UNIT 6 : SOCIAL PROBLEMS RELATING TO WOMEN

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6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to-

- identify various social problems of women.
- explain prostitution as a social problem pertaining to women and its various causes.
- explain the causes and consequences of dowry.
- analyse the reasons behind violence against women.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have learned about the major social problems like unemployment, poverty, youth unrest,alcoholism, crime, etc. Social problems arise when one section of the people of any society are deprived of their basic social rights. When women folk of a society are suppressed and oppressed it causes injurious consequences to the society as a whole. This subordination may cause several kinds of physical and mental assult to women. They are nothing but social problems.Traditional social problems relating to women like sati, purdah, child marriage, etc. were common in the past but are rarely practiced today. But problems like prostitution, dowry, domestic violence are widely prevelant and a great deal of efforts are needed to eradicate them.

The present unit will provide various social problems faced by women: some of which are Prostitution, Dowry and Violence. We wil also learn about the types and causes of these problems. Let us discuss these problems in detail.

6.3 PROSTITUTION

6.3.1 Meaning and definition

The issue of prostitution has attracted the attention of the social scientists as a serious social problem. Especially sociologists opine that prostitution is one of the oldest and most common social problems for all societies. However, it is very difficult to define prostitution. John A. Macionis defines prostitution as the "selling of sexual services" (Sociology, 2005). But this definition is too broad in its approach. A definition of 'prostitution' includes the three criteria of promiscuity, payment and emotional indifference between the partners. According to the Merrian-Webster's Dictionary of Law, prostitution is "the act or practice of engaging in sexual activity indiscriminately especially for money and also the crime of engaging

in such activity" (1996). Thus, prostitution is a service which is available for sexual activities in return for payment. The people who execute the service are called the prostitutes. It is a social problem because individuals go into prostitution due to social conditions beyond their own control and the act of prostitution violates norms and values in society.

Here we can go through some definitions which give us a clear understanding of prostitution.

G.R. Scott says: , 'A prostitute is an individual, male or female, who for some kind of reward, monetary or otherwise or for some form of personal satisfaction and as a part or whole-time profession, engage in normal or abnormal sexual inter-course with various persons who may be of same sex, or the opposite sex, to the prostitute'.

H. Ellis says that, 'a prostitute is a person who makes it a profession to gratify the lust of various persons of the opposite or the same sex'.

A. Flexner expresses the opinion that any person is a prostitute who habitually or intermittently has sexual relations more or less promiscuously for money, or other mercenary consideration.

The legal status of prostitution varies in different countries, from being punishable by death to complete legality. In most of the countries, prostitution is legal among adults. But in countries like India, Argentina and in some muslim and communist countries prostitution is illegal.

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- In ancient Greek society, both men and women were engaged in prostitution. Male prostitutes are referred to as male escorts, rent boys, hustlers and gigolos.
- In India, during the Mughal Empire, prostitutes were referred to as "Tawaif" who performed activities like dancing and singing and entertained their guests at mehfils while sex was often incidental.
- At present, there are 15 million prostitutes in India.

6.3.2 Types of Prostitution

Prostitution is of various types. Broadly, prostitution can be grouped into four types. They are -

a) Street prostitutes : Street based prostitution is a form of prostitution in which a sex worker solicits customers from a public place. They are commercially available in urban sites. The services are performed in the customer's car or in a nearby hotel or at the prostitute's apartment or in a rented room.

b) Brothel prostitutes : Brothels are often confined to red light areas in the big cities. A brothel is a specific establishment dedicated to prostitution, providing the prostitute a place to meet and to have sexual intercourse with the clients. It is often licenced by authorities.

c) Escort or call girls : Customers are typically assigned to prostitutes by the escort agency. The prostitute then negotiates with the customers the price for specific services. Here, the services are not restricted to a specific area.

d) Religious prostitutes : Religious prostitutes are known as Devadasi. Devadasi system of dedicating unmarried young girls to Gods in Hindu temples, which often made them objects of sexual pleasure to temple priests and piligrims, was an established custom in India by 300 A.D. The system still exists as an institution in some Hindu temples of India, mostly in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

In a well known book, *'The Prostitution in Society'*, H. Benjamin significantly mentioned fifteen types of prostitution and these are:

i) The street Walker
ii) The Call girl
iii) Bar prostitute
iv) Camp Followers
v) Brothel Prostitute

vi) The Fleabag
vii) Interracial Prostitute
viii) Beat Prostitute
ix) Dance Hall Prostitute
x) Elderly Prostitute
xi) Gimmick Prostitute
xii) Fricatrice and Felliatrice
xiii) Fetishism and Sadomasochism
xiv) Adule Prostitute (Adolescents) and
xv) Child Prostitute

6.3.3 Causes of Prostitution

Prostitution is not a willful involvement of any person. However, exceptions may be there. In various cases it has been seen that prostitution is a forceful activity or a sudden misfortune. The causes of prostitution may be social, economic and psychological.

The women, who were sexually abused in their childhood and the women whose mothers played the role of a sexual object, are very likely to become prostitutes. This is one of the predominant causes of prostitution. Sometimes women become prostitutes solely for economic reasons. They are forced into prostitution by the labour market, as they have no other option. Psychological causes like desire for physical pleasure, greed and dejection are also responsible for prostitution.

Following are some of the possible causes of prostitution:

1. Poverty,
2. Forced by partner or trafficked,
3. Childhood abuse or neglect,
4. Family history of prostitution,
5. Drug or alcohol addiction,
6. Homelessness,

7. Easy money,
8. Glamourisation,
9. Myths or cultural acceptance,
10. Pressure of peer group.

6.3.4 Prostitution, Sex trafficking and HIV

Human trafficking is an illegal trade of human being, basically for the purpose of commercial sexual activities. Sex trafficking is the process that delivers victims into the profession of prostitution. It includes the recruitment, harbouring, movements and methods by which victims are compelled to stay as prostitutes, whether by violence, threat, debt or cultural manipulation. Victims are recruited from the poor, marginalised and vulnerable populations from the same country or city or may be trafficked from other countries or continents. There are also middle-class girls who having been sexually abused turn prostitutes. Sex trade workers are both vectors and victims of vulnerable diseases. High rates of HIV have been found amongst those individuals who sell sex in many different countries. This means that if they do become infected with HIV, they can potentially pass it on to multiple clients. Femal prostitutes are percieved as the bridge between an HIV-infected person and the general population.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

State whether true or false

1. Religious prostitutes are known as Devadasi.
2. Prostitution is a social service for the society.
3. Street prostitute is often licenced by authorities.
4. Sex trade workers are the vectors of vulnerable diseases.

6.4 DOWRY

6.4.1 Dowry system in India

Dowry is another social evil which is deeply rooted in our society. Dowry has been defined as the payment in cash or kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family. A daughter is regarded as a liability and her contribution to the family is considerear temporary. Hence, parents do not show interest in educating her. According to Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, dowry has been defined as any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given either directly or indirectly:

(a) by one party to the other party through the marriage; or (b) by the parents or by any other person; at or before or after the marriage as consideration for the marriage of the aforesaid parties. But dowry or mehr does not apply in the case of persons to whom the Muslim personal law (shariat) applies.

In the ancient society, gifts were given to daughters as sign of love and affection. Dowry originated in upper caste families as the wedding gifts to the bride from her family. Lower caste people often perform the ritual of bride price which is a contrast of dowry because in these families women were regarded as assets, as women take initiative in economic sphere. It was also part of tribal culture. Later Sankritisation inspired the lower caste people to imitate the higher caste rituals. As a member of patriarchical family woman is always regarded as inferior to man. And therefore bride's family is always regarded as inferior and they are bound to give large quantity of material goods to the groom's family because it is often thought that the groom's family is doing a favour to the bride by marrying her to their son.

This evil practice has gone so far as to become a chronic evil in modern societies. It is in practice in all sections of society in

different forms. Many reformers and nationalist leaders condemned this institution at the time of the freedom movement. But instead of eradication, it has now spread even to the communities where they were once unknown. Now-a-days, dowry as a phenomenon has gone beyond the ritual of marriage. Pregnancy, childbirth and all kinds of religious or family functions are occassions when such demands are made.

6.4.2 Dowry Prohibition Acts

The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961 by the Central Government with the purpose of prohibiting the dowry system. The Dowry Prohibition Act stipulates that a person who gives or takes or helps in taking or giving dowry can be sentenced to jail for five years and fine Rupees 15,000/- or the amount of the value of dowry. In 1986, the Act was amended again, empowering the State Governments. To stop the offences of cruelty by husband or his relatives on the wife, section 498 A was added in the Indian Penal Code and section 198 A in the Criminal Procedure Code in 1983. Domestic Violence Act 2005 was implemented in 2006. According to this Act, a woman has every right to to approach the domestic violence officer to stop dowry harassment.

6.4.3 Causes of dowry

The practice of dowry has been prevalent in our country since ancient times. Following are the main causes of dowry -

Social causes : Dowry is often associated with social prestige. A father who sends large quantities of gifts with the bride is appreciated by the groom's family. And it is a matter of social prestige for groom's family too. Infact, the social stigma associated with unmarried and divorced women is so strong that the most parents would rather prefer their daughters dead than to see her get a divorce and return to parental home.

Economic causes : If a family is economically very sound they would prefer to give dowry with their marriageable daughters. Monetary greed is the major issue which encourages a groom and his family to dmand dowry from the bride's family.

Psychological causes : If a bride comes with large amount of goods, she holds a good position as her in laws are happy. Brides family would like to give large amounts in cash for fear of non-acceptance or ill-treatment of their daughter by the groom's family.



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- The Indian National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) reported that there were about 6,787 cases of dowry deaths registered in India in 2005.
- In Assam, 143 cases of dowry harrasement and 3,807 cases of domestic violence have been registered between April 2009 and January 2010.
- The pracice of female infanticide existed among the Toda tribe of Tamil Nadu

6.4.4 Consequences of dowry

Dowry has various social consequences. Female foeticide is one of the social problems which is very much associated with dowry. In India, female foeticide is very common. There is high incidence of 'gender-based' abortion. Various private medical practitioners and family members enccourage preganant women to spend money to conduct on a gender test to alter the charces to pay dowry in future.

Poverty is another consequence of dowry. Bride’s family often have to borrow huge amount of credits to bear the dowry demand and as a consequence face deterioration in their economic condition.

Discrimination between a male child and female child is also another consequence of dowry. Due to the prevalence of dowry,

daughters are treated as a burden to the parents in the poor families. Sometimes some parents even kill their daughters after birth in order to escape from problems of dowry in future. This is one of the reasons of declining sex ratio of the countries.

Dowry deaths are most often the result of harassement and torture by husband and in-laws in an effort to extort an increased amount of dowry from the brides. Most young women being unable to bear the harassement and torture commit suicide. Sometimes they are killed by the in-laws' family.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- 2

1. State whether the following is true or false.

(i) According to The Dowry Prohibition Act, Mehr is not a case of dowry.

(ii) Incidence of gender-based abortion is much associated with dowry.

(iii) In 1983, the Dowry Prohibition Act was amended, empowering State Governments.

2. Fill in the blanks

(i) The Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in _____ for prohibiting the dowry system.

(ii) Female _____ is very much associated with dowry.

(iii) Dowry is originated in upper caste families as the _____ to the bride from her family.

6.5 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

6.5.1 Meaning

In the Indian society, women have been the victims of exploitation since time immemorial. In spite of the spread of education

and consequential women's gradual economic independence and various legislative measures adopted in favour of women, most of the women still continue to be victims of violence.

Violence against women is a term which is used to refer to the acts that are committed against women. Kempe (1982) has defined violence as "physically striking an individual and causing injury". In practical sense, it may be defined as the "force used to wrest from an individual (a woman) something that she does not want to give of her own free will and which causes her either physical injury or emotional trauma or both." Thus, rape, wife-battering, sexual abuse, eve teasing, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, kidnapping, murder are all examples of violence against women.

In 1993, United Nations declaration defined violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occuring in public or private life."

The Fourth Conference of Women, 1995 has defined violence against women as a physical act of aggression of one individual or group against another or others. Violence against women is an act of gender-based violence which results in, physical, sexual or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life and violation of human rights of women in situations of armed conflicts (Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995).

In northeast India women enjoy a greater mobility and visibility than the women in other places. This often portrays a picture of equality between men and women and therefore, violence against women is not a major concern in the area. However, unfortunately, in recent times cases of violence against women are seen to have been increasing constatntly every year in this part of the country.



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- According to UN estimates, upto 200 million women and girls are demographically missing.
- According to UNICEF 100 to 130 million women around the world have been genitally mutilated.
- Assam (40%) is among those Indian states where the prevalence of spousal violence is well above the national average (37%).

6.5.2 Types of violence against Women

There are various types of Violence against women as categorized below -

(i) Domestic Violence : Domestic violence is the physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in a family. It includes battering, dowry related violence, sexual abuse of female children, marital rape, female genital mutilation, etc.

(ii) Social Violence : It is the physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the community. This includes rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassement and intimidation at work place, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking, forced prostitution, eve teasing, etc.

(iii) Criminal Violence : Criminal violence is that violence where a woman is tortured against the radical law of the state and it is referred to as crime. It is also the violence prepetrated or condoned by the state including murder, abduction, etc.

There has been increasing concern about violence against women in general, and domestic violence in particular, since 1990s. Domestic violence has occured in all socio-economic groups. In many societies, women are socialised to accept and remain silent about such experiences. Domestic violence was recognised as a criminal offence in India in 1983. However, there was no separate civil law for domestic violence. In 2006, a comprehensive domestic violence law, known as the Protection of Women from Domestic

Violence Act 2005, was amended. The law includes the prohibition of marital rape and the provision of protection and maintenance orders against husbands and partners who are emotionally, physically or emotionally abusive.



ACTIVITY

Make a list of the social problems relating to women that you have noticed in your area and describe one of them.

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- 3

1. Fill in the blanks

(i) Violence against women is a _____ act of aggression of one individual or group against another or others.

(ii) Violence prepetrated or condoned by the _____ is a criminal violence.

(iii) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family is called _____ violence.

(iv) Violence occurring within the community is _____ violence.

(v) Domestic violence was recognised as a criminal offence in India in _____



6.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have learnt that -

- Women have faced various problems in society. Prostitution is one of the major social problems and is practised all over the world.
- It is a service which is available for sexual activities in return for payment.
- Prostitution can be categorized into street prostitution, brothel prostitution, religious prostitution and escort or call girls.
- The causes of prostitution are categorized as social, economic and psychological . Prostitutes are often found to transmit vulnerable diseases like AIDS.
- Dowry is another social evil prevalent in our country since ancient times.
- Dowry has been defined as the payment in cash or kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family at the time of marriage. However, this practice continues even after marriage.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 was amended in 1984, 1985 and 1986 with the purpose of prohibiting the dowry system.
- Causes of dowry may be grouped as social, economic and psychological. Poverty, female foeticide, female infanticide, dowry deaths and declining sex ratio are the major consequences of dowry.
- Despite various legislative measures adopted in favour of women, spread of education and economic independence of women, most of the women in our society continue to be victims of violence.
- Violence against women is an act of injury, committed against women. Rape, battering, sexual abuse, female genital mutilation, forced prostitution, kidnapping, murder are all examples of violence against women.
- Violence is perpetrated on women both inside and outside her home. Basically, there are three types of violence against women, i.e., domestic violence, social violence and criminal violence.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No. 1.

1. True. 2. False. 3. false. 4. True.

Ans to Q No. 2.

1. (i) True. (ii) True. (iii) False.
2. (i) 1961. (ii) Foeticide. iii) Wedding gifts.

Ans to Q No. 3.

1. Physical. 2. State. 3. Domestic.
4. Social. 5. 1983.



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1. What is the meaning of prostitution? Describe the different types of prostitution.

Q.2. What do you understand by the concept of dowry? What are the reasons behind this system?

Q.3. Describe elaborately the dowry system in India.

Q.4. Define violence against women. What are the different types?

Q.5. Mention the key point of Domestic Violence Act 2005.

Q.6. "Female prostitutions are perceived as the bridge between an HIV-infected person to the general population". - How?

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