

## Research article

Strategic analysis of intimate partner violence (IPV) and cycle of violence in the autobiographical text –*When I Hit You*J. Sangeetha<sup>a</sup>, S. Mohan<sup>b</sup>, A. Hariharasudan<sup>b,\*</sup>, Nishad Nawaz<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Research Scholar, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Anand Nagar, Krishnankoil, 626126, Tamil Nadu, India<sup>b</sup> Faculty of English, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Anand Nagar, Krishnankoil, 626126, Tamil Nadu, India<sup>c</sup> Department of Business Management, College of Business Administration, Kingdom University, Riffa, 40434, Bahrain

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a globally recognized societal problem that requires intensive research to raise public awareness.**Aim:** Accordingly, the purpose of the study is to analyze IPV at the physical, psychological, and social aspects of abuse.**Method:** The methodology of the study correlates IPV to the personal experiences of notable Indian writer, Meena Kandasamy, according to the autobiographical account of her abusive married life in the award-winning novel *When I Hit You*, which depicts the horrible treatment of women by their perpetrators within a closed sphere. To substantiate, the selected autobiographical work is compared with Lenore Edna Walker's prominent Cycle of Violence theory, which best describes why women become victims and also the abuser's tactics in controlling the women in a violent relationship.**Results:** The study's findings suggest that IPV, a serious global problem, requires government intervention and severe legal enforcement to protect women's lives from the clutches of the abuser.

## 1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a grave social issue that violates women's rights, and it is recognized as a significant global health concern that infringes on women's well-being across all countries and cultures (Ellsberg et al., 2015). It is widely recognized as a kind of gender-based violence, with women being victims of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse at a higher rate than men. Even when women retaliate or engage in mutual aggression, the woman is more likely to be physically and emotionally harmed. Women who defend themselves are frequently detained by the batterer. It is also established that men's conditioning to be more powerful than women perpetuates gender violence, making women victims (Elbert et al., 2018; American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Women who are victims of intimate partner violence have been acknowledged by the discipline of psychology for several decades, and Battered Women's Syndrome (BWS) is now recognized as a mental disorder that can develop in victims of domestic violence as a result of long-term abuse (Rennison and Planty, 2003). The term "syndrome" also medicalizes, or appears to medicalize, the subject of domestic abuse, lending it credibility that other arguments lack. In a society where the

medicalization of deviant conduct is on the rise relying on medical terminology can lend credence to an argument (Conrad, 2010). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Public Health Agency of the United States of America, "the term "intimate partner violence" encompasses physical assault, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Even though women's liberation is spoken of widely, stalking and inhumane treatments are still parts of life for women worldwide (Brooks, 2007; Stark, 2009; Bhattacharyya, 2015). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) analysis, it is estimated that nearly 1 in 3 women experience violence from their intimate partner in their lifespan. Also, it is stated that globally, "as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners" (World Health Organization, 2021). IPV mainly occurs as it is used by the abuser to maintain power and control within the intimate relationship (Tscholl and Scribano, 2010; Straus et al., 2017). Among other different proposed causes of IPV, it is analyzed that in developing nations like India, the prevalence of IPV is higher due to deep-rooted male patriarchal norms and long-standing conventional cultural norms that view women as subordinate to men (Gundappa and Rathod, 2012; Slabbert, 2017;

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Stevens, 2021). A majority of the population in various countries sees wife-beating as justified in some circumstances, most commonly in situations of actual or suspected infidelity by wives or their “disobedience” toward a husband or partner (Stark and Buzawa 2009). IPV is a well-documented international issue. Nonetheless, it is one of the indistinguishable felonies of our time. This can be seen even in recent times in the number of cases of women’s abuse during the pandemic period. Stay-at-home orders, which were intended to protect the public and prevent widespread infection, entrapped many IPV victims with their abusers (Megan et al., 2020). As this problem exacerbates, there is an increasing level of global concern in the field of research to delve into the issue in depth to raise awareness and address violence against women to exterminate the problem of IPV. This research is significant in the contemporary Covid 19 situation because it has brought attention to many continuing public health concerns, including domestic violence. This study not only aims to create awareness among the general public but also attempts to emphasise how much effort is required to guarantee that victims of abuse have continued access to help, safety and healthcare. Accordingly, the present study attempts to connect Lenore Edna Walker’s Cycle of Violence theory with an autobiographical text of Meena Kandasamy (a well-known Indian writer and survivor of IPV). Besides, the current study demonstrates how these two aspects are collectively intriguing and of equal, complementary significance to each other. Walker, a well-known American Psychologist who founded the Domestic Violence Institute, was the most influential in connecting battered woman studies to legal contexts, and it is her work that courts relied on its most in their decisions (Faigman, 1986). This theory is still in practice as research data concerning battered women are still potentially applicable to inform aspects of battered women’s cases (Schneider, 2008; Deb, 2018).

Autobiographical fiction is a good stepping stone for intersectional analysis, as it is concretely interconnected to reality. Intersectionality is a term used to describe how several forms of prejudice can cross and affect someone’s life. It is defined as “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, which are considered as forming overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage” (Veenstra, 2011; Khazaei, 2018). An intersectional analysis tries to provide light on the multiplicative impacts of several but interconnected categories and elements. Using an intersectional lens also entails understanding the historical contexts of a problem. Historical legacies of violence and systemic discrimination have resulted in profound imbalances that have disadvantaged some from the outset. Poverty, caste systems, racism, and sexism are all examples of disparities that deny people their rights and equitable chances. By incorporating the concept of intersectionality into feminism, the movement becomes truly inclusive, allowing women of different nationalities, economic backgrounds, cultures, identities, and orientations to have their voices heard (Gilman, 2020). In Social Sciences research, autobiographical work serves as an ideal model for analysing because, by nature, they lodge more vividly and permanently in professionals’ memories than empirical research (Weaver and Weaver, 2013). *When I Hit You (2017)*, Kandasamy’s shortlisted book for the Women’s Prize for Fiction, is a raw and true account of the author’s abusive marriage. It is a poignant example of IPV as well as a model of a woman’s private thoughts and survival struggles. In an interview about her autobiographical work, she says, “I did not choose that theme, it visited me, imprinted itself upon me, changed my life irrevocably—and I had to write about it” (The Wire, 2017). As the study is based on autobiographical work, it portrays the realistic form of three distinct phases of the cycle of violence that happened in Kandasamy’s life through her narrative and discourse, and it is considered the novelty of the study.

Kawulich citing Silverman’s emphasis on social ideas explains how social theories help and are essential in addressing even the most basic problems in social science research (Kawulich, 2010). As a result, this study incorporates Walker’s well-known construct, such as “Cycle of Violence” theory, which she developed in her seminal work *The Battered*

*Woman (1979)*. Walker created this model to explain the dynamics and coexistence of abuse in an intimate relationship. This book resulted from a series of interviews Walker conducted with women from all over the United States and the United Kingdom who had been subjected to violence by their partners. According to Patricia, “Walker was one of the first psychologists to write on the subject of wife battering and her formulation has become part of the body of generally accepted theoretical literature on all the subject” (Patricia, 1993). Her book *The Battered Woman*, published in 1979, is significant even today since it is based on actual research that confirms the “scientific validity” of her approach and is primarily aimed at other psychologists and social scientists. In domestic violence literature, *The Battered Woman* was probably most often quoted and cited 530 times in the domestic violence literature, according to the Social Science Citation Index, since 1996 (Rothenberg, 2003; Richards et al., 2016; Haider, 2017; Benavides et al., 2019). Another reason for the emerging trend of this theory is that as a proponent of individual counselling for battered women as a means of helping them to escape, Walker offers a solution to the complex situation of domestic violence. Walker believes that larger social issues play a role in the persistence of domestic violence, but she also recognises that giving battered women psychiatric counselling is a good starting step (Rothenberg, 2003). Also, Walker began presenting statements confirming the reality of such a psychological disorder at criminal trials involving abused defendants, and this theory acquired prominence in the criminal justice system as a legal defence (Ferraro, 2003). In most countries, even today, expert testimony on this subject is acceptable in court cases where it is judged relevant, as Walker’s explanation has considerable cultural resonance. With this official acknowledgement, the battered woman syndrome became the only cited-by-name theory to attain institutional power in the legislative and judicial systems (Rothenberg, 2003; Kaur and Garg, 2008).

## 2. Review of literature

Women’s violence continues to be a problem in the culture due to power imbalances between men and women in all ways (Priyadharshini et al., 2021a,b). IPV, according to Walker, results from a socialised androcentric need for power and abuse of authority by men who have been indoctrinated to believe they have the right to control the women in their lives, even through violence (Karides, 2013; Walker, 1989; Benediti and Fagan, 2018). According to Campbell’s research, battering is an important direct and indirect risk factor for various physical health issues that are frequently seen in healthcare settings, with IPV being one of the most common causes of injury in women. The finding of the study reveals that in comparison to non-battered women, battered women suffer from serious and increasing physical health problems, such as injury or death, chronic pain, gastrointestinal and gynaecological signs, including sexually transmitted diseases, with gynaecological problems being the most consistent and long-lasting impact on battered women’s health (Campbell, 2002; Dillon, 2013). The study by Rakovec-Felser illustrates IPV, particularly battering, has specific, continuing serious negative health consequences for women victims, even after the abuse has stopped (Rakovec-Felser, 2014; Nandi et al., 2020). Apart from physical ailments, the victims of IPV suffer severe psychological health issues, such as depression, suicidal ideation, stress, fears, anxiety, nervousness, post-traumatic stress disorder, nightmares, memory problems, sleeping disorders, guilt and self-esteem issues.

Furthermore, it has been discovered that there is a clear and strong link between IPV and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), implying that women in abusive relationships are more vulnerable to PTSD as a result of their cumulative traumatic experiences (Karakurt et al., 2014; Pico-Alfonso, 2005; Peltzer et al., 2013; Pandeewari et al., 2021; Priyadharshini et al., 2021a,b). Not only has it affected the lives of women, but also the children living under such circumstances. When a boy witnesses his father abusing his mother, he is 700 times more likely to use abuse in his own home.

**Table 1.** Summary of extensive review of the literature.

Author(s)	Focus of the study	Paradigm	Findings
Campbell (2002)	Physical health effects of Battered Women	Women's samples were drawn from the general population, health insurance databases, and various primary-care settings in the United States.	In comparison to non-battered women, battered women suffer from serious and increasing physical health problems such as injury or death, sexually transmitted diseases, with gynaecological problems being the most consistent and long-lasting impact on battered women's health. Increased risk of HIV was identified related to IPV.
Dillon (2013)	Associations between IPV and poor physical health	Analysis of Primary and Secondary data collection and review of research papers published from 2006–2012.	
Rakovec-Felser (2014)	Health Consequences of Battering	Review of Secondary Data Collection.	Even after the abuse has stopped, battering has long-term serious negative health consequences for women victims.
Karakurt et al. (2014)	Psychological health issues and mental needs of Battered Women	Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 35 women from a Midwestern domestic violence shelter.	Victims of IPV suffer severe psychological health issues such as depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety, nervousness, sleeping disorders, guilt, traumatic stress experiences, and so on. It also identifies a strong link between IPV and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The findings support a link between the severity of intimate partner violence and mental health issues (PTSD and depression).
Pico-Alfonso (2005)	IPV and its impacts on the mental wellbeing of women	A cross-sectional study was conducted on 127 women from Spain's Valencian Community.	
Peltzer et al. (2013)	The distinctive effects of different types of intimate partner violence on PTSD and depression	A total of 268 women (18 years and older) receiving a protection order in the Vhembe district of South Africa were interviewed by an external interviewer.	
Lawoko et al. (2007)	The Social inequalities in IPV exposure among women in Kenya	A cross-sectional study of the sample comprising 3,696 women was retrieved from the Kenyan Demographic and Health Survey of 2003.	Women's high status may act as a protective factor against IPV. A higher status than the male partner, on the other hand, may increase vulnerability to abuse.
Yofna et al. (2021)	To review and synthesize available knowledge on the subject of Intimate Partner Violence	Review of related articles and results of empirical studies published from 2004 to 2020.	IPV is associated with cultural, socioeconomic, and educational influences.
Dhungel et al. (2017)	To assess the connection between several socio-economic factors and IPV in Nepal	A cross-sectional quantitative survey of 236 women working in carpet and garment factories in Kathmandu, Nepal, was conducted.	Lack of employment and economic dependence of women on their husbands has been identified to be a significant link between violence and risk factors. This is also viewed as the reason for women staying up in abusive relationships.
Patra et al. (2018)	Emphasizes the epidemiology and typologies of IPV, perpetuating factors and their outcomes	Review of secondary sources on the subject of IPV.	
Gover et al. (2013)	Women's reasons for not reporting incidents of Intimate Partner abuse to law enforcement	Qualitative analysis was conducted among a sample of 102 women regarding their reasons for not re-engaging the legal system for subsequent victimizations.	During the study period, women who experienced violence did not report it to police because of a concern that what happened was not serious enough or that they would not be taken seriously.
Maselesele (2011)	Women coping up strategies with domestic violence relating to Walker's view on the victimization of women	A qualitative descriptive study of selected women who were staying with their abusive partners, tolerating abusive relationship for a period of more than 20 years.	Understanding the nature of domestic violence, as described in Walker's Cycle Theory of Violence, is as important as redirecting the victim's coping mechanisms toward multi-sectoral restorative pathways.
Franiuk and Scherr (2013)	Stereotypical Portrayal of gender roles and gender violence in Vampire fiction	Analyzing <i>Twilight</i> and <i>The Vampire Diaries</i> using Cultivation theory.	Vampire fiction has particularly strong traditional patriarchal themes, with male lead characters being aggressive and female lead characters being nurturing.
Kokkola (2011)	Intimate Partner Violence in <i>Twilight</i>	Walker's Battered woman syndrome through the character of Bella.	Bella is a stereotypical victim, analogous to Walker's depiction of Battered Wives.
Bonomi and et al. (2013)	Pervasive reflection of IPV in <i>Fifty Shades of Grey</i>	The study correlates U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's definitions of emotional abuse and sexual violence.	Normalization of abuse in a popular cultural medium such as novels, film and music creates the context to support abusive violence among people.
Shawna Germain (2014)	Different dimensions of IPV	Analyzing Beth Sipe's autobiographical fiction <i>I Am Not Your Victim</i> .	Sipe's point of view and its relation to the decisions made by IPV victims in general, including why they tolerated the abuse and how their lifestyle appears normal and acceptable to them.

Walker observed that the primary reason for rising violence is that many social norms and other traditional cultural aspects have been unsupportive and hinder abused women's decision to leave the abusive relationship, particularly when their partners' actions have remained unchanged (Walker, 2015). According to societal norms, the married woman is viewed as the husband's property, and physical violence against the wife is broadly supported in many countries (Yofna et al., 2021). From an economic standpoint, women are incapable of seeking employment because of the risk of violence and a lack of financial independence, making them remain in abusive relationships. Women's economic dependence on their husbands has been identified to be a significant link between violence and risk factors (Dhungel et al., 2017; Patra et al., 2018). When it comes to the legal system, abused women's most common reasons for staying in abusive relationships and not reporting their abuse to authorities were frustration with the criminal justice system and feared that what had happened was not serious enough or that they would not be treated seriously (Gover et al., 2013; Douglas, 2017). In addition, Lawoko et al. study analyzed educational status and occupation as risk factors for IPV. While having a higher

education/occupational status than her partner reduced a woman's risk of IPV exposure, being employed and having a higher occupational status than her partner increased a woman's liability to IPV (Lawoko et al., 2007; Krebs et al., 2011). In the mid-1990s, the battered woman phenomenon was perhaps the most well-known theory for domestic abuse due to Walker's work being accepted in courtrooms, as well as attention from the media and other social scientists (Rothenberg, 2003). As the problem became more widespread, battered woman shelters sprang up worldwide, sending a message to men that if they abused their intimate partners, the community would defend and shelter them (Walker, 1987). Walker showed how the abuse followed a predictable sequence or pattern that was replicated repeatedly. While each cycle is peculiar to each couple, the amount of time it takes to complete it is shortening, and the violence within it increases (Wilson, 2019). Walker's portrayal of battered woman syndrome has several positive effects on the large minority, allowing advocates to achieve their goals of public sympathy for individual victims. Maselesele's study employs Walker's three distinct stages of the Cycle of Violence, resulting in the majority of IPV victims experiencing the same level of abuse as described by Walker. The victim's life

is severely impacted after a series of abusive episodes and as the cycle progresses (Maselesele, 2011; Nicholson and Lutz, 2017). Breaking the cycle of abuse begins with entering a shelter, and a complete break includes knowledge of the partner's internalised behaviour patterns as well as an understanding that no one wants to live in constant fear of violence (Murray, 1988).

(Refer to Table 1 summarises the extensive review of the literature)

According to the reviewed literature, many scholars have conducted studies on various concepts of the idea of IPV, but no study has been conducted on the concept of IPV in Meena Kandasamy's autobiographical text *When I Hit You* (2017). Thus, the current study will bridge the gap between kinds of literature and extract various IPV concepts from Kandasamy's text.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology of this study employs Narrative approach to examine the intersection of theoretical social structures and personal abusive experiences of women in general to understand the severity of IPV's impacts on victims, particularly the cycle pattern of abuse. This approach has its strongest roots in sociology because it is relational, provides a better understanding of women's life cycles, and can analyze individual agency and structural conditions (Bertaux and Kohli, 1984). Academicians and practitioners in a variety of social science fields can acquire a more holistic perspective by analysing life history narratives, which, while intently focused on an individual, family, or small group of informants, is more humanistic than what can be inferred through observation or other methodological tools, such as surveys (Ojermark, 2007).

Autobiographies are regarded in the literature as a history of selfhood, recall of genuine occurrences, a mirror of society, and a well-spring of one's moral view of life. Autobiography is a truthful account based on true occurrences that focuses on an individual's existence. In sociology, autobiographies and autobiographical studies concentrating on ethnic communities and women have expanded significantly in the last two decades as a result of feminist research and the burgeoning discipline of ethnic studies, is viewed as a shared experience enmeshed within a collective endeavour that, in turn, includes a 'everywoman' depiction (Bornat and Diamond, 2007; Doherty, 2019; McCall, 2005; Maynes et al., 2011). A revived interest in sociological study paradigms that allow access to 'the subjective' in social relationships has led to autobiography being explored as a methodological strategy and/or source of data for this objective (Harrison et al., 1993; McKenzie et al., 2005; Boblin et al., 2013; Harrison et al., 2017). It is stated that autobiographical memory research can assist in broader studies of memory and that the parallels between memory for autobiographical and other materials make an autobiographical memory an extremely pertinent tool for the larger investigation of cognitive functioning and psychological well-being (Holland and Kensinger, 2010; Lewis-Beck, 2004). Women's literature is an important subject for exploring memory and resistance, especially when women's histories and narratives have historically been ignored within patriarchal societies. As a result, women's experiences—recollections of their memories—become important records of personal or community histories that could otherwise remain unspoken or unacknowledged (Sarah Katherine, 2010; Slabbert and Smith, 2017). Women's autobiographies are relational, intertwined with others, and entwined in societies (Dawn et al., 1995; Mason, 2019). Interpreting women's personal narratives frequently necessitates a careful juxtaposing of various realities, which contributes to the feminist aim of changing not just the substance of our understanding of the basic societal structure but also the standards that lead our quest for truths (Polkey, 2000). This can be correlated with the views of Kandasamy, where she employs her own abusive story to instruct her fellow women to create awareness and, at the same time, liberate herself from the shackles imposed by society.

Accordingly, the methodology of this study incorporates Walker's Cycle of Violence theory illustrated in the seminal book *The Battered Woman* (1979) and Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* (2017), a documented narrative of abuse by the writer of the text who supplemented information from her interviews. The authors of the current research have considered the two works as primary sources of the study. In addition, secondary sources, such as journal articles and reviews, were collected from four popular databases, including PsychInfo, Google Scholar, Science Direct, and PubMed, to gather additional information about IPV. The primary and secondary sources were closely read by the researchers, and the ideas discussed were studied and adapted in the study. The researchers of this article also highlight that this study is not a narrative analysis per se but rather a broad examination of the universal plight of IPV women victims within the context of one woman's experienced self-narrative of abuse, as this text is a reflection of the voice of the voiceless women who are trapped in an abusive relationship.

Lenore Edna Walker, a contemporary American psychologist, has been a proponent of women's issues worldwide. She founded the Domestic Violence Institute and is credited for raising public consciousness about the severe impacts of domestic violence. Walker, an independent clinical psychologist, saw clients in her practice in the 1970s who had been battered in their marriages. Analyzing the commonalities among her clients, she developed the well-known "Cycle of Violence Theory," which described the three stages of cyclical behavioural patterns that are commonly attributed to violence in an abusive relationship (Copenhaver, 2019). Walker distinguishes the three distinct stages of abuse as Tension Building Phase, Acute Battering Phase and Honeymoon Phase. Her decades of research suggest that the predictable three-part cyclical abuse is common in every relationship though it is inevitable. For the past 30 years, this model has resounded with victims and violence prevention experts, and it is included in the majority of literature on violent IPV relationships (Schrager, 2021). Walker demonstrated that abuse in a relationship can begin at any point, and it becomes more intense when there is an escalation of tension arouses between the couple.

(Refer to Figure 1—Walker's Cycle of Violence and Its phases)

#### 3.1. Phase-I—Tension Building Phase

This phase is the beginning of the violence, and it is characterized by a gradual escalation in verbal or minor battering incidents within the relationship. On the other hand, the victim alters her behaviour and takes the blame on herself. The woman tries to calm the abuser and attempts a variety of ways to placate him by catering to the needs that please him while not aggravating his anger further. According to Walker, the batterer in this phase expresses dissatisfaction but is not extremely explosive. This phase may last anytime from days to months, and it persuades an increase in the level of violence between the couples. When the coping techniques of the victim fail, or the batterer remains unchanged in his behaviour, it leads to Phase II of the cycle (Walker, 1987).

(Refer to Figure 2—Tension Building Phase)

Figure 2 depicts the Tension Building Phase (Phase-I), which occurred during Meena Kandasamy's abusive relationship with her husband. The tension begins within the first month of their marriage when the husband threatens her by ordering her not to share her phone number with anyone, to stay off social media sites, to groom herself in an unfashionable manner that would not appeal to others, to use internet access only in his presence and the list goes on. When she failed to meet his expectations, he would always punish her verbally or with minor beatings. Kandasamy catalogues the weapons of abuse used by her husband, "The cord of my Mac-Book which left thin, red welts on my arms. The back of the broomstick that pounded me across the length of my back. The writing pad whose edges found my knuckles. His heavy buckled brown



leather belt, broken ceramic plates, twisted electrical cables and the drain hose of the washing machine” (Kandasamy, 2017, p.70). Walker’s representation of Phase-I can be seen through the illustration of Meena Kandasamy, where she says, “It always starts with a silly accusation, my denial, an argument, and along the way, the verbal clash cascades into a torrent of blows” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 69). Kandasamy, on the other hand, decides not to fight with him because she knows that trying to reason with him will result in a long, interminable battle, a war of attrition that will exhaust her and lead to defeat. As a result, she tries to soothe her husband by obeying his wishes and orders, cooking his favourite foods, and keeping up with housework. Despite her dissatisfaction with her husband’s control over her life, she says, “This is the plainness that makes him pleased, a plainness that can be controlled and moulded to his will and that will prevent arguments” (Kandasamy, 2017, p.16).

### 3.2. Phase-II Acute Battering Phase

This phase is distinguished by the uncontrollable release of tensions that have accumulated during Phase-I. This is the stage at which the batterer becomes extremely aggressive, endangering and injuring the women. Walker described this as the cycle’s shortest and most brutal phase. The batterer’s major assault includes forcible restraint, severe physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The abuser, in this phase, explodes in a violent outburst as a result of the abuser’s increasing level of tension that it must be released (Schrager, 2021). This phase depicts how the battered victim, exhausted from the constant stress, usually withdraws from the batterer, fearful of inadvertently setting off an explosion. As soon as the batterer notices her withdrawal, he begins to move more oppressively toward her, resulting in severe devastation (Walker, 1987). This is the phase when the woman wishes to step out of the abusive relationship, and intervention occurs during this phase as the woman is completely helpless in the hands of her abuser’s impending danger, and her basic feelings are focused on her survival.

(Refer to Figure 3–Acute Battering Phase)

Figure 3 depicts the second phase of the abuse, in which Kandasamy’s husband erupts into violence, breaking her laptop, humiliating her in public, and physically harming her. The intensity of the violence can be seen in Kandasamy’s words when she says, “Today it is my arms that he is

punching, but tomorrow it will be my hair that he will wind around his palm to drag me through the rooms, the next day it will be my backbone that will endure a shattering blow, the day after that it will be my head on which his angry fist will descend. Every day I inch closer to death” (Kandasamy, 2017, p.156). He also verbally assaults her, calling her a whore, a prostitute and other derogatory terms to demean her character. Kandasamy’s psychological trauma is expressed in her words, where she expresses her displeasure with her husband’s coarseness of insults, saying, “I’m ashamed that language allows a man to insult a woman in an infinite number of ways. Every part of my body is a word spat out in disgust” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 171). In addition to physical and emotional abuse, she is subjected to brutal sexual abuse in which her husband uses sex, in fact, rape, as a weapon to subdue her. The horror and plight of Meena Kandasamy’s violent marital abuse can be seen through the lines as she says, “He is lifting me by my hair alone. All the blood is rushing to my head. I can imagine my vagina falling out of me like spare change ... Rape is a fight you did not win. You could not win. Death is all that I can think about when I lie there” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 123). The universal plight of women enduring marital rape can be perceived through the words of Kandasamy, “The shame of the rape is the shame of the unspeakable. Women have found it easier to jump into fire, consume poison than tell another soul about what happened” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 169). As described by Walker, intervention occurs during this stage. Kandasamy, for the first time, seeks intervention by addressing her plight to her parents and decides to move out of her abusive relationship, “Walk out. Walk out. The recurrent voice that stays stuck in your throat. It is how you know you need to run” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 60).

### 3.3. Phase-III honeymoon phase

This is the third stage of Walker’s cycle of violence, which is followed by severe abuse. During this stage, the abuser profusely apologises for the mistake, bestows the woman with gifts, and promises her that the violent behaviour will never happen again. This convinces the woman to believe the batterer and gives her hope of resuming her relationship. Walker notices that the battered woman returns to her batterer not because she misses the abuse but because she still believes she can make things better. This phase provides positive reinforcement and encourages the women to stay. However, the cycle continues, and the batterer repeats his violent behaviour. Furthermore, Walker also demonstrated that, in the absence of intervention and treatment, the majority of batterers will repeat the cycle, which leads to a severe and frequent form of violence in which the victim’s life is completely shattered. Walker refers to this as the cycle of severity and illustrates that the honeymoon phase will disappear as the frequency and severity of the violence increases.

(Refer to Figure 4–Honeymoon Phase)

This stage represents the husband’s love for his wife. In contrast to his violent behaviour, he becomes excessively caring and apologises for his mistakes by taking her outside, ordering her favourite food, showering her with attractive gifts, and complimenting her on her good looks. He endorses her with charming words, saying, “We’re inseparable. No force can come between us. You are my lovely wife. My perfect wife. We’re perfect” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 138). She decides to stay with him because she believes he has completely changed his behaviour. She hopes that he will eventually give up violence and improve their relationship. As described by Walker in this phase, the victim’s reaction is exemplified by Kandasamy’s words, “I do not think any of his beatings or belt lashings will cause me to feel any guilt. With me, at this moment, I feel only the relish of rebellion, the comfort of long-forgotten words that now make me feel safe, feel loved” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 142).

To summarise, this section of the study compares Meena Kandasamy’s autobiographical narrative to Walker’s Cycle of Violence, with the results indicating that Walker’s cycle of abuse better reflects victim trapping into

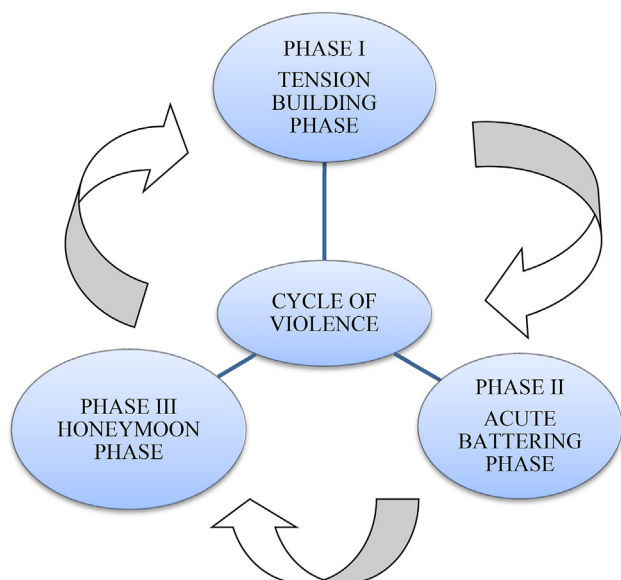


Figure 1. Cyclical representation of Walker’s Cycle of Violence.

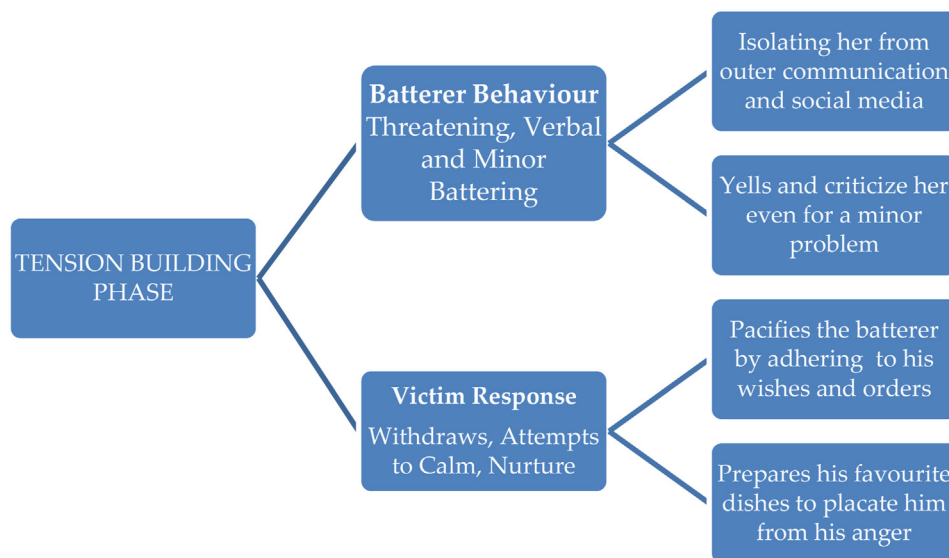


Figure 2. Tension Building Phase—Characteristics—Reflections in the text.

abusive relationships by perpetrators' strategy. Kandasamy's narrative of an abusive relationship is unique in terms of the pattern of violence she endures, but her experience reflects the hardships that the majority of women face globally. This section of the study concludes that the three distinct phases of the cycle of violence occur almost in the lives of the majority of women in abusive relationships and that proper awareness of the dynamics of the cycle will help women emerge from their abusive relationships.

4. Discussion

The above findings indicate that violence against women is viewed not only as an expression of male power and superiority over women but also as a manifestation of male vulnerability resulting from social conventions that enable men to dominate women. Walker acknowledged that battered women were victims not only of their abusers but also of a

patriarchal culture that was oblivious to their plight. She states, "I label [a battered woman] a victim because I believe that society, through its definition of the woman's role, has socialized her into believing she had no choice but to be such a victim" (Walker, 1987, p. 98). Especially in India, IPV is regarded as a private matter, and considerations of familial setup and cultural norms appear to take precedence over women's interests (Amirthalingam, 2005; Hariharasudan, 2020; Sandhu et al., 2020). This is evident in the text, where Meena Kandasamy's parents beg her to save their family honour by compelling her to follow her husband's wishes even though she is fighting for her life with him. Her parents advised her to be patient with him saying "If you break off your marriage, everyone in the town will mock me. It will reflect on your upbringing. A father of a daughter—that is a special kind of punishment. We pay the price. Please think about us this once" (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 160). This incident exemplifies more than half of the Indian parent's reactions to their daughter's decision to leave an abusive relationship.

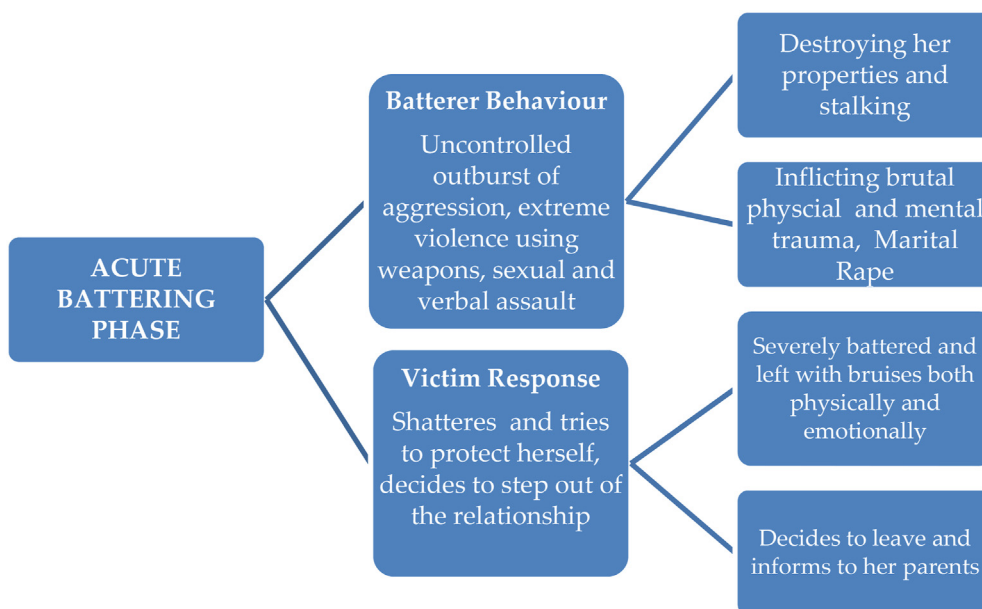


Figure 3. Acute Battering Phase—Characteristics and Reflections in the text.

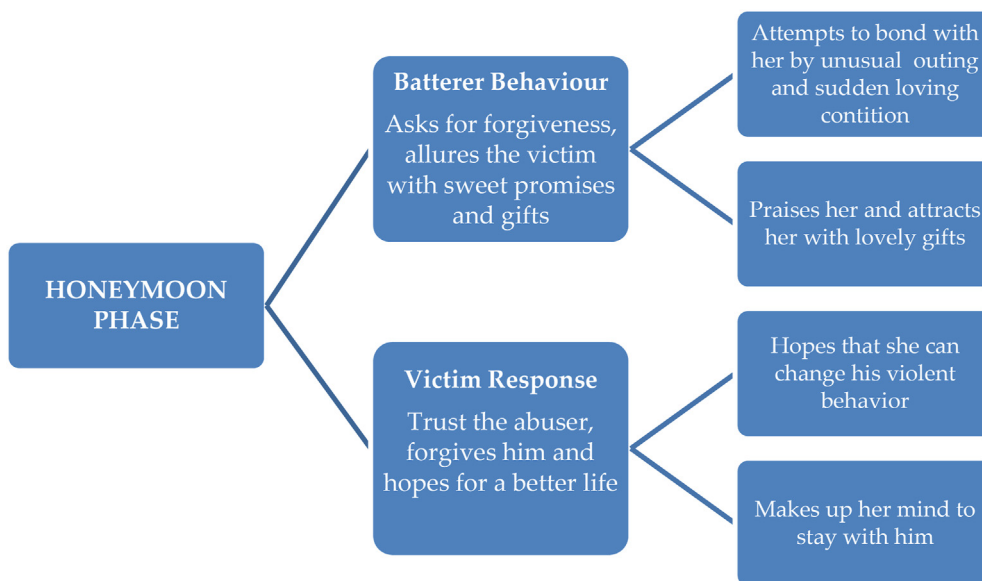


Figure 4. Honeymoon Phase—Characteristics—Reflections in the text.

Looking at the other causes of the rising rate of IPV, it can be observed that marriage is perceived in the majority of cases as a licence for men to have complete control over women. When it comes to legal consequences, it’s surprising to learn that many nations, including India, do not consider marital rape to be a crime. The text also reveals this through Meena Kandasamy’s experience, where she goes to the police station to report her husband’s brutality, and the officer there, upon seeing her marriage photo, mocks her for her height and that of her husband. To her dismay, the female police officer who hears her complaint berates Meena Kandasamy’s mother for not giving a dowry to her husband; she even instructs her, saying, “Men who marry a girl for a dowry treat her nicely. Men who marry her for other reasons, well, this is how it ends” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 230). The plight of women in this situation is very well expressed through the words of Meena Kandasamy, “Sometimes the shame is not the beatings, not the rape. The shaming is in being asked to stand to judgement” (Kandasamy, 2017). This, in turn, indicates that a lack of seriousness toward cases of IPV is seen as a major root cause for women becoming victims, and it also emphasises the critical need for government plans and schemes to protect women from IPV. Kandasamy, on the other hand, unleashes her revolutionary spirit and encourages women like her to leave their violent relationships without regard for society and live their lives on their own. She says “A woman being abused can mostly trust only one person for help. Herself” and addresses her transformation as “I am not afraid of men; I have fashioned myself in the defiant image of its exact, uncompromising opposite—the women men are afraid of. I am anti-fragile. I’ve been made not to break. That is one of the reasons why it becomes harder to talk about the violence” (Kandasamy, 2017, p. 220).

4.1. Limitations

The study has a few limitations because it only looks at IPV in heterosexual relationships. Another drawback is the use of autobiographical research. Though it has its own merits, one disadvantage of adopting an autobiographical narrative is that it focuses heavily on subjective ideas; autobiographies are sometimes regarded with suspicion by readers. Furthermore, owing to the difficulties in reaching out to our target populations as a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic, the methodology of the current study is narrative-based rather than qualitative/quantitative. On

the other hand, as India is concerned, it is bounded by stringent traditional practices and norms that prevent women from discussing their personal life, particularly their intimate issues. Accordingly, this study is about sensitive personal issues; several women are hesitant or otherwise unable to share their experiences or opinions publicly. The limitations of the current study provide scope and recommendation for future research to conduct qualitative/quantitative studies concerning IPV among older couples, lesbians, gay, and bisexual individuals, as there is little knowledge about IPV relating to them. Besides, this research also provides the path for future research to focus on related incidents of violence or victims from various cultures, such as Rosario Castellanos Figueroa, Sonia Núñez Puente, Susan Herman, Jessica Taylor, Isabel Allende, Gabriela Mistral and others.

5. Conclusion

The study spotlight focuses on the micro-level, thus entering the social world of an intimate relationship characterised by various types of abuse and its stages, as seen through the lived experiences of a battered female victim. Kandasamy’s autobiographical work not only explicates the severity of IPV but also raises awareness among women to leave abusive relationships and live independently. The present research clarifies that certain socio-cultural traditions that lend authority to gender-based problems should be condemned. Furthermore, IPV should be seen as a human rights problem that addresses the gender imbalance between men and women. The researchers suggest that expanding research based on Walker’s Cycle of Violence is a promising path for strengthening efforts to improve women’s well-being and eliminate the cycle of violence that makes women victims.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

- J. Sangeetha: Conceived and designed the experiments; Wrote the paper.
- S. Mohan: Analyzed and interpreted the data.
- A. Hariharasudan: Performed the experiments.
- Nishad Nawaz: Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data.

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No data was used for the research described in the article.

### Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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