

## BREAKING THE SILENCE: EXAMINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS

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### Abstract

*This research examines the lived life of Pakistani women who have experienced domestic violence to shed light on the intricacies of their sufferings and suggest social, legal, and policy-based interventions. Based on a feminist theoretical perspective and qualitative methodology, the research investigates the physical, psychological, and social consequences of domestic abuse. Major findings reveal that domestic violence results in serious physical harm, worsening mental health, social isolation, and low self-esteem. Victims avoid reporting their abuse because of societal stigmas, fear of bringing shame to family structures, and economic dependence. The research highlights the prevalence of domestic violence in Pakistan and criticizes the patriarchal and hegemonic systems that support female subordination. In addition, it calls for re-examining Islamic teachings that uphold the dignity and rights of women and calls on policymakers to enact stronger legal frameworks to counter gender-based violence. The research offers suggestions for empowering women through economic independence, legal assistance, and public awareness campaigns.*

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Patriarchy, Gender-Based Violence, Psychological Trauma, Socio-Economic Dependence, Feminist Theory, Women's Rights, Legal Reforms, Islamic Teaching.

### Introduction

Domestic violence is still a major socio-cultural and psychological concern, taking on many forms such as physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. Greenan (2004) refers to violence against women as gender-based harm leading to physical, sexual, or psychological suffering. Mitchell and Hodson (1983) maintain that women continue to be the main victims of domestic violence, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or economic status. In spite of far-reaching studies on gender-based violence across the world, very little research exists to describe the intricate experiences of women in Pakistan. Domestic violence negatively impacts not only the victim but also her children, families, and society as a whole (Watts, 1994). Berry (2000) classifies domestic violence as a coercive control type, incorporating several types of abuse in close relationships. Healey & Smith (1998) reiterate that acts of domestic violence are not accidental but systemic and intended to subdue and subjugate the victim. Domestic violence is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) a serious public health issue with long-term effects on survivors' physical and mental health (Ellsberg et al., 2008).

This study seeks to explore domestic violence in the Pakistani context, determining the impediments victims encounter in accessing assistance and cultural stigmas that reinforce their silence. It also suggests implementable strategies to reduce the effects of domestic violence, recommending legislative reforms, socio-economic empowerment, and community-based support structures. A qualitative research design was utilized to provide in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of survivors of domestic violence in Pakistan. The study is grounded in feminist

theory by Tong (2018) which deconstructs patriarchal systems and emphasizes gendered power disparities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with survivors, legal professionals, and social workers. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants of varying socio-economic backgrounds. Ethical requirements, such as informed consent and anonymity, were rigorously adhered to during the process of research.

The present study attempts to profoundly discover the public issue of domestic violence against women in Pakistan. The current study discusses the domestic violence on women and the causes that why some women are hesitant to unveil these cruel acts. Furthermore, it is necessary to identify causes that discourage females from looking for outdoor support. The outcomes will focus on the difficulty confronted by the women, therefore proposing practical solutions to improve the adverse condition especially in the light of Islamic Teachings. The present study will help to provide evidence for the domestic violence for improving the miserable condition of women of Pakistan.

### **Objectives**

1. To analyze the psychological, social, and economic barriers that prevent Pakistani women from disclosing domestic violence and seeking legal or community support
2. To examine the role of patriarchal structures and cultural stigmas in perpetuating domestic violence in Pakistan, while exploring feminist theoretical perspectives on resistance and empowerment

### **Significance/Rationale**

This research is essential in resolving the systemic problem of domestic violence in Pakistan, which is deeply entrenched in cultural, social, and economic frameworks. Utilizing a feminist theoretical approach, the research identifies the intersection of gender, power, and structural inequalities that underpin domestic abuse. The research not only echoes the testimonies of survivors but also presents actionable policy advice to policymakers, legal institutions, and social organizations to make the environment safer for women. It further calls for re-examining Islamic teachings in order to overcome misinterpretations that entrench patriarchal values. By its qualitative methodology, this study addresses a crucial lacuna in the literature by offering a profound insight into why and how women are prevented from getting help, culminating finally in calls for legislative changes, socio-economic empowerment, and community support structures.

### **Research Questions**

1. What psychological, social, and economic barriers prevent Pakistani women from disclosing domestic violence and seeking legal or community support?
2. How do patriarchal structures and cultural stigmas contribute to the perpetuation of domestic violence in Pakistan, and what feminist theoretical perspectives can be applied to understand resistance and empowerment?

## Research Gap

In spite of widespread international research on domestic violence, there is still a large knowledge gap regarding the specific socio-cultural, religious, and economic determinants that influence the lives of Pakistani women. The literature is dominated by legal structures and statistical models, which fail to address the deeply ingrained patriarchal values and social stigmas that discourage victims from reporting abuse. In addition, little literature discusses the religious interpretation role in sustaining or counteracting domestic violence. This research addresses this deficiency through a qualitative inquiry into survivors' lived realities, emphasizing the roadblocks to justice, and offering culturally informed interventions to mitigate domestic violence in Pakistan.

## Research Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative research strategy to investigate the lived experiences of survivors of domestic violence in Pakistan. Qualitative research is suitable for the study of intricate social phenomena because it enables researchers to grasp participants' accounts, feelings, and views in their socio-cultural settings (Creswell & Poth 2016). The research uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews with survivors, legal professionals, and social workers to obtain firsthand information.

The study is grounded in feminist theory, which challenges patriarchal systems and identifies gender-based power disparities (Tong, 2009). Feminist theory offers a critical framework for examining the institutionalized oppression of women, with a focus on the necessity of structural reforms to end gender-based violence (Butler & Trouble 1990). The study is specifically grounded in intersectional feminism, acknowledging that class, religion, and cultural norms influence women's experiences of domestic violence (Crenshaw, 2021).

Purposive sampling was applied to recruit participants representing various socio-economic groups in order to get a wide representation of experiences. Data were analyzed employing thematic analysis, which is appropriate for discovering patterns and themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure ethical integrity, informed consent was collected from all participants, and anonymity was rigorously maintained in order to ensure the participants' anonymity.

## Review of the Literature

In Pakistan, studies on domestic violence are somewhat limited. The foremost purpose of the present paper is to gather data that permits for similar investigation this Perspective. This part of the study offers a review of the literature on problems of domestic violence related to the current research. This part of study is devised to critically investigate the researches and criticism produced on the domestic violence against women in Pakistan. This is a strategy employed to search out the space for the present study. This part is divided in to three sections: the problem of women and violent acts in the context of Islam, the feminist and the psychological perspective, reviews of the existing literature on domestic violence in Pakistan.

## Violence against women and Islamic point of view

Quran says that both men and women are the same, and this is stressed in regard of their responsibilities, privileges, qualities as well as morals. Both are assured for the similar prize for noble deeds and the similar penalty for evil deeds:

Whoever commits a sin is requited for just that, and whoever works righteousness - man or woman - while believing, these will enter Paradise wherein they receive provisions without any limits. (Quran 40:40)

Pakistan is an Islamic country because nearly 97% of its residents are Muslims. Thus, the necessity of understanding the Islamic methodology on different features of its people's lives is crucial. In Islam domestic violence can be referred as an uncaring outlook towards duties between husband and wife. In regard to matrimonial violence Islam forbids the spouse to use any form of violence against the wife when conflicts rise. A wife's mistreatment is not allowed even though the Quran allows the light beating of a wife for the purpose of chastising. The Qur'an says about such situations:

.....As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them first, next, refuse to share their beds, and last beat them lightly, if it is useful; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of annoyance. (Qur'an 4:34)

The issue of domestic violence is a worldwide problem that disturbs the lives of millions of women. This issue is mostly thought as an isolated problem and a penalty for the disobedience of a female spouse.

#### **Violence against women in the perspective of feminism**

In common, this theory stresses the gender and power inequity in heterosexual relationships. Meselesele (2011) explained the phases of handling the sufferers of domestic violence. He proved that there were quite a few phases that the victim lived in and those phases were different according to their state of minds as well as the environments. The other obstacle that prevent women from revealing mistreatment is absence of knowledge about women's rights given by law.

Ellsberg et al. (2008) has pointed to women who had experienced domestic violence probably claimed about their overall health as being poor or very poor. They said that former researches explored the impacts of psychological disorders such as nervousness illness, stress, depression, despair, and shocking pressure along with suicidal feelings and efforts.

Dorahy et al., (2007) mentioned that a great and increasing part of literature has analyzed the results of domestic violence to a person that is mistreated, the persons that are nearby to them and the whole community. It was proved that bad influence of exploitative connections access from bodily injuries to societal loneliness along with the worsening of mental welfare.

World Health Organization, (2005), has conducted a multi-country research on women's fitness and domestic violence against females. The research has gathered a vast data from ten countries, in which twenty four thousand women have participated. This international study intended to evaluate the occurrence of different kinds of violence committed by men such as bodily, sexual and passionate exploitation.

Yllo (2005) mentioned that feminist approach initiates from a societal viewpoint that emphasizes on the sociological explanation of violence and anger committed by men in a close connection. The spirit of feminist approach is offering equivalence in the gender roles in a wedding.

According to Matud (2005), abused women probably have an inferior sense of self-respect as matched to women that have not experienced of domestic violence. It is thought that existing in an insulting bond little by little weakened the women's ability to feel confident chiefly about managing the violent situation with proper support.

Randa, (2005) says that a large number of researches have proved that obstacles of domestic violence revelation comprise financial causes, shortage of helpers, viewing it a domestic matter, transport issues, lacks of facility suppliers, horror of losing the kids, disgrace and humiliation also self-accusing features.

Dutton, (1996), claimed that the forcible supremacy used by a man over his woman partner causes a vicious conduct in their warm relations. He has further asserted that feminism highlights various socio-cultural issues such as patriarchal norms of society.

Dobash & Dobash (2004) states that feminism approach also forbids man dominance and control over woman and criticizes the inferior place of women in social system. So feminism approach is threatening for the man dominance in society. Man dominance over women is more surviving as results of this are seen in the environment of home.

### **Review of related literature on domestic violence in Pakistan**

Shahid (2018) puts forth her point of view that in many regions of Pakistan women are ignorant of the rules and privileges allowed to these women by the establishment. This ignorance causes their isolation from the structure due to the supposition that there is no other option instead of suffering in their homes and become dependent on the men.

Nabeel et.al (2016) stated that Pakistan is classified as the 3rd very unsafe country for women in the world. A most important cause for this is the frighteningly extraordinary degrees of domestic violence in Pakistan. Even though struggles to fight against domestic violence are started such as the Domestic Violence Act 2012 and the Punjab Protection of Women Act, they have still to produce significant outcomes.

Ghani (2016), states that gender difference between men and women is a creation of patriarchal outlook of the social order and it does nothing to know or think for powers of women. Violence against women sustains its force due to gender difference. Illiteracy, unawareness and lack of wealth are greatly connected with violence against women.

Qaisran (2016) gave her arguments for domestic violence that the most important challenge that women are faced with in Pakistan is violence. Frequently, cultural and religious elements cause an everlasting situation for violence against women. Violence against women may manifest in different ways, and results in shameless bodily, mental, societal and sentimental effects on a victim and those nearby her.

Hadi and Ullah, (2015) mentioned that domestic violence in the country has affected not simply women but also children. The physical and emotional injury of the victimized person puts her health in dangerous circumstances. It has permanent emotional impacts like melancholy and little self-respect and it further affects the victimized person's talent to gain fundamental standards of welfare.

Ali & Gavino (2008) mentioned that in this Asian country domestic violence is measured as a personal problem, because it happens in the household, and does not have a suitable attention for evaluation, interference and strategy alterations. In Asian perspective women are required to bear violence because of the social standards in Asian society. Around seventy to ninety percent of women in Pakistan are victims of domestic violence.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

Domestic violence is referred to some event of violence or exploitation among grown-ups who are involved in a close relation and amongst the fellows of a household. The events of violence consist of bodily, mental, monetary or societal behaviors. Generally, it is a misuse of supremacy



by means of the intention to control and rule single individual via another by one or several violence practices. This paper explores the fact that physical beating is the most used form of domestic violent act committed on the women. The study has exposed that in the course of the time violent acts are committed, the men have used arms to bully or become a reason of physical injury for the women. The men use hands, fists and feet for hitting, beating, kicking, choking and pushing women.

#### **Effects of domestic violent acts on victimized females**

The impacts of household violent acts are huge ranging from the healthy body effects to emotional and passionate issues. Maltreated women are not the single individuals who undergo the harm which is created via domestic violence. In various circumstances, youngsters are found in danger because of the long term impacts of family violence like their mothers. The children are found to be miserable, problematical and have attitude and behavioral problems. Domestic violence causes mental disorders in the abused women of Pakistan as well as in the violence practices children are affected. It is a lengthy phase of time for several women, so these women continue to tolerate their husbands' misbehavior. It is thought that mental disorder is seriously related with the disclosure of domestic violence.

#### **Domestic violence influences on youngsters**

Practice of domestic violence is said to adversely disturb the youngsters in Pakistan because children victimized of violent relations possibly will also openly and implicitly mistreated. Thus occurrences of youngster exploitation amongst the houses of domestic violence are a communal issue in Pakistan and many behavioral problems are revealed among the children who are victim of the abusive relationship. The time that the family spends together is often wasted in disputes, arguments and quarrels. So such children are found aggressive, arrogant and stubborn while dealing to others. Moreover such children are also indulged in school absence and become drug users in a very early time of life.

#### **Hurdles in revealing domestic violence**

Hurdles of revealing domestic violence occurrences in Pakistan have different reasons such as social pressure, misunderstanding and misconception of hurdles which are rooted in the women themselves. In Pakistan women are prohibited to reveal to be victim of violent practices for many reasons.

**a) Fear of rejection by society:** The women in Pakistan are scared of being isolated from their social links because of the exploiter's supremacy and authority. Husband's use this type of societal mistreatment against wives' with the purpose of making them sense separated from their environments. Continued mistreatment of this kind makes women isolated, lonely and also disconnected from the outdoor world. So, devoid of strong social relations it is possible that victimized women realize themselves as trapped in their relation with other people of society. Due to lack of societal relationship a smaller amount of conversation and cooperation is happened between these women and other persons of society. Many of abused women are stated that they are not permitted to contact their relatives or supporters. They are not allowed to mix with their neighbors. As Levendosky, (2004) mentioned that several women in their violent and beating dealing have a small number of societal aids because of the regulatory feature of the beating acts.

**b) Effects on women's' identity:** Pakistani women fail to reveal the domestic violence as it has harmful effects on their personality because these women have no confidence and dignity. Pakistani women' logic of identity is increasingly damaged by means of the exploiter's violent

behavior along with verbal remarks. Insulting behaviors such as constant blames, disgrace, demeaning, and name calling are intentionally used for weakening the women's confidence. It also makes women to consider themselves as valueless. So, exposure of domestic violence practice causes negative impact on Pakistani women's sense of self.

**c) Less understanding about Islam:** Most of the women thought that men are superior to them. So they however are right to treat them in the way they like. Due to lack of knowledge about domestic violence resources several ill-treated women are ensnared in unmannerly relations and find it incapable to avoid these ill-mannered relationships. So, the act of educating women about the gravity of this misconduct and heinous act through different sources can be significant. Instruction about the rights of women, equivalence of genders, and religious ideas related to violent behavior, man-woman stereotypical views will be useful to all Pakistani women. The tutoring programs should consist of publicity campaigns through electronic media as well as through the print media. The publicity campaigns will be helpful in creating consciousness on domestic violence amongst the public. Many so called religious classes also explains to not to disobey husband. So, women mostly keep themselves silent as they are taught that if they are disobedient towards their husbands they will be considered disobedient towards God.

Amirthalingam (2005) states that the cultural view that women should endure some amount of violence must be reread. Furthermore, domestic violence will impact the physical, societal and emotional likelihoods as well as women's' psychological happiness. Domestic violence is vastly private and unreported in Pakistan. Women do not uncover the genuine reasons for postponing or not reporting their practices of exploitation. Domestic violence victims are generally attempting to hide the issue because of the sacredness and the privacy of the family, in addition to trying to avoid from shame. Typical hurdles like harmful societal disgrace which is associated to a victim of domestic violence possibly will affect the females' declaration in revealing or not revealing the violent occurrences and looking for outside support for them.

In future a large quantity of developments may possibly be arranged with the aim of serving the ill-treated women's' needs in a better way. After a complete analysis it can be said with confidence that the women in Pakistani society are controlled, driven and exploited by their counter parts. They are fully dependent on their men for the fulfillment of their needs because a man is a bread winner in Pakistani society. In Pakistani society most of the women are not allowed to go out of the house for earning livelihood for her needs. Humans are the product of nature and they are born with equal rights and equal freedoms. But usually this law of nature is violated in the social life. As it is against nature to deprive women of their freedoms and liberties, therefore the results of the male chauvinistic living are always dangerous. Women normally constitute the half of the population and the nation that mistreats and keeps its half of the population in cages cannot confront the waves of the times for a long time. Such societies ultimately fall a prey to some predator.

### **Conclusion**

Pakistani women are victims of bodily and emotional violence as well as sensual, societal and economic exploitation. The present study has explored the perception of injured females of Pakistan related to the real spirit of existing in domestic violence relations. The current study aims to evaluate the practices of violent acts especially in regard to the influences, the hurdles of revealing exploitation and problems confronted by females regarding existing domestic violence aids in Pakistan. The outcomes of present research emphasized that the effects of domestic

violence on females goes from bodily damage to alienation and psychological disorder. Actually, the harm produced by this societal difficulty goes far away from the females themselves. Possibly, the utmost ill-treated persons both mentally and physically, in addition to females are the kids which become adult in the violent households. In spite of this the harmful impacts because of violence consist of absence of boldness, a low sense of dignity and a poorer self-respect amongst the females.

Domestic violence often add numerous forms of bad consequences in the abused women along with their children. The worth of present study is obvious because of its analysis of domestic violence that comprised traditional and social views within Pakistani society. The outcomes of the study reveal that the influences of domestic violence consist of the decline of psychological fitness, safety, and bodily injury along with societal separation of a victimized person. The current investigation proves that commonly there are numerous causes that why Pakistani females are hesitant in revealing and trying to find outdoor support. The results recommend that cultural dogmas also perform an important part in affecting the females' decisions. These results increase our consideration about the Pakistani females which are victims of domestic violence and afterwards make addition in the increasing form of a literary work in Pakistan in reference to this specific issue. At the end it is proved that the present study creates a number of questions for future research. It will be exciting to evaluate the criminal's opinion relevant to the under discussion problem. So, further research can be explored on the effectiveness of interventional programs in the present condition.

### **Recommendations**

1. Improving the legal system in Pakistan through the enforcement of more stringent laws against domestic violence in line with Islamic concepts of justice (*Adl*), assuring equitable treatment and protection for victims. Courts must speed up domestic violence cases and deliver speedy justice to survivors.
2. Encouraging women's financial independence through vocational training and Islamic microfinance schemes, in accordance with the Islamic concept of economic justice and self-reliance (*Istighna*). Financial empowerment diminishes women's reliance on abusive relationships and increases their capacity to access legal and social assistance.
3. Urging religious scholars and community leaders to take an active role in responding to domestic violence during Friday sermons (*khutbahs*) by focusing on the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) instructions about being kind, respectful, and just with women. This will change cultural mindsets and make domestic abuse less socially accepted.
4. Revisiting Islamic principles which uphold the dignity and safety of women, reiterating that domestic violence goes against Islamic teachings. Quranic passages like *Surah An-Nisa* (4:19) emphasize respect in dealing with women, and this should be emphasized in social and family institutions.
5. Step up countrywide campaigns to de-stigmatize debate on domestic violence and inform women of their legal and religious rights. Community outreach through Islamic scholars and educators can assist in reorienting society's attitudes and removing cultural taboos about marital disputes.
6. Increase state-sponsored shelters and counseling programs for victims, with guarantees of psychological and legal aid. *Zakat* and *Waqf* money can be used to grant monetary assistance, since charity is a mainstay pillar of Islamic social justice.



7. Promoting pre-marital counseling and seminars on Islamic family marriage ethics for encouraging respect, conflict resolution, and a non-violent culture among families. Family relationships should be established based on love and mercy, according to the Quran.

With these steps taken, Pakistan can ensure a safer and more just society where Islamic teachings of justice, dignity, and compassion prevail against domestic violence.

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