

Research Report

Human Rights Council

2 | Measures to eradicate domestic violence and femicide

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Introduction

The Human Rights Council aims to protect human rights of people across the globe irrespective of their race, gender, sexuality, religion. This committee focuses on improving the livelihoods of people all across the world and ensuring safety, freedom and equality. It works with people across the world who are vulnerable to violence and other human rights violations. This includes providing basic human necessities and opportunities that work towards achieving equality. These responsibilities include empowering women and protecting them from violence.

Domestic Violence and Femicide have been issues faced by society for centuries. One in three women have reported to be victims of domestic violence in romantic relationships or otherwise. These issues are especially prevalent in underdeveloped countries which have a low education rate. Most domestic violence victims suffer because proper authorities and organisation of help are not set in place by government bodies. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) encompasses intimate partner violence, sexual violence and harassment, human trafficking, female genital mutilation and child marriage. This also includes psychological forms of abuse, forced marriage, stalking and cyber-harassment.

While gender-based violence is common and can happen to anyone, certain situations increase the possibility of violence on women. For example, members of the LGBTQ+ community are often targeted. Women and girls who are living through humanitarian crises are often taken advantage of and abused. The same applies for members of the disability community. These specific cases make some women more vulnerable than others.

Violence can cause adverse effects on the psychological and physical well-being of victims. These negative impacts can restrict women from gaining equality in society or leading productive lives. VAWG can have serious side-effects like PTSD, decrease in sexual health and disabilities.

The Human Rights Council must focus on creating solutions that help in preventing domestic violence and femicide. The priority must lie with protecting women and girls and punishing perpetrators. Fighting against violence also comes under the UN SDGs - to achieve equality, development and peace.

Definition of Key Terms

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence refers to violent behaviour between current or former intimate partners – typically where one partner tries to exert power and control over the other, usually through fear. It can include physical, sexual, emotional, social, verbal, spiritual and economic abuse..

Femicide

Femicide or feminicide is a sex-based hate crime term, broadly defined as "the intentional killing of women or girls because they are female"

VAWG

An abbreviation for 'Violence Against Women and Girls'.

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination, also known as sexual discrimination, is any action that specifically denies opportunities, privileges, or rewards to a person (or a group) because of gender.

LGBTQ+ Community

LGBTQ+ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. The “+” signifies that one acronym can't capture everyone's experience of their gender identity or expression and/or sexual orientation.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD)

A disorder characterised by failure to recover after experiencing or witnessing a terrifying event.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse, also referred to as molestation, is abusive sexual behavior by one person upon another. It is often perpetrated using force or by taking advantage of another

Female Genital Mutilation

The practice, traditional in some cultures, of partially or totally removing the external genitalia of girls and young women for non-medical reasons. It is illegal in many countries.

Child Marriage

Child Marriage is defined as a marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18 and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married.

Consent

Permission for something to happen or agreement to do something. Here, refer to sexual relationships and encounters.

Current State of Affairs

Prevention of Domestic Violence and Femicide has become essential in recent times because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of cases has increased significantly during the lockdown period, women and children have had no opportunity to seek help. Identifying cases of violence is also difficult when there is no interaction between victims and their friends, colleagues, etc. Women became more vulnerable in abusive relationships because they were unable to report abuse cases or even protect themselves from the perpetrators. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown has given not only an excuse but also an opportunity for abusers to get away with violence.

The number of domestic violence cases surged in countries all over the world and not only hotspots. This includes developed countries like The United States of America, Australia, The United Kingdom and South Korea. Countries which had seen a decline in recent years also saw a sharp spike like India and China. The COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to another pandemic of domestic violence.

Keeping the pandemic aside, VAWG still remains one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world. It is an issue that has proven to be persistent because victims are hesitant to report abusers. Cases of domestic violence and femicide go largely unreported due to the stigma, silence and shame surrounding it in some communities. Victims often feel compelled to hide their abuse and safeguard their abuser. In 2017, an estimated 58% of domestic violence was caused by a family member or an intimate partner. Research also shows that only 40% of women who experience violence seek help of any sort, and less than 10% of these women seek help from formal institutions and medical professionals. Often, when cases are reported the abusers are left unpunished.

These problems have been considered private matters, and are still treated this way by older generations and uneducated societies. Law Enforcements in these regions could also hold similar attitudes. However, globally it has been recognised as an important issue which has to be dealt with using law enforcement and social services. Over 140 countries have passed laws against domestic violence, however the problem persists.

Major Countries and Organizations

Sudan

Sudan has one of the highest rates of child marriages in the world. 34% of women aged 15 to 49 think that their husband/partner is justified in abuse and violence. Many girls are also married below the age of 18 without consent. The rate of female genital mutilation in Sudan is 87%

Iraq

A 2010 UN fact sheet stated that one in five Iraqi women were subject to domestic violence. The rate of child marriage in Iraq is above 25% and FGM is 7%. Religious and societal norms in Iraq prevent any government or social body to raise awareness in Iraq.

Pakistan

Violence against women especially in rural areas remains prevalent in Pakistan. This includes offences like child marriage, rape, murder, honor killings, acid attacks and domestic violence. The rate of child marriage is 21%.

Mali

Mali remains one of the worst countries for women with a gender inequality index gap of 156. 51.5% of girls are victims of child marriage. FGM is extremely popular in Mali at 87%. The rate of violence in marriages is at 35.5%.

UNICEF

This organisation aims to protect children and promote fair education and learning. They focus on helping children and fight for their basic rights. Prevention of violence against children comes under their goals.

World Health Organisation

This organisation looks towards helping abuse victims and protecting them. Victims, especially children can have severe disorders like PTSD which they will require professional help for.

United Nations Women

This organisation works towards the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. They work in areas which lack laws protecting women and work to better society. They have passed laws in the past which can help with domestic violence and femicide.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

The United Nations Work on Violence Against Women

This topic was covered in World Conferences in Mexico, Copenhagen and Nairobi from 1975-1985. The General Assembly adopted the 'Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women' in 1993. Steps were outlined which stated the steps the UN and Human Rights Council were going to take to tackle this problem. It focused on punishing the perpetrators and introducing laws in all member states. The declaration failed to include any form of education for citizens which would help in removing stigma and shame surrounding the topic in some countries. It also did not include any therapy or medical help for abuse victims.

Strategies for Confronting Domestic Violence: A Resource Manual

This Manual was written by the United Nation along with the Canadian Justice Department in 1993. This includes specification on the justice department and their role in the problem. It includes suggestions for improving the criminal justice systems which will help in decreasing the number of perpetrators. It also includes details on how to deal with and help the victims, during and after the trial. However, this document acted as a suggestion for member states and did not include anything binding. No member states were compelled to follow the suggestion given in the guide.

UN Global Action during COVID-19 Crisis

In April 2020, the UN recognised the dangers a lockdown could have on people in abusive conditions. They decided to assign roles to their ground-level workers which would help in improving condition in the short-run. This was not a permanent or significant solution, it was instead an immediate one aimed to help people that were stuck in an unfavourable condition during this pandemic.

Possible Solutions

As mentioned before this is a complex and difficult problem to solve because it involves deep-rooted changes in society and ideals of people around the world. To completely eradicate the issue, women must be empowered and all people have to be educated. This could involve implementing health classes in schools to inform and educate children about domestic violence and its negative impacts. In fact, classes for all age-groups would help in removing the stigma and explaining the human rights violation that comes with violence.

Educating populations would be the first step towards achieving equality and reducing the societal causes of violence.

One of the reasons why domestic violence cases remain high in some countries is because of the lack of action by the judicial system and local law enforcement. Many of these organisations are either biased by societal norms and ideals or held back by limitations by laws and procedure. Perpetrators often go unpunished because of lack of evidence and a classic “he said/she said” situation. Reforms that go towards improving the judicial system and law enforcement and work towards benefitting the victim can help improve the situation. This includes protective measures for victims and greater punishment for abusers - jail time, fines, etc.

In order to completely eradicate this problem, it is important that we protect and help the victims. Abuse victims often experience many problems even after the trauma takes place, organisations should be set up that operate to help past victims. Systems that help with PTSD - therapy, medication and any other resources they might need. They will also need help in ensuring they are protected from their abusers, especially in countries where crimes like honour killings and acid attacks are still prevalent.

Questions to Consider

1. What is the fundamental cause for domestic violence in your country? For example, is it caused by poverty, religious ideals or other specific reasons?
2. What is the biggest problem regarding this topic - the stigma, the victims, the impact?
3. What sections of society are most vulnerable to domestic violence?
4. What solutions have been most effective in countries with decreasing domestic violence cases?
5. What punishments are justifiable for crimes like femicide, acid attacks, etc?
6. What is common between the major countries mentioned in this guide?
7. What are the main factors that affect the attitude towards domestic violence? Look for factors like age, financial situation and education level.
8. What steps had your government taken to improve the situation? Have they worked?
9. How does the prevalence of domestic violence affect women’s position in society and the country’s development?
10. What is the difference between short-term and long-term solutions for this issue?

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