



Economic empowerment - a catalyst in eradicating domestic violence against women in India

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Introduction:

Women world over has woken up to realize that freedom is the most important aspect of any human beings existence. Women as a species have been discriminated and made to be dependent on male members who make them vulnerable to violence-physical, mental, emotional and financial. Out of the above mentioned violence's economical dependence is the root cause of all other violence and abuse which women are subjected to. Her material dependence has diminished her position and status in society and has nurtured her oppression. Economic independence of male has been an eternal thing and is base of patriarchal society we live in which apparently means that women will be dependent for all their material needs and leading her to be exploited in numerous ways and since centuries.

There is a direct interrelation between economical dependence and domestic violence faced by women; many studies have supported this equation. The violence faced by women is by and large goes unreported because of the fact that the women are economically dependent on men and less able to leave him and start a life of her own. Economic abuse by intimate partner is a form of domestic violence and includes a range of tactics used by an abuser to undermine the economic independence of a current or former intimate partner. Economic empowerment is an overarching theme that includes the following:

- 1) An increase in *financial literacy* or the knowledge and skills to make sound financial decisions and obtain resources;
- 2) An improvement in *economic self-efficacy* or the belief that one has the resources, options, and confidence to be successful; and
- 3) An enhancement in *economic self-sufficiency* or economic behaviours that demonstrate their economic self-efficacy or financial literacy regarding personal financial management (Gowdy & Pearlmuter, 1993; Perry & Morris, 2005; Vitt, et al., 2000).¹

The reason women tolerate domestic violence is somehow associated with social and cultural practices which prevail in societies. A woman will take abuse in fear of breaking her marriage, in fear of safety and welfare of her children and most importantly economic support she gets from her partner. The more a woman is dependent financially the more is she abused physically, mentally and emotionally.

As per a 2015 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs report states that in some studies of individual countries, up to 70 percent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.² This leads us to firmly believe that societies traditionally accept this pattern of administering domestic violence and the sole reason being dependence of women on men for her financial needs. Kalmus and Strauss (1989) have also tried to mention this relation between financial dependence and domestic violence; they focused on the objective and subjective dependency of women in a marital relation. The objective dependency is her economic dependence and subjective is her emotional or perceived feelings about her marital relation. This study analyzed and concluded that a married woman

¹ Judy L. Postmus, Rene Renick, Sandra Mayoral Pedroarias, Kim Pentico, VAWnet: The National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV) (October, 2010) retrieved from <https://vawnet.org/material/economic-empowerment-domestic-violence-survivors>

² Chicago Policy review, retrieved from <http://chicagopolicyreview.org/2016/12/07/the-role-of-economic-independence-in-domestic-violence-evidence-from-africa/>

is most likely to tolerate domestic violence if she is economically dependent.³ Violence against women is one of the biggest causes of injury and death to women worldwide, causing more deaths and disability for women ages 15 to 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war. In other words, it's an epidemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that **1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.**⁴

Reasons of Economic Dependence:

Traditionally women are presumed to undertake house hold activities and men will assume the role of fulfilling families' financial needs. Unmarried girls are financial dependent on fathers to support her educational expenses, than her marriage expenses, which is seemed to be burden on male member who earns and is the reason he curtails her educational needs and also compromise in the marriage prospects of finding a better groom for daughters due to financial burdens. Once married, a woman is dependent on her husband for each and everything she requires to sustain her life, from food to shelter, from child birth to child's upbringing and thus the vicious circle of dependence goes on.

Economic Power brings great Bargaining power:

With men in society holds the economic power they also wield higher bargaining power, they are the ones who decide upon all major or minor issues relating to family and do not bother to consulting the dependent members. This in turn means being victim of mental and emotional abuse because of getting no choice and rights due to being financially dependent. Men tend to realize their power of random decision making once the family starts accepting them in fear of being economically deprived of resources if they oppose.

Though women contribute a lot to families' upkeep and in for of labour work she puts in but these efforts have no economic value and thus she does not have any say in the matters of family and finances in spite of her contribution.

Reach and effect of Economic dependence:

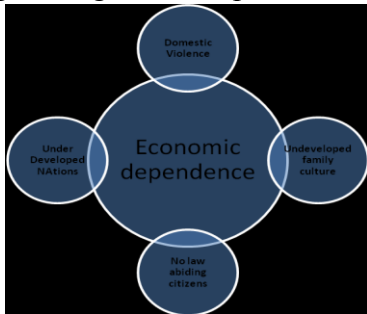
Economic abuse has far and wide-reaching effects. It leads to women's material deprivation and social exclusion while living with an abuser. It is quiet difficult for a woman to leave a physically violent partner when she is financially dependent on him. When an abuser limits access to economic resources, women will have to struggle to meet her basic necessities. Interfering with education or employment can make it difficult for women to find a job. Those women who have experienced economic abuse are less likely to do well in financial settlements on separation. Women may be jointly responsible for debts accrued by their abusive ex-partner. Economic abuse magnifies the financial precariousness women face through lower pay, fragmented paid work and insufficient superannuation. In short, economic abuse can contribute to a lifetime of economic struggle for women.⁵

³ Basu, Bharati & Famoye, Felix. (2004). Domestic violence against women, and their economic dependence: A count data analysis. Review of Political Economy. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/24088356_Domestic_violence_against_women_and_their_economic_dependence_A_count_data_analysis

⁴ Action against Hunger, Violence against Women Is Also: Reinforcing Economic Dependence, November 2017, retrieved from <https://actionagainsthunger.ca/violence-against-women-is-also-reinforcing-economic-dependence/>

⁵ Tackling economic abuse of women must be part of our domestic violence response, the conversation, October 2015, retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/tackling-economic-abuse-of-women-must-be-part-of-our-domestic-violence-response-48376>

The circle of economic dependence of women is not just associated to her and surrounding, it has far reaching and greater impact, which is represented in the below mentioned diagram. This diagram



represents that once a women is economically dependent she is surely prone to domestic violence, her family is underdeveloped-nutrition, education, overall development, than the children who live in such atmosphere will learn and imbibe the same things which they see in their family, which means they can also become abusers and will not be abiding law in future, thus in turn the nation as whole will suffer by being underdeveloped.

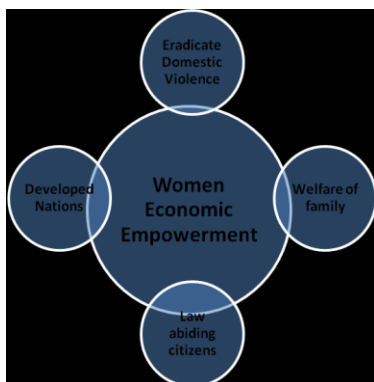
The poorer and dependent the women is, she is less likely to fend for herself and will take the abuse without reporting it which will lead to aggravating this situation and leading the predator to believe that it is his right to administer violence because she is financially dependent. Such mindsets needs to be changed and women need to understand their value and should report or speak out about the violence they face which will certainly scare the predator and thus will reduce such behavior.

Economic Independence-need of an hour:

Economic independence is about expanding the capacity of women to make genuine choices about their lives through full and equal participation in all spheres of life. It is about recognising women's work, paid and unpaid, as valuable, both socially and economically. It is about having policies and systems that value and celebrate women's contributions, and reflect the reality of women's lives.⁶ As per observations made by Dahrendorf (1979) that support obligations function as railings that guide people's lives and encourage them to go further , whereas claims on support or economic dependency are most likely to serve as barriers making the full use of available options more difficult.

Women today have ample of opportunities to become economically independent they have chance to have education, be employed, stand up for her rights, voice out against discrimination, such changes have come from the fact that women are accepted in societies and nations as equal and their talent is appreciated in many forms, overall development of any nation will be seen when all its citizens are treated equal and given equal opportunities.

The following diagram sums up the discussion one economically empowered women can lead nation on the path to development, and it is just to say that women rights are human rights, which is why she is neither asking much nor less, its time she gets what is hers and she truly deserves to live with dignity and without fear with the help of opportunities in form of economic empowerment.



Definition of women economic empowerment by World Bank Gender Action Plan: Women economic empowerment as making markets work for women and empowering women to compete in the market.⁷ This definition gives us two major criteria:-

1. Market opportunities need to be created for women to participate, so that women are empowered.

⁶ 3 Theme One - Economic Independence for Women: Listening Tour Report, retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/3-theme-one-economic-independence-women-listening-tour-report>

⁷ Maria Elena Ruiz Abril, Women's economic empowerment in conflict and post-conflict countries, 2009, retrieved from <https://www.sida.se/>

2. Women need to compete in the market that means enabling women by providing them with better education and skills to be competitive and be empowered.

Thus, women once empowered will become enabler of social and cultural change too, women who are economically independent will look after her children, educate them, nourish them and make them law abiding citizens of a country, which means it is a interconnected activity if a women is empowered it is in favour of society and nation both.

Conclusion:

Women form half of world's population and if they are kept oppressed and violated no developing society can put claim to being democratic and reformative. Women need to realise her worth, today education and employment opportunities have paved road for women to accomplish her dreams and leave the abusive relation if any she is stuck with. Men need to understand that women if given proper opportunity will help in improving the economical stability of household which means she will have bargaining power like men in the matters concerning family.

Inspite of legislations enacting women centric acts the implementation of these acts is still a problem, women are either not aware of their rights or are under social pressure to do away with their rights, say her inheritance rights. These all make her economically vulnerable and thus more prone to face abuse and violence in her domestic lives. Judiciary and society both needs to promote economic/financial independence of women which will reduce her chance of facing violence and will lead to her leading a healthy and fulfilling life.

Resources should be made available to victims and legal reforms should be in place to tackle such instances, however familial support and social outlook need to change women needs to be taken as equal partner in any marriage and family setup irrespective of her economic status. But once the women empowered they get power to choose, a choice between staying in the abusive relation, a choice to walk away from such relation, a choice to stand up for her own rights and for welfare of her children, that's true empowerment. With support from society and with help from reformative legislations gender based domestic violence will eventually eradicate with the rising empowerment of women, thus building a healthy and developing society.