
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN RUSSIA: THE DARK TRUTH

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Abstract: Domestic violence against women is a huge problem in the contemporary Russian society. Infact, Russia has a long history of cultural acceptance for domestic violence. As an old Russian saying goes, “If he beats you, it means that he loves you.” The problem of domestic violence is a seriously underreported crime in Russia. Domestic violence has long been perceived to be a private matter within the four walls of the home. According to estimates more than 600 Russian women are killed a month in their own homes, and that up to 36,000 women a day are being abused. Despite these alarming figures and recommendations from international players like CEDAW, Russia’s parliament voted by an overwhelming majority – 380 to 3 – in favour of an amendment that decriminalizes domestic abuse. Thus such law sends a clear signal to the society that violence against women is acceptable. Thus the paper studies domestic violence, its types, effects and also explores domestic violence in Russian society & its consequences on the lives of women. It will also study the dark reality of the bill decriminalizing domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Russian Society, Women in Russia.

Introduction: Throughout the world, every society experienced some kind of Domestic violence. We often read it in newspapers, magazines and books related to social issues. Moreover, we sometimes see some kind of Domestic violence in television programme and now-a-days the virtual world has also enough documentaries on Domestic violence. All these information revealed that it is a kind of Social issue which is prevailing more or less in every society. It may happen with anyone irrespective of any race, age, gender and religion. It can bring people of all types of socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels, into its cluster. One can find difference from country to country about the awareness, perception, definition and documentation on this issue. But it is accepted as a norm in many cultures. Sometimes, some kind of revolution also seen in many societies but the revolution hardly brings any change in a society. In this article, I am going to analyze, one of the prevailing condition called domestic violence in Russian Society. But before that, we must comprehend, what the domestic violence is? how it occurs? its types, its effects etc.

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic Violence is known by various names in various societies, for example domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence, intimate partner violence (IPV). But in all these situations, one thing is common i.e. one partner shows a pattern of abusive behavior against the other partner in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family, live-in relationship or cohabitation. The abusive behaviour sounds many thing for example, physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects), or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering; intimidation; stalking; passive/covert abuse (e.g., neglect); and economic deprivation.[1] Domestic violence and abuse is not exactly limited to physical violence only. It differ upto some extent from one country to another and has evolved from time to time. Domestic violence may also includes endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing and harassment. But in all these circumstances, one thing is clear that it is practices in order to gain and maintain control over the victim. Abusers deviate their behaviour in many forms to exert power by humiliating, isolating, giving threats, intimidating, denying and blaming over their spouse or partner as dominance.

Types and Effects of Domestic Violence: In domestic sphere, people abusing their partners in many forms. They are broadly categorized in to four. They are Physical, Sexual, Emotional or Psychological

and Economical. In the next paragraphs we can go through the main types and the effects of domestic violence.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse leads to physical injury to the victim for example hitting, slapping, punching, choking, pushing, burning etc. Denying to the medical care when needed, depriving the victim from sufficient sleep or any other functions require to live and forcing the victim to consume drug or alcohol against his/her will are also comes under this category. The abuser sometimes inflicts physical injury onto other targets, such as children or pets, in order to give psychological pain to the victim. Because of physical violence, bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations, and internal bleeding often found.[²] Some chronic health conditions are also seen. They are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pain, pelvic pain, ulcers, and migraines.[³] Expecting mothers when become Victims, they often find miscarriage, pre-term labor, and injury to or death of the fetus.[⁴]

Sexual Abuse: Obtaining sexual participation by means of force or threat that results in unwanted sexual activity known as sexual abuse. It is considered as an act of aggression and violence, even if the victim is a spouse or intimate partner with whom consensual gratification has satisfied.

Emotional Abuse: Behaviour shown to confuse and create insecurity in the victims that lead the victims to ask themselves, and finally give a cause to believe that they are making up the abuse or that the abuse is their own fault leads to emotional abuse. With emotional abuse, the victims often suffer from depression, eating disorders, misuse of drug and alcohol and sometimes this kind of abuse puts them into risk of suicide. Emotional abuse can include verbal abuse in which the victim's self-worth undermined or controls the victim's freedom. With emotional abuse, the victims face humiliation both privately or publicly. In this kind of abuse, the abuser controls what the victim can and cannot do, withholds information from the victim, deliberately does something to make the victim feel embarrassed, isolates the victim from near and dear ones and implicitly blackmails the victim by harming others. As a result, high amounts of stress, fear, panic and anxiety have to face by the victim. The most commonly psychological effect occurred due to emotional abuse is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is characterized by flashbacks, intrusive images, exaggerated startle response, nightmares, and avoidance of triggers that are associated with the abuse.[⁵]

Economical Abuse: When the abuser has control over the victim's access to economic resources, economic abuse happens. The control may involve preventing the victim from resource acquisition or limiting the amount of resources for use of victim, or exploiting economic resources, the victim already has. In these cases, the motive is to harm victim's capacity to support him/herself.[⁶] So, the victim forced to depend on the perpetrator financially. In this scenario, the victim can not obtain education, find employment, maintain his/her career and finally acquire assets.[⁷]As a result, the victims usually has very little money of their own. After this, they can believe few people on whom they can rely at the time of need.

From the above factors, we know what are the types of domestic violence and its effects on victims. Now I am analyzing the situation of domestic violence in Russian society. Is domestic violence widely prevailing in Russian society? If yes then what are the causes of domestic violence there? What measures the government had taken to curb them.

Domestic violence in Russian Society: Throughout the history of Russia, domestic violence made life of many women miserable. The situation was a nightmare in the former Soviet Union. The country also has a long history of cultural acceptance for domestic violence. As an old Russian saying goes, "If he beats you, it means that he loves you." Domestic violence has long been perceived to be a private matter within the four walls of the home. Statistics about domestic violence in the former Soviet Union revealed that the situation is much worse than other prevailing countries like Armenia or Uzbekistan. Report from the Anna Center for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, a long-running Moscow-based non-governmental organization shows that a Russian woman is 2.5 times more likely to die at the hands of a partner than an American woman, and five times more likely than a European. Russia's Interior

Ministry estimates that domestic violence kills 14,000 women a year which is 2/3rd of the country's homicides, and equates to a woman dying at the hands of a partner every 40 minutes. Russia is home to 145 million people, but the country has only about 48 shelters for battered women nationwide.[⁸]

Reaction of People and Legislation in Former Soviet Union: The problem of domestic violence is a seriously under-reported crime in Russia. In former Soviet Union, organizations for Women's rights have tried for more than 20 years to prod lawmakers in order to enact domestic violence legislation. But most of those efforts have failed. The main problem was the parliament is male dominated where members contend that a domestic violence law is unnecessary. They thought that prevailing laws already cover assault, battery and murder. Instead, they enforced those laws which make a distinction between a woman being attacked by his/her partner or not. When the attacker is not a partner, police and prosecutors will bring a case against him but if the attacker is a partner, they try to talk to the couple for compromise. In this situation, a woman can bring charges against a partner on her own without any police assistance, but it's a intimidating proposition. She also has to gather evidence and line up witnesses herself and has to bring a case before a judge herself which is a formidable task if she's not a lawyer. As a result, only 2% of Russian domestic-violence victims reporting their battering to police.[⁹] In this scenario, prosecutors bring charges against a batterer only after he has killed his partner or assaulted her so severely that she's disabled. Journalists in the former Soviet Union called for separate legislation to address it. Most of the domestic-abuse bills that have been drafted in the Soviet union have focused on prevention only i.e. stopping the batterer from continuing to abuse his partner to the point that she becomes crippled or dies. There was no country in the region which has a restraining-order law that would allow a judge to order a batterer to avoid further contact with his victim. With the absence of such provisions, a batterer could continue assaulting his partner until it's too late.

Social Reasons That Support the Batterer in the Soviet Era: In order to preserve the marriage, community elders always try to adjudicate a domestic abuse situation as they are typically conservative. They usually advise the victim to bear the abuse for the sake of the family. They said, it is worse to change whatever behavior she engages in that provokes her batterer. Most women continue to get battered as they have no resources to start a life of their own and few battered-women shelters are available.

Most of the former Soviet Union consists of patriarchal societies where men are considered head of the family. They behaved like a king and their partners were just like their servitors. So it is a deeply ingrained attitude that men can batter women with impunity. Whatever domestic-abuse laws were available in the former Soviet Union, they could not bring a change as there was no change in men's attitudes. If we take into account the role of media, journalists and activists can't get specific numbers for domestic violence speaks volumes.

Domestic Violence in Contemporary Russian Society: Thousands of women in Russia die each year as a result of domestic violence. According to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (police), 40% of violent crimes happen within the family. It is estimated that up to 36,000 women a day are being abused by their husbands or partners daily, and 14,000 women and 2,000 children are killed by family members every year. But despite many years of discussions, domestic abuse is still not recognized as a crime. Russia have not enacted laws specifically targeting domestic violence. There is only one legal provision applicable to prosecuting domestic violence i.e. article 116 of the Code. Article 116 deals with physical assault, defined as "battery or similar violent actions, which have caused physical pain but have not amounted to light injury" i.e., have not merely caused temporary harm to a person's health or the insignificant loss of the general capacity to work. Up to July 2016, non-aggravated battery was a crime and punishable by a fine or by varied terms of restriction of liberty with reduced income at a place designated by the authorities.[¹⁰]

Decriminalization of Domestic Violence: The Russian federation decriminalized nonaggravated battery in July 2016 and made it an administrative offense punishable by a fine or detention. However, repeated battery and battery committed against close relatives remained punishable under the Criminal

Code. Russia amended the Criminal Code once again in February of 2017 and removed the provision regarding assaulting close relatives from the article on nonaggravated battery. As a result, violence committed against family members has also been made an administrative offense. Only repeated instances of battery are now prosecuted as criminal offenses and punishable by criminal law.^[11] Reducing battery within the family from a criminal to an administrative offense and with weaker sanctions for offenders, would be a clear sign of regression within the Russian Federation. With this amendment, Russia preserve the “tradition of parental authority.” The term "domestic violence" which is so widely used in the West does not exist in Russian law.

Failure of Russia in International Commitments: International and nongovernmental organizations have noted the failure of Russia to adequately protect victims of domestic violence.

- The Secretary General of the Council of Europe said, the February 2017 amendment would strike a blow to global efforts to eradicate domestic violence.
- Russia is bound by the European Social Charter, which requires States Parties to protect children against violence. But as per the new law passed in February 2017, it failed.
- The Human Rights Watch (HRW) said, the February 2017 amendment was “dangerous. The failure to adequately protect victims of domestic violence and ensure access to justice violates Russia’s international human rights obligations.
- Russia is among only 4 out of 47 Member States of the Council of Europe who have neither signed nor ratified the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.^[12]

Conclusion: From the above analysis, I can say, domestic violence is established as a positive sanction in the society of Russia. The country doesn’t consider familial battery morally or fundamentally wrong anymore. In many ways, this reflects the thrust of an old Russian proverb: “If he beats you it means he loves you.” With this, old traditional values have become popular again.

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