



STUDY ON THE ROLE OF GENDER NORMS AND INEQUALITY IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Violence against women is a pervasive global concern that crosses cultural, social, economic, educational, ethnic, and age lines. Although many cultures publicly denounce such violence, the grim reality is that these acts are frequently rationalized through cultural customs, societal expectations, or distorted interpretations of religious doctrines. This phenomenon constitutes one of the most extensive breaches of human rights, stripping women and girls of their equality, safety, dignity, self-worth, and essential freedoms. Domestic violence is prevalent in all cultures and social strata. Research has identified several common factors contributing to this issue, including marital conflicts, infidelity, gender-based economic inequalities, dowry pressures, negative influences from in-laws, and infertility issues. This study, which surveyed 150 participants from rural areas of the Delhi NCR region, examines the social factors that contribute to domestic violence against women. Data was gathered through a stratified random sampling approach, concentrating on female survivors of domestic violence. An explanatory research design was utilized to investigate the connections between gender-based inequality and discrimination, which are fundamental causes of violence against women. The results offer important insights into the social factors driving domestic violence and the specific challenges faced by rural women in the Delhi NCR region.

Keywords: Indifferent attitude of in-laws, domestic violence, rural women, Social causes, demand for dowry, infertility.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations, through the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women adopted by the General Assembly in 1993, defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” All forms of violence are linked to power imbalances between genders and are exacerbated by increasing economic disparities both within and among nations. Women make up approximately half of the global population, yet they often face violence and exploitation due to gender biases. The most egregious form of discrimination against women manifests as physical and psychological violence. Although domestic violence is prevalent, it often remains hidden from public view. It is the most common type of gender-based violence. The repercussions of violence against women are profound, affecting their physical health, emotional well-being,

financial stability, and social relationships, impacting families and communities worldwide. Domestic violence is a particularly intricate and insidious form of abuse, typically occurring within the confines of the home or within entrenched power dynamics and socio-economic structures that hinder recognition and acknowledgment of such abuse. Violence serves as a tool to manipulate, control, and restrict women's behavior and aspirations. It is evident that domestic violence against women transcends cultural, religious, class, and ethnic boundaries. Despite its widespread occurrence, the societal perception of a divide between public and private matters contributes to the ongoing invisibility of domestic violence.³

Domestic violence represents a significant sociological issue, with women often finding themselves in traditional roles marked by discrimination, oppression, and inequality. This form of violence transcends cultural, class, educational, income, ethnic, and age boundaries, affecting women in every nation. While many societies may endorse violence against women, such violations of human rights are frequently justified under the guise of cultural customs or misinterpretations of religious beliefs. Furthermore, when such abuse occurs within the home, it is often tacitly accepted due to the silence and inaction of both the state and law enforcement agencies. The prevalence of violence against women and girls is a global crisis that inflicts physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harm. It stands as one of the most widespread human rights abuses, stripping women and girls of their equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and fundamental freedoms. Domestic violence can manifest in various forms, including verbal, emotional, psychological, financial, spiritual, sexual, and physical abuse, affecting individuals across all demographics. Violence is defined as the act of one individual inflicting harm on another, encompassing physical, sexual, psychological, and economic dimensions. It involves at least two parties: the perpetrator and the victim. The repercussions of violence against women are profound, impacting the physical, emotional, financial, and social well-being of women, children, families, and communities globally. Consequently, it is evident that violence against women is prevalent across all social classes and groups.

In order to understand the nature and extent of domestic violence against women, to identify the major social factors associated with domestic violence, different theoretical models have been developed and used by the social scientists and the psychologists. The resource theory rests on the notion that decision making power in family relationship depends to a large extent on the value of resources each person bring to the relationship. Violence is used as a last resort to regain status quo. Social control theory of domestic violence proposes social control model of domestic violence. According to theory, inter-familial relations cannot be broken off easily. Consequently, when family member perceive injustice in daily interaction they resort to violence. Symbolic interaction theory of domestic violence explores the different meanings of violence people hold and consequences of such meanings in situational setting. The sub-culture of violence theory suggests that some sub-cultural groups develop norms and values that emphasize the use of physical violence to a greater extent than it seemed appropriate by dominant culture. General system theory explains the domestic violence as a product of system rather than of individual pathology. The dependency framework has been involved and is being used to understand the phenomenon of domestic violence against women.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Universe of the study

The universe of present study constitutes female victims of domestic violence in district Delhi NCR region.

2.2. Sampling plan and design of the study

This study focuses on a sample of 150 female victims of domestic violence selected from rural areas within

the Delhi NCR region. It is essential to note that this entire sample was specifically chosen to align with the study's objectives and nature. A stratified random sampling method was subsequently employed to gather data from the participants. The research utilized a descriptive design to facilitate the collection of empirical data. An interview schedule was implemented to engage with the respondents, and relevant literature was reviewed to guide the development of this schedule. The primary tools for data collection included the interview schedule and informal discussions with the participants. The interview schedule underwent pre-testing and necessary modifications. In-depth interviews and discussions were conducted to extract detailed information from the respondents. The interview schedule served as the principal instrument for gathering data. The study incorporated both primary and secondary data sources; primary data was obtained through direct interviews and field observations, while secondary data was sourced from books, journals, articles, and magazines related to the topic. Attention was given to non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language, and informal conversations with respondents contributed to the depth of the study. The citation and reference format adhered to the American Psychological Association's 5th edition (APA) guidelines.

2.3. Hypothesis of the study

To examine the specified research issue, the following hypotheses have been established: Women in rural areas of the Delhi NCR are perceived as unequal, inferior, and vulnerable. They face both physical and psychological violence, not only from their in-laws but also from their intimate partners. The social factors contributing to violence against these rural women primarily include dowry demands, the apathetic behavior of in-laws, and issues related to infertility.

Objectives of the study

In order to testify the aforesaid mentioned hypothesis, the following broad objectives have been taken into consideration:

1. To identify the social causes of domestic violence against rural women in Delhi NCR region.
2. To explore the nature of social causes of domestic violence against rural women in Delhi NCR region.
3. To trace the link gender inequality and discrimination as root causes of violence against women in Delhi NCR region.

2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Causes of Domestic Violence against Women

Gender inequality and discrimination serve as fundamental contributors to violence against women, shaped by historical and structural power disparities between genders that manifest in different intensities across global communities. Violence against women cannot be attributed to a single cause; rather, it arises from a complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to the increasing prevalence of such violence. Factors such as financial difficulties and relationship crises may elevate the risk of violence against women due to the stress they generate. Below are several reasons identified for domestic violence against women?

Table 1: Causes of Domestic Violence in the Family? (Multiple Responses)

S. No.	Causes of domestic violence in the family	No. of respondents	Percentage
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1	Demand for Dowry	98	65.33
2	Indifferent attitude of in-laws	92	62.66
3	Extra- marital affair of husband	62	41.33
4	Infertility	68	45.33
5	Financial problems/economic dependence of women	102	68.00
6	Lack of understanding	92	61.33

Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR region.

The data presented in Table 1 illustrates the various factors identified by respondents as contributing to domestic violence within families. Among the 150 participants surveyed, 65.33 percent indicated that the demand for dowry is the primary cause of domestic violence against women. Additionally, 62.66 percent, or 92 respondents, attributed the violence to the indifferent attitudes of in-laws. Furthermore, 41.33 percent of respondents, totaling 62 individuals, cited extramarital affairs as a significant factor, while 45.33 percent, or 68 respondents, identified infertility as another contributing cause. Notably, 68.00 percent of respondents, amounting to 102 individuals, pointed to financial issues as a major cause of domestic violence, and 61.33 percent, or 92 respondents, acknowledged that a lack of understanding is the foremost reason for domestic violence within families.

3.2 Demand for Dowry

Dowry is the main tool of exploitation against married women. Dowry is one of the most ancient practices in India. Dowry is the payment in cash or some kind of gift given to bridegroom's family at the time of marriage. This practice continues even today in India although banned by law since 1961, and in recent years dowry amounts have raised dramatically.⁹ The dowry system is considered to put great financial burden on the bride's family. There are strong links between domestic violence and dowry and in order to analyse those links several questions were passed to the respondents.

Table 2 Demand for Dowry

S. No.	Demand for dowry	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	98	65.33
2	No	52	34.67
<i>If yes, how many times dowry was demanded</i>			
	Once	18	18.37
	Twice	15	15.31
	Thrice	27	27.55
	Often	26	26.53
e)	Rarely	12	12.24
f)	Any other	0	0
Total		98	100.00

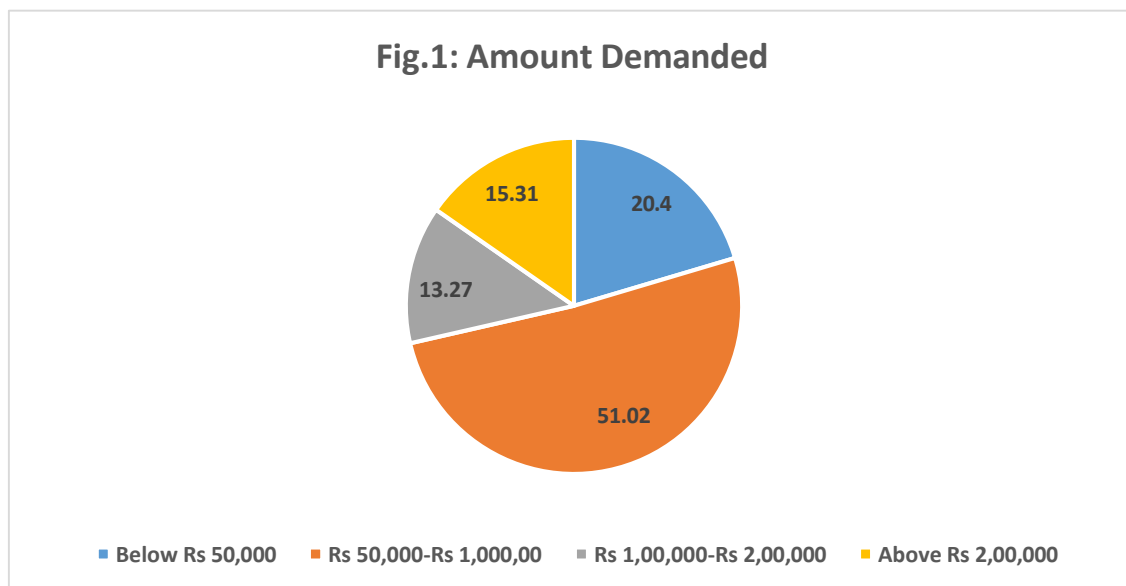
Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

From the above table 2, it becomes evident that while 98 respondents i.e. (65.33 percent) admitted that husband's family demand dowry after marriage, however 52 respondents i.e. (34.66 percent) mentioned that there was no demand for dowry. Out of 65.33 percent respondents, 18 respondents i.e. (18.37 percent) were compelled to pay dowry at once, 15 respondents i.e. (15.31 percent) respondents were troubled for dowry twice, 27 respondents i.e. (27.55 percent) were harassed thrice. 26.53 percent of respondents were

demanded dowry often. While as 12.24 percent of respondents were rarely demanded dowry.

3.3 Amount Demanded

Majority of respondents admitted that the problems for women in the post marital life starts with the demand of dowry by their in-laws family members, especially by husband, father and mother in-laws. Even if the demand is fulfilled, it still continues and is increasing day by day. So violence related with dowry is increasing at a fast rate. It has been observed from the study that dowry is becoming a common menace for maltreating and burning women who suffer great harassment and torture at the hands of in-law family. In whole, the entire family stands involved in demanding dowry from married women. Furthermore, it was seen that dowry demand was fulfilled by parents due to the fear of harassment of their daughters.



Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

The above fig. 1 reveals that cash is demanded by husband once after marriage. Out of 98 respondents i.e. 20 respondent's i.e.20.40 percent, admitted that they were demanded amount of dowry below Rs 50,000. It has been found that 51.02 percent women were demanded dowry Rs 50,000 - Rs 1,000,00,13.27 percent were demanded dowry of Rs 1,00,000 - Rs 2,00,000. A good number respondent i.e. 15.31 percent were compelled to bring money above Rs 2, 00,000. It was also observed from the study that the amount of dowry demanded from women is increasing and the majority of cases of women face taunts from her in-laws for demand of dowry in cash

3.4 Indifferent Attitude of In-laws

Indifferent attitude of in-laws is another cause of violence against women in the family. Indifferent attitude towards daughter in-law plays adverse role in the life of women after marriage and also it leads towards all round development and unhappiness in the family life. The attitude of in-laws towards the daughter in-laws is therefore extremely important in creating the atmosphere of pleasure or sadness. In this context respondents were asked to express their views in this regard.

Table 3: Indifferent Attitude of In-laws

S. No.	Is attitude of in-laws indifferent	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	94	62.66
2	No	56	37.34
Total		150	100.00
<i>If yes, mention</i>			
a)	Unresponsive	24	25.53
b)	Uninterested	15	15.96
c)	Apathetic	25	26.60
d)	Uncaring	30	31.91
Total		94	100.00

Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

The above table 3 depicts that out of 150 respondents, 94 respondents i.e. 62.66 percent say that there is indifferent attitude towards daughter in-law, while as 56 respondents i.e. (37.34 percent) said that is not indifferent attitude in-laws. There are various types of indifferent attitudes of in-laws like domestic violence abusing, by both husband and in laws. An attempt has been made to know the attitude of in-laws toward the married women. It is clearly evident from the above table that out of 94 respondents i.e. (62.66 percent) 24 respondents i.e. 25.53 percent reveals that their in-laws were unresponsive, 15 respondents i.e. 15.96 percent affirmed their in-laws are uninterested, 25 respondents' i.e., 26.60 percent said that they met with apathetic attitude daughter in-laws, while as 30 respondents i.e., (31.91 percent) reveals that their in-laws are uncaring towards the daughter in-laws. It has been observed from the respondents that husbands did not favour their wives when they are violated by their family members. Besides it was found that mother-in-law is mostly responsible for rude and erratic behaviour towards their daughter-in-laws.

3.5 Extra-Marital Affairs of Husband

Extra marital affair is another reason of domestic violence against women in the family. Extra marital relations with other than own spouse amounts to cruelty and also causes separation. Extra-marital relationship is found to be the major cause of domestic violence against women in the present-day society. The most commonly perceived contributing factor in domestic violence is extra- marital affairs. An overwhelming number of cases showed that domestic violence occurred as a result of extra-marital affairs. In this context, the respondents were asked to reveal their ideas which are shown in the below table:

Table 4: Extra-Marital Affair of Husband

S. No.	Do you feel that your husband have any extra marital affair	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	62	41.33
2	No	88	58.67
Total		150	100.00
<i>If yes, how does it affect you</i>			
a)	Physical abuse	8	12.90
b)	Verbal abuse	6	9.68
c)	Mental toucher	18	29.04
d)	Suffer economic hardship	10	16.13
e)	Chronic heart disease	12	19.35
f)	Low self esteem	8	12.90

Total	62	100.0
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Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

The above table 4 reveals that out of 150 respondents i.e. (100 percent), 41.33 percent had extra marital affairs while as (58.67 percent) did not have any extra marital affairs. Out of 62 respondents who have extra marital affairs, (12.90 percent) women are being physically abused, (9.68 percent) face verbal abuse, (29.04 percent) have mentally tortured and (16.13 percent) have to go through economic hardships, 19.35 percent have developed chorine heart disease and (12.90 percent) suffer from low self- esteem. Further, there are also many women who have been isolated. Some have been forced to leave home with their children as their husbands have started to live with other women. It was also further observed that mostly, extra-marital affairs involved multiple partners and repeatedly tends to occur over a number of years. Most often wives would hear of the alleged affairs from family members, neighbours and people from the village. Thus, she becomes emotionally disturbed.

3.6 Infertility

Infertility is one of the major causes responsible for domestic violence against women. Infertility is generally defined as the inability to conceive after one year or trying to become pregnant. Infertility is a biological condition, which has got much socio- cultural implications. A woman is considered a reproductive machine to bear and rear. In this context, the respondents provide information which is shown in the below:

Table 5: Infertility

S. No.	Infertility responsible for domestic violence	No. of respondents	Percent age
1	Yes	68	45.33
2	No	82	54.67
<i>If yes, in your opinion how does it affect women?</i>			
a)	Loneliness	19	27.94
b)	Feeling to insecurity	26	38.24
c)	Social stigma	9	13.24
d)	Any other (All of the above)	14	20.58
Total		68	100.00

Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

The above table 5 reveals that out of 150 respondents only 45.33 percent agree that infertility is cause of violence against women in their family. 54.67 percent do not agree that infertility is a major cause of domestic violence. Out of 68 respondents (45.33 percent) agreed that infertility is responsible for domestic violence, (27.94 percent) reveals that infertile women are subject to loneliness and (38.24 percent) have feeling of insecurity and (13.24 percent) respondents suffer from social stigma, while as 20.58 percent respondent say women face all of the above. It reveals that childless women endure enormous emotional suffering because they don't bear children. In most of the societies, a high value is placed on children. Status of women is reduced to a child bearing machine and they are subjected to violence. Women are socialized and expected to be submissive mainly because of patrilocal system of marriage, where a woman is always at the receiving end at her-in law place. The majority of the respondents reveal that infertile women are threatened to be divorced by their husbands and all this leads to insecurity in life, stress and suppression.

Table 6: Women Blamed for Being Infertile

S. No.	Do you think that women are blamed for being infertile?	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	100	66.66
2	No	50	33.34
<i>If yes, what are these reasons</i>			
a)	Male dominance	34	34.00
b)	Traditional view	28	28.00
c)	All of the above	38	38.00
d)	Any other	0	0.00
Total		100	100.00

Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

The above figure 6 depicts that out of 150 respondents 66.66 percent reveal that women are always blamed for being infertile while as 33.34 percent say that women are not blamed for being infertile. Out of 100 respondents i.e. (34.00 percent) who consider women are being blamed the reason behind this male dominance in the family. (28.00 percent) says that traditional view in their families is responsible for the victimization and while as (38.00 percent) says that all of the above reasons are responsible. It follows that majority of respondents are always blamed for being infertile. It was observed from the field that culturally, the inability of a woman to conceive is considered as a major fault on the part of women. Sometimes the problem may be with the husband. But often the women is ostracized for infertility. Hence, it can be infertility that increased violence against women and is attributed to a wide range of factors and infertility is one of the major reasons. Married women who are found incapable (generally confirmed without medical test) of giving birth to a child, usually face humiliation, verbal abuse, mental or physical torture by husband or husband's family members. It was observed that the increasing prevalence of divorce rate or taking another wife has become a major concern for infertile women.

3.7 Financial Problems/Economic Dependence of Women

Gender inequality leads to the economic dependency of women on men. Women are economically dependent on men especially in the developing countries. Economic dependency is the degree in which a person relies upon others for fulfilling his or her needs. In Delhi NCR region women are economically dependent on their husbands and they are not free to spend their own income on their will because of the culture and patriarchal society. Economic dependency makes women vulnerable to violence and suppression they are considered as a burden on family.

Table 7: Financial Problems are Responsible for Domestic violence

S. No.	Financial problems are responsible for domestic violence	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	102	68.00
2	No	48	32.00
<i>If yes, how</i>			
a)	Basic needs are not fulfilled	44	43.13
b)	Schooling of children suffer	30	29.41
c)	All of the above	28	27.46
d)	Any other	0	0.00
Total		102	100.00

Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

The data presented in Table 7 indicates that financial issues within households are a significant factor contributing to domestic violence. Specifically, 68.00 percent of respondents attribute domestic violence against women to financial difficulties, while 32.00 percent do not view it as a contributing factor. Among the 102 participants surveyed, 43.13 percent reported that their basic needs are unmet, 29.41 percent indicated that their children's education is adversely affected, and 27.46 percent acknowledged that both of these issues contribute to their situation. The findings suggest that a majority of respondents experience violence primarily due to economic factors, as many women are entirely reliant on their husbands for financial support. The social standing of women and their access to resources are largely determined by their marital relationships. Within this overarching framework of subordination, there are variations in the degree of dependency among women. Those who endure violence often lack an independent income source, which exacerbates their vulnerability. This economic reliance, coupled with the threat of violence, confines women to their homes, where they endure various forms of exploitation. Supporting this, Panday (2018) in his research on the psycho-social aspects of domestic violence notes that many women face economic pressures and abuse. Additionally, entrenched cultural values often deter women from considering separation or divorce. They also fear the repercussions of reporting violence and are reluctant to face the stigma associated with being identified as victims. A lack of awareness regarding available alternatives further compels women to suffer in silence within their homes.

Table 8: Economic Dependency on Husband

S. No.	Economic dependency on husband is a cause for tolerating domestic violence?	No. of respondent	Percentage
1	Yes	98	65.34
2	No	52	34.66
Total		150	100.00

Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

It becomes clearly evident from the above table 10 that 98 respondents i.e. (65.34 percent) agree that economic dependency on husbands is a cause for tolerating domestic violence while as 52 respondent's i.e. (34.66 percent) do not consider it to be the cause for tolerating reason for domestic violence. It has been observed from the field that the economic dependency is reason for tolerating violence because it consequently makes women fully dependent on their husbands for their economic needs. It follows that dependency was considered to be positively related with domestic violence against women. Due to economic independence, women have no power to escape from violent relationships. Women who are economically dependent on their husbands suffer from financial constraints and have a feeling inadequacy which leads them to tolerate and stay in abusive relationship.

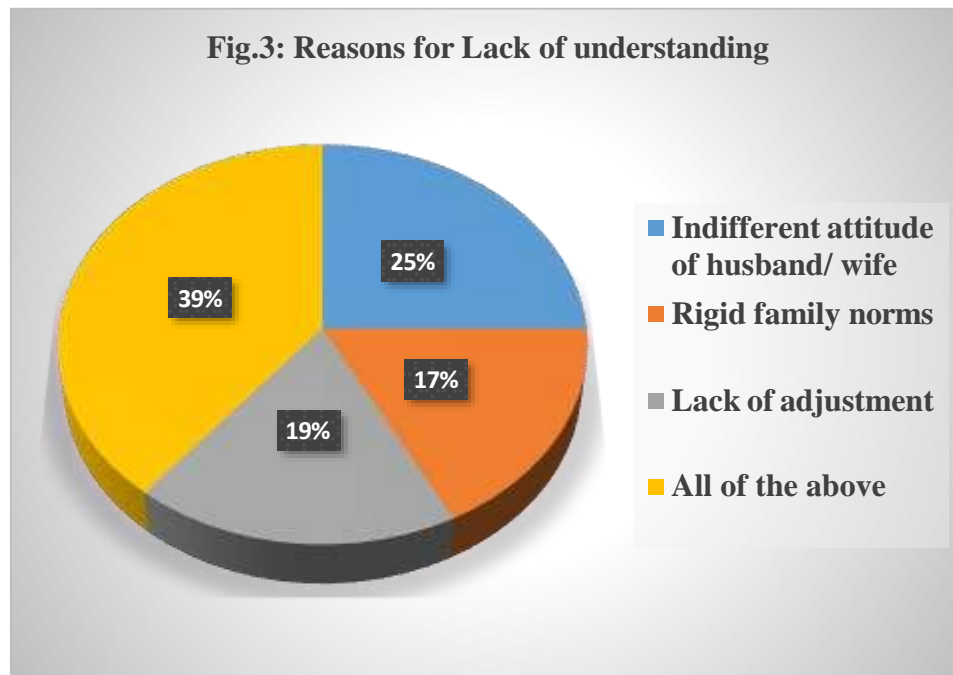
3.8 Lack of Understanding

Lack of understanding can lead to a lack of trust in the relationship. When there is lack of trust, a lot of misunderstanding and doubts begin to spike up in the relationship. Therefore, couples need to find a way to deal with each other and learn to understand one another. Lack of understanding in a relationship can lead to more fights, as a couple can lose trust in each other. In this context, respondents reveal their ideas/opinions in the below table.

9: Lack of Understanding

S. No.	Lack of understanding	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	92	61.33
2	No	58	38.66
Total		100	100.00

Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region



Source: Field work, 2023 carried out in Delhi NCR Region

The above table 9 depicts that out of 150 respondents i.e. 61.33 percent said there is lack of understanding between husband/in-laws, while as (38.66 percent) of respondents said that there were not lack of understanding between in-laws and their family. Out of 92 respondents only (25.00 percent) says that there is lack of interaction in their family, (17.39 percent) respondents told that rigid family norms, (18.48 percent) of the respondents reveal that there is lack of education in the family and (39.13 percent) of respondents said it is because of lack of interaction, rigid family norms and lack of education and so on. It has been observed from the field that the majority of respondents reveal that lack of interaction has great impact of patriarchy and the influence of traditional cultural and lack of interaction among women because rigid family norms and education of women themselves are the main reason for domestic violence against women in the family. At the same time the respondents reveal that physical and verbal fights are the worst and they hamper the growth of the relationship.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Domestic violence represents a highly intricate and brutal form of abuse, predominantly occurring within the confines of the home or stemming from entrenched power dynamics and socio-economic structures that often prevent acknowledgment or recognition of such abuse. This issue transcends cultural, class, educational, income, ethnic, and age boundaries, manifesting as a global epidemic that inflicts physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harm on women and girls. It stands as one of the most widespread violations of human rights, undermining the equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and fundamental freedoms of women and girls. Research indicates that several social factors contribute to domestic violence against women, including men's alcohol consumption, infidelity or suspected infidelity, economic disparities between genders, hierarchical gender relations, and traditional family norms. Additionally, a range of other causes, from the seemingly trivial to the bizarre, can trigger domestic violence, such as inadequate household

chores, fashionable dressing, jealousy, dowry demands, extramarital affairs, inappropriate laughter, and raised voices during conversations, close friendships, disrespect towards elders, and more. In the Delhi NCR region, the most prevalent social causes of domestic violence include dowry demands, a lack of concern from in-laws, husbands' extramarital affairs, infertility issues, financial difficulties, and economic dependence of women, along with a general lack of understanding.

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