

# Violence Against Women

Humaira Nosheen\*

## Abstract

*The women have all along been a frail & feeble layer of every society. Violence against them, with a difference of degree (& intensity), has been a universal phenomenon. In the post-industrial revolution era, however, female folk (along with the young children) were drawn out of the four-walls of their homes & urged to work in industries as a cheap labour force. They were compensated by offering a legislative sanction of right to private property. This financial independence changed their vision & enabled them to fight for their socio-moral & legal rights. As a result, there has been a marked reduction in violence against women. But, unfortunately, the shadow of this menace is still lingering on. In this article attempt has been made to assess the state of violence in KPK province, Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** Women, Violence, Gender, Human Rights, Education

Living free from violence is a human right. Yet millions of women and girls around the world come across rape, domestic abuse, mutilation and other forms of gender-based violence.<sup>1</sup> There is no universally accepted definition of violence against women. Some of the human rights activists prefer a broad based definition that includes “*structural violence*” such as poverty and unequal access to health and education.<sup>2</sup>

United Nations defines the term violence against women 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 act, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.<sup>3</sup> The UN Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women (1993) states that violence against women is a demonstration of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the

---

\* Humaira Nosheen, Ph.D Scholar, Institute of Social Work, Sociology and Gender Studies, University of Peshawar.

essential social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compare with men.<sup>4</sup>

According to Gelles and Straus, "Violence is an act carried out with the intention of perceived intention of physically hurting another person".<sup>5</sup> Women's activists have marked November 25 as a day against violence since 1981. On December 17, 1999, the United Nations General Assembly designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (Resolution 54/134). The UN invited governments, international organizations and NGOs to organize activities designated to raise public awareness of the problem on this day as an international observance.<sup>6</sup>

Violence includes honour killing, acid throwing, bride burning, domestic violence, denial of property, rape, human trafficking, trafficking for forced labour and sex forced and child marriages, obscene phone calls, sexual harassment, torture, exchange of females to settle disputes (*swara/vanni*).

Violence against woman passes through her life cycle. In first phase at the beginning of her life that is pre-birth she suffers from sex-selective abortion, at infancy she suffers from female infanticide i.e. physical, sexual and psychological abuse, at girlhood child marriage, incest, child prostitution and pornography, at adolescence and adulthood dating and courtship violence (acid throwing and date raping, dowry abuse, murder and psychological abuse etc. At elderly forced suicide or homicide of widows for economic reasons i.e. sexual physical and psychological abuse.<sup>7</sup>

Gelles study<sup>8</sup> focused on the violence in the family, concentrated on abusive relationships within the family, including violence between brothers and sisters, parental violence towards younger children and teenagers, the physical abuse and neglect of the elderly, courtship violence and violence between husband and wife. Many factors are responsible for violence in the family. Steinmetz<sup>9</sup> research theme known as "*Family violence perspective*" accounted various factors such as employment, poverty, cultural norms which promote violence in the family. There is no one particular factor to account for violence against women.

Several multifaceted and interconnected institutional, social and cultural factors have kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them. In many countries women are discriminated culturally, economically, legally and politically. These discriminations endorse an environment in which women are subjected to violence. Some factors are poverty, low economic status, education, social status, norms, and traditions of the society, employment and family problems as well.

Many forms of violence are deeply rooted in the patriarchal, feudal and tribal systems.<sup>10</sup> Walby<sup>11</sup> defines “patriarchy a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women”. Manish<sup>12</sup> also supports this view by saying that patriarchy is associated with subordination and oppression of women.

Drug addiction, impotency (husband-wife) insanity, (husband-wife) premarital and extra marital sexual relations, more children, no children, no son and more daughters, infertility of wife, social differentiation class/caste are the major causes of family violence.<sup>13</sup>

In Pakistan violence against women has enormous effects on society. It not only cause financial strains, traditional and cultural aspects, pighor (to remind one of his defamed past and taunt) psychological strains of the male members, misuse of media, injustice in the society, feudal system, lack of medical facilities, social insurances and unemployment.

Violence against women is affecting every society of the world and is considered an obstacle to achieve equality, development and peace. This reality was recognized at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, by the delegates from 189 countries where they identified violence against women as one of the critical areas of concern that must be addressed world-wide for women in order to achieve equality with men.<sup>14</sup>

Women are subjected to discrimination and violence on a daily basis due to the cultural and religious norms that Pakistani society embraces. Male dominance subjects women to violence on a daily basis in Pakistan. Approximately seventy-percent to ninety-percent of Pakistani women are subjected to domestic violence.<sup>15</sup>

According to Harvey and Gow, “History of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and a gender role assigned to be subservient to men”.<sup>16</sup> Pakistani society is a true example of manifesting this violence where there are deep-rooted beliefs based on culture, traditions, norms and social institutions that legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women. Women are considered as personal properties of men and men control every aspect of lives of women including their behaviour and movements. Men have the right to make decisions, and women have to follow their decisions in family, tribe, community and society.<sup>17</sup>

A total of 8548 incidents of violence against women were reported in the four provinces of Pakistan and in capital territory Islamabad during year 2009. Of these, 5722 cases of violence were recorded in Punjab, 1762 in Sindh, 655 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 237 in

Balochistan and 172 in Islamabad. Almost all these cases are reported cases.<sup>18</sup>

Wife beating occurs in 85 of 90 societies (Levinson)<sup>19</sup>. Kalmuss and Straus<sup>20</sup> argued that the more dependent a woman is on her abuser, the more likely she is to suffer extreme battering. She is not self supporting and needs economic, social and political support of her husband and he benefits from his advantaged position.

### **Successful approaches to combat violence against women**

#### *Interventions to stop violence against women*

Violence against women in all its manifestation is a criminal act.<sup>21</sup> The Government of Pakistan has established a special Ministry for Women Development in 1979. It is a platform for the promotion and undertaking of projects that provides special facilities for women and ensures equality in education and employment and full participation of women in all spheres of social welfare. Right now, this Ministry for Women Development is the main platform through which women's rights organizations get governmental funds.<sup>22</sup>

The Government of Pakistan set up a "Commission of Inquiry for Women", headed by a Supreme Court judge and consisting of human rights lawyers, Islamic scholars and legislators in 1994 to review the existing laws that perpetuate discrimination against women. The recommendations of the Commission were not given adequate attention by the government.<sup>23</sup>

According to national guidelines in Pakistan<sup>24</sup>, the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women was adopted as a working document in August 1998 by the President of Pakistan. In July 2000, the Chief Executive of Pakistan General Musharraf initiated National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), an independent department. The main purpose behind this development was to make comprehensive strategies to end the domestic violence and abuse against women, and to direct government to implement these strategies for long-term purposes.<sup>25</sup>

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in its annual report 1997 reported "*The worst victims were women of the poor and middle classes*". Their resourcelessness not only made them the primary target of the police and the criminals, it also rendered them more vulnerable to oppressive customs and '*mores*' inside and outside.<sup>26</sup> The Government of Pakistan is committed to improve the status of women. Pakistan is signatory to CEDAW 1996. The government has taken certain measures including legislation for protection of women. The government also

established a fund for women in distress and detention to provide relief to the victims of violence. Crisis centers were set up in various cities with the purpose to protect women against violence of all kinds, to eliminate all forms of discrimination. Family protection project has been launched under Gender Equality Umbrella Project to combat crime and violence against women.<sup>27</sup>

In spite the government's measures, the incidents of violence in 2009<sup>28</sup> reached to 8548, the number of cases of abduction and kidnapping are 1987, honour killing 604, followed by cases of sexual assault 274, stove burning 50, acid throwing 27, offences of miscellaneous nature 1977, such as *Vanii*, *Swara*, custodial violence, torture, trafficking, child marriages, incest, threat of violence. There was highest increase in the number of the reported cases i.e. from 281 in 2008 to 608 in 2009 in domestic violence. The reported murder cases decreased from 1422 in 2008 to 1384 in 2009.<sup>29</sup> Out of 1384 women murder 604 honors killing cases were reported in 2009 against 647 in 2008 a decrease of 2.62 % which is insignificant.

The right of life of women in Pakistan is conditional on their obeying social norms and traditions which are deeply rooted and have made the life of women miserable.<sup>30</sup>

It can be safely said that at the governmental level, there are policies and programmes to end violence against women in Pakistan but still the women are discriminated because these policies are not implemented properly because almost all politicians either religious lords or feudal lords who give more importance to their tribal and religious narrow approaches rather than towards universal rights for women.

Radhika UN Special Reporter on Violence against Women has rightly concluded:

*“There's a lot of law writing, standard setting, programmes being planned, but the biggest problem is that people are using culture and religion to deny women's rights.”*<sup>31</sup>

### **Recommendation**

- The Federal and Provincial government should expand the violence victim support service.
- The NGOs, civil society and women activists should be associated with the legal aid, vocational training and provisions for children.
- To eliminate the practice of women's mock marriage to the Holy Quran.

- To declare acid throwing, a criminal act and propose death penalty for the culprit.
- The number of victims shelter crisis centers should be increased as the present number can not accommodate the large number of violence victims.
- There should be regular programmes on radio and Television, regarding women issues and problems.
- The government should introduce literature, concerning civic etiquettes and dignity of women in the schools, especially at secondary level which will create awareness in the new generation.
- To provide gender sensitization centers training to law enforcement agencies and judicial personnel to enable them, to address complaints of all cases including violence in the name of honour.

### **Conclusion**

The research data reveals that majority of the females do not suffer from violence in their families while 44.6% reported violence is in the form of physical violence (torture), wife beating, slapping, hitting, strangling, mental abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, between the family.

Violence against women is reduced in the family due to improved educational level of women in the society. Education, modernization and other socioeconomic and political factors are also responsible for such change.

## Notes & References

- <sup>1</sup> Amnesty International USA, Human Rights. Violence Against Women. retrieved on July 2010, from [http:// www.amnestyusa.org/](http://www.amnestyusa.org/)
- <sup>2</sup> Innocent Digest, Domestic Violence Against Women and girls UNICEF, United Nations Children Fun Innocenti Research Centre Florence, Italy.
- <sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, violence Against Women, retrieved on July 2010, from <http://www.who.in/countries/en>
- <sup>4</sup> General Assembly 85<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting 20<sup>th</sup> December 1993, 48/104. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.
- <sup>5</sup> R.J. Gelles, & M.A. Straus, "Determinants of violence in the family: Toward a theoretical integration", (New York: Free Press, 1979)
- <sup>6</sup> United Nations, International Day For the Elimination of violence Against Women 25 November. Retrieved on August 2011 from <http://www.un.org/en/-events/endviolenceday>
- <sup>7</sup> *Innocent Digest*, No.6, June 2000, Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls, op.cit. 4.
- <sup>8</sup> R. Gelles, *The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Aggression Between Husbands and Wives*, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974) 151.
- <sup>9</sup> Suzanne, K. Steinmetz, "The Battered Husband Syndrome", *Victimology: An International Journal*" V2, Nos. 3/4, (1977-78) 499.509.
- <sup>10</sup> Sharma Usha, *Women in South Asia Employment, Empowerment and Human Development*. (Authorspress, 2003) 107.
- <sup>11</sup> S. Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, (Oxford UK: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 20.
- <sup>12</sup> Bahl Manish, *Violence on Women by Men*, (New Delhi: Cyber Tech Publications, 2007) 204.
- <sup>13</sup> Fazli Hamid, *Pakistan's Changing Villages*. Unpublished.
- <sup>14</sup> "Elimination of Violence against Women", Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Retrieved on July 2010, from [http://www.international.gc.ca/about-a\\_propos](http://www.international.gc.ca/about-a_propos).
- <sup>15</sup> "Crime or Custom? Violence Against Women in Pakistan," (Human Rights Watch, 1999) 1.
- <sup>16</sup> A thesis submitted by Zaheer Udin Babur, *Pakistan Violence Against Women in Pakistan :Current realities and strategies*, (June, 2007) 21
- <sup>17</sup> Yasmeen Hassan, "The haven becomes hell: A study of domestic violence in Pakistan", (Lahore: Shirkat Gah, 1995).
- <sup>18</sup> Press Statement, Violence against Women Watch Group, Islamabad, 1 (Islamabad: February 2010)
- <sup>19</sup> Levinson, cited by Abdul Hameed Malik, *Sociology of Gender Relations*. (Multan: Teachers Students Welfare, 2005) 202.
- <sup>20</sup> A. Kalmuss, & M. Straus, Wife's Marital Dependency and Wife Abuse *Journal of Marriage and Family*, (1982) 44 & 277-278.
- <sup>21</sup> Margaret, Schuler, *Freedom from violence: women's strategies from around the world*, (New York: PACT communications, 1992) 56
- <sup>22</sup> International Labour Organization, "Equality of Opportunity in Education and Training". Ministry of Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special

---

Education–Pakistan, (2004). Retrieved from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/eoo/edu/inst/pakmwd.htm>

<sup>23</sup> Yasmin lailufar, “Law and order situation and gender based violence”, Institute of Regional Studies (2002). Retrieved from [http://www.rcss.org/policy\\_studies/ps\\_16\\_3.html](http://www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_16_3.html) on 30 Jan 2007.

<sup>24</sup> “National guidelines in Pakistan”, International Labour Organization, (1997). <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/eoo/guide/pakistan/npdew.htm> retrieved on 30 Jan, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch Report, “Violence against women in Pakistan”. (2004). <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/pakistan/forms.htm>. Retrieved on 2nd Jan, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Mohammad Khalid, *Social Problems of Pakistan*, (Karachi: Kifayat Academy, 2003)186

<sup>27</sup> “Pakistan Women Opportunities and Challenges”, Ministry of Women Development, (Government of Pakistan, 2001) 7-23

<sup>28</sup> “Annual Report of Pakistani NGO Notes 13 Percent Increase in Violence Against Women”, Daily Dawn, and Pakistan, (February 2, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> “Violence against Women Rose 13pc in 2009”, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), (2 February 2010).

<sup>30</sup> “Pakistan: Honour killings of girls and women”, Amnesty International. Retrieved on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2010, from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA33/018/1999/en/dom-ASA330181999en.html>

<sup>31</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy quoted in S. Camerson Moore 5<sup>th</sup> May 2005. Violence Against Women in South Asia. UN Islamabad Reuters in Women Empowering Themselves A framework that interrogates and transform. Pakistan: Research Programme Consortium, Southeast Asia Research Centre. (6)

---

## Bibliography

### Books

- Bahl, Manish. (2007). *Violence on Women by Men*. New Delhi: Cyber Tech Publications.
- Gelles, R.J. & Straus, M.A. (1979). "Determinants of violence in the family: Toward a theoretical Integration". New York: Free Press.
- Gelles. R. (1974). *The Violent Home: A Study of Physical Aggression Between Husbands and Wives*. Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Hamid, Fazli. (2010). *Pakistan's Changing Villages*. unpublished.
- Khalid, Mohammad. (2003) *Social Problems of Pakistan*. Kifayat Academy.
- Levinson. (1993) cited by Abdul Hameed Malik .(2005). *Sociology of Gender Relations*. Multan: Teachers Students Welfare.
- Sharma. Usha. (2003). *Women in South Asia Employment, Empowerment and Human Development*.
- S, Walby. (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford UK: Basil Blackwell.
- "National guidelines in Pakistan". (1997). International Labour Organization. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/eeo/guide/pakistan/npdew.htm> retrieved on 30 Jan, 2007.
- United Nations. International Day For the Elimination of violence Against Women 25 November. retrived on August 2011 from [http:// www.un.org/en/-events/endviolenceday](http://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday).

### Thesis

A thesis submitted by Zaheer Udin Babur, Pakistan Violence Against Women in Pakistan :Current realities and strategies, June, 2007 for change.

### Journals

- Innocent Digest*, Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls UNICEF, United Nations Children Fund Innocenti Research Centre Florence, Italy, p-4.
- Kalmuss, A & Straus, M. (1982) .Wife's Marital Dependency and Wife Abuse *Journal of Marriage and Family*.
- Schuler, Margaret. (1992). " Freedom from violence: women's strategies from around the world." New York: PACT communications.
- Suzanne, K. Steinmetz. (1977-78). The Battered Husband Syndrome. *Victimology: An International Journal* 2, Nos. 3/4, pp.499.509.

### Reports

- Annual Report of Pakistani NGO Notes 13 Percent Increase in Violence Against Women, Dawn, Pakistan. February 2, 2010.
- "Crime or Custom? Violence Against Women in Pakistan," Human Rights Watch 1999,

---

General Assembly 85<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting 20<sup>th</sup> December 1993, 48/104. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Hassan, Yasmeen. (1995). "The haven becomes hell: A study of domestic violence in Pakistan". Lahore : Shirkat Gah.

Pakistan Women Opportunities and Challenges .(2001). Ministry of Women Development, Government of Pakistan.

Press Statement .1 February 2010, Islamabad. Violence against Women Watch Group, Islamabad.

Radhika Coomaraswamy quoted in S. Camerson Moore 5<sup>th</sup> May 2005. Violence Against Women in South Asia. UN Islamabad Reuters In Women Empowering Themselves A framework that interrogates and transform. Pakistan: Research Programme Consortium, Southeast Asia Research Centre. p.6.

Violence Against Women Rose 13pc in 2009, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). 2 February 2010.

#### *Web*

Amnesty International USA, Human Rights. Violence Against Women.

retrieved on July 2010, from [http:// www.amnestyusa.org/](http://www.amnestyusa.org/)

Elimination of Violence against Women. Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. retrived on July 2010, from [htt://www.international.gc.ca/about-a\\_propos](http://www.international.gc.ca/about-a_propos).

Human Rights Watch Report. (2004). "Violence against women in Pakistan". <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/pakistan/forms.htm>, retrieved on 2nd Jan, 2007.

International Labour Organization.(2004). "Equality of Opportunity in Education

and Training". Ministry of Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education–Pakistan. Retrived from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/eo/edu/inst/pakmwd.htm>

"Pakistan: Honour killings of girls and women". Amnesty International.

Retrieved on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2010, from

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA33/018/1999/en/dom-ASA330181999en.html>

World Health Organization, violence Against Women, retrived on July 2010, from [htt://www.who.in/countries/en](http://www.who.in/countries/en)

Yasmin, lailufar. (2002) "Law and order situation and gender based violence".

Institute of Regional Studies. [http://www.rcss.org/policy\\_studies/ps\\_16\\_3.html](http://www.rcss.org/policy_studies/ps_16_3.html) retrieved on 30 Jan 2007.