

Perspectives in Social Work

College of Social Work (Autonomous),
Nirmala Niketan
Mumbai

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- Work with a preferential option for the vulnerable and exploited, both locally and globally.
- Build cadre of young, competent professionals having a global perspective and a strong value base of compassion, personal integrity, moderation, tolerance and self-respect.

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EDITORIAL

This issue of *Perspectives in Social Work* brings together eight scholarly articles that critically engage with diverse dimensions of women's lives and broader gender concerns in contemporary society. Collectively, the contributions foreground how gender is shaped by structural inequalities, social institutions, and everyday lived experiences. The articles address a wide thematic range. Some focus on the experiences of spouses of migrants, highlighting the emotional, social, and economic vulnerabilities faced by women in translocal and transnational family arrangements. Others examine gendered experiences in urban transport systems, revealing how mobility, safety, and access to public spaces are deeply influenced by gender norms and power relations. The issue also includes critical explorations of suppressed masculinities, drawing attention to how rigid gender expectations marginalize men who do not conform to dominant ideals of masculinity. Further, studies on youth perceptions of domestic violence shed light on how young people understand, normalize, or challenge violence within intimate and familial relationships, underscoring the importance of early gender socialization. In addition, the exclusion and marginalization of LGBTQ communities are examined, emphasizing how heteronormativity and binary gender frameworks limit access to rights, services, and social acceptance. Overall, this issue contributes to ongoing feminist and social work debates by advocating for inclusive, rights-based, and transformative approaches to practice, policy, and research on women and gender issues.

The first article by Ms. Bhumika and Dr. Sanjeev Kumar examines the theoretical framework and evolution of eco feminism, focusing not just on women's involvement in local and global environmental initiatives but also on current global issues including social inequality, climate change and biodiversity loss. Ecofeminism is a resilient theoretical framework that has adapted its methodologies while maintaining its core commitment to

exposing the structural connections between gender-based oppression and ecological degradation. The article offers holistic solutions that integrate environmental justice with gender parity and reimagine human relationships with nature with reciprocity, care, and mutual interdependence rather than domination and exploitation.

The second article by Arul Vinnarasi and Dr. Essac Raphael focuses on the impact of increasing transnational migration on family structures and cross-border marriages. Unlike the migrants who may experience upward mobility abroad, their partners frequently experience prolonged separation, increased household responsibilities and social expectations in their home communities, with financial benefits but at emotional costs. The article assesses the role of social networks, community engagement and digital communication in mitigating stress and promoting resilience.

The third article by Monika Rajak and Dr. Minara Yeasmin aims to uncover the gaps in the existing literature on the psychological empowerment of women from 1994 to 2024. Once these gaps are identified, a future research agenda is proposed with focus on developing theories and tools along with qualitative, mixed and multi methods to measure women's psychological empowerment. The framework for the psychological empowerment of women suggested in this article provides intrapersonal, interactional and behavioral components.

The fourth article by Anu Rani is about understanding and reimagining gender in Delhi's urban transport planning. The article critically examines how national transport policies and successive Master Plans have only narrowly understood and addressed women commuters from a lens of safety, ignoring the structural, socio-cultural, and institutional barriers they face as service users as well as employees of the transport workforce. The article posits that a gender-inclusive policy must acknowledge the diverse roles of women, not merely as commuters, but as active

participants in transport planning and the workforce to ensure urban mobility is equitable and sustainable.

Jhimli Chatterjee and Dr. Pritha Roy's article compares psychosocial stress and its determinants between a cross-section of childless and childbearing women in Eastern India. The results show significantly higher anxiety, depression and hopelessness; with poorer marital adjustment, social support, overall quality of life, coping skills and lower self-esteem among infertile women. The article proposes that a state of infertility cannot be defined as merely a medical condition, but includes a deeply social and psychological experience, shaped by gender norms, cultural expectations, and interpersonal dynamics.

The sixth article by Meghna Vesvikar is on the experiences of masculinity of slum youth in Mumbai. The article proposes a need for creating non-Eurocentric subtypes of masculinities that relate to uniquely Indian circumstances such as caste. The article suggests the outlines of media to be used to interact with slum dwelling youth and generate awareness among them as well as partnership with the youth and CSOs/NGOs in this content creation.

Rushila Rebello's article focuses on the perception and attitude of youth towards domestic violence against married women in the slums of Mumbai. The article offers interesting insights such as the impact of gender and education on not just the perception of domestic violence but also its frequency and intensity. The article outlines the family, educational institute and community level interventions as well as those at broader societal and legal levels such as media and religious and cultural institutions.

The last article is by Dr. Sangeeta Krishna on the politics of LGBTQ exclusion from a human rights perspective. According to the article, most LGBTQ individuals are still hesitant to disclose their identity to others because of social stigma, homophobia and discriminatory laws. Academic institutions, businesses, schools,

and colleges must promote conversations about sexuality and raise awareness about discrimination against members of this community. Instead of a duality of theory and ground realities, there needs to be a synthesis of academic knowledge and LGBTQ persons' socio-cultural reality.

We hope this edition brings you valuable field-based knowledge that is relevant to social work education and practice. The insights presented in these articles aim to strengthen critical understanding of gender issues and enhance reflexive, rights-based interventions. It is our hope that this issue will contribute meaningfully to socially just and inclusive social work engagements.

Editorial Team

GENDER, ECOLOGY, AND JUSTICE: THE FOUNDATIONS OF ECOFEMINISM

Ms. Bhumika¹, Dr. Sanjeev Kumar²

Abstract

As a sociopolitical and philosophical movement, ecofeminism explores the relationship between ecological degradation and gender inequality. The objectives of the paper include examining theoretical underpinnings and historical evolution of ecofeminism; to look at the connection between environmental exploitation, capitalism, and sexism; to investigate women's involvement in grassroots and international environmental initiatives, and to provide ecofeminist methods for attaining gender parity and sustainable development. The methodology employed in the paper includes qualitative approach incorporating literature review of texts on ecofeminism like that of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, and various research papers and examination of ecofeminist case studies like the Chipko Movement. This work is relevant in the light of current global issues, including social inequality, biodiversity loss, and climate change. By providing an intersectional framework for comprehending the connections between gender and environmental challenges, it advances scholarly discourse which can be used by academics, and policymakers to create sustainable development plans.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Environmental Exploitation, Capitalism, Gender, Sustainable Development, Justice.

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Introduction

Ecofeminism emerged as a transformative theoretical framework that illuminates the interconnected oppressions of women and nature under patriarchal and capitalist systems. Coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, this interdisciplinary movement synthesizes feminist and ecological concerns, challenging the dualistic logic that has historically justified the domination of both women and the environment. The historical trajectory of ecofeminism reveals its evolution from early environmental advocacy, exemplified by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), through the radical activism of the 1980s, to contemporary intersectional analyses that incorporate dimensions of race, class, and indigenous knowledge systems. Despite facing significant theoretical critiques, particularly regarding essentialism, ecofeminism has demonstrated remarkable resilience, adapting its methodologies while maintaining its core commitment to exposing the structural connections between gender-based oppression and ecological degradation. This paper examines ecofeminism's theoretical foundations, its critique of modern science and capitalism, the nature-women nexus, and its contemporary relevance in achieving environmental sustainability alongside gender parity.

1. Theoretical Underpinning and Historical Development of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a social and political movement that emphasizes the connection between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature by fusing feminist viewpoints with ecological concerns. Growing awareness of gender inequality and environmental deterioration led to its emergence in the late 20th century. Through activism, study, and advocacy, the movement aims to solve the dual oppressions of women and the environment by highlighting the connections between patriarchal regimes.

The connections between patriarchal societies and the intensive capitalist mode of operation have been shown by feminist theory. Women's rights, whether they relate to land ownership or

inheritance, education, marriage and divorce, or paid work, frequently tell a violent tale. As a result, the fight for women's rights has been continuous, and nothing in the realm of rights can be taken for granted. As we study the history of the conflicts of the concepts and issues of the human population, both locally and globally, it is a mined terrain that is connected to several other difficulties. Women's movements have taken a new turn in recent years due to civil society activities that incorporate youngsters for climate change.

Françoise d'Eaubonne, one of “the pioneers of the degrowth movement”, first used the term “ecofeminism” in 1974, linking women with the environment. It voiced disagreement with the conventional wisdom or ways of knowing about growth-led economics. Through her ideas and work, d'Eaubonne aimed to change how humans relate to nature by taking a respectful stand toward women and the natural world, moving away from issues of power, aggression, and exploitation. Both were thought to possess the ability to bear children.

Before d'Eaubonne, Rachel Carson is a prominent ecofeminist writer. It is widely acknowledged that Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* served as a catalyst for the environmental movement that emerged by Earth Day in 1970, despite the fact that her applied feminism in her personal, professional, and literary life is largely ignored in favor of the more prominent feminists of the 1960s, whose activism powered the anti-nuclear and anti-war movements. Ecofeminism was however, a part of broader Feminist framework till late 1970s.

Slowly, Ecofeminism started emerging from the intersections of feminist studies and the many movements for social justice and environmental health, as seen by influential books such as Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) and Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* (1978). These studies demonstrated how the oppressions of race, gender, ecology, species, and nation are intertwined. The historical and intercultural discrimination

against women, which is supported by the numerous male-dominated religious, cultural, and medical establishments (including Chinese foot binding, Indian sati, genital mutilation in Africa etc.). This all was exposed in Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978). It linked the physical well-being of women and the environment to the resurgence of a woman-centered vocabulary and way of thinking.

Griffin's *Woman and Nature* predates modern gender studies by exploring how the nature, women, animals and other vulnerable people (children, people of color, farmers, and slaves), as well as the body itself, emotions, and sexuality, has been conceptualized as inferior and distinct to justify their subordination under an elite, often violent, and militarized male-dominant social order. By bridging the gap between ecology and socialist feminism, Merchant's *The Death of Nature* provided historical support for the claim that the dominance of women and nature is the shared origin of the logic of capitalism and science which Merchant traces from 1484 to 1716.

By uniting the antinuclear demonstrations with the peace movement, feminist action in the 1980s provided a feminist as well as ecological viewpoint that connected military actions, corporate life, and unsustainable energy production. "Women for Life on Earth," was a camp of women who urged the Air Force to stop testing and using cruise missiles with nuclear warheads, first appeared at Greenham Common in England in 1981. They declared their "fear for the future of all our children and for the future of the living world, which is the basis of all life." (Cook and Kirk 1983). This was the beginning of the longest-running women's peace camp (1981-2000). Alice and Kirk's *Greenham Women Everywhere* (1983) had included the first two years of this movement. Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland's anthology *Reclaim the Earth* (1983) connected the Women's Pentagon Action in USA and the women's peace camp with the politics of women's health, environment, indigenous people, faunal health, animal rights and poverty while also offering international feminist perspectives on the intersection of women and ecology.

By the end of the 1980s, ecofeminism had also been articulated on the West Coast of the USA, first at a conference at Sonoma State University in California in 1981 and then at the University of Southern California (USC) in 1987. Feminist actions in British Columbia to defend Clayoquot Sound (Maingon 1994) and Judi Bari's (1994) organizing in northern California's Redwoods demonstrated how ecofeminism could be used to advance intersectional analyses of gender, class, indigeneity, and ecology. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein's *Reweaving the World* (1990), a volume of conference essays and presentations edited by the organizers of the USC conference, articulated ecofeminism through essays that addressed the intersections of race and toxic waste (Lin Nelson, Cynthia Hamilton), childbirth, midwifery, and colonialism (Arisika Razak, Irene Diamond), the patriarchal and colonial “development” of non-Western countries (Vandana Shiva), the role of religion in forming human relationships with nature (Charlene Spretnak, Riane Eisler, Carol Christ, Starhawk), critiques of feminist theory's anthropocentrism (Carolyn Merchant, Ynestra King, Lee Quinby), and bioregionalism (Judith Plant)

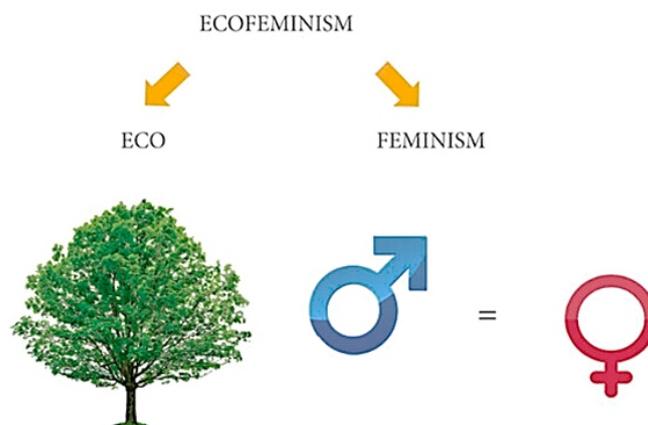


Fig. a) Representation of Ecofeminism

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Schematic-diagram-of-ecofeminism_fig1_365650703.

Thus, ecofeminism as a domain of study was quite diverse in terms of topics which were taken up ranging from simple environment-women link (d'Eaubonne) to complex and intersectional topics like cultural practices, nuclear and armaments race and waste management.

The history of ecofeminism appears to be quite promising when considered in this light. Many thought that ecofeminism would emerge as the “third wave” of feminism, expanding upon and changing the first- and second-wave feminism's anthropocentric criticisms with an ecological viewpoint. However, something quite different took place: Poststructuralist and other third-wave feminisms, which focused on the celebration of goddess worship and the criticism of patriarchy in cultural ecofeminism, discredited ecofeminism's diversity of arguments and viewpoints to the point where, by 2010, it was very difficult to find a research article or essay, dedicated to the issues of ecology and feminism in the majority of books and articles of gender or women's studies. According to Charis Thompson (2006), “Poststructuralist feminisms somehow lost sight of the structuralist insight of ecofeminism that yoked together world patterns of environmental degradation with women's oppression.”

The ecofeminist approach in the Indian context is going to be understood through various ecological movements in which women were at the center stage. Women's daily activities, which are crucial to all economic activity in both urban and rural settings but are not always considered labor, are not automatically recognized. Women engage closely with the environment, whether in human connections or with nature as the term ecology indicates. This is true whether they are collecting forest produce, weeding, planting, reaping, threshing, weaving, winnowing, farming, gardening, collecting waste, decorating, or providing care. The Chipko movement, which opposed the removal of trees from Himachal Pradesh's forests, was a prime example of an ecofeminist campaign. Environmental movements were inspired by this woman-led forest conservation effort. Vandana Shiva's

efforts to establish seed collectives which share and recreate seeds to help farmers become independent from the influence of multinational corporations that impose genetically modified seeds, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides, have garnered international recognition and are furthering the environmental cause.

Manisha Rao's article "Rethinking the Ecofeminist Discourse: View from the Western Ghats, India," which is based on fieldwork in the Uttara Kannada District of Karnataka, details a local community-led effort to preserve the woods that support the economics of spice gardens. In the 1980s, members of the Appiko Movement in the state of Karnataka remained close to the movement, which subsequently sparked the development of collectives, forums for discussion, and social and commercial endeavors centered upon farm products and agroforestry. It is necessary to view the ecofeminist discourse in this local context from a feminist political ecology viewpoint, given the widespread privatization of the Commons and environmental degradation.

2.Connection between modern Science, Capitalism, and Sexism

Determining the limits of ecofeminism as a political movement and as a subject of critical philosophy is challenging. Environmental studies, criticisms of science and modernity, development studies, and a surge in feminist critical writing are just a few of the political and theoretical endeavors that make up and are influenced by ecofeminism. However, the majority of ecofeminist writing has some common ideas. Among these are criticisms of patriarchal science, concerns about the deterioration of "nature" and the environment, the connection between these two and the mistreatment of women. This is evident from the writings of various ecofeminist scholars like Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Karen Warren.

The critique of contemporary science and Enlightenment ideas is a central theme in both Mies's and Shiva's ecofeminism. They

contend that scientific advancement serves as the foundation for capitalist “growth.” Secondly, they assert that the violence of colonial relations between industrialized and “underdeveloped” nations has historically formed the violence of scientific epistemology and practice. They contend that as a result of these interconnected relationships, women and children, especially those residing in the “underdeveloped” South, are disproportionately affected negatively by science, which is mirrored in the gradual devastation of the natural world.

Perhaps most fundamentally, the dualistic and reductionist character of scientific thought, as well as the simultaneous romanticization of what science destroys, are perceived as the root causes of these oppressions. In this context, women and the natural world are framed as the archetypal objects of male dominance and scientific investigation. In an objectifying scientific worldview based on purported binary oppositions between man and nature, north and south, and industrial and indigenous, and structured on dominance and capitalist accumulation, they contend that violence against nature is closely related to violence against women. Exploitation of women, nature, and the 'Third World' is perceived as the foundation of the scientific search for and creation of universalized 'truth.' In addition, Mies refers to the 'White Man's' love for women, nature, and indigenous 'Third World' peoples as idealized objects. Therefore, scientific logic is viewed as inherently rationalizing violence, desire, and dominance at all of these levels. Moreover, it is seen as a fundamentally masculine rationality.

Shiva offers a comparable interpretation, albeit one that is argued a little more rigorously than Mies'. For instance, Shiva challenges the mechanical and reductive character of scientific reasoning in her chapter “Reductionism and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science” by introducing an “organic” generative viewpoint that she particularly links to indigenous, non-Western women. Here, she argues that mechanistic “metaphoric” logic has gradually destroyed biodiversity and broken up female bodies and the

environment. In a later chapter, she continues by arguing that diversity is the organizing principle of non-Western pre-scientific cultures and the foundation of women's work and politics.

Both Mies and Shiva contend that an essentialized and romanticized conception of feminine consciousness and experience, as well as of “nature,” counterbalances the totalizing and reductionist construction of science and scientific authority. Both Mies and Shiva contend that an essentialized and romanticized conception of feminine consciousness and experience, as well as of “nature,” counterbalances the totalizing and reductionist construction of science and scientific authority.

3.Connection between Nature and Women

Feminism and environmentalism are intrinsically linked, according to ecofeminists. Simone de Beauvoir noted in 1952 that both women and nature are viewed as other in the logic of patriarchy. In that same year, Françoise d'Eaubonne created the term “ecofeminisme,” highlighting the need for women to bring about an ecological revolution. She also used the slogan “Feminism or death [Le féminisme ou la mort]” (d'Eaubonne 1974) to contend that the phallic order is the cause of two threats to humanity: resource depletion and population growth. Overproduction has depleted natural resources to the point of devastation, while overuse of female reproductive power has resulted in an excess of births and consequent overpopulation. Despite being a rallying cry, “feminism or death” also served as a warning that humans could not withstand the ecological effects of patriarchy.

In a culture where the basic form of relationships is still one of dominance, Rosemary Radford Ruether noted that “women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis” (Ruether, 1975).

The issue of Hypatia that Karen Warren edited in 1991 was titled Ecological Feminist Philosophies and was later enlarged and

reprinted with an all-ecofeminist focus. Warren's anthology was groundbreaking because it brought together a variety of viewpoints, not so much into an ecofeminist platform as into a vision of the lay of the land, so to speak, about ecofeminism.

For instance, misogyny was crucial to the contemporary conquest of nature; according to Carolyn Merchant's (1980) study of the history of science, the idea that man (sic) is superior to nature, however, is not unique to Bacon; it is also clear in Christian teachings about the expulsion from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:17–24. Adam is given the authority to alter his surroundings to suit his wants when he is sent out of the garden with instructions to till the earth and work for nourishment. That may be the case, but patriarchy and its oppressive behaviors also involve women. One great example is the cosmetics sector. Although the issue is complicated by questions of women's body discipline and image in the context of patriarchy, women cannot deny their support of such activities through their purchasing power. Animal testing for cosmetics is a barbaric, cruel, and generally needless activity.

To advance discourse and create connections, she (Warren) and Jim Cheney demonstrated in 1991 that ecology is a feminist concern by “identifying theoretical points of intersection between ecofeminism and ecosystem ecology” (Warren and Cheney, 1991). In *Ecofeminist Philosophy*, Warren's goal is to argue that “adequate analysis and resolution of such environmental issues as deforestation, water pollution, farming and food production, and toxins and hazardous waste location must be integrally connected to an understanding of the plight and status of women, people of color, the poor, and children ... [to help] one understand how mainstream environmental practices and policies often reflect, reinforce, or create practices and policies that devalue, subvert, or make invisible the actual needs and contributions of women, people of color, the underclass, and children” (Warren, 2000). Therefore, her primary goal is to diagnose and focus on the future. To grasp the linkages toward the redemption of all the “-isms of domination,” as she has been referring to them since 1991

(Warren and Cheney, 1991), such as sexism, racism, ageism, classism, naturism, and so on, she turns to both the past and the present rather than assigning blame.

However, she and Cheney have ultimately demonstrated that ecology and feminism are “complementary, mutually reinforcing projects” and that they are not necessarily related.

4. Revisited Ecofeminism

Although Ecofeminism witnessed humongous popularity in the 1980s, it also faced severe criticism along various lines. These broad generalizations, frequently made without specific and supporting documentation, have been repeatedly refuted in academic and popular journals, at conferences, and in conversations, but the contamination persists. Ecofeminists are accused of being 'essentialist, ethnocentric, anti-intellectual goddess-worshippers who mistakenly depict the Earth as female or issue totalizing and ahistorical mandates for worldwide veganism'(Gaard,2011). Ecofeminism in the 1980s was a broad umbrella for a range of diversely inflected approaches, some of which grew out of liberal, social, Marxist, anarchist, and socialist feminisms, while others were rooted in essentialist (cultural) feminisms (Gaard 1993b, 1998; Merchant 1995; Sturgeon 1997). In the 1990s, ecofeminist theories continued to ground and refine their analysis and developing viewpoints which were economical, international, and multidimensional. It is a straw-woman argument that utilizes an “outlier” position to undermine a complete body of ideas, and it is a logical error to misrepresent the portion for the total.

Both feminist environmentalists and ecofeminists were developing critiques of ecofeminism at the same time as mainstream feminism was rejecting animal ecofeminism. The criticisms made by Bina Agarwal (1992, 2001) provided a solid refutation of the essentialism of the unitary category “woman.” According to Agarwal (1992), “Women cannot be posited... as a unitary category, even within a country, let alone across the Third

World or globally, because the processes of environmental degradation and appropriation of natural resources by a few have specific class-gender as well as locational implications.”

Two types of criticisms were made, adopting the scholarly stance of exposing essentialism: one against the incorporation of species and nature as analytical categories essential to feminist philosophy and the other against the conflation of sex and gender categories and the homogenization of women's experiences.

In wake of these criticisms, the ecofeminist academics and activists who are eager to be recognized for their rigorous research and who are dedicated to igniting a shift in consciousness that leads to tangible action have adopted the anarchist tactic of eschewing organizations and terminology that no longer serve as platforms for critical ideas and have carried on with their work under alternative names. So which terms ought to be applied by the ecofeminist scholars? Which language is the most effective at communicating? Noel Sturgeon argued in 1997 that the term “ecofeminism” should be kept because it “indicates a double political intervention, of environmentalism into feminism and feminism into environmentalism.” However, Sturgeon replaced this term with “global feminist environmental justice” ten years later.

In this way, the term ecofeminism itself came under scanner even from its most vocal scholars but the areas to be studied under it were similar because Eco-feminist analyses can be used to analyze, theorize, organize around, and reform a wide range of eco-justice issues: The production and disposal of hazardous wastes; international gender justice; climate justice; sustainable agriculture; healthy and affordable housing; universal and dependable health care, especially for mothers and infants; safe, dependable, and free or inexpensive reproductive technologies; food security; sexual self-determination; energy justice; interspecies justice; ecological, diverse, and inclusive educational curricula; Indigenous rights; religious freedom from

fundamentalisms; and more. By framing these challenges in a way that transcends the borders of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, species, age, ability, and country, an intersectional ecological-feminist approach provides a foundation for active theory, education, and activism.

What should we call this method so that feminists of the future can learn about its background, conceptual framework, and activism tactics? “New eco-feminism,” if it is to survive, must be more aware of its long and prophetic past.

5. Women's Involvement in Grassroots and International Environmental Initiatives and Ecofeminist Methods for attaining Environmental Sustainability along with Gender Parity

Women's participation in grassroots environmental and agriculture movements has been monumental around the world. Many women in India and abroad have participated in broad-based movements like the Green Belt Movement of Kenya led by Wangari Maathai, which empowered women to plant trees to combat desertification and improve livelihoods. In India, there has been a rich and vibrant history of such instances where women preferred nature even at the cost of their lives. This alludes to the example of Amrita Devi Bishnoi, who, along with fellow villagers, hugged the Khejri trees when the King of Jodhpur's soldiers started cutting the forests to build. However, all of them were massacred, but Amrita Devi Bishnoi inspired future generations to pioneer such movements in the form of the Chipko and Appiko movements, where people, especially women, hugged trees to start community-led environmental activism.

Through groups like UN Women, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), and the Global Green Grants Fund, women actively influence environmental policies on a global basis and promote gender-responsive climate policies. Their participation in international fora, such as the UNFCCC COP summits, has resulted in policies like the Gender Action Plan

(COP23) and the Lima Work Programme on Gender (COP20) that acknowledge gender equality as essential to climate action. Despite these initiatives, there are still obstacles in the way of attaining complete representation in climate governance. In order to develop fair and long-lasting environmental solutions, women's leadership must be strengthened on a local and global level.

The crucial role that women play in environmental preservation and climate action has been increasingly recognized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The adoption of decision 36/CP.7 at the seventh Conference of the Parties (COP7) in Marrakech, Morocco, in 2001 marked a critical turning point. This ruling placed a strong emphasis on increasing women's involvement in climate change decision-making at all levels. Building on this basis, decision 23/CP.18 was approved at COP18 in 2012, which was held in Doha, Qatar. The goals of this historic ruling were to advance gender parity and enhance women's involvement in UNFCCC talks and in the representation of Parties in bodies created in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol or the Convention. These rulings demonstrate how the UNFCCC acknowledges the critical role that women play in combating climate change and the value of their active participation in environmental decision-making.

The relationship between environmental sustainability and gender justice is emphasized by ecofeminist strategies for achieving gender parity and sustainable development. Through a feminist perspective, ecofeminism promotes ecological stewardship, challenging capitalism and patriarchal systems that oppress women and the environment. Important strategies include sustainable farming methods that incorporate indigenous ecological knowledge, community-led conservation initiatives that enable women to participate as guardians of natural resources, and policy lobbying for fair access to energy, water, and land. In addition to encouraging participatory decision-making, ecofeminist activism makes sure that underrepresented

voices - especially those of women - are heard in environmental governance. Intersectional ecofeminism also acknowledges the contributions of rural and indigenous women to climate resilience and biodiversity conservation, emphasizing their involvement in sustainable resource management. Ecofeminism promotes a comprehensive, inclusive approach to sustainability, bringing environmental justice and gender parity into line and paving the way for a more sustainable and just world.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism remains a vital analytical framework for understanding and addressing the dual crises of environmental destruction and gender inequality in the twenty-first century. The movement's historical development demonstrates its capacity for theoretical refinement and practical application, from the Chipko Movement in India to international policy interventions at UNFCCC conferences. Despite enduring criticism regarding essentialism, ecofeminism has evolved into a sophisticated intersectional approach that recognizes the diverse experiences of women across race, class, and geographical locations while maintaining its foundational critique of patriarchal-capitalist structures. The participation of women in grassroots environmental movements and international climate governance underscores the continued relevance of ecofeminist principles in contemporary sustainability discourse. Moving forward, ecofeminist methodologies offer essential insights for developing holistic solutions that integrate environmental justice with gender parity, challenging us to reimagine human relationships with nature through frameworks of reciprocity, care, and mutual interdependence rather than domination and exploitation.

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**CROSS-BORDER CONNECTIONS: EXPLORING
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND QUALITY
OF LIFE IN THE SPOUSES OF TRANSNATIONAL
MIGRANTS**

Arul Vinnarasi¹ , Dr. Essac Raphel²

The increasing prevalence of transnational migration has reshaped family structures and created new dynamics within cross-border marriages. While research has largely focused on migrants themselves, psychological well-being and quality of life of spouses who remain behind or live in fragmented family arrangements often receive less attention. This study addresses that gap exploring the emotional, social, and mental health challenges faced by the spouses of transnational migrants, with emphasis on how prolonged separation, economic remittances, and shifting social roles affect their daily lives. The population under this study comprises 72 spouses, as respondents were selected in the Rajakamangalam village in Kanniyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. The findings suggest that financial security derived from remittances provide some stability but does not fully compensate for the psychological strain experienced in loneliness, limited emotional support, increased domestic responsibilities. Spouses often encounter social stigma, community isolation, and reduced access to institutional support systems which further deteriorates their quality of life. On the other hand, some spouses develop resilience through social networks, community groups, and digital communication which partially buffer negative impacts.

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The study's implications extend to policymakers, and mental health professionals, highlighting the urgent need for programs that integrate psychological support, counseling, and community-based resources for non-migrant spouses. Future research could explore comparative perspectives across different cultural contexts, gender-specific experiences, and the role of digital technologies in sustaining emotional ties. By focusing on the less examined group of spouses, this research contributes to a holistic understanding of the human consequences of transnational migration and underscores the necessity of multidimensional support frameworks.

Keywords: Transnational migration, cross-border spouses, psychological well-being, quality of life, family separation

Introduction

Transnational migration has become a defining feature of globalization, shaping not only the lives of migrants but also those of their families left behind. Within this framework, spouses of transnational migrants face unique emotional, psychological, and social challenges that are often underexplored in migration literature. Unlike the migrants who may experience opportunities for upward mobility abroad, their partners frequently navigate the complexities of prolonged separation, increased household responsibilities and social expectations in their home communities. These conditions create a delicate balance between financial benefits and emotional costs.

The introduction of digital technologies has somewhat eased communication, allowing couples to remain emotionally connected despite physical distance (Aryal et al., 2020). However, the absence of physical companionship and shared daily experiences continues to strain marital relationships. For many spouses, the challenges extend beyond loneliness to include community pressures, stigmatization, and diminished support systems, which collectively impact their mental health and overall quality of life.

Rationale

This study situates the spouses of transnational migrants at the center of analysis, aiming to examine how cross-border family connections influence psychological well-being and everyday life. By emphasizing both the challenges and coping strategies, the research acknowledges the resilience of spouses who navigate fragmented family lives. The introduction also underlines the broader significance of this issue, as the mental health and stability of spouses directly affect children's well-being, intergenerational care responsibilities and the sustainability of migration as a household strategy. Addressing these dynamics is essential for developing more inclusive migration and social welfare policies.

Objectives

To investigate the psychological well-being and quality of life among spouses of transnational migrants, focusing on how cross-border family arrangements affect their emotional health and social experiences.

To understand the extent to which prolonged separations, economic remittances, and community interactions shape their everyday lives.

To analyze the interplay between economic security and emotional strain. While financial remittances frequently improve material living conditions, they may not alleviate the psychological toll of loneliness, family fragmentation, or increased caregiving burdens.

To assess the role of social networks, community engagement and digital communication in mitigating stress and promoting resilience.

To contribute to policy and academic debates by emphasizing the need for targeted support systems for spouses, including counseling services, community programs, and policies that recognize the indirect emotional costs of migration.

Research Questions

To guide the investigation, the study is structured around several research questions that explore the multidimensional impact of transnational migration on spouses. These questions are designed to address both the psychological and social aspects of cross-border family life, while also highlighting the resilience and adaptive strategies of affected individuals.

1. How does prolonged physical separation from migrant partners affect the psychological well-being of spouses who remain in the home country?
2. To what extent do economic remittances contribute to improving material conditions while simultaneously influencing emotional well-being and relationship?
3. What are the social consequences, including stigma and community isolation, experienced by spouses of transnational migrants in their local contexts?
4. How do social networks, peer groups, and community institutions serve as coping mechanisms for managing stress and loneliness?
5. In what ways does digital communication (such as video calls, messaging apps, and social media) sustain marital relationships and mitigate emotional strain?
6. How do gender, cultural norms, and family responsibilities shape the experiences of spouses differently in transnational households?

These questions aim to uncover the nuanced realities faced by spouses, where economic benefits often coexist with significant emotional hardships. By framing the inquiry around both challenges and resources, the research acknowledges the complexity of transnational living arrangements. The answers to these questions will provide insights into the broader implications of migration on family dynamics, mental health, and social cohesion, while also offering directions for future comparative and policy-oriented research.

Statement of the Problem

While migration studies have extensively examined the economic benefits and challenges of cross-border labor mobility, the psychological well-being of spouses left behind has received limited scholarly attention. This neglect creates an incomplete picture of the human consequences of transnational migration, as spouses endure unique stressors that significantly shape family dynamics and community life.

The central problem lies in the paradox of migration: although remittances contribute to household income, education, and material security, they cannot substitute for the absence of emotional support, shared responsibilities, and companionship within marriage. Spouses of migrants often carry a double burden—managing domestic duties and child-rearing alone, while simultaneously coping with the emotional strain of separation. These challenges are further compounded by social stigma, limited access to institutional support, and cultural expectations that discourage open discussions about loneliness or marital difficulties.

The problem is not only personal but also structural. Without adequate recognition of the psychosocial costs of migration, policies continue to prioritize economic gains while overlooking the silent suffering of spouses. This oversight may undermine the long-term sustainability of migration as a household strategy, as family disintegration, mental health struggles, and intergenerational tensions become more pronounced.

Therefore, the problem addressed by this study is the lack of comprehensive understanding and support for the psychological well-being and quality of life of spouses of transnational migrants. By highlighting these dimensions, the research seeks to bridge gaps in literature and inform interventions that balance economic and emotional well-being in cross-border families.

Literature Review

Unemployment is the primary factor driving male migration (Amuthan, 2018). Male out-migration phenomenon has evolved as a crucial social reality, affecting the people staying behind in the community "(Bahuguna, 2021). When husbands migrate for employment reason women left behind also take up the responsibility and actively involve in household money management ""(Datta & Mishra, 2011). The growth of transnational families underscores the importance of comprehending migration's psychological and social effects on these families ""(Rai et al., 2023).

The increasing prevalence of transnational marriages and cross-border migration has brought significant attention to the psychological well-being and quality of life of spouses who experience prolonged separation or adapt to intercultural unions. Scholars emphasize that the dynamics of migration extend beyond economic implications, influencing family stability, mental health, and overall life satisfaction (Hines, 2024; Yu & Chen, 2016). For spouses of transnational migrants, the intersection of distance, cultural adaptation, and institutional supports creates a complex reality that shapes their emotional resilience and quality of life.

Research consistently highlights the dual nature of transnational ties, functioning as both a source of strength and a stressor. A study conducted among rural population in Tamil Nadu disclosed psychological issues faced by women whose husbands were abroad. The financial difficulties they faced further heightened their stress levels ""(Arokkiaraj et al., 2021).

On one hand, maintaining cross-border connections can buffer against loneliness and sustain identity continuity (Horn & Fokkema, 2020). On the other, separation often produces psychological strain, heightened by financial uncertainties, cultural dissonance, and limited access to social support systems (Adhikari, Regmi, Devkota, & colleagues, 2022). Literature

suggests that while remittances and digital communication provide partial relief, they cannot fully replace the intimacy and stability offered by physical togetherness (Silver, Edelblute, Mouw, & colleagues, 2018).

Life satisfaction emerges as a critical measure in understanding how spouses navigate these challenges. Studies reveal that the presence of institutional supports—such as integration programs and legal protections—positively correlates with the psychological well-being of cross-border marriage migrants (Oh, 2018).

Gender also plays a pivotal role in shaping outcomes. Female spouses in cross-border marriages often shoulder disproportionate burdens, including caregiving responsibilities, exposure to domestic violence, and constraints on mobility (Md Said & colleagues, 2023). Cross-border marriages can foster resilience and identity renegotiation. Kim (2025) and Bojarczuk and Moriarty (2025) argue that intercultural relationships provide opportunities for spouses to redefine their sense of self and family in ways that accommodate cultural hybridity and autonomy. This process, though challenging, may enhance adaptability and long-term psychological resilience. The balance between strain and growth however, often depends on the availability of community networks, supportive communication, and cultural openness within host societies.

A related strand of scholarship emphasizes the impact of transnational family structures on broader relational dynamics. Bryceson (2019) and Odasso, Vitali, and Sciortino (2025) note that the negotiation of care across borders introduces both opportunities for solidarity and risks of emotional neglect. Grandparents, children, and spouses alike experience varying degrees of well-being depending on remittance flows, caregiving arrangements, and frequency of communication (Merry, Casares, & Archambault, 2025). The fragmentation of family life, while sometimes mitigated by strong social ties, can generate cycles of

stress that undermine both individual and collective well-being.

Technological mediation has become increasingly significant in maintaining emotional bonds. Salma, Kaewwilai, and Ali (2021) observe that communication technologies reduce psychological distress by enabling real-time interaction across distances. Yet, reliance on virtual contact is insufficient to counteract the profound sense of absence experienced by many spouses. Sharifonnasabi, Mimoun, and colleagues (2025) add that the notion of “home” itself becomes redefined, where emotional security and psychological well-being are linked less to physical spaces than to transnational relational ties.

Overall, literature reveals that the well-being of spouses in transnational marriages is shaped by a constellation of factors: structural supports, gendered expectations, cultural integration, and the availability of emotional resources. While cross-border connections can provide a sense of continuity and resilience, they also magnify vulnerabilities tied to separation, inequality, and institutional neglect. In sum, cross-border marriages and transnational family arrangements carry profound implications for spouses' psychological well-being and quality of life. The evidence underscores the need for policies and community initiatives to foster integration, safeguard vulnerable spouses, and strengthen support networks to promote healthier transnational family life.

Methodology

Data Collection

Data for the present study was collected from women whose husbands were international migrants residing abroad for at least one year. A total of 72 respondents were selected as participants in Rajakamangalam in Kanniyakumari district of Tamil Nadu. To capture a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences, a mixed-method approach was adopted. Quantitative data was gathered through structured questionnaires that explored

indicators of psychological well-being and perceived quality of life. This provided measurable insights into levels of life satisfaction, emotional stability, and coping mechanisms. In parallel, qualitative data was collected using in-depth interviews and open-ended questions that enabled participants to articulate their experiences, challenges, and support networks in greater detail.

The qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which helped to identify recurring themes such as loneliness, financial security, community support, and perceived family stability. This dual approach offered both statistical patterns and nuanced personal narratives. Ethical clearance was obtained, and participants were briefed about the aims of the research. Informed consent was mandatory prior to participation. Data confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained to encourage honest sharing of experiences.

The study sought to understand the psychological impact of transnational marriages on spouses left behind, particularly how absence of a partner shaped their emotional resilience, daily responsibilities, and outlook on life. This integration of qualitative and quantitative data ensured a balanced exploration, allowing findings to reflect not only the numerical trends but also the depth of individual voices within the community studied.

Sample Method

The study utilized a purposive sampling method, as the research targeted a specific population group: women whose husbands had migrated internationally for employment. Purposive sampling was chosen because it allowed the researcher to focus directly on participants with relevant experiences rather than relying on random selection, which might include individuals outside the scope of the study. The final sample consisted of 72 respondents who met the inclusion criteria.

The inclusion criteria ensured that participants were spouses of men who had been living abroad for at least one year, thereby providing sufficient time for migration to influence psychological and social outcomes. Women who agreed voluntarily and provided informed consent were included. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of age, education level, socio-economic status, and length of marriage, in order to capture a wider spectrum of experiences.

Recruitment was conducted through community organizations, local women's groups, and referrals from existing participants. This helped in building trust and encouraging participation from women who might otherwise hesitate to share personal experiences.

The sample method was particularly suitable for the research aim, which required in-depth exploration of psychosocial well-being within a specific group. Unlike probability-based sampling, purposive selection allowed the researcher to prioritize relevance over representativeness, ensuring the data directly addressed the research questions. While generalization beyond the study population is limited, the method facilitated rich, meaningful insights into how women spouses of transnational migrants navigate emotional, social, and familial challenges in the absence of their partners.

Hypothesis

The study was guided by the central hypothesis that spousal migration significantly affects the psychological well-being and quality of life of women left behind. Specifically, it was proposed that extended periods of spousal separation due to international migration lead to heightened emotional distress, loneliness, and reduced life satisfaction, but that these effects may be moderated by factors such as financial remittances, community support, and personal resilience.

Dependent Variables:

The dependent variables were psychological well-being and quality of life of the spouses. These were assessed through self-reported indicators such as emotional stability, happiness, stress levels, coping mechanisms, social participation, and perceptions of personal and family security.

Independent Variables:

The independent variables included spousal migration-related factors, such as duration of separation, frequency of communication with the husband, receipt of remittances, social support networks, employment status of the spouse, and family structure (nuclear or extended).

The hypothesis assumed that psychological well-being is not uniformly negative or positive but is shaped by a dynamic interplay of stressors and supports. For example, while the absence of a husband might increase feelings of loneliness, financial remittances and strong social networks may buffer against such effects.

By testing these relationships, the study aimed to understand not only whether spousal migration affects women's mental health and life satisfaction, but also how different contextual factors influence these outcomes, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of transnational family life.

Statistical Tools:

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, MAXQDA 20, and Microsoft Excel, with the application of Thematic analysis, multiple regression analysis and descriptive statistics to interpret the findings.

Results and Discussion:

The demographic profile of the respondents (N=72) shows that the majority (47.6%) were aged between 31–40 years, while 30% were 41 years and above, and 22.4% were below 30 years.

Educationally, most women (51.6%) had completed secondary schooling, followed by 29.1% with a degree, and 19.3% with only primary education. In terms of occupation, 43.4% were employed in private jobs, 26.6% worked in government jobs, and 30% were homemakers.

Monthly income data reveals that nearly half (46.2%) of the respondents earned below ₹5,000, while 33.6% earned between ₹6,000–10,000, and 20.2% earned above ₹11,000. Regarding family size, 54.6% had fewer than two children, while 45.4% had three to four children. A majority (57.4%) lived in nuclear families, whereas 42.6% resided in joint families.

In terms of housing, two-thirds (66.4%) lived in rented houses, while 33.6% owned their homes. Financially, 55.2% did not have savings, while 44.8% reported having savings. Indebtedness was relatively high, with 64.8% reporting debt compared to 35.2% without.

Looking at husbands' occupations, 44.8% were semi-skilled workers, 28.6% were unskilled, and 26.6% were skilled. Regarding the duration of their husbands' employment abroad, 47.2% had been away for 5–10 years, 36.1% for less than five years, and 16.7% for over 10 years.

**SPOUSAL MIGRATION SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTS
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND
QUALITY OF LIFE OF WOMEN LEFT BEHIND**

Table 1

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Psychological Well-Being And Quality Of Life Of Women Left Behind	2.4881	.95237	72
I often feel lonely because of my husband's absence due to migration.	3.9444	.87031	72
The financial support from my husband abroad improves my overall quality of life.	3.4861	.88800	72
I experience higher levels of stress in managing household responsibilities alone.	2.4861	1.55639	72
Communication with my husband helps reduce my emotional distress.	2.4722	1.29975	72
I feel socially isolated compared to women whose husbands live with them.	2.2361	1.31613	72
My children's well-being is positively affected by the financial stability provided by remittances.	2.4444	1.33098	72
I find it difficult to make important family decisions without my husband's presence.	2.5000	1.28917	72
Support from relatives and community members helps me cope with my husband's absence.	2.1806	1.25963	72

The results clearly indicate that spousal migration significantly influences the psychological well-being and quality of life of women left behind. The descriptive statistics reveal that loneliness due to the husband's absence ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .87$) is one of the most prominent challenges, while financial support from remittances ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .88$) contributes positively to improving quality of life. Stress in managing household responsibilities ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.55$) and difficulties in decision-making ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.28$) highlight the psychological and social burden placed on women. Communication with husbands abroad ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.29$) and support from relatives ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.25$) appear to act as partial coping mechanisms, though not sufficient to eliminate distress entirely.

Table 2

Table 2: Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.882 ^a	.778	.749	.47681
a. Predictors: (Constant), Support from relatives and community members helps me cope with my husband's absence., The financial support from my husband abroad improves my overall quality of life., I often feel lonely because of my husband's absence due to migration., Communication with my husband helps reduce my emotional distress., I find it difficult to make important family decisions without my husband's presence., I experience higher levels of stress in managing household responsibilities alone., My children's well-being is positively affected by the financial stability provided by remittances., I feel socially isolated compared to women whose husbands live with them.				
b. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well -Being And Quality Of Life Of Women Left Behind				

Table 3

Table 3: Anova						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	50.075	8	6.259	27.532	.000 ^b
	Residual	14.323	63	.227		
	Total	64.398	71			
a. Dependent Variable: Psychological Well -Being And Quality Of Life Of Women Left Behind						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Support from relatives and community members helps me cope with my husband's absence., The financial support from my husband abroad improves my overall quality of life., I often feel lonely because of my husband's absence due to migration., Communication with my husband helps reduce my emotional distress., I find it difficult to make important family decisions without my husband's presence., I experience higher levels of stress in managing household responsibilities alone., My children's well-being is positively affected by the financial stability provided by remittances., I feel socially isolated compared to women whose husbands live with them.						

The regression analysis ($R^2 = .778$) demonstrates that approximately 77.8% of the variance in psychological well-being and quality of life can be explained by spousal migration-related factors, confirming the hypothesis. The ANOVA results ($F = 27.532$, $p < .001$) further validate that these predictors collectively exert a significant impact. Among the independent variables, social isolation ($\beta = .347$, $p = .002$), children's well-being through financial stability ($\beta = .248$, $p = .012$), and support from relatives/community ($\beta = .291$, $p = .005$) emerged as significant contributors. Conversely, loneliness, stress, communication, and decision-making difficulties, though negatively associated, did not reach statistical significance.

In conclusion, spousal migration creates a dual impact: while financial remittances and social support provide stability, the absence of the husband fosters emotional distress, isolation, and added household burdens. Thus, the findings underscore the need for targeted psychosocial support and community-based interventions to strengthen the resilience and quality of life of women left behind.

Figure 1: Word Cloud on Psychological Well-Being and Quality of Life In The Spouses of Transnational Migrants



The word cloud highlights the most prominent psychological and social themes experienced by women whose spouses work abroad. Larger words such as “*emotional distress and anxiety*,” “*loneliness due to spousal absence*,” “*decision-making burden*,” “*sense of abandonment*,” “*reduced self-esteem*,” and “*increased caregiving stress*” indicate that these issues are central to the lived experiences of left-behind spouses. These findings reveal that the emotional vacuum created by migration significantly contributes to stress, reduced confidence, and mental health strain. Smaller codes such as “*spiritual/religious coping strategies*,” “*resilience through children's academic success*,” and “*emotional support from relatives/community*” suggest secondary but important coping mechanisms. The word cloud therefore demonstrates that while financial security through remittances provides material stability, the emotional and psychological toll of separation is a dominant theme shaping the quality of life.

The analysis of coded documents indicates that spousal migration exerts a multifaceted impact on the psychological well-being and daily lives of women left behind. A large proportion of the codes—each appearing in 66.67% of the analyzed documents—highlight significant emotional and psychological challenges. Women consistently reported loneliness, emotional distress, anxiety, and a sense of abandonment, pointing to the deep emotional toll created by prolonged separation from their husbands. Similarly, issues such as increased caregiving stress, decision-making burdens, reduced self-esteem, and sleep disturbances suggest that the absence of a spouse transfers additional responsibilities onto women, often straining their mental health and overall stability.

At the same time, the findings also reveal a nuanced balance between challenges and coping mechanisms. On the positive side, financial stability from remittances was coded in 66.67% of the documents, indicating that while emotional well-being is compromised, economic benefits serve as an important source of security. Similarly, emotional support from relatives and community members emerged as a recurring theme, showing how social networks function as buffers against stress.

Less frequent, but still notable, were codes such as resilience through children's academic success and spiritual or religious coping strategies, each appearing in 33.33% of the documents. These reflect individual and cultural strategies that women adopt to cope with separation and sustain hope for the future.

Overall, the coding pattern demonstrates that while transnational migration enhances financial well-being, it simultaneously amplifies psychological strain and caregiving responsibilities. With 66.67% of documents reflecting overlapping emotional and social challenges, the evidence suggests that the costs of migration extend beyond economics, demanding recognition of the emotional dimensions of transnational family life.

Concept of “*well-being*,” which is linked to multiple dimensions such as *psychological issues, extended family dynamics, left-behind children, and left-behind families*. Branches highlight specific aspects of these challenges: emotional strain, disruption of family roles, and the blurred boundaries between home and market due to transnational living arrangements. It also brings attention to children's well-being, including emotional and behavioral difficulties, as well as the responsibilities shouldered by elderly parents. Another branch emphasizes coping strategies, such as reliance on possessions, consumption practices, and spiritual frameworks, which migrants' families use to maintain a sense of stability and identity. This visualization highlights that migration is not solely an economic process but also a deeply social and psychological experience affecting household security, family cohesion, and personal resilience.

Conclusion

This study on Cross-Border Connections: Exploring Psychological Well-Being and Quality of Life in the Spouses of Transnational Migrants highlights the complex and multi-dimensional effects of spousal migration on women left behind. The findings suggest that while economic remittances from migrant husbands bring measurable improvements in material well-being and financial stability, they cannot fully compensate for the emotional and psychological void caused by prolonged separation. Many women reported experiences of loneliness, social isolation, and difficulty in managing household responsibilities in the absence of their spouses. At the same time, financial contributions enhanced children's education, healthcare access, and overall family security, demonstrating the dual nature of migration outcomes.

The research also emphasizes the role of social networks and community support in mitigating distress. Women who had stronger connections with relatives, neighbors, or community groups demonstrated better coping mechanisms and greater resilience in handling emotional stress. Similarly, regular

communication with migrant husbands through digital means offered emotional reassurance, although it could not entirely bridge the gap created by physical absence. These findings underline the significance of interpersonal and community relationships in balancing the challenges of cross-border living arrangements.

Importantly, the study reveals that the psychological costs of migration often remain invisible in public debates focused predominantly on economic benefits. Women bear the burden of increased caregiving, decision-making, and household management, often without recognition or adequate support. Their mental health and emotional well-being are significantly shaped not only by financial resources but also by the availability of social, emotional, and institutional support systems.

Overall, the study concludes that transnational migration creates a paradoxical reality: it simultaneously improves material conditions while straining psychological well-being. The findings highlight the urgent need for migration studies and policy frameworks to adopt a holistic perspective that acknowledges both economic and emotional dimensions of migration. Addressing the hidden costs borne by spouses left behind is essential for creating sustainable migration policies that account for the welfare of the entire family unit rather than focusing solely on the migrant worker. By bringing visibility to the experiences of women left behind, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of transnational households and the nuanced challenges they face.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations emerge to enhance the psychological well-being and quality of life of spouses left behind in transnational households. First, there is a pressing need for mental health interventions and counseling services tailored specifically for women whose husbands are international migrants. Community health centers, non-

governmental organizations, and local governments could collaborate to provide psychological counseling, peer support groups, and stress management programs. Such initiatives would help women manage feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety more effectively.

The role of social networks and community engagement should be strengthened. Community-based organizations and self-help groups can be instrumental in providing both emotional support and practical assistance. Encouraging women to participate in neighborhood groups, religious associations, or skill-development programs would not only reduce isolation but also build resilience and confidence.

Digital connectivity should be promoted as a means of sustaining emotional ties across borders. Policies and programs that improve affordable internet access and digital literacy for women can enhance communication with their migrant spouses, thereby reducing psychological distress. Regular virtual interactions can also help strengthen family bonds and ensure joint decision-making despite geographical separation.

Financial remittances, while crucial, should be complemented by capacity-building initiatives for women. Providing training in financial literacy, entrepreneurship, or vocational skills can empower women to use remittances productively, reduce dependency, and gain greater control over household management. This economic empowerment can indirectly improve psychological well-being by fostering a sense of security.

Policymakers should recognize the indirect costs of migration by designing family-inclusive welfare frameworks. Migration policies often focus exclusively on labor mobility and economic remittances, neglecting the social and emotional consequences for families. Introducing support programs such as family welfare schemes, social security benefits, and targeted subsidies for migrant households can address this gap.

More academic and policy attention should be directed toward the hidden burdens faced by spouses of migrants. Future research should examine gendered dynamics, long-term effects on children, and the intergenerational implications of parental absence. By expanding the scope of migration studies to include the voices of spouses left behind, policymakers and scholars can create holistic approaches that balance economic gains with family well-being.

In summary, the recommendations emphasize the importance of integrating economic, social, and psychological support for women in transnational households. By acknowledging both vulnerabilities and strengths, these measures can promote resilience, improve quality of life, and ensure that the benefits of migration extend to the entire family unit.

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EMPOWERING MINDS: AN EXTENSIVE REVIEW ON PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN OVER THE LAST THREE DECADE

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Abstract

Psychological Empowerment of women is one of the most extensively investigated and discussed problems. Its meaning and definition differ from individual to individual. Out of 1,948 research papers identified on psychological empowerment, no systematic review is available on the topic.

Objectives: The present research aims to uncover the gap from 1994 to 2024 in the existing literature on this topic.

Method: 13 empirical studies were selected from three databases based on inclusion/exclusion criteria.

Results: This review's results enrich the existing literature by adding the following critical elements: 1. The research on women's psychological empowerment is hardly founded. 2. Only two tools were found to measure the psychological empowerment of women, which are too limited.

Keywords: Psychological empowerment, Systematic literature review, Worldwide review, Women.

Introduction

In 1988, Conger and Kanungo introduced the concept of the term 'Psychological Empowerment' (PE) in the work environment.

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They introduced 'Self-Efficacy' as an element of PE. In 1990, Thomas and Velthouse expanded upon Conger and Kanungo's ideas of PE. They defined 4 aspects of PE, i.e., choice, meaning, impact and competence (Arroteia et al., 2021; Batool & Batool, 2017; Oladipo, 2009; Zimmerman et al., 1992). PE is an inspirational concept. It helps to build a strong and positive mind in every individual, especially women (Hibbs, 2022). Empowerment of Women is a broad term which includes every aspect of life. However, without PE, it is not possible to achieve women's empowerment (Moubarak et al., 2022; Ahmedova et al., 2022). When women are empowered psychologically, they will develop a positive mindset, possess increased self-confidence, self-motivation, and decision-making power (Batool et al., 2016). Hence, PE is crucial for the overall development of women.

PE is a motivational term in which people feel autonomous, have a strong mind, develop cognitive abilities, and have a good understanding, which affects their work and personal lives (Mohamed et al., 2017). Additionally, PE is a psychological mindset in which individuals are aware of taking responsibility, making decisions, and having ideas and actions that influence others (Hung-Ng, 2006). In 1988, Conger and Kanungo described PE as an intrinsic motivation that helps enhance women's self-efficacy (Ghani et al., 2009). Spreitzer 1995, defined PE as a multidimensional concept (Ghani et al., 2009). Ginler 2014, defined PE as helping a person gain strength in self-esteem, improve capability to critically analyze situations and solve problems in life (Alao et al., 2021).

The term 'Psychological Empowerment' was initially more popular in the management and organizational fields (Spreitzer, 1995; Batool & Batool, 2017; Menon, 2001; Wall et al., 2004). Most researchers have defined the term 'Psychological Empowerment' from employees' and organizational perspectives (Sarkar & Singh, 2012; Batool & Batool, 2017). Literature review revealed that limited work has focused on women's PE. Empirical work has been done on this particular topic, but no systematic

literature reviews have been conducted on the subject. Therefore, this paper focuses on women's PE through a systematic literature review.

This study has five sections. The first section contains the introduction. The methodology is discussed in the second section. The results and discussion are included in the third section. Finally, the study ends with a conclusion and implications.

Purpose of the study

This study focuses on discovering the gaps and outlining a future agenda on women's PE. The focus is on how many studies have been conducted, how many theories have been developed, and which countries have worked on particular areas. The systematic review will contribute to understanding what kind of research has been done on this topic and which aspects need more emphasis. Following the aim of the study, research questions are discussed below:

Q1. From 1994 to 2024, how many annual publications related to women's psychological empowerment (PE) have been published, which articles have been the most cited papers, and what was their number of citations, which are the most contributing journals, which countries and continents have worked on this topic and how many articles have been published, what type of nature (Qualitative, Quantitative, and mixed) has been used, what variables have been studied, how many subjects worked in this field, how many theories and tools were developed to measure women's PE?

Methodology

As a methodology, the systematic literature review has been used in this study.

Search techniques

Scopus databases, Google Scholar, Medline, ERIC, PsycINFO,

and Web of Science were searched for published articles related to the topic from 1994 to 2024. The term 'Psychological Empowerment' (PE) started gaining popularity in 1994 (Batool & Batool, 2017). Keeping that in view, the current systematic review includes the literature on PE published since 1994. Searching keywords, focused areas and domains, all details are discussed in *Table 1*

Table 1. Search terms.	
Search engine	Google Scholar, Research Gate, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, Sage Journal, etc.
Keywords	Psychological Empowerment*, Women's Empowerment*, Women's Education*, Mental Strength of Women*.
Search Style	"Psychological Empowerment of Women" 1994 – 2024 pdf
Year	1994 - 2024
Mode of search	Online
Focus area	Psychological Empowerment of Women
Domain	Nursing, Employed, Household women.

Criteria of Inclusion and Exclusion

The inclusion parts were only in English-language papers, research articles, open-access papers and women-related papers (women from different backgrounds are accepted). The exclusion criteria were thesis papers, conference papers, and low citation papers (below 10). Inclusion and exclusion criteria are discussed in *Table 2*.

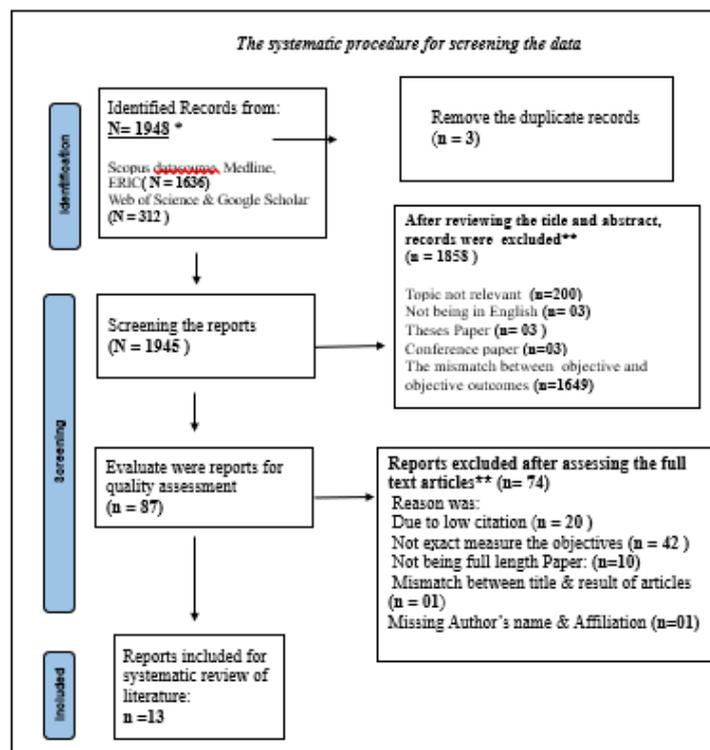
Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.	
Year limits of Publications	From 1994 to 2024, were included.
Nature of the study	Qualitative and quantitative & mixed studies were included.
Types of Research	Research articles, peer review papers, open access papers (theses & Conference papers were excluded).
Language	Only English language papers were accepted.
No. of citation	A minimum no. of 10 citation papers were accepted.

Process of Data Extraction

A systematic search was conducted using the keywords "Psychological Empowerment," "Empowerment," and "Women's Education" across Scopus, Google Scholar, Medline, ERIC, PsycINFO, and Web of Science. Articles published in English,

open access, and focused on women's PE between 1994 to 2024 were selected. After screening, 1,948 records were identified and organized in Excel. Data extraction followed the PRISMA 2020 framework. Three duplicates were removed, and 1,858 studies were excluded after title and abstract screening. 74 full-text articles were further excluded for methodological and reporting limitations. Finally, 13 studies met the inclusion criteria, as illustrated in Figure 1, presenting the detailed screening and selection process.

Figure 1. PRISMA Framework 2020.



Quality Assessment

The adapted 'Quality Assessment Tool' (Nguyen et al., 2017) evaluates 13 papers using five checklist items. Scores: Yes = 2, No = 1, Uncertain = 0. Total scores are converted to percentages,

classifying studies as low (0–40), above low (50–70), or high quality (80–100 (Hjazeen et al., 2024). All details are clearly discussed in Table 3.

Table 3. Quality assessment of each paper.

Authors & year	was the study's aim defined clearly and described?	Did the details information described about the sampling method?	Was the study's location clearly defined?	were the analysis methods and techniques clearly defined?	were the classification of samples defined clearly?	Percentage scores (%)
Moubarak et al., (2022)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Hibbs, L. (2022)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Pervin et al., (2022)	2	2	2	2	1	90
Batool & Batool (2017)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Bakhshi et al., (2017)	2	2	1	2	2	90
Batool et al., (2016)	2	2	1	2	2	90
Aggarwal et al., (2018)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Tanner et al., (2018)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Taghipour et al., (2016)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Dajani & Mostafa (2021)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Bakr and Alfayezb (2021)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Tariq et al., (2021)	2	2	2	2	2	100
Zimmerman (1995)	2	2	1	2	2	90

Results

- *Publication output regarding PE of women from 1994 to 2024.*

Figure 2. Publication Outputs from 1994 to 2024.

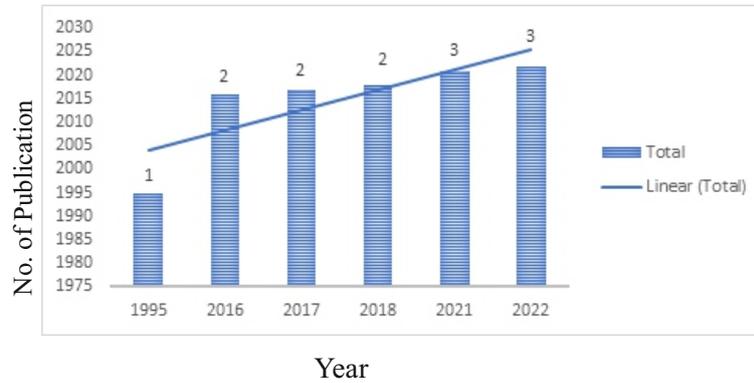


Figure 2 presents the publication trend on women's PE from 1994-2024. One study appeared in 1995; two each were published in 2016, 2017, and 2018; three appeared in 2021; and three more in 2022. Overall, research output remained very limited between 1995 and 2015. After 2016, most researchers have given importance to this topic. So, the publication growth chart explains that in recent times, this topic has been the most emerging and this trending process will continuously increase in the future.

- ***What articles were the most cited papers, and what was their number of citations in measuring women's PE from 1994 to 2024?***

Table 4. Most cited papers.

Rank	Authors	Title	No. of Citations
1	Zimmerman (1995)	Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations	1067
2	Aggarwal et al. (2018)	Impact of Structural Empowerment on Organizational Commitment: The Mediating Role of Women's Psychological Empowerment	61
3	Pervin et al. (2022)	An Action Study on Psychological Empowerment of Turkish Women: Effect of Psychoeducation Program Which is Grounded Self-Awareness of Women	14
4	Batool et al. (2016)	Economic and Psycho-social Determinants of Psychological Empowerment in Women	14

Table 4 represents the most cited articles in the field of PE of women from 1994 to 2024. Selected the top four articles out of 13 studies based on their number of citations.

- ***What are the most impactful journals in this area?***

Table 5. Most impactful Journal

Rank	Journal Name	Impact Factors	Publishers
1	<i>American Journal of Community Psychology</i>	3.4	WILEY
2	<i>Vision</i>	3.0	Sage
3	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>	2.6	Frontiers
4	<i>Women's Studies International Forum</i>	2.5	Science Direct
5	<i>Bangladesh Journal of Medical Science</i>	1.7	BanglaJOL
6	<i>Journal of Business Administration Research</i>	0.8	SCIEDU
6	<i>Pakistan Journal of Agricultural Sciences</i>	0.8	PAKJAS
7	<i>Informing Science</i>	0.3	Informing Science Institute
7	<i>International Journal of Community Based Nursing and Midwifery</i>	0.3	IJCBNM
8	<i>Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology</i>	0.2	GCU
8	<i>Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology</i>	0.2	GCU
8	<i>Turkiye Klinikleri Journal of Health Sciences</i>	0.2	Web of Science
8	<i>Electronic physician</i>	0.2	Web of Science

Table 5 represents the most impactful journals in PE of women. All journals are arranged according to the rank based on the impact factors of the journal, which are presented in table 5.

- ***What countries and continents have worked on this topic and how many research papers were published on women's PE from 1994 - 2024?***

Figure 3. Countries-wise distribution.

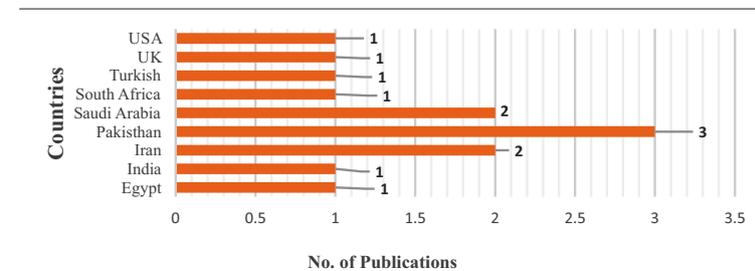


Figure 3 highlights the contributing countries based on the number of publications in the field. According to the data, country-wise, more work needs to be done in the field. Pakistan has published three papers, Saudi Arabia two, and Iran two, but the UK, Turkey, South Africa, India, Egypt and the USA have published only one paper on the PE of women.

Figure 4. Continents-wise distribution.

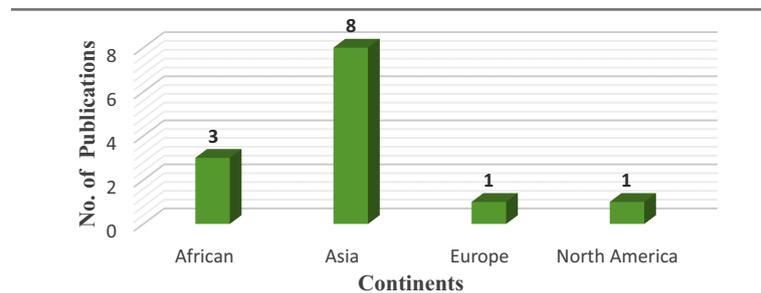


Figure 4 represents the continent-wise distribution and reveals that three works on the African continents, eight works on the Asian continents, one work on the European continents, and one work on the North American continent on the PE of women have been discovered so far.

- ***What type of nature (Qualitative, Quantitative, and mixed) has been used to measure women's PE from 1994 to 2024?***

Table 6. Type of Nature of the Works.

Authors	Key Objectives	Nature of the Study
Moubarak et al. (2022)	To develop and validate the scale of multicultural PE for Saudi women.	Quantitative
Hibbs (2022)	To measure the role of nongovernmental organizations of women in developing PE of women and participation in civic in Wales, UK.	Quantitative
Pervin et al. (2022)	To evaluate the impact of Psychoeducation programs on developing PE of Turkish Women.	Mixed Methods
Batool & Batool (2017)	To construct tools for global PE for women.	Quantitative
Bakhshi et al. (2017)	To construct a tool for PE for NGO women.	Qualitative
Batool et al. (2016)	To examine the impact of dowry, self-esteem, social support, husband support, internal locus of control, paid job and education on PE of women.	Quantitative
Aggarwal et al. (2018)	To measure the mediating role of PE on the association between structural empowerment and organizational commitment.	Quantitative
Tanner & Tabo (2018)	To find out the role of mobile dating apps on PE among female users.	Qualitative
Taghipour (2016)	To assess which factors influence on PE of Iranian pregnant women.	Mixed Method
Dajani & Mostafa (2021)	Impact PE on Work-life balance during Covid19 situation of Egyptian working women.	Quantitative
Bakr and Alfayezb (2021)	The objective of the present study was to measure the correlation between Transformational leadership and PE.	Quantitative
Tariq et al. (2021)	to measure the relation among work-life balance, PE, and turnover intention.	Quantitative
Zimmerman (1995)	To construct world measure of PE.	Qualitative

Table 6 shows that more quantitative work has been done on the PE of women, and limited work has been done on qualitative and mixed methods research. The authors' names, titles, and nature of the study are discussed below.

- ***What variables have been worked with PE of women from 1994 to 2024?***

Table 7. Different variables associated with the PE of women.

Authors	Key Objectives	Variables
Moubarak et al. (2022)	To create validate the scale of multicultural PE among Saudi women.	PE
Hibbs (2022)	To evaluate the role of nongovernmental organizations of women in developing PE of women and participation in civic in Wales, UK.	PE & Civic Participation.
Pervin et al. (2022)	To evaluate the impact of Psychoeducation programs on developing PE of Turkish Women.	PE
Batool & Batool (2017)	To construct tools for global PE for women.	PE
Bakhshi et al. (2017)	To construct a tool for PE for NGO women.	PE
Batool et al. (2016)	To examine the impact of women's self-esteem, husband's support, paid job, dowry, internal locus of control, social support and education on PE of women.	Economic and psycho-social determination
Aggarwal et al. (2018)	To measure the association between structural empowerment and organizational commitment through a mediating variable as PE.	Organizational Commitments, Structural empowerment, and PE.
Tanner & Tabo (2018)	To find out the effect of mobile dating apps on PE among female users.	Mobile dating app and PE
Taghipour (2016)	To assess which factors influence on PE of Iranian pregnant women.	Socio Economic status & PE.
Dajani & Mostafa (2021)	Impact PE on Work-life balance during Covid19 situation of Egyptian working women.	PE & Work-life Balance
Bakr and Alfayezb (2021)	To measure the association between Transformational leadership and PE.	Transformational leadership and PE
Tariq et al. (2021)	To explore the relation among work-life balance, PE and turnover intention	PE, work-life balance and turnover intention
Zimmerman (1995)	To construct a world measure of PE.	PE

Table 7 revealed that civic participation, Economic and psycho-social determination, Work-life Balance, Organizational Commitment, Structural empowerment, Transformational leadership and turnover intention as a variable mostly examined with PE of women.

- *How many subjects work in this particular area?*

Figure 5. Subject wise distribution.

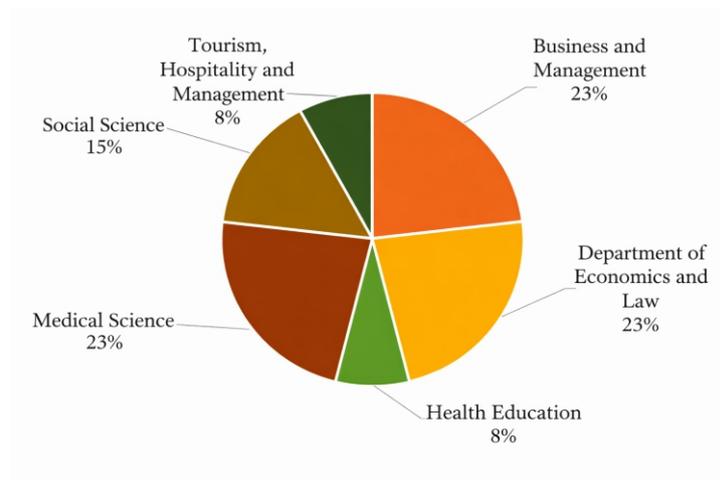


Figure 5 shows the distribution of the published literature on the PE of women across various disciplines. 23.07 % of the articles belong to the subjects of Business and Management, economics, law, and Medical Science. 15.38 % of the total publications are in social science, and 7.69 % of the articles belong to the fields of tourism, Hospitality, management and Health education. The distribution of the published work according to its subject areas is shown in Figure 5.

- ***How many theories have been developed on the PE of women from 1994 to 2024?***

Figures 6 and 7 describe Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) and Zimmerman's (1995) theories of Empowerment, which are most popular in the field of PE (Hibbs, 2022; Batool & Batool, 2017; Batool et al., 2016). Various aspects of PE have been assessed using these theories. These two theories are used for measuring the PE of various people such as employees, nurses, doctors and urban youth (Hosseiny et al., 2015; Azizi et al., 2019; Ozer & Schotland, 2011; Eisman et al., 2016; Kyoo et al., 2019; Taj et al., 2019; Meng & Sun, 2022).

Figure 6. Dimension of PE of Thomas & Velthouse's (1990) empowerment theory.

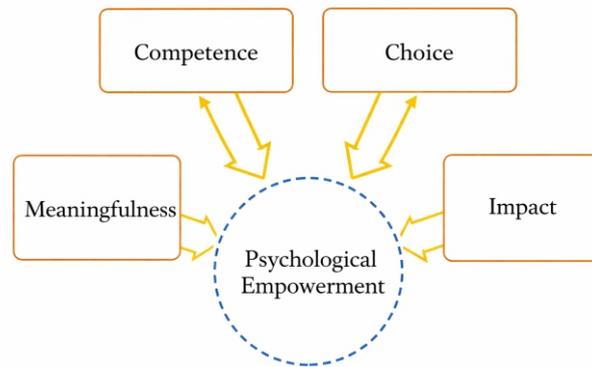
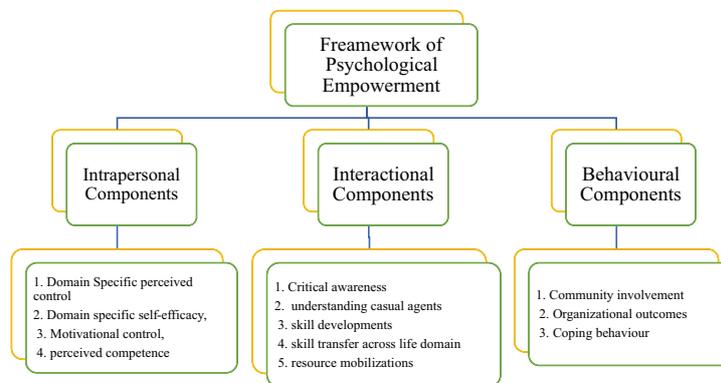


Figure 7. The systematic network theory of PE by Zimmerman, 1995.



Empowerment theory of Thomas and Velthouse

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) gave the operational definition of PE for employee empowerment (Hung-Ng, 2006). In 1990, they introduced PE as an internal work motivation, motivated towards work and internal motivational environment (Hung-Ng, 2006; Batool & Batool, 2017). These theories focus on the employee's

PE. They defined PE as a construct with four subgroups, i.e. 'Meaningfulness', 'Impact', 'Choice', and 'Competence' (Hung-Ng, 2006; Batool & Batool, 2017). Four dimensions are discussed below, one by one.

'Meaningfulness': The importance of one's ideas and the task goals of an individual (Hung-Ng, 2006).

'Competence': When a person tries skilfully to do a particular work (Hung-Ng, 2006).

'Choice': Choice means freedom (Hung-Ng, 2006).

'Impact': work effect on his or her organizational environment (Hung-Ng, 2006).

Zimmerman's (1995) theories of Empowerment

Zimmerman (1995) developed a systematic network to create a universal and global measure of PE. He defined PE as an individual empowerment, control of one's internal situation, participation in positive activities, always self-motivated, and having critical awareness of a particular situation (Zimmerman et al., 1992; Zimmerman, 1995).

He defines three aspects of PE, i.e., Intrapersonal, Interactional and Behavioural (Zimmerman, 1995). All dimensions are discussed below.

'Intrapersonal Components': It means self-perceptions. This component included different sub-dimensions i.e., perceived control & Competence, self-efficacy and Motivational control (Zimmerman, 1995).

'Interactional Components': It means observation and perception of their communities. Skill development and transfer, resource mobilizations and critical awareness as a subdimension of these

components (Zimmerman, 1995).

Behavioural Components': It means behavioural outcomes. Community involvement, Organizational outcomes and coping behaviour are sub-dimension of this components (Zimmerman, 1995).

It is concluded that no theory has been developed on women's PE, which remains as a massive gap in women's PE area.

- ***How many tools have been used to measure women's PE from 1994 to 2024?***

Surprising results have been found by reviewing the literature in the last 20 years. In 2017, two scales were developed to measure women's PE. There is a huge gap in this field. These two studies are discussed below.

Batool & Batool (2017) study focused on developing a scale to measure the worldwide PE of women. Firstly, they did a pilot study. After that, researcher generated 45 items with some dimensions (i.e., impact, problem-focused coping, meaningfulness, self-determination and competence) based on the Thomas and Velthouse model. Then, 45 items were applied to 202 women who belonged to the 21 to 60 age group from Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar, Quetta, and Karachi, Pakistan. Finally 21 items with 5 subscales were selected after a pilot study and applied to the same sample group of 500 women. Construction tool using Confirmatory factor analysis. The results indicated that 21 items were a good fit for assessing the PE of women.

Bakhshi et al. (2017) focused on an appropriate tool for measuring the PE of NGO women in Iran. Initially, 58 items were generated from eight dimensions, i.e., Social support, Cognitive thinking, Intention, perceived control, Participation, Self-efficacy, Motivation and Critical thinking. 21 items were reduced from 58 items after applying exploratory factor analysis. However, Cronbach's value was 0.81 for checked reliability. Concluded from that study, satisfactory and appropriately fitted for measuring PE for Iranian women.

Discussion

From 1994 to 2024, an investigation of the existing review of literature on women's PE uncovered that hardly any literature review covered this topic, added with few empirical studies have been identified. During this period, only 13 studies have been found on women's PE, which were too limited. Therefore, future research should focus more on women's PE. Among the 13 studies, four top highly cited papers are beautifully presented in *Table No. 4*. Results reveal that the number of highly cited papers was too limited. The impact factor of the journal in which the paper was published on this topic is arranged in order of rank in *Table 5*; among these journals, the high impact factor journals are American Journal of Community Psychology, IF= 3.4, (WILEY, 2023) & Vision IF = 3.0, (Sage, 2024).

After reviewing the literature, it has been found that Pakistan (three works) (Batool et al., 2016; Batool & Batool, 2017; Tariq et al., 2021), UK (one work)(Hibbs, 2022), Turkish (one work)(Ahmedova et al., 2022), South Africa (one work)(Tanner & Tabo, 2018), Saudi Arabia (Two works) (Bin Bakr & Alfayez, 2022; Moubarak et al., 2022), Iran (Two works) (Bakhshi et al., 2017; Taghipour et al., 2016), India (one work) (Aggarwal et al., 2018), Egypt (one work)(Dajani & Mostafa, 2021) and USA (one work) (Zimmerman, 1995) countries, as well as Africa (three works) (Tanner & Tabo, 2018; Bin Bakr & Alfayez, 2022; Dajani & Mostafa, 2021), Asia (eight works) (Batool et al., 2016; Taghipour et al., 2016; Batool & Batool, 2017; Bakhshi et al., 2017; Aggarwal et al., 2018; Tariq et al., 2021; Ahmedova et al., 2022; Moubarak et al., 2022), Europe (one work) (Hibbs, 2022) and North America (one work) (Zimmerman, 1995), as continents, have worked on women's PE. According to data, it can be said that, worldwide, a limited number of papers have been done on the PE of women. Further, more research should be done on particular areas in different countries, especially developing countries.

Among the selected documents, most of the studies applied quantitative methods (Bin Bakr & Alfayez, 2022; Batool et al.,

2016; Batool & Batool, 2017; Aggarwal et al., 2018; Dajani & Mostafa, 2021; Tariq et al., 2021; Hibbs, 2022; Moubarak et al., 2022) but few studies used qualitative (Bakhshi et al., 2017; Tanner & Tabo, 2018; Zimmerman, 1995) and mixed-methods (Taghipour et al., 2016; Ahmedova et al., 2022) research to measure women's PE. This findings are very pinpointed and highlight problems. Future studies may consider applying the qualitative, mixed-method and multi-method (Johnson & Christensen,2020) research needed in the particular area. Variables used among the 13 studies were civic Participation and PE (Hibbs, 2022), Economic and psycho-social determination (Batool et al., 2016), Structural empowerment, Organizational Commitments and PE (Aggarwal et al., 2018), work-life Balance and PE (Dajani & Mostafa, (2021), Transformational leadership and PE (Bakr and Alfayezb, 2021), turnover intention, PE & work-life balance (Tariq et al., 2021). The majority of the studies are limited emphasized on scientific attitude and problem-solving capability. In the future, more focus will be on how PE helps to build a scientific attitude and develop a problem-solving capability for women. Results also revealed that Business and management (Moubarak et al., 2022), economics (Batool & Batool, 2017), law, medical science (Taghipour et al., 2016), social science (Hibbs, 2022), tourism, hospitality and management (Aggarwal et al., 2018) and health education (Zimmerman, 1995) have worked on the PE of women in these subjects. Medical science, law, and management subjects emphasise a particular area. However, limited studies have been done on the social science discipline.

Among the selected 13 studies, no single theory has been found on women's PE. Only two theories have been found on women's empowerment, which have been mostly used to measure women's PE, i.e., Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) (Batool & Batool, 2017) and Zimmerman's (1995) theories of Empowerment. Future studies should be highly concerted on theories on women's PE.

According to a literature review from 1994 to 2024, only two instruments were found adequate to measure women's PE.

Namely, Batool & Batool (2017) developed the worldwide Women's PE Scale and Bakhshi et al. developed the PE scale only for Iranian NGO Women. This area has a massive gap; therefore, future work should be more required on measuring women's PE.

Conclusion

The existing study investigates the literature on PE women's using a review of systematic literature to identify the gap and propose a future research agenda. So, all studies related to the PE of women from 1994 to 2024 were examined. After screening, 13 out of 1948 studies were selected through a systematic literature review in this area. The selected 13 studies were reviewed (Zimmerman, 1995; Taghipour et al., 2016; Batool et al., 2016; Bakhshi et al., 2017; Batool & Batool, 2017; Tanner & Tabo, 2018; Aggarwal et al., 2018; Dajani & Mostafa, 2021; Tariq et al., 2021; Bin Bakr & Alfayez, 2022; Ahmedova et al., 2022; Moubarak et al., 2022; Hibbs, 2022) and focused on the publication output, most cited papers, most contributing journals, publication output in different countries and continents, nature of the works, use of other variables and disciplines, and different theories and tools from 1994 to 2024.

Implications for further social work research, mainly focusing on theory development and scale development, have been identified, which would help bridge the gap between social work practice for women's empowerment and theories related to the phenomena. Another focus of future research should be theory development and tool development for women's PE. Other key areas of the future research agenda are qualitative, 'mixed' or 'multi' methods (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) to measure women's PE. More studies will be conducted on various countries, especially developing countries, because if women are psychologically empowered, then those countries will automatically develop. Future research will focus on women's PE and its association with different variables, i.e., scientific attitude, achievement tests, and problem-solving capability. The social science discipline will be more focused on a particular area. Overall, limited studies have

been found, especially theory development and scale development related to the PE of women, which have future research gaps.

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**REIMAGINING URBAN MOBILITY IN DELHI:
GENDERED DIMENSIONS IN TRANSPORT
PLANNING**

Anu Rani¹

ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the evolution of urban transport planning in Delhi through a gendered lens, tracing how national transport policies and successive Master Plans have engaged with the intersection of gender and mobility. By analysing key policy documents such as the National Urban Transport Policies (2006 and 2014), the Delhi Master Plans (1962, 2001, and 2021), as well as various state-level interventions, the study explores how women's mobility needs have been understood and addressed within Delhi's broader urban planning trajectories. The analysis highlights that for several decades, urban transport planning in Delhi remained largely infrastructure-centric, with minimal attention given to the specific needs of women. Where gender did appear, it was often framed narrowly through the lens of safety. It was only the NUTP 2014 and MPD 2021 that explicitly addressed the differential needs of women in the transport system. Nevertheless, these approaches continue to position women primarily as passive users of the transport system, rather than considering them as active participants in the transport ecosystem. By situating these policy shifts against the backdrop of global development agendas such as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, the paper argues that a gender-inclusive transport system requires addressing the structural, socio-cultural, and institutional barriers that shape women's mobility choices and restrict their participation in the transport workforce. A gender-inclusive policy must acknowledge the diverse roles of women, not merely as commuters, but as active participants in transport planning and the workforce, and in shaping equitable and sustainable urban mobility.

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Keywords: Delhi master plan, Urban transport, Mobility, Gender inclusive policy, National urban transport policy

1. INTRODUCTION

Delhi, the capital city of India, has undergone rapid urbanisation since Independence, becoming one of the most urbanised cities in the country (Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009). Between the years 1951 and 1961, its population rose rapidly from 1.6 to 2.7 million, accompanied by a highly uneven distribution of population densities (Thynell et al., 2010). These demographic pressures necessitated the development of a comprehensive urban planning framework, leading to the release of the Master Plan for Delhi (MPD) in 1962. This paper critically examines the ways in which national urban transport policies and successive Master Plans have addressed Delhi's evolving mobility landscape, with a particular focus on integrating gender-sensitive perspectives. By analysing these policy trajectories, the study seeks to unpack how policy frameworks have evolved (or failed) to address gender responsive mobility in the city.

The rationale for this study is grounded in the recognition that global development frameworks, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscore the critical role of the transport sector in advancing gender equality. SDG 11, which focuses on fostering inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities, explicitly highlights in Target 11.2 the need to provide safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems for all (United Nations, 2015). This target emphasizes improving road safety and expanding public transport with specific attention to groups in vulnerable situations, such as women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities. In doing so, it underscores the importance of transport in achieving equitable urban development.

Through this paper, the author argues that an inclusive transport sector requires not only attention to the accessibility and safety of mobility infrastructure for women but also the active promotion of

gender parity within the transport workforce. Increasing the presence of women within the transport ecosystem, particularly in operational and decision-making roles, constitutes an important pathway for improving the safety and quality of women's commuting experiences. Given the persistent gender imbalance in transport employment, fostering gender inclusivity is essential for cities aspiring to achieve world-class mobility standards.

2. REFRAMING URBAN TRANSPORT POLICY THROUGH A GENDERED LENS

This section examines key urban public transport policies and planning documents in India from a gender-sensitive lens. The focus is primarily on policies introduced since the early 2000s, a period that marked significant shifts in the urban mobility discourse. It is an attempt to map out the structural transformation in urban transport and critically examine the extent to which gender has been incorporated into the transport policy framework.

2.1 The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)

A prominent policy initiative introduced during the 2000s was the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), which was launched by the Ministry of Urban Development on December 3, 2005. The JNNURM was operational for seven years (2005-2012) and aimed to support infrastructure development in selected urban cities in India. The mission sought to implement urban reforms that would enhance the efficiency of service delivery, encourage citizen participation, and strengthen the accountability of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) across 63 identified cities (Ministry of Urban Development, n.d.). However, while JNNURM promoted inclusive urban reform, it failed to acknowledge gender as a crucial dimension in planning. Urban infrastructure was reimagined without adequate attention to the mobility needs of women, who often travel shorter distances, at off-peak hours, and for caregiving purposes.

JNNURM comprises two components: a) the Sub-Mission for

Urban Infrastructure and Governance, focusing on core urban infrastructural issues and urban transport; and b) the Sub-Mission for Basic Services to the Urban Poor, aimed at the holistic development of slum areas to ensure better access to services for those living in urban poverty (Ministry of Urban Development, n.d.). Yet, both missions remained largely gender neutral. The urban transport sector, for instance, received approximately 11% of the total JNNURM funding allocation (Baindur, 2015) for public transport bus procurement, formulating comprehensive mobility plans, and facilitating the development of city transport infrastructure. However, these investments did not reflect a nuanced understanding of how transport affects men and women differently. Safety concerns, affordability, and access to last mile connectivity are critical to women's mobility, which is neither explicitly addressed in the policy framework nor reflected in implementation.

The second phase of JNNURM was initiated in 2014, and aimed to assist small urban settlements in enhancing essential services like housing, water, waste management, transportation, and so forth (Misra, 2012). This also remained silent on the gender-related aspects of mobility and inclusivity.

Therefore, a critical gap in the JNNURM framework was its failure to address gender as a core dimension of urban transport planning and infrastructure. Despite the mission's emphasis on inclusive urban reform, its formulation remained largely gender-neutral, lacking any specific provisions to ensure women's accessibility, affordability and inclusivity. Thus, while JNNURM addressed urban infrastructure in many aspects, it fell short of integrating gendered aspects necessary to make the city inclusive in a true sense, especially for women from low-income segments who are mostly dependent on public transport.

2.2 National Urban Transport Policy, 2006

Another important policy initiative intended towards strengthening transport infrastructure and providing long-term

strategies, was the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP). The NUTP was introduced by the Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, in April 2006, and aimed to facilitate the sustainable development of urban transport. The main objective of the policy was to emphasize the need to move people, not vehicles (Kuriakose, 2013) and ensure affordable, sustainable, comfortable, and safe access to the expanding urban population (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2006). The policy identified key problems in urban mobility, such as traffic congestion, low parking costs, improper land use, lack of transport integration, a decline in non-motorized transport (such as walking and bicycle riding), and rising road accidents (Kuriakose, 2013). To address these concerns, the NUTP recommended increased investment in public transport and non-motorized vehicles, along with the integration of transport planning and land use (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2006). Additionally, it also encouraged greater participation of private players in the public transport system (Kuriakose, 2013). As a result, many other kinds of public transport systems were envisioned and some of them were implemented under this strategy, including the metro, monorail, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, and modern bus services (Kuriakose, 2013).

Despite advocating for sustainable urban transport, the NUTP 2006 failed to incorporate a gender sensitive lens into its planning (Singhai & Singhai, 2021). While the policy promoted the idea of 'moving people, not vehicles' and aimed to ensure accessible and efficient transport for all, it remained neutral on the differential mobility needs of women, who often encountered different constraints in navigating urban spaces, such as improper lighting at night, lack of safety during travel, multiple short trips, lack of last-mile connectivity, and so forth. Gender concerns, such as safety, accessibility, and affordability, which are central to equitable urban transport and inclusivity, were largely absent within the urban transport planning framework.

2.3 National Urban Transport Policy, 2014

To address the shortcomings of NUTP 2006, the government introduced a revised version, the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) 2014, aimed at making the policy more user-friendly, practical, and easier to implement (Ministry of Urban Development, 2014). The NUTP 2014 emphasized a shift from vehicle-centric to people-centric transport planning, aiming to promote sustainable mobility and ensure equitable access to essential services and opportunities. It advocated for providing transport services that are affordable, efficient, and timely for all sections of society. The policy laid down a comprehensive framework to achieve these goals, which includes coordination of land use and transport planning, formulation of comprehensive mobility plans, modal mix priorities, implementation of Transit Oriented Development (TOD), and so forth. It also emphasized the regulation of personal vehicle use, strategic planning for freight traffic and the adoption of a participatory planning approach to ensure inclusivity in decision making. Additionally, the policy focused on infrastructure improvements for public and non-motorized transport, effective traffic management, and sustainable financing mechanisms (Ministry of Urban Development, 2014).

One of the striking aspects of the NUTP 2014 is its explicit acknowledgement of the different mobility needs of women, marking a significant shift in transport policy in India. For the first time, gender was formally integrated into transport policy. The policy underscored the importance of universal accessibility while specifically recognizing the need to ensure women's safety and security, along with other marginalized commuters (Ministry of Urban Development report, 2014). The policy recommended that the state transport authorities appoint only drivers and conductors who have undergone police verification as a measure to enhance passenger security. Furthermore, it also advised that bus stops and terminal areas should be equipped with Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance and Global Positioning System (GPS) technology, with all buses connected to a centralized control room for real-time monitoring (Ministry of Urban Development report,

2014). In addition to this, the policy also proposed the integration of Intelligent Transport System (ITS) components within buses such as Light Emitting Diode (LED) Sign Boards, an Audio-Visual Passenger Information System, Multiplexing systems, two cameras capable of recording for at least 48 hours. (Ministry of Urban Development report, 2014).

The NUTP 2014 extended these safety and security requirements to para-transit modes as well. These modes were also directed to be equipped with a GPS tracking system and emergency alarm devices, and managed through a Common Control Centre. Further, the policy stated that para-transit drivers should not be issued licenses without prior police verification (Ministry of Urban Development report, 2014). While these measures appear to recognize the vulnerability faced by women in public transport, the incorporation of gender within the policy remained narrowly framed. Gender inclusion within the transport sector was largely interpreted through the lens of protection and safety, and positioning women primarily as passive recipients of transport services. The inclusion of gender was inherently limited and restricted to a matter of surveillance rather than addressing the broader structural questions of access, agency, participation, and representation. Importantly, the policy failed to recognize women as active agents who were not just users of the transport system, but also as planners, drivers, decision-makers, and workers within the transport system. Without integrating women into the transport workforce or in policy-making, gender inclusion remains tokenistic and superficial.

3. EVOLUTION OF TRANSPORT PROVISION IN DELHI MASTER PLANS: LOCATING GENDERED DIMENSIONS

Delhi ranks among the most highly urbanized cities in the country (Sudarshan & Bhattacharya, 2009). Its population witnessed a sharp rise from 1.6 million in 1951 to 2.7 million in 1961 (Thynell et al., 2010). This rapid demographic expansion was characterized by highly uneven population densities, with some areas

experiencing extremely high population densities, while others experienced low population density (Thynell et al., 2010). To address these challenges, the Regional Master Plan for Delhi was developed, leading to the release of the first Master Plan for Delhi (MPD) in the year 1962.

3.1 Master Plan for Delhi (MPD) in 1962

The primary aim of the MPD-1962 was to manage the growing urban population of Delhi. To this effect, urban planners proposed establishing a 1.6 km wide green belt surrounding the city and the relocation of surplus population to the adjacent ring town (Thynell et al., 2010). The city was divided into zones to maintain separation between residential and commercial areas, and transport infrastructure was developed to support these new urban forms (Delhi Development Authority, 1962). This plan also introduced a hierarchical road network consisting of ring and arterial roads, and emphasized the separation of pedestrian movement and vehicular traffic to avoid traffic congestion. However, the focus remained predominantly on the construction of wide roads to enable faster movement of motorized transport, with limited attention given to public transportation or non-motorized modes of transport (Delhi Development Authority, 1962).

The MPD-1962 was inherently gender blind. By promoting spatial segregation through zoning and prioritizing long-distance travel corridors over local connectivity, it envisioned commuters to be largely male breadwinners, overlooking women's everyday mobility needs. This reflects a deeper systemic bias in early urban planning where the intersection of gender, equality, and inclusivity was largely absent from the imagination of the city.

3.2 Master Plan for Delhi 2001 (MPD 2001)

The Master Plan of Delhi 2001 (MPD-2001) marked a significant shift in urban public transport development through the introduction of the Mass Rapid Transit System (MRTS), which includes the Delhi Metro (Delhi Development Authority, 1990).

The plan emphasized the need for a Multi-Modal Public Transportation System comprising buses, electrified ring rail, light rail transit, and intermediate public transport (such as feeder buses). It also highlighted the need for segregated bicycle tracks, better provisioning of parking facilities, efficient traffic management and freight movement, along with the integration of land use and transportation planning (Delhi Development Authority, 1990).

Similar to MPD-1962, this plan also overlooked gendered perspectives in transport and failed to recognize the differential travel needs of women, such as safety, last-mile connectivity and affordability, which remain central to women's mobility and access to urban spaces.

3.3 Master Plan for Delhi 2021 (MPD-2021)

The Master Plan for Delhi 2021 builds on a more comprehensive and sustainable mobility approach, based on an integrated land use and transportation plan through Transit Oriented Development (TOD) (Delhi Development Authority, 2007). It advocates a transition from private to public modes of transport through the integration of multi-modal transport systems that consist of both rail and road-based systems, intermediate passenger transport, and non-motorized transport. The infrastructure initiatives include dedicated cycle lanes, green corridors, and pedestrian friendly pathways. Furthermore, the plan largely focuses on incorporating smart mobility solutions through the implementation of Intelligent Transport System (ITS), and promotes the adoption of electric vehicles for environmental sustainability (Delhi Development Authority, 2007).

Importantly, while MPD-1962 and MPD-2001 largely overlooked the need for gender sensitive planning in urban transport, MPD-2021 explicitly addresses the gendered dimensions of mobility in transport planning and strategies (Delhi Development Authority, 2007). The plan recognizes the differentiated mobility needs of women and recommends gender inclusive infrastructure such as

safe and accessible roads, accessible public transport, safe last-mile connectivity, safe pedestrian design for women, and an enhanced surveillance system around transport nodes (Delhi Development Authority, 2001, pp. 142-147).

Despite these provisions, MPD-2021 also ends up adopting a limited approach to gender inclusion by framing women primarily as consumers in need of protection and safety. The focus remains on safety and accessibility, which is definitely essential, but reinforces the perception that women are passive recipients of transport services. This overlooks the broader vision of empowering women as active participants within transport policy making and, in the workforce, such as the role of women as drivers, conductors, operators, and planners. Further, the plan fails to address the structural barriers that impede women's participation in the transport workforce. Thus, without recognizing and facilitating women's roles beyond commuters, the plan will remain incapable of achieving gender inclusivity and equitability in the transport planning framework.

4. STATE-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS: TOWARDS GENDER INCLUSION

At the state level, the Delhi government has undertaken several initiatives to address gender specific mobility challenges within the public transport system.

4.1 Reservation of Seats for Women: The Delhi Metro introduced a reserved coach exclusively for women in all metro trains from 2 October 2010 in response to rising women commuters and the significant rise in reports of sexual harassment in public transport (Agrawal & Sharma, 2015). Similarly, Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) buses also have designated seats for women passengers. Additionally, the transport department mandated that 25% of seats in public transport be reserved for women commuters to ensure safety and security (Mathur, 2013).

4.2 Lady Special Buses: In September 2012, the former Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit launched the Ladies' Special buses of DTC

with women conductors to improve the safety and accessibility of public transport for women commuters (Zaman, 2016).

4.3 The Bus Marshal Scheme (2015): To strengthen women's safety in public buses in Delhi, the Transport Department of the Delhi government launched the Bus Marshals Scheme in 2015 (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi, 2022). Under this scheme, civil defence volunteers and home guards were designated as Bus Marshals and were deployed in DTC buses.

4.4 The Free Bus Ride Scheme for Women (2019): Another significant step towards gender inclusivity was the introduction of a scheme (in October 2019) to provide free bus travel for women, aimed at making public transport more accessible and safer for women (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi et al., 2022).

4.5 A Task Force for Women's Safety in Public Transport (2019): The Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi established a Task Force for women's safety in public transport to address and improve women's commuting experience across the city (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi et al., 2022). As part of its broader commitment to gender inclusive mobility, the government reserved 33% of new auto permits for women drivers (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi et al., 2022). The Task Force later submitted a set of recommendations in the form of an Action Plan, which included the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for bus marshals, bus drivers, and conductors to address incidents of sexual harassment. Following these recommendations, the Bus Marshals program was expanded significantly, with the Transport Department deciding to deploy 13,000 marshals, ensuring coverage on every bus during every shift (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi, 2022).

4.6 Mission Parivartan Initiative (2022): To further address gender issues within urban transport, the Department of Transport

launched Mission Parivartan in April 2022, an initiative aimed at training women to obtain Heavy Motor Vehicle licenses through the Society for Driving Training Institute (SDTI) in Burari (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi et al., 2022). The initiative aimed to promote employment opportunities for women in the public transport sector with qualified candidates initially being posted as drivers in low-floor buses. Further, to facilitate greater participation of women in driving roles, the government relaxed recruitment criteria by lowering the standard height requirement from 159 to 153 cm and reducing the period of mandatory driving experience to one month. Additionally, in July 2022, the government committed to subsidizing 50% of the cost of commercial driving training for women who are interested in entering the field (Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi et al., 2022).

5. POLICY SUGGESTIONS

Advancing gender inclusion in Delhi's transport sector requires policy interventions that go beyond safety measures for women commuters and extend to focus on meaningful participation of women across all levels, including the transport workforce. Central to this effort is the provision of gender-inclusive workplace infrastructure, such as accessible and adequately maintained toilets and restrooms, and other basic facilities, which remain a fundamental precondition for women's continued engagement in a sector characterized by long, irregular, and spatially dispersed work routines. Given the mobile and essential nature of transport work, arranging flexible work schedules for women employees also becomes particularly important, alongside ensuring safe and reliable commuting arrangements, particularly for those working late or early-hour shifts.

To create an equitable and inclusive workplace culture, regular gender-sensitization programmes for all transport workers are essential. While the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, provides a legal framework for addressing workplace harassment,

strengthening the efficiency, accessibility, and responsiveness of grievance-redressal mechanisms remains crucial. Ensuring consistent and timely implementation of POSH guidelines across all organizational levels is important. Finally, increasing the representation of women in senior management and decision-making positions is crucial, as it enables institutional perspectives that are more responsive to the experiences and needs of women workers.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has traced the evolution of urban transport policies and Delhi's Master Plans, and highlighted that policy attention for several decades remained centered on supply-side interventions (such as expanding infrastructure, improving service provision, and encouraging private-sector participation), while largely overlooking the gendered dimensions of urban mobility. National policies formulated in the early 2000s addressed crucial structural and operational gaps in the transport system but remained gender neutral and therefore, failed to account for women's differentiated mobility needs. It was only with the introduction of the National Urban Transport Policy 2014, that issues of commuter safety, particularly for women, began to receive explicit recognition at the policy level.

A similar trajectory is evident in the Master Plans for Delhi. Both MPD-1962 and MPD-2001 largely overlooked gender issues within the transport sector, implicitly assuming a male-centric commuting pattern. It was only MPD-2021 that clearly acknowledged the differential needs of women and recommended safety-oriented interventions, such as enhanced lighting, surveillance measures, and improved last-mile connectivity. However, even within this more progressive framing, women were positioned primarily as vulnerable users requiring protection, rather than as active agents or participants in transport planning processes or as integral contributors to the transport workforce.

Recent initiatives undertaken by the Delhi transport authorities to increase women's participation in the transport workforce represent an important step towards fostering a more gender inclusive transport system. However, these initiatives become more meaningful when supported by broader structural changes, including the provision of gender-inclusive infrastructure, such as dedicated toilets and restrooms, institutional mechanisms for support and grievance redressal, and targeted interventions to address the socio-cultural barriers that impede women's entry and retention in the transport workforce.

A genuinely gender-inclusive transport policy must move beyond symbolic representation and actively recognize women as planners, decision-makers, and workers who contribute to shaping equitable urban mobility systems. Such an approach aligns with the broader vision articulated in SDG 11, which emphasizes safe, accessible, and inclusive transport systems as a fundamental pillar of sustainable urban development.

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**'PSYCHOSOCIAL UNDERPINNINGS OF
CHILDLESSNESS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL
STUDY FROM EAST INDIA'**

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Abstract:

Infertility is a state of chronic suffering for a person. On the outset, in a collectivistic pro-natalist society like India, it is a desired and revered societal role for women. Bearing a child is likened to a boon for the family and a proof of masculine prowess for the father. Such societal perceptions bring along stigma in and towards childless/ infertile women. Numerous scientific modalities for its successful treatment are available medically; along with other alternatives like adoption and voluntary childlessness. Still, the state of infertility persists to be psycho-socially relevant as it impacts one's emotional well-being, self-percept, couple's relationship, social identity and cultural expectations. This present study was conducted at an Infertility Clinic in Eastern India with cross-sectional, comparative design, aiming to compare Psychosocial stress and its various determinants between 20 childless and 20 childbearing women. The results reflect a significantly higher burden of anxiety, depression and hopelessness; with significantly poorer marital adjustment, social support, overall quality of life, coping skills and lower self-esteem among infertile women. The findings also point to a vicious cycle between these parameters which perpetuate their condition, thus, further worsening their mental well-being. These findings reiterate the importance of networking between gynecologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers during the course of

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infertility treatments as well as post-treatment for the women's better mental health outcomes.

Keywords: Infertile, infertility, psychosocial stress, coping, mental health

Introduction:

Infertility is defined as - “A disease of the reproductive system defined by the failure to achieve a clinical pregnancy after 12 months or more of regular unprotected sexual intercourse”. From a social vantage, the construct of health and illness is quite unique in the case of infertility. Firstly, regardless of the medical definition of infertility, couples tend to seek treatment only when they recognize and accept parenthood as their desired social role. Secondly, unlike other gynecological conditions, infertility is indicated not through any pathological symptoms, but rather through the absence of an anticipated or desired condition. Thirdly, infertility is often conceptualized, especially in developed nations, as a condition affecting the couple as a *unit*, unlike the biomedical model which treats infertility as any other medical condition which affects an individual. Hence, identifying oneself as infertile entails interactions and negotiations with medical professionals vis-a-vis discussions among the partners and with their broader social systems. Fourthly, there are other existing alternatives for the infertile couple apart from pursuing a 'cure'; e.g.,- defining oneself as 'voluntarily childfree', fostering, adoption or changing partners. Therefore, researching infertility offers sociological insights on health and illness, and provides an optimal perspective for examining key aspects of medicalized healthcare—such as the conflict between medical authority and personal experience, the gendered dimensions of health and care, and the dynamic relationship between social structures and the individual agency.

Background:

As infertility involves the inability of both partners to fulfill a valued social role, it frequently results in various forms of psychological distress. A study on the psychological consequences

of infertility by Greil described it as a 'devastating experience'. Numerous studies show how infertility in women is associated with negative psychological states of mind like stress, anxiety, hopelessness and depression. Many studies show that infertile women have poorer "Health-related quality of life" compared to infertile men; while few studies show no spousal difference in the quality of life. A number of studies have also established significant negative correlation between infertility and marital adjustment. Majority of these studies have assessed the variables individually and not in unison while in reality, these variables can also be interlinked. Notably, infertile women in pro-natalist societies such as India often face profoundly negative repercussions.

Studies from India have mostly focused upon the biological aspects of infertility; its prevalence the biological and psychological underpinnings of infertility and attitudes towards treatment-seeking for infertility in couples. This leaves a gap in knowledge about infertility and its psychosocial consequences.

Methodology:

The present study aimed to explore psychosocial stress (focusing on aspects such as coping, social support, self-esteem, marital adjustment, and quality of life); and subjective well-being (in terms of hopelessness, anxiety and depression) of women with infertility/ childless women.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To compare the facets of psychosocial stress (in terms of coping, social support, self esteem, marital adjustment and quality of life) between childless/ infertile and childbearing women.
2. To compare the determinants of subjective mental well-being (in terms of hopelessness, anxiety and depression) between childless/ infertile and childbearing women.
3. To explore whether any relation exists between these determinants among childless/ infertile women.

Research Design : This cross-sectional comparative study was conducted at a Infertility Outpatient Clinic of the Obstetrics and Gynaecology department at a Tertiary Care Hospital. Two groups, comprising 20 childless women (Group A) and 20 childbearing women (Group B), were studied. Subjects in Group B were matched with those in Group A with respect to age, education and socioeconomic status.

Sampling method: Purposive.

Inclusion Criteria: For the study group of 'Childless Women' (group A), inclusion criteria were: diagnosis of 'primary infertility', duration of marriage at least five years, age between 25 and 35 years, education at least up to higher secondary and those willing to give written informed consent.

For control group of 'Childbearing Women' (group B), age, education and socioeconomic status-matched women were included, with duration of marriage at least five years, having one or more children and those willing to give written informed consent. Participants in Group B (child-bearing women) were selected from those women who would either (i) visit the hospital for follow-ups and currently asymptomatic or (ii) who would accompany other patients to the OPD, who were not their spouses.

Exclusion Criteria: For both groups (A & B), those with secondary causes of infertility, those having a co-morbid diagnosis of other psychiatric, neurological or medical disorder, suffering from sexual dysfunction, with history of substance intake except nicotine and caffeine and those not providing informed consent.

Tools:

- Informed Consent form
- Semi-structured Proforma to record Socio-demographic and Clinical details
- Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS) - This observer-rated scale with 21 items, is used to assess

presence and severity of depressive states. In this scale, a score of 0-7 indicates no depression, 8-13 = minor depression, 14-18 = moderate depression, 19-22 = severe depression and ≥ 23 = very severe depression. This scale is most widely used and established as a highly reliable and valid assessment tool.

- Hamilton Anxiety Scale (HAS) - This scale measures both psychic anxiety and somatic anxiety; and consists of 14 items. A score of <17 indicates mild anxiety, 18-24 indicates mild to moderate anxiety, 25-30 indicates moderate to severe anxiety and >30 indicates severe anxiety.
- Beck's Hopelessness Scale - This scale (20 questions) assesses three domains: feelings about the future, loss of motivation and future expectations. Score of 0-3 is normal, score of 4-8 indicates mild, 9-14 indicates moderate and 15-20 indicates severe hopelessness. Higher scores indicate more sense of hopelessness.
- WHOQOL-BREF (World Health Organization Quality of Life - Brief Version)- Hindi- The Hindi version (based on the WHOQOL-100) has been developed by Saxena et al. The 26 items of this scale measure 4 domains (physical; psychological, social and environmental health) of QOL. This tool appears suitable for comprehensive assessment of quality of life in a healthcare setting.
- Ways of Coping Questionnaire (Revised) - This is a 66-item questionnaire; it assesses coping strategies in individuals. Subjects respond to each item on a 4-point Likert scale where 0 means does not apply and/or not used to 3 meaning used a great deal. It assesses eight distinct domains - Confrontive coping, Distancing, Self-controlling, Seeking social support, Accepting responsibility Escape, Avoidance, Plan full problem-solving and Positive reappraisal.
- Marital Adjustment Inventory (MAI)- This 10-item self-administering scale for marital adjustment has two forms, Form-A (for husbands) and Form-B (for wives). This scale

has been validated on 600 couples belonging to different social classes, professions and walks of life.

- Infertility Stigma Scale - This 27-item scale evaluates four dimensions—self-devaluation, social withdrawal, public stigma, and family stigma—and has demonstrated reliability and validity in assessing the level of stigma experienced by infertile women. It has a Content Validity Index of 0.92. The scale is divided into four sub-scales:
 - a) **Self-devaluation:** Assesses irrational beliefs about one's self-worth.
 - b) **Social withdrawal:** Measures a fear of social interactions.
 - c) **Public stigma:** Focuses on the stigma perceived from the wider community.
 - d) **Family stigma:** Evaluates the stigma perceived from family members.

The total score ranges from 27 to 135, with higher scores indicating a greater level of perceived stigma.

- Social Support Questionnaire - This 18-item questionnaire was developed and standardized at the Department of Psychology, PGIMER, Chandigarh. Range of score for each item is 1-4 (4-Fully agreed to 1-completely disagreed).
- Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale - This 10-item self-report Likert scale (consists of equal number of positively-worded and negatively-worded statements) is used to evaluate individual self-esteem. It uniquely assesses both positive and negative types of feelings about oneself.

This study has attempted to measure and explore clinical mental health-related states (depression, anxiety, hopelessness) in the light of various other constructs (self-esteem, stigma, coping, marital satisfaction, quality of life, social support, etc.) which are also inter-connected. Since each construct represents a distinct dimension of mental health, several validated rating scales were used as relying on a single instrument would not adequately capture the complexity of their connections. Also, using several

validated scales enhances measurement precision as well as increases the reliability and validity of findings while reducing the limitations associated with a single scale.

Procedure: Childless women/those diagnosed with primary infertility (group A) and the control group/ childbearing women (group B) were selected through purposive sampling. After screening them according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria, they were included in the study. Then, the objectives and purpose of the study were explained and their informed consent was taken. An in-depth conversation with assurance of confidentiality was conducted before collecting the required socio-demographic and clinical information from the study group participants, so that these women felt confident and free to disclose their issues.

All the aforementioned tools were applied on the study group participants; and for the control group participants, all the tools except the Infertility Stigma Scale were applied. Appropriate statistical analysis software was used for analyzing the data.

Ethics: Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee.

Results:

Socio-demographic profiles of both the study and control groups were found to be similar in terms of their ages, family type, occupation and income. The duration of marriage of women in the infertility group was found to be significantly shorter compared to control group ($p < 0.01$)

Table-1: Socio-demographic profiles of Infertile and Child-bearing groups.

Variables	Group A (N=20)	Group B (N=20)	t/ χ^2 / Fisher's exact Test	df	p
Age (in years)	28.80±2.19	30.05±2.06	1.857	38	0.071
Duration of marriage (in years)	5.65±1.18	6.75±1.20	2.910	38	0.006*

Family type	Nuclear	9(45%)	7(35%)	.417	1	.524
	Joint	11(55%)	13(65%)			
Occupation	Employed	7(35%)	13(65%)	3.60	1	.061
	Unemployed	13(65%)	7(35%)			
Income (Rs. per month)	20000-29000	8(40%)	10(50%)	.608	2	.738
	30000-39000	10(50%)	9(45%)			
	40000 and above	2(10%)	1(5%)			

*p<0.01

Among the clinical parameters, scores on the Beck Hopelessness Scale, Hamilton Anxiety scale and Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS) were significantly higher in infertile women (p<0.001). Also, there was significant difference in the scores of physical, psychological, social domains as well as total WHOQOL score among both groups. But, the environmental quality of life scores were found to be similar in both groups. Marital adjustment inventory (Form B) scores were significantly lower in infertile women (p<0.05), but there was no significant difference with regard to marital adjustment inventory (Form A) scores. The scores of Social support questionnaire (p<0.05) as well as Rosenberg self-esteem Scale (p<0.001) were found to be significantly lower in infertile women

Table-2: Clinical parameters of Infertile and Child- bearing groups

Variable	Infertility N=20 (Mean±SD)	Child-bearing N=20 (Mean±SD)	t	df	P
BHS	6.55±3.77	0.65±0.93	6.783	38	0.000***
HAS	9.30±7.81	0.20±0.89	5.17	38	.000***
HDRS	5.45±5.19	0.10±0.45	4.59	38	.000***
PHYSICAL	21.50±3.95	25.30±3.18	3.35	38	.002**
PSYCHOLOGICAL	18.00±2.69	22.00±1.02	6.20	38	.000***
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP	9.60±1.42	11.10±0.91	3.95	38	.000***
ENVIRONMENT	24.50±2.46	25.10±2.12	.825	38	.414
QUALITY OF LIFE (WHO_QOL)	73.60±8.18	83.50±5.11	4.59	38	.000***
MAI_A	31.85±21.76	41.95±0.45	1.87	38	0.070 #
MAI_B	30.55±16.21	40.15±11.33	2.17	38	0.036 #
SSQ	47.50±8.52	51.40±1.69	2.00	38	0.05 #
RSES	17.10±4.48	24.75±2.63	6.58	38	.000***

***p<0.001; **p<0.01; #p<0.05 level

[BHS- Beck's Hopelessness Scale; HAS- Hamilton Anxiety Scale; HDRS- Hamilton depression rating scale; WHO_QOL- WHO- Quality of Life Scale; MAI_A- Marital adjustment Inventory Form A(for husband); MAI_B- Marital adjustment Inventory Form B(for wife); SSQ-Social Support Questionnaire; RSES – Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale]

With respect to the Ways of Coping, almost all the domains in infertile women were significantly lower

Table-3: Ways of Coping in Infertile and Child bearing groups.

Variables	Infertility N=20 (Mean±SD)	Child-bearing N=20 (Mean±SD)	t	df	p
CONFRONTIVE COPING	6.00±1.89	11.45±3.42	6.22	38	.000***
DISTANCING COPING	6.50±1.53	7.50±2.68	1.44	38	.157
SELF CONTROLLING	7.40±1.60	11.40±3.16	5.03	38	.000***
SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT	7.15±2.18	10.25±3.17	3.59	38	.001***
ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY	3.90±1.20	7.10±2.22	5.65	38	.000***
ESCAPE-AVOIDANCE	8.40±2.92	9.50±4.60	0.90	38	.373
PLANFUL PROBLEMSOLVING	6.85±2.73	10.65±2.81	4.32	38	.000***
POSITIVE REAPPRAISAL	9.50±2.94	12.00±3.12	2.60	38	.013**
WAYS OF COPING	55.70±9.58	79.85±8.35	8.49	38	.000***

***p<0.001 level; **p<0.01 level

Spearman's correlation analysis revealed that among women experiencing infertility, quality of life showed a significant negative correlation with anxiety, depression, and infertility-related stigma, while it was significantly positively correlated with their own and their spouse's perceptions of marital adjustment, as well as with social support and self-esteem

Table-4: Correlation analysis among the clinical parameters within the Study group (Infertile women).

	BH S	HA S	HD RS	MAI _A	MAI _B	SSQ	RSE S	ISR S	W OC	WHO_ QOL
BHS										
HAS	.45 0*									
HDRS	.33 6	.814 **								
MAI_A	-.47 1*	-.84 7**	-.72 0**							
MAI_B	-.41 4	-.84 2**	-.80 1**	.880 **						
SSQ	-.24 4	-.77 4**	-.81 0**	.730 **	.861 **					
RSES	-.36 4	-.69 6**	-.87 4**	.705 **	.762 **	.830 **				
ISRS	.20 1	.688 **	.813 **	-.638 **	-.728 **	-.77 5**	-.87 5**			
WOC	-.21 7	-.31 5	-.32 9	.383	.430	.228	.203	-.175		
WHO_ QOL	-.43 7	-.83 6**	-.71 6**	.718 **	.725 **	.637 **	.638 **	-.662 **	.23 7	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

[BHS- Beck hopelessness scale; HAS - Hamilton anxiety scale; HDRS - Hamilton depression rating scale; MAI_A- Marital adjustment inventory (form-A for husband); MAI_B- Marital adjustment inventory (form-B for wife); SSQ- Social support questionnaire; RSES- Rosenberg self-esteem scale; ISRS – Infertility stigma rating scale; WOC – Ways of coping; WHO_QOL– WHO quality of life]

Also, among infertile women, their anxiety and depression were found to be significantly negatively correlated with their spouse's perception of quality of married life, subject's perception of quality of married life, social support, and self-esteem. However, anxiety and depression had significant positive correlation with stigma associated with Infertility. Significant positive correlation within spouse's perception of marital adjustment (form-A), subject's

perception of marital adjustment (form-B), social support and self-esteem was found. There was significant negative correlation of infertility-related stigma with marital adjustment, social-support and self-esteem

Discussion:

This study was conducted at the Infertility clinic of a tertiary care hospital located in Jharkhand, India. Participants in both groups were selected through purposive sampling and represent a similar geographical and socio-cultural background. The groups differed from each other only in the duration of marriage. In the present study, only primary infertile subjects were included so women who were trying to conceive but unable to do so, came under medical supervision within a 'traditionally' critical period post-marriage, which might explain the significantly lesser duration of marriage in the study group. Also, a previous study on infertile women conducted in Chattisgarh, India, found their mean age and duration of marriage to be comparable to our findings.

The significantly higher levels of hopelessness, anxiety and depression experienced by the infertile women in our study has been replicated in multiple studies conducted previously.^[33,34,35] These studies found that infertile women reported a greater number of health complaints, more symptoms of anxiety, depression and experienced more complicated grief as compared to the general population. Another study conducted on the Indian population also reported that infertile women exhibited significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and overall psychopathological differences. Looking from the perspective of a traditional, developing nation like India with conservative socio-cultural values where young married females are expected to bear children soon after marriage, the female's societal conditioning, yearning for the maternal identity, wide social acceptance for motherhood role and the failure to bear a child due to infertility might be contributory to the psychological burden. Not only this, hormonal imbalances associated both with the condition of infertility and with infertility treatment have been shown to cause

similar symptoms. In our study, there was significant correlation of anxiety with both hopelessness and depression; anxiety stemming from various socio-biological causes, in turn, lead to adverse psychological consequences.

The current study also found that the infertile women had significantly poor quality of life (QOL) in physical, psychological, social-relationship spheres. Same findings have been reported previously as well. All infertile females in this study had scored high on the Infertility Stigma Scale (mean 53.7 ± 20.54) which is comparable to a study conducted on obese, infertile women in Turkey. Generally speaking, higher levels of anxiety, depression, hopelessness as well as societal stigma due to the state of infertility, combined with expending time and energy in infertility clinics for their treatment, can explain the poorer quality of life. In addition, they also reported feeling ill owing to adverse effects of hormonal preparations administered to promote fertility. Often, repeated failure of the treatment compounds the situation. However, the scores of environmental domain of QOL (which include opportunities, health care, financial support, secondary and tertiary resources, financial resources) were comparable. This is a contrast to findings of earlier studies which speak of the 'psycho-economic' impact of infertility treatment causing burden; possible explanation of which might be - shorter duration or lower cost of treatment and comparable socio-economic status. Secondly, poorer QOL, unmet traditional role of womanhood and motherhood, mental morbidity as found in infertile women explains their marital maladjustment and supposedly poorer levels of marital intimacy. According to women experiencing infertility, sexual relations with their spouses had lost the spontaneity present in the early days of marriage; couples often engaged in intercourse only during the woman's ovulation period—a pattern that seldom resulted in positive emotional outcomes.

Another finding during interviews was that, the clinical state of infertility was identified as a chronic stressor and a hindrance to form social networks by the childless women. Criticisms from

their in-laws' is quite common; often, these women themselves avoid social gatherings like baby showers, children's first rice eating ceremony... thus explaining their significant lower social support. Studies previously assert the same. This vicious cycle of female infertility, leading to social ostracism, stigmatization, poor quality of life and poor mental well-being, leads to a poor level of self-esteem and coping, which, in turn, aggravate the aforementioned problems.

A 2001 study by Lee, Sun, Chao stated that infertile women found themselves inferior in terms of societal coping, causing poor self-esteem, poor social relationships and feeling “under stress”, which were further compounded by family and social pressure. They also noted that women with diagnosed “female infertility” had lower self-esteem and less societal acceptance and satisfaction than women with diagnosed “male infertility”. However, they found no differences in psychosocial responses between the husbands of both groups, which clearly underlines the role of gender in determining the interplay between psychosocial issues, their perception and societal reactions. Being infertile is not only a gynecological pathology but is also associated with metabolic, endocrinal, and associated disorders- which aggravate the psychosocial burden. During in-depth interviews, majority of the study sample reported that they felt 'freaky', 'weak' and 'abnormal' and often questioned their own femininity and sexual attractiveness. They are prone to make less use of positive coping styles which, in turn, perpetuates their psychosocial issues and also adversely affects other domains of their lives. Our findings are supported by numerous studies on infertile women which found them to be at a higher risk of physical health complaints, psychological distress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, poorer quality of life and poorer social-emotional well-being.

The findings of our study can be theoretically explained in terms of few social science and psychological theories. The sociocultural context of the effects of 'infertility' on self-percept, self-esteem, coping and overall well-being of the women can be understood

through the lens of these theories. The Stress and Coping Theory by Lazarus & Folkman posits that psychological stress is a resultant of perceived demands exceeding coping resources. Infertility, associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and hopelessness and ineffective coping, aggravates stress owing to the unmet demand of child bearing. On the contrary, good social support and marital adjustment can serve as buffering factors to mitigate stress. Here, one can understand this aspect through the lens of the Social Support Buffering Model which states that, perceived support from family, partner or community can reduce / 'buffer' the negative psychological impact of stressors by fostering emotional security and shared coping. In our study group, lower levels of social support, therefore, exacerbated psychological distress. Coming to the context of patriarchal social systems, social conditioning, social interactions and expectations of womanhood and motherhood are pertinent in shaping a woman's social self. Just as fertility is equated to femininity, infertility is symbolic to a threat to femininity (Symbolic Interactionism theory). Thus, infertility, a symbolic threat, is associated with stigma. The negative correlation between infertility-related stigma and self-esteem, marital adjustment, and social support reflects the internal conflict between personal identity and societal labeling.

Goffman's conceptualization of stigma as a discrediting attribute that reduces one's social value is particularly relevant here. In patriarchal societies where motherhood is a marker of social status, infertility becomes a "spoiled identity." Internalized stigma mediates mental health outcomes (higher anxiety, depression, hopelessness) by fostering shame, secrecy, and social withdrawal. Poorer mental well-being, negative self-percept owing to non-fulfilment of motherhood leads to diminishing of perceived competence and belonging with poor QOL and low self-esteem (t h w a r t e d s e l f - d e t e r m i n a t i o n) .

Regarding the differential findings between female and male partners regarding marital satisfaction, one can interpret these differences through the Family Systems Theory, which views the

family as an interdependent system. Infertility may disrupt family equilibrium, with the woman often bearing disproportionate emotional and relational strain. The gendered patterns of emotional expression, role expectations, and the social attribution of infertility can explain why the male partners did not report such marital dissatisfaction.

From a sociological vantage, infertility challenges the socially constructed role of women as 'nurturers' and 'mothers'. The social meanings attached to motherhood influence self-worth and identity in women. When faced with infertility, they often internalize societal expectations, leading to shame, self-blame, and relational strain. The interplay of stress, stigma, identity, and relational dynamics underscores the need for interventions that not only address individual coping but also challenge societal narratives surrounding womanhood and fertility.

Intervention: Post-assessment, all the women in the study group were taken up for group therapy with their consent. A total of two group therapy sessions were provided, focusing on the following points: the findings of the study, attempted to shift focus from 'infertility as a clinical, pathological state' to 'a predominantly society-ascribed stigmatised state' which can be 'normalized through self-acceptance'. Their feelings were normalized and they were psychoeducated about emotion regulation, healthy coping techniques, self-care, self-acceptance. The researcher attempted to instil hope into them by restructuring their thought processes and rebuilding their relation with themselves. Clinical guidance including the option of visiting a psychiatrist if needed, was also discussed. The researcher received a positive outcome.

Challenges: The study was conducted as part of M. Phil (Psychiatric Social Work) Course work. Obtaining the permission from any hospital to conduct this study, was the first major challenge. After unsuccessful attempts with two institutes, the researcher finally received permission from an institute located in a different city.

Obtaining consent for data collection was another significant difficulty. The researcher visited the gynecology OPD for a month, but even after referrals from the gynecologist, many childless couples refused to give consent once they learned that the researcher was a PSW trainee. Due to the stigma attached to mental health, they feared that any positive finding might label them as “*pagal* (mad).”

Also, commencing the research while simultaneously working as a clinical trainee in PSW was also challenging. The data collection site was in a different city from the institute, and no designated period was allocated exclusively for data collection within the course tenure, making the process even more demanding.

Implications for Social Work: Social workers can play a crucial role in reproductive healthcare settings by offering interventions such as support group, group therapy, focused group interventions, couple and family counseling. These services help address the emotional, relational, and social challenges faced by individuals and couples experiencing involuntary childlessness.

Additionally, placing social work students as interns in specialized infertility setups can strengthen their ability to screen and identify mental health concerns among this population. Such training will prepare them to work effectively within multidisciplinary teams.

Infertility clinics and reproductive healthcare setups should also formally include social workers as part of their professional teams. Although involuntary childlessness is a physical condition, it carries significant psycho-social implications that often go unaddressed without psycho-social expertise.

The researcher also internally felt a clear lack of women empowerment while conducting the study. Despite most women in the study group being educated and many being employed, they still believed that motherhood is essential for fulfillment of

womanhood, even leading to significant distress within the couple. This underscores how deeply societal expectations and gender norms continue to shape women's emotional well-being, regardless of their independence or achievements.

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for more gender-sensitive health-care policies, as women frequently bear disproportionate stigma, emotional and societal burden. Ensuring equitable, respectful, and supportive care for all genders is essential for holistic well-being.

Conclusion:

As the findings of this study suggest, there is a profound psychosocial impact of infertility on women. The state of infertility cannot be defined in its entirety as merely a medical condition, but includes a deeply social and psychological experience, shaped by gender norms, cultural expectations, and interpersonal dynamics. Certain theoretical perspectives like the Stress and Coping Model, Social Support Buffering Hypothesis, and Stigma Theory provide valuable insights into the mechanisms through which infertility leads to emotional distress and diminished quality of life. The results emphasize the need for a holistic and gender-sensitive approach to infertility care—one that integrates psychological counseling, marital support, and community-based stigma reduction efforts alongside medical interventions. Strengthening social support networks and fostering adaptive coping can play a pivotal role in improving the well-being and life satisfaction of women navigating infertility. During the study, an attempt was made to conduct in-depth interviews with the consent of the women to understand the root of their psycho-social issues and this process helped in their emotional ventilation as well.

Some of the possible limitations of this study are : (i) These results cannot be generalized; (ii) Couples who are childless by choice or who have accepted their childlessness without any distress, are not represented in this study; (iii) Cross-sectional design hinders the

establishment of any cause-effect relation between the various parameters. The burden of childlessness in a traditional society like ours, is often overlooked and females face significant stigma from family and society as a result of this. Professional liaison (between gynecologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers) is necessary during the course of infertility treatments plus post-treatment for females/couples with involuntary childlessness.

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Conflicts of interest:

There are no conflicts of interest.

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SUPPRESSED MASCULINITIES AND RAP MUSIC

Meghna Vesvikar¹

Abstract: The author conducted a pilot study of her PhD interview schedule regarding how slum dwelling youth in Mumbai perceive masculinity. Masculinity is chiefly divided into four types: hegemonic, complicit, subordination and marginalization. However, there seems to be a need for creating other non-Eurocentric subtypes that relate to uniquely Indian circumstances such as caste. These under-privileged youth show certain common characteristics: a strong dislike for reading and writing, undiagnosed learning disability, negative attitudes about LGBTQIA+ and hetero-normative relationships still forming based on their friends and the internet, and ever-increasing pressure to earn. These factors take their emotional toll, and in a megapolis like Mumbai with multiple levels of class and other privileges, also create a unique milieu where class-based masculinity interacts with the one based on caste, religion and occupation. The factor that cuts across all these is an unexpected one – rap music. Rap has traditionally been a marginalized genre in music, without the gravitas of classical music or the wholehearted acceptance and enjoyment of Bollywood songs. Most Mumbai rap artists also come from disenfranchised and under-privileged backgrounds. Is it their struggle that resonates with these young men or is it the easier comprehension of lyrics with street slang? This paper explores the initial understanding of masculinity the slum-dwelling youth in Mumbai have and the scope of utilizing rap music in the required social intervention.

Keywords: Masculinity, youth, slum, rap music, counselling.

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Introduction

Masculinity consists of those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine. Masculinity exists as both a positive, in as much as they offer some means of identity significations for males, and as a negative, in as much as they are not the 'Other' (feminine). Masculinity and male behaviours are not the simple product of genetic coding or biological predispositions (Clatterbaugh, 1990).

According to Kimmel (1988), meanings of masculinity vary from one society/culture to another, within any society/culture over time, within each individual over time, and among different individuals in one group at one point in time. Societal standards of masculinity exist but they may or may not be reflected in a man's personal definition of his masculinity (Kimmel, 1988).

Types of Masculinity

Sociologist RW Connell proposed a model named types of masculinity having relations of alliance, domination and subordination. There is exclusion and inclusion, intimidation, exploitation and so on - a gender politics of its own within masculinity (Connell, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity: Hegemonic masculinity is exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal and violent. Among its defining features are misogyny, homophobia, racism and compulsory heterosexuality (Connell, 2005). For example, during slavery, American society was patriarchal and many white men popularized their supremacy by defining themselves as a superior race. Conversely, for African boys growing up as slaves, their future masculinity was already being subordinated (Gomez, 2007).

Complicit masculinity: It refers to the extension and institutionalization of a male power group under mutual agreements. Thus, a group agrees on the procedures through which

subordination is going to be carried out (Connell, 2005). For example, slaves in the United States were treated inhumanly not just by their masters but also magistrates, legislators, professors of religion, preachers, governors, gentlemen of property and standing and even women.

Subordination masculinity: It deals with any political and cultural exclusion, including legal violence to dominate another masculine group. It directly has to do with the actual performance of authoritarian power based on established methods of control such as physical and psychological abuse, punishments, economic, social and cultural discrimination, verbal insult, any kind of humiliation, personal boycott and even condemnation to death, if necessary (Connell, 2005). For example, many whites believed that slavery was noble, a divine providence – God had predisposed Africans' fate to be submitted since they were thought to be animal-like and inferior and, in a deeper sense, because slave labour was a profitable business tactic (Gomez, 2007).

Marginalization masculinity: It involves the relationship between masculinities in dominant and subordinated classes or ethnic groups (Connell, 2005). For example, in the time of slavery, since black men constituted a subservient kind incapable of freely expressing their masculinity and in correspondence to their African cultural ideals, they developed another type of masculinity based on a strong Christian faith resembling the masculinity of Jesus Christ (Gomez, 2007).

Literature Review

According to Connell, schools are active players in the formation of masculinities. Schools' overall gender regimes typically reinforce gender dichotomy, though some practices reduce gender difference. Masculinizing practices are concentrated at certain sites: curriculum divisions, discipline systems and sports. Pupils are also active in constructing masculinities. Pupil culture commonly emphasizes heterosexual relationships and construct gender hierarchies. Boys take up the offer of gender privilege in

diverse ways, ranging from protest masculinity to anti-sexism (Connell, 1996).

Singh applies the uniquely Indian filter of caste to existing masculinity theories that discuss its intersection with race and class and cites relevant examples from Anandhi et al's field study in 2002 on masculinities. Singh outlines how in Thirunur village in Tamilnadu, upper caste Mudaliar men constantly emasculated and humiliated Dalit men who then engaged in symbolic wish fulfillment in safer locations. The Dalit men couldn't beat up the Mudaliar men so they would dismember the dead bodies of Mudaliar men while they were being cremated. This was based on the Dalit men's desire to be masculine and their acknowledgment that they were unable to do so. As Dalit women started working in the cities and the Dalit's socio-economic status improved, especially in the younger generation, the younger Dalit men found new ways of resisting Mudaliar domination, primarily by refusing to work for the Mudaliars and by getting direct access to land, either as sharecroppers or as owners of land. The upper caste Mudaliar men asserted their masculinity through the use of violence against women. Interestingly, though the Mudaliar men's hegemonic masculinity was being resisted, increasingly contested and threatened by the Dalit men of the village, and the Dalit masculinity of the village was being asserted by distancing themselves from the hegemonic Mudaliar masculinity, the emerging Dalit masculinity does not develop into a hegemonic masculinity (Singh, 2017).

Pleck et al's study lists young males' beliefs about health seeking behavior, sexuality and risk taking. They believed that a man should not concern himself overly about his physical or mental health and can abuse substances. He should lose his virginity early, have multiple sexual partners in short relationships, and have sexual intercourse as often as possible with his girlfriend or wife. He should have been exposed to pornographic material and other such sexual stimuli. He should have less intimacy in heterosexual relationships and believe that relationships between women and

men are adversarial. He should not know much about or take responsibility for contraception. His use of contraception need not be consistent with less belief in male responsibility to prevent pregnancy, and greater belief that pregnancy validates masculinity (Pleck et al., 1990). He can have specific attitudes towards male contraception like condom interference and condom embarrassment. He can have lesser value for his partner's appreciation of his condom use. He can engage in high-risk behavior that could result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS. He should not know much about or take responsibility for housework and parenting.

In general music is associated with emotional reactions, sometimes via incidental stimulus (Juslin et al, 2011) and sometimes intentionally for regulating affect (Saarikallio, 2011). These "everyday" exposures to music and associated emotions are important to consider for insight into "how" music may be developmentally relevant or "therapeutic" for youth. Music engagement has shown to facilitate emotional regulation, where both adolescents and adults often turn to music to promote positive mood, reduce negative mood, and invoke nostalgia or solace (Miranda and Claes 2009; Saarikallio, 2011; Juslin et al, 2011). For example, in a study of adults, individuals used music for "expression of feelings, reinforcement of feelings, and the discharge of feelings" (Saarikallio, 2011). Differences by gender are not consistent but emotion-oriented coping was shown as less effective for boys, and significantly associated with depression (Miranda and Claes, 2009).

Research on music engagement has since expanded beyond emotion regulation to examine affect regulation, cognitive, emotional, social and physical functioning, health, and quality of life, each as valued coping strategies among youth and adults (Saarikallio, 2011; Laiho, 2004; Mindlin, et al. 2012; Chin and Rickard, 2012; Juslin, et al. 2011). These findings are important because they suggest that people actively cope through engagement with music. They already use music as a strategy for

help without any professional help. As per studies, rap music content actually comprises developmental narratives (Travis and Deepak, 2011; Travis and Bowman, 2012).

Objectives of the Proposed Study

1. To study male slum dwelling youth's perceptions of masculinity
2. To identify their sources of information about masculinity
3. To understand their experiences with masculinity and their responses

Methodology

Research design

Research design is the logical strategy of the study. It deals with the plan developed to answer a question, describe a situation, or test a hypothesis, in other words, it deals with the rationale by which a specific set of procedures, which include both data collection and analysis, are expected to meet the particular requirement of a study (Polansky, 1967).

Social work research serves many purposes. Three of the most common and useful purposes are exploration, description and explanation (Rubin & Babbie, 1993). Considering the objectives and hypothesis of the study and the nature of enquiry, the researcher carried out a descriptive study, utilizing the survey design, using personal interviews to collect quantitative data. The case study method is also used for narrating individual cases of problems faced by male youth and observing how they handled the situations despite various constraints.

Sampling design

The researcher studied male youth's perceptions and experiences of masculinity in the suburban slums of Mumbai. Therefore, the universe of the study was all male youth aged between 18-25 years residing in the slums of Mumbai.

The researcher used two stage cluster sampling technique to identify the respondents for the research. Cluster sampling is a probability sampling method in which the population is divided into clusters such as slums, of which certain clusters are randomly selected. These clusters are smaller representations of the population. They are similar to each other but have internal heterogeneity. The second stage of cluster sampling was collecting data from a certain number of members within each cluster. Since Mumbai has a large general and slum population, cluster sampling helps reduce the cost, time and resources required when studying a large population. It is also accurate and easy to implement.

The first stage of cluster sampling was listing Mumbai slums as per their population and location across the 24 wards. The second step was to select 2 slums each with the highest population density across the 4 wards. In each slum, 25 eligible respondents will be identified and interviewed using convenience sampling, that is, 50 respondents each in 4 wards. Thus, the first stage of cluster sampling is to list the slums in Mumbai as per their population density and location in wards, the second is to list the top 4 slums in terms of population density. CBOs in each of these slums were then contacted. The CBOs that responded were informed about the objectives and methodology of the study. The researcher took permission from these CBOs to interview the male youth known to them. Three male youth from each slum were interviewed for this pilot study. These slums were geographically non-overlapping: Dharavi, Kurla, Govandi and Vile Parle. The CBOs have not been named in the study as they wanted to maintain their confidentiality. The researcher ensured that respondents were interviewed across religions and castes in each slum, keeping in mind the objectives of the study.

Inclusion Criteria

The respondents were male youth aged between 18-25 years. They resided in the slum, either on rented or owned property. The respondents could be either studying, employed or working part-time. The respondents could be working in the organized or

unorganized sectors. The respondents could be local residents or migrants.

Exclusion Criteria

Respondents above or below the age limit were not included. Female respondents were not included.

Sample Size: The sample size was 24 respondents. *The CBO had a local centre in each of the four locations mentioned above. Each centre has a list of local boys and girls who are within the age criterion. The researcher randomly selected four names from each centre for the pilot test.*

Tools of data collection

An interview schedule in the local language was prepared with both open and close ended questions as per the research objectives. Verbal consent was taken after explaining the purpose of the study. *The quantitative data was categorized and coded as per SPSS. The qualitative data was thematically analysed to identify recurring themes within the transcripts, especially meaning making and beliefs. To identify recurring themes, the researcher read and re-read the data, colour coded content into potential themes and reviewed them.*

Scope of the Study

The study is an initial attempt to find out what 'being a man' is according to slum dwelling male youth. It does not include opinions of female youth. The focus of the study is also to understand which media, social or others, are economically and intellectually accessible to the research participants.

Limitations of the Study

This research has respondents of a similar socio-economic profile and all respondents are from the same city, across caste, religious, education, income and occupation-based categories. Hence, the findings cannot be generalised to youth in other cities.

Findings

- 1. Most rap songs by Mumbai-based rappers are about how their under-privileged status undermines their inherent capabilities and how established institutions like education have not been useful for them beyond a point.**

Across geographical slums, the youth said they liked rap music because they resonated with the struggle of the artist and is a bit trendier and edgier than basic Bollywood music which they also like. This finding matches the studies in the literature review which state that rap music content actually comprises developmental narratives (Travis and Deepak, 2011; Travis and Bowman, 2012) and that these developmental narratives are relevant in every day music engagement and therapeutic self-expression (Travis, 2013).

- 2. The lower the education of the young men, the more strongly they believed in notions of masculinity and the less reliable their sources of such information (chiefly fathers, older male relatives and peers).**

The lower the education of the young men, the lower their income, the more difficult it is for them to implement notions of masculinity. The respondents understood hailing from a significantly lower economic stratum meant they would not be able to follow the socially accepted indicators of masculinity like fancy haircuts, gym memberships and diets for building a particular type of physique etc. Hence, without any critical thought, they totally accepted older notions of masculinity from their elderly male relatives as these do not require any financial status to accept and are easier to replicate. This matches Singh's mention of Anandi et al's 2002 study wherein Dalit men create their own unique masculinity by distancing themselves from other men (Singh, 2017).

- 3. The lower the respondents' economic status, the more likely it is that their experiences with masculinity have been negative.**

**“Jiske jeb mein Gandhi,
Ladki uske pyaar mein andhi!”**

In general the respondents were somewhat resigned to not having a girlfriend as they had limited money to spend on relationships. However, those who had been in a relationship expressed somewhat negative attitudes towards girls as suggested by the above quote. They did not understand that romantic relationships at such a young age are not rationally expected to last long and their lack of social skills could well have contributed to the demise of their relationship. This matches Pleck et al's study wherein young males believe that relationships between women and men are adversarial and men should be more concerned with multiple sexual partners and lack on intimacy rather than take responsibility for contraception and adopt health seeking behavior (Pleck, 1990).

- 4. Respondents from a female-headed household are less likely to believe in traditional notions of masculinity.** When asked who a masculine man is, one respondent said,

“Meri mummy asli mard hai.”

He had lost his father and his mum drove a taxi to make ends meet. The respondent often felt bad that he could not contribute financially to the household but also took comfort from the thought that once he had a well-paying job, he would be able to help out his mother. This matches Pleck et al's 1990 study wherein masculine men are not expected to know much about or take responsibility for housework and parenting (Pleck, 1990). It also matches another Indian cultural norm wherein men learn to cook for the sole reason that their mothers and sisters cannot enter the kitchen while on their period.

- 5. Intervention designed for under-privileged youth requires needs customization and a careful observation of the researchers' own biases.**

There were six cases of research participants not being able to

write longer sentences like their opinions on particular statements and were slow in speech. Both their handwriting patterns and inability/unwillingness to read and write strongly indicate undiagnosed learning disability and/or negative experiences with formal education.

One respondent asked, “Magazine kya hota hai?” (What's a magazine?) This indicates that any resource created for them on any topic needs to be an audio-visual or experiential one for better understanding and assimilation, that new ideas of masculinity need to be first verbally discussed in a safe space. Reading stories or articles, journalling would not help. This matches the studies in the literature review that youth already use music as a strategy for help without any professional help as. rap music content actually comprises developmental narratives (Travis and Deepak, 2011; Travis and Bowman, 2012)

Discussion

- 1. Rap may be considered a form of self-expression by under privileged boys but universally now, rap music emerges not just from environments of injustice and oppression but also those of wealth. Consumers of contemporary rap music do not fit neatly into stereotypical demographic genres (Iwamoto et al. 2007). We find consumers across ages, racial and ethnic categories, genders, and geographic regions. Hip-hop enjoys as much praise in certain circles as it is maligned in others (Rose 2008). Also, the increasing commercialization of this genre in India could lead to a gradual change in its content. The flip side of this commercialization would be that it would be viable for rap artists to create meaningful gender-based content for under privileged youth.*
- 2. A majority were planning to stop studying after Std. XII or graduation as the time, money and effort being spent on their formal education was not getting sufficient returns in terms of job placement and income. Most respondents are not part of*

either academic or extra-curricular activities in their schools or colleges. They remain on the fringes and are hard to catch hold of. Colleges need stronger outreach to assimilate them. This reflects marginalisation masculinity where socially excluded groups develop their own alternative forms of masculinity (Connell, 2005; Gomez, 2007).

3. *The average age of the respondents was 19-21 years, not children but not mature either. They had doubts about their present situation and future choices and need mature guidance to make their decisions. Since their masculinity ideas were based on their culture and economic status, a community elder's engagement with them in a safe space is important. This is reflected in hegemonic masculinity wherein social structures are utilized to maintain one group's supremacy over others – if the respondents do not break out of poverty now, it becomes generational for them (Gomez, 2007).*

4. *Since the overwhelming source of ideas on masculinity is the father or other male elders in the family, in the future, intervention with older males can also be designed. This will ensure a balanced relationship across generations and passing on of healthier values. This must be preceded by family strengthening if these youth are to break out from the cycle of poverty. This requires multi-frontal interventions such as family counselling and financial aid, optimum utilization of community resources like youth groups and available spaces, and community outreach programs by local educational institutes and NGOs. If socio-economic differences were to strengthen in the long run in Mumbai, this would be the precursor to the formation of a complicit masculinity (Connell, 2005).*

Conclusion

The media to be used to interact with slum dwelling youth and generate awareness among them needs to be created keeping in mind that our probable class bias needs to be acknowledged and

cast aside. The media used also needs to be easily comprehensible and preferably audio-visual, made in coordination with the consumers and if possible, their idols. A sustained partnership with the youth and CSOs/NGOs in this content creation exercise is the challenge.

***'Day by day, akele
Katne ko daudta ye sheher Bombay
Aur kitni zor se cheekhun
Ki apko meri awaz sunai de?'***

Rapper: Dino James

Song: Loser

***(Day by day, alone
This city Bombay feels like it will bite me
How much louder do I have to scream
That you hear my voice?)***

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UGC approved under Social Sciences

**THE PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE OF THE YOUTH
TOWARDS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST
MARRIED WOMEN IN THE SLUMS OF MUMBAI**

Ms. Rushila Rebello¹

Abstract

Domestic violence against married women remains one of the most pervasive yet hidden human rights violations in contemporary society. In this context, the attitude and perception of today's youth hold profound significance as they play a decisive role in either perpetuating or preventing this social problem. This paper examines the attitude of youth toward domestic violence against married women. It is a quantitative study that utilized a descriptive design with a sample consisting of 300 youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years residing in the Western Suburban Region of Mumbai. Face-to-face interviews were conducted. The study demonstrates that although most of the youth were able to acknowledge domestic violence as a serious problem, yet only one third perceived domestic violence as gender based violence, For more than half of the respondents, domestic violence is acceptable and justifiable on one or other rare occasion, and a quarter percent felt that the wife should not be allowed to enjoy the same amount of freedom as her husband has. This paper underscores how critical it is to encourage a shift in youth attitudes regarding domestic violence experienced by married women.

Keywords: perception, attitude, youth, slums, domestic violence.

Introduction

The problem of domestic violence is deeply rooted in historical inequalities between women and men. It is the husband who enjoys a higher status in society, whereas the wife has to conform to the

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social ideals. The entire process of socialization aims at justifying, reinforcing and strengthening gender power dynamics in society. (Saxena, 1995). This eventually becomes an impediment to the safety, equality and progress of the socio-cultural value system, family relations, as well as the political and administrative environment (Gill, 2010). Gayathri (2017) points out that domestic abuse is a life-threatening problem, particularly for married women and a grave problem for societies too. Kozma and Dauer (2001) regard domestic violence as threatening, frightening, humiliating, demeaning, and degrading, which destroys the self-esteem and self-respect of women. It even endangers the right to life, physical integrity and liberty. Domestic violence brings serious threats to women's inherent human rights despite their socio-economic status (Chauhan, 2003). The overall quality of human life and development is at stake due to widespread domestic violence.

The article “Perception and Attitude of Youth Towards Domestic Violence Against Married Women in the Slums of Mumbai” is a scientific and systematic endeavour to highlight the mindset of the youth on the issue of domestic violence against married women. It is very important that the youth reveal their opinions and attitudes on this topic because it is the people's perception of and attitudes towards domestic violence that define whether they acknowledge or deny the incidence of domestic violence, how they react to such violence, and whether they empathize with the survivors, offering them the necessary support or whether they justify such violence.

This study examines the attitudes of youth regarding domestic violence against women in the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai.

Review of Literature

Perception and Attitude Towards Domestic Violence against Married Women

As per various studies conducted by Flood and Pease, 2009; and VicHealth, 2010, perceptions and attitudes impact on how an individual victim responds to domestic violence as well as

community, societal and institutional responses. The literature on perceptions and attitudes towards domestic abuse against women shows a direct correlation between domestic violence supportive perceptions and attitudes that perpetuate domestic abuse. Literature on perception and attitude indicate the following contributing factors to domestic violence: violence-supportive attitudes, determinants of attitudes to domestic violence against women, such as gender, gender and sexual norms, culture, age and developmental stage, socioeconomic factors, childhood exposure to domestic violence, peer groups, informal social relations, religion, media, and organizational factors. It provides evidence on the perceptions and attitudes towards the acceptance and justification of domestic violence in various circumstances.

Literature suggests that perceptions and attitudes are highly significant risk factors and predictors of domestic abuse (Offenhauer & Buchalter et al., 2011, as cited in Mweru, 2015). Social norms and values that give legitimacy to domestic violence are the byproduct of perceptions and attitudes favourable to such violence (Sands, 2009, as cited in Mweru, 2015). Studies have revealed that in societies where there is social acceptance and tolerance of violence against women, or in societies where there are domestic violence supportive perceptions and attitudes, women are more vulnerable to violence (Jewkes, 2002; Riggs & O'Leary, 1989, as cited in Ahn, 2002 & Heise, 1998). The basic argument here is that men with violence-supportive perceptions and attitudes are perpetrators of domestic violence, and women are likely to accept, tolerate and even justify domestic violence (Heise, 1998). Studies by Hawkins (2007) and VicHealth (2010) also highlight the link between perceptions, attitudes and people's idea of and response to domestic violence. People's perception of and attitudes towards domestic violence define whether they acknowledge or deny the incidence of domestic violence, whether they endure or protest against such violence, whether they overlook or observe domestic violence taking place in other's lives, whether they empathize with the survivors, or raise their voice against such social evil and give them the necessary support

or whether they simply justify such violence (VicHealth, 2010). Garcia et al. (2006) point out the role of public attitude towards domestic violence in shaping and influencing the social environment in which the survivors of domestic violence live. The social environment includes family members, friends, relatives, neighbours and colleagues. Similar to the other authors cited in this article, Garcia and Herrero, also assert that public attitude either contributes to domestic violence or helps in reducing it. Perceptions and attitudes of unacceptability of all forms of domestic violence or only specific types of harassment and violence against women will help in preventing such violence by appropriate interventions at different times.

According to a nationwide survey conducted by NFHS-3 in the year 2005-2006 in 29 Indian states, the attitudes of youth between the age group of 25 to 49 towards gender roles are highlighted. The study reveals a lack of gender egalitarian attitudes among the youth, a majority of whom were found to be justifying and accepting domestic violence under specific situations. They accept wife beating regardless of whether women are currently married or unmarried. However, a good number of youth are likely to have attitudes that reject social norms which do not render sexual autonomy to women (Parasuraman et al., 2009).

Sardinha's (2012) study on "Young people's attitude to domestic violence and the role of schools in primary prevention: The Indian Context" examined the attitude of youth to domestic violence in Mumbai and investigated the intervention of schools in altering attitudes that condone domestic abuse and gender-based violence. A mixed methodology was used that included survey and interview methods. In Mumbai's 14 secondary schools, the survey was conducted with 2229 school children between the age group of 12 to 15 years, belonging to classes six and nine. This study highlights that the justification of domestic violence depicts the deep-rooted gender myths, stereotypes, and normalization of domestic violence among the youth in these 14 schools in Mumbai. The result indicated that the majority 66 percent youth agreed that

women are the basic targets of domestic violence. 73 percent of respondents from coeducational schools agreed that domestic abuse is an issue of power and control. The study reveals that male respondents, low standard of living, co-educational schools and other religious minority groups were the most influential predictors of a narrow definition of domestic violence. Prevalence of victim-blaming attitude was found among 50 percent of school youth, including boys and girls. About 38 percent boys and 30 percent girls believe this justification of violence. Fifty-eight percent girls and 56 percent boys stated that the violence is justifiable if a woman fails to take proper care of her children. Fifty-four percent boys and 52 percent girls endorsed violence if a woman was disrespecting her in-laws. Sixty-five percent youth believe that it is women who provoke violence by the way they dress in public. Boys were more likely to justify domestic violence than girls.

Thus, the above literature shows the magnitude of the issue of domestic violence and the perceptions and attitudes of people, including the youth, associated with it, which either increase or decrease the level of domestic violence. Various studies confirm that domestic violence supportive perceptions and attitudes are the contributory factors of domestic violence.

Gadd et al. (as cited in VicHealth, 2015) point out that youth is a significant phase of life where they learn to form close and formative relationships. An understanding of the youth's attitude is significant as behaviours and attitudes that are learnt and imbibed during the stage of adolescence will be exhibited through behaviours in adult life too. Thus, prevention must commence with youth before attitudes that encourage violence and affect their experiences as they navigate this formative time of life (VicHealth, 2015).

An exploration of perceptions and attitudes of youth living in slums is important because it helps to find preventive strategies. It is a vital step towards planning, executing proper gender sensitive prevention policies, programmes and activities at the individual, family, community and societal level.

Objective

To understand the perception and attitude of the youth residing in the slums of Mumbai towards domestic violence against married women.

Methodology

The objective mentioned above is derived from the researcher's doctoral study, which has several objectives, of which this article addresses only one. The study considered young persons between the age group of 15 to 24 years as youth and was carried out in three wards of the Western Suburban Region of Mumbai, namely, Dahisar R/N, Malad P/N, and Santacruz H/E, by applying a multi-stage simple random sampling method as described below:

The researcher first identified nine wards that come under the Western Suburban Region of Mumbai. Thereafter, by way of a simple random sampling procedure (lottery method that provided each respondent with an equal chance of being selected), three wards (Dahisar R/N, Malad P/N, and Santacruz H/E) were selected. The rationale for selecting three wards was to narrow down the focus (study area) to increase the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study, as it was not feasible for the researcher to study all nine wards. After selecting three wards, a list of notified slums of the selected wards was obtained from the colony department of these wards, from which 20 percent of notified slums (9 notified slums) were selected using simple random sampling. The rationale behind selecting 20 percent notified slums was an article by Glenn Israel titled "Determining Sample Size". According to the author, in order to determine the appropriate sample size, one needed to consider the following three criteria: the level of precision, the level of confidence or risk as well as the degree of variability in the attributes being measured. The author further states that the sample size is often increased by 30% to compensate for non-response. The number of planned interviews can be substantially large for the desired level of confidence and precision (Israel, 1992).

After the selection of notified slums the researcher contacted the local NGOs from the nine notified slums, obtained a list of young boys and girls between the age group of 15 to 24 years who were interested in being part of the study. Thus, 300 youth (150 girls and 150 boys) were selected by way of a stratified sampling method. Only those boys and girls who were linked with the local NGOs were included in the study. The researcher used a stratified sampling method since it creates a diverse research sample that represents different groups and allows for more precise sampling. Face-to-face interviews were conducted. The data were collected from 15th October 2021 to 30th March 2022. Data analysis was done by using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation chi-square tests, and charts are used to present the data.

Study Findings and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The study comprised a survey sample of 300 youth residing in the slums of the Western Suburban Region, Mumbai, of which 50 percent comprised females and another 50 percent male respondents. The respondents were between the age group of 15 to 24 years. Regarding religion, a vast majority (83.0 %) of respondents in this study were Hindus, whilst the other respondents were Muslims (7.0 %), Buddhists (5.3 %) and Christians (4.7 %). The vast majority of respondents (92.3 %) had studied up to secondary school, higher secondary and under graduation. A small percentage (7.3 %) were graduates and postgraduates. In terms of university-level education, female respondents were found to be more educated compared to the male respondents. A very insignificant segment of the sample (0.7 %) in the study had completed a primary level of education. Only 13 percent of the total respondents were employed, whereas all the rest (87 %) were students. A vast majority (81.3 %) of the respondents' monthly family income was below Rs. 30,000. All the respondents were unmarried. A substantial section (62%) of the total respondents lived in the nuclear family system.

Perception on the Prevalence and Seriousness of Domestic Violence against Married Women

Domestic abuse against married women remains a grave social issue internationally, with the World Health Organization (2014) reporting that one in five women globally is a victim of such abuse. In India, 33 percent married women have experienced domestic violence from their husbands in the form of verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and at least once in 12 months, 26 percent of married women have undergone domestic violence from their husbands. The NFHS-4 highlighted that 30 percent of married women underwent physical abuse from their married partners (Das & Roy, 2020).

Despite these high statistical magnitudes, the present study reveals a complex social perception of the issue, while a majority of the respondents (66.3 %) acknowledged the existence of domestic violence against women in society, a significant portion (26 %) denies its existence entirely, while a minor 7.7 % remain neutral. This gap between the documented prevalence of abuse and the over one-quarter of respondents who deny its presence underscores a critical disconnect between the lived reality of victims and societal awareness.

Building upon the established prevalence of domestic abuse, the findings show an overwhelming consensus on the gravity of the issue. A vast 88 % of the respondents perceived domestic violence against married women as a serious problem (comprising 47.7 % females and 40.3 % males), whereas 7.3 percent of respondents were not aware whether domestic violence is a serious issue in society or not. According to a minor fraction (4.7 %) of the respondents, the issue of domestic violence is not a serious problem at all. The researcher wanted to ascertain whether there existed any association between the gender of the youth and their perception of domestic violence against married women as a serious problem. The Chi-Square test result showed a statistically significant result. A highly significant association was noted between the gender of the youth and their perception of domestic

violence against married women as a serious problem. The seriousness of domestic violence was perceived more by the female respondents than the male. (Chi Square value= 15.314^a, df=2, p=.000) Cramer value=.226 Since CV >.05 There is a moderate association.

Another Chi-Square test was conducted to assess whether the respondents with a higher level of education consider domestic violence as a grave issue. However, no statistically significant association was observed. (Chi Square value=11.499, df= 10, P=.320) Cramer value=.196 since CV >.05 Hence, it is concluded that as the level of education among the respondents increased, the awareness among them of domestic violence as a serious issue did not increase.

Acceptability of Domestic Violence Against Married Women

Table 1: Gender Acceptability of Domestic Violence Against Married Women

Gender of the Respondents	Acceptability of Domestic Violence Against Married Women			
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Female	5 (1.7%)	142 (47.3%)	3 (1.0%)	150 (50.0%)
Male	7 (2.3%)	143 (47.7%)	0 (0.0%)	150 (50.0%)
Total	12 (4.0%)	285 (95.0%)	3 (1.0%)	300 (100%)

The above table reveals that a huge majority, that is 95 percent of the respondents (female 47.3 % and male 47.7 %) find domestic violence committed against married women not acceptable. Interestingly, the rejection of violence remains consistently high regardless of the domestic environment. A sizable majority (95.6 %) of the respondents who stayed in a joint family system did not accept domestic violence against married women, except 3.5 percent who accepted it. Of those who stayed in a nuclear family, a large percentage (94.6 %) did not accept domestic violence as permissible. Still, a small fraction (4.3 %) of the respondents accepted domestic violence against married women. This suggests that while family systems vary, the ethical stance against domestic violence remains largely uniform across different household types.

It was pertinent to find out whether the gender of the youth and the type of family they come from influenced their acceptance of domestic violence against married women. The Chi-Square test result indicated that there was no statistically significant association between the three variables. The gender of the respondents and the type of family, whether nuclear or joint, did not have any influence on their acceptability of domestic violence. Therefore, the study hypothesis was invalidated. (Chi Square value=3.337, df=2, P=.189) Cramer's value=.105 Since CV is >.05 There is a weak association.

Table 2: Acceptability of Domestic Violence Against Married Women by Educational Background of the Respondents

Educational Background of the Respondents	Acceptability of Domestic Violence Against Married Women			
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Primary School	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.3%)
High School	1 (0.3%)	69 (23.0%)	0 (0.0%)	70 (23.3%)
HSC	4 (1.3%)	120 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	124 (41.3%)
Under Graduate	7 (2.3%)	73 (24.3%)	3 (1.0%)	83 (27.7%)
Graduate	0 (0.0%)	18 (6.0%)	0 (0.0%)	18 (6.0%)
Post Graduates and Above	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.3%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (1.3%)
Total	12 (4.0%)	285 (95.0%)	3 (1.0%)	300 (100.0%)

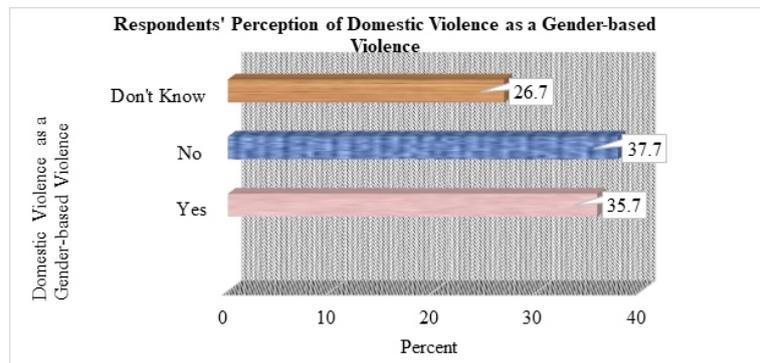
The data also revealed that an overwhelming majority (95 %) of the respondents, despite their varied educational backgrounds, did not accept domestic violence against married women as against four percent respondents who accepted it. The data did not show any variation in the decreased level of acceptability of domestic violence against married women with an increased level of education among the respondents. In fact, a resounding negation to acceptance of domestic violence came from those who had cleared higher secondary examination and above. This could also be due to the presence of very few respondents in the below higher secondary examination category. The Chi-Square test also did not yield a significant value, thereby indicating that there was no statistically significant association between the higher level of education of the youth and the lower level of acceptability of domestic violence among them. (Chi-Square value = 14.815, ^a df= 10, P=.139). Cramer's Value= .222 Since CV >.05 The association

is a moderate association. It can be concluded that education is not helping at all in inculcating the awareness level among the youth on the issue of domestic violence against married women. The education system is lacking in sensitizing youth on domestic violence as a serious social problem.

Respondents' Perception of Domestic Violence as Gender-based Violence

Bano (2003) confirms that domestic violence against married women is a gender-based violence. It is a violence that is targeted at some particular persons due to their gender. Such violence is directed at women to keep them in a subordinate position in the family as well as in the larger society.

Figure 1: Respondents' Perception of Domestic Violence as Gender-based Violence



Despite the high unacceptability rate, there is a distinct lack of consensus on the nature of violence. As apparent from the above figure, 37.7 percent of respondents did not consider domestic violence as a gender-based issue.

Table 3: Respondents' Perception of Domestic Violence as Gender-based Violence by Sex of the Respondents

Sex of the Respondents	Respondent's Perception of Domestic Violence as Gender -based Violence			
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
Female	66 (22.0%)	52 (17.3%)	32 (10.7%)	150 (50.0%)
Male	41 (13.7%)	61 (20.3%)	48 (16.0%)	150 (50.0%)
Total	107 (35.7%)	113 (37.7%)	80 (26.7%)	300 (100.0%)

As reflected in the table above, only 22 percent of female and 13.7 percent male respondents explicitly perceive domestic violence as a gender-based violence. Conversely, a significant portion (20.3 % of males and 17.3 percent of females) do not view it through a gendered lens at all. It was necessary for the researcher to find out whether there existed any relationship between the gender of the youth and their perception of domestic violence as a gender-based violence. The Chi-Square test applied showed statistically significant results. There existed a highly statistically significant association between the gender of the youth and their perception of domestic violence as a gender-based violence. Female respondents were in a better position to acknowledge domestic violence as a gender-based violence than males. (Chi-Square value = 9.758, df= 2, P= .008) Cramer's V=.180 CV is > .5. There is a weak association.

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of Domestic Violence as Gender-based Violence by Age of the Respondents

Age of the Respondents	Respondent's Perception of Domestic Violence as Gender -based Violence			
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total
15-17 years	42 (14.0%)	73 (24.3%)	47 (15.7%)	162 (54.0%)
18 to 24 years	65 (21.7%)	40 (13.3%)	33 (11.0%)	138 (46.0%)
Total	107 (35.7%)	113 (37.7%)	80 (26.7%)	300 (100.0%)

The study found that more respondents belonging to the age group of 18 to 24 years were able to perceive domestic violence as a gender-based issue. This indicates that as the age of the respondents increased, their awareness of domestic violence as

gender-based violence also increased. The Chi-Square test indicated a highly significant association between the age of the respondents and their perception of domestic violence as gender-based violence. (Chi-Square value-15.208, df=2, p = .000, P < .05) Cramer's V =.225 CV >.05 There is a moderate association.

Perception of Youth about the Effects of Domestic Violence on Men and Women

Table 5: Effects of Domestic Violence More on Men or Women by Sex of the Respondents

Sex of the Respondents	Effects of Domestic Violence More on Men or Women				
	Men	Women	Both	Cant's Say	Total
Female	2 (1.3%)	100 (66.7%)	22 (14.7%)	26 (17.3%)	150 (100.0%)
Male	8 (5.3%)	54 (36.0%)	49 (32.7%)	39 (26.0%)	150 (100.0%)
Total	10 (3.3%)	154 (51.3%)	71 (23.7%)	65 (21.7%)	300 (100.0%)

It can be discerned from the above table that with regard to the effects of domestic violence, more than half of the respondents (51.3 %) acknowledged that women are more affected than men by domestic violence. The data showed that compared to males, female respondents are in a better position to understand the effects of domestic violence on married women. Less than a quarter (23.7 %) of the respondents perceived effects on women as well as men. 21.7 percent of respondents could not say who is affected more due to domestic violence since they were not aware of it. Only a marginal section of respondents (3.3 %) perceived greater effects on men. The 21.7 % who are unaware of the effects of domestic violence and the 26 % who deny its existence correlate strongly, indicating that a significant portion of the youth remain insulated from or indifferent to the lived experiences of the one-third of Indian women facing domestic violence.

The study findings also indicate that the gender of the respondents is associated with the perception of respondents. Chi-Square result yielded a statistically significant value. There was a remarkable association between the gender of the youth and their perception of

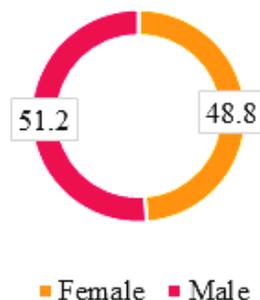
the effects of domestic violence, particularly on women who are at the receiving end. The Chi-Square result yielded a statistically significant value. (Chi Square value= 30.208^a df= 3 P= .000 P<.05) Cramer's value= .317 Since CV >.05 There is a moderate association. The majority of female respondents in the study were able to identify the effects of domestic violence on women, in contrast to the male respondents. Of the total female respondents, a majority (66.7 %) felt that the effects of domestic violence are more on women while more than a third of the male respondents (36 %) have acknowledged that women experience the effects of domestic violence more than men.

Perception of the Respondents About Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue

Domestic abuse is a violation of women's human rights, whether it is committed by private or state actors. It violates several fundamental rights of women, which include their right to a dignified life, rights against torture and inhuman treatment, right to liberty and security, and right against all forms of discrimination with grave consequences both immediate and long-term (Gabriel, 2015).

Figure 2: Respondents' Perception of Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue

Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue



The study indicates that a large majority (71 %) perceived domestic violence as a human rights issue. The illustrative graph above shows that more males (51.2 %) recognised this than females (48.8 %). Thus, it can be concluded that the respondents align with the legal and ethical framework by categorising domestic abuse against married women as a human rights violation. The findings reveal that at a theoretical level, the youth recognise that domestic abuse transcends private domestic dispute, and enters the realm of fundamental rights and State protection. Those who acknowledged domestic violence as a human rights issue, particularly mentioned that women's rights to equality and equal status, the right to education and employment are violated since the husband does not allow her to make decisions about education and employment. Moreover, freedom of speech, freedom to move, which are fundamental to every human being, are also restricted. The participants also shared that domestic violence is a social problem.

Respondents' Perception of Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue by Gender and Monthly Family Income of the Respondents.

The data reveal an inverse relationship between income levels and recognition of domestic violence as a human rights issue, particularly among women. The highest concentration of respondents who acknowledged domestic violence as a human rights issue is found in the lowest income bracket (below Rs. 15000), where 55.8 % females and 28.4 % males are represented. Females are nearly twice as likely as males to recognise domestic violence as a human rights issue. The trend reverses in the middle-income group category (Rs. 15000 to Rs. 30000). About 45.9 percent of males in this category recognised the human rights aspect as compared to 30.8 percent of females. A small percent (11.9 %) of males and (10.6 %) of females belonged to the income category of Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 45000. There is a sharp decline in recognition among women in the higher income (Rs. 45000 and above), with only a 2.9 percent minority represented where as 13.8 percent males in this bracket maintains this perception.

Respondents' Perception of Domestic Violence as a Human Rights Issue by Educational Background of the Respondents

The researcher explored whether the education of the respondents influenced their perception of domestic violence as a human rights issue. The Chi-Square test did not yield a significant value, thereby indicating that there was no statistically significant association between the level of education of the respondents and their perception of domestic violence as a human rights issue. An increased level of education of the respondents did not have any effect on their perception of considering domestic violence as a human rights issue. Respondents, whether less qualified or more, acknowledged violence as a human rights issue. (Chi Square = 5.724, df= 10, P= .838) Cramer's V= .138 $CV > .5$. There is a weak association.

One Incident of Domestic Violence against Married Women is not Violence

Despite the 'human rights' label, the definition of domestic violence perceived by the respondents is startlingly narrow; more than half (56.7 %) of the respondents, perceived one incident of domestic violence against married women as not violence at all. In his study, Harne and Radford (2008) explain that in certain societies, domestic violence in the form of physical abuse is seen as normal. For instance, wife beating, slapping in intimate partner relationships, is perceived as a means of disciplining wives in some cultures. Perceptions of legality and social acceptance of men's use of violence against their wife or partner in domestic relations are based on a belief system that men are superior, and therefore they have the right to dominate and control their partner. This dominance is executed through physical, emotional and sexual abuse. There is also a notion that men have uncontrollable sexual desire and marriage is seen as a license to sexual intercourse. Such notions are held by many people in intimate family relations and are enshrined in social norms (Cowan, 2000; Simonson & Subich, 1999, as cited in Flood & Pease, 2009).

A Husband Should Not Allow His Wife the Same Amount of Freedom as He Has

The study revealed that a quarter percent of the respondents felt that the wife should not be allowed to have the same amount of freedom as her husband. This restricted freedom for wives suggests that patriarchal control over women is still viewed as a domestic right of men, which often serves as the precursor to the 33% prevalence rate mentioned in the NFHS-4 data.

In her study, Gabriel explains that controlling a woman as to what she can and cannot do, negating her access to finance, resources, causing social isolation from friends and family, curtailing her right to self-expression, condemning, maligning her conduct as immoral and unchaste, victimizing her for her irresponsible conduct and pressurizing, compelling, threatening her constitutes emotional abuse (Gabriel, 2015).

Social Work Implications

The findings from the study provide a roadmap for social work practice. They can be used to conduct awareness programmes that reshape youth attitudes towards domestic violence against married women. Youth exposed to domestic violence may reproduce violent behaviour in their relationship with their peers; hence, this study will also help in developing a tool for early detection in schools, universities and community centres. It will help create an evidence-based curriculum for adolescents and youth. The findings can be used to plan and execute a survivor-friendly social environment. Community outreach will become more specific and relevant. It will also contribute to making grassroots organizations, institutions, NGOs and stakeholders extra vigilant about the risk factors of domestic violence. They can then take logical, effective and concrete steps to prevent domestic violence and create the necessary social awareness. This study will make a valuable contribution to research and policy targeted at the prevention of domestic violence. Social workers can advocate for policy changes using data-driven evidence. Furthermore, the study adds to scholarly research and literature in the field.

Recommendations

Changing the attitude of youth towards domestic violence against women requires a multi-pronged approach that brings awareness on gender sensitization, and encourages youth to see domestic violence as gender-based violence. At personal as well as family level, the youth need guidance in understanding healthy relationships, gender equality, non-violence, dignity, respect, justice, and rights, supported by the elders who model respectful non-violent behaviour. Educational institutions can strengthen these efforts by designing gender sensitive curriculum that challenges harmful norms. Community initiatives such as youth groups, local leader engagement, formation of action groups, and safe discussion spaces reinforce positive attitudes by encouraging bystander intervention and collective responsibility. At broader societal and legal levels, media campaigns, involvement of religious and cultural institutions can help demystify myths and stereotypes against domestic violence, reshape community norms and reduce acceptance of domestic violence. Together, these strategies create an environment where young people learn to reject violence, support survivors, and advocate for gender equality.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the gravity of domestic violence against married women perceived by the youth. However, female youth were able to recognise this more than the male. The study reveals that as the level of education among the respondents increased, their awareness of the gravity of domestic violence did not increase. It is important to note that more than one-third of the respondents did not perceive domestic violence against women as gender-based violence, while more than half of the respondents, primarily female respondents, acknowledged that the effects of domestic violence are more severe on women than on men. Although domestic violence as a human rights issue was identified and acknowledged by most of the respondents, it is important to note that for more than half of the respondents, one incident of domestic violence was not perceived as violence at all. Moreover,

the study reveals that a quarter percent of the respondents felt that the wife should not be allowed to have the same amount of freedom as her husband.

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LGBTQ POLITICS OF EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION: A HUMAN RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Sangeeta Krishna¹

Abstract

Over the last few decades homosexuality has drawn global attention from the human rights perspective of the LGBT. The LGBT community is different with regard to almost every trait other than sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. The existing strong grounding of socio - cultural and ethical orientation/norms have made the LGBT a stigmatized community. Even though LGBT rights have advanced significantly in recent years, stigma and discrimination still exist worldwide, and many LGBT individuals are still hesitant to disclose their identity to others. Social stigma driven by homophobia and discriminatory laws augment the exclusion of LGBT people by not only denying them from equal access to employment, health care, education and housing but perpetuating inequality and deprivation in society pushing them on the margins too. Their struggle is to find a space in society where gender non-conformity is not being condemned as abnormal. Adding to their woes was Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalized homosexuality.. The LGBT community has not yet been granted the right to marriage and adoption, nor has it been fully assimilated into society. Overcoming 'exclusion' constitute the most basic precondition for the building of a democratic or inclusive society. Furthermore, in order to address their helplessness, their political demands might be better understood as requests for acknowledgment intended to rectify or amend cultural inequalities. In India, academic institutions, businesses, schools, and colleges have yet to promote conversations about sexuality and raise awareness among employees about discrimination against members of this community.

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Theoretically most educated support alternative sexualities and gender identities however the ground realities and everyday experiences are different. The duality of theory and ground realities should be appropriately debated. The present paper, approached from a non doctrinal/ socio-legal perspective, analyses some of the theoretical underpinnings which highlight the contemporary status of LGBT in Indian society and suggest imperatives of inclusion to deal with their exclusion.

Keywords: LGBT, Social Exclusion, Human Rights and Inclusive Imperatives.

Rule of Heteronormativity & LGBT

*We are Human, We are Human
No matter What Gender or Sexual Orientation
Born with the same flesh
Same blood & same external features
On this queer Earth
Seen differently within social order
Where rules the hetero normativity
And where treatment is discriminatory
Why this queer normative society
Considers our biology wrong
Why I am being treated that I committed a wrong
Without any fault of Ours.
And deprived of human rights, love & compassion*

*Our Heart pains Our Soul Grieves
Let us hope for an open road to rights
And unweave the page of grief and pain
To engrave/sculpt a map of another world,
Let the Society sing the tune of
Just and compassionate, equal and free.
Let the society accept and understand
Let the world join hands to abandon fear, hate
And social ostracism that prevails among minority groups*

Fight for Equality of Every human being
Sing the song They are Human, They are Human
(Poem composed by author)

Introduction

The above poem speaks of the woes and agonies the LGBTQ community experiences, which finds no space within a hetero-normative social order or perceived majority norms. Perceived gender identity and sexual orientation, despite being innate and out of their control, lead to their discrimination and a wide range of human rights violations. Societal approval of hetero sexual relations has deprived them of a life of dignity and fulfilment. People cannot be diminished, and their identities cannot be disregarded because they are few in number, says an activist who has been fighting for their cause (Iyer, 2018).

A wide range of human rights violations committed against the LGBTQ community has been documented by the UN human rights office. They face violent attacks ranging from aggressive verbal abuse, psychological harassment, physical assault, beatings, torture, kidnapping and targeted killings to discriminatory criminal laws and discriminatory treatment in the family and society.

Article 2 of the UDHR (1948) states the following:

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Further, Article 2 sets out universally fundamental non-discrimination norms (Heinge,2001). Every human being is equally entitled to human rights irrespective of color, race, ethnic origin, nation, religion, language or any other status like age, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation. These rights are indivisible, universal, interconnected, and interdependent,

whether they are economic, social, and cultural rights (such the rights to labor, social security, and education) or civil and political rights (like the right to life, equality before the law, and freedom of speech). In response to the horrors of World War II, human rights were created and expressed in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) starts with the following statement:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the right of every person to life, privacy, health and equality before the law, as well as the right to freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination and violence, including torture. Despite international efforts, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) persons are constantly at risk of persecution and gross violations of their fundamental human rights in a number of countries.

LGBTQ and the National Scenario

Over the last few decades, homosexuality has drawn global attention from the human rights perspective of the LGBTQ. Literature on LGBTQ in India, both ancient to contemporary, is essentially a reflection of a society in transition, struggling with both a conformist present and a rich, flexible past. It uses stories to demand visibility and challenge norms while still overcoming structural and systemic obstacles and ingrained prejudice. Gender fluidity/flexibility and non-normative sexualities are portrayed as normal in Indian texts. From deities with unclear gender identities namely Mahabharata's *Shikhandi* and the *Ardhanareeshwara* Aravan, Harihara, Gadadhara, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Mohini, Vaikuntha Kamalaja, and Bhagiratha to the depiction of homosexuality in the monuments of *Khajuraho*, the criminalizing of homosexuality under Section 377 by the Britishers during the colonial period, exemplifies societal transition. The existing grounding of socio - cultural and *ethical* norms have made the

LGBTQ a stigmatized community. Homosexuality is illegal in many countries, sometimes even punishable by death although it is common that LGBTQ people face social exclusion even where homosexuality is legal. Social stigma driven by homophobia and discriminatory laws augment the exclusion of LGBTQ people by not only denying them equal access to employment, health care, education and housing but pushing them to the margins in social space too. Lack of social acceptance of this community not only generates tension, violence and disruption but also perpetuates inequality and deprivation in society. Their struggle is to find a space in society where gender non-conformity is not being condemned as abnormal. Adding to their woes is Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalizes homosexuality. However, in 2018, the apex court of India took the first step to decriminalize this section which was a great victory for this community. Many same-sex couples in India solemnized their marriages after this decriminalization of homosexuality yet their rights at par with heterosexual couples still remain debatable. This means that the LGBTQ community is yet to receive the right to marriage and adoption¹, and yet to be integrated into the larger framework of society for which they are fighting presently. They argue that despite marriage, they would be deprived of a family life without the right to adoption, guardianship, succession, inheritance and above all, social legitimacy. Many of their problems make them feel isolated, afraid, depressed, excluded and even suicidal. Overcoming 'exclusion' constitutes the most basic precondition for the building of a democratic or inclusive society. Moreover, to deal with their powerlessness, their political claims may be identified as claims for *recognition* aimed at correcting/amending cultural injustices Academic institutions and workplaces in India are yet to encourage discussions on sexuality and sensitize workers against any form of discrimination against the LGBTQ community.

¹What we are asking as queer people in this county is merely that the rights which exist for heterosexual couples be extended to us, nothing more and nothing less'. The Guardian, April, 18 2023 <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/18/indian-government-labels-same-sex-marriage-elitist-as-supreme-court-hearing-begins>, retrieved on April 20, 2023.

It is therefore, important to adopt a more inclusive scope and context of social exclusion, especially when addressing social exclusion of LGBTQ people which cannot be defined strictly in socio-economic terms. Theoretically, most educated support alternative sexualities and gender identities but the ground realities and everyday experiences are different. This duality of theory and ground realities should be appropriately debated. The present paper analyses some of the theoretical underpinnings which highlight their contemporary status in Indian society and suggests imperatives from a human rights perspective for the inclusion of the LGBTQ community. This paper is based on secondary sources obtained from print and online modes. The author has taken a stance that gender orientation or gender identity is all about a social frame of mind.

For the invisible LGBTQ population in India, there are no official demographics but reports from 2012 recorded around 2.5 million homosexual people in India. These figures are only based on individuals who have spoken to the Ministry of Health about belonging to this community. (Kedia, 2018). There may be higher statistics for individuals who have concealed their identity, since a number of homosexual Indians are living in the closet due to fear of discrimination. According BBC News (2012), India has 2.5m gays, government tells supreme court". The Indian government's census process which is the most authentic source of information on demography, literacy, and housing amongst other data, did not officially include transgenders for the first six decades after independence. For the first time, during the census of 2011, an option was given to identify oneself as transgender. As a result, half a million persons (amongst a 1.2 billion populace) identified themselves as transgender. This signaled the official recognition by three states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra, of self-identified transgenders in India (GOI, 2011).

Social Exclusion of LGBTQ

Based on numerous evaluations and research, a critical examination of the problems of the LGBTQ community, shows

that despite some global advancements in visibility and rights, systemic and interpersonal discrimination continues to widen as the LGBTQ community in India constantly experience violence, rejection and discrimination in spheres such as education, employment, healthcare and access to social services (Badgett, 2014).

The LGBTQ population in India has long been denied their genuine identity and representation in the social and cultural spheres of society, and the present paper aims to document their predicament.

The LGBTQ “face significant challenges and biases related to their sexual orientation, starting right from their family members, society and workplaces” (Berik, Rodgers & Seguino, 2009) in a society where the only accepted orientation is heterosexuality and homosexuality is regarded as abnormal.

The idea that only "normal" or "good citizens" should be entitled to full citizenship rights can be reflected in discriminatory practices in the legal system and social institutions. Since "good citizens" are typically heterosexual, it appears that "heterosexuality is a necessary if not sufficient basis for full citizenship"(Phelan, 2001).

LGBTQ :Theoretical Perspectives and Politics of Exclusion

Scholars have provided different theoretical explanations and perspectives on the how and why of victimization of LGBTQ . A few of the theoretical frameworks are discussed here.

Theories on Social Constructionism

Berger and Luckmann (1991) developed the social constructionism theory which argues that identity categories such as gender and sexuality are defined and interpreted by historical process and cultural institutions (Subramaniam,2014). It contends that language, culture, and history, rather than just biology, shape identities and meanings of sexuality and gender. Social constructionism's central claim was that gay behaviors existed

historically before homosexual identities. It was suggested that identities were social constructs that underwent social communication (Foucault,1981).

Gay and Lesbian Studies (GLS)

It was initially a modernist perspective that viewed sexuality and gender as stable identities, but queer theory later critiqued it for essentialism (Gammon, & Isgr,2006). Its main purpose was to combat homophobia and heterosexism while advancing the cause of the gay liberation movement (Abelove, Barale, & Halperin, 1993).

Queer Theory

It opposes fixed identities and binaries (such hetero/homo), viewing gender and sexuality as performative, flexible, and socially created. It is derived from feminism, and post-structuralism. Identity-based theories and discourses can be dismantled using queer theory as a critical lens (Angelides, 2001; Jagose, 1996).

The politics of exclusion of LGBTQ persons on the grounds of gender identities is more political. It implies that in social power structure, hetero-normativity rules the social system pushing homosexuality to the margins. Hetero-sexist socialization – through which they discover that whereas homosexuality results in marginalization and being seen as somewhat less of a person, heterosexuality ensures social inclusion. LGBTQ people frequently fall prey to various forms of discrimination based on age and sexual orientation as well as multifaceted, multilevel mechanisms of social exclusion. Due to their low wages, unemployment, bad health, education, living conditions, gender, religion, ethnic origin, and incapacity to exercise their rights to autonomy and citizenship, these overlapping features of vulnerability suggest that they may face social exclusion. The politics of exclusion has been explained in an elaborate manner by Foucault in his 'The Order of Discourse' (Foucault, 1981).

LGBTQ : An International Scenario

LGBTQ people are exposed to severe discrimination, abuse, torture, and sometimes State-sponsored execution in many societies. While most nations do not consider abuses against LGBTQ people to be violations of human rights, many have laws that punish those who commit such crimes. Laws in nations like Saudi Arabia and Iran call for the execution of "practicing homosexuals" (World Legal Survey,1999). At least 40 countries criminalize same-sex behavior for both men and women, whereas 35 or more countries criminalize it just for men (Ibid). Countries most recently in the news on this issue include Uzbekistan, India, Nigeria, and Saudi Arabia(ICLHRC, 2004 & 2005; Human Rights Watch,2006). Muslim countries are more stringent about criminalizing homosexual activity, as they have declared it as a crime according to both, civil law and *shariat* (the rules governing the practice of Islam). Police abuse of LGBTQ people is common and pervasive in many places, including the United States (Amnesty,2005). Recent notable abuse cases have occurred in Nepal (Human Rights Watch, 2005) Ecuador (Amnesty ,2001) Colombia, (Amnesty 2004) India (PUCL, 2001), Taiwan , Uganda and Zimbabwe (IGHLRC, 2005).

Human rights and LGBTQ issues

Recognition of the existence of LGBTQ and intersex persons serves as the basis of human rights and LGBTQ issues. It is nearly impossible to assert and struggle for the protection and exercise of such people's human rights in a particular nation if their existence is not positively acknowledged. LGBTQ and intersex people must be able to participate and be visible at all public levels in order to be acknowledged as individuals with full human rights in a non-discriminatory manner. LGBTQ individuals themselves must be involved and given the chance to speak in public and throughout decision-making processes in order to have complete accountability.

The violence, prejudice, and societal stigma LGBTQ persons face in every nation are documented in a vast and expanding corpus of

research (Badgett, et al., 2014).

In India, July 2009 came as turning point in the history of transgender rights when Delhi High Court in *Naz Foundation vs Government of Delhi* decriminalized homosexuality allowing consensual sex between two homosexuals above the legal age of 18 years. The Court stated that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was violative of Article 14 (Right to Equality), Article 15 (Prohibition of discrimination) and Article 21 (Protection of life and personal liberty). The judges upholding the spirit of the Constitution stated that criminal law cannot be held captive by the popular misconceptions of who the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgenders and queer are (LGBTQ).

This judgment was appealed against in the Supreme Court in 2013 in the *Suresh Koushal vs. Naz Foundation* case. Suresh Kaushal, an astrologer argued that homosexuality could even pose danger to national security as the soldiers fighting at the borders could be tempted to take male lovers and India might lose a battle because of that. In a regressive order, the Supreme Court set aside the 2009 order asserting that Section 377 affects only a 'miniscule' population in India and the Delhi High Court judgment was legally unsustainable. This was a huge blow to the transgenders who felt emboldened to assert their identities after the 2009 judgment.

In April 2014, the Supreme Court, in a seminal judgment of *National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) vs. Union of India* declared that transgender persons have the right to decide their self-identified gender and the State/Central Government need to legally recognize the gender of their choice- male, female or as third gender. The Supreme Court held that the right to express one's identity in a non-binary gender was an essential part of freedom of expression. The judgment gave directives that all kinds of reservation should be extended to transgenders in educational institutions and for public appointments. Pursuant to the judgment, the third gender category on identity documents such as passport and voter's card has begun to make an appearance.

Exclusion and discrimination have serious impact on the lives of LGBTQ persons which can be traced to early school dropouts, leaving of home and family, being ignored in the community, lack of family support, suicidal attempts

Why has there been so much discourse on the issue/concept of inclusion in contemporary times? In the fast-changing world we are witnessing how moral values are being re-examined with the growing politics of recognition and identity and the response to diversity in a manner that values everyone equally. The national and international directives are for integration, cohesion and inclusion

A social, cultural or ethical lens is required for considering the issue of human rights and equality for LGBTQ people. We cannot think of a socially inclusive society amidst the politics of exclusion. Space for social connectedness, inclusion and integration is possible only where all identities are recognized and valued, where their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met.

Over the last decades the LGBTQ people and other sexual minorities have focused on the intrinsic value of human rights from a social, cultural and ethical perspective. Recognizing these rights represents a commitment to equality for stigmatized groups of people. Enacting these rights to achieve equality means working to end discrimination and violence against LGBTQ people.

The World bank defines social inclusion as 'the process of improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of people, deprived on the basis of their identity, to take part in society'(World Bank, 2013). Therefore, social inclusion is both a process and a goal. In the present article, it has been argued that supporting/promoting social inclusion entails tackling social exclusion by eliminating barriers to people's participation in society, as well as by taking active inclusionary steps to facilitate such participation

The term exclusion captures the structural manifestations of stigma in institutional settings, depriving LGBTQ persons access to equal treatment to participation in diverse social institutions including schools, workplaces, health care systems, the political process, the financial system, the criminal justice system, families, and government programs. Exclusion in terms of LGBTQ persons refers to disadvantages that stem from stigma and discrimination.

Discriminatory Literacy Rates

Heteronormativity being the accepted social norm seems to be institutionalized in schools where transgender students in secondary schools were found facing harassment and discrimination by students and teachers as revealed by the study of a small group of researchers (Nirantar, 2013). One significant initial comparison of the literacy rates for those "using the 'other' gender option" is to be found in the 2011 census. Compared to 74% of the population, just 46% of people who selected the other gender option were literate. The severe and widespread harassment of transgender individuals in educational environments may be the cause of this glaring disparity in literacy.

Discrimination by Legal systems

Legal systems often entrench this marginalization, feed inequality, and perpetuate violence against LGBTQ people because of the societal orientation toward hetero-normative norms. All people are entitled to their basic human rights, and nations are obligated to provide for these under international law, including guarantees of non-discrimination and the right to health (OHCHR, 1976). However, LGBTQ people are rarely assured of such protection under these State obligations.

Discrimination in Employment/Workplace

Discrimination and unfair market labor outcomes are present for male, female, and transgender LGBTQ individuals in a variety of economic circumstances. According to the 2011 Indian population census, 38% of respondents of the third gender are employed, compared to 46% of the general population (Nagarajan, 2014).

In a 2013 survey of college educated, white collar LGBTQ workers in India, 56 % said they have encountered prejudice at work because of their sexual orientation (Hewlett et al. ,2013). Research on LGBTQ people in the workplace shows that they are marginalized and barred from gainful employment. Discrimination against them occurs at every stage of the employment process, including hiring, training, benefits, and career advancement. (Suriyasaran, 2014). Such environment discourages the trans-people to apply for jobs, increases pessimism with internalized trans-phobia. Due to these severe employment restrictions, LGBTQ persons are forced into occupations with little room for advancement, like beauticians, performers, or sex workers and as a result of these (Baral et al. , 2011) they are forced into the cycle of poverty and homelessness by unemployment and low-paying or high-risk, precarious employment. LGBTQ people in India may use self-employment or informal labor as tactics to avoid stigma and prejudice in formal sector workplaces.

Health Disparities

Sexual and gender minorities in India also experience the same health issues as the general population. However, in addition to the usual difficulties, LGBTQ individuals experience extra physical and mental health problems that have been reported in India and other countries. The health of LGBTQ individuals may be impacted by minority stress² (Meyer ,2003) various forms of stigma, and exclusion in other significant social and economic contexts. Their families' rejection reduces potential resources and causes conflict. The situation for LGBTQ people can be improved by family support. Families sometimes accept LGBTQ children, and that support might reduce the damage of social exclusion, although supportive families might not be common (Vanita, 2009).

²It is a conceptual framework that focuses on the psychological effects of LGBT people's disadvantageous status, whether on a large scale, such as unfair treatment in legal and/or economic institutions, or on a smaller scale, such as the stigma that LGBTQ persons face in daily interactions and micro-aggressions.

LGBTQ people are socially vulnerable throughout their lives due to such hostile and excluding circumstances.

The fight and struggle of LGBTQ is for a wider space. They are entangled between the constitutional commitment of right to equality (Article 15) and the social acceptability of heteronormativity. Their human rights are considered from a socio-cultural and ethical lens which stand for heteronormativity and heterosexuality.

Success Stories and Impacts:

Suspected, ostracized, stigmatized and criminalized for ages, LGBTQ, the sexual minorities are now stepping out from the shadow of invisibility. There are stories and initiatives of many LGBTQ people in India who have succeeded greatly in a variety of sectors, including activism, business, the arts, and sports, frequently overcoming social prejudice and legal obstacles. To name a few like, Dutee Chand, a professional sprinter, Keshav Suri an executive director of The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group and Ashish Chopra, Founder of BeUnic, an e-marketplace instrumental in empowering over 27 other queer entrepreneurs, Padmini Prakash, India's first transgender news anchor in Tamil Nadu Sushant Divgikar a popular singer, musician, and drag artist who uses his platform to spread awareness, Rudraksh, a successful designer, gender-free, inclusive fashion brand, Akkai Padmashali, a prominent human rights activist and the first transgender woman to register her marriage in India, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, a well-known transgender rights activist, dancer, and actor representing at the United Nations in 2007, Gauri Sawant an activist and social worker, Madhu Bai Kinnar, India's first Dalit transgender mayor of Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, K. Prithika Yashini who made history by becoming India's first transgender police officer. They and their efforts represent significant strides toward visibility, acceptance, and empowerment for the LGBTQ community in India.

Intervention Models and Inclusionary Policy /Strategies

From the human rights perspective inclusion of LGBTQ people is

very crucial for development. It is like leaving no one behind in the development process. “Social inclusion matters because exclusion is too costly,” as a recent World Bank report concludes (World Bank ,2013). Keeping them out of markets, services, and spaces cost individuals, society and the nation too. Inclusion serves as the foundation for shared prosperity.

Given the standards that, by international law, States are required to offer to all human beings, some actions are necessary in order to address the human rights obstacles that trans individuals face. In order to effectively address the systematic marginalization that LGBTQ people endure, it is imperative to pay attention to these.

LGBTQ people must be guaranteed a number of rights that others take for granted in order to be acknowledged as human beings. Regardless of the sex assigned to them at birth—male, female, or a category that does not fit within the male–female binary—acknowledging the gender component of LGBTQ involves recognizing that person's ability to be identified. The 'third' gender usually has been stated by many traditionally existing trans- communities, the *hijras* in India.

Research studies conducted by TISS and legal policy groups with focus on explicit anti-discrimination measures, visible support systems, comprehensive education and training, have suggested effective intervention models and policies for LGBTQ persons in India. This includes several aspects ranging from legal changes such as rights for same-sex couples, the Transgender Act, Health initiatives like NACO TIs, Trans Affirmative Mental Health Guidelines, SMILE scheme for livelihood/welfare, and Ayushman Bharat TG Plus, to social programs like Garima Greh shelters of NGOs with government support, focusing on rights, healthcare, and inclusion. The outcome of all such efforts have aimed at formulating strategies to fight against the exclusionary approach towards the LGBTQ community which are discussed below.

Minimizing violence and discrimination

Systemic measures to reduce violence against transgender persons must be implemented at multiple levels, including holding offenders accountable, promoting legislative and regulatory changes that end criminality, raising public awareness of transgender issues and concerns. Increasing trans-collectives' and organizations' ability to assert their rights can also help combat violence's impunity. Several initiatives like free registration of lands and ration cards, free health insurance, scholarships for school and higher education, pension schemes, so on and so forth, have been initiated by States like Karnataka , Orissa Chhattisgarh & Tamil Nadu.

The Right to Health

Ensuring the right to health for LGBT people is greatly needed. It can only be assured if health services are provided in a non-stigmatizing, non-discriminatory, and informed environment. Stakeholders related to the healthcare sector should be properly educated and trained about gender identity and orientation. Zero tolerance policy or approach should be adopted for any kind of exclusion related to these people. Some examples of societal bias and prejudice include offensive remarks, provider confidentiality violations, and service denials based on gender identity or HIV status. All people have the right to be free from discriminatory treatment under international law, and this right must be carefully upheld to shield them from any abuse. Participants in interventions such as the SAAHAS model (developing self-worth, coping skills) report more resilience and improved abilities to deal with difficulties in social and personal contexts.

Right to Work and Employment

The right to an inclusive workplace is as important as having employment opportunities and job security for the LGBTQ community. Everyone can reach their full potential in an inclusive atmosphere if there is no discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation, no obstacles to their career, respect, equality, and the freedom to express themselves. As a step toward an

inclusive workforce, the Kochi Metro Rail Corporation is the first government-owned business to hire transgender employees. The Corporation even set an example with all gender restrooms (Ghoshal, 2017). In addition, gender-neutral restrooms have been adopted by companies like Mphasis in India, encouraging a more inclusive infrastructure. Further, LGBTQ employees feel empowered and think they can advance within the organization when they witness LGBTQ coworkers in top roles. Visibility and role modeling promotes empathy and dispels myths. The economy may benefit from legislation that acknowledges LGBTQ people's rights to participate in the marketplace, in families, and in significant organizations. Enhancing public perceptions of LGBTQ individuals will also benefit the economy, either on its own or in conjunction with legal rights. Moreover, if appropriately included in the programmes and policies designed for economic development, the community can serve as human capital.

Right to Education

Recognising their right to education with their existing identity, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued a circular to all the Vice Chancellors of the Universities in October 2014, for including a column for the transgender community in all applications forms '*so as to accelerate the realization of their human rights and mainstream the entire community which has been terribly marginalized over centuries*'(UGC,2014). It gave instructions on affirmative action measures that universities should take to ensure that transgender students are acclimatized without experiencing humiliation, fear, stigma, or shame. It also mentioned the inclusion of clauses such as building infrastructure that is transgender-friendly, organizing sensitization programs, and promoting research on transgender issues and their solutions Further, UGC as per Government of India guidelines, amended the guidelines of Gender Champions including transgender as Third Gender. (Govt. of India, 2016) After incorporation of the term '*third gender*' some noticeable and positive changes were witnessed. In Maharashtra Common Entrance Test of MBA 2017, out of 363413 applicants, 9000 applicants belonged to *Other*

gender which implied Third Gender. The column of **Others**, other than male and female were incorporated in the form specifically.

The journey of the LGBTQ community is essentially defined by a deep conflict between exclusion and the desire for inclusion. The irony is that despite formulation of several policies in India, its poor implementation slurs the intention. The ugly reality is that there have not been many inclusionary methods for the transgender population in the past. Individual community members or a small number of civil society organizations that support the cause take up the fight for rights. Systemic measures to lessen violence against LGBTQ individuals must be implemented at several levels, including holding offenders accountable, promoting legislative and regulatory changes that eliminate crime, and engaging in general advocacy to raise awareness of LGBTQ issues and concerns among the Public. Sustainable and equitable development depends on putting an end to social exclusion and human rights abuses. While there are instances of this community's human rights advancement, most of it is weak, isolated, and non-systemic. People who identify as LGBTQ still live in severely hostile environments.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above analysis it can be observed that exclusion and discrimination towards LGBTQ persons in India persist. However, effective intervention models and policies focus on explicit inclusive, anti-discrimination measures. Affirming mental health intervention, providing safe physical spaces, visible support systems and comprehensive education and training by the government and non-governmental organizations, have been instrumental in bringing better all-round results.

The environment that LGBTQ people frequently find intolerable to navigate is gradually changing because of individual efforts, Corporate LGBTQ inclusion, and civil society activism. The most significant obstacle is the narrow mindset and social opposition to integrating LGBTQ people into everyday life. Although the

majority of educated people welcome different gender identities and sexual orientations in theory, the reality on the ground speaks a different story. Organizing more seminars, sensitization and orientation programmes as well as creation of a supportive and inclusive environment to develop a human right perspective for the LGBTQ community will facilitate the process of inclusion and integration. The need is to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and everyday experiences of socio- cultural reality so that LGBTQ people are viewed as an essential part of society.

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The Journal welcomes articles, reports of research studies, field experiences and academic papers related to Social Work, Social Change, Social Research, Social Psychology, Social Policy and current topics having a bearing on Social Work Theory and Practice. Manuscripts are selected on the basis of relevance to Social Work education and practice, sound treatment of subject, clarity in presentation, methodology of research articles, implications for intervention, appropriateness of references, correct language and evidence of a high level of scholarship.

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Each article should be accompanied with a declaration by the authors stating that the article is original and has not been earlier published nor been submitted for publication elsewhere. If the article has already been published, then permission from the publishers for republishing has to be enclosed along with the manuscript.

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- All parts of the manuscript should be typewritten in MS Word typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, with margins of at least one inch on all sides. The pages should be numbered serially.
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- Tables, figures, graphs and diagrams (illustrations) should not be embedded in the text. Place tables and figures after the References section and indicate preferred placement point in the body of the manuscript such as "<Insert Table 1 here>".
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The review of the manuscript will be blind and impartial. Manuscripts are reviewed by the Editorial Board and peer-reviewers. Accepted manuscripts may be revised for clarity, organization and length. The article will be sent to authors via e-mail for correction and should be returned **within seven days** of receipt. Corrections and editing as suggested by the Editorial Board and peer-reviewers should be undertaken by the author and is not the responsibility of the publisher. The decision of the Editorial Board will be final and binding.

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The book under review should have been published in the **last two years** and should have direct relevance to the field of social work.

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The book review can include the following aspects.

- Title of the book (underlined/italicized), edition, name(s) of the author(s)/editor(s), year of publication and name of publisher (separated by a colon), ISBN number, Format (hardcover/soft cover), number of pages and price of the book.
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- A catchy quip/anecdote that succinctly delivers the reviewer's perspective/viewpoint/argument
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The Book reviews are scheduled by the Editorial Team of Perspectives as per the quality of the review and contemporary issues. Priority will be given to invited book reviews. Every book reviewer gets a complimentary copy of the journal issue in which their review gets published.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARTICLES

I. Writing an Article based on a Research Paper/Reports.

This is an article based on an original research project/study, involving information from primary data sources. Such an article contains the following sections:

- Introduction
 - Description of the subject
 - Critical Summary of available information
 - Background of the research
 - Problem identification / analysis
 - Research questions
 - Rationale for the study
- Methodology
 - Aims of the research
 - Research design
 - Variables
 - Operational definitions
 - Sampling strategy
 - Description of the tools of the data collection
 - Techniques for analysis
 - Limitations of the study, if any
- Discussion:
 - Results of the study: This should include a summarized description of the statistical figures and techniques as well as a concise note on the key findings which could be descriptive or numeric
 - Interpretation of the data in terms of:
 - Validation of the hypothesis
 - Corroboration with cited literature
- Conclusion and recommendations:

This section should include the following

- Recommendations to improve/remedy the situation
- Implication for the future research and field practice

II. Writing an Academic Article

This article is based on information from secondary data sources. It generally seeks to raise new issues or examine existing issues from a new perspective. It can also be used for theory building. It should contain the following sections:

- Introduction:
 - Description of the background and importance of the subject under consideration

- Statement of purpose
- Rationale for the article
- Discussion:
 - Critical review of literature

- Gaps in knowledge/services and emerging area addressed:
 - Intervention methods
- Conclusion:
 - Summary of key points
 - Recommendations

III. Writing an Article based on Field Experiences

This article stems from the experiences of the author. It focuses on a specific issue / problem / project / program that is within the purview of the author's professional practice and is descriptive in nature. It provides details of how the author dealt with the specific issue / problem or implemented the program / project under consideration. An overview of such an article is given below.

- Introduction:
 - Description of the subject under consideration
 - Critical review of relevant literature
 - Problem identification/analysis
 - Rationale for intervention
- Discussion:
 - Details of the problem/issue/program/project under consideration
 - Action plan to improve/remedy the situation
 - Details of implementation of the action plan
 - Critical assessment of effectiveness of intervention
 - Learning in relation to existing theory
 - Limitations and suggested modifications
- Conclusion:
 - Summary of key points
 - Suggestions for future work

Submissions that do not conform to the above guidelines will be returned for modifications before entering the review process.



N.A.A.C 'A' ACCREDITED
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