In order to understand the phenomenon of domestic violence in great detail, it has to be explained with the help of a theoretical framework. Various scholars have propounded different theories in order to explain domestic violence. Gelles, (1993) provides a description of these frameworks:

“Theoretical frameworks define where we should look if we want to make sense of violence and hence where we should intervene if we want to stop it. The psychological, sociological, feminist frameworks are competing ways to conceptualize the behaviours involved in family violence; each viewpoint provides a way to place the phenomenon of violence in a larger frame of meaning”\(^1\).

A theoretical framework comprises of theories that are formulated to explain, predict, and understand a phenomena and, in many cases, to challenge and extend existing knowledge, within the limits of the critical bounding assumptions. The theoretical framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study. This chapter offers a comprehensive review of a number of theories that attempt to explain violence within intimate relationships.

2.1 Social Learning Theory

Before discussing the social learning theory, concept of socialization will be discussed. Socialization is a learning process that begins shortly after birth. Through socialization both genders learn what is right and wrong for both, and degrees of different expectations as a part of learning their gender identity and sex roles. The individuals have an impact of the culture in which they live and they learn social behaviour by observing and should be imitating other people\(^2\). Some scholars believe that there is a connection between violence in a person’s family or community of

Theoretical Perspective of Domestic Violence

origin and later spousal victimization\(^3\). Children who grow up with violence in the home learn early and imbibe powerful lessons about the use of violence in interpersonal relationships to control others, and may be encouraged to follow\(^4\). Moreover, women are socialized to give priority to family roles, hence, their work related behaviour is also affected. They are also taught to take major responsibilities for the success or failure of their relationship with men.

Social learning theorists believe that the behaviour of a person is shaped by observing well-known others in early childhood\(^5\). Thus, early life experiences of a child are believed to shape the child’s basic personality, which later forms their future violent adult relationships\(^6\). Social learning theory applied to marital violence centers on the parent - child relationship and the experiences the child undergoes within that arrangement which impacts behaviour in adulthood\(^7\). Boys who witness their fathers beating their mothers are more likely to batter their own spouses\(^8\) and girls who witness their father beating mother and her mother silently accepting all the violence instills in her a sense of subordination, submissiveness, and subservience that results in her playing an inferior role in society\(^9\). Rahmatian, (2009) in his study revealed that domestic violence occurs at a higher rate in intimate relationships where either the victim or the offender has been exposed to prior domestic violence, as opposed to those that have not been exposed. Of the male offenders, 48 percent reported that a

---


8 Supra 2.

family member had previously engaged in domestic violence, while 67 percent female victims indicated the above formal abuse. Of the offenders group 72 percent indicated the first exposure as a juvenile and 28 percent as an adult, while 45 percent of the victims reported their first experience as a witness and 55 percent as a victim. This study supports the social learning theory.\(^\text{10}\)

Social learning theory attempts to explain the presence of intergenerational transmission of violence. It is proposed that, while growing up, children receive response from others about their own behaviours, from which they begin to develop standards for judging their behaviour and seek out models who match these standards.\(^\text{11}\) Finally, researchers have found that children who observed and experienced abuse were more likely to be in an abusive intimate relationship as either an abuser or victim after marriage.\(^\text{12}\).

### 2.2 FEMINIST THEORY

Feminist theories provide the basis and justification for the existence of domestic violence throughout history. Feminism focuses primarily on the concept of the patriarchal nature of society; a system of male supremacy which highlights man’s possession of power.

Feminists never make use of the terms such as “Conjugal violence”, “Spousal Violence”, “Marital Violence”, and “Family Violence” because they consider that these terms shift the focus away from the concept of male coercion and woman. Rather, they advocate terms such as “Wife Beating”, “Domestic Violence”, “Battered Woman”, and “Woman abuse” because they more accurately depict the phenomenon

---


of domestic violence. By defining domestic violence in this manner, the victim is clearly the woman\textsuperscript{13}.

At the center of feminist explanations is the view that all violence is a reflection of unequal power relationships of men and women in society and also, therefore, within their personal relationship\textsuperscript{14}. The main factors that contribute to violence against women include the historically male-dominated social structure and social practice teaching men and women gender-specific roles\textsuperscript{15}. The main roles of men are expected to encompass work outside the house in order to support their families economically. Women’s roles, though tend to include domestic labour in domestic field such as doing household work, preparing food, taking care of children, and serving the husband, etc. Feminists attribute the pervasiveness of violence against women to institutionalized sexism—cultural norms and expectations that accept women as “legitimate victims” of male violence. In general, cultural norms and expectations prescribe and proscribe the rights and responsibilities (i.e., the roles) of all people in a particular social status or category. They are learnt and transmitted from one generation to the next in the home, workplace, and in peer groups. In most societies, norms related to gender and violence support female subordination and justify male violence\textsuperscript{16}. Society expects men to be ‘head of the household’ in terms of earning and controlling the family income, directing decisions and authority. By societal support of these attitudes the use of violent behaviour to control women in relationships is legitimized\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{17} Supra 1.
Theoretical Perspective of Domestic Violence

Feminist explanations of violence also focus on the relationship between this cultural ideology of male dominance and structural forces that limit women’s access to resources. Violence against women, consequently, is a result of the inferior position women occupy in the social structure, and this position is the cultural inheritance of the traditional family. Researchers working from the feminist perspective suggest that marital violence stems from inequalities in marriage relationships.

2.3 ECOLOGICAL THEORY

The ecological framework is based on the evidence that not a single factor can explain why some people or groups are at higher risk of IPV, while others are more protected from it. Ecological theory seeks to better understand the “influence of external environments on the functioning of families as contexts of human development.” It is used to explain or understand individual instances of spousal abuse as well as domestic violence as a social problem. It is also very useful in helping to explain the cyclical nature of family violence both within a particular family and across generations. The ecological framework given by Bronfenbrenner was revised by Jay Belsky, who incorporated an additional level, the notion of individual history or background, a kind of internal environment. This framework views IPV as the result of interaction among many factors at four levels—the individual, the relationship, the community, and the societal. The same is depicted schematically in figure 2.1.

---

This ecological theory for domestic violence argues that no one issue alone causes violence, rather a, number of reasons combine to raise the probability that a specific man in a specific setting may act violently towards a woman. This model breaks influencing factors down into four categories: The innermost circle of the ecological framework represents the biological and personal history that each individual brings to his or her behaviour in relationships. Each individual has his/her own personal beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. An individual may also be influenced by demographic characteristics such as age, income and education. Protective factors could include high self esteem, tolerance and good conflict resolution skills. Risk factors could include low self esteem, childhood history of sexual or physical violence and substance abuse. The second circle represents the immediate situation in which violence takes place – frequently the family or acquaintance relationship. The third circle represents the institutions and social structures, both formal and informal,
in which relationships are embedded—neighbourhood, workplace, social networks, and peer groups. The fourth, outermost circle is the economic and social environment, including cultural norms.

It embraces individual and social factors as well as male dominance, saying:

“No single factor explains why one person and not another behaves in a violent manner. Violence is a complex problem rooted in the interaction of many factors—biological, social, cultural, economic and political,”

In ecological framework, social and cultural norms such as those that assert men’s inherent domination over women combine with individual-level factors such as whether a man was abused himself as a child to determine the likelihood of abuse. The more risk factors present, the higher the likelihood of violence.

2.4 FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORIES

The family system theorists view the family as a dynamic organization of interdependent components. The behaviour of one member of the family, and the probability of a reoccurrence of that behaviour, is affected by the responses and feedback of other family members. The family system theory is based on the idea that each individual should be viewed not in isolation, but in terms of interactions, transitions, and relationships within the family. It assumes that violence within the family is a result of a system rather than individual pathology of the family member. The theory asserts that domestic violence is rooted in the dynamics that both parties participate in creating, and therefore see the abuse as a “relationship problem”. For example, family members spend a great deal of time with each other is, they know

each member’s vulnerabilities, membership is not voluntary and family matters are generally private and therefore there is a lack of social control of behaviour within the family. All these characteristics serve to cloak or hide violence in the family. Straus, (1990c) suggests a number of characteristics unique to the family that make it prone to violence. For example, he argues that families legitimate violence by using corporal punishment and accepting violence as one solution to family conflict. The families provide basic training in the use of violence through physical punishment, thus creating a link between love and violence. The domestic violence is rooted in the faulty interactions of a couple and family system, and that an individual’s abusive behaviour cannot be addressed without understanding the situation, characteristics, and dynamics of the familial relationships. Moreover, it is important to remember that the family system is a subsystem of a larger system of community, which interact with and influence one another and contribute to the maintenance of particular patterns of behaviour.

According to this theory, both partners may put into the intensification of conflict between them. Theorist believes that most of the abuse is verbal or emotional, but as the differences increase, either partner may have recourse to physical violence, no one is considered to be the abuser or abused, even if only one person is physically violent.

---

26 Supra 18.
2.5 RESOURCE THEORY

The resource theory argues that the family members with more power or aggregate value of resources (e.g. money, property, prestige, strength) in society, traditionally the male, command higher power in the married and family relationships than other members, namely, women and children who are in subordinate and vulnerable position\(^{28}\). Goode conceptualizes violence as a resource much like material resource. He argues that husbands command more force within families than other members do and that husbands with the most material resources assure obedience and compliance. Violence or the threat of violence, serves as an alternative to material resources as a power base\(^{29}\). Anderson, (1997) indicates that husbands who did not possess clear resource superiority over their wives tended to use violence to maintain their power in the family more than husbands who possessed such resource superiority. Therefore this theory leads to the prediction that husbands with lower social class, status would be more likely than husbands with higher class status to use violence\(^{30}\).

Resource theory is supported by many studies which indicate that men with lower level of income, prestige and education are more likely to abuse their wives\(^{31}\).

---


(b) Supra 29.
2.6 LEARNED HELPLESSNESS THEORY

The theory of learned helplessness was conceptualized and developed by American psychologist Martin E.P. Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania in the late 1960s and ’70s. Seligman, while studying depression in experiments with dogs, discovered that sometimes dogs would “learn” that their behaviour did not bring about the expected or desired outcome in situations where barriers (electric shock) were present. As a result, the dogs would stop participating within the behaviour even once the barriers were removed. Much like the dogs that “learned” to be helpless after being subjected to electric shocks with no ability to escape, battered women may fall into the same pattern. Learned helplessness theory implies that feelings and perceptions of helplessness may be learned from childhood experiences of uncontrollability. Childhood experiences that may increase a sense of helplessness may comprise large family size, lack of affection, and family violence. This theory states that susceptibility to being a victim is a socially learned behaviour that often begins in the family of origin. Walker maintained that learned helplessness occurs in domestic violence situation when abused women are not assured of their own safety because regardless of their own efforts, they face the batters’ unpredictable, abusive behaviour. Over time, as the violent incidents increase, women begin to live in a steady state of terror, believing that there is no run off from their situation. This fear is typically reinforced by the batterers’ threats that if they attempt to leave or seek help, he will subject them to even greater abuse or kill them and their children. The beatings leave them with a diminished capacity to control events that go on around them. This theory explains why women stay in relationships in which they are being beaten for long periods of time.

35 Supra 6.
36 Ibid.
2.7 CYCLE OF VIOLENCE THEORY

The theory that domestic violence occurs in a cycle was developed in 1979 by Lenore Walker. This theory is based on the opinion that women are not always being battered, and their decision to stay in a violent relationship is attributed to alternating fluctuations between periods of abuse and relative peaceful occurrences. The theory also explains how women become victimized, how they fall into “learned helplessness” behaviour, and why they do not attempt to escape\(^37\). The cycle theory of violence comprises three phases - the tension building stage; the acute battering incident; and kindness and apologetic loving behaviour.

In phase one, the abuser is aggressive; angry; shouts out; criticizes; and uses coarse language and angry gestures. Sometimes the abuser will use constraints, threats or small fights may occur. The tension between the couple increases, and the victim fears that the abuse could occur at any moment. Victim during this phase sometimes says they feel like they are walking on eggshells. As the tension builds, the victim becomes more submissive and he, more repressive. She blames herself for all, and her lack of capability to control the episode, makes her feel quite powerless. The tension reaches a stage where it is intolerable.

In phase two when the tension peaks, physical violence starts. It is usually provoked by the presence of an outside event or by the abuser’s emotional state-but not by the sufferer’s behaviour. This means the start of the battering incident is unpredictable and beyond victim’s control. However, some experts consider that in some cases victims may unintentionally aggravate the abuse so they can release the tension, and move on to the honeymoon phase and in third phase where the perpetrator is embarrassed of his behaviour. He expresses regret, tries to reduce the

---

\(^37\) Ibid.
abuse and might even blame it on the partner. He may then show loving, kind behaviour followed by apologies, kindness and helpfulness. He will truthfully try to convince the partner that the violence will not happen again. This loving and apologetic behaviour strengthens the relationship between the partners and will probably convince the sufferer, once again, that leaving the relationship is not needed. This cycle continues again and again, and could help to explain why victims stay in abusive relationships. The abuse may be horrible, but the promises and kindness of the honeymoon phase gives the sufferer the false belief that everything will be all right.

2.8 POWER AND CONTROL THEORY

Power and control theory is based on the concept that many family conflicts result from an individual’s need to obtain and maintain power and control within a relationship. The motivation behind the abuser’s behaviour is the power and control that she/he is able to exercise over other members of the family. Power-control theorists further assume that households within which mothers and fathers have different levels of power in the work place, so-called "unbalanced households," are more “patriarchal” in their attitudes regarding gender roles and parents place greater levels of control upon daughters than upon sons. Thus, in unbalanced households the theory predicts major gender differences in deviant behaviour, with male children being more likely than females to engage in deviant acts. The Power and Control Wheel, that was developed in Duluth, Minnesota, is an excellent tool for assisting people to understand what the signs of domestic violence are. The more powerful

---

members of the family like father, parents and husband, more often are the use of threats or violence to obtain compliance from less powerful members of the family. The "Power and Control Wheel" below shows that Power and Control are at the center of an abusive relationship. In other words, abuse is when there is a pattern of one person trying to gain power and control over the other. One of the most obvious or deliberate ways to control another person is by using many form of intimations, such as coercion, isolation, economic abuse, emotional abuse and denial of personal blame.

**Figure: 2.2 Power and Control Wheel**

![Power and Control Wheel](http://www.advocates-oz.org/youth/pandcwheel.htm)

**Source:** Power & control and equality wheel Unhealthy Relationships - Power & Control Wheel [http://www.advocates-oz.org/youth/pandcwheel.htm](http://www.advocates-oz.org/youth/pandcwheel.htm) 27/3/2014

The victims of violence learn how to respond to various forms of intimidation, although the struggle to challenge the abuser may become too dangerous for the abused one. As a result the abused may begin to modify his/her behaviour in order to survive and avoid continued abuse⁴¹.

⁴¹ Supra 38.
2.9 SURVIVORS THEORY

As opposed to the cycle theory and in sharp contrast to the learned helplessness, E.W Gondolf and E.R Fisher proposed the Survivor Theory in 1988, which views women not merely as passive victims but proactive help-seekers and survivors. According to Gondolf & Fisher, victims increase their help seeking as the physical violence and danger to themselves and their children increases. Further, a number of qualitative and quantitative studies have given rise to a stage model, whereby IPV survivors progress from more private attempts to deal with abuse (e.g., placating and resisting) to informal support-seeking (e.g., from family and friends), and as violence worsens, to more public help-seeking (e.g., from legal system or community agencies). This theory asserts that “in-fact” abused women continuously engage in effort to survive conditions in which they live by seeking help, persisting through adversity and adaptation as survival mechanism for themselves and their children. The survivor theory offers further insight into battered women’s help-seeking pattern by showing that the majority of women make extremely self-confident efforts to stop the abuse. This model implies more of a “system failure” than a failure on the part of the battered women, since it seems that battered women, instead of staying passive in violent relationships, have contacted a multiplicity of helping sources in response to the violence.

---


2.10 INVESTMENT THEORY

The Investment Model based on exchange theory describes a cost/benefit analysis in making commitment decisions. These commitment decisions are based on comparing rewards and costs for the current relationship against the estimated benefits and costs for alternative relationships. The Investment Model theorizes that women involved in violent relationships, like all individuals, become committed to relationships to the extent that important needs, such as financial security and intimacy, cannot be met successfully without them. Investment Model’s strength lies in its emphasis on commitment, which is theorized to be a key concept and serious precursor to predicting and understanding stay/leave decisions. The Investment Model states that women’s feelings of commitment (COM) are the sum of the factors that influence the relationship dependence (i.e., Satisfaction, Alternative, Investment) and the mediator between those factors and women’s stay/leave decisions. The overall model is represented by the following equation: COM = SAT – ALT + INV. Thus, battered women who feel relatively satisfied, possess lower quality alternatives, and have more invested in the relationship, tend to feel more strongly committed and more often choose to remain in their violent relationships. For example, a married woman may have spent a huge time, energy, and money trying to make her marriage work. Although she continues to feel unhappy with the status of her relationship, she may continue to invest more time and energy into the marriage in order to justify her previous expenses. Hence, the woman has invested too much into the relationship to quit. Based on this theory of commitment, a victim of intimate partner violence...

---


would be most likely to leave the relationship when there was low relationship satisfaction, small investment into the relationship, and plentiful, rewarding alternatives available.

2.11 DEPENDENCY RELATIONS THEORY

The Dependency Relation Theory is based on the concept that victims of abuse are dependent on their abuser (not true in all situations). The rate of dependency in domestic violence is very high in abused children, elders, and spouse. The children remain dependent on their abusers because they tend to be smaller and weaker than adults and are unable to escape from an abusive family or support themselves. This theory also asserts that violence against an aging parent results from stress, especially as the elder’s incapacity escalates. Wolf concluded in his report, after he surveyed the records of reports of abuse of three agencies, that there is a “web of mutual dependency” between abused and abuser.

Traditional sex roles socialization teaches young girls to be passive and dependent. Therefore, a woman married to an abusive spouse will to some degree have a sense of moral and legal dependency on that relationship. The sense of dependence can be further aggravated by the length of relationship between the abused woman and the abuser: the longer the relationship the more dependent the woman can be expected to be. Children are yet another factor that may add to the sense of dependency in an abusive relationship. As women have been taught to be nurturers and protectors of their children, an abused woman will often “sacrifice” themselves to protect the children, and will choose to stay in the relationship in a

48 Supra 11.
protector role rather than leave with the children. Economic dependency has been found to contribute to women being trapped in an abusive relationship. The greater the difference in income between the domestic partners, the greater the economic dependency of the less well-off person. Maltreated wives may have little or no income of their own and thus may believe that they would not be able to support themselves or their children if they were to leave the abusive relationship.

2.12 STRUCTURAL THEORY

The Structural Approach to violence also begins with the assumption that deviance is inconsistently distributed in the social structure, with violence being more common amongst those occupying a lower socio-economic position. Elements of the structural environment—particularly age, race, cohabitation, and educational and income resources are associated with domestic violence. Gender interacts with structures of race, marital status, and socio-economic status to influence power within relationships and propensities for domestic violence. The domestic violence is rooted in gender and power and represents men's active attempts to maintain dominance and control over women. According to Mishra, (2007) social group differs in respect to typical levels of stress, strain, deprivation and frustration and uses all the resources to deal with these stresses. Those individuals who combine stress with low resources are more violent. The possible sources of stress are economic conditions, bad housing, poverty, lack of opportunities and unfavorable and frustrating work

54 Gelles, R. J., & Straus, M. A. (1979), Determinants of Violence in the Family: Toward a Theoretical Integration
55 Supra 30.
Theoretical Perspective of Domestic Violence

conditions. Jewkes’ (2002) review of the relationship between domestic violence and poverty found that there is a strong positive correlation between poverty and rates of violence, and that this relationship may be mediated through stress or a crisis in male role identity. Straus et al. (1980) maintains that individuals from low income groups, for example, may be more vulnerable to domestic violence since such environments produce economic instability, which has been identified as a high marker of violence.

2.13 PSYCHOPATHOLOGY THEORY

When the women’s movement began in the U.S in the early 1970s, the existing theory of why men abuse their wives was based on psychopathology. This model focuses on the personality characteristics of offenders and victims as chief determinants of criminal violence. According to this theory, individuals are violent or abusive because of some internal abnormality, or defective characteristics. These characteristics include insufficient self-control, sadism, psychopathic personality types, and undifferentiated types of mental illness. Schumacher et al. (2001) said that some type of psychopathology have been found to be more common in domestic violence perpetrators compared to other men, including bipolar disorder, thought disorder, psychotic thinking, hysteria, paranoia, and anxiety. Perpetrators are said to be weak, pathologically jealous men with low self-esteem and experiencing insecurity, especially about their masculinity. Other researchers emphasize the perpetrators’ rigid notions of male and female roles are responsible for violence.

---

59 Supra 54.
Theoretical Perspective of Domestic Violence

O’Leary, (1993) has argued that psychopathological factors do influence the capacity for violent behaviour and that these factors turn out to be more relevant at a larger level of violent behaviour. A number of studies have found a high incidence of psychopathology and personality disorders, most frequently antisocial personality disorder, borderline personality organization, or post-traumatic stress syndrome among men who assault their wives.

2.14 PATRIARCHY THEORY

Patriarchy theory developed by R.E. Dobash and R. Dobash (violence against wives, 1979) maintains that throughout history, violence has been steadily directed towards women. Economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support a patriarchal social order and family structure. Domestic violence reflects women’s inequality in a culture and this reality is reinforced by various institutions. Dobash’s essential theoretical argument is that patriarchy leads to the subordination of women and contributes to a historical pattern of systematic violence directed against females.

Although the review above provides an overview of some theories that are thought to help explain the development, existence, and maintenance of domestic violence, no single theory in and itself is likely to be sufficient in explaining this phenomenon. Complex behaviours, complicated thinking patterns, individual psychologies, and the interactions among individuals and systems all play a role in domestic violence.

---
