



Domestic Violence Act and Women's Protection in Karnataka

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence remains a significant social issue affecting women across Karnataka despite the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. This study examines the effectiveness of the Act in ensuring women's protection, awareness, and access to justice. The research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Primary data is collected through structured questionnaires and interviews, while secondary data is sourced from reports, journals, and legal documents. The study is conducted in selected urban and semi-urban areas of Karnataka, focusing on women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. A sample size of 100 respondents is selected using random sampling. The research identifies key problems such as lack of awareness about legal rights, social stigma, underreporting of cases, and delays in legal procedures. The findings aim to evaluate the gap between legislation and implementation, highlighting the challenges faced by women in seeking protection. The study also suggests the need for stronger awareness programs, improved legal support systems, and policy interventions to enhance the effectiveness of the Act in safeguarding women's rights.

Introduction:

Domestic violence is a pervasive social issue that affects women across all sections of society, cutting

across age, class, education, and region. In India, the need to address this issue led to the enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which provides comprehensive legal protection to women against physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse within domestic relationships. This Act marked a significant shift from viewing domestic violence as a private matter to recognizing it as a violation of human rights.

In the context of Karnataka, despite legal provisions and government initiatives, many women continue to face challenges in accessing justice and protection. Factors such as lack of awareness, social stigma, economic dependency, and fear of retaliation often prevent women from reporting abuse. Moreover, gaps in implementation, limited support systems, and delays in legal procedures further hinder the effectiveness of the law.

This study aims to explore the level of awareness, accessibility, and impact of the Domestic Violence Act among women in Karnataka. It also seeks to understand the challenges faced in its implementation and to suggest measures for strengthening legal protection and empowering women in society.

Background of the Study:

Domestic violence has long been a deeply rooted social problem in India, traditionally considered a private family matter and often left unreported. Cultural norms, patriarchy, and gender inequality have contributed to the normalization of abuse against women within households. Over time, increasing awareness of women's rights and advocacy by social organizations led to the recognition of domestic violence as a serious legal and human rights issue.

To address this, the Government of India enacted the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which came into force in 2006. The Act provides a comprehensive framework for protection, including the right to residence, protection orders, monetary relief, and custody arrangements. It also introduced the role of Protection Officers and service providers to support affected women.

In Karnataka, various initiatives have been undertaken by the government and non-governmental organizations to implement the Act and support victims. However, despite these efforts, domestic violence cases continue to be reported, and many remain unaddressed due to lack of awareness, social stigma, economic dependency, and procedural challenges.

This background highlights the need to critically examine the effectiveness of the Act at the ground level. Understanding the socio-legal context and challenges in Karnataka is essential for strengthening implementation and ensuring that women receive adequate protection and justice.

Literature Review

International Level:

Domestic violence is recognized globally as a major public health and human rights issue. The World Health Organization multi-country study highlights that domestic violence affects women across different cultures and societies, with significant impacts on physical and mental health. The study, conducted across 10 countries, reveals that intimate partner violence is widespread and often underreported due to social and cultural barriers.¹

National Level (India):

In India, domestic violence has been widely studied, especially after the enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. A systematic review of multiple studies found that nearly 41% of women have experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives, indicating its widespread nature.² Research based on National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data shows that around one-third of married women in India face physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.³ Studies also highlight the adverse impact of domestic violence on women's health, including malnutrition, anemia, and psychological distress.⁴

State Level (Karnataka):

At the state level, studies indicate that domestic violence remains a serious concern in Karnataka. Research based on NFHS data shows a rising trend of spousal violence in the state, despite improvements in women's empowerment indicators.⁵ Another study reported that Karnataka has recorded significant levels of domestic violence, with socio-economic factors such as education, employment, and cultural norms influencing its prevalence.⁶ Furthermore, gaps in implementation of legal provisions and low reporting rates continue to challenge effective protection of women.

Research Gap

Despite the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, there is limited empirical research focusing on its ground-level effectiveness, awareness, and accessibility among women in Karnataka.

Statement of the Problem:

Despite the existence of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, domestic violence continues to persist among women in Karnataka. Many women lack awareness about their legal rights and face barriers such as social stigma, economic dependency, and limited access to legal support systems. This creates a gap between the legal provisions and their effective implementation, raising concerns about the actual protection provided to women.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To examine the level of awareness about the Domestic Violence Act among women.
2. To analyze the effectiveness of the Act in protecting women.
3. To identify challenges faced by women in accessing legal remedies.
4. To study the role of socio-economic factors in domestic violence cases.
5. To suggest measures for improving implementation and protection mechanisms.

Hypotheses:

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant relationship between awareness of the Domestic Violence Act and women's protection in Karnataka.
- **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** There is a significant relationship between awareness of the Domestic Violence Act and women's protection in Karnataka.

Feminist Theoretical Perspective

- The issue of domestic violence can be critically understood through feminist theory, which views violence against women as a result of **patriarchal social structures and gender inequality**. Feminist scholars argue that domestic violence is not merely an individual or private issue but a reflection of unequal power relations between men and women in society.



- **Liberal feminist theory** emphasizes the need for legal reforms and equal rights. The enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 aligns with this perspective, as it aims to provide legal protection and justice for women. However, the study findings show that legal provisions alone are not enough due to lack of awareness and accessibility.
- **Radical feminist theory** views domestic violence as a tool used by men to maintain dominance and control over women within the family. The high prevalence of emotional and physical abuse in Karnataka supports this view, indicating that violence is deeply embedded in patriarchal norms.
- **Socialist/Marxist feminist theory** links domestic violence to women's economic dependency. The study shows that a large proportion of respondents are homemakers, and financial dependency acts as a barrier to reporting violence, reinforcing this theoretical perspective.
- **Intersectional feminism** further explains how factors such as class, education, and social status influence women's experiences of violence. Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds may face greater challenges in accessing legal support and protection.
- Overall, the feminist theoretical framework highlights that domestic violence is a **structural and systemic issue**, requiring not only legal measures but also social transformation, gender equality, and women's empowerment to effectively address the problem.

Research Methodology

This study on “**Domestic Violence Act and Women's Protection in Karnataka**” is based on a **mixed-method research approach**, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The research adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**. Primary data is collected through structured questionnaires and personal interviews with respondents, while secondary data is gathered from books, journals, government reports, and legal documents related to the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

The study is conducted in selected urban and semi-urban areas of Karnataka. A **sample size of 100 women respondents** is selected using **random sampling technique** to ensure unbiased representation.

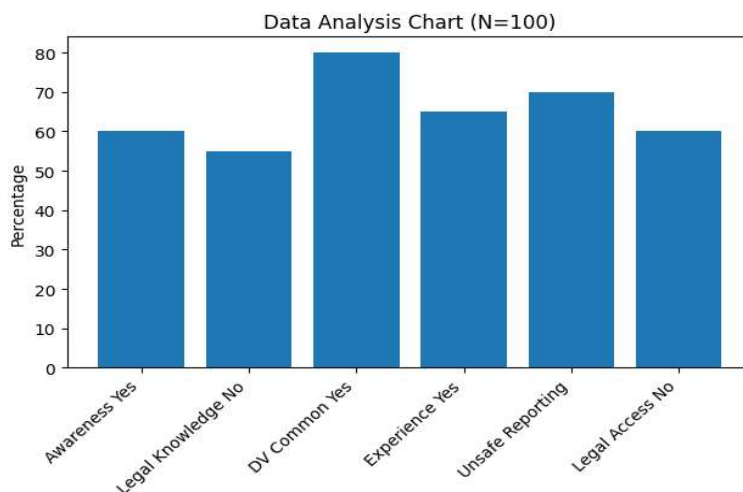
The collected data is analyzed using simple statistical tools such as percentages and charts to interpret the level of awareness, challenges, and effectiveness of the Act.

Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for respondents’ privacy are strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. It aims to describe the level of awareness and analyze the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence Act. The research uses a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data (survey) and qualitative insights (interviews). The study is conducted in selected areas of Karnataka, focusing on women from different socio-economic backgrounds to ensure diversity and accuracy.

Table: Data Analysis Summary (N = 100)



Aspect	Category	Respondents	Percentage
Age	26–35 years	40	40%
Education	Graduate	35	35%
Occupation	Homemaker	40	40%
Marital Status	Married	70	70%
Income	₹10k–₹25k	40	40%

Awareness of Act	Yes	60	60%
Legal Knowledge	No	55	55%
DV Common	Yes	80	80%
Experience	Yes	65	65%
Type of Violence	Emotional	35	35%
Safe Reporting	No	70	70%
Barrier	Fear	35	35%
Legal Access	No	60	60%
Suggestion	Awareness	40	40%

Discussion

The findings of the study highlight important insights into the awareness and effectiveness of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 among women in Karnataka. The data shows that while 60% of respondents are aware of the Act, only 45% have proper knowledge of their legal rights, indicating a significant gap between general awareness and in-depth understanding. This suggests that existing awareness initiatives are not sufficient to empower women to take legal action.

A major concern is that 80% of respondents believe domestic violence is common, and 65% have either experienced it or know someone affected, reflecting the widespread nature of the issue. Emotional violence emerges as the most common form, indicating that non-physical abuse is often overlooked but highly prevalent. Despite the presence of legal provisions, 70% of women feel unsafe reporting cases, mainly due to fear, social stigma, and economic dependency. This clearly indicates that societal and cultural barriers continue to restrict women from seeking help. Furthermore, 60% of respondents reported limited access to legal support systems, pointing to gaps in implementation and service delivery.

The findings suggest that the effectiveness of the Act is constrained not by its provisions but by lack of awareness, weak enforcement, and social barriers. There is a strong need for grassroots-level awareness programs, improved legal accessibility, and support mechanisms to ensure that the law fulfills its intended purpose of protecting women.

Overall, the discussion emphasizes that legal frameworks alone are insufficient unless supported by social change, institutional strength, and empowerment initiatives. Linking Feminist Theory with Objectives and Hypotheses (with Data Support). The feminist theoretical framework is strongly supported by the empirical data collected in this study on the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 in Karnataka. The objective of examining awareness is justified by the data showing that 60% of respondents are aware of the Act, but only 45% know their legal rights. This supports liberal feminist theory, which argues that legal knowledge and awareness are essential for women's empowerment. The gap between awareness and understanding directly validates the need for this objective.

The objective of analyzing effectiveness is linked to findings where 70% of women feel unsafe reporting violence and 60% report poor legal accessibility. These results reflect radical feminist theory, which explains how patriarchal control and fear restrict women's freedom to seek justice. The objective of identifying challenges is supported by data showing fear (35%), social stigma (25%), and economic dependency (25%) as major barriers. This aligns with socialist feminist theory, highlighting how economic and social inequalities limit women's choices and protection.

The hypothesis (H_1) states that awareness of the Act significantly affects women's protection. This is supported by the data: despite 60% awareness, low legal knowledge and high fear levels result in 70% not feeling safe to report, indicating that awareness alone is not sufficient—effective understanding and support systems are necessary. Thus, the data clearly supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1) and reinforces feminist theory by showing that structural inequalities, lack of awareness, and socio-economic barriers directly impact women's protection. Overall, the integration of theory and data demonstrates that improving awareness, accessibility, and empowerment is essential for the successful implementation of the Act.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 in Karnataka, the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1. Awareness Programs:**

Conduct regular awareness campaigns at community and grassroots levels to improve women's understanding of their legal rights.

- 2. Legal Literacy Initiatives:**



Organize workshops and legal aid camps to bridge the gap between awareness (60%) and legal knowledge (45%).

3. Strengthening Support Systems:

Improve access to protection officers, helplines, and counseling services to ensure timely support.

4. Encouraging Reporting:

Create a safe and confidential environment for reporting, addressing the 70% who feel unsafe to report.

5. Economic Empowerment:

Promote skill development and employment opportunities for women to reduce financial dependency.

6. Strict Implementation:

Ensure effective enforcement of laws with faster legal procedures and accountability mechanisms.

7. Community Involvement:

Engage NGOs, local leaders, and self-help groups to reduce stigma and support victims.

Conclusion:

The study highlights that domestic violence remains a serious concern in Karnataka despite the presence of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. While a moderate level of awareness exists, there is a significant gap in legal understanding and accessibility. The findings reveal that fear, social stigma, and economic dependency continue to prevent women from seeking help.

The study confirms that awareness alone is not sufficient; effective implementation, strong support systems, and social change are essential to ensure women's protection. The hypothesis is supported, indicating that increased awareness and empowerment can significantly improve outcomes. Overall, the research concludes that a combined effort of legal enforcement, social awareness, and women's empowerment is necessary to address domestic violence and ensure justice and safety for women in society.

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