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THE ROLE OF GENDER AND RACE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

~Aashish

Abstract:

Domestic violence is a widespread social issue that cuts across national, cultural, and geographic borders. However, intersecting factors like gender and race have a significant impact on its occurrence and impact. This project investigates how racial disparities and gendered power dynamics influence victims' experiences as well as how institutions react to domestic abuse. Structural disparities, cultural stigmas, and restricted access to support networks frequently make women more vulnerable, especially those from marginalised racial and ethnic groups. Systemic bias in legal and social responses may also affect men from minority backgrounds, underscoring the nuanced role of race in the framing of domestic violence narratives.

The study looks at victimisation trends, legal obstacles, and the socio-legal structures that support or contradict these inequities through an intersectional perspective. The goal is to draw attention to the fact that racial and cultural contexts must be taken into consideration in order to fully comprehend domestic violence as a gendered issue. This project highlights the need for inclusive policies, culturally sensitive interventions, and stronger advocacy to address domestic violence in all of its manifestations by examining both theoretical viewpoints and real-world case studies.

Key Words: Domestic violence, gender, race, victims, justice, society.

Introduction:

Domestic violence is a serious social problem that transcends national, cultural, and economic borders and impacts millions of people globally. It is most frequently described as a pattern of abusive behaviour used to acquire or preserve power and control in close or familial relationships. Although people of all genders and backgrounds experience domestic violence, social categories like gender and race have a significant influence on its nature and effects.

The frequency and dynamics of domestic violence are significantly influenced by gender. Violence against women has historically become more commonplace due to patriarchal norms and unequal power dynamics between men and women. Because of their economic dependence, women are more susceptible to intimate partner violence, especially in societies with strong gender hierarchies.

Thus, when researching domestic violence, it is essential to take an intersectional approach, taking into account how race and gender interact to create distinct victimisation experiences and legal access. The goal of this project is to examine how gender and race contribute to domestic violence, highlighting institutional responses, structural injustices, and the need for inclusive and culturally aware interventions. Through an analysis of these dimensions, the study highlights the significance of acknowledging the diversity of victims' experiences and making sure that responses to domestic violence are socially just, equitable, and effective.

Review of the Literature:

A lot of studies have shown that women are more likely than men to be abused at home. Studies also show that race and culture have an impact on how cases are reported and handled.

People who are part of marginalised groups may face discrimination in the legal system, which means they don't get the same level of support.

- **Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy**

(Dobash & Dobash, 1979, Book)

This groundbreaking book challenged the idea that domestic violence is a private family matter. It showed that it is a deeply rooted problem of patriarchy. The authors documented how men used violence to assert power and control over their wives, treating abuse as a normal part of marriage. It revealed that society and institutions tolerated this violence, leaving women without real protection. This work is foundational for feminist views on domestic violence.

- **Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family**

(Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980, Book)

This pioneering study used extensive survey data to reveal that domestic violence is much more common in American households than previously recognized. It highlighted that violence occurs across class, race, and economic status, breaking the myth of the family as a safe and nurturing space. The study documented not only spousal abuse but also child maltreatment within families. It significantly impacted U.S. social policy and research directions.

- **The Battered Woman**

(Walker, 1979, Book)

This book introduced the idea of “battered woman syndrome.” It explained the psychological state of women trapped in abusive relationships. The author described cycles of fear, trauma, and learned helplessness that prevent many women from leaving violent partners. The author connected psychological explanations with the need for legal recognition in courts. This work changed how domestic violence was understood in psychology and law.

- **Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Colour**

(Crenshaw, 1991, Journal – Stanford Law Review)

This influential journal article introduced the concept of intersectionality to the study of domestic violence. It argued that women of color experience violence differently due to overlapping issues of race, gender, class, and immigration status. The article pointed

out that legal and social services often fail these women because they are designed with a narrow view of gender. This approach is now central to feminist and legal analysis.

- **Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective**

(Levinson, 1989, Book)

This book compared domestic violence in different cultures, showing that while violence against women is universal, its forms and justifications differ by society. The author explained how cultural norms, social expectations, and economic conditions affect the prevalence and acceptance of family violence. It challenged the idea that domestic violence is only a Western issue and demonstrated that it is global. The work highlighted the need for culturally sensitive interventions.

- **Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered Black Women**

(Richie, 1996, Book)

This study looked at how African American women are uniquely affected by domestic violence and how many are criminalized when they defend themselves. The book highlighted systemic racism, poverty, and inadequate state protection as compounding factors. It showed that Black women are often driven to unlawful acts as a survival strategy in violent households. The work sharply criticized both the justice system and feminist discourse that ignored racial realities.

- **The Cycle of Violence**

(Walker, 1984, Journal – Victimology)

This influential article developed the “cycle of violence” theory, outlining three stages: tension building, acute incident, and honeymoon phase. The model helped explain why many survivors return to abusive partners and why violence often escalates over time. It showed that abuse is not random but follows a predictable and controlling pattern. This concept became a key idea in counseling and legal support for survivors.

- **Battered Women and Feminist Lawmaking**

(Schneider, 2000, Book)

This book critically examined how feminist legal reforms shaped domestic violence policies. It assessed the successes and failures of implementing protective legislation, restraining orders, and criminal justice reforms. The work highlighted how legal systems still show gender bias, often undermining feminist progress. It contributed to understanding the gap between feminist theory and legal practice.

Research Gap:

Despite the fact that domestic violence has been the subject of much research, most of the literature currently in publication tends to view gender and race as distinct categories rather than through an integrated, intersectional lens. Gender-based violence is the main focus of traditional studies, which ignore the particular vulnerabilities faced by women from racial and ethnic minority communities in favour of concentrating on the experiences of women generally. On the other hand, research on race and ethnicity rarely discusses how these variables specifically interact with gendered power dynamics in domestic violence, but it frequently draws attention to larger social injustices.

Research objective:

- To look at how being a man or a woman affects the experiences of victims of domestic violence.
To look into how race plays a role in cases of domestic violence.
To suggest better ways to get fair help and justice.

Questions for research:

- How effective are judicial remedies like Protection Orders under domestic violence laws?
- How does race affect how victims of domestic violence feel or talk about it?
- Is there a need for more laws, or is the existing law sufficient?

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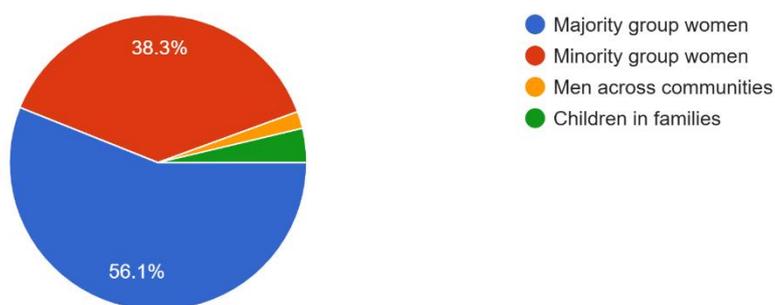
Methodology:

This study will use a mixed-methods approach – Doctrinal research (books, articles, case laws, govt sites) and Empirical research (questionnaires to around 100 people. This will help to study domestic violence both in theory and real life.

QUESTIONNAIRE: The role of gender and race in domestic violence:

1. According to studies, which group faces the highest risk of domestic violence?

107 responses



According to studies, women face the highest risk of domestic violence, especially intimate partner violence. Marginalized groups, such as women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those with lower socioeconomic status, experience even higher rates. Cultural, social, and economic inequalities contribute to their vulnerability. Overall, gender and race together significantly shape the risk and impact of domestic violence.

2. In the judiciary, what is the most common shortcoming in handling domestic violence cases?

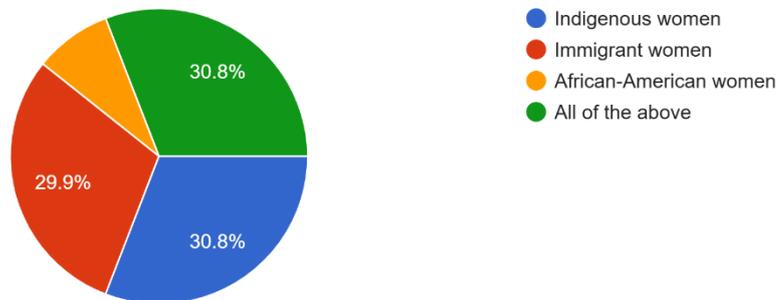
107 responses



The most common problem in the judiciary when dealing with domestic violence cases is delayed justice and a lack of sensitivity toward victims. Courts often struggle with backlogs, inadequate training, and gender bias, which result in inconsistent judgments. Victims may also face poor protection measures and insufficient enforcement of restraining orders. These issues together reduce the effectiveness of legal help for survivors.

3. Which racial/ethnic group of women is often reported as facing the highest domestic violence rates globally?

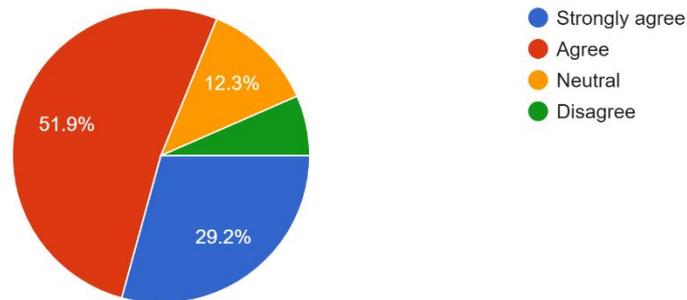
107 responses



Black and Indigenous women are frequently cited as experiencing the highest rates of domestic violence worldwide. Research indicates that the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women is significantly higher than that of non-Indigenous women. Their susceptibility is exacerbated by poverty, systemic racism, and restricted access to justice. These differences demonstrate the close connection that exists globally between gender-based violence, inequality, and race.

4. Can awareness and education programs reduce domestic violence?

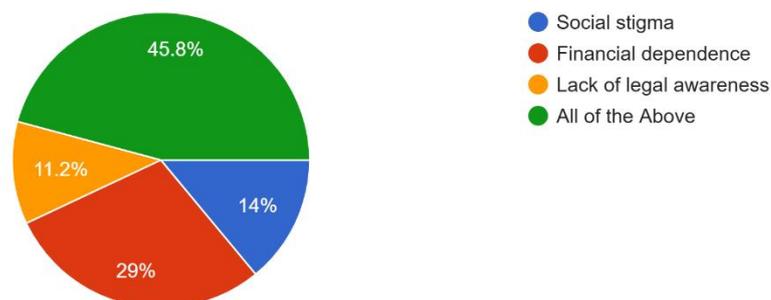
106 responses



Programs for education and awareness can, in fact, greatly lower domestic violence. They support equality and respect in relationships, dispel gender stereotypes, and alter societal attitudes. These programs empower victims to seek assistance by teaching them legal rights and conflict resolution techniques. They successfully prevent and lessen domestic violence when paired with law enforcement and community support.

5. What is the biggest barrier for women in reporting domestic violence?

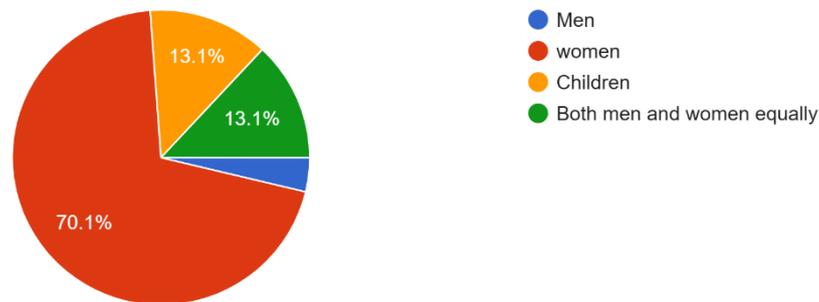
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Fear—fear of reprisals, social disapproval, or losing family and financial support—is the largest obstacle to women reporting domestic abuse. Because they think their complaints won't be taken seriously, many women also lack faith in the legal and police systems. It is even more difficult to leave or report abuse when there is financial reliance and emotional attachment to the abuser. Many survivors are further silenced by victim-blaming attitudes and cultural norms.

6. Who are the most common victims of domestic violence?

107 responses

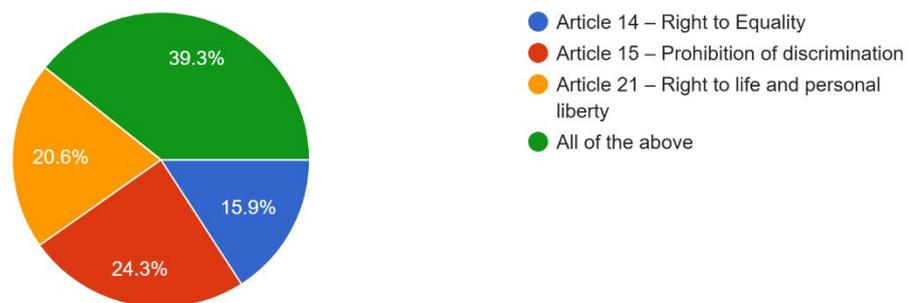


Women are the most frequent victims of domestic abuse, especially those who have close relationships with men. They frequently endure economic, sexual, emotional, or physical abuse.

In abusive homes, elderly family members and children may also become victims. Vulnerability to such violence is increased by elements such as poverty, social discrimination, and gender inequality.

7. Which Indian constitutional right is most directly violated in domestic violence cases?

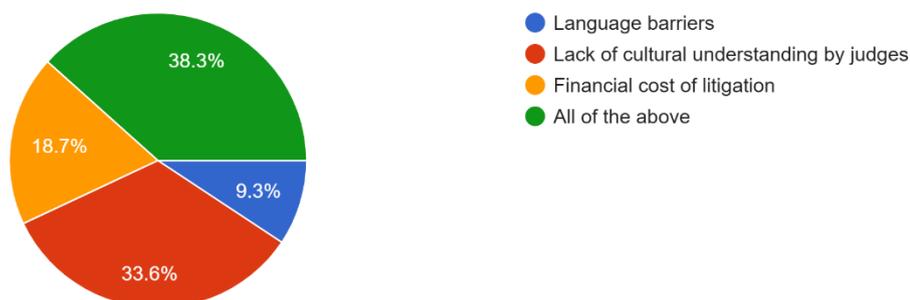
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The Indian Constitution's Article 21 on the Right to Life and Personal Liberty is most frequently violated in cases of domestic abuse. A person's right to live in safety, dignity, and without fear is violated by domestic violence. Additionally, it is against the rights to equality (Article 14) and nondiscrimination (Article 15). Thus, the fundamental human rights protected by the Constitution are compromised by such violence.

8. Which of these is an institutional barrier faced by minority women in courts?

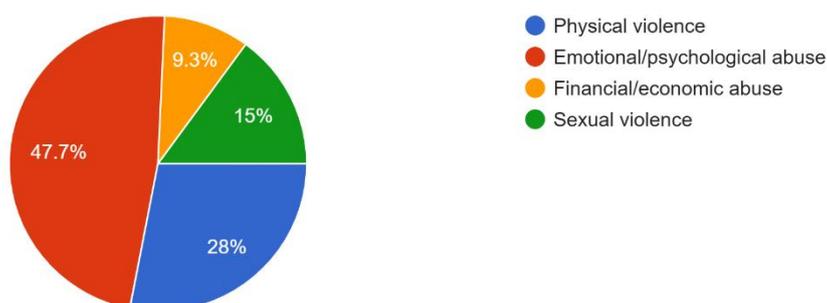
107 responses



Bias and a lack of cultural sensitivity in the legal system are significant institutional barriers that minority women in courts must overcome. They frequently face prejudice, communication difficulties, and insufficient legal counsel. Because of preconceptions or biases, court officials may reject or doubt their testimony. Minority women have a harder time getting fair justice and protection because of these factors.

9. Which form of domestic violence is most under-reported in minority communities?

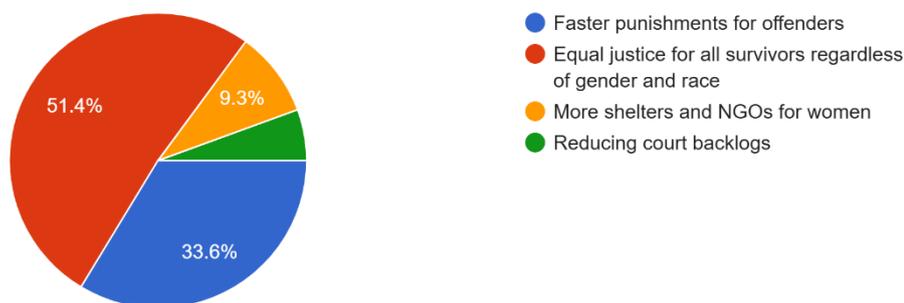
107 responses



In minority communities, sexual and psychological (emotional) abuse are the most underreported types of domestic violence. Victims are frequently silenced by stigma, cultural taboos, and a fear of social shame. Additionally, a lot of survivors don't trust authorities or are afraid of discrimination and reprisals. Because of this, these abuses in marginalised groups continue to go unreported and unchecked.

10. What is the ultimate aim of intersectional judicial reform in domestic violence cases?

107 responses



Ensuring fair, equal, and sensitive justice for all victims—regardless of gender, race, class, or ethnicity—is the ultimate goal of intersectional judicial reform in domestic violence cases.

It aims to eradicate systemic prejudice and acknowledge the overlap between various types of discrimination. The goals of these reforms are to improve the legal system's accountability, accessibility, and protection. In the end, they support a framework for justice for survivors that is genuinely inclusive and equitable.

11. What does domestic violence mean to you in the context of gender?

In the context of gender, domestic violence refers to the control or abuse that one partner exercises over another, frequently as a result of power disparities and gender inequality. It illustrates how stereotypes and patriarchal standards enable men to control women in intimate settings. Physical, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse committed with the intention of retaining control is considered gender-based domestic violence. I see it as a gender-based violation of human rights, equality, and dignity.

12. What role should police play in cases of domestic violence among minority women?

When minority women are victims of domestic abuse, the police should act in a protective, considerate, and objective manner. They are required to guarantee security, document grievances impartially, and offer prompt legal and medical support. Additionally, police should refrain from discriminatory actions and respect cultural differences.

Above all, they must serve as reliable allies, guaranteeing each survivor's protection and justice.

13. What is your one suggestion to make laws against domestic violence more effective?

Strict enforcement combined with victim-centered support networks is my one recommendation for improving the effectiveness of laws against domestic abuse.

Fast-track courts, qualified officials, and robust safeguards should support laws. Safe shelters, counselling, and legal assistance must be immediately available to survivors. The law can be genuinely effective when it combines compassionate application with strong legal protection.

Analysis and Discussion:

The multifaceted issue of domestic violence is influenced by racial, caste, ethnic, and class factors in addition to gender. This project examines how these elements interact to create distinct experiences for survivors via the intersectionality lens.

Gender as the Primary Factor

The analysis affirms that the primary factor contributing to domestic violence is gender. Because of cultural acceptance of male dominance, economic dependence, and patriarchal structures, women continue to be disproportionately impacted. Domestic violence stems from patriarchy and the restriction of women's autonomy, as Dobash & Dobash (1979) contended.

- **Ethnicity, Caste, and Race as Contributing Elements**

The experience and reporting of domestic violence are further influenced by race and caste. Black and immigrant women in the United States, tribal women in South Asia, and Dalit women in India are examples of minority and marginalised women who frequently experience both racial/caste-based discrimination in society and domestic violence based on their gender.

- **Towards an Inclusive Understanding**

Effective responses to domestic violence must adopt an intersectional framework—acknowledging how gender, race, class, sexuality, and immigration status interact. Prevention and intervention strategies should be culturally sensitive, gender-inclusive, and trauma-informed.

- **Socioeconomic and Cultural Intersections**

Socioeconomic status acts as a mediating variable linking gender, race, and violence. Poverty, unemployment, and inadequate housing increase domestic tensions and restrict women's exit options. For racial minorities, these conditions are often intensified by discriminatory labor markets and housing segregation (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Cultural norms within some communities may also encourage silence to preserve family honor or community reputation. However, blaming "culture" alone risks obscuring structural inequalities imposed by racism and patriarchy.

- **Global and Transnational Perspectives**

In the global context, domestic violence reflects transnational hierarchies of gender and race. Migrant domestic workers, refugee women, and those living in conflict zones are especially vulnerable. Global economic policies and migration regimes often exploit women's labor while denying them social protection (UN Women, 2022). Thus, domestic violence must be understood not just as a personal or national issue, but as a global human rights concern shaped by intersecting inequalities.

- **Policy and Reform Directions**

Addressing the intertwined role of gender and race in domestic violence requires a multidimensional strategy:

- **Intersectional Law Reform:** Integrate race, gender, and class considerations into domestic violence legislation.
- **Cultural Competence Training:** Train police, judges, and social workers in cultural sensitivity and anti-racist practice.
- **Empowerment of Minority-Led NGOs:** Support organizations led by women of color, such as *Southall Black Sisters* (UK) and *Black Women's Blueprint* (US).
- **Economic Justice:** Promote financial independence through education, employment, and access to housing for survivors.
- **Representation and Advocacy:** Amplify marginalized voices in policymaking and research to ensure inclusive solutions.

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- **Intersectionality: Linking Gender and Race**

- Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1989) reveals how gender and race interact to produce unique experiences of oppression.
- Women of color exist at the intersection of multiple inequalities, facing compounded risks and limited recourse.
- Intersectionality challenges the "one-size-fits-all" feminist framework that centers on white, middle-class women.
- Black feminism and postcolonial feminism argue that ignoring race within gender studies renders minority women invisible.
- Example: A white woman's experience of abuse may receive empathy and institutional support, while a Black woman may be criminalized or ignored.

- Intersectionality exposes how legal protections often fail to consider overlapping identities such as race, class, and sexuality.
- It emphasizes that solutions must be contextual, not universal.
- **Media Representation and Public Perception**
- Media plays a key role in shaping how domestic violence is understood and addressed.
- Mainstream narratives often depict white women as “ideal victims” deserving of sympathy.
- Women of color are frequently portrayed as complicit or responsible for their own abuse.
- Racialized media portrayals reinforce stereotypes and bias institutional responses.
- Lack of minority representation in media limits the visibility of diverse survivor experiences.
- Media should promote intersectional awareness, highlighting structural causes of violence.
- Ethical reporting guidelines are needed to avoid victim-blaming and racial stigmatization.
- Positive portrayals of survivor resilience can challenge silence and inspire community action.
- Digital platforms offer spaces for grassroots activism and survivor storytelling.
- Transformative media discourse can support legal and cultural change in addressing DV.
- **Global and Transnational Analysis**
- Domestic violence is recognized by the UN and WHO as a global public health and human rights crisis.
- Migrant and refugee women face compounded risks due to displacement, lack of legal protection, and xenophobia.
- Globalization and labor migration create new forms of exploitation, particularly for domestic workers.
- Postcolonial contexts reveal that colonial legacies continue to shape gendered violence and racial inequality.
- International law (CEDAW, 1979) establishes obligations for states to eliminate gender-based violence.

- Cross-border cooperation is necessary for protecting women in transnational marriages and migration contexts.
- Addressing DV globally requires tackling economic imperialism, cultural bias, and systemic inequality.
- The intersection of gender and race must be central to all global anti-violence frameworks.
- **Race and Ethnicity as Structural Determinants**
 - Race plays a major role in shaping both experiences of violence and responses to it.
 - Racialized groups experience higher vulnerability due to socioeconomic marginalization and systemic discrimination.
 - Black, Indigenous, and Latina women face intersectional disadvantages — poverty, over-policing, and under-protection.
 - Historical racism, including slavery and colonization, has normalized violence and state neglect toward minority women.
 - Cultural stereotypes (e.g., “angry Black woman,” “submissive Asian woman”) distort perceptions of victims’ credibility.
 - Institutional racism within the justice system leads to distrust and fear of law enforcement.
 - Many women of color avoid reporting abuse because they fear racist treatment of their partners by police or courts.
 - Immigrant women face additional barriers such as language, documentation issues, and dependency on abusers for visa sponsorship.

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 4. Offers data and advocacy perspectives on how race and gender influence domestic violence outcomes.

Research finding:

The study will reveal that domestic violence will continue to be strongly influenced by gender, with women being the primary victims due to existing patriarchal structures. It will also show that race and ethnicity will play a critical role in shaping survivors’ experiences, as women from minority communities will face additional barriers such as discrimination, lack of resources, and social stigma. The judiciary’s response will be found to be inconsistent, where legal protections will exist on paper but their implementation will

remain weak. The findings will highlight that survivors will struggle with access to justice because of lengthy court procedures, high legal costs, and insensitivity among officials. At the same time, the empirical research will indicate that public awareness about gender and race in domestic violence will remain limited, but participants will express that reforms such as judicial training, faster trials, and stronger protection measures will be urgently needed.

- **Prevalence Patterns Based on Gender**

1. Research consistently demonstrates that domestic violence is gendered — women constitute the majority of victims, and men the majority of perpetrators.
2. According to the World Health Organization (2021), nearly 1 in 3 women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner.
3. Male victims also exist, but gender norms discourage men from reporting abuse, leading to underestimation.
4. Female survivors face higher risks of physical injury, mental trauma, and homicide, particularly in contexts of gender inequality.
5. Research confirms that patriarchal norms, male entitlement, and economic dependence are major predictors of domestic violence.
6. Societies with more egalitarian gender norms show significantly lower rates of intimate partner violence (IPV).

- **Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Domestic Violence**

1. Domestic violence rates vary significantly across racial and ethnic groups, reflecting systemic inequalities.
2. In the United States, Black and Indigenous women experience IPV at 40–50% higher rates than white women (U.S. Department of Justice, 2020).

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3. Hispanic and immigrant women are often underrepresented in data due to language barriers and fear of deportation.

4. Indigenous women in Canada and Australia face some of the highest global DV rates, linked to historical trauma and colonization.
5. Research in the UK (Anitha & Gill, 2011) found that South Asian women experience unique forms of coercion, such as forced marriage and “honour-based” abuse.
6. Racialized survivors are often less likely to access shelters, police help, or legal aid, citing discrimination and fear of bias.
7. Structural racism influences how victims are perceived and how abusers are punished, leading to disparities in protection and justice.
8. Studies confirm that intersectional factors — race, immigration status, class, and language — shape both the frequency and the response to domestic violence.

- **Institutional Response and Legal System Bias**

1. Research reveals persistent institutional bias in how domestic violence cases are handled across racial lines.
2. Police reports show that cases involving women of color are more likely to result in dual arrests or dismissal than those of white women.
3. Court data indicate harsher penalties for minority perpetrators but weaker victim protection for minority women.
4. Immigrant women often avoid contacting authorities due to fear of immigration enforcement or family separation.
5. Without intersectional reform, legal progress remains partial and exclusionary.

- **Economic and Structural Findings**

1. Economic inequality is a critical driver and consequence of domestic violence.
2. Studies show that financial dependence on abusers is one of the strongest barriers preventing women from leaving violent relationships.
3. Women of color are disproportionately employed in low-wage, informal, or domestic labor sectors, limiting independence.
4. Research in the Global South (UN Women, 2020) confirms that economic empowerment programs reduce domestic violence incidence by up to 30–40%.
5. However, these programs are most effective when combined with gender equality education and legal awareness.
6. Structural poverty amplifies abuse risk — housing insecurity, unemployment, and welfare exclusion all perpetuate dependence.
7. Economic abuse, such as controlling access to money or sabotaging employment, is now recognized as a distinct form of violence.

8. Racialized women often face systemic barriers to credit, loans, and inheritance, reinforcing vulnerability.
9. Research recommends integrating economic justice within domestic violence policies.
10. Economic empowerment is not just a remedy; it is preventive and transformative.

Conclusion:

Domestic violence is a systemic problem with roots in unequal power dynamics, in addition to being a personal or family issue. According to this study, women are disproportionately exposed to economic dependency, physical abuse, and coercive control in patriarchal systems, making gender a significant predictor of domestic violence. In addition, survivors' experiences of violence, access to justice, and institutional support are significantly influenced by their race and ethnicity. The analysis demonstrates how race and gender interact to produce particular vulnerabilities rather than existing independently. Women from marginalised racial, ethnic, or caste backgrounds experience two forms of marginalisation: systemic discrimination in society and gendered violence in the home.

Scope for Future Research:

Although the intersectional roles of gender and race in domestic violence have been emphasised by this study, there are still a number of areas that could use more research:

Field-Based and Empirical Research

The majority of the research that is currently available is theoretical or secondary data based. To better capture lived experiences, future research could involve conducting extensive surveys, interviews, or ethnographic studies with survivors from a variety of racial, caste, and ethnic backgrounds.

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 6. Gill, A. K., & Anitha, S. (2011). *Forced marriage: Introducing a social justice and human rights perspective*. Zed Books.
 7. Integrate in-text diversity: Avoid citing the same author repeatedly; interweave evidence (e.g., WHO, 2021; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Richie, 2012) for balance.
 8. Optional MLA version: For humanities or cultural studies journals, citations can be converted to MLA 9 with italics for titles and author-first formatting.

Recommendation:

The following suggestions are put forth to address domestic violence from a gender-sensitive and racial-conscious perspective in light of the analysis and findings:

1. Fortify Policy and Legal Structures

Make sure that current laws against domestic violence, such as the Violence Against Women Act (U.S.) and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (India), are strictly enforced.

To acknowledge the varied realities of survivors, include intersectionality (gender + race/caste/ethnicity) in domestic violence laws.

Establish accountability systems to stop police, courts, and other state actors from being biased and careless.

2. Support Services That Are Culturally Sensitive

To address the needs of women from under-represented racial and caste groups, establish shelters, counselling centres, and legal aid clinics in both rural and urban areas.

To assist migrant, tribal, and minority women, offer multilingual helplines and interpretation services.

3. Economic and Social Empowerment

Economic Independence for Survivors:
Provide access to employment, microcredit, housing, and vocational training for survivors.

Social Protection Schemes:
Develop welfare programs for widows, single mothers, and marginalized women at higher risk of DV.

Education for Empowerment:
Integrate gender equality and anti-racism education in school curricula.

4. Health and Psychological Support

Accessible Counseling and Mental Health Services:

Establish trauma-informed mental health centers with culturally competent staff.

Integration with Primary Healthcare:

Screen for DV during routine medical visits, especially in high-risk communities.

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