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**Socio-economic and Cultural Factors of
Violence against Women in Pakistan**

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Acronyms

FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

Abstract

In Pakistan, violence against women is an uncanny behaviour that transpired to be a 'norm' due to the preposterous acceptance of centuries-old conservative and feudal mindset. Though there have been legislative developments to address this serious issue, the actual state of affairs remains disappointing and discouraging. This study discusses the socio-economic, cultural, religious and institutional factors that sustain abuse conducted against women.

In this regard, qualitative approach has been adopted to understand the power-dynamics that prevail at different levels of the society to draw out perspectives from a wide variety of stakeholders regarding the issues at hand. The locale of the study is the provinces of Punjab (Lahore, Multan, and Khanewal) and Sindh (Karachi, Sukkur, and Hyderabad). The main purpose of the study is to expose the major abusers who are directly or indirectly responsible for committing violence against women. The study also aims to identify the pressure groups that may help improve the situation.

The outcome of our assessment shows that women face direct, cultural and structural violence through a deeply entrenched system of patriarchy at all tiers of public and private life. Overcoming this challenge requires a shift in the conservative mindset and collective thinking of male members of the society to recognize women's rights so as to bring an improvement at all levels.

1. Introduction

The most fundamental challenge women are faced with in Pakistan is violence (Jasam, 2001; Babur, 2007). Quite often, cultural and religious factors lead to a perpetual setting for violence against women.

Violence against women may manifest itself in different ways, and more than often results in serious physical, psychological, social and emotional implications for the victim and those around her (Ali and Gavino, 2008). With its deep impact on different aspects of the society, it is, therefore, not as easy to comprehend as other issues.

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women 1993¹, defines it as:

“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

The term includes in its realm physical, sexual and psychological abuse that a woman may face in the family or within the general community (ibid.). According to World Health Organization Fact-Sheet (2016), about one in every three women experience physical or sexual harassment. In most cases, these abuses are done by their intimate-partners (ibid.). However, measuring the prevalence of violence against women is not a straightforward task owing to the differentiations in the definitions of violence, significant underreporting and lack of comprehensive analytical studies on the issue (Raphael 2000; Bradley et al. 2002; Ali and Gavino 2008).

A study by Aurat Foundation (2012) shows that in the year 2012, on average six women were kidnapped, four were raped, three committed suicide and four were murdered everyday in Pakistan. It is noteworthy that these statistics only reflect the reported cases and are gathered through police records. The number of cases that go unnoticed, if added, may present an even more ghastly image of the exiting scenario.

Recently, there have been developments in the state’s response to violence against women. The Punjab government passed the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016. This is a milestone in terms of lawmakers’ commitment to ensure protection of women rights (Ashfaq 2016), however it received much criticism and resistance from religious groups as being ‘un-Islamic’. The Sindh government passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill in 2013. Both the bills are commendable and include some really good laws regarding protection of women, but the extent and transparency in their implementation remains a major concern.

It is imperative to understand the extent of violence against women in Pakistan. However, what is more important is to comprehend the context that leads to the continued prevalence of this crime in current times. This study is an attempt to unpack the factors behind the deeply embedded systematic nature of violence against women. For this we have analyzed the political, social and economic hurdles that give rise to gender-based discrimination and

¹Declaration on the elimination of violence against women. New York, United Nations, 23 February 1994 (Resolution No.A/RES/48/104).

misbehaviour at household, society, and state level. That's why, the most insidious gender-related violence incidents occur in tandem with the political economy of the society (Fu 2015). The study mainly focuses on two provinces of Pakistan, i.e. the Punjab and Sindh. By using qualitative tools, the study tries to draw out the motives and driving forces behind violent actions against women.

The study also builds on the existing theoretical backgrounds of comprehending the social, cultural, economic and political factors behind violence against women. By doing so, it attempts to bring to focus the dynamics that rein actions of the powerful over the powerless. The novelty that this study brings in the literature is drawing on opinions, experiences and suggestions of various stakeholders from various fields of life in order to analyze the psychology that goes behind the socio-political and cultural settings of Pakistan in terms of violence against women. An effort has been made to understand the driving forces behind various forms of violence against women by conducting the interviews of lawyers, police officials, human rights activists, religious representatives, government officials, media, and general citizenry.

2. Research Methodology

A qualitative approach has been adopted to analyze the extent, nature and political economy of violence against women in two provinces – the Punjab and Sindh.

In each province, three sample districts were selected. Selection criteria for the districts were the degrees of incidents of violence against women and on the basis of high, medium and low incidence of reported cases². To get a comprehensive picture of the state of violence against women and the leading factors behind it in the Punjab and Sindh, we made use of multiple qualitative research methods in our study. We drew opinions and viewpoints of various stakeholders through 46 Key Informant Interviews (KII), and 22 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). KIIs were held with various experts and stakeholders in each district from pre-defined categories, including:

1. District Administration
2. Police Officials
3. Lawyers
4. Media Personnel
5. Human Rights Activists/NGOs/Civil Society Organizations
6. Religious representatives (Muslims, Hindus and Christians)

² Aurat Foundation's Annual Report titled "Beyond Denial – Violence against Women in Pakistan" (2012) ranks different cities of Pakistan according to the extent of violence against women occurring in them. Following that ranking, from Punjab we chose Lahore as a district with high extent of violence against women with 599 reported cases, Multan lies in the medium extent districts with 129 cases and Khanewal lies in the low extent districts with 85 reported cases of violence against women. Similarly, following the same criteria, from Sindh we chose Karachi as a high extent district with 313 reported cases, Sukkur as a medium extent district with 179 cases and Hyderabad/Jamshoro as a low extent district with 31 cases.

FGDs were held to know about the opinions of community members, hailing from different walks of life (see Annex I for details of FGDs). In each district, three FGDs were held: one with community women, another with a mixed (male and female) group, and one with people from religious minority groups. The FGDs were held in both urban and rural areas to capture both types of the mind-set, however the purpose of the study was not to compare the similarities and differences among them, rather to draw out opinions in order to understand the contextual background of violence against women. Our FGDs focused on adult population (above the age of 18) so there were no upper age restrictions. It was observed later that the participants ranged between the ages of 18-70. The number of participants ranged between 8-12 and the discussions lasted for 60-90 minutes. The semi-structured interview tools were pilot-tested in Islamabad before the field survey.

2.1. Limitations of the Study

The study has certain limitations that need to be highlighted:

1. The focus on the Punjab and Sindh does not allow us to generalize the findings of the study. It cannot be ascertained through this study whether the same factors contribute to violence against women in other areas of the country like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Balochistan.
2. Owing to inaccessibility to certain religious groups like Parsis, Sikhs, and Ahmedis, our discussions were mainly limited to Hindus and Christians. Therefore, our study does not serve to generalize the findings among all religious minority groups.

3. Background and Literature Review

Ancient history speaks a lot about women having no rights. Women had no rights over their children, inheritance, property, choice of marriage, etc. (Pakeeza 2015). Man's violent attitude was, and sometimes still is, considered socially acceptable and not in the realm of legal jurisdiction in spite of the law declaring equal basic human rights to all citizens irrespective of gender (ibid.). While the situation has now improved with the concerted efforts of feminist activists³ (United Nations, 2006; Babur, 2007; Khan, 2009; Qureshi, 2012), the magnitude and intensity of abuses that women face in their lives are still horrifying. Recent statistics show that one in every three women worldwide faces physical and/or sexual violence in her lifetime (WHO 2016). According to the United Nations (2015), only 40% of women, who face violence, seek any sort of help.

There is a general consensus that women face violence and discrimination throughout their life-span (Heise and Germaine 1994; Ali and Gavino 2008; Saxena and Kumari 2016). Violence against women may start prior to birth with sex selective abortions and may continue up to

³Ratification of Convention of Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996; Protection of Women Act (2006); Domestic Violence Bill (2009); Establishment of National Commission for the Status of Women (2000); Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act (2011); Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act (2011); the Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace (2010); Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016; Sindh Government passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill 2013

adulthood leading to untold misery, cutting short of lives and leaving women in a state of misery and pain (United Nations 2006). Khan et al. (2013) and Coleman (2004) discuss that the skewed sex ratio⁴ of Pakistan reflects the higher infant mortality rates of female childbirths as well as the neglect that they may face in their early years leading to untimely deaths. During childhood, female children may be ignored in aspects of health, education and opportunities in comparison to male children. It comes under the context of gender discrimination and violation of women rights. Some more gruesome acts may involve child-pornography, prostitution, acid violence, etc. Physical, psychological and sexual coercion may, in most cases, increase after women enter into marriage. This is reflected by the fact that intimate-partner violence has the highest degree of occurrence among all other forms (WHO 2016; United Nations 2006). Even in old age, methods like forced-suicide and homicide of women (especially widowed women) are sometimes practiced for economic reasons⁵ (Nosheen 2011).

In countries like Pakistan, particularly widespread are the dangerous societal norms and conservative practices such as early marriages, forced conversions, watta satta (bride-exchange), honour killings, etc. that depict the upsetting state of affairs. Unlike the social condemnation of rape, what makes these acts more horrifying is their social acceptance, especially in the underdeveloped conservative areas of the country. In Pakistan, legislation has been done in line with the Islamic principles, however the social setting of the country's norms and the influence of other cultures reflect pre-Islamic tribal trends (Pakeeza 2015) which promote a patriarchal society where women live under the submission of men. Sometimes, violence against women is also attempted to be justified under religion by taking various Quranic verses out of their context to justify violence for 'disciplinary act'. For instance, many conservative religious scholars try to justify men's superiority over women in the light of Verse 228 in Chapter 2, which states:

'And they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them, and men are a degree above (them).'

Contrary to this interpretation, the reference here is about women's protection. Galtung (1996) writes that direct, structural and cultural violence is the root cause of gender inequality. Direct violence is inflicted upon individuals to punish by causing pain and damage whereas structural violence is dictated by the power-relations in social structures, which favours the powerful and works against the weak and powerless segments of the society. Cultural violence reinforces the norms of direct and structural violence by legitimizing them, resulting in vicious cycles of violence, mostly victimizing women.

Babur (2007) says patriarchal setup in Pakistan gives control of all aspects of women's lives to men and leaves women relying on men on matters of their behaviour, mobility, control over resources and productive and reproductive choices. He explains that perpetual infliction of violence against women in Pakistan is quite often due to the traditional association of men's honour with women's freedom and liberty. It is considered disrespect to a man if the women of

⁴105 men to every 100 women (CIA World FactBook, 2015).

⁵Taking over inheritance, wealth etc.

his family enjoy rights and liberties like the western women. The author recommends using education, mass awareness and overall economic prosperity as tools to take Pakistan out of the shackles of direct, cultural and structural violence against women.

Karmaliani et al. (2012) say that violence against women in Pakistan is common at all levels of the society. Furthermore, violence is analyzed in terms of five contributing factors, namely: social/cultural context, economic context, politico-legal context, and psychological context (United Nations 2006). All these factors work in unison to create unfavourable atmosphere for the realization of women rights and result in an overall conservative culture of patriarchy where violence is used as a socially accepted means of treating women, adversely affecting their mental and physical health.

States have the responsibility to address violence against women and ensure human rights of all its citizens equally. Pakeeza (2015) writes that though the Constitution of Pakistan is in accordance with the Islamic Shariah Law, the actual social and legal attitudes towards women indicate practice of pre-Islamic tribal cultures. Furthermore, perpetual neglect of women's rights under the dominance of men has created a long-lasting impression that domestic violence is a familial matter that does not require legal consideration.

4. Findings and Discussion

The overall scenario discussed by our stakeholders gives a hazy picture of rights of women in both provinces. We received mixed reviews regarding the situation of violence against women from different respondents. While most key informants pointed out the existing nature of discrimination and violence faced by women in the society, some experts, mostly government officials and lawyers, were of the view that the situation has drastically improved whereas one of our lawyer respondents from Lahore said:

A Pakistani woman enjoys full respect in the society; now she wants to control the society (by participating in everything) and that is a major flaw in her thinking.

Issues faced by women in today's society are complex and many. Based on our findings, women in the two provinces, both rural and urban, still face violence, though the nature and degree of that violence may vary from place to place and on the basis of different socio-economic levels. So while in Lahore, Multan, Karachi and Jamshoro, cases of workplace harassment, divorce and domestic violence were high, rural (interior) Sindh and semi urban areas of Punjab like Khanewal had more cases of crimes like karokari (honour killing), vani (forced child-marriage) and watasatta (bride-exchange) along with the other issues. The general perception was that women in big cities are much empowered and they have more freedom of exercising their rights. Despite that, the women of urban areas still face considerable social hurdles that result in violation of their rights.

Probing the causes and elements responsible for the above-mentioned situation in Sindh and the Punjab, we found that these factors could be grouped into two broader categories.

4.1. Socio-economic and Cultural Factors

Economic factors stood out as one of the main factors causing violent behaviour in the society. All our stakeholders, including key informants and community members shared that the lack of economic resources is the root cause of a lot of evils. Poverty is the main reason for sufferings, which stems deprivation of basic needs and thus creates frustration in the society. This frustration is then translated through different violent attitudes. Respondents believed that since women are a weaker segment of the society, they are naturally at the receiving end of this frustration. Poverty has been linked to increased violence against women including sexual violence and trafficking (UN Women 2014). Economic deprivation is coupled with social injustice which collectively contributes towards frustration and violence.

Lack of economic sources pushes away the priority of getting education. It was drawn from the discussions that in interior Sindh and Southern Punjab, there are still many villages⁶ which do not have educational facilities for girls and most families do not allow their girls to travel to other cities for gaining education. In poor households, with greater contest over limited resources, education of girls is usually foregone for the education of the boys of the household. It was viewed that illiterate women are not aware of their rights and thus are more victimized for violence and abuse. Additionally, the quality of education and the discrimination taught in curriculum was factored as one of the major causes of violence against women. A women rights activist in Khanewal said:

I still remember an essay in our childhood Urdu book. The essay started with the sentence 'Bano stays at home and Dara goes to school'. How the children fed with such discrimination` will be able to treat their women equally?

It was observed that though the educational level of both men and women has increased in most areas, conservative mindset still prevails blocking the way of majority of educated women not to work and earn. It was highlighted that even if a small number of women is allowed to work, the society has pre-defined roles and jobs for them. It was discussed that working women in small cities and rural areas are considered to have immoral character and are thus not given much respect in the society. Social pressure on working women can be gauged from the fact that a majority of religious representatives are against the working of women outside the house. According to a Hindu respondent, "It is okay for married women to work, but it is not considered acceptable that unmarried girls should go out and work with men."

The same concept was echoed by one of the Pastors interviewed, who said:

When young girls work in factories or do jobs, they are often attracted to the men around. It is okay to fall in love however there is a chance that they can be trapped.

A Muslim respondent used the following words to explain the situation,

⁶Respondents referred to villages near Pannu Akil, Ghotki, Dherki, Shikarpur in Sindh and Muzaffargarh, Mian Channu in South Punjab.

Aurat (woman) means 'veil'. You keep precious things safe and hidden.

During discussions, it was repeatedly highlighted that if a household consists of the working couple, only the husband takes rest after returning from workplace while the wife has to perform all the domestic chores in addition to serving her husband. Even she is paid less compared to her male counterparts at work. Whatever little amount a woman does earn, she has little or no control over it as in most cases husbands or in-laws control financial matters at home.

Our discussions concluded that the issue of workplace harassment is quite large both in urban and rural areas of Sindh and the Punjab provinces. In Sindh, many cases came to light wherein male colleagues took photographs of their female colleagues and uploaded them on various websites without their permission. In rural districts, like Khanewal, where women mostly work in health or education sector, it was learnt that young nurses, lady doctors and female teachers were often subjected to mental and sexual abuse, especially during night duties. When they complained, they were transferred to far-flung villages of the districts. At least eight respondents highlighted that though the Work Harassment Bill exists and cases are reported, implementation of the law is the real issue. Women often withdraw the cases due to social pressures. Otherwise, the cases remain pending in courts for years, resulting in little outcomes.

This brings forth two important aspects of violence against female labour force participation. First, women face societal and cultural pressures to work and participate in the labour force. They have prejudiced roles that they can perform and particular sectors that they can work in. Even then, they are labelled and looked down upon by a number of social groups. Second, the workforce itself biases against women by not compensating them in accordance with their work thus creating gender inequity in terms of wages and recompense. Furthermore, workforce harassment is a serious concern and despite having legislative protection, the reality of such incidences is still stark.

Violence against women is more structural than causal in this society. Rape, one of the biggest violations of human rights, is still rampant in Sindh and the Punjab. Not only is the number of cases increasing as reported by respondents, the brutality and callousness of the act is also getting more and more horrendous. A famous lawyer of Karachi narrated it in the following words:

If a woman is not protected from rape, then other rights are irrelevant. This is the right which needs no debate; it means no one can say that rape is good. When we look at the number, not only the number has increased but also the brutality has increased. In the past, it was the only rape but now there is rape followed by murder and that too brutally.

A human rights activist in Jamshoro said:

Majority of the rape victims in this area are girls aging between 6-10. What is worse is that the perpetrators are more than often the family members. Brother, father, and cousin are responsible most of the time, and later on they kill the children.

Mian Channu, a Tehsil of Khanewal district, is notorious for rape cases. In many cases, videos of rape victims are used to blackmail them to file a case against the perpetrators. It was learnt that women are mostly used as mere tools to manage economic, political and family disputes.

The conclusion drawn from the discussion was that despite an overall consensus that rape is one of the biggest violations of human rights (as respondents indicated that other violations were often justified by perpetrators in the name of religion, culture and honour), it is difficult to identify the factors and influences that result in its practice except for psycho-sexual behaviour. In some cases, rape was used to take vengeance from rivals, but in case of incest, this justification does not hold. Nonetheless, it was agreed that rape and sexual assault are primarily driven by the sentiments of having dominance.

Male dominance stems from family structures at home. Right from the time when the family finds out that a woman is pregnant with a girl, she is subject to victimization. A woman's purity and chastity is essential for the transfer of guardianship from her father to her husband; so right from the start she is dealt as a burden to be transferred to another family (Jasam 2001). A human rights activist in Karachi stated that she has received many cases in which a woman is forced to undergo abortion when the family finds out that the child is a girl. Severe displeasure on the birth of baby girl is still very common in the society. As a girl grows older, she is discriminated in every aspect starting from the amount and quality of food served to the level and standard of education gained, the type of job she is allowed to have (or not allowed to have), the man she is arranged to get married to, how she expresses herself, her freedom of mobility, etc. Married working women said that their husbands and in-laws forcibly get their earnings and do not get to spend their earnings according to their will. Non-working women said that their husbands do not give them sufficient money to meet the household expenses. Torturing, beating and acid-burning are also quite common on matters as petty as cooking food not on time. About four respondents indicated that this mind-set is so deeply etched in the society that even education and awareness has not been able to wear it off.

A government official from Lahore said:

A woman is taught from the childhood that she needs help from others to survive. She is brought up in an environment in which she is dependent on others for her day-to-day activities like shopping, etc. In such an environment, she loses her identity and relies on her relationships for support. So when her family members discriminate against her or violate her rights, she keeps mum and suffers. She believes that in case of leaving the family, she would find no other place to live.

A women's rights activist from Karachi told us about the levels of domestic violence that prevail in the society and involves physical violence too. At the time of nikah (signing of marriage contract), the sections where a woman can demand Haq Mehr (legitimate amount of money to be gifted to the bride at the time of her wedding) and a divorce are crossed out beforehand and it is considered socially unacceptable to criticize it. Issues of property inheritance are also taken up, which is a major violation of their rights. Quite often, women are forced to forego their inherited property to their brothers and are not even consulted when making decisions about property matters. The society does not allow a woman to rent property in her name. In female-specific FGDs, it was learnt that when women try to raise their voice for their rights, they are silenced due to societal pressures. When a newly-wed bride is brought to her new home, her husband adopts a strict attitude with her from day one because he has been taught by his family and peers to cut a woman down to size to ensure that she must obey him throughout her life. A Karachi-based lawyer, who has worked on various serious cases of violence against women, said:

In a society where it is believed that a woman is born to serve her husband, no law can protect her from violence.

Concept of violence against women is closely linked to the concept of masculinity as well. Men have a predominant feeling of ruling over women. A man considers it a show of his masculinity by abusing or harassing women. According to a human rights activist in Khanewal, this culture is more common in villages. Man is also pressurized from his peers to adopt such an abusive behaviour, especially with women out of the family. If he refrains himself from committing such acts, he is ridiculed and considered weak. Regarding impotence problem among men, two experts were of the view that in such cases, men adopt a more violent behaviour with women instead of accepting their health issue.

The driving force behind such cultural and societal settings is the sentiment of dominance and supremacy that men of this area perceive to be entitled to them. Often times, this misogyny and patriarchal attitude get religious cover, despite accepting that Islam provides full freedom to women. More than eight people said that traditions and customs are considered superior to laws and religion here. A patriarchal society with a strong belief that a woman is born to serve her man has destroyed the lives of thousands of girls. It all comes down to the exercise of power-relations between men and women, which are translated through violence against women.

Four respondents, three of whom were religious representatives, were of the view that a woman is restricted to go out for her own good as the society becomes unsafe for her. It was even said that if women are allowed to go out, they will go astray. Participants also shared some incidents. In one of such incidents, when a girl told her parents that someone misbehaved with her outside, she was beaten up by the parents. Sometimes even they ask her to quit studies and stays at home. At least four respondents held mobile-use as a major factor in leading girls astray. Their emphasis was that young girls

fall in the trap of fraudulent men and then bring dishonour to their family. It was observed, however, that the use of mobile technology was considered bad only for girls; the same respondents have no issue with boys using the same saying that it has become a necessity for them now.

This once again reflects the self-entitled feeling of ownership that men and society perceive over women despite accepting that the society has become unsafe for women due to the very same reasons. There was a general agreement that the world outside a woman's home is risky for her safety, yet instead of addressing the factors that tantamount to such an environment, the society's way of addressing it is by controlling the victims, lest they diverge from the "right path".

Another finding that came forward was that often women make lives difficult for other women and are involved in enticing men to discriminate against them. For example, people commented that many times it was observed that a husband was harsh to his wife due to the comments given by his mother or sisters about his wife. About five respondents indicated that women in a joint family system suffered from more violence than those living separately. A respondent during an FGD said:

In a joint-family system, a woman has to comply with the orders of her in-laws as well as her husband. She is under more restrictions and has doubled the work.

This type of behaviour is also an offshoot of gender-related power-dynamics. It reflects that women in the in-laws feel superior and consider it their right to exercise what little dominance they have in the hierarchy of the family structure on the relatively weaker members of the family. Often times, respondents used the word "jealousy" to explain why mothers and sisters in-law opted to provoke their husbands and brothers against their wives.

Interior Sindh is notorious for its high number of cases of karokari (honour killing), but this trend was found to be quite common in the Punjab as well. If a girl is interested in someone or marries of her choice, she is declared kari (literal translation: blackened woman), meaning she is shunned from the society and must be killed in the name of honour. In Sukkur, community members narrated a case of honour killing in their neighbourhood happened two days prior to the interview in which a woman married to a man of her choice and on return to her family after a few days, she was beaten to death by her family members; when people came for her rescue, her family declared it a family matter and asked the people not to interfere. Her husband was also beaten up severely, but fortunately he survived.

During FGDs in Sukkur (except an FGD with religious minorities), at least one member of the group was able to narrate an honour killing incident in his vicinity, which shows the intensity of the crime. About 10 respondents (including key informants and community members) reported that this practice is so common in a small town of interior Sindh like Ghotki, Jacobabad and Shikarpur that there are separate graveyards for women, who have been killed in the name of honour.

About the factors responsible for such a brute and heinous act, at least three respondents (both key informants and community members) stated that this custom is not the part of their culture; rather it has been introduced by foreign tribes that have migrated over the years. A senior police officer in Sukkur said:

Sindh was a very peaceful land, but Baloch tribes assimilated their cultural values to the local communities after they migrated here.

To supplement this statement, a professor at Shah Abdul Latif University in Khairpur, said:

Karokari started in Afghanistan more than a century ago; later, it travelled to our area (with the influx of migrants).

It was also found that though this culture is less prevalent in the Punjab, there are still considerable number of cases of honour killing in all three study sites (i.e. Lahore, Multan and Khanewal). Surprisingly, even respondents in the Punjab related this trend to be an offshoot of foreign culture that got adopted by locals with the influx of migrants. About three respondents tied it with Balochi culture while two to three also tied it with age-old Hindu culture prevalent here since pre-partition.

Moreover, at least two respondents also correlated the trend of honour killing in villages with lack of education. The custom is so entrenched in some areas that it is not even considered a crime or murder. Many respondents mentioned that some areas of interior Sindh like Shikarpur, Jacobabad and Ghotki have extremely poor situation of education and thus this trend is more common there. This custom is also used as a punishment tool by informal legal systems like Jirga and Panchayat,⁷ where matters of honour are taken too seriously and the murderer is usually perceived as a victim (Jasam 2001). This custom has now become a political tool for people there who settle their disputes and property matters by killing a man of some other family and labelling their women as kari to them and then killing them on false pretences.

Honour killings reflect strong cultural associations of a family's honour with women's sexuality. In such orthodox perceptions, a woman's right to life is determined by the degree of her compliance with the traditions and norms established for her. If she deviates from such a path, she is said to bring dishonour and shame to her entire family and is thus permissible to be killed. The reason why as to why there are more cases of women being honour-killed than men is that men are often spared if they pay blood money while women are given no such chance (Jasem 2001). It is quite a paradox to see

⁷ Panchayats and Jirgas are kinds of local judicial system through which social justice and local development issues are regulated and managed. These systems have functioned for centuries in the sub-continent. These are a kind of today's ADR systems. Panchayats and Jirgas are now becoming part of local government system which is operational in more than 60 countries in the third world. (http://www.zeepedia.com/read.php?panchayat_local_government_system_and_adr_definitions_of_panchayat_definition_of_jirga_conflict_management&b=30&c=44)

that on the one hand women are treated as a tool for businesses and settling dispute while on the other they are tied with the family's honour.

There was a strong reference to the culture of oligarchy prevalent in Sindh (interior) and the southern Punjab which the locals label as "feudalism". It is often used as an umbrella term to define the culture of power and influence in a society. More than 10 respondents claimed that these influential people deliberately avoid education in their areas lest the people learn about their rights and liberate themselves from the clutches of influential people. For example, respondents in the Punjab (in two FGDs in Khanewal) gave examples of the village of a former foreign minister, who comes from a strong family in Southern Punjab. It was told that the minister's own village had no school till recently when some NGO opened a school there.

More than feudalism in its actual form, the practice more prevalent in these areas is the "feudal mindset" and authoritarian tendency of influential people. They exercise a certain form of cultural hegemony to fulfil their motives. So it can be seen that these powerful families exploit the weaker ones for economic and political benefits. They keep age-old traditions and orthodox norms alive to keep the people busy in their own petty matters. They are known to use different religious, economic and fear-inducing tactics to keep their subordinates bound to them.

Apart from this oligarchy, another factor that influences the traditions and customs is the manipulated version of religion that some mullahs (clergy) spread. An interesting finding is that violence against women is far less in non-Muslim households than it is in Muslim households. Even though women of all religions experience societal pressures outside their homes, non-Muslim women face far less violence within their households. They do not have cases of honour killing, face little physical domestic violence in their homes and enjoy more liberty in their households than Muslim women. However, female members from minority groups indicated harassment they have to face from Muslim men outside their homes. They complained about verbal abuse in streets and derogatory remarks being passed on them in public.

Moreover, among other violations of women's rights reported by community members and key informants in Lahore and Khanewal, a startling discovery is that a lot of non-Muslim, especially Christian men, are converting to Islam with the purpose of doing second marriage. The Christian faith does not allow a man to conduct polygamy, but as Islam allows for men to have more than one wife (up to four), so there is a trend starting for men from other faiths to accept Islam to fulfil their desires of doing second marriages. Lawyers, police officers and religious representatives also pointed out that according to the Christian Marriage Act, divorce cases have to be sent to the ruling Church, which could be one of the reasons for Christian men to resort to changing religions.

At least two respondents said that religion is used to spread taboos that discriminate against women and non-Muslims. It is being used to exploit the weak and the vulnerable. According to Davidson (1978) and Pagelow & Johnson (1988) (both cited in

Zakar, Zakar and Kramer, 2011), religious leaders are often known to entice male chauvinism and male-oriented religious spirituality in the marital relations and in society. Zakar, Zakar and Kramer (2011) also highlighted that due to the prevalence of polarized versions of religion in Pakistan, many religious leaders adopt contradictory views wherein some leaders' views may breed sentiments of violence against women. Being backed in the name of religion, such interpretations are hardly ever contested by the locals, who accept the religious leaders' perception of religion without question.

4.2. Governance and Institutional Factors

The above-mentioned socio-economic and cultural factors are reinforced with the discrimination faced by women from institutional structures. Pakistan is reined by institutionalized sexism and systematic misogyny (Naqvi and Syed 2015). It was told that it is very difficult for a victim of violence to reach a police station to file a complaint. There are major hurdles in the process, but the first and the foremost remains the social taboo attached with a female going to a police station. The major reason as to why women avoid going to police station is because they have to keep the opinion of the society before them.

During probe, it was found that when a woman raises voice against violence, she is perceived to lose her respect. A respondent in an FGD said:

Orthodox minds think that a woman should keep her domestic issues to her home. She loses her respect when she brings them out in the streets or to police.

At least four officials in Punjab Police Department said that a woman should not come to the police station for trivial issues of domestic violence while breaching the security of her home.

For the women who gear up the courage to take a stand and go to the police station, the major problem they face is how to reach there. Many women from far-off villages do not have easy access to police stations. Either they are unaware of the process or have no money to file a case and proceed further due to loopholes in the system. A human rights activist in Karachi pointed out that in severe cases of violence against women, when women are hospitalized and unable to speak then police officers come to take their statements. They write the report that the victim was unable to record her statement. Consequently, the case is buried. This shows the system's failure to conduct investigation in a timely and comprehensive manner. It was also mentioned that in cases of domestic violence and assault, police adopted an accusatory approach towards the complainants and asked women to 'prove their innocence before registering the offense (committed) against them', as put by one of the respondents.

About four respondents from the police and judiciary said that when women are succeeded in filing a case, most of the times they compromise with the perpetrator. They said that women are weak; they succumb to compromising with the perpetrators because of the immense social pressure of protecting one's family. Police officials said there are flaws in the legislation which create hurdles in the dispensation of justice. They

referred to the domestic violence bill in which a woman has to prove a specific degree of physical injury in order to file a case. Many times in cases of domestic violence, a woman is not able to prove this injury and thus the police are not able to take action. A senior police official in Jamshoro said that in such cases, they often need to 'mould the law' because the existing segments of the law do not protect women from violence.

Moreover, it was discussed that existing laws are also not thoroughly implemented. For example, the bills on workplace harassment and domestic violence are sometimes exploited, using women as tools to fulfil ulterior motives of the parties involved. The process of court is quite time consuming, for which a poor woman does not have the resources. The system has been designed in such a way that a poor woman cannot afford repeated visits to the courts. Unless given bribes, for which more financial resources are required, the court process is not sped up.

The discussions highlighted significant loopholes in the Criminal Justice System of Pakistan. At every step of the law-enforcement and criminal justice system, women have to face antagonistic and at times, indifferent attitudes due to the patriarchal norms held in the society. At least five respondents complained that the behaviour of police officials with women is very derogatory. Police officials especially the junior staff use abusive language with them and harassed them at police stations.

A police officer in Jamshoro reported that even though they have a Women's Department in the Human Rights Cell of police, there are no cases filed in that cell. One reason for this is that women are not willing to come out to report their cases for fear of shame and another is the attitude of police with them.

The role of police as an agent of change was also discussed at length with the respondents. A general consensus was that the role of police mainly depended upon the nature of the highest police official in the area - if he is unbiased and strict, then there prevails a general law abiding environment. However, in case the official is politically biased and lenient in law-enforcement, then among other crimes, violence remains high.

Sindh government has set up a Human Rights Cell in the provincial police department with a further unit within it called the Women's Cell. Although the initiative was appreciated by all the respondents from Sindh, its performance remained questioned. It was complained that the Women's Cell could not deliver, as it is not equipped with the sufficient human and financial resources.

Similarly, the Punjab government has started a helpline for women in Lahore; however, its effectiveness was also questioned by four experts. The main issue highlighted was the lack of publicity of this helpline among those women that need it the most. According to a senior government official in Lahore, these helplines will not be much successful as they do not break the social barriers faced by women to approach such institutions for help. Similarly, the incapacity of shelter homes for women was identified as a major gap in the process of providing justice to women. Women shelter homes like Dar ul Aman are in deplorable condition.

Discussions with community members showed that in areas where there is a hold of elite and influential people, even the police are under their influence. They mentioned some cases of violence that were taken to police but the officials at the police station refused to register an FIR because the perpetrators were from influential families. Money was quoted as the most important tool to influence the police behaviour with either party. It was repeatedly said by the community members that police took a biased stance towards those who struck a better deal with them. Moreover, it was observed that particular policeman's perception also affected the case. As said by one of the respondents, police staff also comes from the same culture, so they are moulded by the same societal misperceptions. There are people in the police institution who hesitate to pursue the cases of violence against women and often disregard them as family matters. This proves to be a major obstacle in treating violence against women as a crime in Pakistan (The Human Rights Watch 1999).

With regards to legislation, the introduction of various women's rights bills was highly commended by all experts. Political quota making female participation mandatory for election seats has encouraged women to take part in political decision-making. This was commended, however, there was a general concern that women in most cases are merely used as puppets by the party-heads and have little authority to work against the status quo of social evils. Initiatives⁸ like the Protection of Women Bill 2006, the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Bill (2011) etc. were much admired but received severe criticism for not providing a mechanism for increased reporting and implementation. The bills hold in principle, however their effectiveness is under question as there is no proper framework of implementation. In the words of a prominent advocate in Karachi (speaking with reference to violence against women):

There are too many laws in this country, yet too little justice.

Government officials, lawyers and police also highlighted certain gaps in legislation. Of those, a major loophole is the treatment of honour-killing as a compoundable offence under the Qisas and Diyat component of the Hudood Ordinance. This was highly criticized as the biggest flaw in this law is that those people (i.e. family) who would have filed the case as complainants are themselves the perpetrators. To fill this gap, the government has initiated that the police itself should file the case as a plaintiff to reduce the chance of the case being compounded.

An important element in the justice system is the prevalence of informal legal systems. It was highlighted at various occasions that since the legal process is so lengthy and resource-consuming, many community members still prefer the Panchayt or Jirga system as it brings speedy decisions. It was claimed that the Panchayt members are highly biased as they are not elected by the community rather selected by the influential

⁸The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Bill (2015) was not released when the interviews took place.

people and are dictated by them. These Jirgas or Panchayts mostly resolve matters of land and property disputes, family rivalries, honour and shame, theft, kidnapping, revenge, etc. However, it was reported numerous times that many matters were resolved using women as a tool for settlement and revenge of matters that were related to men, resulting in Jirga-dictated honour killings, kidnappings, vani (girl child marriage), watta satta (bride exchange), rape, etc. as punishments for the defendant's family.

In a male dominant society like Pakistan, the fact that women pay the price of acts of men in their families speaks volumes. She is used as an agency of exchange, an asset for revenge and settlement and a tool for business in groups of male-dominated jirgas that people follow with obligation for pursuits of "speedy justice". It goes without saying in this matter how jirga-controlled societies view "justice" as only relevant to men.

The onus of the gloomy state of affairs of treatment of women also lies on the state to a certain degree. According to a senior police official in Lahore, the behaviour of our state reflects a male dominant society where women are not given sufficient opportunities to express themselves and have justice. Every field is dominated by men and they decide the role of women in the society. A prominent lawyer of Karachi stated that our state is completely militarized which supports extra judicial killing. Such behaviour breeds sentiments of intolerance in the people due to which they exercise their power on women. At least six respondents criticized the rule of law and inability of state to provide speedy justice to people. They appreciated the laws made by parliament to curb violence against women but they held the government responsible for not ensuring their implementation.

4.3. Role of Pressure Groups

During our detailed interviews, we also tried to probe about the factors and entities that act as "pressure groups" for change, both positive and negative, in the context of violence against women.

It was learnt that not a single factor was accounted as a pure positive agent of change. Every factor that was mentioned had a dual role, positive in some cases while extremely negative in others. Media in all its forms, (print, electronic and social media) was categorized as an important influence on the situation of violence against women in both the Punjab and Sindh. However, the nature of the influence remained debatable.

Generally, respondents accredited media as a positive factor that has brought in awareness about the overall situation and rights of women in the society. Women are now more informed about the kinds of violence taking place and how to take help in such situations. This has increased their access to information, opportunities and justice. Women's rights awareness campaigns via television, radio, newspapers and social media are proving to be quite fruitful in informing people about their rights. Moreover, by reporting cases of violence and abuse, media also acts as a pressure group on law-enforcement institutions to act upon them.

However, respondents also censured media for playing a sensational role in increasing violence against women. It was viewed that the content of media is highly gender insensitive. It promotes women victimization instead of women empowerment. A government official from Lahore said:

Have you seen the kind of themes that our dramas are highlighting? Polygamy, extra martial affairs, women being slapped and beaten up, incest, victimization of women, etc. is shown in all our dramas. They say they highlight these issues because they are sold.

Moreover, respondents also denounced the kind of reporting done by news agencies. They criticized the reporters for posting news without doing thorough investigation and verification of the matter. Often times, news channels and papers report incidences related to issues of women without considering the impact of such news on women quoted or referred to in the news. It was also said that sometimes media is under influence of the perpetrators (due to matters of money, political influence, etc.), in which case it fabricates and distorts the facts, which may affect the victims badly.

Besides media, civil society and NGOs were considered strong pressure groups in matters of violence against women. It was generally agreed that the civil society and NGOs were efficient in raising voice against social evils and mainstreaming the issues in policy debate. There was a consensus in both the provinces that civil society has played an effective role as a watchdog and succeeded in raising voice against issues of human rights at the government level. However, their domain is limited and it was recognized that they could only be effective to work as a pressure group for change. It was largely agreed that NGOs and civil society are performing far better than government and state institutions for issues regarding violence against women, though two respondents remarked that they work better when they coordinate with the government, a trend which is becoming more popular now.

At least five experts and some respondents in FGDs agreed that performance of NGOs has a flip side as well. Their main objection was the project-based, donor-funded nature of NGOs. They complained that because the work done by NGOs is project-based, its impacts are not long-term and fade off easily. The impact, if any, is also concentrated on a very small population and does not improve the overall situation of the issue. Another more serious objection was that some NGOs do not perform actual work on the ground and just visit the community for a small event for pictures and evidence for their reports. A community member from Jamshoro said:

NGOs use us. They only work for money, like all others. They show our miseries to the world and make profits [on our stories].

On the other hand, human rights activists and social workers had their own concerns. They informed us about the pressures they face from different societal groups in their social work. They say that most of the times they face resistance from the community itself as the community believes that they work on “western agenda”. An NGO worker in Sukkur said:

When we go to villages and inform women about their rights, their elders and men accuse us of brainwashing their women and teaching them immoral ideas (of empowerment) of the West.

It was observed that on the whole, NGOs are working effectively to raise voice in this regard. However, an important observation made by the research team was that at many study sites, NGOs had little cooperation amongst themselves and with the government. NGOs working in the same area were observed to be in competition with each other rather than working in alliance for the improvement of the society.

All these factors reflect the multi-factorial, structural and systematic nature in which violence against women persists in our society. These are explained by the power structures that exist at all levels of the society. As explained by Foucault (1980), power is exercised not only at the state, institutional or cultural level, but more so within the family for the particular case of women. The interplay of culture, norms, lack of education, issues in governance and institutions, gaps in legislation, flaws in the criminal justice system, the role of informal legal systems and the overall elitist power dynamics of the society reinforce each other to create a hostile environment against women. Women in Pakistan are victimized through the practice of disciplinary power that the society exercises, always keeping them in a state of surveillance and enforcing certain behaviours that they have to maintain (Jasam 2001). The role of media and NGOs as agents of change remains debated and it was enlightening to see how different stakeholders viewed the dual nature of these entities. All three types of factors that came out of discussions were ruled by supremacy of norms and culture, coupled with economic and political vested interests of stakeholders under the umbrella of a male-dominant mindset at all levels of the society.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The whole scenario leads to the conclusion that violence against women exists in different forms and areas and at all levels of the society. The foremost reason behind such a widespread prevalence of violence is the patriarchal culture practiced throughout the two provinces under study. Culture, norms, traditions and even the interpretation of religion define power relations within family structures and dictate men's dominance over women in all aspects of life. Male dominance prevails in the society at all levels; yet their "honour" fails to match their masculinity in all other matters and remains highly delicate, easily compromised by and highly dependent upon their women's modesty and sexuality.

Some factors that reinforce such an orthodox outlook are the level and quality of education, access to police stations and other facilities, feudal mindset and rituals, misinterpretation of religion, etc. Furthermore, what is more ironic is that all organs of the criminal justice system of the country also have bias against women and often times, women face discrimination, abuse and harassment at the hands of these institutions and legislation as well. There have been some improvements in recent times and the state tries to address these issues through a parliamentary approach, yet implementation lags behind the bills, giving way to continued acts

of violence. Media has been highlighted as playing on the one hand as an agent of change and on the other as a mean of violence depending upon the content shown. Similarly civil society is also much appreciated as well as heavily criticized. Nevertheless, it was agreed that they do not feed violence and, at worse, fail to bring a holistic and sustained change in the society.

Based on our findings, we recommend the following actions to be taken in order to curb violence against women:

1. Poverty was increasingly identified as a key contributor to socio-economic and socio-cultural marginalization of women in Pakistan; hence introduction of gender-sensitive macroeconomic growth process is needed. Greater employment opportunities for both men and women and an environment conducive to working women (which includes measures for their security, education, mobility, protection against harassment at workplace, and childcare facilities) is also essential.
2. There is a dire need to revise curriculum to make it gender sensitive and remove all contents that encourage discrimination.
3. It is essential to conduct a thorough analysis of the criminal justice system (especially the Pakistan Penal Code) and identify the social and institutional constraints that women may face at any point of the process. Only when the challenges are identified comprehensively, then a proper framework for their solution can be devised.
4. Bills and acts are important, but a favorable environment for reporting of violence against women is more important to ensure effectiveness of such legislation. Thereby, access to criminal justice system for women should be smoothed by removing taboos through the use of media and education as agents of change.
5. There is a need to understand the position of women in the power hierarchy within family and societal structures and considering that, violence against women should be treated as a state offense rather than an offense against the individual. This is to reduce the negotiations and compromises that women victims often make under the influence of society in general and family in particular.
6. Most of the existing awareness campaigns regarding violence against women and women rights target women as audience. Though awareness among women about their rights is crucial, what is more imperative is infusing empathy among men regarding women empowerment.
7. Media should be sensitized to play a responsible role in terms of the content that is aired, especially on family channels. It should promote women as leaders, winners and equal component of the society instead of portraying them as victims of violence in the hands of men and society. State should initiate broadcasting of public service messages regarding women's rights and violence against women a state crime. TV and radio advertisements should also change the way they portray women. Similarly, minorities' equality in the society should be taken care of by media.

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Annex I

List of Focus Group Discussions

District	Type of FGD	Area	Number of Participants
Lahore	Male/female General	Rural	8
Lahore	Minority group	Urban	9
Lahore	Women	Rural	9
Multan	Minority group (Christians)	Urban	9
Multan	Minority group (Hindus)	Rural	12
Multan	Male/female General	Urban	9
Multan	Women	Rural	8
Khanewal	Women	Urban	9
Khanewal	Male/female General	Urban	8
Khanewal	Male/female General	Urban	8
Khanewal	Minority group 1	Rural	10
Khanewal	Minority group 2	Urban	10
Khanewal	Minority group 3	Rural	8
Karachi	Women	Rural	9
Karachi	Male/female General	Urban	10
Karachi	Minority group	Urban	11
Sukkur	Male/female General	Urban	12
Sukkur	Minority group	Rural	12
Sukkur	Women	Rural	8
Jamshoro	Male/female General	Urban	9
Jamshoro	Minority group (Christians)	Rural	11
Jamshoro	Women	Urban	8