

Domestic violence and Human security

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Introduction

Everyone would like to be free and enjoy life in an egalitarian environment in the context of class, cast, gender and race and without any fear of violence. There are many forms and levels of violence against human beings. Some forms of violence or insecurity occur periodically or in specific areas, such as during periods of poverty, war, and famine. Women are always vulnerable in insecure situation such as during wartime, or periods of political instability. However, in daily life women also face increased vulnerability from sexual and/or physical assault, a kind of domestic violence prevalent in the confine of one's home that tends to be overlooked or ignored by society. This paper intends to demonstrate that domestic violence is a form of human insecurity that happens to women in their daily lives. It is therefore a kind of violence closest to women's experience. Furthermore, domestic violence has significant indirect impacts on other sectors of society, such as the economy. As such, dealing with domestic violence should be part of a larger human security solution to ensure women are free from fear. This paper uses domestic violence in Thailand as an actual example of how it can be integrated into a human security response.

Human Security and Domestic Violence

The concept of security is a major focus of Nation-States to be free of external threats. Nevertheless, in the 21st century, the threats have become more complex and broader as a result of globalization and affect people directly within one's state (Commission on Human Security, 2003). Furthermore, states can fail or be ineffective in ensuring these security obligations and, moreover, at times the state itself is a cause of

insecurity. Therefore, the focus of security is shifting from the State to people and communities. Human security, as an idea, intends to formulate new safeguards for people by complementing the state's security. Human security is a new approach to protecting people from threats that combines responses from individuals themselves to cooperation at the community, national, regional, and international levels (Commission on Human Security, 2003).

Human security is not only seeking to ensure protection, it also means greater empowerment through human capacity building (Alkire, 2003). As a result, "human security brings together the human element of security, of rights and of development" (Commission on Human Security, 2003: 4).

The concept of human security is divided into two broad areas to make people more secure (Commission on Human Security, 2003): to be free from both needs and violence in terms of freedom from want and freedom from fear. Freedom from want is mainly focused on the threats to life's basic needs such as poverty, famine, financial crisis, flood, drought, and hunger. The main emphasis of freedom from fear, or the fear of violence, is the human cost of conflict, the loss of dignity or the violation of human rights during wars, because of crimes (Acharya, 2001) or terrorism, and the fear of diseases including epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, the Avian flu, or SARS.

From the point of view of human security, we can assume that people are vulnerable to various threats. Most people would acknowledge threats occurring in the public sphere and creating impacts on our daily lives. In contrast, violence within the confine

of the home often goes unnoticed even though this kind of violence is happening daily to women and girls and affects those individuals' lives and standard of living.

Domestic violence or intimate partner violence is a social problem which takes place or occurs in the household or private sphere, usually considered the safest place for women. Domestic violence is thus the closest harm experienced by women although many may not interpret it as violence because it is happening behind closed doors. Studies have confirmed that domestic violence can happen to women of every socio-economic backgrounds. It also takes place in every country: estimates are that 20-50 percent of women have suffered from domestic violence depending on the country (UNICEF, 2000). Women can face domestic violence in the form of physical abuse such as beating, kicking, sexual abuse or marital rape, and psychological and emotional abuse by verbal threats that intend to terrorize (Karmen, 2004).

To respond to women's insecurity stemming from domestic violence, one has to understand the various contributing factors that caused domestic violence. Domestic violence is not the result of one single factor, there are many factors that can have an effect on this problem such as cultural practice and norms, and economic, legal and political status (UNICEF, 2000). These factors reinforce each other in a cycle that perpetuates domestic violence against women and girl.

Culture can be a factor of violence against women because of the "gender-specific socialization, cultural definitions of appropriate sex role, expectation of roles within relationships, belief in the inherent superiority of male, values that give men proprietary rights over women and girls, notion of the family as the private sphere and

under male control and the acceptability of violence as a means to resolve conflict” (adapted from UNICEF, 2000 quoting Heise, 1994).

One of the concrete examples of cultural factors in Thailand is the notion of being a good woman. The notion of being a good woman distinguishes women’s role into first the good daughter and then the good wife. The good daughter is supposed to be obedient to her father and appropriately educated to be well-mannered, good in cooking and taking care of household, and with good caring and nursing skills (Kritiya, 2005, Saisamorn, 1986). Being a good wife means women have to satisfy their husband and be obedient. From these beliefs, we can see that women are expected to be passive and protected by the male members of their family, beginning with their father and then continuing with their husband. At the same time, women are strongly expected to have many responsibilities toward their families. This notion creates an imbalance of power between men and women, and provides a man with the opportunity to exercise their power over women in a violent form to ensure their obedience and as a means to disciplining women. Therefore, men may use violence against women as a form of punishment, for example, when women are seen as disobeying their husband, when they are suspected to be, or has been, unfaithful, or when women are seen as not fulfilling their expected household work or dissatisfy their husband (Kritiya, 2005).

Legislation and legal institutions, for their part, are also a cause of domestic violence because of “the lesser legal status of women either by written law and/or by practice, laws regarding divorce, child custody, maintenance and inheritance, legal definitions of rape and domestic abuse, low levels of legal literacy among women, and

insensitive treatment of women and girls by police and judiciary” (adapted from UNICEF, 2000 quoting Heise, 1994). One has to understand that domestic violence is both influenced by and influence the legal framework, and, in turn, culture. It reinforces the belief that men have the right to discipline their women, whether daughters or wives, since it is consistent with historical laws which give men the right to beat their wives as a form of controlling power (Bacchi, C.L., 1999). There are many examples in the legal tradition of many countries giving a lower status to women compared with men, such as in England. The basis of English common law granted the man as “head of the household, they have rights to discipline his wife and children and regard them as their property”. In addition, women have the duty to “love, honor and obey” their husband, thus if women behaved out of this path, husbands have rights to punish them (Karmen, 2004). Also in Thailand, a traditional law called *Kod Mai Tra Sam Doung* stated that husbands and fathers have rights to sell their wives and daughters and the right to beat them in order to discipline them.

Women also face difficulty in escaping violence from a brutal husband because of their economic dependence. It is more difficult for women to get a job or be employed in a high position. There is gender bias in the economy (Els0, 1994). Thus women are still dependent on their husband’s income. In contrast, although some women may earn a living as well, they may be forced to share or pass on their income to their husband. One common tactics by disgruntled husband to avoid separation is to accuse their wives of child abuse. On the other hand, women who face domestic violence have difficulty finding jobs because of their ill-appearance and health problems. Thus, in this case, domestic violence forces women to work in low-paid positions or engage

in house-based work which does not provide a reasonable income in order to improve their economic status and their independence (UNICEF, 2000).

Moreover, in the political realm “domestic violence is not taken seriously”(adapted from UNICEF, 2000 quoting Heise, 1994). Therefore, the state does not see this matter as an urgent problem in policy making or as a human security development obligation. As a result, there are many women suffering from domestic violence each year because witnesses to violence do not provide any assistance or report the battered women to the authorities. This further increases women’s insecurity and pushes women into a vicious cycle of fear.

There are also some other factors can contribute to domestic violence, including alcohol use and the perception of domestic violence as a myth. Furthermore, the WHO fact sheet (2006) reports that alcohol use is one of the causes of domestic violence. Alcohol use is directly related to physical and emotional health. It can lead to a lack of consciousness and encourage drunken men to use violence against others, especially their family members. Otherwise, it can have an impact on the household’s economic wellbeing, childcare as well as other others family issues, increasing conflicts and feeding more domestic violence, leading to greater women’s insecurity.

Moreover, the myth of domestic violence creates the notion of domestic violence as a private or household problem and not a social problem. Fighting becomes a normal phenomena occurring in every household, and thus not a problem for outsiders to intervene in. Thus many people see this problem as a fairly normal situation which can happen in an intimate relationship or in the family, and expect that after fighting

the spouse will come back to conjugal love and resent any attempt by outsiders to mediate the situation.

From the many reasons advanced to explain the causes of domestic violence, we can identify one important cause in the denial of fundamental rights of women (UNICEF, 2000).

Having explained the causes of domestic violence, we should understand that impacts of domestic violence, in addition to increasing women's sense of insecurity, also affect the overall social insecurity.

Domestic violence directly impacts an individual's insecurity in term of physical, psychological and emotional abuse (UNICEF, 2000). Battered women are constantly burdened by a range of health problems such as injuries, unwanted pregnancies, permanent disabilities, and self-injured behavior (UNICEF, 2000). In addition, there is an important impact on mental health. They can have psychological problems, like anxiety, depression, fear, low self-esteem, or traumatic stress disorder (UNICEF, 2000). Also, these mental health problems can lead to fatal outcomes as in suicides, homicides, and maternal mortality.

Furthermore, the impact of domestic violence is felt across the whole society by weakening human resources, and contributing to economic decline because of the socio-economic cost of violence (UNICEF, 2000). According to UNICEF, the socio-economic cost of violence can have four major effects. First

“direct cost: value of goods and services used in treating or preventing violence such as medical, police, criminal justice system, housing and social service.

Second, non-monetary cost: pain and suffering such as increased morbidity, increased mortality via homicide and suicide, abuse of alcohol and drugs and depressive disorders. Third, the economic multiplier effects: macro-economic, labor market, inter-generational productivity impacts which are decreased labor market participation, reduced productivity on the job, lower earning, increased absenteeism, intergenerational productivity impacts via grade repetition and lower education attainment of children, decreased investment and saving and capital flight. Lastly, social multiplier effects: impact on interpersonal relations and quality of life such as intergenerational transmission of violence, reduced quality of life, erosion of social capital and reduced participation in democratic process” (Buvinic et al, 1999 quoted in UNICEF, 2000)

Consequently, we can argue that domestic violence contributes to women’s insecurity increasing various ‘fears’, as it also affects women’s needs in term of economic status, standard of living, and national development. In addition, from the situation of domestic violence in Thailand, there are some statistical data illustrating that the number of battered women who seek help from the public is not small. First, statistics from women’s shelters show that in 2003 4,305 battered women came to the shelter, while in 2004, there were 2,247 cases, and in 2005 662 cases (Office of Women Affair and Family Development, 2004-2006). Second, from the consultancy service of Friends of Women Foundation, a Thai NGO, there were an additional 986 cases in 2004 and 1461 cases in 2005. Third, the number of battered women who sought assistance from the Foundation for women went from 154 cases in 2003, 99 cases in 2004, 114 cases in 2005, and 108 cases in 2006. In addition, statistics from the Bureau of Health Service System Development, Ministry of Public Health show that in 2003 there were 1,144 cases of battered women who came to One Stop Crisis Centers (OSCC), and data from 8 hospitals in Bangkok having OSCC during October, 2003 to March 2004 show that there were 253 women beaten by their husband who sought medical care service (Office of Women’s Affairs and Family Development, n.d.). Moreover these statistics only represent a small part of the total number. We can

assume that there are many thousands of women who suffer from domestic violence but have not come out for help.

Human Security and the elimination of Domestic violence

Therefore, the impacts of domestic violence should be seen as a major impediment to human security with regards to freedom from fear. It should also be seen in the broader context of human rights and development. Thus, in order to build human security, it requires effective initiatives and cooperation at every level—from global, regional, and local levels, between local civil society and civil society beyond the border of nation-states (Acharya, 2005, Alkire, 2003) as well as an effective human security awareness framework.

For the sustainable construction and maintenance of human security, it is necessary to have good cooperation between the international, national, community and individual levels in creating a human security environment. At the international level, domestic violence is seen as one of the forms of violence committed against women against which many international organizations mobilizing, ending the impunity for violence against women and girl and ensuring women's human rights through different agencies such as the United Nations, the United Nation Children's Fund, and the World Health Organization. The outcomes of this cooperation are international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna), ICDP (Cairo), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms

of Discrimination Against Women. Domestic violence is one of the forms of violence against women included in these declarations. However all these legal instruments will only be effective if states agree to applying them in their policies and local obligations.

Starting from the international level, all of these instruments require the agreement of states, but also cooperative actions at the national level by the governments of member countries. The state has to adopt concrete measures to provide the authority of protection and prevention for ending domestic violence against women, while simultaneously strengthening the human security environment.

In Thailand, the state is trying to create an anti-domestic violence environment, by following international norms, supporting social movements and NGOs, while the product of power struggles in the house of parliament (Chalidaporn, 2006) results in appropriate laws, policies and programs to help domestic violence victims, such as the Act on the Protection of Victim of Domestic Violence¹, One Stop Crisis Center, and family's collective therapy program. The NGOs, and civil society sector, has also contributed for a long time impressive efforts in fighting domestic violence (Ji et al, 2006). Women NGOs in Thailand such as the Friends of Women Foundation, Foundation for Women, and other women's NGOs, are also trying to provide assistance to battered women. Basically, NGOs will provide legal counseling and shelter for these women. Beside this, they also try to generate an anti-violence environment in order to stop domestic violence through many activities such as anti-violence campaigns, activities to raise women's awareness of their rights and increase

¹ Translated from Thai by the author

women's empowerment via the media, in addition to increasing the overall social awareness around domestic violence while, at the same times, pressing the government to take serious actions by providing fundamental protections and assistance.

Furthermore, communities can also be an important factor in protecting women from domestic violence, while, at the same time, creating a preventive environment against domestic violence. Communities can take a key role in helping battered women, because this is where women belong. However, one should underline that communities can have both negative and positive effects on domestic violence. It can help in the prevention and protection of women from brutal husbands or further oppress women as victims of domestic violence by making them follow community norms. These norms influence the history, the economy, and the overall power structure of community (Pimpawal, 1997, cited in Pimpawal et al, 2003). These elements are important factors since they can provide support or obstruction in solving the problem. Therefore, for bringing out the potential of communities in solving the problem, it is necessary to understand the background of each community, and create a local network between communities and NGOs in term of responding to domestic violence, supporting women's rights, and increasing awareness of women's security and violence against women, especially domestic violence, as well as empowering women to respond by themselves and increase their confidence to exercise their rights, including the fundamental right not to be assaulted.

Moreover, we should stress the importance of the individual response, where women confronted with domestic violence take action on their own. Women do not have the

luxury to wait for external assistance, because it may not come in time. There are many cases of women who have fought domestic violence on their own in the past. There is the example of the well-known historical case of *Am Dang Meon* who fought for her right to choose her husband by herself, and the case of *Am Dang Jun* who fought for her right not to be sold by her husband and father during the reign of King Rama IV. These struggles were successful and made a great impact towards reforming Thai traditional law, especially the part of Family Law which gave women the right to make their own decisions in marriage and the canceled the act which allowed and gave the rights to fathers and husbands of selling their daughters and wives. As a result, the status of women was improved and women were more secured.

These two cases suggest that women can initiate and protect their rights on their own or seek the support of outsiders such as NGOs and government agencies. At present, the constitution already provide equal rights to its citizens, therefore, women should be made aware on this and use these legal tools to increase their security.

We therefore suggest that actions are needed at every level and cooperation is necessary for creating an anti-domestic violence environment and ending violence against women. It is very important to take the intervention in the domestic violence as well as providing the assistance to the battered women as prevention to further violence against women, and possibly violence in self-defense against an offender.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is the most personal insecurity that happens daily to women. It also has impacts on other aspects of society. It should be viewed as a major problem of

human security and every segment of society should be concerned and take responsibility for fighting it. Women's security cannot emerge as long as domestic violence exists. Therefore, immediate actions should be taken urgently and seriously at all level to secure women and girls' rights in their private sphere. This way, we may start eliminating violence against women in their daily life and then extend the struggle to other forms of violence against women. Human security will be ensured when women security is guaranteed.

Recommendations stemming from this paper are multi-sectoral. In order to stop domestic violence and increase women security and human security, legal instruments should be used and followed by the relevant government agencies. We would like to emphasize the required effectiveness of policy implementation. There are many high-quality legal instruments produced in both international and national levels, however, many of these fail to produce change at the implementation stage because civil servants who implement these plans still lack training in gender sensitivity and human security awareness. Consequently, to make all these instruments work, the state should urgently train staff relevant to the issue of domestic violence, including medical care staffs, police officers, lawyers, and judges.

Cooperation between individual, communities, national, regional, and international level as well as the inter-cooperation of civil society and the state in fighting violence against women is crucial for an interdependent and effective response. The state can design and provide training in cooperation with experienced NGOs workers, ex-battered women and gender experts to have a clearer understanding about the status and needs of domestic violence victims. As a result, human security would be ensured

at a most fundamental level: in women's everyday lives. This cooperation is important if we want to ensure that human security is more than a concept. Security in the personal sphere can contribute to strengthen overall human security for all.

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