Violence against Women in Pakistan: Role of Police and Media

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to highlight the contributing role of police and media regarding violence against women. Media portrayal of women makes them more susceptible to physical and symbolic violence. Likewise, the attitude of police towards cases of violence against women encourages the perpetrators owing to under representation of females in police department and discriminatory behavior of male police stations. Data were collected from thirteen daily newspapers of Pakistan, five English and eight Urdu, and content analysis was done. Analysis showed 164 cases of rape, 99 cases of honor killing, 162 cases of domestic violence, 26 cases of sexual harassment, 28 cases of suicide respectively and total 479 cases of violence against women were portrayed in the months of June and July, 2010. The study revealed that incidents of women violence are not reported to the level that it could sensitize the society. Such underreporting violence also exonerates the police department to take stern action against culprits. The study has important policy implications regarding the role of police and media.

Introduction

In modern societies, man and woman both are evaluated and be entertained by equal rights. They work together for the betterment of their societies and play their role for the development of the country. But unfortunately, some developing countries have less focus on the sensitive issue of women’s equal rights.

They have some educational, social, cultural, traditional and religious traditions which make women subservient to men. These societies usually operate under rigid patriarchal system where women work under the dominance of men. Some ambiguities lie in their norms, values and belief due to which they have more male dominant societies. In some orthodox families or remote areas in Pakistan women live in an environment, which is structured by interpreted false religious and old cultural values and traditions. As a result, women are subjected to discrimination and violence on daily basis.

Rehman (2009) study implies that women face discrimination and neglect at all levels in our society. They have the sense of being inferior, imposed by the traditional thoughts of a male chauvinist society; women are suffering tremendously especially in their homes. Lack of education and economic opportunities for women restrict the potential of women to think about their due rights.

Poverty and wrong interpretation of religious are also big hurdles in the way of Pakistani women becoming progressive and independent. Men normally control their movements and behavior whether he is a father, husband or brother. The women of Pakistan will have to struggle for a long time to survive and get their equal rights. Until and unless the traditional thoughts regarding women as inferior, or as chattel are changed, it might be difficult for women to get any sort of freedom in this environment. Pakistan may not become a prosperous country in the world unless the half of the population consisting of women is given equal...
opportunities to take part in this process of development. No doubt the police and media are considered as a force for establishing norms, values and cultural patterns in societies. Unfortunately, Pakistani police and media are not working according to the requisites of a developed society. The growing trend of crime and inefficiency of such institutions is increasing incredibility of institutions in the mind of the masses.

**Objectives:**

This study aims the following objectives:

1) To look at the society with feminist perspective

2) To identify obstacles faced by women in this patriarchal society

3) To aware the readers about this sensitive issue along with the role of police and media

According to Galles and Straus (1979), "Violence is an act carried out with the intention of perceived intention of physically hurting another person". (p.5) When this violence comes in the circle of gender relations, it becomes a pervasive and prevalent problem worldwide, touching all aspects of women's lives, from the home to the workplace (Schular, 1992).

The definition of gender-based violence according to the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development (APWLD) in 1990, participants concluded that the definition of gender based violence is “any act involving use of force or coercion with intent of perpetuating or promoting hierarchical gender relations" (Schular, 1992, p.2). Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men (Unesco 1999 p.52). Violence against women is a technical term as refers to violent acts as are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Violence against women has been recognized as serious and pervasive problem. The importance of the issue may be gauged from the fact that a UN resolution designated November 25 as “International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.”

United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as: “Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (Symonides & Volodin, 2002, p. 33).” This definition was concluded at the occasion of Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 and also the UN General Assembly passed resolution 48/104 on 20 December 1993, which binds member states to eliminate violence against women (Symonides&Volodin, 2002).According to its article 3, women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, and civil or any other field. These rights include the rights to life, equality, liberty, protection, equal protection under law, the right to be free from all forms of discrimination, and the right to the highest standards attainable of physical and mental health. Similarly, under this declaration, women were given the right not to be subjected to torture or other inhuman treatment. Also, under this declaration, it is obligatory for states that they
should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition and religious practice which cause violence against women (Marjorie, 2001).

The situation of violence varies from place to place. The females of rural areas suffer more than the females of cities. According to a 2008 HRCP report, 80 percent of wives in rural Punjab feared violence from their husbands, and nearly 50 percent of wives in developed urban areas admitted that their husbands beat them. In rural areas, where traditional customs are followed, girls and women continue to be traded to settle debts or conflicts (Shaheed, 1990). Young women are sometimes given in marriage to hostile families as compensation for a relative's crime in a practice called "swara" in Pashtun populated areas of NWFP, and "vanni" in the Punjab (Babur, 2007). According to this custom, women are paid in form of forced marriages to the rival party as a part of compensation of crimes, done by their male relatives (Ebrahim, 2007).

Their basic rights are snubbed such as getting education, health care facilities and independency in economic and social decisions. Men have the right to make decisions, and women have to follow their decisions in family, tribe, community and society (Hassan, 1995). In many cases, women or their honor become victim of land lord’s wrath. In 2002, in southern Punjab, the famous incident of Mukhtarah Mhai happened in which the tribal council raped her in front of the village. The reason was that there were suspicions that her brother had illicit sexual relations with a girl from another tribe. Her brother was 12 years old. She was raped and then forced to walk nude from the place where the tribal council was being held to her house (Human Rights Watch Report, 2004). Women come to be discussed in law in the same terms as material objects and possessions. This is normally reflected in Pakistan's rape laws, which treat the offence as one of theft of a male’s private property, with no consideration for the woman's rights (Shaheed, 1990).

Shaheed (1990) further explores the conditions of women living in rural areas of Baluchistan where most of women have to bear the double burden of domestic and work outside the home mainly in fields. Many men in these rural areas completely consider women as subordinates, mere servants for doing work in the home. According to Asian Human Rights Commission (2008), three teenage girls named as Hameeda, Raheema and Fauzia, attempted to marry men of their own choosing, and were then reportedly kidnapped by armed local tribesmen of Umran tribe along with two older women they were beaten and shot then they were thrown alive into a ditch.

Davis (1983) highlights that women’s economic opportunities are largely restricted by the economic standings of their husbands and their fathers. Women’s views of their work possibilities are limited by others’ expectations and by tradition (Margaret, 1992). In some orthodox families of Pakistan, there is a traditional set-up, whereby a man is believed to be the responsible person for the nourishment of the family, in economic terms. Babur (2007) Due to this cultural belief, men try for jobs, and women, who are dependent on men, try to marry that man who has a job and economic stability.

In most societies, different values are transmitted to boys and girls from an early socialization. Girls are reared to be docile, obedient, and nice. In many places, they are brought up to
believe that their role is to serve men, to sacrifice their own needs for the good of the man and for the well being of family. Normally, a father in rural areas of Pakistan thinks that there is no benefit to give education to my daughter, because she will have to wash dishes after marriage. Men strongly believe that the actual duty of women is to work inside the home not outside (Babur, 2007). According to a Feudal lord in rural Sindh, "if our women get education, they will forget their culture". (Hassan, 1995, p.23) The meaning of culture in front of these feudal lords is a complete subjugation (ibid).

Wrong interpretation of religion sometimes too views women’s traditional behavior as a part of a sacred and natural structure that should be maintained. In this regard, if any woman asks questions about their status or about their actions to increase egalitarianism, they are considered as being suspect or even anti-religion (Margaret, 1992). In Pakistan religion has a strong influence on the people of rural areas. Poverty and ignorance allow religious dogma to be accepted without question. Illiteracy, ignorance, superstition, fatalism and blind faith in clergy (religious leaders) are great allies in the maintenance of the status quo, providing a sound basis for an extreme form of patriarchal society (Babur, 2007). It is unfortunate that women in Pakistan are the major victims of this patriarchal and traditional narrow-mindedness.

**Police**

The police force is a civil force organization that maintains peace, solidarity and stability in the society. To provide protection and security to individual in respective of gender, race, ethnicity and religion is its basic right. Similarly in Pakistan, police department is established to reduce the conflicts and disputes and to enhance law and order situation. Police is considered a major institution of executive in Pakistan. Unfortunately, the working of Pakistani police is not up to the mark and image of police is worsening with every coming moments. Pakistan is among those states where people’s trust on police institution has been gradually eroding. Owing to the dismal performance of the police institutions, their inefficiency and corruption, they are losing their credibility in the eyes of public. During a research the results of a recent Poll conducted by Gallup Pakistan show that from a given list of professionals, Pakistanis place (85%) the highest level of trust in teachers and (18%) the lowest in police officers (Daily Times, 2011).

Especially, the role of police on women related issues is also not satisfactory. Unfortunately, affected women have no access to lodge FIR (First Information Report) since there are only nine women police stations and seven complaint units in the whole country. Three complaint units in Islamabad have been established on September 30th, 2010 in the collaboration with National Police Bureau and GTZ (German Technical Cooperation).The majority of women are not aware of women police stations and complaint units. Some other women who have a little access to general police stations but they are ignored due to some political and male dominant factors. Sometimes they are victimized and raped on political cause even in police custody. According to Amnesty International (1999), Human Rights Watch (2003), and Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2003), women are raped even in police station and many incidents go unreported. Also in some cases, the police tortures women from opposition
political parties, allegedly by the orders of government of ruling party. Kursheed Begum, the wife of a low-level Pakistan People's Party (PPP) activist who had been imprisoned on charges of being involved in a Karachi bomb blast, was allegedly kidnapped and raped in police custody on November 19, 1991. Despite her complaint, no charges were filed against the officers (Human rights watch, 1992).

PWHRO (2005) Sonia Naz, 23 and a mother of two children is a police rape victim. She was locked up in a house for 15 days and repeatedly raped and beaten by a police officer as punishment for questioning her husband’s arrest and making an effort toward his release. According to another report of PWHRO (2010) 17 years old Pakistani teenager, Natasha was illegally arrested and held in detention for 11 days while she got raped the four officers in the village of “Lab Thato” in the northern part of Pakistan.

**Media**

In this modern age, media is regarded as influential institution of a country so it is their moral and national duty as well to participate in the national development by providing valuable talk shows of experts and disseminating program with solutions of the societal problems. Print media should also be committed for betterment of Pakistani society. Unfortunately Pakistani media sometimes show leniency while portraying news about women related issues. The media is biased against women in many areas. This bias affects images of women in the media, and in turn has a negative effect on women’s development in a society.

Especially electronic media sometimes create hype and portray exaggerated news by adding their personal opinion that causes for anarchy in the society. For instance, in the case of rape media channel show the victim again and again which cause dehumanization for that girl already under stress of humiliation? Women are shown in many advertisements addressing domestic consumer items like the ones for ‘Lemon Max’, ‘Fair and Lovely’ and certain washing powders portray women in stereotypical roles that limit their capabilities. Women are objects of beauty and if they lack it, they need to do everything to achieve what they lack (Ahmar, 2004). In drama serials, women are literally treated as less competent, a burden over family and psychologically weak and emotional which strengthen already existing stereotypes in this male chauvinist society.

On the other hand, the attitude of some newspapers is less sensitive and gender irresponsible by disseminating news. In our print media, some sensitive issues of female are discussed with the inappropriate portrayal e.g. bare breasts are made more prominent by the black ink used by the publications that want to sell their newspapers and magazines through women’s bodies. Sometimes, print media touch its extreme by reporting “the mother of five children elopes with lover”.

**Research Findings**

The study was conducted on daily Newspapers of Pakistan, in which the news related to violence against women is highlighted during the month of June and July, 2010. News on
violence against women is further divided into sub-categories like rape, honor killing, domestic violence, sexual harassment and suicides. According to mentioned newspapers reports 164 cases of rape, 99 cases of honor killing, 162 cases of domestic violence, 26 cases of sexual harassment, 28 cases of suicide respectively and total 479 cases of violence against women are portrayed in the month of June and July, 2010.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the months of June and July, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cases of June</th>
<th>Cases of July</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.92 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor Killing</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.12 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.71 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.66 : 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>1.75: 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: 13, 8 Urdu+ 5 English, daily newspapers of Pakistan)

The statistical data of incidents of violence against women is drawn in the Figure 1. Cobalt color shows the cases of June while scarlet color shows the cases of July, 2010. The graphical presentation shows little discrepancy in the occurring of such cases there might be some reason e.g. security threats or others in some areas due to which less cases are reported.

Figure 1: the combine graph of the cases of categories of VAW in the months of June and July, 2010.

Conclusion

The UN has condemned violence against women. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Women was proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 on 20 December 1993 (Symonides & Volodin, 2002). Pakistan has signed on this Declaration but in reality women could not get any relief (Hassan, 1995). The Constitution of 1973 in several articles guarantees gender equality. For example, article 25 says: "all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of law" and article 27 states: "there will be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone” (Khan, 2001, p.55). In article 28, it is clearly written that “steps shall be taken to ensure full participation of women in all spheres of national life” (Khan, p.56).
Pakistan is a developing country and the 6th biggest population of the world and 2nd biggest population of Islamic countries. To deal such a population we have to take steps to reduce this growing trend of inequality else it would harm our society seriously. Police and media both are considered very influential in our society they should pay their duty vigorously. Police should pay more attention on women related issues and media should fulfill its duty by portraying news as it is and with solution of problems. Authorities have to put specific measures at the level of police and media organizations to assist the government in fulfilling its binding commitments to deal with discrimination and injustice against women especially related to violence against women.

These both institutions may affect public opinion and perform their role to promote solidarity, cohesion and stability in the society. If some measures would not be taken in near future, this discriminatory behavior pushes society into devastating and alarming situation of anarchy. Pre-cautionary steps have to be taken to avoid this predicted derailment. Now it is the need of the hour; there should be mutual understanding and commitment among these institutions (Police & Media) especially on women related issues should be dealt with more responsibly so that they also might have equal opportunities and work with their men for the development of the country.

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