

The Perpetuation of Psychological Wounds: A Comprehensive Review of Intergenerational Trauma in Indian Patriarchal Society

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Abstract

The transmission of trauma effects from one generation to the next is known as intergenerational trauma, and it is particularly common in patriarchal civilisations such as India. Laws, economy, and social conventions are shaped by patriarchy, a societal framework that primarily gives males power, authority, and advantages. This perpetuates gender inequity and marginalises women. Aim: The purpose of this review is to examine how trauma is transmitted throughout generations in India, with a particular emphasis on the interaction between trauma and patriarchal systems. The review included previous research from Google Scholar and PubMed that was published during the previous 15 years. Results: Through the prism of historical trauma, the article analyses both minor traumas, such as emotional abuse within families, and big traumas, such as forced migration during the 1947 Partition. It also looks into how patriarchal standards normalise gender-based violence, which worsens psychological injury and feeds the trauma cycle for decades. The review covers a number of trauma transmission mechanisms, such as genetics, family, and psychological elements. It draws attention to the ways that sociocultural factors fuel psychological suffering, health inequities, and enduring dysfunctional parenting styles. To treat trauma, the review finds culturally sensitive coping mechanisms and healing techniques, such as contemporary psychotherapies and customary rituals. To support healing and resilience among populations impacted by intergenerational trauma, a comprehensive strategy that takes into account individual, family, and societal aspects is crucial.

Keywords: Intergenerational trauma, patriarchal societies, epigenetic mechanisms, cultural healing practices, gender inequality

INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational trauma, the transmission of trauma effects from survivors to their descendants, has been observed across various cultures (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018) [1]. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in societies with strong patriarchal norms, such as India. A patriarchal society is a socio-cultural system where power, authority, and privileges are predominantly held by men, influencing legal, economic, and social norms. It perpetuates gender inequality through institutional structures and societal expectations, often marginalizing women's roles, contributions, and opportunities in various spheres of life.

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Received Date: November 02, 2024

Accepted Date: November 14, 2024

Published Date: January 03, 2025

Citation: Rhea, Sangeeta Kakkar. The Perpetuation of Psychological Wounds: A Comprehensive Review of Intergenerational Trauma in Indian Patriarchal Society. International Journal of Trends in Humanities. 2025; 2(1): 20–26p.

Trauma can be classified into small "t" and large "T" categories, based on whether the events are perceived as personally or universally traumatic (Barbash, 2017) [2]. This distinction is crucial in understanding the diverse manifestations of trauma

within families. While small "t" traumas, such as living in an emotionally abusive household, may be more prevalent in patriarchal settings, large "T" traumas like forced migration also contribute to the intergenerational trauma landscape. Historical trauma theory further elucidates how socio-economic disadvantages persist across generations, providing a framework to contextualize individual suffering and mobilize effective responses (Kirmayer et al., 2014) [3]. This paper explores the complex interplay of these factors in perpetuating intergenerational trauma within India. Addressing this through a culturally sensitive approach can lead to more effective interventions and policies to reduce trauma in future generations.

PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The central focus of this academic inquiry is to deeply scrutinize and systematically evaluate the nuanced mechanisms that characterize intergenerational trauma in the unique context of Indian patriarchal structures, emphasizing the need to comprehend how trauma is manifested and sustained across successive generations, especially in relation to gender-based violence and major historical events like the tumultuous Partition of India in 1947.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study serves to underscore the critical necessity for culturally attuned and sensitive interventions that are specifically designed to effectively address the transmission of trauma within patriarchal societies, while simultaneously emphasizing the pivotal roles that both contemporary psychological therapeutic approaches and traditional healing practices can play in fostering resilience within affected communities and ultimately contributing to the reduction of the pervasive cycle of trauma that impacts successive generations.

METHODOLOGY

This review synthesizes the past 15 years existing literature on intergenerational trauma and patriarchy within the Indian context, drawing from peer-reviewed articles and frameworks sourced from academic databases. Studies were selected based on their relevance to the themes of intergenerational trauma transmission, patriarchal structures, and their psychological, social, and biological impacts. A thematic analysis approach was applied to identify key patterns and variations in the literature. The review prioritizes contemporary research while also including seminal works to provide a foundational understanding of trauma interactions. The methodology ensures a comprehensive and critical evaluation of the factors perpetuating trauma across generations in patriarchal societies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Context of Patriarchy and Trauma in India

Research pertaining to intergenerational trauma associated with the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition elucidates its enduring repercussions on subsequent generations. Empirical investigations have identified significant levels of trauma among the offspring and grandchildren of Partition survivors (Kaur & Jaggi, 2023) [4]. This historical trauma may exacerbate health inequities among South Asian immigrants, potentially through an interplay of social, economic, psychological, and biological factors (Qureshi et al., 2023) [5]. The traumatic legacy of Partition has been subject to a process of sanitization within Indian historiography, which includes efforts to normalize acts of violence. Nevertheless, literary discourse assumes a pivotal role in the transmission and processing of this trauma across generations. Theoretical constructs such as post-memory and phantom theory underscore the extent to which unresolved trauma can influence descendants (Eleftheriou, 2019) [6]. Grasping this transgenerational transmission is of paramount importance, particularly considering the ongoing conflicts in South Asia, and may present avenues for healing and the reformation of historical narratives.

Patriarchy in Indian Culture

Intergenerational trauma and the construct of patriarchy within Indian culture represent interrelated phenomena that yield extensive ramifications. Empirical studies reveal that exposure to violence

between parents during formative years substantially elevates the probability of males engaging in domestic violence and adopting controlling behaviors towards their partners in later life (Martin et al., 2002) [7]. This perpetuation of violence is profoundly entrenched in the patriarchal framework of Indian society, where gender roles are not only performative but are also perpetuated through religious and social institutions (Chander, 2021) [8]. The trauma engendered by such violence has the potential to influence personal identities, shape worldviews, and catalyze the development of new discourses and processes of self-restructuring (Ceciu, 2020) [9]. In addition, cultural trauma, particularly associated with historical events like the Partition of 1947, has been subjected to a sanitization process within Indian historiography, thus affecting collective memory and the understanding of national identity (Pandey, 2020) [10]. A comprehensive understanding of these intricate interrelations among trauma, culture, and patriarchy is imperative for effectively addressing gender-based violence and fostering social transformation in India.

Gender-Based Violence and Trauma

The omnipresent occurrence of gender-based violence in Indian society operates as both a reflection and a contributor to intergenerational trauma. The deeply rooted patriarchal frameworks often function to normalize and endorse this violence, resulting in significant psychological distress for women and their families, thereby sustaining a persistent cycle of traumatic events. This complex form of subjugation transcends simple physical aggression, incorporating emotional, psychological, and economic facets, all of which create enduring effects that resonate across generations, impacting both the direct victims and their descendants. Confronting these challenges requires strategies that take into account familial backgrounds, trauma manifestations, and the restructuring of family dynamics toward more just relationships (Lünnemann et al., 2019) [11].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Mechanisms of Intergenerational Trauma in Patriarchal Societies

Familial Transmission

Trauma within patriarchal family structures is frequently conveyed through the behaviors exhibited by parents and the interactions that occur within the family unit. Yehuda and Lehrner (2018) contend that parental trauma, whether stemming from gender-based violence or societal oppression, has a profound impact on the psychological development and coping mechanisms of offspring [1]. This transmission may present as a complex array of emotions, internal states, and coping strategies, often characterized as existing in a state of "survival mode" (Bezo & Maggi, 2015) [12]. Prevention is regarded as the most efficacious intervention strategy, necessitating trauma-specific therapies for adults alongside attachment-oriented interventions within familial contexts (Isobel et al., 2018) [13]. Analyzing family dynamics through the framework of group theory can augment clinical efficacy when engaging with families adversely affected by collective traumas (Berger, 2014) [14].

Cultural Norms and Maladaptive Parenting

Unyielding gender norms and societal expectations within Indian culture exacerbate the trauma faced by women, thereby sustaining a cycle of oppression and marginalization. Cultural traumas can catalyze innovative subversions of established social norms, the deconstruction of linguistic frameworks, and the emergence of novel discourses (Ceciu, 2020) [9]. Furthermore, these traumas may lead to a reconfiguration of the self and psyche via dialogic interactions with the surrounding environment, shaped by both genetic and epigenetic factors, thereby indicating a transgenerational transmission of trauma (Ceciu, 2020) [9]. The intergenerational transfer of maladaptive parenting practices and their ramifications for a child's mental health is significantly influenced by cultural norms but can be disrupted through parenting interventions or financial enhancements. The transference of parental rejection across generations, which correlates with elevated externalizing and internalizing issues in children, is prevalent across diverse cultural contexts. The intensity of this intergenerational transmission is more pronounced in societies where parental rejection is normatively accepted. Participation in parenting programs can effectively disrupt the intergenerational cycle of parental

rejection among fathers from cultures where such rejection is prevalent, while increases in family income can similarly interrupt this cycle among mothers across a majority of cultural settings (W. Rothenberg et al., 2022) [15].

Psychological and Epigenetic Pathways

The repercussions of trauma are not limited to the immediate psychological impacts faced by individuals who have survived but rather pervade across successive generations through a multifaceted interplay of psychological, biological, and social factors. Recent studies in the domain of epigenetics have elucidated how exposure to trauma can lead to alterations in gene expression, thereby affecting an individual's susceptibility to mental health disorders. These alterations transpire without any changes to the DNA sequence itself; instead, they involve adjustments in gene regulation through mechanisms such as DNA methylation, histone modification, and the activity of non-coding RNAs. The transmission of intergenerational trauma may encompass epigenetic mechanisms, categorized into two primary types of effects: developmentally programmed outcomes stemming from early environmental exposures and trauma-induced alterations affecting the germline prior to conception. Research conducted on animals provides substantial evidence for these transmissible effects, while studies involving humans remain scarce. Epigenetic changes may arise through social, intrauterine, and gametic pathways, thereby elucidating how cultural trauma influences subsequent generations. A dual-pathway framework posits that both personal trauma exposure and intergenerational epigenetic modifications contribute to adverse health outcomes in populations that have historically faced oppression (Conching & Thayer, 2019) [16]. Variables such as sex-specific epigenetic effects and the developmental stage of parents at the time of trauma exposure play critical roles in the transmission of trauma from mothers and fathers (Yehuda & Lehrner, 2018) [1]. The potential for reversing epigenetic modifications instills optimism for enhancing health outcomes in marginalized communities (Conching & Thayer, 2019) [16]. The necessity for integrative therapeutic strategies is underscored by the interaction between psychological and epigenetic factors. To break the cycle of trauma transmission between generations, it is crucial to tackle trauma at both personal and societal levels.

The majority of findings in this domain derive from animal research, and there exists a scarcity of direct evidence substantiating these mechanisms in human subjects, especially concerning cultural trauma. Ultimately, the discussion surrounding coping mechanisms and healing approaches predominantly highlights psychological therapies and cultural methodologies, with insufficient emphasis on systemic and policy-oriented interventions. Tackling intergenerational trauma in patriarchal societies necessitates not only therapeutic strategies but also structural reforms that contest the foundational aspects of gender inequality and the perpetuation of trauma. Future inquiries should endeavor to integrate a wider array of perspectives and methodologies to cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of intergenerational trauma within patriarchal contexts.

LIMITATIONS

This review article, although thorough, possesses certain constraints that warrant recognition. Initially, the predominant emphasis on patriarchal systems and the transmission of trauma in India may not entirely encompass the varied experiences present within the nation. Cultural, regional, and socioeconomic differences profoundly affect the perception and transmission of trauma, and a more refined analysis of these elements would enhance the comprehension of intergenerational trauma.

Moreover, a significant segment of the scholarship about trauma transmission is grounded in Western frameworks and conceptualizations, which may not be entirely applicable to the Indian context. The categorization of traumas into "small 't'" and "large 'T'" may serve a practical purpose, yet it risks oversimplifying the intricate, culturally specific trauma experiences in non-Western cultures. Moreover, while the review underscores the significance of epigenetic pathways in trauma transmission, empirical investigations concerning epigenetic alterations in human populations impacted by trauma remain nascent.

FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

Coping Mechanisms and Healing Strategies

In the southern region of India, the folk ritual known as Theyyam functions as a cathartic mechanism for the collective trauma endured by marginalized lower caste communities, thereby facilitating potential therapeutic outcomes through symbolic empowerment and acts of protest (Ahammed, 2019) [17]. The diverse cultural landscape of India offers valuable perspectives on how trauma influences identity formation and conceptual frameworks, with both genetic and epigenetic elements playing a significant role in its intergenerational transmission (Ceciu, 2020) [9]. Likewise, research focusing on Holocaust survivors elucidates the significance of Jewish rituals in the intergenerational transmission of trauma through emotional processes, as second-generation survivors engage in the innovation of rituals to delineate themselves from their traumatized progenitors (Jacobs, 2011) [18].

8.2 Cultural Healing Practices:

In the context of India, comprehending the complex interplay among trauma, identity, and culture is imperative for facilitating cultural healing among individuals who have experienced trauma. The phenomenon of trauma possesses the capacity to modify identities and perspectives, engendering novel subversions of societal norms and self-reconstruction through dialogical engagements (Ceciu, 2020) [9]. The process of healing from cultural trauma often necessitates the "working through" of experiences, employing modalities such as dream analysis, symbolism, metaphor, and imaginative processes (Merchant, 2020) [19]. Approaches to trauma treatment that are cross-cultural emphasize therapies tailored to the individual, grounded in culturally sanctioned practices including customs, rituals, and communal ceremonies (Wilson, 2006) [20]. The culturally specific expressions of trauma are significantly influenced by historical and social contexts, notwithstanding the existence of analogous metaphors—such as "shock," "burden," and "wound"—that traverse various cultures (Rechsteiner et al., 2020) [21]. These findings underscore the critical importance of integrating cultural elements into the trauma healing process and propose potential strategies for customizing therapeutic interventions to align with cultural values.

Psychological Therapies

These traumatic experiences significantly influence personal identities, perspectives on the world, and societal norms, frequently resulting in psychological anguish and cultural discord. The propagation of trauma transpires via genetic and epigenetic mechanisms, impacting several generations. Proposed interventions that integrate traditional cultural methodologies with contemporary therapeutic strategies aim to mitigate historical trauma and facilitate healing. A nuanced comprehension of the intricate relationship between trauma, identity, and culture is essential for the formulation of effective psychological interventions in heterogeneous contexts such as India. Contemporary therapeutic modalities, such as trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and narrative therapy, have demonstrated efficacy in assisting survivors and their families in processing and overcoming trauma. Innovative practices encompass trauma-focused multi-family therapy, which seeks to minimize the relational repercussions of parental trauma while enhancing familial resilience (Mooren et al., 2023) [22]. This methodology highlights the critical significance of developing emotional regulation capabilities and mentalization to improve the dynamics between parents and children (Mooren et al., 2023) [22]. In conclusion, the effective management of intergenerational trauma requires a comprehensive, culturally sensitive strategy that addresses individual, familial, and societal aspects to promote healing and resilience (Roy et al., 2015) [23].

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational trauma within patriarchal societies such as India represents a complex phenomenon intricately connected to the socio-cultural milieu. This analysis has elucidated that the transference of trauma transpires through intricate interrelations among psychological, familial, and epigenetic mechanisms, frequently intensified by inflexible gender roles and the institutionalization of violence within patriarchal frameworks. The 1947 Partition, a significant historical trauma, has imparted lasting

impacts on subsequent generations, contributing to health inequities among South Asian immigrants and shaping familial dynamics. Likewise, gender-based violence, a widespread concern in India, operates concurrently as both an expression and a sustainer of trauma, further marginalizing women and entrenching patriarchal systems. This ongoing cycle of trauma accentuates the imperative for culturally attuned interventions that extend beyond the treatment of individual trauma to encompass familial histories, cultural practices, and socio-political conditions. By amalgamating traditional cultural healing methodologies with contemporary psychological interventions, a more comprehensive strategy for trauma recovery can be formulated. Tackling intergenerational trauma in patriarchal environments demands a holistic methodology directed at eradicating systemic gender imbalances, strengthening women's agency, and supporting intergenerational recovery.

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