

# Domestic Violence against Women: A Micro-Level Study of Avinissery Panchayat in Thrissur District, Kerala

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*Abstract:* Kerala is known for its achievements in education, health, and gender equality. However, despite this progress, many women continue to face domestic violence, much of which remains unreported. This study examines the issue in Avinissery Panchayat, Thrissur district, using data collected from 120 households through interviews. The findings reveal that verbal abuse is the most common form of violence, followed by physical, emotional, and financial abuse. The study calls for stronger institutional support, increased public awareness, and coordinated action among government agencies, NGOs, and local self-governing bodies. It emphasizes the need for community education, better enforcement of protective laws, and the introduction of pre- and post-marital counselling as preventive measures. Ultimately, the paper highlights the urgent need for collective and sustained efforts to eliminate domestic violence and uphold the dignity and rights of women.

*Index Terms - Domestic Violence, Women's Rights, Kerala Community Interventions, Gender-Based Violence*

## INTRODUCTION

Kerala the God's own country is one of the highly developed states in India in high literacy, high life expectancy, low infant mortality rate, low maternal mortality rate, favorable sex ratio of women etc. But still Kerala has been witnessing high rate of crimes against women over a period of time. The most common crime against women is domestic violence. It is nearly 51.4 percent. Gender based violence is clearly based on unequal power relation between men and women. The status of women in India is not equal to the status of men in terms of access, participation and reward. The issue of gender discrimination manifests itself as violence in the family, community and society. History shows that women have never had an opportunity to express their individuality. One of the reason for it being so prevalent is the orthodox and idiotic mindset of the society that women are physically and emotionally weaker than men. Though women today proved themselves in almost every field that they are no less than men, the reports of violence against women are much larger than violence against men.

The problem of domestic violence is a serious problem affects the lives of women both in rural as well as urban areas. Domestic violence means violence in the family. It refers to violence against women in particular, as almost the victims are women. Domestic violence as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, family violence, intimate partner violence etc. is a pattern of behavior which involves the abuse by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, contribution and dating or with the family. The domestic violence surely affects the women particularly in their autonomy, their creative, their productivity, their capacity to care themselves and caring their children too.

Domestic violence is shown differently. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse etc. are the common violence existed in our country. Physical, sexual, emotional violence occurring in the family including battering, sexual abuse in the female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape etc. Usage of alcoholism, drugs, mental disorder, problems related to finance, different social status etc. are the major factors which leads to domestic violence.

The most common cause for women stalking and battering include dissatisfaction with the dowry and exploitation women for more of it, arguing with the partner, refusing to have sex, neglecting children etc. In some cases infertility in females also leads to their assault by the family members. The greed for dowry, desire for a male child and alcoholism of the spouse are the major factors of domestic violence against women in rural areas. In urban areas there are many more factors for domestic violence. These include more income of working women than her partner, her abuse in the house till late night, abusing and neglecting in-laws, being more forward socially etc.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bhatti (1989) while taking into account various forms of violence concluded that 88% of women in lower class were the victims of physical and verbal violence in contrast to 43% from the middle class, with regard to emotional and intellectual violence, he found that representation of the upper and middle classes were more as compared to the lower class. David Levinson (1989) outlines three other factors that together help predict violence against women: a pattern of using physical violence for conflict resolution, male authority in the home, and divorce restriction for women. Devasahayam (1991) found that approximately 21% admitted the existence of marital violence; alcoholism was the major cause of violence in their families. Jejeebhoy (1998) indicates that the patriarchal culture pervasive in rural India encourages the acceptance of domestic abuse, even during pregnancy, and appears to increase infant and fetal mortality. Lewis (1998) states that domestic violence is considered to be a significant negative factor in women's health in the South Pacific.

Devi (2005) states that domestic violence against women is a global phenomenon. The domestic violence may take the forms of wife battering, demand for more dowry, divorce, bride burning, psychological torture, wordy quarrels, uncared and so on. Marwick (1998) state that the American Medical Association reports that approximately 2 million women internationally are abused by their domestic partner each year, indicating that domestic violence is an issue worthy of concern and a problem with international significance. Trumen (1998) explains that the World Health Organization indicates that domestic violence puts women at risk internationally for the negative health outcomes of physical injury, mental health problems, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies. Walker (1999) states that each country has unique factors that contributes to the nature of domestic violence in that particular area. Social factors such as low status of women, oppressive political structures, oppressive fundamental religious beliefs etc. Contribute to the existing prevalence rate of domestic violence in other countries.

Mishra (2002) explains that violence against women in the family occurs in developed and developing countries alike. It has long been considered a private matter by bystanders including neighbors, the community and government. But such private matters now have a tendency to become public tragedies. Veer (2005) states that living in a society which is largely patriarchal though centered around the wife the family has its share of marital violence in which the women bears the brunt in spite of being the pillars of the home. Devi and Prema (2006) explains that the main cause of domestic violence against women are unequal power relations, gender discrimination, patriarchy, economic dependence of women, dowry, low moral values, negative portrayal of women's images in media, no participation in decision making, gender stereotypes and negative mind set. These are various manifestations of violence, which includes beating, mental torture, forced pregnancy, rape, denial of basic necessities and battering. The worst form of violence is dowry murder.

Luthra (2007) asserts that the law on domestic violence seems more effective. Sethi (2008) explores that various kinds of systemic violence that women face even in developed countries. Gupta Shampa Sen (2012) find out that effect of domestic violence on disabled women is similar to non-disabled women. This form of violence makes them helpless, more dependent and is mentally devastating. She is a burden on the family and authority.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

To find out types and extend of domestic violence against women in Kerala.

To analyses the socio-economic conditions of the victims under study.

To analyses the effect and suggest measures to reduce the occurrence and prevalence of domestic violence.

## METHODOLOGY

To understand the problem of domestic violence against women in Kerala, an area specific survey was conducted in Avinissery Panchayath in Thrissur District. By employing random sampling method 120 families were selected at random. The requisite data on various aspects of the study are collected from selected families with the help of a detailed questionnaire specially designed for the purpose. The present study is mainly based upon both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from direct interviews. Secondary data were collected from various sources like books, published journals, periodicals, leading newspapers, websites etc. In addition discussion with key persons were also undertaken to make more information about the topic.

**IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

Kerala is one of the women friendly states but at the same time women face a lot of problems include domestic violence, trafficking in women, forced sex, sexual violence and dowry related killings etc. Over the last two decades, domestic violence has emerged as one of the most serious problems faced by women. It affects the women particularly in their autonomy, their creativities, their productivity, their capacity to care themselves and caring their children too. They are experiencing physical and psychological violence not only from their in-laws but also often from their intimate partners. This study undertaken to gauge the extent of violence experienced by women at their marital home along with the characteristics of the affected parties. Similarly this study focus on the root causes leading to domestic violence and its consequences on the family and the society and also looks in to the existing institutional and non-institutional arrangements for addressing and to create a blockage to domestic violence against women.

Moreover it would be an elementary step in bringing together the victims of domestic violence under one umbrella and fight against this that break down the bonds that exist within the primary institution of society, and thereby make effort to formulate appropriate measures or strategies that could contribute to the minimization of domestic violence and uphold their rights before society.

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE-TYPES, CAUSES AND EFFECTS**

Domestic violence also named domestic abuse or family violence is a pattern of behavior which involves violence or other abuse by one person against another in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation. In 1993, The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination on violence against women defined domestic violence as “ any act of gender based violence that results in , or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. The definition of the term “Domestic violence” varies, depending on the context in which it is used. According to the most commonly used definitions, Domestic violence comprise “physical, emotional, sexual and economic abuse occurring in an adult relationship between intimate or formerly intimate partners with a pattern of controlling behavior by the abusing partner”.

**Forms of Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence takes various forms, each impacting the victim in different ways. The most visible form is physical abuse/violence, which includes slapping, hitting, kicking, biting, or using weapons to cause harm. This can escalate from other abusive behaviors, like threats or intimidation. Strangulation, though often overlooked due to lack of visible injuries, is recognized as one of the most dangerous forms of physical abuse.

Sexual abuse/violence involves any sexual act forced upon a person without consent. This includes physical force, coercion, or manipulation, and can occur when the victim is unable to freely consent, due to factors like age, illness, disability, or intoxication. Sexual violence can also include incest or cultural practices where children are made to engage in sexual acts under family pressure.

Emotional abuse undermines a person’s self-worth through threats, constant criticism, humiliation, or isolation. This can leave victims feeling powerless, with many suffering from depression and mental health issues like anxiety or suicidal thoughts. Stalking is another common form of emotional abuse, especially by former or current partners,

Finally, economic abuse occurs when one partner controls the other’s access to financial resources, making them financially dependent. This could involve restricting the victim's ability to work, forcing them to sign documents, or controlling household spending, which further isolates and diminishes their independence.

**Causes of Domestic violence**

Some people believe domestic violence occurs because the victim provokes the abuser to violent action while others believe the abuser simply has a problem managing anger. In fact the roots of domestic violence can be attributed to a variety of cultural, economic and physiological factor.

Deep rooted problem of dowry is also contributing to domestic violence towards women to a great extent. Apart from all these, psychopathology, substance abuse, poverty, cultural factors, anger, stress and depression are often thought to cause domestic violence, however there is little empirical evidence that suggest these factor patriarchy, torture as direct causes of domestic violence. Though, research suggests that such causes can affect its severity, frequency and the nature of perpetrator’s abuse.

Further, the most common causes for women stalking and battering include, inter alla, exploitation of women for demanding more dowry, discrimination of women, alienation of women’s self-acquired property

fraudulently torture by husband and in-laws of the husband, arguing with partner, refusing to have sex, going out of home without telling partner, indulging in extra marital affairs, insulting and using vulgar language.

## Effects of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence has serious effects on women, not just physically, but also mentally and emotionally. Many women suffer from health problems like insomnia, eating disorders, and stress-related issues.. They often find it hard to go about daily activities, leading to job loss and social isolation, which harms their self-esteem.

Domestic violence also reduces productivity. Victims struggle to work effectively, and children may have trouble concentrating on their studies. Elderly people may withdraw from family life, affecting their well-being. This loss of productivity impacts the overall growth of society and the economy.

On a societal level, domestic violence can create a negative atmosphere. While some women who speak out inspire others, others may feel trapped in abusive situations. Children who witness violence often believe they are to blame and may experience emotional and social difficulties. These children are more likely to suffer from abuse themselves. Early help and support are crucial to prevent long-term harm.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA

In India, 70 percent of women are victims of domestic violence. There is an increasing trend in the cruelty by husband or relatives. From 2008 to 2012 there was a 7.5 percent increase in cruelty by husband and relatives. In India most of the cases by reported in West Bengal (23278 cases) followed by Rajasthan (15905 cases), Utharpradesh (10471) and Assam (9626 cases). These four states together accounted for 48.2 percent of total such cases (59280 out of 122877 cases). The highest crime rate (62.1) was reported from Assam as compared to the national rate 20.5.

In Kerala there is an up and down trend in the domestic violence cases during 2007 to 2016. The highest domestic violence cases reported in the year 2011 and lowest case reported in 2016. In Kerala, most of the cases were reported in Malappuram (5725 cases) followed by Kollam (4881 cases), Trivandrum (4552 cases) and Kozhikode (4467 cases). Thrissur rank fifth position in the domestic violence cases reported (4346 cases). The lowest cases reported in Wayanad district (1056 cases).

Table 1  
Reported Cases of Domestic Violence

Year	Reported cruelty by husband or relatives(Kerala)	Reported Cruelty by husband or relatives (Thrissur)
2007	3976	330
2008	4135	331
2009	3976	348
2010	4788	400
2011	5377	580
2012	5216	507
2013	4820	512
2014	4810	580
2015	3664	405
2016	3454	353

Source: Kerala police crime record

Thrissur, a district in Kerala, which accommodates over 10% of Kerala's population, rank fifth position among other districts in the domestic violence cases reported during 2007-2016(4346 cases). In Thrissur most of the domestic violence cases reported in the years 2011 and 2014(580 cases).in recent years the occurrence of domestic violence cases are shown a downward trend.

## Policies and Interventions against Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a widespread and complex issue affecting women across India. To address this, the Government of India enacted the *Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005*, implemented in 2006. This civil law was the first in India to provide a comprehensive definition of domestic

violence, including not only physical abuse but also emotional, verbal, sexual, and economic abuse. The Act empowers women to seek protection orders through Protection Officers and offers legal recourse without requiring criminal prosecution. It also complements Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalizes cruelty by a husband or his relatives, particularly in the context of dowry harassment.

In addition, the *Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013* strengthened the legal framework by explicitly criminalizing acts such as stalking, acid attacks, and disrobing of women. It also introduced stricter punishments, including life imprisonment and the death penalty in extreme cases of sexual assault. Though not specific to domestic settings, this amendment significantly expanded the protection available to women from gender-based violence. Globally, models like the *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act, 2012* in Queensland, Australia, offer useful insights, emphasizing victim safety, offender accountability, and police empowerment through protective notices.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a crucial role in supporting survivors of domestic violence in India. Organizations such as SAKHI (Kerala), MAJLIS and SWADHAR (Mumbai), SNEHA (Chennai), and VIMOCHANA (Bangalore) provide legal aid, counseling, shelter, and community awareness programs. They bridge the gap between legal provisions and real-life application, often working with police and local authorities to ensure timely intervention and support. Their role is vital in creating grassroots awareness and helping women access justice and rehabilitation in a system often hindered by stigma and silence.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The study area is Avinissery Grama Panchayat which is a semi-urban local body located in the Thrissur district of Kerala, approximately 6 kilometers south of Thrissur city. Falling under the Cherpu Block Panchayat, Avinissery comprises two census towns—Avinissery and Palissery—and is known for its strategic location close to the district headquarters, making it a blend of rural livelihood and urban influence. According to the 2011 Census, it had a population of 13,983 people, spread across 3,302 households. The gender composition of the area is fairly balanced, with 6,833 males and 7,150 females, resulting in a sex ratio of 1,046 females per 1,000 males, which is slightly below the state average of 1,084 but still indicates a healthy demographic profile.

Almost 58 percent of the victims of domestic violence belong to the age group of 20-40. . 43 percent of the victims have only the secondary education. From the occupation side 55 percent of the victims were unemployed.

From the nature side of domestic violence, large number of victims had to suffer verbal abuse followed by physical, emotional and financial violence. It is found that main reason for domestic violence is alcoholic behavior of the husbands, where 83 percent of husbands were alcoholic. 58.3 percent victims were self-suffering the violence they face and do not communicate with others. From the study it is realized that majority of the victims do not get any social support. Most of the victims argued that the domestic violence problem can be solved mainly by giving punishments with the help of government laws.

Table 2  
Distribution of respondents by selecting variables relating to housing

Selected variables	No of Respondents	Percentage
Area of land(in cents)		
Less than 3	62	52
3-20	38	32
21-30	12	10
31-40	4	3
41-50	4	3
Type of ownership		
Own	112	93
Rental	8	7

Owner of the house		
Husband	60	54
Wife	8	7
Both	4	3
Other	20	36
Total	120	100

Source: survey

The data related to area of land shows that 52 percent of respondents were lived in less than 3 cent area and only 3 percent were owned area between 41-50 cents. 93 Percent of the respondents were lived in their own houses and 7 percent were lived in rent. In this data 54 percent houses were owned by husbands and 7 percent by wife. In some cases both husband and wife together owned the houses (3 percent).

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of respondents by their educational qualification**

	No of Respondents	Percentage
Primary education	8	7
Secondary education	52	43
Higher secondary	64	28.3
Graduation	20	16.7
Above	6	5
Total	120	100

Source: survey

The data related to the education of the respondents' shows that only 7 percent respondents have primary education. 43 percent respondents have secondary education followed by 28.3 percent have higher secondary education, 16.7 percent were graduates and only 5 percent have higher education above graduation.

**Table 4**  
**Employment details of respondents**

Employment	No of respondents	Percentage
Yes	54	45
No	66	55
Employed sector		
Private	18	33.3
Public	12	22.2
Self employed	24	44.4
Monthly earnings		
1000-10000	40	74
10000-20000	14	26

Source: survey

The employment status of respondents revealed that 55 percent of them were unemployed and 45 percent were employed. Out of the employed respondents 44.4 percent were self-employed followed by 33.3 percent were employed in private sector and 22.2 percent were in public sector. 74 percent of the employed respondents earned a monthly income between 1000-10000.

The data related to the type of marriage shows that 92% respondents have arranged marriage (92 percent) and only 8 percent have love marriage. The study shows that related to the types of domestic violence shows that violence against women is a common practice. Common type of violence prevailed in this area is verbal violence (80 percent). 40 percent of the women faced physical violence followed by 23.3 percent faced emotional violence and only 6.7 percent were faced financial or economic violence.

From this study we can realize that most common mode of domestic violence is physical violence and hitting is the common mode of physical violence (83.3 percent) followed by pushing, pulling hair and throwing object. The study also reveals the fact that 17 percent of victims were hospitalized due to physical violence.

#### **Different causes of domestic violence**

At least one in ten married women in Kerala has experienced domestic violence. This has evoked a number of questions with the minds of several, what could be the leading factor that results in domestic violence, was one of the important objectives of this study.

The data related to different causes of domestic violence shows that 83 percent of respondents opined that the primary factor which leads to the domestic violence is the alcoholic nature of the husbands followed by dowry problem (10 percent). Instead of these some other reasons such as infertility problem, marriage without the consent of family are the other factors leading for domestic violence.

The study shows that only 41.7 percent victims were communicating their violence experience with others and (58.3 percent) of the victims were not communicating with others and they are suffering the violence themselves.

The study shows that 25.9 percent employed women says that domestic violence affect employment efficiency of the victims shows that domestic violence affecting their employment efficiency. And 65 percent of the victims do not get any kind of social support for the violence they face and only 35 percent were get social support.

#### **MEASURES TO REDUCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:**

From the sample survey undertaken to know the extent of domestic violence against women from their husbands or relatives, the victims suggested some measures to reduce the domestic violence. They are,

- Give proper punishment.
- Proper communication of victims with others about the violence faced in the family.
- Effective execution of existing laws.
- Implementing new laws against domestic violence

With the prevailing status of the domestic violence against women, the following recommendations have been drawn based on the interaction with the victims although interviews and discussion. There should be coordinated efforts of police, administration and judiciary for enforcing measures against violence against women. Efforts should be made for the proper and effective enforcement of existing laws related to women. Police need to sensitize to treat domestic violence cases seriously as any other cases. More counseling centers with professionally qualified counselors should be started at the rural or urban areas focusing more on domestic violence victims. Pre-marital and post marital counseling should be made compulsory resulting in the minimization of the breaking down of the families. To increase the reporting of such cases, at first it is need to empower the women and the children. They must be educate on their rights and encourage them to come forward to register the cases. There are many violence cases but very few are reported. All police stations should be equipped with special legal aid cells to provide assistance to the victims of domestic violence. Vulnerable communities should be identified and services like counseling, legal aid etc...should be made easily accessible with free of charge.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Centuries have come and centuries have gone, but the plight of women is no likely to change. Time has helplessly watched women suffering in the form of discrimination, oppression, exploitation from society and from their family. Over the last two decades, domestic violence emerged as a serious problem faced by women.

The study of domestic violence against women in Avinissery Panchayat reveals that despite increased awareness and legal measures, many women continue to suffer silently due to social stigma, economic dependence, and fear of social isolation. The findings show that domestic violence takes multiple forms—physical, emotional, sexual, and economic—and significantly affects not just the women, but also children, the household, and the larger community. Cultural norms, lack of support systems, and low awareness about legal rights often prevent women from reporting abuse or seeking help.

The law of Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) exist to safeguard women's rights, their implementation at the local level needs strengthening. NGOs and local self-government institutions must play a more active role in providing counseling, legal aid, and rehabilitation. Community-level education, support networks, and empowerment programs for women are essential to create a safe and dignified environment for all. This micro-level study highlights the urgent need for a collective effort—from families, communities, authorities, and civil society—to break the cycle of violence and foster a culture of respect, equality, and justice for women in Avinissery and beyond.

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