

Domestic Violence in Married Women of Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Pakistan; A Mixed Method Study

Nadia Tariq, Sadia Zafar, Shehla Farhin, Farah Rashid*, Tamkeen Nishat Jaffry**

Department of Community Medicine, Islamabad Medical & Dental College, Islamabad Pakistan, *Department of Community Medicine, Federal Medical & Dental College, Islamabad Pakistan, **Department of Community Medicine, National University of Medical Sciences, Islamabad Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Objective: To estimate the frequency of domestic violence among women of Rawalpindi/Islamabad, its associated socio-demographic risk factors, and explore its reasons.

Study Design: Mixed Method study.

Place and Duration of Study: Rawalpindi/Islamabad, Pakistan from Feb to Jul, 2021.

Methodology: Two hundred and eight married women of Rawalpindi/Islamabad were selected. Data was collected through a pre-tested structured questionnaire. A focal group discussion was carried out in a group of 10 women to explore the reasons for domestic violence, and themes were created.

Result: The mean age of the participants was 33.6±8.63 years. The frequency of verbal, physical and emotional abuse was 102(49%), 108(51.9%) and 152(73.1%), respectively. The most commonly reported verbal abuse was abusive language. Physical abuse was slapping and emotional abuse was taking decisions without the wife's consent. There was a strong association between verbal and physical abuse with family income and women's and husbands' education. Significant reasons for abuse were the husband not earning, unfulfilled wish for a male child, interference from in-laws and drug addiction.

Conclusion: Verbal, physical and emotional abuse were high. Women or husband education and family were significant determinants of all forms of abuse. In contrast, jobless husbands, drug addicts, interfering in-laws and unfulfilled wishes for the male children were the perceived reasons for abuse.

Keywords: Abuse, Domestic violence, Socio-demographic factors.

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INTRODUCTION

According to World Health Organization (WHO), violence against women is a common and acceptable practice globally, though its prevalence varies widely from country to country.¹ It affects people of all races, ages, ethnicities, religions, geographical settings and socio-economic classes.² The highest rates of domestic violence have been observed in Africa, South East Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean.³ Among Asian countries, in contrast to the lowest rate of domestic violence in Japan (15%), data from Pakistan reveals that more than one-third of married women have disclosed that they feel harassed by their partners, and about two-thirds have reported that they have witnessed violence in their parental homes.^{4,5}

In all South Asian countries, the prevalence rates of violence against women are higher than the human development index (HDI). In contrast, the gender-related development index (GDI) is lower than the HDI.⁶ Pakistan reflects a low-income and male-dominated society where marriage requires submission,

subordination and silence from women. Consequently, intimate partner violence is considered normal, accepted behaviour and a cultural norm. Pakistan is 147th out of 188 countries regarding gender equality, with a Gender Inequality Index (GII) of 0.55.⁷ Many studies have reported adverse psychological health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidal and self-harm tendencies, poor quality of sleep and sleep disorders.⁸ Many women are also subjected to violence during pregnancy which has lethal consequences, both for maternal and fetal life.⁹

Domestic violence is a global public health issue that extensively spans the entire world. Domestic violence is deeply ingrained among societies and is considered a typical and accepted behaviour. This violence against women not only violates fundamental human rights but also has enormous adverse effects on women's physical and psychological well-being. Its cost to humanity, health systems, and social structure is considerable. Yet no other crucial public health issue has been widely ignored and poorly understood. This study was conducted to estimate the frequency of domestic violence among women of Islamabad and identify the socio-demographic risk factors associated with domestic violence.

Correspondence: Dr Nadia Tariq, Department of Community Medicine, Islamabad Medical & Dental College, Islamabad Pakistan
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METHODOLOGY

The mixed-method study was conducted among married women of all ages residing in Rawalpindi and Islamabad Pakistan, from February 2021 to July 2021, after approval from the Institutional Review Board of Islamabad Medical and Dental College (Ltr no. 25/IMDC/IRB-2020). The sample was selected through a non-probability consecutive technique and calculated by the Open Epi software.

Inclusion Criteria: All accessible, adult married women willing to participate were included.

Exclusion Criteria: None

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection after pre-testing. It was divided into two sections; socio-demographic variables and questions related to physical, verbal and emotional abuse. Pilot testing was done on 10% of the sample size. Pre-testing was done for the reliability of the questionnaire and time taken to fill the questionnaire, respondent interest and attention, flow and skip patterns. The interviewing procedure was based on a set standard protocol. The consent form was read out to the participant, clearly stating the objectives of the study. Complete confidentiality and privacy were ensured. Informed written consent was obtained. During the interview, if the participant chose to skip any question, she was allowed to do so. The questionnaire was formulated in English and then translated into Urdu for interviews. It was translated back to English for data entry and analysis.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was carried out with ten women (after saturation was achieved) who reported abuse in any form. They were contacted on their cell phones; numbers were initially taken from all the women. Out of all those who reported abuse, women were selected for focal group discussion based on their availability and willingness to participate. At least 30 women were contacted to get ten willing women for FDG. Principle investigator and two scribes conducted the session in the institute where the principal investigator belonged. FDG focused on perceived reasons and feelings about being abused. FDG could not be audio-taped due to the sensitivity of the issue.

To build up a rapport with the participants, a general discussion was initiated regarding social and cultural issues, women's empowerment, and their general health problems. Once the group was comfortable, the debate started on domestic violence. A set of questions was asked regarding perceived reasons for

domestic violence, the feelings of the participants and the physical and psychological effects of violence. Informed written consent was taken from all the women who participated, and they had the right to skip any question considering the sensitivity of the topic. Women's names were anonymized to safeguard their privacy. The interview was conducted in Urdu, later translated into English at the time of analysis.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 was used for quantitative data analysis. Quantitative variables were expressed as Mean±SD and qualitative variables were expressed as frequency and percentages. Chi-square test was applied to explore the inferential statistics. Interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Textual analyses were performed, and themes were constructed.

RESULTS

A total of 208 women were included in the study. The mean age of the participants was 33.6±8.63 years. More than half, i.e. 115(55.3%) of the women, were homemakers, with 88(42.3%) women in the family income bracket of PKR 11,000 to 50,000.

Table-I: Association of Sociodemographic Profile with Various forms of Abuse (n=208)

Variables	Verbal Abuse		p-value	Physical Abuse		p-value
	Yes(%)	No(%)		Yes(%)	No(%)	
Family Income						
<10,000	25(24.5)	10(9.4)	0.02*	26(24.1)	9(9)	0.03*
11,000-50,000	43(42.4)	45(42.5)		44(40.7)	44(44)	
51,000-100,000	17(16.7)	26(24.5)		19(17.6)	24(24)	
>100,000	17(16.7)	25(23.6)		19(17.6)	23(23)	
Women Education						
Illiterate	16.7(17)	9.4(10)	0.039*	18(16.7)	9(9)	0.01*
Primary	16.7(17)	7.5(8)		18(16.7)	7(7)	
secondary	17.6(18)	21.7(23)		19(17.6)	22(22)	
Graduate	34.3(35)	34.0(36)		38(35.2)	33(33)	
Post graduate	14.7(15)	27.4(29)		15(13.9)	29(29)	
Emotional/Mental Abuse						
Yes	89.2(91)	10.8(11)	0.00*	98(64.5)	10(17.9)	0.00*
no	57.5(61)	42.5(45)		54(35.5)	46(82.1)	
Physical Abuse						
Yes	81.4(83)	18.6(9)	0.00*	-	-	-
no	23.6(25)	76.4(81)				
Women Profession						
Laborer	21.4(9)	9.8(5)	0.05	11(22.4)	3(6.8)	0.001*
Service women	26.2(11)	11.8(6)		13(26.5)	4(9.1)	
Teacher	28.6(12)	33.3(17)		16(32.7)	13(29.5)	
Other	23.8(10)	45.1(23)		9(18.4)	24(54.5)	
Husband Education						
Illiterate				6(5.6)	4(4)	0.005*
Primary				17(15.7)	9(9)	
Matric				25(23.1)	8(8)	
Intermediate				8(7.4)	17(17)	
Graduate				30(27.8)	29(29)	
Post-graduate				22(20.4)	33(33)	

The overall frequency of verbal abuse was 49%, physical abuse 51.9% and emotional abuse 73.1%. The most commonly reported verbal abuse was the use of abusive language (43.5%), Physical abuse was slapping (38.5%), and emotional abuse was taking decisions without the wife’s consent (47.6%). Physical and verbal abuse was strongly associated with family income, women’s profession and women and husbands’ education, as shown in above mentioned Table-I. Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the various forms of verbal, physical and emotional abuse encountered by the participants.

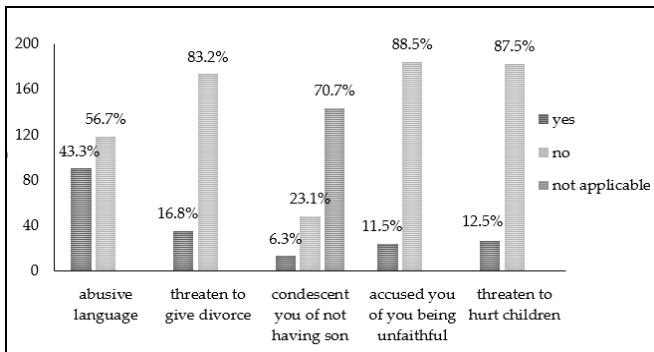


Figure-1: Frequency of various forms of Verbal Abuse (n=208)

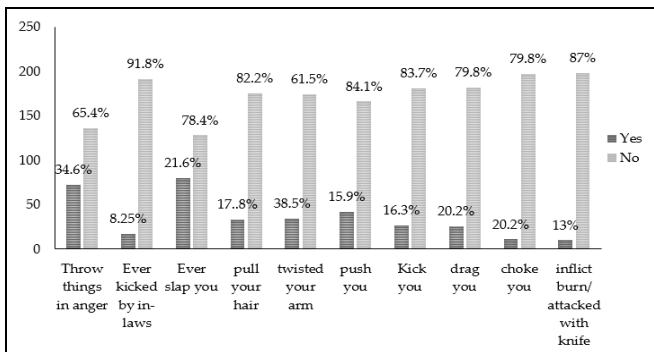


Figure-2: Frequency of various forms of Physical Abuse (n=208)

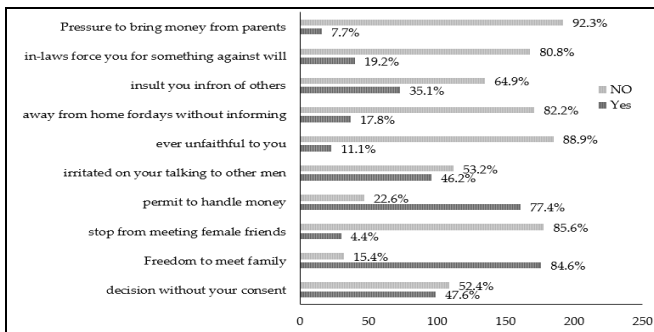


Figure-3: Frequency of various forms of Emotional Violence (n=208)

Exploring the reasons for domestic violence via FGD revealed the information, according to which four

broad themes were identified; husband not earning, unfulfilled wish for a male child, interference of in-laws and drug addiction by the husband. Most women frequently faced violence, while only a few reported occasional violence. The main form of violence in this group was physical, accompanied by verbal and emotional abuse. One of the women said, “My husband tells me that I have a long tongue, but he thinks I should keep quiet even if he does not give me money and bear with him. My widow's mother sends me money, but he takes all that for the drug addiction.” Exploring the feelings and thoughts of women revealed two main feelings; acceptance as it is the way of society (n=6) and extremely debilitating (n=4). One of the responses was, “I have grown up seeing my father beating my mother for petty issues, and I have been told to accept it like that by my father. He says a man has a right to the woman and can do whatever to his wife.” Interestingly, women who accepted violence also mentioned violence's psychological and physical effects as others. Significant issues reported were body aches (n=6), headaches (n=6), high Blood pressure (n=2) and Depression (n=5) (Table-II).

DISCUSSION

In Pakistan, domestic violence is one of the significant issues that restricts women from leading a pleasant life. In 2020, a total of 2297 registered cases of domestic violence were reported countrywide. It includes physical, mental and sexual brutality. A study was done on runaway women in Karachi that revealed that the reason for runaway for the majority of the women was abuse by their husbands, their boyfriends, and other family members.¹⁰ The frequency of physical, verbal and emotional abuse reported by this study is also very high, i.e. 51.9%, 49% and 73.1% respectively. As our sample included only married women, the reported abuse was by the husbands or the in-laws in our study.

According to our study, many forms of verbal abuse are reported among women, the most common being abusive language followed by threatening divorce. Verbal abuse is particularly interesting among all forms of domestic violence as it is directly related to psychological aggression and influenced by social norms. Traditional masculinity is built on the dominance, strength and authority of men, while conventional femininity is defined by subordination, passivity and benevolence. Abuser husbands may take advantage of the kindness of wives and manipulate their feelings. The long-term effects of verbal abuse can be

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Table-II: Exploration of Reasons of Abuse, Feelings and Effects (n=10)

Themes	Sub Themes	Word (n)	Comment Verbatim
Perceived Reasons and Feelings of Women Facing Abuse	Husband not Earning	6	My husband tells me that I have a long tongue but he thinks I should keep quiet even if he does not give me money and bear with him. My widow mother sends me money but he takes all that for the drug addiction
	Unfulfilled wish for male child	2	
	Interference of in laws	8	
	Drug addiction by the husband	5	
Feelings of the Participants	Acceptance as it is the way of society	6	I have grown up seeing my father beating my mother for petty issues and I have been told to accept it like that by my father. He says a man has a right on the woman and he can do whatever to his wife.
	Extremely debilitating	4	I have been married for 10 years. There was no problem in the beginning until we moved to live with in laws. He hit me for the first time after being provoked by my sister-in-law. For me, it was unacceptable and I wanted to move out and live separately but I was told that his old parents needed his support and he has to live with them. I want to make him feel the same way one day as he made me feel. I have three daughters. He blames me for not giving him son and threatens to divorce me
Perceived Physical and Psychological Effects of Violence	Body aches	6	My whole body aches all the time. My Blood pressure shoots under stressful conditions. No body takes care of me in my family. I work the whole day to give my family food and comfort but they don't have even polite words for me. Even my kids don't respect me. For me, life has no purpose
	Headache	6	
	High Blood Pressure	2	
	Depression	5	

devastating, and its negative impact may be much more than physical violence.¹¹

According to a report, 42% of Turkish women experience physical or sexual violence from their intimate partners during their lifetime. In this study, 51.9% of the women reported physical abuse, the most common form being slapping and throwing things in anger.¹² Physically and sexually abused women are twice more likely to experience depression, which has long-lasting effects on children and society. An Indian study revealed that 40.5% of women in educated societies are victims of abuse by their intimate partners. In India, there is social acceptance of male partners abusing female partners.¹³ Due to this, economically independent women also become victims of abuse. This is also the case in our country.

Having physical and verbal abuse was significantly associated with family income, with most reported cases in those having family income between Rs. 11,000-50,000 and the majority of graduate women complaining of both physical and verbal abuse. Interestingly, graduate husbands also, are more involved in the Physical abuse of their women, according to this study. According to a study conducted in Saudi Arabia, higher education among women and lower education among husbands are strongly associated with Domestic violence.¹⁴ Husband's education level is shown to be predictive of women's risk of Intimate Partner violence in Nepal.¹⁵ An Indian study revealed

that most women thought the husband was justified in hitting his wife in certain situations, including arguing with the husband, going out without permission etc., and husbands also endorsed wife beating in these situations.¹⁶ This shows that in India, regardless of how educated husbands are, physical violence is somewhat acceptable.

A large number (73.1%) of women in this study reported emotional abuse, the most common being taking decisions without the wife's consent. According to Suchita Tiwari *et al.* emotional violence is a determinant of women's health and negatively affects reproductive outcomes.¹⁷ According to a qualitative study on northern Vietnamese women, controlling the behaviour of their husbands, lack of their support and being ignored by them were the most common accounts narrated about emotional abuse that had detrimental effects on women's health.¹⁸

The strengths of this study are its representable sample size, data cleaning before analysis and its consideration for types of abuse other than just physical.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The limitation was the topic's sensitivity, due to which questions related to sexual abuse could not be asked, which is another important form of abuse among women.

CONCLUSION

Verbal, physical and emotional abuse were reported to be high among married women of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, with women's education, family income and husband's

education being significant determinants of all forms of abuse, while jobless husbands, drug addicts, interfering in-laws and unfulfilled wish for the male child were the perceived reasons of abuse.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Author's Contribution:

Following authors have made substantial contributions to the manuscript as under:

NT & SZ: Study design, drafting the manuscript, data interpretation, critical review, approval of the final version to be published.

SF & FR: Concept, data acquisition, drafting the manuscript, approval of the final version to be published.

TNJ: Data acquisition, data analysis, critical review, approval of the final version to be published.

Authors agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

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