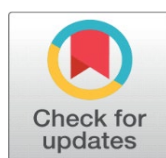
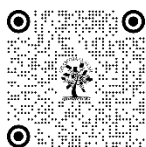


MARRIAGE DURABILITY AND FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR: CASE STUDY OF A SWADHAR GREH

M. Jimbhashwari Devi¹, Dr. Ma yanglambam Lilee²

¹ Research Scholar (SRF-NFSC), Department of Sociology, Manipur University: Canchipur (A Central University), Imphal West

² Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Manipur University: Canchipur, (A Central University), Imphal West



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ABSTRACT

Marriage is a social institution in which a man and woman unite and start a new beginning of a family. It includes the social sanctity and cultural heritage of a community. Marriage system varied from one community or region to another across the globe, Meitei of Manipur, North-East India have also unique way of social acceptance when it comes to traditional marriage practices. It consists of various rituals, functions, and deep-cultural practices. It is also a tight knot of a beautiful new life journey. However, it sometimes misleads directly or indirectly and traps women in unhealthy conditions of social problems. The notion of a marriage is to live together and forever throughout life. Nevertheless, this preconceived notion of togetherness can misguide women, and they are often the victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence is a violent/potential act of behavior that causes harm/injury to anyone in the form of physical, mental, sexual, or economic abuse and is also a social problem in every society. In Manipur, there is a high rate of spousal domestic violence in the NFHS-5. In this context, the study focuses on the linkages of duration of marriage and different forms of domestic violence in Manipur. Thus, the study explores the secondary sources and the primary data of a Swadhar Greh in Manipur to understand domestic violence as social problem.

Keywords: Marriage, Domestic Violence, Swadhar Greh, Meitei Community, Manipur

1. INTRODUCTION

In early times, women enjoyed high status in the society. However, the position of women gradually started to decline during the Brahminic age. Thus, the status and identity of women began to fade, forcing them to live in lower positions. Besides this, women were the ones who faced many social evils, and even social respect was obtained from the male perspective (Ajay, 2016). This perception helps women facing any form of violence within and outside the home. Women in India have been victims for many years in all cultures, ethnic, race, class, etc. Violence against women (VAW) has become a severe issue in our society. The VAW, like dowry death, child abduction, kidnapping, rape, physical, sexual, and mental abuse, etc., is considered a crime under the Indian Penal Code. This crime can be exacerbated various violence in the society. Increasing VAW means there is a hindrance in our society's social, economic, political, and cultural development. The Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code introduced the rules and regulations of domestic violence. It enforced that people also have the right to know their duties, respect, and honour as human beings (Kamei, 2016). Even

though there is a penalty for the VAW, our country is still facing the increasing issues of domestic violence, VAW, crime against women, and many more abuses.

Like mainstream India, Manipuri women had a profound cultural impact on the growth of civilization. The status of women was also equal to that of men's counterparts before the influence of Hinduism in Manipur. Even though the patriarchal influence/system was cultured, there was a high status of women in the pre-Hindu period. In 1715, during the reign of Garib Niwas (Pamheiba), there were four courts over and above the king's court (Kuchu, which is the highest court among them): i) courts concerned with religious matters, ii) courts for secular matters, iii) courts concerned with females matters, and iv) military courts. Any issues related/concerned with women were solved at the Maharani court (3rd court). Women were the only members of this court who decided on the problems alone, except for unsolved matters referred to by the king's court. Women also played a significant role in religion during the pre-Hindu period (Tineshowri, 2013). This shows the high position of women in earlier times in every aspect.

In terms of marriage, the Meitei marriage system is sacred and ceremonial, with various rituals. It is exogamous, but endogamy was found earlier. Endogamy is prohibited in Meitei marriage, and this culture/custom is still practiced today. Practically, the exogamy can multiply the power of clans. In Manipur, polygamy was also a famous/practice during the early days of the reigning king. It became a custom as a symbol of winning a war, or the decisive/victory king took the wife of the defeated king or the weak king gave away his daughter to the mighty king. In such a way, this custom is imitated/ followed by the wealthy/noble family, and this custom is further spread to the ordinary people. Still, there is the practice of polygamy in our state, but there are some taboos regarding marriage. Unlike in mainland India, child marriage is hardly recognized, and widow remarriage is allowed (Basanti, 2016). These were the customs and practices of Meitei marriage. Some customs are now prohibited due to the course of time, yet some are retained as they are in the present generation, too.

In the Meitei society, marriage is the propagation of the family line. Under the patrilineal society, marriage was considered male-centric, and the main emphasis of the wife's duty was to look after/serve her husband and her parents-in-law. The mate selection is the preliminary step in a matrimonial alliance in Meitei marriage, and the boy's parents mainly search for the mate/wife. Whether love or arranged, consent from both the families/parents of the boy and girl is needed for a beautiful tie. The phenomenon of looking for a mate by the boy's parent is the most common form of selecting a wife. In contrast, the selection of a boy by the girl's parent is unseen/uncommon/untraditional in Meitei society. The Meitei marriage shows the absence of a rigid or compulsive dowry system. However, the well to do groom families even helps the bride families in organising the marriage ceremony in terms of providing goods and monetary assistance. These centuries old traditional practices including '*awunpot*' culture is still continuing in Meitei society. The '*awunpot*' is the gifts presented by the parents and family members at the time of marriage, such as utensils, beddings, gold ornaments, clothes, and other valuable items that belonged to the girl only. If divorce occurs, the wife can take along the '*awunpot*' while leaving the matrimonial home (Kunj Bihari, 1962). In terms of social mobility, the practice of giving '*awunpot*' becomes a race in the present society. This could exacerbate the different types of abuse in our state.

Within this sacred knot of marriage, there are lots of problems and issues. Some consider it a family issue/matter, but in reality, it is a severe crime in the four walls of Sweet Home. Domestic violence is still a contemporary issue in our state. The report of NFHS-5 shows that Manipur occupies the third position with 42per cent of ever-married women (age 18-49), Karnataka stands at the top position (48per cent), and Bihar at the second position (43per cent) in spousal physical, sexual, or emotional. This shows that a higher percentage of married women are still facing spousal violence in our state. To know the relationship between marriage and domestic violence, this paper studied the relevant literature and the primary case study of Swadhar Greh.

2. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

In search of the relationship between the durability of marriage and domestic violence, the study focuses on identifying the relation between the durability of marriage and different types of domestic violence in Manipur. Considering the methodological design, the study focuses on the secondary data and explores the primary data of a Swadhar Greh in Manipur. Manipur is a small state in northeast India, comprising sixteen districts (now) and nine earlier districts (before 2016). According to the data distribution of a list of Swadhar Greh by the Department of Social Welfare of Manipur, the data is confined to the earlier distribution of nine districts with four valley districts: Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West, and Thoubal. There are more than two Swadhar Greh in these districts except in the district of Bishnupur. So, the study focuses on the least available Swadhar Greh, i.e., the Women's Income Generation Centre (WIGC), in the Bishnupur district to discuss the relationship between marriage durability and domestic violence in Manipur. Here the study is based on the case stories of victim survivors of DV who are registered in the Swadhar Greh of WIGC.

3. THE CONCEPTS OF DURABILITY, MARRIAGE, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND 'SWADHAR GREH'

Here, durability means the duration of marriage between spouses and can be measured in years. Marriage is a social institution that unifies a man and woman (generally) into a family by performing certain rites and rituals or simply. The study here considered the Meitei marriage system that the victims performed/ practiced at the time of their marriage. Domestic violence is an age-old practice and social problem in our society. It means any action/potential act of being aggressive that further causes violence and tends to abuse/hurt/injure women. It consists of four types- physical, sexual, mental, and economic abuse. Swadhar Greh is the destitute home of deserted women, widows, divorced, or any other victims of violence against women (VAW), crime against women (CAW), and domestic violence (DV). Here, women from different types of abuse came and sought help. It allows women from 18 to 60 years to be admitted for a maximum of three years. Nevertheless, women above 60 can stay at the old age home. It supplies the basic requirements of food, clothing, shelter, medical help, vocational and skill development programs, counseling, etc, and also allows children with them.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 A BRIEF REVIEW ON RELEVANT LITERATURE

While looking at the international level, Poland became the first nation to criminalize marital rape in 1932. There are still 36 nations that do not consider it as a crime. India is among them and includes nations like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Algeria, and Botswana (Asheema, 2024). A large percentage (95per cent) of India's marriages is arranged marriage by the parents of the respective groom and bride. The criteria for searching for a bride or groom are based on age, education, wealth and caste, and religion. The search for a match is priceless, but both parents observe their characteristics (Rubio, 2014). From such finding, we can ask whether the younger generation agreed to choose their spouse from parent's preferences or is it by force. Many researchers pointed out the linkages between the durability of marriage and domestic violence across the globe.

Roychowdhury and Dhamija (2020) suggested that domestic violence is a global pandemic that affects one in three women in their lifetime and has adverse effects on health and economic problems. The study focused on women's age at marriage and its relation to different forms of domestic violence- less severe physical violence, severe physical violence, sexual violence, and emotional violence. It found that the delay in a year of women's age at marriage could get less severe and severe physical violence but no difference in sexual and emotional violence. Further, the study explored the effects of this on women's education and husband's education. It was also found that an older bride means women are more educated and have a more remarkable ability to move forward and then able to get more educated and abled men and subsequently less in physical violence due to educated spouse.

A quarter of ever-married women in rural areas of Kerala experienced one or more forms of domestic violence. These forms are overlapping in nature; the determinants of spousal violence are age, unemployment of husband, controlling (dominant) nature, behavior of husband, extramarital affairs, alcoholic consumption of husband, etc. (Jesha et al., 2021). This signified that married women are not safe at home as well as in society. Bharati Singh (2014) studied the social exclusion of women in different sections. The paper highlighted the victimization of women in every sense and often victims of physical and verbal abuse. As a patriarchal state, son preference is relevant till today. Women's voices are socially excluded in decision-making and when considering complex tasks/family problems. So, gender disparity is easily visible in our society. In a family, if a male member/son commits a crime, he is forgiven, unlike in the same scenario, a female member/daughter who commits the same crime is unforgiven and called a characterless woman. They are even scolded and socially unacceptable. Again, a woman is belittled by a woman. Even if a woman is a bread earner and earns out of the house, then society views her as a distrusting eye or evil eye and often a victim of domestic violence. Furthermore, the meagre amount they earn is taken by the husband/spouse for drinking, gambling, etc. So, Manipur women silently bear all the pain, sacrifice, humiliation, and social stigma to preserve the dignity of their family and their marriage.

While observing the durability of married women (only once) who ever experienced spousal violence, it was found that 11per cent of women experienced spousal violence within two years of marriage and 2per cent of women in five years of marriage (NFHS-5, 2019-2021). It is assumed that the longer the duration of marriage, the higher the chance of committing domestic violence (Saratchandra & Anand, 2022). Some researchers also studied the types of marriage and their relation to DV. The study found that the various types of DV are more common in consanguineous marriages than

in non-consanguineous (Sumana et al., 2020). The NFHS-4 also stated that approximately 12 per cent of people married in consanguineous relationships. Consanguineous marriage is more prevalent in South India than in North India. The consanguineous forms of marriage are considered the safest and most secure of daughters, as they are more familiar before marriage. Nevertheless, this has a severe impact on social, biological, and demographic among individuals and families, and most of the cases of such violence are underreported (Bhopal et al., 2014). In case of Manipur, Das (2022) studied the medical records of deaths by domestic violence in Manipur from 2004 to 2013. Around 61 persons died out of 3000 cases. Among these death cases, the majority of them are married women. While considering the socio-economic status and demographic pattern, most of the victims belonged to the lower class in urban residences. Most of the fatalistic cases of the victim are from a joint family, and it is beyond the eye of intimate partner violence. The study also found some causes, such as land disputes, alcoholism, and sudden provocation. These occur due to the lack of development and urbanization process. So, there is a need to bring mass awareness drive, necessary strategies, counselling, disclosure of victims, education, effective safety plans, etc. Nepola (2024: 116) identified the main cause that lead 66 per cent of distress married women belonging age group of 20-40 years seek institutional supports i.e. Swadhar Greh in Manipur was due to family conflict and physical abuse.

4.2 RELATION BETWEEN THE DURABILITY OF MARRIAGE AND DIFFERENT TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MANIPUR

The above literature discussed the prevalence of arranged marriage at a significant national level. It further explained that the longer the duration of marriage, the higher the chances of having domestic violence. Here, the study further explores the relationship between the durability of marriage and different forms of domestic violence in the Swadhar Greh. This includes the following sub-themes:

A) DURATION OF MARRIAGE: It refers to the duration of the consummation of marriage. It also signifies how long the couple has been married as husband and wife. It measures the number of years of togetherness. Thus, the study explores the relationship between the duration of the marriage and its effect on the livelihood of domestic violence in Manipur. The study found that a negligible number of victims have duration of marriage of less than a year, and almost all the victims stay together for more than four years of marriage and up to 23 years. It also testified that the happening of domestic violence does not necessarily depend on the longer or shorter years of being together as a married couple. It means there is no guarantee that the longer the duration of the marriage, the greater the domestic violence, or the shorter the duration, the lesser the domestic violence. Thus, domestic violence occurs irrespective of the durability of marriage. The severity or various forms of violence differed from person to person or family to family according to the nature of the perpetrators.

b) DURATION OF STARTING ABUSE: It refers to the identification of starting abuse after marriage. It identifies whether the abuse started from the early phase/time of marriage, i.e., during one year, after one year, after five years, after ten years, and more than ten years. The study found that most of the victims of various forms of abuse started during and after one year of marriage, and a few victims got abused after five and ten years of marriage. This pattern portrayed that women who are in the early phase of marriage (adjustment period/probation period) are easy prey for domestic violence. This also symbolizes that even though the victims are in love or arranged marriages, they are a vulnerable group to any form of violence. In our patrilineal society, women come for their loved ones by sacrificing all their childhood memories and parents to their husband's homes. That home now becomes the Pandora's box of their abused life.

C) TYPES OF ABUSE AND ITS PERPETRATOR: The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 is an act that aims to safeguard the rights of women who are victims of domestic violence within the family/home. The act consists of the terms like aggrieved person and perpetrator. *Aggrieved person* means women who are or have been in a domestic relationship with the respondent/ perpetrator and are subject to any form of domestic violence while *perpetrator* refers to a person who commits a crime or immoral act towards other people. In domestic violence, a perpetrator is someone who performs/ acts of VAW to the aggrieved person within the family or in an intimate relationship. Domestic relationship is a relationship between two people who share the same household or live together and have relations through marriage, kinship, or in a relationship of marriage. Domestic violence consists of various forms of abuse, namely physical- abuse by the perpetrators physically, like slapping, beating, hitting, kicking, etc.; sexual- attempt to rape, tempting to sex without consent, forcing sex even in a couple, etc.; mental- no visible scars but effects on mental health, psychological trauma like name calling, scolding, threatening, etc.; and economical- financial constraint by the abuser like not giving money, unaware of medical expense, not providing food, etc.

There are many types of abuse according to the PWDV Act 2005. In the context of Manipur, the present study explored the nature of abuse in Swadhar Greh and its perpetrator. They are:

I) PHYSICAL ABUSE: At the Swadhar Greh (WIGC), most of the physical abuse is done by the respective husbands of the victims. Almost all the perpetrators drink alcohol and use tobacco products regularly. A few husbands/perpetrators are drug abusers. So, after consuming such substances, they tried to search for reasons for abusing them physically, breaking things, and sometimes throwing objects at the victim. Some victims got severe bruises on the face and body, and a few had serious injuries of twisted limbs and fractures on the body. On a serious note, some victims are the target group of attempts to murder by their husbands. So, to seek help, the victims took shelter at the Swadhar Greh and revitalized their lives.

II) SEXUAL ABUSE: Few victims exposed the sexual abuse in the form of attempted rape by their father-in-law or brother-in-law and marital rape before and after marriage by their husband. A rare case of mentally disturbed victims also took shelter at the Swadhar Greh. The anonymous perpetrator took advantage of such mentally disturbed women, impregnated them, and took away the child after delivering from the hospital. Such inhuman acts are still happening in our state. This is a violation of fundamental human rights.

III) MENTAL ABUSE: Most of the mental abuse is done by the husband as well as the mother-in-law. The husband often used slang in public places and even scolded them before the child and family members. In a few cases, the mother-in-law also helps in instigating the abuse. An alcoholic husband, drug user, and gambler asked for money from his wife. If the women do not meet the demand, then they are easy prey to physical and mental abuse. On top of this, in a few cases, the mother-in-law abused the victim mentally as well as sexually for not having a child and told her son to marry another wife. This will cause mental trauma to the victim and thus has a severe health impact and stress, and could help in provoking lifelong diseases. In a specific case, the inmate became mentally abusive because of their husband having affairs with another woman. Surprisingly, women who were having affairs also came to Swadhar Greh by taking advantage of the PWDV Act 2005. In such cases, the husband caught the affairs, they got abused, and for such acts, the women came to the shelter home. In reality, the woman is the one who commits the actual crime, but in the course of his action towards the woman, the woman takes advantage of it and blames him as a perpetrator.

IV) ECONOMICAL ABUSE: In this form of abuse, the perpetrator dominantly suppresses the victim in economic activity. This puts the victims who are unemployed in a financial deprivation mode. Even they are denied of taking food. The medical expenses are also rejected even if the victim is pregnant. The main perpetrators are the husband, mother-in-law, stepbrother, and sometimes the real brother. Being a materialistic mother-in-law, they asked for more '*awunpot*'. If the daughter-in-law fails to meet her expectations, then they mentally and economically abuse her for not bringing enough '*awunpot*' and look down on being a poor family. In a few cases, the step-brother and real brother refused to give property to the separated and divorced woman.

By considering all these types of abuse, the women in Swadhar Greh became the victims of almost all forms of abuse. There is no exact case story that has only one form of abuse. Instead, the inmates are the victims of three or more forms of abuse. This signifies that all these forms of abuse are correlated and complement each other. The most common forms of abuse are physical, mental, and economic abuse. At the same time, sexual abuse is the most miniature visible form of abuse in Swadhar Greh. Women still consider sexual abuse to be a compassionate case, and thus, they feel uncomfortable, shy, silent, and not ready to expose such stories/data. There will be many cases, but due to the sensitivity, the data is not the actual image of domestic violence in our state.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

By analyzing the relevant literature and primary data on Swadhar Greh, the study can draw a concluding remark that the durability of marriage and domestic violence are sufficiently related to each other. It was found that the said types of abuse occurred from the early phase of marriage. The preconceived notion of happily ever after marriage becomes a false hope for many victims in Swadhar Greh. Therefore, it can be said that the companionship of love is diminishing after marriage due to the changing behavior of spouses, economic factors, etc. There are the factors that alarm the relation between the durability of marriage and domestic violence. The occurrence of domestic violence is irrespective of the duration of the marriage, which means the longer the marriage does not mean there is high domestic violence or vice versa. Moreover, among the various types of abuses, physical abuses are one of the most common types of abuse in the destitute home. In contrast, sexual abuse is the most petite visible form of abuse in our state. These forms of abuse are

complemented by each other rather than occurring abuse alone. So, this is the needed hour to check the different strategies to curtail the various forms of domestic violence in the state.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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