



THE REAL TRUTH BEHIND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the prevalence, impact, and challenges of implementing legislation intended at preventing domestic violence in Pakistan. The study employed a hybrid methodology, including a survey of 140 women and an examination of legal case studies. The findings indicated a high prevalence of physical, psychological, financial, and sexual violence, with significant health consequences. Fear factors, such as retaliation, social stigma, divorce, and future instability, were identified as significant deterrents for victims to report abuse. The research also reveals a disconnection between the enactment and enforcement of domestic violence laws. While some cases of domestic violence were acknowledged and addressed, a significant number were dismissed as private matters or were not pursued after registration. The study recommended comprehensive interventions to increase public awareness, strengthen legal enforcement, enhance victim support services, and advance gender equality. Future research should investigate unreported cases and assess the efficacy of interventions. The findings highlight the urgent need for concerted efforts to reduce domestic violence and guarantee the safety and justice of all Pakistani women.

KEYWORDS: Domestic violence; Enforcement; Loss of dignity; Legislation; Reporting barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a global problem that transcends geographical, cultural, and socioeconomic boundaries. In addition to physical violence, its manifestations include emotional, sexual, and financial abuse¹. Domestic violence is a global issue, but the context and essence of domestic violence in each region is shaped by unique dynamics. Due to societal norms, cultural beliefs, and legal impediments, this pervasive issue remains in the shadows in Pakistan, where it is frequently regarded as a private matter and dismissed or denied².

To reveal the true nature of domestic violence in Pakistan, it is essential to delve into the cultural, legal, and societal factors that permeate this topic. The patriarchal culture, gender-based social norms, and enforcement of protective legislation all contribute to the complex narrative surrounding domestic violence in this South Asian nation³⁻⁴.

In addition, this study examined critically the national efforts that have been made to address this issue, as well as their efficacy and limitations. It provided a comprehensive analysis of the current domestic violence legislation, examined its enforcement, and highlighted the obstacles victims confront when seeking justice and protection. Statistical prevalence of domestic violence in Pakistan was examined, despite underreporting and a lack of data. The objective was to provide an empirical comprehension of the scope of this problem, which has far-reaching consequences not only for the victims but also for their families and for society as a whole⁵⁻⁶.

The study concluded by outlining potential avenues for reducing domestic violence in Pakistan. By analyzing successful case studies and prospective strategies, we discussed the multidimensional approach necessary to effect change, including public awareness, education, institutional support, and promoting gender equality⁷.



The issue of domestic violence in Pakistan is complicated and unsettling, but it requires immediate attention. Domestic violence's true cost is borne by its victims, who endure its physical, emotional, and mental scars. Through thorough comprehension of the situation, we can contribute to a brighter future in which every individual is free from the dread of domestic violence. The purpose of this study was to cast light on these facets, revealing the hidden dimensions of domestic violence and providing insights that can spark meaningful discourse and action.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In 2022-23, a study was conducted in Karachi that included interviews with 140 principal informants and meetings with 140 survivors of domestic violence, for a total sample size of 280. We utilized the mixed-methods approach in this research investigation. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods enabled a comprehensive comprehension of the issue, encompassing both the breadth and depth of the phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For a comprehensive comprehension of domestic violence in Pakistan, a systematic literature review was conducted. The review included academic articles, books, non-government organization reports, government reports, and legal documents. Utilized databases included JSTOR, PubMed, Google Scholar, and SpringerLink. Included in the list of search queries were "domestic violence in Pakistan," "patriarchy in Pakistan," "gender-based violence in Pakistan," "domestic violence laws in Pakistan," and "prevention of domestic violence in Pakistan."

ANALYSIS OF SUBSEQUENT DATA

Secondary data analysis involved the examination of previously collected data from reputable sources such as the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS), Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, and reports from numerous national and international organizations such as Aurat Foundation, Human Rights Watch, and UN Women. These data sources provided vital statistical insights into the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence across the nation.

PRINCIPAL INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

To acquire a deeper understanding of the issue, interviews with key informants were conducted. Social workers, lawyers, human rights activists, police officers, and health professionals were among the participants. The expertise and experiences of these professionals provided important insights into the realities and complexities of domestic violence in Pakistan.

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

There were focus group discussions with survivors of domestic violence. This provided firsthand accounts of domestic violence victims' experiences.

ETHICS-RELATED FACTORS

Before beginning the investigation, ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained.

DATA ANALYSIS

Frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations were calculated from quantitative data using statistical software to characterize the characteristics and prevalence of domestic violence. Using SPSS 25.0 software, qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were transcribed and thematically analyzed.



RESULTS

Statistical analysis of the incidence of various forms of domestic violence among the population surveyed comprised physical and emotional abuse, financial assault, sexual violence, and life restriction are highlighted as types of violence. The incidence rate of physical maltreatment is reported to be 24% ($p < 0.05$). Extremely low p -value strongly suggested that physical abuse was substantially prevalent form of domestic violence among the population surveyed. Incidence rates for emotional abuse (27%), financial assault (21%), sexual violence (13%), and life restriction (15%) were also provided (Table 1).

Analysis of various victim responses to violence was also recorded and incidence of the first response type, "Did not report due to fear," was 19%. This suggested that nearly one-fifth of all surveyed victims did not disclose the violence they experienced out of fear ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, fear is a substantially prevalent reason why the surveyed population does not report violence. Additional response categories, including "Sought help from family" (37%), "Sought help from institutions" (12%), "Sought help from neighbors" (18%), and "Others" (14%) (Table 2).

The most frequently cited reason was fear of retaliation, cited by 45 percent of victims as a barrier to reporting violence. This suggested that nearly half of victims fear that reporting the violence would result in retaliation or additional damage from their abuser or other related parties. The second reason, fear of social stigma, was significantly lower than fear of retribution ($p < 0.05$), with only 13% of victims articulating this concern. 20% of respondents cited fear of divorce as the third factor. This indicated that one in five victims fear that reporting violence would result in the dissolution of their marriage, which they may regard as undesirable for a variety of personal, social, or economic reasons. 22% of victims also expressed apprehension regarding future instability. This could include concerns such as financial instability, loss of housing, or ambiguity regarding the well-being of children. Overall, the data illustrated the complex and multifaceted barriers that victims face when deciding whether or not to report domestic violence (Figure 1). There is an urgent need for societal, institutional, and legal measures to address these legitimate anxieties, as evidenced by the high percentages associated with each cause.

The most frequently reported effect of DV was "Physical injuries by assault," with 48 participants (34.28%) experiencing this effect. Analysis indicated that incidence of physical injuries caused by assault was statistically significant among the population surveyed ($p < 0.05$). "Chronic pain" was reported by 28 individuals (20%), while "Social isolation" was reported by 8 individuals (5.71%). 14 (10%) and 16 (11.42%) participants, respectively, reported experiencing "mental depression" and "dignity loss." The effects of "Insomnia" and "Apathy towards life" were reported by 10 (7.14%) and 16 (11.42%) respondents, respectively. Despite the fact that some effects may not be statistically significant in this sample, they are nonetheless severe consequences of DV that merit consideration. Moreover, statistical significance does not imply clinical or practical significance; even effects that are not statistically significant can have significant consequences for the individuals who experience them. These findings highlighted the ubiquitous, negative effects of domestic violence on women's physical and mental health, as well as their social well-being. They indicated an urgent need for comprehensive support services, including medical care, mental health services, and social support, for victims (Table 3).

The frequency of "Domestic violence recognized and action taken," was 32%, indicating that in 32% of cases, domestic violence was recognized and appropriate action was taken ($p < 0.05$). According to the legislation, domestic violence cases were therefore widely recognized and acted upon by the surveyed population. In addition, the frequency of "Domestic violence dismissed as a personal matter" (20%), "Domestic violence case registered but not pursued" (41%), and "Misuse of domestic violence legislation" (7%) were also recorded. Despite the fact that a considerable number of domestic violence cases were recognized and acted upon, there are also a substantial number of cases that were dismissed, not pursued, or in which legislation was misapplied, according to these



data. This highlighted the ongoing difficulties in effectively implementing domestic violence legislation (Table 4).

Table 1: Prevalence of different types of domestic violence in Pakistan

S. No	Violence type	Incidence (%)	F-value	p-value
1	Physical abuse	24	35.00	0.00001*
2	Emotional abuse	27		
3	Financial assault	21		
4	Sexual violence	13		
5	Restricted life	15		

*indicated that the value is significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 2: Responses sought by the violence victims

S. No	Response type	Incidence (%)	F-value	p-value
1	Did not report due to fear	19	54.7222	0.00001*
2	Sought help from family	37		
3	Sought help from institutions	12		
4	Sought help from neighbors	18		
5	Others	14		

*indicated that the value is significant at $p < 0.05$

Figure 1: Reasons for not reporting the DV due to fear

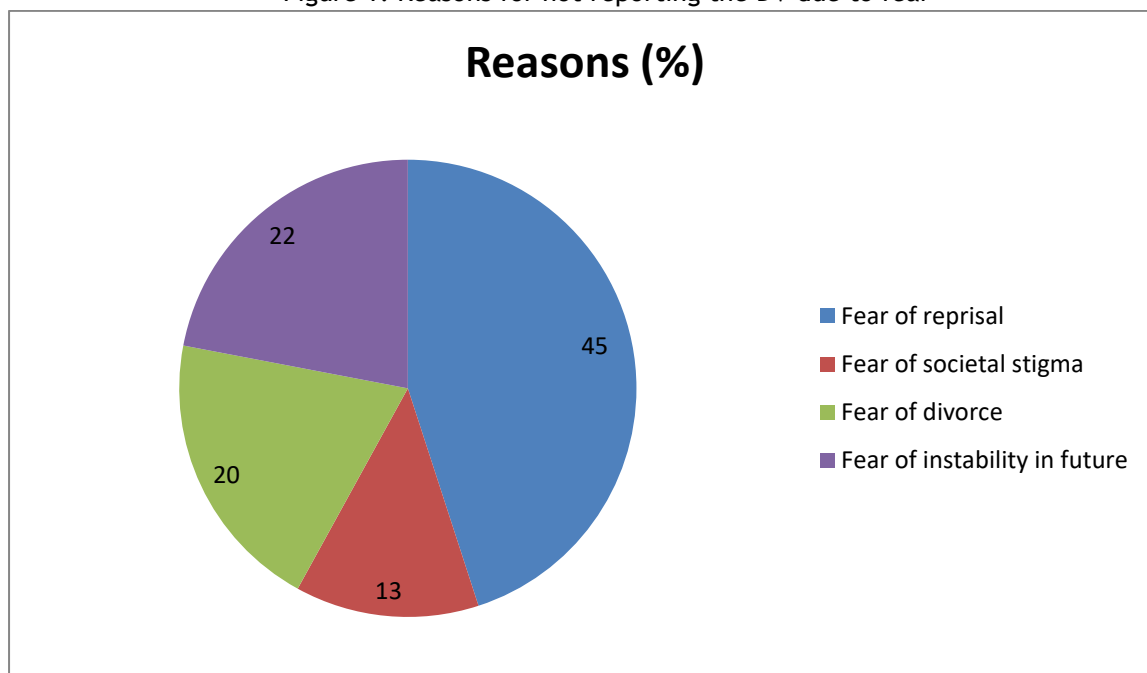




Table 3: Impact of DV on women's health

S. No	Impact on health	Number of participants n=140	Frequency (%)	p-value
1	Physical injuries by assault	48	34.28	0.0045*
2	Mental depressiveness	14	10.0	0.1390
3	Loss of dignity	16	11.42	0.0568
4	Social isolation	08	5.71	0.0001*
5	Chronic pain	28	20.0	0.0001*
6	Insomnia	10	7.14	0.2001
7	Apathy to life	16	11.42	0.1760

*indicated that the value is significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4: Implementation of domestic violence legislation

S. No	Implementation of legislation	Frequency (%)	F-value	p-value
1	Domestic violence recognized and action taken	32	218.00	0.00001*
2	Domestic violence dismissed as personal matter	20		
3	Domestic violence case was registered but not pursued	41		
4	Misuse of legislation of domestic violence	07		

*indicated that the value is significant at $p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

This study's findings shed light on the dire reality of domestic violence in Pakistan. These findings illustrated the complexity of this issue, which has profound roots in cultural norms, societal structures, and the law¹.

The high prevalence of various forms of DV, including emotional abuse, physical violence, economic abuse, and sexual violence, was indicative of the pervasiveness of the problem. Fear of retaliation was the most frequently cited cause for not reporting the violence, followed by fear of social stigma, fear of divorce, and fear of future instability. This highlighted how domestic violence victims were frequently trapped in abusive relationships due to a variety of concerns and constraints, many of which are supported by societal norms and expectations⁸⁻⁹.

It is extremely disturbing that a significant number of victims did not report abuse out of fear. This finding testified to the extreme power imbalance and fear tactics employed by abusers, as well as systemic problems such as the absence of safe and confidential reporting mechanisms. Victims dread retaliation from their abusers, stigmatization or blame from their communities, and severe legal or social consequences¹⁰.

Physical injuries, mental depression, loss of self-respect, and chronic discomfort were reported as significant health effects of domestic violence on victims. This demonstrated that domestic violence was not only a violation of human rights, but also a significant public health concern. In terms of legislation, the findings revealed a substantial disparity between the existence of laws and their effective application. Despite the existence of legislation against domestic



violence, a substantial number of cases were disregarded as personal matters or were registered but not pursued. This indicated an urgent need to strengthen the enforcement of domestic violence laws, ensure victims receive justice, and hold offenders accountable¹¹⁻¹².

The research highlighted the critical need for multifaceted interventions. Domestic violence-related societal attitudes and norms can be altered significantly through public awareness campaigns. In addition to bolstering the legal system's response to domestic violence, enhancing victim support services, and promoting gender equality are essential measures for addressing this pervasive problem. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize the limitations of this investigation. Although the data provide valuable insights, they are based on reported cases of domestic violence, which likely represent only a small fraction of actual incidents. Due to fear, stigma, and other barriers, many incidents of domestic violence go unreported¹³.

DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence encompasses not only physical but also sexual, emotional, and financial assault. This complex phenomenon is characterized by systematic patterns of control and dominance, which can result in anxiety, physical harm, and psychological distress. This definition is indispensable for comprehending the scope and depth of the problem in Pakistan¹⁴.

CONTEXT CULTURAL AND PATRIARCHY

Pakistan is no exception to the global prevalence of patriarchal values. Women are relegated to secondary positions in the social hierarchy as a result of patriarchy's propagation of the notion of male superiority. This hierarchy frequently fosters domestic violence because it can sanction and justify male aggression and control over females¹⁵.

As in many South Asian nations, women in Pakistan are frequently regarded as property or symbols of family honor. Their responsibilities are typically limited to domestic spheres, and they are under tremendous pressure to conform to societal norms and expectations. In cases of domestic violence, victims are frequently held accountable, exacerbating the problem and its effects¹⁶.

Legal Landscape

Pakistan's 2016 Prevention of Violence Against Women Act was a landmark piece of legislation. The law marked a significant step in the direction of criminalizing domestic violence. However, its implementation has been complicated by societal opposition, a lack of awareness, and institutional obstacles.

In addition, the Act's effectiveness is hampered by the tendency of law enforcement agencies to regard domestic violence as a private matter. Fear of stigma, retaliation, or lack of faith in the legal system prevents many victims from reporting the violence they experience¹⁷.

Moving Forward

Domestic violence in Pakistan necessitates multifaceted approaches and the participation of multiple stakeholders, including the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

First and foremost, there is an immediate need to increase public awareness. Domestic violence must be viewed as a grievous violation of human rights, rather than as a private matter, if society is to change its perspective. Educational campaigns can play a crucial role in altering perspectives and encouraging victims to seek assistance.

Second, institutional assistance must be enhanced. The police and judiciary require extensive training to manage cases of domestic violence with compassion and efficiency. The victims must be guaranteed safety, anonymity, and justice.

Thirdly, a strong system of support for victims is essential. Safe shelters, free legal aid, counseling services, and rehabilitation programs can provide victims with the resources they need to flee abusive situations.



Lastly, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is crucial over the long term. Providing women with access to a quality education and fiscal opportunities can increase their independence and decision-making capacity, thereby decreasing their susceptibility to violence^{8, 18}.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that domestic violence continued to be the distressing reality for significant proportion of women in Pakistan. The severe consequences of this violence included negative effects on physical and mental health, social isolation, and loss of dignity. Fear of repercussions prevents many victims from reporting violence, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and silence. Existing legislation provided a framework for addressing this issue, but our findings revealed disconnection between legislative intent and actual implementation. Domestic violence being dismissed as a personal matter and cases being registered but not pursued are evidence of the systemic obstacles that must still be overcome. In order to reduce domestic violence in Pakistan, a multidimensional approach is necessary. Enhanced public awareness, strict enforcement of laws, victim support services, and efforts toward gender equality are essential components of this strategy. The complexity of the task cannot be denied, but the urgency of the situation necessitates immediate and persistent action.

This research served as a sobering reminder of the magnitude and severity of domestic violence in Pakistan. It is hoped that these findings will inspire additional research, policy discussion, and action aimed at preventing domestic violence and providing meaningful support to its victims. The fight against domestic violence goes beyond law enforcement and social services; it is a societal problem requiring societal solutions. Individuals, communities, and institutions are collectively responsible for contributing to the establishment of a safe and respectful environment for all women in Pakistan.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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