

A Social Work Study on Women Problems and Measures

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Abstract: *Characteristics of women who access the call for assistance, as well as the types of violence they face. Over half the women who sought help from the cell did so in the first five years of abuse. For women who had experienced violence for more than five years, the numbers dropped sharply. In nearly 60 per cent of cases, women are reporting violence within joint or extended family households. As noted above, over a third of the women seeking help were involved in paid work. These records include the first report of a crime taken by police, women's narratives, the testimony of witnesses, and other documentation. Further, access to the records was often slow because individual police personnel needed to use the duplicate records in their ongoing work. Finally, there was often little or no information in them regarding interventions or actual completion of cases, making an analysis of assistance difficult.*

Keywords: Women, Violence, Struggle, Sharpness, Households, Family

1. Introduction

One of the most significant gains of the women's movement in India has been the creation of legislation affecting women and specifically violence against women. Increasingly, the women's movement and the law enforcement machinery of the police have begun to collaborate to make justice accessible to women. Some outcomes of this collaboration are women's police stations, women's cells within general police stations, gender training programs, and police counselling cells. The Special Cell works directly with women, their families, and the community in providing a range of services, including interface with police and emotional support; in working with the police, the Special Cell has tried to influence the interpretation of legal provisions to widen the police umbrella for women facing violence. The researchers, who also work at the Special Cell, studied the Special Cell records to analyse the existing database on violence against women. In Indian legal parlance, cognisable cases refer to criminal cases with severe punishment, either the death penalty or long imprisonment. These cases are investigated and taken for trial in the Sessions Court. Non - cognizable cases are criminal cases with less severe punishment, which the magistrate can hear and dismiss without a trial.

These records include the first report of a crime taken by police, women's narratives, the testimony of witnesses, and other documentation. Researchers' field notes from participant observation at the Special Cell. Rerecords from the non - cognizable offences register and 15 criminal cases under Section 498A. The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The Special Cell records and the non - cognizable offences recorded in the NC register at the police station were analysed with a pre - coded questionnaire. Later, qualitative methods of textual analysis were used for the in - depth case studies of the criminal cases that fell under Section 498A. It is essential to note that the methodological paradigms of the two parts of the study are entirely different. As research exploring

procedural and investigative processes from a feminist lens is infrequent, provocative and essential questions regarding the social response to domestic violence remain unexamined. Hence, in the second, more qualitative part of the study, the researchers applied more innovative approaches to the data to garner much - needed new insights. Researchers encountered several obstacles in accessing and examining the data. The women's narratives were emotionally draining, and their information was usually uneven.

Further, access to the records was often slow because individual police personnel needed to use the duplicate records in their ongoing work. Finally, there was often little or no information in them regarding interventions or actual completion of cases, making an analysis of assistance difficult. Despite the difficulties encountered, the study shed light on the demographic profile of cases referred to the Special Cell and some emerging trends. The number of cases referred to the Special Cell increased three - fold between 1990 and 1996. The data sets at the cell also make clear the role of ex - clients in increasing the outreach of its services, as many women (40.6 per cent) approached the cell due to referrals by older clients. Another 13 per cent of the women were referred to the Special Cell by the police. However, links with courts and hospitals were weak, with barely one per cent of those institutions referring them to the Special Cell. Many women had approached other mediating agencies, such as family members, older counsels, and welfare organisations, before seeking recourse at the Special Cell. Surprisingly, 34 per cent of the women had initially approached the police for help. Thus, despite the image of the police as brutal, uncaring, and insensitive, women do view them as an immediate source of protection from violence. Most women approaching the Special Cell from 1990 - 1997 were 18 - 34 years (65.4 per cent). However, a relatively large number of women were also aged 35 - 44. More than 60 per cent were married, primarily through arranged marriages. In 33.4 per cent of the cases, the complainants were single women (either widowed, divorced, separated or unmarried). Interestingly, only 9% of women

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reporting to the Special Cell had no education. A significant majority had either primary or secondary education. Concerning employment, more than a third was involved in paid work.

Emerging trends

The records from the Special Cell provide insights into the characteristics of women who access the cell for assistance, as well as the types of violence they face. Over half the women who sought help from the cell did so in the first five years of abuse. For women who had experienced violence for more than five years, the numbers dropped sharply. In nearly 60 per cent of cases, women are reporting violence within joint or extended family households. As noted above, over a third of the women seeking help were involved in paid work. Though a woman's employment status was not associated with an increased or decreased likelihood of violence, the form and nature of the abuse did vary by employment status. Women in paid work reported less physical violence, but the reporting of mental violence was pervasive across both employed and unemployed women. Fewer women in paid work reported deprivation within their matrimonial home. In the initial five years, more non - working women came forward to report inter - spousal abuse. Still, in later years of the marriage, their proportion declined dramatically compared to working women.

Hypothesis

Cell hypothesised that women in paid employment were more in touch with the outside world, enabling them to explore broader alternatives for longer. Among women not employed outside the home, the choices become very limited over some time, as reflected by the sharp decline in reporting rates of violence. The impact of financial independence and mobility on women's ability to exercise choices cannot be understated. At the same time, it is significant to note that economic independence by itself does not reduce the propensity for women to face violence within marriage. Support from the natal home has also been found to be a crucial factor in women's struggle against spousal abuse. Most of the women were found to be staying with their parents at the time of reporting. However, this was found to be more common among women not employed outside the home. More women in paid employment have reported violence to the cell while continuing to reside in the marital home. Most women named the husband as the primary perpetrator of violence. However, field experience reveals that often, women are battered in an environment where other family members actively encourage or tacitly consent to this abuse. Women accused the husband in 2/3 of all cases, whereas the mother - in - law was named a collaborator in nearly 1/3 of all cases.

Domestic Violence in India

The mental trauma and agony of psychological abuse also emerged as a pervasive issue through the Special Cell's recordings. Women reported several forms of abuse, and their perceptions of what constitutes mental and physical abuse are very fluid and undifferentiated. Yet mental violence is consistently reported and remains very alive in the minds of women. Women place many forms of physical abuse as being far more *mentally* disturbing than physically painful. This is evident in 83.5 per cent of cases where

women have verbalised precisely how their perpetrator operates against them with words, expectations, and behavioural norms. While physical violence is not detailed, mental violence is described in great detail. Desertion by the husband, deprivation of matrimonial residence, substance abuse, fraudulent marriage, and non - fulfilment of responsibilities are some of the many problems women have articulated in their applications to the Special Cell.

Nature of Assistance sought.

A primary reason that women approached the Special Cell was to seek help to prevent further domestic violence. This included negotiation for peaceful cohabitation, emotional and legal support (including counselling, legal help, and shelter), and resources to combat family violence. However, information on the kind of assistance the cell provided was sparse. In 83.8 per cent of cases, information on the nature of help given was unavailable in the records. The available data shows that the demand for legal assistance was the highest across almost all age groups. One of the reasons for this could be that women seek external intervention, in this case, the Special Cell, only when marital relations have reached a stage of near collapse, and legal intervention may be necessary. Further, caseworkers at the Special Cell observed that women's goals and priorities shift during the intervention process itself, and the caseworker often has to accommodate these shifts. From the available data on assistance given, Special Cell workers could provide police help for women in over 1/4 of the cases. Police help ranged from writing up non - cognizable offences to registering criminal cases against the offending husband, retrieving assets, and enforcing court orders. The data on retrieval of personal assets received at the time of marriage (*streedhan*) also indicates that women seek outside help to assist in the struggle for control over assets when they want to opt out of marriage. When women approach the police for help, the police must decide whether to register a complaint as a criminal case or a non - cognizable offence. Thus, police records of non - cognizable offences provide essential data regarding this decision - making process and the emerging demographic trends.

Evidence from these non - cognizable or NC registers indicates a demographic profile similar to that from the Special Cell records regarding age, marital status, and employment status. The records of the NC register also provide more insight into the kinds of issues that women and children are bringing to police stations, their expectations from the system, and the response of the police to these women. NC records show that in over 50 per cent of the cases, women complained of mental violence. In very few of these cases, there has been no recording of physical injuries by the police, and these records show that the police took follow - up action in 40 per cent of the cases.

Initiatives Undertaken by Governments to Enhance Women's Rights

In the past ten years, numerous governments across the globe have implemented measures to address heinous acts against women, encompassing domestic violence, sexual harassment, human trafficking, and systemic discrimination. Notable initiatives include:

1) Fortification of Legislation Addressing Gender - Based Violence

- A multitude of nations have enacted or reinforced legal statutes to criminalize domestic violence, marital rape, and sexual harassment.
- Certain countries have instituted expedited judicial processes to adjudicate cases of violence against women with greater efficiency.

2) Creation of Helplines and Support Centres

- Governments have established around - the - clock helplines aimed at aiding women who are experiencing violence.
- Women's shelters and crisis intervention centres have been augmented in various nations.

3) Enhanced Penalties for Sexual Offenses

- More stringent punitive measures, including life sentences and capital punishment for acts of rape, have been adopted in several jurisdictions.
- Certain legal frameworks have minimized bureaucratic obstacles for women seeking to report sexual crimes.

4) Advancement of Gender Equality in the Workplace

- Legal mandates enforcing equal remuneration and safeguarding against workplace harassment have been actively implemented.
- Policies regarding maternity leave and safety protocols for women in the workplace have been significantly improved.

5) Intensified Measures against Human Trafficking

- Governments have fortified anti - trafficking legislation and bolstered international collaboration to rescue and rehabilitate victims.
- Public awareness initiatives have been initiated to avert trafficking and exploitation.

6) Educational and Awareness Initiatives

- Educational institutions have integrated gender - sensitivity programs into their curricula.
- Governments have partnered with non - governmental organizations to disseminate knowledge concerning women's rights and gender parity.

7) Augmented Representation of Women in Leadership Roles

- Certain nations have established quotas to ensure a higher representation of women in political and governance spheres.
- Women's commissions and advisory entities have been created to influence policy formulation.

8) Enhanced Access to Justice and Reforms within Law Enforcement

- Dedicated police units and women's assistance desks have been established to support female victims of criminal acts.
- Training initiatives for law enforcement personnel on the management of gender - based violence cases have been instituted.

Social Work Intervention in Addressing Women in distress in India

Social work plays a crucial role in addressing women in distress by providing emotional, legal, and social support to survivors. Social workers, through both government and non - governmental organizations, have developed intervention strategies that help women navigate legal processes, seek shelter, and access financial and psychological support. The interventions can be categorized into several key areas:

1) Crisis Intervention and Immediate Support

Social workers engage in crisis intervention to provide immediate assistance to women facing violence. This includes:

- **Helpline Services:** 24/7 crisis hotlines are established to assist women in distress. Social workers collaborate with the police and NGOs to ensure swift action.
- **Emergency Shelters:** Women facing immediate threats are provided with temporary shelters where they receive food, medical aid, and counselling.
- **Psychosocial Support:** Trained social workers offer counselling services to help women cope with trauma, build resilience, and regain confidence.

2) Legal Assistance and Advocacy

- Social workers act as intermediaries between women and the legal system, ensuring that survivors understand their rights and can access justice. Their role includes:
- **Legal Literacy Programs:** Educating women on laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), Section 498A (dowry - related harassment), and property rights.
- **Court Support Services:** Helping survivors file complaints, access legal aid, and navigate the judicial process.
- **Advocacy for Policy Change:** Engaging in activism to ensure better implementation of laws and gender - sensitive policies.

3) Family and Community Mediation

- Many survivors hesitate to take legal action due to social and economic constraints. Social workers use mediation strategies to:
- **Facilitate Family Dialogue:** Encouraging family members to support the survivor rather than force reconciliation.
- **Community Awareness Campaigns:**
- Engaging religious leaders, village elders, and community groups to break the stigma around domestic violence.
- **Behavioural Change Programs:**
- Conducting gender sensitization workshops for men to challenge toxic masculinity and promote healthy relationships.

4) Economic Empowerment and Rehabilitation

- Economic dependence often prevents women from leaving abusive relationships. Social workers address this issue by:
- **Vocational Training:** Providing skills training in areas such as tailoring, handicrafts, and entrepreneurship.
- **Microfinance and Self - Help Groups:** Helping women access microloans to start small businesses.

- Employment Assistance: Partnering with companies to provide job placements for survivors.
- 5) Long - Term Counselling and Rehabilitation**
- To help women rebuild their lives, social workers focus on:
 - Trauma - Informed Therapy: Providing long - term psychological counselling to help women heal from emotional and mental abuse.
 - Support Groups: Creating peer networks where survivors can share experiences and support each other.
 - Child Welfare Services: Ensuring children affected by domestic violence receive counselling and educational support.
- 6) Strengthening Institutional Support**
- Social workers collaborate with various institutions to enhance support for survivors, including:
 - Police Training: Conducting gender sensitivity training for law enforcement officers to ensure a survivor - centric approach.
 - Hospital - Based Interventions: Training medical professionals to identify and report domestic violence cases.
 - Integration with Government Schemes:
 - Connecting women to welfare schemes such as widow pensions, housing assistance, and free legal aid services.

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2. Conclusions

Analysing the Special Cell records and the in - depth case studies of the criminal cases registered under Section 498A has yielded several key conclusions. While women seek help with the support of the natal family, the case studies reveal that women do not register cases without male approval. In the detailed statements, it emerges that fathers, brothers, uncles or brothers - in - law have given approval and often take the lead in registering a case. Secondly, the woman's voice is not enough to validate the complaint as a criminal charge; there has to be endorsement by witnesses to build a picture of the violation and have weight in the court. Thirdly, from the data, it is evident that violence within marriage is viewed hierarchically, with grievous hurt being treated more seriously than being kicked, punched or beaten by hands. In addition, data from the records and the case studies clearly showed mental violence to be pervasive and well articulated. Still, women at the Special Cell rarely mentioned sexual violence in the narratives.

Social work interventions play a vital role in bridging the gap between survivors and justice. By providing immediate crisis support, legal aid, economic empowerment, and long - term rehabilitation, social workers help women reclaim their dignity and autonomy. Collaborative efforts between social workers, law enforcement, and community organizations are crucial in creating a society where women feel safe and empowered to break free from cycles of abuse.

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