

Atrocities and violence against women sociology essay



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Theories of why crime, atrocities and violence against women occur provide insight into the changes necessary to prevent and eradicate that. At the fact that the vast majority of crime atrocities and violence committed against women is committed by men. This raises the question, “ Why do men batter women?” We believe that a root cause of woman abuse is the pervasive social belief system that posits male superiority over women as natural and preferred. Moreover, there exists a broad-based social belief that women are inferior and that it is their role to be subservient to men. We also acknowledge that this belief system of “ domination over” can be adopted by women as a framework for relationships to men as well as their relationships with one other. Because these beliefs pervade so much of our society and its institutions, eradicating violence against females will require changes at the most fundamental levels of society. These changes must eliminate policies and practices perpetuated by the male-dominated culture that sexualize women as objects, demean their value, restrict their participation in decision making, dehumanize them with labels, control their rights over their own bodies, and marginalize and demean their presence.

Explanations of crime, atrocities and violence against women that focus on characteristics of individuals use a micro-level or individual-level perspective. Theoretical explanations of crime, atrocities and violence against women that reflect the micro perspective include social learning theory; psychopathology, psychological, and physiological explanations; resource theory; and exchange theory. Social learning theory is one of the most popular explanatory frameworks for crime, atrocities and violence against women, suggests that individuals learn how to behave through both the

experience of and exposure to violence. Biological and physiological explanations suggest that the crime atrocities and violence against women is related to the process of natural selection, such that men, who are biologically driven to reproduce as much as possible, will resort to rape when they have difficulty finding consensual female partners. Alcohol has also been cited by researchers as a frequent factor in violent acts against women.

Under exchange theory, individuals are viewed as engaging in certain behaviors either to earn reward or to escape punishment; under this theory, men's violence against women can be interpreted as a means for men to maintain their position in the social structure. Resource theory is situated within the framework of exchange theory, which views men as using violence within the family to establish power over women within family dynamics when other resources of persuasion are lacking. In contrast to micro theories, macro or socio-cultural theories focus on the social and cultural conditions that make violence against women a likely occurrence. A psychopathological explanation of crime, atrocities and violence against women suggests that individuals who are violent toward women have some type of personality disorder or mental illness that might get in the way of otherwise normal inhibitions about violent behaviour.

More recently, the trend in theory development regarding crime, atrocities and violence against women has moved toward the development of multidimensional theories of crime atrocities and violence that take into account both social structural factors and individual characteristics. As well as social theories which consider external factors in the perpetrator's environment, such as family structure, stress, social learning. As with many <https://assignbuster.com/atrocities-and-violence-against-women-sociology-essay/>

phenomena regarding human experience, no single approach appears to cover all Factors.

Some of the theoretical propositions on criminal violence against Women generally are:

it can be an instrument useful in obtaining some end or reward,

it is a some psychopath, and

it can be a response that is consistent with norms supporting its use, and so forth.

A few social scientists have attempted to explain criminal violence types of violence against women. These associations and correlations howsoever do not provide a scientific theoretical insight into the causes of violence against women.

Theories of Crime, Atrocities and Violence against women

The analyses of various types of crime, atrocities and violence against women and their varied patterns presented in this study, therefore, calls for examining and testing some important theories.

So far as Indian scene is concerned, in the past few decades, with increasing evidence the phenomenon, domestic violence has drawn the attention of several concerned feminists, human rights groups, social scientists and social work practitioners. Many scientists have also attempted to study the phenomenon and have proposed several theories to explain the same. An overview of various theories that have been put forward is as follows:-

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Feminist Theory and violence

The Family System Theory

Psychological Theory: A Focus on Individual

Physiological theory

Psycho-Pathological Theory

Socio-Psychological Theories,

Perversion Theory,

Self-Attitude Theory,

The Cycle Theory of Violence and Psycho-social theory of Learned Helplessness,

Survivor Theory,

7. Socio-Cultural theories,

Structural Theory,

System Tension and Feedback Theory,

Resource Theory,

Patriarchy Theory,

conflict and control Theories,

Inter-actionist deviance Theory,

Social Learning Theory,

Cognitive Behaviour Theory,

Exchange Theory

8. Multi-Factor Theory,

Integrated Approach Theory,

The Multi-factorial Systemic Theory

Feminist Theory and Domestic Violence

Feminist theory in domestic violence emphasizes gender and power inequality in opposite-sex relationships. It focuses on the societal messages that sanction a male's use of violence and aggression throughout life, and the proscribed gender roles that dictate how men and women should behave in their intimate relationships (Pence & Paymar, 1993). It sees the root causes of intimate partner violence as the outcome of living a society that condones aggressive behaviours perpetrated by men, while socializing women to be non-violent.

Proponents of feminist theory acknowledge that women can also be violent in their relationships with men; however, they simply do not see the issue of women abusing men as a serious social problem, and therefore, does not deserve the same amount of attention or support as violence against women (Kurz, 1997).

Treatment Approach

The “ Duluth Model” represents the dominant treatment approach aligned with feminist theory. This model was created following a serious domestic violence homicide that took place in Duluth, Minnesota (Pence & Paymar, 1993). Community and government officials wanted to address the problem of domestic violence, but did not know where to begin. They wanted to create a treatment approach that involved the courts, police services, and ‘ human services’. Guiding the model’s development were the following questions:

“ Why is she the target of his violence? How does his violence impact the balance of power in their relationship? What did he think could change by hitting her? Why does he assume he is entitled to have power in the relationship? How does the community support his use of violence against her?” (Pence & Paymar, 1993, p. xiii).

As one can begin to see, much of the Duluth model revolves around the power dynamics inherent in opposite-sex relationships, which is a reflection of the different ways men and women are socialized on issues of power and equality. The goal of treatment is to educate men about gender roles, and how behaviours and values identified as ‘ masculine’ have been shaped by societal messages and attitudes that reinforce patriarchal privilege and unhealthy ways of relating with women.

Limitations of Feminist Approach

Limitations of feminist theory can be found when trying to explain violence in same-sex relationships (Lawson, 2003). While issues of power, control, and

autonomy have also been identified as reasons for intimate partner abuse in lesbian relationships, issues such as dependency and jealousy also exist (Renzetti, 1992). The point is that partner abuse in same-sex couples requires a more comprehensive analysis and theoretical explanation.

Secondly, a feminist approach is also limited for explaining abuse perpetrated by women. Feminist theory typically explains women's use of violence in the context of self-defence and retaliation for previous abuse. Yet, by doing so, a strictly feminist orientation denies that women can also feel angry and enraged without provocation in their relationships with men (Nolet-Bos, 1999). Additionally, while much of a woman's use of violence does exist within the framework of retaliation and self-defence, feminist theory does not explain why women perpetrate violence outside their intimate relationships (e. g., at work, with children, or with peers).

The Family System Theory[7]

Family systems theory has had a significant impact on the study of families and on approaches to working with families. Such as understanding traumatic events or chronic health issues and their impact on individuals and families, substance abuse intervention and treatment modalities, and kinship networks. It has provided a useful lens through which a greater understanding of families has emerged. However, as with any lens, critics have challenged the clarity of the lens in certain areas. Some critics have argued that issues of gender inequality are not fully articulated or addressed within family systems theory.

For example, in patriarchal societies, where power lies primarily with men, equality of influence between men and women cannot be assumed. Critics of family systems theory argue that such inequality is often overlooked or understated (Goldner 1989; Yllo 1993). The application of family systems theory to issues of family violence has been criticized.

For example, a systems perspective on family violence will focus on the family dynamics that contribute to the violence, and less attention will be given to the characteristics, motivations, and attitudes of the perpetrator of the violence. Critics argue that the utilization of family systems theory in this area can lead to the perception of a shared responsibility for violence between the victim and perpetrator and less accountability by the perpetrator for his or her actions (e. g. Whitchurch and Constantine 1993; Finkelhor 1984).

Over the years variants in family systems have emerged. The communications model focuses on the communication patterns found within family systems, specifically on the role of inputs and outputs in communication and the consistency between these in explaining family communication patterns in functional and dysfunctional families. Such a model was heavily influenced by the work of Gregory Bateson, Don Jackson, Paul Watzlawick, and others at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto (Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson 1967). In contrast, Salvador Minuchin's (1974) work with family systems theory has focused more on the spatial nature of families. Central to this orientation is an examination of the social contexts and structures in which families find themselves and their interaction with those contexts and structures.

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Criticism:-

Family systems theory will be challenged to consider and integrate the increasingly important role that genetics and neurobiological structures have on personality traits and individual behavior. Family systems theory is also being challenging to consider cultural and broader contextual issues that influence families. The integration of family systems theory into the medical realm, the study of ethnic and cultural differences, and broader systems is a testament to its continued utility.

Psychological Theory: A Focus on Individual[8]

There are many different theories as to the causes of crime, atrocities and violence (abuse). These include psychological theories that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender, as well as social theories which consider external factors in the offender's environment, such as stress, social learning and drug and alcohol abuse. These are following:-

Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender. According to this theoretical approach, characteristics associated with individuals who abuse their partners include low self-esteem, isolation from social support, a manipulative nature, and a desire for power and control (Suman Kakar 1998).

These individuals are likely to be unwilling to take responsibility for their own actions, have extreme feelings of jealousy and possessiveness, be overly dependent on the victim, and/or have certain mental or psychological disorders. These

Important aspects in the psychological theory are power and control. In some relationships, violence arises out of a perceived need for power and control. This are the abuser may use violence as a strategy to gain or maintain power and control over the victim. Abusers may feel the need to control their partner because of difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, or when they feel inferior to the other partner in education and socioeconomic background.

Stress may be one most cause of the crime, atrocities and violence against women, increased when a person is living in a family situation, workplace and social level with increased pressures. Social stresses, due to reason for sometime inadequate finances or other such problems in a further increase tensions. Violence is not always caused by stress, but may be one way that some (but not all) people respond to stress.

Families and couples in poverty may be most likely to experience domestic violence, due to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects. Some speculate that poverty reason hinder a man's ability to live up to his idea of "successful manhood", thus he fears losing honour and respect.

Social learning theory suggests that the people are learning from observing and modelling after others' behaviour. With positive reinforcement, the behavior continues. If one observes violent behaviour, one is more likely to imitate and there are no negative consequences (e. g. victim accepts the violence, with submission), then the behaviour will likely continue.

Oftentimes, crime, atrocities and violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a cyclical manner.

Drug and/or alcohol abuse may be a precursor to domestic violence.

Substance abuse leads to out-of-control behaviour. A drunk or high person will be less likely to control his or her violent impulses. However some have argued that abusers use drug and alcohol as an excuse for their action. Yet, alcohol is an important risk factor for partner abuse., many of the most gruesome murders and sexual violence are linked to mental disease brought about by drug and alcohol addiction, respectively.

For instance, a young boy may see his father come home from work and his activities;- first he drunk and angry, screaming at his mother and second outside home abusing neighbours and fighting others. He watches his mother attempt to please and placate his father's drunken behaviour and outside others to see shameful. The young boy is being taught that crime and violence gets results. He is developing his own ideas about what makes a man.

Physiological theory

Another theory emphasizing on individual is physiological theory. There are several variants of physiological theory. One focuses on evolution and the genetic characteristic that predispose men to violence. Others emphasize brain structures, chemical imbalances, dietary deficiencies and hormonal factors such as testosterone. Genetic and hormonal explanations reasons for the greater pre-disposition towards violence in men than in women, but this not apply to chemical imbalances or dietary deficiencies.

Criticism

Physiological theories are not context specific. They purport to explain all forms of violence and they contribute little to the understanding of specifically domestic violence. Their main deficiency, however, is that they play down both individual responsibility for violent acts and the influence of structural and political factors. Such theories always more commonly encountered are now deservedly out of fashion.[9]

Psycho-Pathological Theory

According to this theory, men who abused their wives were mentally ill and could be cured through medication or psychiatric treatment. Comparisons were made between the “ typical” batterer and severely mentally ill, primarily schizophrenic, men (Dobash and Dobash 1979). The researchers found that the behaviour of batterers did not correspond to profiles of persons who were mentally ill. When the battered women’s movement began in the United States in the early 1970s, the prevailing theory of why men batter was based on psychopathology.[10]

From this perspective, domestic violence is rooted in individual psychopathology or dysfunctional personality structures, which are more likely than biological factors to be learned and shaped by early childhood experiences. Research in this area includes studies of male batterers, showing that witnessing domestic violence or being the victim of abuse undermines one’s ability to trust and to regulate emotions and results in hostile, dependent, insecure individuals with ability to develop healthy relationships. Similar research shows that male batterers are more likely than non-batterers to score poorly on mental health tests (for example, <https://assignbuster.com/atrocities-and-violence-against-women-sociology-essay/>

anxiety, depression, mania, psychosis) and criminality indicators (for example, antisocial personality and stranger violence).[11]

Feminists criticized this theory because they believed it excused the batterers and did not take into account the patriarchal structure of the society. But today, psychopathology has once again become a popular. Since the mid-1990s, researchers have been investigating the psychological roots of domestic violence.

A number of recent studies have found a high incidence of psychopathology and personality disorders, most frequently antisocial personality disorder and borderline personality organization (or post-traumatic stress disorder), among men who assault their intimate partners (Dutton and Bodnarchuk 2005).

Studies have included the Million Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI) as a personality evaluation tool (Million, Davis, and Million 1997). These studies found that almost 90 percent of batterers had MCMI scale elevations for at least one personality disorder, and more than a third of these men had such elevations on four or more MCMI personality scales (Million, Davis, and Million 1997).

Most recently, researchers have studied the role of antisocial personality characteristics in understanding intimate partner violence by men. The most conclusive studies have been conducted by researchers studying large, preexisting data samples for subjects originally recruited in childhood to examine development of delinquency, criminal behaviour, and aggression.

This work demonstrated a relationship between antisociality and intimate partner violence by men (Holtzworth-Munroe and Meehan 2002).

Dutton and Bodnarchuk (2005) describe an “abusive personality” as one that is characterized by shame-based rage; a tendency to project blame; attachment anxiety manifested as rage; and sustained furious outbursts, primarily in intimate relationships. This abusive personality is constructed around characteristics of the borderline personality. According to this theory, men become violent when they fear abandonment, given their great dependency on their intimate partners.

In a 1999 study, Gondolf found that a smaller percentage of men than in previous studies had high enough scores on any personality subscale to indicate a “clinical disorder” (i. e., 48 percent in his sample versus up to 80 percent in other samples). He concluded that batterers are “less pathological than expected” and that too much attention has focused on the pathology of batterers (Gondolf 1999). However, a significant number of researchers have drawn attention to the potential importance of personality characteristics, often at a sub clinical level, in understanding batterer violence.[12]

Socio-Psychological Theories,

The Socio-psychological theories assumes that criminal violence can best be understood by careful examination of external environmental factors that exercise impact on an individual offender. This theory also examines the types of everyday interactions (say, stressful situations or family interactional patterns) which are precursors of violence. Theories such as the

Frustration-Aggression theory, the Perversion theory and the self-Attitude theory approach criminal violence from a socio-psychological level of analysis.[13]

Frustration-Aggression theory

This theory first stated in 1939 by Dollard, derived many of its basic postulates from Freudian theory. It explains the process by which aggression is directed to the source of frustration. Whenever something interferes with an individual's attempt to reach some goal or end, he feels frustrated and frustration in turn leads to some form of aggression (John Dollard). After taking various criticisms into account, this theory was modified. Today it is recognised that an actual display of aggression may be inhibited by either internalized norms or external controls, even though the impulse for aggression may be strong following some frustrating experience. It is also recognized that frustrations can be cumulative and that they can remain active over a long period of time. It is also acknowledged that people perceive frustrations in varying ways, with those deemed arbitrary or unreasonable most likely to trigger aggressive responses. Further, it is recognized that responses to frustrations can be learned. In short, aggressive actions are not an automatic consequence of frustration, and their occurrence depends upon numerous factors.[14]

Criticism

According to the Frustration-Aggression theory, aggression is always directed towards one who is believed to be responsible for frustration. If this is so, this theory does not explain criminal violence in the types of crimes we have analyzed here. Take for example the case of a dowry-death. Why does the <https://assignbuster.com/atrocities-and-violence-against-women-sociology-essay/>

mother-in-law/husband kill the daughter-in-law/wife, when the source of frustration is not the girl who is killed but her parents who fail to fulfil the dowry demands?

Thus, theory is criticized on the ground that aggression is not always directed to the source of frustration but also because it is often directed towards some other object. It is also criticized on the grounds that:-

the relationship between frustration and aggression is not innate,

a wide variety of responses may result from frustration and aggression is not the only response, and

aggression may be an adaptive response and a rational choice of behaviour.

Yet another criticism against this theory is:-

human behaviour is not an extension of animal instinctive or innate behaviour but the product of a complex interplay of biological and environmental factors. An individual's social behaviour depends upon his social and cultural milieu;

responses to frustrations are learned just like any other social behaviour and what is learned has a lot to do with socialization practices which themselves differ from group to group and society to society.[15]

Perversion Theory

The psychoanalysts explain violence on the basis of the Theory of Perversion (Giles Pie, 1952) and the Theory of Symptom Formation. They do not regard

perverts as constitutionally inferior people but maintain that perversion develops from instincts (see, Menachem, Amer, Patterns in Forcible Rape, 1971). According to Freud's early theory (1949), perversion essentially means persistence in the adult of infantile instincts and behaviour at the expense of adult behaviour. In the pervert, infantile traits fail to undergo the normal process of integration during puberty but are not converted into neurotic symptoms. Violence can be the product of strong inborn drives or of pathological experiences in infancy or early childhood (Johnson, 1956). In the latter cases, childhood conceptions of the relations between the sexes as being aggressive and sadistic and the idea of pleasure as a negative process, essentially achieved by relief from a state of " unpleasure" are carried into adulthood.

Explaining different kinds of perversion, psychoanalysts point out that maturation involves leaving early aims and objects and choosing new aims. Perversions can therefore, be conceived of as distortions of aims and objects and in the absence of the distortion of appropriate feelings towards these objects (see, Freud Three Essays).

Fenichel (1945) consolidated the approach that aggression arises from castration fears which in turn are derived from earlier oral sadism. This was later accepted by most psychoanalysts as a possible explanation of the etiology of perversion, in particular violence against the weak. This theory was considered important because it was supported by the clinically established fact that there is a higher incidence of perversion among males than among females.

A discussion of the dynamics of perversion has included the objects of aggression and the operations of the ego and superego. One theory suggests that the ego mechanisms, the object splits. Klien (1946) suggests that a 'good' object⁶ is idealized by the pervert while he uses aggression towards a 'bad' object.[16]

Criticism

The present theory is rejected because of the limitations of its approach. While explaining psychoanalytical hypothesis of 'infantile instincts', 'inborn pathological drives', 'distorted feelings', 'childhood sadism' or 'split ego' about causes for committing an offence by individual male offenders it ignores an important dimension of environment in the causation. Wife-beating, rape, bride-burning, and even murder cannot be the result of a mere primary institutional component of a personality or a means of solving psychic conflict. Though aggression is a basic element in personality structure, its origin and direction in social relations, especially between the sexes, cannot be explained only as a result of personality pathology.

Self-Attitude Theory

This theory maintains that in a society, a culture, or group that values violence, persons of low self-esteem may seek to bolster their image in the eyes of others and themselves by carrying out violent acts. It explains the propensity to violence of those for whom society makes it difficult to achieve an adequate level of self-esteem (see Gelles and Straus, 1979)

Accepting this theory would mean that all individual who use violence against women (that is, rapists, abductors, murderers, and batterers) suffer from low self-esteem.[17]

The Cycle Theory of Violence and Psycho-social Theory of Learned Helpless

Two of the most often discussed theories on battered women are Lenore Walker's, ' The Cycle Theory of Violence' and ' Psycho-social Theory of Learned Helplessness'.

The cycle theory of violence comprises three distinct phases in the cycle of violence- the tension building stage, the acute battering incident and kindness and contrite loving behaviour. In the first stage, when minor battering incidents occur, the woman adapts, rationalizes and externalizes the problem. Tension mounts in the second phase leading to the acute battering incident leading to severe repercussions on the woman physically, emotionally and psychologically. Phase three is welcomed by both the partners, which is marked by uncontrolled love, affection and promises by the husband never to repeat the incidents again. This cycle keeps repeating itself in the lives of almost all battered women. The psycho-social theory of learned helplessness focuses on the factors which reinforce battered women's victimization. According to this theory, battered women operate from a premise of ' helplessness' which further serves to only aid passivity and a fatal acceptance of the exploitative situation.[18]

Criticism

Walker talks of immobilizing terror leading to learned helplessness. Dobash and Dobash reject the notion of 'learned helplessness' which has 'negative implications for public perceptions and actions associated with the problem of violence against women' and is 'based on false premises and unsubstantiated evidence regarding the predicament and actions of women experiencing persistent violence'. [19]

Survivor Theory

As opposed to the cycle theory, 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. The assumptions of the survivor theory are in sharp contrast to the above theory of learned helplessness. The survivor theory credits women with the capacity to innovate newer strategies of coping and acknowledges the efforts of the survivors in seeking help from formal and informal sources. In addition, the survivor theory stresses the need for accessible and effective community resources for the woman to escape from the batterer. As mentioned earlier, the survivor theory takes cognizance of several help-seek behaviour in women in the face of increased violence. Further, it also lauds the 'female survivor instinct' which focuses on nurturing rather than destruction, the willingness to adapt and the efforts directed at furthering of self-growth. [20]

Socio-Cultural Theories

The sociological or socio-cultural model provides a macro-level analysis of criminal violence. This model examines criminal violence in terms of socially structured inequality, and social and cultural attitudes and norms reg