



The Role of Gender in Domestic Violence: Breaking Stereotypes

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Abstract:

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive yet misunderstood human rights violations worldwide, deeply shaped by socially constructed gender roles and power dynamics. This article examines the role of gender in domestic violence, challenging traditional stereotypes that portray women solely as victims and men exclusively as perpetrators. While acknowledging that women disproportionately experience severe forms of domestic abuse due to systematic gender inequality and patriarchal norms, the study also explores underreported experiences of male victims and abuse within same sex relationships.

Keywords: Stereotypes, perpetrators, disproportionate, portray, embarrassment, resilience.

Domestic violence is often portrayed in public discourse and media as an issue that predominantly affects women. The stereotype of the vulnerable woman and the aggressive man is so entrenched in our cultural understanding of abuse that it can obscure the experiences of male victims. This binary view not only fails to address the complexities of domestic violence but also perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes that prevent both men and women from seeking help, thereby exacerbating the issue.

In reality, domestic violence is a deeply gendered problem, but it affects both men and women in different ways. While the majority of victims are women, men also suffer abuse, often underreported and misunderstood. To address domestic violence in a comprehensive and inclusive way, it is essential to acknowledge the experiences of all victims regardless of gender and break the stereotypes that hinder progress in combating this pervasive issue.

Domestic Violence affects both Men and Women

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of behaviors used by one person to establish power and control over another in an intimate relationship. This can include physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological abuse. While women make up a significant proportion of domestic violence victims, men can also fall prey to abusive relationships, albeit in different forms and often with different consequences.

The reality for Women:-

Women are disproportionately affected by domestic violence, with studies consistently showing that they are more likely to experience severe physical abuse and sexual violence than men. The physical manifestations of abuse in women often include bruising, broken bones, and other visible injuries, which are often recognized by society and law enforcement. The psychological effects are similarly profound, as women may suffer from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and long-term trauma as a result of ongoing abuse.

Women are also more likely to face gender-based violence, such as sexual abuse and coercion, which adds another layer of vulnerability and exploitation. The patriarchal structures of many societies often exacerbate the situation, with women being economically dependent on their abusers, facing limited social mobility, or even experiencing cultural or religious pressures that keep them in abusive relationships.

The reality for Men:-

Though men are less likely to report experiencing domestic violence, they are by no means immune to it. According to various studies, approximately one in seven men in the U.S. will experience severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. However, men often face unique challenges in both recognizing and reporting the abuse they experience.

For many men, the societal expectations of masculinity, such as being strong, independent, and unyielding, make it difficult to admit vulnerability or seek help. There is a prevailing stigma that domestic violence is a "women's issue," and men who experience abuse may fear being seen as weak, emasculated, or unmanly if they come forward. These fears can prevent men from seeking help and can lead to feelings of isolation, shame, and self-blame.

The Stigma Men face in Seeking Help:-

One of the key barriers preventing male victims of domestic violence from seeking help is the stigma surrounding their experiences. Social norms around gender often shape how both men and women view domestic violence, and these norms can discourage men from acknowledging or addressing their victimization.

1. Social Stigma and Gender Roles

Men are typically socialized to view themselves as the protectors and providers, and as such, seeking help or admitting victimhood can be perceived as a violation of these deeply ingrained gender roles. This social conditioning can result in feelings of shame, embarrassment, or even self-loathing. They may fear that they will be ridiculed or rejected for not conforming to the traditional image of male strength and resilience.

Additionally, the media and societal narratives often frame domestic violence as an issue of male perpetrators and female victims, perpetuating the belief that men cannot be victims of intimate partner violence. This portrayal leaves male survivors feeling invisible and unheard, reinforcing their reluctance to come forward.

2. Lack of Resources for Male Victims

Another issue is the limited availability of resources specifically designed for male victims of domestic violence. Shelters, hotlines, and counseling services are often geared toward female victims, and as a result, men may not feel welcome or supported when they seek assistance. This lack of targeted support can further discourage men from reaching out for help, as they may feel that there are no safe spaces or services available to them.

3. Concerns about Being Believed

Male victims may also fear that they won't be taken seriously or believed when they report abuse. Due to the stereotype of the male abuser and the female victim, some people may dismiss or trivialize the experiences of male victims, believing that a man cannot be abused by a woman or that he must have done something to provoke the violence. This disbelief can be especially damaging, as it invalidates the victim's experience and contributes to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

The Impact of Gendered Perceptions on Domestic Violence:-

The societal focus on women as primary victims of domestic violence does not mean that men's experiences are any less valid. However, the emphasis on female victimhood can perpetuate several harmful misconceptions about domestic violence and shape how both victims and abusers are perceived.

1. Minimizing Male Victimhood

By focusing predominantly on female victims, we risk minimizing the experiences of male victims of domestic violence. Men who suffer from physical abuse, emotional manipulation, or sexual violence may feel alienated from the broader conversation, particularly if they don't see themselves represented in the discourse around domestic violence. It is essential to recognize that abuse is about power and control, and both men and women can be victims, regardless of their gender.

2. Perpetuating Gendered Violence

The emphasis on male perpetrators and female victims also reinforces the idea that domestic violence is always linked to gender inequality. While it is true that power dynamics related to gender often contribute to abuse, the belief that only men can be abusers and only women can be victims fails to address the full complexity of domestic violence. Domestic violence can take many forms, and abusers may also be female, non-binary, or transgender. Gender is not the sole determinant of whether someone can perpetrate abuse or fall victim to it.

Breaking Stereotypes and Promoting Inclusivity

To address domestic violence in a more comprehensive way, it is essential to break the stereotypes surrounding gender and violence. This requires a multi-pronged approach:

- 1. Raising Awareness of Male Victims:** Public education campaigns should highlight that men can be victims of domestic violence and that their experiences are valid. These campaigns should aim to dismantle the stereotypes that suggest only women can be victims or that men should never experience vulnerability.
- 2. Expanding Resources:** Shelters, hotlines, and counseling services should be made available and accessible to male victims of domestic violence. These services should provide a safe and supportive environment where men can find refuge, healing, and legal assistance.
- 3. Training for Professionals:** Social workers, law enforcement, and healthcare providers should receive training to understand and respond to domestic violence across genders. This training should emphasize the importance of not making assumptions about who is the victim and who is the perpetrator based solely on gender.

4. **Challenging Societal Norms:** Society must also challenge traditional gender roles that discourage men from expressing vulnerability and seeking help. Encouraging healthy, non-violent expressions of masculinity and providing support for men who are victims of domestic violence can help reshape the narrative around gender and abuse.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is not a problem confined to one gender. While women are more likely to experience severe violence, men can also be victims of intimate partner violence. It is essential to break the stereotypes and assumptions about domestic violence that limit the understanding of this issue and prevent all victims from receiving the support they need. Only by recognizing the diverse experiences of both men and women can we develop a more comprehensive, inclusive approach to addressing and preventing domestic violence. For too long, gendered perceptions of domestic violence have silenced the voices of male victims—it's time to listen to all victims and provide them with the resources and support they deserve.

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