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Narrative Review

Battered women continue living in abusive relationships in Pakistan.

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Abstract

Cultural practices, societal views, and customs all significantly impact the mental health of women in Pakistan. Religious and ethnic tensions, attitudes that dehumanize women, extended family structures, and the role in-laws play in women's daily life are major issues and stressors. Such actions have severely marginalized Pakistani women, which has had a negative psychological impact. Men can now control women by using violence against them, which has become one of the acceptable methods for doing so. Still, Pakistani women are generally better off than their counterparts when compared to other South Asian nations. No one hypothesis can categorically foresee this tendency on the part of battered women because the problem is little understood and rarely discussed. A review of the domestic violence was conducted to determine the most important factors that forecast a woman's likelihood of staying in or leaving an abusive relationship.

Keywords

Battered Women, Abusive Relationship, Women's Mental Health.

Introduction

Battered women continue living in abusive relationships in Pakistan despite efforts to address the problem. Domestic violence is a widespread issue that affects women of all ages and social backgrounds in the country. It is a complex problem deeply rooted in cultural norms, social and economic inequalities, and a lack of effective legal and institutional support for victims¹.

Why battered women continue to be in abusive relationships is the most often asked question about them. This question is predicated on the idea that battered women are motivated to be abused by others for some reason. This question has inspired researchers to investigate the psychological, social, or self-esteem issues that lead women to accept abuse. Researchers with many theoretical perspectives have discovered evidence to support their theories. No one theory can provide us with the depth of information we require, even though each theoretical viewpoint has contributed to our understanding of the dynamics of women in abusive relationships.

Early studies on domestic violence concentrated primarily on one underlying cause to explain why women stay in abusive relationships. According to Snell, Rosenwald, and Robey (1964), violence was used in marriages to satisfy the wife's masochistic needs². Thus, violence preserves equilibrium for the person and the relationship. Dobash et al. used historical and contemporary sources to support their claim that violence against women is a socially accepted behavior caused by our patriarchal society and the family structure³. They argue that current policies only continue to support violence in a more subtly acceptable way than our legal, cultural, and religious legacies have up until recently. This study's reliance on historical data was clearly its biggest flaw. They did not test their theory empirically.

One major factor contributing to the persistence of domestic violence is the cultural expectation that women should be submissive to their husbands and tolerate abuse as part of their marital obligations. This expectation is deeply ingrained in

Pakistani society, and women who try to resist it may face stigma, shame, and ostracism from their communities. For many women, the fear of social isolation is a significant barrier to leaving abusive relationships and seeking help⁴⁻⁷. Moreover, women in abusive relationships often face economic and social dependence on their partners, which makes it difficult for them to leave. In Pakistan, where women's access to education, employment, and financial resources is often limited, leaving an abusive partner can mean losing the only source of financial support and risking homelessness.

These ground-breaking studies helped to increase public awareness of domestic violence as a social issue that requires further study. Following several replications, the study on battered women branched out into many different fields.

Domestic violence happens within the family and is regarded as a private concern; hence it is not a legitimate subject for assessment, intervention, or policy reforms in Pakistan. Pakistani society promotes cultural and religious traditions that subject women to assault and prejudice on a daily basis⁸. An estimated 70 to 90 percent of Pakistani women experience some form of domestic violence⁹. Physical, mental, and emotional abuse are just a few diverse ways domestic violence can manifest. Among the most prevalent sorts include honor killings, spousal violence, marital rape, acid attacks, and being set on fire by family members. Spousal abuse is rarely viewed as a crime in society unless it takes the extreme form of murder or attempted murder, such as forcing a woman to commit herself or faking an accident¹⁰.

Theoretical Base

Most explanations for violence against women are based on context and culture. In this article, we attempt to analyze this problem using various theories applicable to Pakistan. After a literature survey analyzing the issue and its many perspectives, a framework employing the causes of violence against women as a unit of analysis is proposed.

One of the methodologies most frequently employed to study this problem is the nested ecological framework. The most read and cited author in relation to this framework is Bronfenbrenner (1986, 1979, and 1977)^{11,12}. Several authors have applied this framework to domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect¹³. According to the framework, interactions between specific individuals and their social environment influence behavior. Interaction at different levels of social organization leads to development^{11,12}. The biological and psychological factors that affect an individual's behavior are catered for at the individual level. The family and work situations are included in the microsystem levels. The interaction between a person's microsystems is dealt with at the mesosystem level. The systems and structures of the society in which a person lives are considered at the exosystem level. The macrosystem level also considers the significance of culture and broader context¹¹.

According to feminist theory, most societies' patriarchal structures are what cause social phenomena. This theory holds that one result of a system that permits prostitution and other sexist restrictions to keep women in subservient roles is the abuse of women. According to the feminist perspective, not much will change until women are no longer viewed as helpless, compliant victims. Social change is necessary to address this deeply ingrained social issue¹⁴. The premise of Bandura's social learning theory is that physical and psychological abuse is a learned behavior and that it can be both perpetrated and accepted¹⁵. A variation of the learning theory approach is the exchange theory¹⁶. It suggests that batterers strike victims because they are able to. Violence will inevitably be used as a form of control as long as the costs do not outweigh the benefits.

Intrinsic Biological & personal factors

Individual behavior is influenced by biological and personal factors. Personal traits like age, education, income, influences from one's personality, and acceptance of interpersonal violence are included. A person's personality may also be affected by other factors, such as substance abuse, witnessing

domestic violence as a child, abuse as a child, and absent or unsupportive fathers^{11,17}.

Younger women are more likely to experience violence, according to studies¹⁸. But no significant association between age and violence was discovered in a local cross-sectional study. According to the research, a woman's age had no bearing on whether or not she was protected from domestic violence in Pakistani culture. As a result, women of all ages are abused¹⁹. Women who have less education than their husbands are more likely to be beaten and intimidated than women whose educational levels are on par with or higher than their husbands^{20,21}.

Literature suggests that some men are predisposed to acting maliciously and aggressively toward others, especially women, because of inherited and ingrained personality traits. These routines are hard to break and deeply ingrained. In comparison to non-violent intimate partners, violent partners report higher rates of depression, lower self-esteem, and aggression. According to studies, these individuals are more susceptible to personality disorders like schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, antisocial or narcissistic behavior, dependency, and attachment issues²².

Extrinsic factors

The environment in which the abuse occurs is created by extrinsic elements. These elements include marital/verbal conflict, male wealth control, and male dominance in the home^{11,17}. Employment opportunities, economic influences, women's access to resources and power, social support networks, societal norms governing gender roles, and power structures are additional factors^{11,12,17}.

Male dominance is frequently cited as a contributing factor to domestic abuse²³. Man's dominance in the family and society increases when he has the power to make decisions, which increases the likelihood of violence against women²¹. The male members of Pakistani society, who have the power to make decisions, are in charge of the families. Women are typically excluded from decision-making processes and

seen as socially and economically dependent on men²⁴⁻²⁶. Without men, women perceive themselves as insecure, incomplete, ineffective, and inefficient²⁷. As a result, male dominance emerges as a key indicator of violence against women in the nation. Domestic violence and marital conflict have been found to be related²³.

Numerous studies conducted around the world have revealed that regardless of geographic, cultural, psychosocial, or financial differences, marital conflict accompanied by verbal and physical abuse is widespread in all social classes^{12,19}. In a study, 34% of the 150 participants said their husbands had physically abused them as a result of marital issues. Financial limitations, the presence of in-laws, children, and the lack of a male child was among the causes of the marital conflict.

According to studies, unemployment raises the risk of depression, aggression, and violent behavior, all of which can raise the possibility of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse^{20,21}. Given that unemployment is one of the major issues facing the nation, it is a significant determinant of violence against women. Any society's level of economic independence has an effect on women. Women are less likely to experience violence if they are permitted to work and are financially independent. The statement cannot, however, be applied universally because research has shown that women's economic independence does not shield them from domestic abuse¹⁹. Women have been encouraged to work outside the home and support their families' finances in some places, particularly in urban areas. It is, however, thought to be a privilege bestowed by men. It is not a right; it is permission²⁵. Economic independence might indicate that women are gaining power, which is frowned upon in many cultures. As a result, when women attempt to become economically independent, men resort to violent means to retake control²⁷.

In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, sons are typically seen as having economic, social, or religious utility, while females are frequently seen as a financial responsibility²⁴. Studies^{20,21} show that

women who have more daughters than sons are more likely than women who have more sons to experience violence. Similar to how women who do not have children experience violence from their spouses and in-laws, as well as harassment from society. Early marriage is another characteristic that puts women at risk for violence from intimate relationships. Because girls are viewed as a social, financial, and religious burden on families and should be disposed of as soon as possible, early marriages are a fairly widespread practice in Pakistan and other Southeast Asian countries²⁴. According to research reports, young marriage exposes women to abuse at the hands of their husbands^{9,20,21}. Additionally, the use of dowries contributes significantly to the rise of violence against women in the nation. The literature claims that harassment suffered by women in the husband's home is significantly higher for those whose dowries are deemed inadequate by their husband and in-laws than for those whose dowries are more substantial^{9,20,21}.

Discussion

Historically, women were regarded as the property of men in the tribal and rural cultures of Indo-Pak. The traditional role of women has been one of submission, commodity service, and self-sacrifice for the sake of values set by men²⁷. Goats, sheep, and women were once traded as a means of resolving tribal disputes. Marriages for tribal and political harmony were common²⁰. Similar customs are still prevalent, and many families still forbid their daughters from getting married for fear that someone from outside the family might inherit their ancestral lands²⁷. These limitations are in place to prevent women from inheriting land, possessions, and the influence and land that would otherwise pass to their offspring from another man. She is tortured and murdered in the name of morality and values created by humans.

A woman is less likely to be abused and beaten if she is respected in her culture. It is significant to note that one very interesting phenomenon in many nations, such as Pakistan, is that young women are not respected while older women are. This does not imply that older women are never

abused, though. Wife beating is not reported because it is even accepted as normal in the culture^{20,21,27}.

Regrettably, tribal and feudal systems continue to dominate Indian and Pakistani society, and the majority of people live under feudal authority in rural areas²⁸. Because there is no freedom or access to education, and because women are regarded like slaves or prisoners at home, feudal civilizations frequently have violence against them. Some tribal cultures believe that women are the root of all evil and that men are not involved in any wrongdoing. In these societies, there is a well-known saying that "Zan, Zar, Zameen" (woman, money, and land) are the root of all evil and are used and believed to be so universally. These cultures have a strong understanding of this. This is employed not as a tool for education but rather as a means of blaming women rather than men when men engage in undesirable behavior. In these societies, a woman's personality is shaped by the desires of the man. If she is disobedient and rebellious, she suffers beatings, seclusion, virtual imprisonment, and occasionally murder as punishment.

Efforts are being made by government and non-governmental organizations to address the problem of domestic violence in Pakistan. The government has passed laws to protect women from domestic abuse and has established special courts to deal with cases of violence against women. Many non-governmental organizations are also working to raise awareness about domestic violence and provide support to victims. However, much more needs to be done to ensure that women are protected from abuse and have the resources and support they need to leave abusive relationships if they choose to do so.

Conclusion

In conclusion, violence against women can be studied by examining how the identified determinants interact. People have characteristics that either leave them open to abuse or give them a propensity for violence and abuse. The extrinsic factors that are pervasively present in Pakistani culture create the conditions that lead to violence

against women. Both in Pakistan and its neighboring nations, the patriarchal system in place encourages and influences violence against women. The right interventions could be started if decision- and policy-makers were made aware of these factors. The framework might help women see their situation differently and acknowledge their equality. Men, on the other hand, might consciously opt for a society that values equality after realizing the negative repercussions of violence.

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