

# **Working with Women Facing Spouse Abuse**

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This article provides an overview of the knowledge and insight gained from the work of the Special Cell for Women and Children, a field action project of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, and describes a model of practice and strategies, which were developed by the Cell over time to work with women who have been facing violence at home or outside.

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## **I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The nature and extent of violence against women (VAW) within their families and in society is a very pervasive phenomenon. In June 1984, the Special Cell for Women and Children, a field action project of the Department of Family and Child Welfare, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, was initiated at the Office of the Commissioner of Police. Since 2006, it has been institutionalised as a programme of the Government of Maharashtra and has currently expanded to 20 districts of the state.

In the process of working in the area of VAW, social workers at the Special Cell acquired considerable knowledge and insight into this area of work. This experimental project has evolved a unique approach when dealing with the problems of violence faced by women within their families and in society. The interventions employed are drawn from the framework of social work practice and the pro-women perspective (feminist analysis).

### **FRAMEWORK OF UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE AT HOME**

In India, VAW and girls is located within a complex web of social, cultural and economic factors. The sacredness of a traditional marriage, rigid ideas of gender norms, and patriarchal traditions of family structure create an

environment of discrimination and deprivation that constraints the society from addressing gender-based violence. The most visible and widely prevalent form of VAW and girls in India includes domestic violence, which encompasses spousal abuse; incest; violence against single women, widows and the aged within the family; rape; trafficking; dowry; murder; and infanticide and foeticide.

### **DEFINING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The Declaration on Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, defines VAW 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.

It encompasses, but is not limited to, ‘physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation’.

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the community includes rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment at work, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.

The aspect of domestic violence receiving the most attention in recent years is men’s violence against their female partners (that is, wives and lovers), which is also called women battering, family violence or spouse abuse. The problem of spouse abuse is much more common than most people believe. Research has shown that men from all socioeconomic strata abuse their wives. It occurs in ‘arranged’ and ‘love’ marriages and live-in arrangements. However, the problem is more hidden in urban, middle-class, nuclear families where family prestige and both or either spouse’s career may be at risk if the abuse is discovered.

Spouse abuse is defined as the victimisation of the spouse through physical violence, sexual aggression, verbal threats and psychological degradation or intimidation (Greffner and Pagelow, 1990). Violence not only includes the physical act of violence — though this maybe the easiest to identify — but also the whole continuum of behaviour which invokes men’s abuse of power over women. Physical violence in an intimate

relationship is almost always accompanied by psychological abuse and sexual abuse. Abuse in a marriage can take many forms.

1. *Physical Abuse*: Refers to any behaviour that involves the intentional use of force against the body of another person that risks physical injury, harm, and/or death (Dutton 1992). Physical abuse includes beating, hitting, slapping, punching, choking, burning with fire, cigarettes or hot iron, poisoning, and use of weapon — often leading to permanent injury or death.
2. *Sexual Abuse*: Sexual abuse is any non-consensual contact with a sexual purpose. It may include fondling; touching; all forms of penetration such as penile/vaginal, penile/oral, penile/anal, finger/vaginal, object/anal, object/vaginal, which is forced and against the woman's wishes; forced nudity; forced exposure to pornography material; refusal to practice safe sex; sexually criticising the woman; forcing sex after beating; and conducting an incestuous relationship.
3. *Mental/Emotional Abuse*: Mental pain and anguish that is caused without physical and sexual violence is treated somewhat differently. This is a vast area of abuse, which is often not recognised as cruelty, and remains outside legal controls. Difficulties in the definition, proof and unreasonableness of the state over regulating private life and intruding on privacy are familiar arguments that have prevented the criminalisation of this (mental) type of conduct. According to Goonesekere (2004), '... the brutality of mental cruelty caused to women precedes and often accompanies physical and sexual violence'.
4. *Economical Abuse*: This is financial deprivation like preventing the woman from getting or keeping a job, taking away her money, not giving her money to run the house, not letting her know about or have access to family income.

### **Extent of Violence against Women**

Domestic violence is widely prevalent, but remains largely invisible as the extent of domestic violence in Indian society is far greater than what is generally admitted. Official estimates from the Ministry of Law and Justice suggest that women in over 60% of urban homes experience domestic violence; only 5% of these complain to the police. In another nation-wide study done by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW, 2000), 85% of men admitted resorting to violent behaviour at least once

and 32% had committed acts of violence against their pregnant wives. On the other hand, National Family Health Survey (NFHS) III data places the number of ever-married women who experienced spousal violence at 37.2% for India. Overall, one in three women aged 15–49 years has experienced physical violence, and about one in 10 has experienced sexual violence.

Interestingly, the NFHS-III Report (2007) highlights violence on never married women — 16% of never married women have experienced physical violence since they were 15 years of age, generally by a parent, sibling or teacher. Among never married women who have been sexually abused, 27% say that the perpetrator was a relative.

According to the data available with National Crime Records Bureau (India: Ministry of Home Affairs, 2007), in total, crime against women has increased by 12.5% over 2006 and 31.8% over 2003. Cruelty by husband and family (Section 498A, Indian Penal Code [IPC]) constitutes 3.8% of total IPC crimes, with a conviction rate of 20.9%. In 2005–2006, there was an 8.2% increase in the rate of cases filed. Dowry deaths (Section 304B, IPC) constitute 0.7% of total IPC crimes and from 2006 to 2007, there was a 6.2% increase in the rate of cases filed.

## **KEY CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTANDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### **Patriarchy**

In India, the man enjoys absolute authority, power, and all privileges and makes all decisions as the ‘head of the family’ or the *karta*. The belief that men are superior automatically entitles men to privileges in the public and domestic spheres. The preference for sons is so strong that it has worsened the woman’s status and increased her vulnerability. Women are viewed as economic liabilities and cultural practices such as dowry reinforce this belief. Dissatisfaction with the dowry received is directly related to domestic violence against women: in a household level study on domestic violence, 12% of women reporting violence cited dowry harassment as its cause (ICRW, 2000).

Women’s abuse is viewed here as a historical expression of male domination manifested within the family and currently reinforced by institutions, economic arrangements and sexist division of labour within capitalist society. Battering or abuse is often attributed to alcohol, poor impulse control, personal illness or various sociological factors.

‘Why are men violent?’ The more appropriate question would be ‘why do men beat women?’ Examining why men are violent does not explain why men act violently towards a specific target — women. Some psychologists explain/justify that men who batter are under great stress and have no tools for handling it. But we believe that stress does not ‘cause’ abuse, men choose to deal with stress in specific ways. The belief in one’s right to use violence, batter, and dominate women is what causes a man to relieve his stress by beating his wife. Conflict between partners does not ‘cause’ violence; the belief in the right to beat women and in the use of force do.

Across the world, VAW is recognised as a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women. These power hierarchies are perpetuated by gender norms in our family, community and the legal system. The sociopolitical critique interprets wife abuse as a manifestation of patriarchy, which is an ideology seen to control women’s fertility, sexuality, labour and mobility at the material and ideological levels. ‘Patriarchy’ literally means rule of the father or the ‘patriarch’ and originally, it was used to describe a specific type of ‘male-dominated family’. Feminist scholars have theorised this violence as being used by men/husbands to dominate, control and subjugate the women/wives in the family.

In the Indian context, ‘patriarchy’ has socialised women to look upon the husband as *swami*, *pati* or *maalik* — all of them meaning ‘lord’ or ‘owner’. Further, violence is used to socialise women into accepting her subservient position in her matrimonial home. Women have also been socialised to accept violence as part of marriage and family. The rationale for the man’s behaviour is ‘If you are wrong, you are beaten’ or ‘You belong to him, so his beating is acceptable’ (Dave, 1994).

The problem is not the family per se, but the power relations within it. Violence is used as a technique and hence, as a strategy to control. The need to dominate is rooted in the indoctrination imparted since childhood and this is translated in the right to dominate and control and violence becomes an easy method. Other constructs that explain VAW are the ‘cycle theory of violence’ and ‘battered women as survivors’.

### **Cycle Theory of Violence**

Walker (1979) has propounded a cycle theory of violence through which she has sought to explain the women’s psychological state through this theory. It also explains how violated wives/partners become victimised and how they fall into learned helpless behaviour and why they do not attempt

to free themselves from the battering relationship. Once the woman starts operating from a belief of helplessness, the perception becomes a reality and she becomes passive, submissive and helpless. She allows things to actually get out of control. In this manner, the battered woman becomes blind to her options and convinces herself that she cannot do anything to help herself. Walker's theory of the cycle of violence focuses on the physical violence in an abusive relationship. The battering cycle includes three distinct phases:

### ***Tension-Building Phase***

The tension builds over a series of small occurrences such as a wife's request for money, noise made by children, annoyance with the meals prepared by the wife, and other similar incidents. There is poor communication between the couple. The woman attempts to cope with these minor battering incidents in various ways such as attempting to calm him, become more nurturing, more compliant, anticipating his every whim in advance and fulfilling the same, assuming guilt by identifying with the batterer's faulty reasoning, covering up and making excuses for him, and in the process often alienating herself from people who could help her.

As the battering incidents become more frequent, there is a build up of residual tension. Towards the end of this phase, coping techniques fail to work and each becomes more frantic and the tension becomes unbearable. This is called the tension-building stage and the duration may vary from minutes, hours to days.

### ***The Acute Battering Incident***

There is a point towards the end of the tension-building phase where there is total loss of control on both sides and acute battering is inevitable. The batterer accepts that his anger is out of control and he is unable to justify his own behaviour to himself. Anticipating the acute battering creates severe stress in the woman. She tries to remain calm and does not resist. She feels emotionally trapped and unable to face the situation. The acute attack is followed by initial shock, denial and disbelief that it has really happened and a general emotional collapse. Both the batterer and the victim find ways of rationalising the attacks. The woman does not seek help in this phase unless faced by injury requiring medical attention.

In this phase, women can become victims of various types of assaults ranging from being punched, choked, kicked, knived or stabbed, slammed against the wall, thrown on the floor, or down the stairs. Sometimes, women

are threatened with weapons. This stage, characterised by the battering incident, is the release of built-up tension translating into violent behaviour.

### ***Calm and Loving Behaviour***

This phase is welcomed by both parties. The batterer repents his actions, asks for forgiveness and promises never to do it again. He also tries to make up by showing kindness and affection towards the victim and in order to show his sincerity will give up drinking, seeing other women, or whatever else affects his internal anxiety state.

The batterer's reasonableness supports the woman's belief that she will no longer have to suffer what was earlier unbelievable. She is made to realise how fragile and insecure her batterer is and the reason for which she must be with him and not leave him. This calm, loving period is called the honeymoon stage. This phase may last a little longer, but it eventually paves the way to the next tension-building stage. The author has adapted Walker's framework for understanding it in the Indian context (see Figure 1).

In the author's opinion, this cycle is only one way of understanding the experiences of battered women in India as all women do not necessarily go through the three stages and not all male batterers feel any remorse. Patriarchy is so ingrained in the Indian male psyche that they feel it is their right to beat the woman as he considers her his possession.

### **Learned Helplessness**

According to Gondolf and Fisher (1988), severe abuse fosters a sense of helplessness in the violated woman. The victim experiences low self-esteem, self-blame, guilt and depression. The only way to feel some sense of control over what is otherwise unpredictable is to think that 'if I change my ways, things will get better'. The abuse, however, continues.

The violated woman eventually becomes psychologically paralysed. She fails to seek help for herself and may even appear passive before the beating. When she does reach to get help she is very unsure, confused and tentative about receiving help. We also see women reconciling and returning to the abuser despite of the danger, advice or opportunity to leave. This vulnerability and indecisiveness prolongs the violence and may also escalate.

### **Battered Women as Survivors**

Gondolf and Fisher (1988) saw battered women as survivors. They believed that severe abuse prompted violated women to come up with





agencies are unable to respond adequately to the abused woman. This piecemeal approach to help and limited resources leaves her unsure and helpless. The failure of help-giving sources to intervene in a comprehensive manner allows the abuse to continue and escalate.

It is of utmost importance that a battered woman — a survivor of abuse in an intimate relationship — has access to resources that enables her to leave the batterer. The state and community services need to be coordinated to assure long-term comprehensive intervention

The survivor's vulnerability and indecisiveness makes her unsure whether she wants to leave her abusive husband as she is unaware about her options and is unstable financially. In this state of helplessness, violated women need support and counselling to build their self-confidence, self-esteem and dignity. At the Special Cell, the battered woman is seen as a survivor who has used innovative coping strategies to deal with her situation and is aware of her strength of will in enduring the abuse. As interveners, we need to be extra careful when a survivor approaches for help. Most often when a woman comes for formal help she has exhausted all her informal channels of help seeking. When formal agencies fail to respond in a coordinated manner, this allows the violence to continue or increase. At the Special Cell, the attempt is to intervene in a comprehensive manner where the woman understands her various options in both the pre-litigation stage as well as when she decides to enter the formal system of police and court

### **Why Women Stay?**

Walker (1979) and Martin (1977) indicate that abused women do not remain in a violent relationship because they like being abused. On the contrary, woman feels tremendous guilt and shame to even talk or share about the abuse they are undergoing at home. They have difficulty leaving because of complex psychosocial reasons. Many stay because of economic, social and legal dependence. Others are afraid to leave because they have no safe place to go. The police, hospitals, courts and social service agencies do not offer them adequate protection. The lack of options, know-how and finances raise fears about trying to escape the batterer. The battered women may, therefore, attempt to change the batterer instead of attempting to leave.

In the author's experience, there are several reasons why a woman might remain in a violent relationship:

- *Women's own attitudes and beliefs:* She believes that violence is temporary and is caused by incredible stress/tension, which the man

experiences in the outside world. She hopes that the violence will soon stop and things will change for the better. Women believe that marriage is 'forever' and look at divorce as a stigma. They also fear singlehood and are conditioned to believe that they have failed as a woman if their marriages fail.

- *Fear of isolation*: Many women have become isolated from friends and family members and lose their support systems. Some of this isolation may have been forced upon them by a jealous, possessive and abusive husband, while it might be self-imposed by women who are ashamed that the visible signs of wife beating might be seen by friends and family. Due to this, they are more isolated and more likely to feel there is no place to turn to for help.
- *Societal denial*: Lack of social support so that she has no friends or family who can or will help her physically leave and/or deal with attitudinal barriers. Violated women fear that no one will believe that their spouses or partners beat them. Batterers are also often popular men who keep threatening and controlling behaviour within the family behind closed doors. The violated woman knows this, and it compounds her fear that no one will believe her.
- *Economic dependency*: The actuality of an abused and violated woman leaving her husband is largely dependent on whether she has the economic resources to survive without him. Therefore, it is incredibly important that violated women obtain support and work towards gaining economic support, job training and avail of employment opportunities.

### **Battering as a Way to Maintain Control**

As mentioned earlier, in patriarchal societies, all men learn to dominate women, but only some men batter them. Battering or wife beating can also be called the 'most unreported crime' in India. Moreover, many people believe that it is not a crime at all. Violence is viewed as only one of the many ways in which men express their socially structured right to control. Men in such societies are conditioned to feel uncomfortable when not in control.

Men batter to punish or teach women a lesson. The batterers often justify their inappropriate behaviour by blaming women for 'provoking' them to do the same. Their constant 'nagging' is sufficient to goad them to inflict physical punishment on their women. The batterers often

rationalise their behaviour by saying ‘She deserved the beating’ or ‘I beat her for her own good’ or ‘This beating will teach her a lesson’.

Violence works in the sense that the violent man intimidates the woman and makes her act according to his will. Violence as a method to force women into subservience is convenient as men temporarily get their way and know as a matter-of-fact that they are frightening their victim. Thus, violence or battering is a way of organising a relationship so that men continue to feel superior to women.

### **Power and Control Theory**

Pence and Paymar (1982) developed the ‘power wheel’ theory that holds the opposite view of other theories, which emphasises abnormalities within the batterer, the relationship or the victim, and promotes treatment strategies, which do not alter or challenge the power system that creates the foundation of the battering behaviour. Pence and Paymar reject the Cycle of Violence as a model theory. Instead, they opine that the idea of battering is a constant state and not a cycle. They also say that the key factor in abusive relationships is the man’s desire to maintain power and control (see Figure 2). To do that, he isolates and intimidates her, abuses her emotionally, economically and sexually, threatens to deprive her of her children’s affection, and does not hesitate to use the male privilege of treating her like a nobody. The weapon he uses to back up all these methods of controlling her is violence. As expressed in the Cycle Model, the batterer may stop some blatant behaviour at times, but will continue different oppressive tactics.

In battering relationships, the women are always controlled, and not always physically beaten. Therefore, our focus while working with violated women is to help her think again to raise her consciousness.

### **THE LAW AND SPOUSE ABUSE**

In the 1970s and 1980s, the women’s movement campaigned against the judgment in the Mathura Rape Case and demanded for criminalising dowry and domestic violence. This culminated in the enactment of Section 498A in 1983 and 304B in 1986 in the IPC. With this, the issue of domestic violence came out of the hidden private domain of family to the public domain in India for the first time.

Section 498A of the IPC states that ‘whoever, being husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subject such women to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years

and shall also be liable to fine.’ The explanation of the term ‘cruelty’ for the purpose of this Section is as follows:

- (a) any wilful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or death whether mental or physical of the woman; or
- (b) Harassment of the woman where such harassment is with a view to coercing her.

This seems quite straightforward. But in practice the police do not tend to perceive violence against wives as ‘just as criminal as any other crime’. Unfortunately, the police often refuse to register a case under Section 498A unless dowry harassment has been alleged — thus making wife abuse more difficult and invisible.

**FIGURE 2: Power Wheel Theory**



Source: Adapted from Pence and Paymar (1982)

The Special Cell's recent research on Section 498A shows that there is still a widespread acceptance of violence against wives in our society, and that this acceptance is reflected in the judgments given by the courts in this matter. This means that a husband is likely to be excused or pardoned by the court for having assaulted his wife.

Unfortunately, domestic violence has not disappeared with the enactment of Section 498A IPC. No law can magically make a gender just society. Also with 498A IPC, the police need to act to make an arrest, investigate the case, and prosecute where an incidence has happened in the private realm of life. However, the police are often reluctant to apply 498A to cases of domestic violence and they most often show a paternalistic attitude while 'counselling' and 'mediating' and using a 'reconciliation' approach to address the issue of violence within the home. Thus, a woman complaining of violence is often forced to go back to the very people against who she has complained.

This Section of IPC has also been burdened with the myth of its misuse by women. A petition was filed by some lawyers in Mumbai in 1994 alleging misuse of 498A and asking for amendments to the IPC. The demand was to make the section non-cognisable, bailable and compoundable with permission of court. The idea was to prevent misuse of 498A by women who sent their spouses and family members into jail. The men wanted the same rights to file proceeding of cruelty against women. The myth of misuse is also projected in the media as 'old mother-in-law arrested', which create emotions not backed by any evidence or authentic data from the police department.

### **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005**

The demand for a civil law on domestic violence was made in this very context of continuing violence. Women, more often than not, had to stay on in an exploitative relationship out of the fear of either being forced out of the home, being deprived of their children, or being socially ostracised. Apprehension about their husbands marrying again and economic deprivation along with their safety and security were also of concern. In such circumstances, there was an urgent need for a law that protected women from domestic violence and the accompanying distress. Strong campaigns by women's groups led to the enforcement of Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (PWDV) Act on October 26, 2006.

The response of only using criminal law was not redressing the real issues of violated women. Thus, a civil law addressing the above mentioned issues and providing civil remedies to a woman was a welcome step in the

right direction. The PWDV Act has not only confined its scope to married women facing violence, but also includes other categories of women in shared households such as mother, sister and women in relationship in the nature of marriage. Also, the PWDV Act has expanded the definition of domestic violence by including emotional and sexual violence. Also, this Act recognises the woman's right to reside in the shared household and her protection from illegal dispossession. It provides remedies for violence faced and to prevent destitution of women. It also facilitates coordinated response to domestic violence and increases the violated women's access to justice — both in terms of court-mandated remedies and other support services through the protection officer and service providers.

### **Why do Women not take Legal Action?**

As with rape, many women find it difficult to make decisions when it comes to taking legal action against their violent husbands. There are many reasons why women do not take legal action. Women worry more about family prestige and try to maintain the family honour at all costs. Women are also socialised to believe that their marital home is their only home and hence the stigma attached to women who leave their marital home. Added to this is the threat that she faces from her husband and in-laws that if she leaves, she will lose custody of her children. A woman often does not complain or take recourse to legal action as she fears that in doing so she will be responsible for breaking up her home. A woman also carries the burden of guilt that her husband might lose his job or go to jail if she complains. If she were to complain, she fears that the violence will escalate and her life might be at threat. Women often find excuses for their husbands' abusive behaviour and also go to the extent of blaming themselves for their husbands' violent behaviour.

### **THE SPECIAL CELL'S MODEL FOR INTERVENTION**

The eclectic model discussed here has been developed and used by the social workers of the Special Cell for Women and Children on the issue of VAW. While working with violence, crisis intervention is the most important technique as a woman usually seeks help as a result of a precipitating factor which is linked to the crisis in the mental/physical/sexual/emotional aspects of her life. A triggering event to the crisis could be getting very badly beaten or thrown out of the house. Here, it is important to remember that the abuse may have been perpetrated for many years. It is, however, the precipitating event like a particularly harsh and violent form of abuse that may convince the woman to seek help. Sometimes, the crisis is not the

result of something which happens to the person, but more a result of a build-up of emotional turmoil experienced over the years.

Crisis counselling is an approach, which concentrates on helping a person around the time of a crisis and for a short while afterwards. After a crisis, some people may need intervention in terms of both crisis counselling and long-term, support-based activity. For others, crisis intervention by itself is enough to help them get back to a normal life.

### **Building the Counsellor's Perspective for Intervention in Spouse Abuse**

Any counsellor who is looking into cases of domestic violence has to have an in-depth understanding of the problem within the systems and patriarchal contexts. Otherwise, the counsellor may be in danger of arriving at misguided conclusions and can end up blaming or labelling these very abused women as inadequate wives and mothers. A feminist understanding will enable the counsellors to recognise the heroic struggle that these women have faced against physical and emotional harm, compounded by structural inequalities in pay, opportunities and family responsibilities.

Violence at home between couples should be equated with any other violence. It must be named and confronted and not minimised or silenced. Preserving the couple's relationship and hence the family unit should not be the desired outcome held by the counsellor either overtly or covertly. Instead, the counsellor needs to take a pro-woman's stance and the approach should be to address and protect the needs and interests of the violated woman. Counsellors must believe that spouse abuse is a crime. Hence, 'violence is non-negotiable' and there is no excuse for it. As it would be in a rape case, the blame is not to be shared by the violated woman; the man alone is responsible for the abuse.

The counsellor's involvement in the life of the battered wife cannot be 'neutral'. On the contrary, the counsellor needs to take a pro-woman's stance, placing the woman's needs as most important. Also, the woman's safety should be of utmost concern. As interveners, counsellors must recognise the danger they might place the woman into, if they do not challenge the abuser's behaviour and fail to stand by the violated woman.

### **Intervention Strategies for Joint Counseling**

According to the interactional perspective, battering is not characterised as one partner attempting to control or dominate the other but by the couple's combined communicational deficits to discuss 'marital communication,

resolving conflict and ending violence' and that both partners in marital relationship need to change. This approach may reinforce the view that the woman is at fault. Keeping in mind the Indian context, the interactional approach may result in the woman modifying her behaviour as per the advice of the counsellor, who in turn may have noticed that the woman's particular behaviour may have triggered off the man's violent temper.

While working on the issue of VAW, joint meetings or joint interventions involving both partners is important. While conducting joint sessions with the couple, the counsellor must keep the following aspects in mind, which could hamper the process of counseling:

- Inaccurate messages conveyed about responsibility for violence.
- The abuser may not commit to non-violent behaviour unless the partner makes agreed changes.
- Portraying abuse as understandable, therefore, excusable.
- Leading the woman into accepting the blame.
- Collusion with the myth of provocation.
- Not allowing the woman to negotiate with her husband about her life or their shared life.
- Creating a situation, wherein, the violated woman is made to feel that she is nagging if she has to repeat her statements or comments to her partner when he fails to listen to her or comply.
- Silencing the woman.

It is dangerous and pointless to take couples into counselling when the abuse is ongoing. It is not safe for a woman to open herself up to honest communication with a partner who is attempting to control her thoughts and action. Joint intervention or counselling is a viable option only when (i) the abuser has accepted full responsibility for his violent behaviour and has made concerted effort to change that behaviour; (ii) the violated woman is clearly able to protect herself, reassured by her understanding of the situation and willingness to assume responsibility for her protection; (iii) potential for further abuse is minimal; and (iv) degree of intimidation and fear felt by the victim is significantly reduced, so as not to interfere with open discussion of marital issues.

## **Counselling the Battered Wife**

### ***Exploration Stage***

In the initial exploration stage the counsellor facilitates the woman to think carefully about her situation and also makes her realise that she is not



alone, strange or unusual. As a result of violence, the woman often goes through feelings such as fear, helplessness or hopelessness. It is important to help her to recognise and accept the feelings, which are hindering her from thinking clearly.

Women often find it difficult to open up about the violence they go through and experience a lot of negative emotions. A conducive and non-judgmental environment needs to be created where the woman feels respected and valued. In this initial stage, it is important that the counsellor builds the trust of the woman so that she feels comfortable to disclose. The counsellor can do all this by making her aware of others who have had similar experiences keeping in mind the differences and diversity of women as well. Equality is not sameness; women of different class and caste experience life differently.

### ***Understanding Stage***

In the understanding stage, the counsellor helps the woman to define her problem clearly. It is important to validate her experiences of violence as politically oppressive, rather than as self-caused or irrational. A woman in a difficult situation may feel ambivalent or confused about what she really wants and she may even avoid being honest with herself about how she feels. The counsellor needs to make her realise that a woman facing violence is responding normally to an abnormal situation and that she is an expert on or about her own life and to help her learn about her strengths.

In this stage, the counsellor needs to understand how the woman feels about resolving the problem, recognise the woman's avoidance behaviour to evade tackling the problem, and explain to her the implications of not resolving a problem and the consequences she and her children may suffer in the future. To facilitate her to make her own decisions, it is important that the counsellor encourages her to think through her available options and list the positive and negative consequences of each alternative plan of action — for example, the advantage of getting a divorce verses the disadvantages. Through this process the counsellor will focus on helping her in bringing about realistic changes in her life for example, ask her husband for a divorce or secure a commitment from him to attend regular counselling sessions for six months.

The counsellor has to analyse the ways in which violence has controlled and limited the woman's life and help her to increase her self-confidence and gain more control over her own life. She needs to be taken her through a

process of self reflection so that she can be equipped to take her own decisions and also be encouraged to take certain risks by providing her with the necessary support. The counsellor needs to use strategies that will help the woman to ensure her safety and also provide her support. In instances, where the woman has to deal with the legal or bureaucratic system, the counsellor needs to provide the required help, information and other resources.

***Action or Decision-Making Stage: 'The Decision to Stay or Leave'***

Many counsellors know from experience that it is difficult for a violent man to change his behaviour. Even then, it is not appropriate for the counsellors to advise the woman to leave her violent partner as no one can make this decision, except the woman herself. The counsellor's role is to support the woman through whatever decision she takes.

Being in a violent relationship with an intimate partner, it often is difficult for the woman to take a stand and make a decision. At this juncture, the counsellor needs to offer support and helps the woman to improve her situation by encouraging her to be more assertive about her needs and wants and help her to see through her problem and the risks involved before taking a decision to stay in the relationship.

In the time after the attack, many men feel sorry and guilty for battering their wives (refer to the cycle theory of violence) and are hence, more amenable to change at this time. The woman should be encouraged to utilise this opportunity and time to seek improvements and suitable changes in her life. For example, in the case of a husband, who usually objects to her going to visit a friend or parents, she could use this time when he is feeling sorry and repentant, to go out to work or visit people who support her. The woman might hesitate to go out of the house due to embarrassment on account of a black eye or any other visible injury. At this juncture, it is vital that the counsellor encourages the violated woman to take full advantage of the opportunity to gain support.

In instances where the woman chooses to stay in a violent relationship, the counsellor must empower the woman to recognise any signs of mood changes in her husband that may lead to another violent attack directed towards her. Once she learns to identify the signs, the counsellor and the woman together can work out a strategy to escape the assault and build her confidence.

In the action phase, the woman needs to work towards her goal. During this phase, the woman will also need to make a lot of decisions regarding

her future course of action. For example, in a situation where a woman is in a violent relationship and is contemplating what to do at this time it might be useful for her to draw up the following lists weigh the advantages and disadvantages of leaving against the advantages and disadvantages of staying.

**BOX 1: Disadvantages and Advantages of Leaving versus Staying**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Disadvantages of Staying</b></li> <li>• Risk of physical injury</li> <li>• Traumatic experience for children</li> <li>• Feeling sad and depressed</li> <li>• Being controlled and restricted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Disadvantages of Leaving</b></li> <li>• Loneliness</li> <li>• Not enough money</li> <li>• What will society say</li> <li>• No secure place to stay</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Advantages of Staying</b></li> <li>• Security</li> <li>• Children will get to stay with both parents</li> <li>• Will not need to earn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Advantages of Leaving</b></li> <li>• Live an independent and free life</li> <li>• Will not be abused</li> <li>• Will not be controlled</li> </ul>

This will help the battered woman to understand the hindering and the facilitating factors affecting her life. The counsellor will have an important role to play once a woman has decided to leave her partner. A part of this role will involve providing her with emotional support and information, building her confidence and helping her to think through the various options available to her and assisting her with practical matters.

There are aspects that the counsellor would have to help the woman to consider before she leaves her marital home such as a safe plan of action for leaving which will include taking her ‘streedhan’ and personal belongings (like money, jewellery, certificates, ration card, passport, and so on) along with her. Securing support from the natal family, friends and relatives is also very essential. In case the woman does not have immediate support the counsellor needs to help her in locating a safe place to stay for a short while such as a state-run shelter home till she finds a permanent accommodation.

The woman also need to be prepared in deciding about her future plan for herself and for the children, if any, and how she would sustain herself financially. Identifying local women’s groups, NGOs and other services like hospitals to assist her is also very essential. The counsellor also needs to

elicit support from the police in helping the woman to file criminal complaints if necessary. In instances where the woman needs to take legal action — for example, apply for maintenance, divorce, judicial separation, custody, injunctions — the counsellors needs to provide adequate information, support and referral services that she will require.

## II

### COURSE OUTLINE AND LESSON PLAN

#### Learner's Objectives

1. To develop an understanding of the various ideologies, perspectives and concepts on violence against women.
2. To be able to identify different types and forms of violence against women.
3. To develop an understanding of strategies used to work in the area of violence against women.
4. To understand the available legal remedies and the procedures of the criminal justice system to help the violated women.

#### Lesson Plan

Module	Topic	No. of Hours
1	Understanding Violence Against Women: Perspectives; Concepts; Gender, Feminism, Human Rights, Violence, Patriarchy	8
2	Theories of Violence against Women, International and National Instruments and Policies for Protecting Rights of Women	2
3	Understanding Spousal and Domestic Violence: Forms and Types	6
4	Strategies for Working with Violated Women and Families	8
5	Legal remedies and procedures in the Criminal Justice System	6
	Total	30

## Teaching Methodology

A variety of training strategies will be used for the different modules of the course. Two pedagogic techniques are demonstrated here in a lesson format.

### Exercise 1: Sites and Types of Violence

**Purpose:** To explain how the four institutions in society have been involved in perpetuating violence and the types of violence perpetuated by each site.

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Materials Required:** Whiteboard and markers

**Method/Description:** The facilitator divides the white board into four quadrants and invites the participants to brainstorm and identify the four institutions/sites in society, which perpetuate violence against women. Each institution is written in one quadrant.

**Debriefing:** After the brainstorming, the facilitator will ask the participants to reflect on how the four institutions have resulted in perpetuating violence on women at every stage of their lives. The facilitator ends by stating that while working with women affected by violence, the social workers/counsellors will have to keep in mind that the violence which they deal with today is not caused only due to immediate factors but has its roots in the perpetuation of violence against women by the four basic institutions of society.

The participants are then invited to brainstorm on the types of violence each of the four institutions perpetuates and these are written down in the appropriate quadrant.

The following information is obtained after the brainstorming session:

Family	Community
Female foeticide; Harassment due to infertility; Deprivation of mother's milk in infancy; Burden due to roles and responsibilities; Child marriage; Dowry harassment; physical Battering; Sexual violence; Mental cruelty; Financial abuse; Emotional abuse; Out of marriage relationships; incest, Dowry death, Abetment to suicide; Child sexual abuse; Forced prostitution; Swapping partner; Forced pregnancy; forced abortion; female infanticide Fraudulent marriage, marital rape	Sati; Devdasi or kolkati pratha; Forced divorce; Purdah; Dowry harassment; Gender biased Panchayat; Honour killing; Genital mutilation; Eve teasing, molestation; Amniocentesis

State	Market
Forced sexual assault , Rape; Gang rape; Ethnic cleansing; Torture Rape and sexual harassment at police custody; Remand homes; Hospitals; Coercion and violence related to Population control programmes; State Sponsored violence.	Human trafficking of women and female children; Prostitution; Sexual exploitation of Bar dancers; Entertainment; Sexual harassment at work place, Pornography Discrimination in employment wages, etc.

**Exercise 2:** Myths and facts surrounding spouse abuse to understand different types of violence.

**Purpose:** To clarify and break myths and misconceptions regarding domestic violence.

**Duration:** 90 minutes

**Materials Required:** A sheet of paper on which a list of statements (myths) pertaining to spousal violence are written. A separate sheet on which the facts or explanation about each of the statements (myths) are written.

**Method/Instruction:** Each statement or myth is written on a separate slip and placed in a bowl.

The participants are asked to form groups of three to five persons. Each group is then asked to pick up two to three slips from the bowl and hold a discussion on the same and decide whether each statement is true or false. The group is also asked to be ready with their rationale for the responses. The groups are given 10-15 minutes for the discussion.

The participants once again meet in a plenary session in which each group is requested to read out the statements that were discussed, share their responses to each statement and their rationale for the same.

The statements of myths and facts are given below:

1. **Myth:** Marriages that are not based on love frequently result in quarrels and end up with wife-beating.  
**Fact:** A love marriage does not guarantee freedom from abuses. Wife-beating occurs in love marriages as well as in arranged marriages.
2. **Myth:** Women provoke violence by their intolerance and nagging.  
**Fact:** Women are often beaten for reasons beyond their control. They have been beaten because they were unable to accommodate their

husband's sexual desires, or because they could not prove that they were not seeing a lover while picking up the children from school. A woman who had been a dutiful wife for 30 years was beaten by her husband who was in a bad mood because of things that happened outside the family.

3. **Myth:** Only men who are mentally ill beat their wives.

**Fact:** The incidence of mental illness among men who beat their wives is the same as that of those in the rest of the population.

4. **Myth:** Only men who fail in other aspects of their lives beat their wives.

**Fact:** Often men who have successful careers beat their wives. Wives of successful men are more reluctant to expose a husband who has a high profile, in case this threatens his social standing, his business or employment, and often her only source of income.

5. **Myth:** Only poor and uneducated men abuse their wives.

**Fact:** Men from all social backgrounds beat and abuse their wives. Domestic violence may appear to be a problem primarily of the poor, because middle and upper class women often have the resources to hide the violence. Abused women with fewer resources are more visible since they must turn to public institutions, such as police and hospitals, for help.

6. **Myth:** Indian men do not beat their wives. Violence in the home is a Western problem.

**Fact:** Violence against women cuts across geographical, cultural, socioeconomic and religious categories. Examples of wife-beating have been drawn from all Asian countries.

7. **Myth:** Women who remain with a violent husband are masochistic - they stay because they enjoy the violence.

**Fact:** Women will remain in a violent relationship because they are economically dependent on their partners. They lack marketable skills and cannot afford to move. An Indian woman is also trapped by the 'good woman' ideology through which she has been instructed to suffer and accept male aggression and violence as inevitable, while acceptance and docility are prized virtues. She often feels ashamed at having failed to fulfil her traditional role as a housekeeper, a mother and as a faithful and supportive wife. She is made to feel guilty about 'breaking up the family unit. She fears losing custody of her children, and of being ostracised by family and friends.

8. **Myth:** Drunkenness, drugs and gambling cause domestic violence.

**Fact:** No evidence has been found of a relationship between substance abuse leading to domestic violence. Some men may have been drinking when they are violent to their wives, but many are violent even when they are sober. Similarly, some men may have been using drugs when they are violent. Many do not. Some gamblers are violent. Many are not.

9. **Myth:** Women can always leave.

This myth can be better explained by the Power and Control Wheel, which describes the different tactics an abuser uses to maintain power and control over his partner. In abusive relationships, the batterer uses the pattern of tactics described in the Power and Control Wheel to reinforce his use of physical violence. Violent incidents are not isolated instances of a loss of control, or even cyclical expressions of anger and frustration. Rather, each instance is part of a larger pattern of behaviour designed to exert and maintain power and control over the victim.

**Fact:** Women often stay in destructive relationships because they feel guilty about leaving, because of fear, and sometimes for the sake of their children. Their financial dependence is often a major factor in their decision to stay. The man makes a woman totally dependent on him for her resources. This dependency leaves her with no choice but to put up with the violence. Once she starts tolerating the violence, the man exerts more power and over a period she gets stuck in a circle of violence. Only when a woman develops personal competencies, is financially independent, can she get out of this circle of violence.

10. **Myth:** Children need two parents even if their relationship is violent.

**Fact:** There are severe long-term detrimental effects on children who live in families where violence is a frequent occurrence.

11. **Myth:** Violent men are violent in all their relationships.

**Fact:** Very few men who are violent towards their partners, exhibit violence in other relationships. Most appear very reasonable and respectable outside the family.

12. **Myth:** Women are women's greatest enemies.

**Fact:** A man earns money, owns property and as a result has savings, status and prestige in society. A woman on the other hand, does not earn, has no control over resources and is completely dependent on the man. The women who are dependent on the man are his sister/sisters, his mother and his wife. All the women are competing amongst



themselves to attract the attention of this one man for the fulfilment of their needs. The fallout of this competition is that the women end up fighting among themselves and hence, the propagation of the myth that women are women's greatest enemies. Women can understand each other better once they gain financial independence and are in no way dependant on men.

13. **Myth:** Violence between husband and wife is a private matter and should be settled internally. The police and other organisations should not interfere/ intervene.

**Fact:** Violence by a man on a woman has been perpetuated by the gender relations created and perpetuated by the state and community. Violence, which cannot be resolved by the husband and wife and transgresses to the extent of becoming a violation of rights and dignity of the woman, requires the intervention of the police and outside organisations to ensure her safety.

**Debriefing:** After the sharing of each statement by the group, the facilitator supplements the explanations where necessary when the group has got the fact right. Where the group has not got the facts right, the facilitator explains the facts.

### Assessment

Since the emphasis in this course is on the learner's ability to develop skills in various aspects of violence against women and specifically domestic violence, the assessment will be based on the following:

Class Participation	20 marks
Group presentation	20 marks
Written Individual Assignment of a case during field work	60 marks
Total	100 marks

## III

### CONCLUSION

The Special Cell for Women and Children has completed 25 years of work on the issue of VAW within the police system, drawing from the framework of social work practice and a pro-woman perspective. The social worker's role is central to the process of intervention where the social

worker intervenes in the interest of the violated women. The complexity of the issue of VAW demands a multi-faceted and coordinated response — both at the individual and at the systemic levels.

The Special Cell for Women and Children has been demonstrated as a feminist intervention for VAW within the criminal justice system and has been adopted as a programme of Government of Maharashtra. This model has been demonstrated and replicated in many states such as Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana and Orissa as an effective intervention strategy to redress VAW.

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