patriarchy is related to a myriad of male assaults on women, feminist theorists reject narrow, legalistic definitions of violence (Renzetti, 2018). While there are a variety of feminist theories of woman abuse in adult heterosexual relationships, most of them share the view that men abuse women to maintain power and control over them. Feminists are also united by a deep desire to eliminate all forms of gender inequality and their injurious consequences, such as violence against women. Moreover, the goal of feminist scholars is “not to push men out so as to pull women in, but rather to gender the study of crime and criminal justice”, as well as other social problems (e.g., poverty, unemployment, health care). Gender refers to “the socio cultural and psychological shaping, patterning, and evaluating of female and male behavior” (Renzetti, 1993). According to feminist theory, violence against women is caused by patriarchy. It is the social system in which men dominate the society by holding the power and authority while women and other groups are given subordinate positions in the society. In this system, women are meant to be obedient to men’s authority and power. There is male dominance in the entire world, and the feminist theory considers it to be the main cause of violence against women. It suggests dismantling the patriarchy system and giving equal rights to men and women to solve the problem of violence.

Culture Theory:

The culture of violence theory is generally defined as a culture that promotes violence in its “direct or structural form”. Violence against women is deeply rooted in culture. Culture is defined as a unique way of life observed by the people. In some culture, women are given subordinate position and treated like an object. In this culture, women are not considered equal to men, but as an object of entertainment. Thus,



owing to these beliefs, violence against women is considered normal and as a part of culture (Johan Galtung, 1990).

Interactionist Theory:

The Interactionist Theory views violence against women as a social process shaped by everyday interactions and societal expectations. This theory suggests that deviance, including violent behavior, is not inherent in an act but is defined by how society reacts to it (Becker, 1963). In the context of gender-based violence, social norms and roles play a key part. Women are often expected to act according to traditional gender roles being submissive, nurturing, and obedient within the family (Schur, 1971). When women deviate from these expectations, some men may use violence to reinforce conformity to these gender norms (Erikson, 1966). A core component of interactionism, argues that once a person is labeled as "deviant," they may internalize this identity, influencing future behavior (Lemert, 1951).

Multi-factor Theory:

This Theory concentrates on the sociological analysis of social structural conditions. According to this model, the important condition which leads a person to women's victimization is status, frustrations, life stresses, career crisis and structural opportunities. Therefore, the man who assaults a woman physically or mentally is often the man who either feels at a disadvantage with women or who feels at an advantageous position in demanding a specific thing from women. He further maintains that violence is used by the people who are either frustrated or develop a superiority ego due to lack of adjustment, attachment and commitment under specific circumstances (Ahuha, 1998).

Resource Theory

Resource Theory is the theory that all social relationships are based on an assumption of force or a threat of force. It theorizes that the more resources that are available to an individual the greater the threat of force, but the less likelihood that force/violence will be used in that relationship (Kenny, 2019). It does not mean that no threat will be used to maintain control, it means that physical violence will not be used. Rather the violence that a woman may experience in this situation is not physical violence but rather emotional violence. However, when someone has fewer resources, they can only resort to force/violence to maintain control over the relationship. Resource theory needs to be addressed to further the social change to end violence against women because the legislative policies only address the physical violence women experienced but do not address the emotional violence. Emotional violence is still not recognized as a criminal offense or illegal. Further social change is needed to challenge emotional violence against



women as well. This is challenging many cultural standards. One example is that words and emotional abuse are protected under freedom of speech. It is also challenging the cultural stigma that women are emotional. In addition to addressing emotional abuse, Resource Theory also needs to be considered in order to prevent physical violence against women in vulnerable populations-the poor with fewer resources. Despite the criminalization of violence against women, women within this demographic are still being victimized by gender based violence. Further social change is needed to create programs or legislation that specially targets assistance of prevention and help to this population (Walters, et.al, 2013).

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory is the theory that people seek the highest reward while putting in the least amount of effort while in a social relationship (Kreager, et.al, 2013). As it pertains to violence against women, violence is used when the reward of gaining control is worth the effort and potential legal consequences. Although there are laws against abuse, this does not always prevent abuse. This occurs for a multitude of reasons. Many women, when reporting abuse, are re-victimized and accused of putting themselves in that situation (Vidales, 2010). This attempt to justify gender based violence not only harms the victim further by blaming her for the violent actions of another human being, but also encourages more violence from the perpetrator because society is essentially condoning the violence. Without cultural retribution against the violence, the effort of violence costs nothing but gives the perpetrator control. Furthermore, the legislative punishment of violence is not always as it should be. Many judges will lessen the sentence of the perpetrator if the victim defends herself. Furthermore, many perpetrators are released after being charged with violence, or given less time under the precedence that they are “first time offenders” (Johnson, S. A, 2005) Many the reduced sentence is a small price to pay for the violence that rewarded them with control of the relationship. Without societal or true legislative support to punish those who commit violent acts against women, the abuse is further rewarded because the woman, after having violence used against her, is more likely to comply with the wishes of her partner as a way to avoid having violence acted against her again especially since the its not handled appropriately by society (Resko, 2010).

Some theories consider the psychological problem of the victim as the major cause for the act of violence. According to these theories violence against women occurs due to the psychological problems of the offender like depression, impulsiveness, uncontrolled emotions, stresses, deprivation, frustration, career crises, and failure in achievement of goal. Similarly other characteristics of the offender like physically weak, pathological jealous and low self-esteem are also considered as the cause for



committing violence. Some theories argue that genetic characteristics of men like brain structure, chemical imbalances, dietary deficiencies and hormonal factors sometimes also encourage them to commit crime against women. Though, undoubtedly these theories are helpful in understanding the causes of violence against women but at the same time many other related factors like legal and political have not been covered by any theory. Legal status of women either by written law and by practice, law regarding divorce, child custody, maintenance and inheritance, legal definition of rape and domestic abuse insensitive treatment of women and girls by police and judiciary and the low level of legal literacy should also be taken as the major cause of violence against women. There are also some political reasons, ignored by the investigators of the causes of crime against women like under representation of women in legislatures and decision making. Similarly, the theories which consider the psychological problems of the victim as a cause of violence seem to sympathize with the offender/ perpetrator who in majority of cases happen to be men not the victim. If poor economic condition is a cause for violence against women then economically poor women are the most backward section. Rather contrary economic status/weakness is more a cause of their victimization. So, if poor economic condition is taken as a cause of violence then theoretically women should be more aggressive and violent to men than, the vive-versa.

Conclusion

It seems as if different theories regarding violence against women wanted to make it conform that it is not the offender himself rather his social, economic, physical, cultural and environmental condition which compel him to commit crime against women. Thus, largely it is the unlimited/unrestricted power and authority of man that encourages him to keep 'his' woman in such a manner as he pleases to. Therefore, committing violence against women is nothing but a matter of honour to preserve the cultural and traditional stereotypes against women. The study of violence/domestic violence against women is a very complex issue. Therefore, any acceptable theory on violence/domestic violence should be comprehensive enough, to include both the psychological as well as the social aspects of the problem. To understand domestic violence one requires multidimensional approach in the light of psychological, cultural, social, economic and ethical aspects of the offender as well as the victims' life. No theory can be exhaustive or universal to the extent of being applicable to all cases, in all countries and in all cultural setups. Violence against women is a complex and urgent societal problem that demands collective action and commitment to creating a world free from gender-based violence. Let us continue to advocate for the rights and well-being of women everywhere.



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