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Mental and Physical Victimization of Rural Women

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to assess the type and extent of domestic violence against married women in rural areas and to find out the association between the extent of victimization and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The universe of the study consisted of two villages in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. Through a preliminary survey of these villages a list of married females was prepared and 55 married females were randomly selected from each village (110 respondents). The interview schedule was prepared for collecting the requisite information. Majority of the respondents (about 98%) expressed mental tension due to the behavior of husbands. Almost 56% also reported to be physically abused. Extent of victimization was negatively associated with the age, education and income of the respondents.

Key Words: Women; Violence; Victimization; Socio-economy

INTRODUCTION

Violence within the family has been one of the most hidden crimes because the family is considered a sacred institution. The family matters are considered to be private matters and no body is allowed to interfere in them. It is generally assumed that violence can not exist among family members, because it is believed that family members always help and cooperate with each other, but the facts are that different forms of family violence are the reality of almost every society. The extent of violence against women in the home has been largely hidden and widely defined by communities that fear that an admission of its incidence will be an assault on the integrity of the family. However, existing statistics reflect the pervasiveness, frequency and the intensity of violence against women all over the world.

In the contemporary society criminal exploitation of women is intense, rampant and global in nature. Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten and coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime. Most often abuser is the member of her own family (Govt. of Pakistan, 1999). Women in Pakistan live in a world structured around strict religious, family and tribal customs that essentially force them to live in submission and fear. In Pakistan certain formal code, informal traditions and values of society discriminate against women.

Within the broad purview of violence against women, this phenomenon at a domestic level has been found to be quite pervasive and recognized as a major public health concern and violation of human rights. The problem of violence against women has been recently recognized as a crime and major obstacle to equality, development and peace. A woman's right to be free from danger and fear for her personal safety within the home is likely to be a toughest battle, women are waging in the 21st century.

The term violence against women refers to many types of harmful behavior directed at women. Any act of gender based violence that results in or likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life (Anonymous, 1993). The definition of domestic violence against women underscores both intentions and behavior of perpetrators with focus on patriarchal hierarchy or any act involving use of force or coercion with intent of promoting hierarchical gender relations (Fishbach & Therbert, 1997). Violence against women in the home may be manifested in the form of psychological or mental violence that includes constant verbal abuse, harassment, isolation and deprivation or physical and economic resources, threatening her with violence or taunting her with threats of divorce, intentions of taking another wife fall within the definition of domestic violence.

It is hypothesized that association exists between extent of victimization of the respondents and it decreases as the level of education increases and socio-economic status of the family improves. Main objectives of the study were to i) assess the type and extent of domestic violence against married women in rural areas and b) find out the association between the extent of victimization and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The universe of the present study consisted of two villages (Chak No. 64/JB & Chak No. 7/JB) randomly selected from Tehsil and District Faisalabad, Pakistan. Through a preliminary survey of the two villages a list of married females was prepared. From this list 55 married females were randomly selected from each of the two

villages, constituting a sample of 110 respondents. The interview schedule consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of questions about the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents i.e., age, education, family type, family income etc. of the respondents. The second part dealt with the more sensitive aspects of respondent's marital life i.e., the level of mutual understanding and adjustment with their spouses. In this regard few direct questions were asked to ascertain, as to whether they were mentally and physically abused by their husbands.

The responses of the respondents on questions of "mental victimization" were recorded using following response categories i.e., 'often' 'sometimes' and 'never'. Likert type of scaling technique was used through assigning certain score to each of the response (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1986). The scores for each respondent were added. The range of total scores on selected questions was between 5 and 14. The extent of domestic victimization of respondents were categorized in three categories i.e., low (5-7) medium (8-10) and high (11-14) (Table I).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics. In any social setup the socio-economic characteristics of an individual play a vital role in the formation of his attitudes and behavior patterns and his standing in the social set-up. Therefore it seems imperative to explain socio-economic characteristics of the respondents under study. Some of the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents were as follow.

As for age distribution of the respondents 16.4% of the respondents were less than 30 years. However, 57.3% and 26.4% were in middle age (30-39 years) and old age category (45 years & above) respectively. Nearly 58% of the respondents and 41% of their husbands were illiterate, only 3.6% of the respondents and 10% of husbands were matriculate or above. Majority of the respondents (80.9%) lived in nuclear family system. A significant majority (64.6%) of the respondents was housewives and not involved in any economic activity. Only 19.1% domestic laborers and 16.4% were teachers or self-employed. As for economic status of respondents, 60.9% belonged to lower income group (Rs. 25000 – < 75000 annually), 24.5 belonged to middle (Rs. 75000 – < 125000) and remaining 14.5% belonged to higher income level group (Rs. 125000-176000+annually).

Domestic violence against women. Gender based domestic violence against women is mostly perpetrated due to social values that attribute low status to women and devalue their

lives and activities. Physical abuse is more common form of violence against women and is rooted in patriarchal social system, psychological and economic dependence on men throughout their lives. Wife beating is common but its frequency and intensity vary across different groups and communities (Hafeez, 1998).

According to World Bank (1997), gender based violence including rape, domestic violence, murder and sexual abuse are severe problems for women across the globe. Although gender violence is significant cause of female morbidity and mortality, it is almost never seen as public health issue. Female focused violence also represents a hidden obstacle to economic and social development, by sapping women's energy undermining their health, gender violence deprives society from women's full participation.

Violence does not occur as an isolated incident in the lives of abused married women. Physical torture as well as mental torture usually occurs on a regular basis causing deep sears on the victims, the victim's family and on society as a whole. Women's physical health and mental health is often permanently damaged (Anonymous, 2000).

The confidence to express their desires to their husbands was reported by 81% respondents, (i.e., 40% said it was 'often' while 41% said 'some times'). Almost 19% reported to be meek and depressed. In other words they could hardly express their any desire to their husbands. Further, probe in to the feelings of the respondents, as to whether their husbands gave preference to others over them also portrayed depressing picture of wives. About 48% said sometimes their husbands give preference to others while 22%, said that it was 'often' so (almost always). Only 30% said that it 'never' happened.

Response pattern to another question i.e., whether the respondents experienced 'mental tension' due to the behavior of their husbands, 40% said 'often' and 58% said 'sometimes'. None reported that she was free from any mental tension. About 56% of the respondents were not physically abused by their husbands. However, little less than one-fourth i.e., 24.5% (often) and 19.1% (sometime) respondents reported to be physically tortured by their husband at home (Table II).

About 14% reported to be physically abused by their family members, 82% had no such problem. About 35% of the respondents said that the main reason of marital conflict and domestic violence was 'poverty' (Table III). Similarly, 32.7% of the respondents reported that the main reason of domestic violence was 'illiteracy' of husbands. They believed that men-folk had little respect for women.

Table I. Percentage Distribution of the respondents with regard to the extent of their mental victimization

| Type of violence | Extent of victimization | | | Total |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Often F (%) | Sometime F (%) | Never F (%) | |
| Respondents Enjoy confidence in expressing their desire to their husbands | 44 (40.0) | 45 (40.9) | 21 (19.1) | 110 (100.0) |
| Husbands give preference to other family member's over them | 24 (21.8) | 53 (48.2) | 33 (30.0) | 110 (100.0) |
| Experience 'mental tension' by the behavior of the husbands | 46 (41.8) | 64 (58.2) | - | 110 (100.0) |

However, 22.3% said that major reason of violence against them was for not having ‘any male issue’. Only 5.5% said that the ‘dowry’ was the cause of their being victimized.

The above data show that among younger age and middle age categories i.e., 20-29 years and 30-39 years, the Extent of victimization of the respondents was very high i.e., 76.9% and 50.0%, respectively. As the age increases, the extent of violence decreases. The calculated value of statistical test of chi-square at 0.05 level was significant, thus the hypothesis i.e., association between extent of victimization of the respondents and their age is up held. The data in Table VI show that as the educational level of the respondents increased the extent of victimization decreased. The hypothesis i.e., association between extent of victimization of the respondents and their educational level was accepted.

Majority of the respondents of low income category (Rs. 25000-75000) fell in medium and high extent of violence i.e., 52.2% and 29.9%, respectively. Only 17.9% low violence. On the contrary, in the higher income group majority i.e., 70.4% reported low extent of violence, while 11% expressed high extent of violence. Hence, the association between extent of victimization and level of income was negatively related.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Violence does not occur as an isolated incident in the lives of abused married women. Physical torture as well as mental torture usually occurring regularly causes deep sears on the victims, the victim’s family and on society as whole. Women’s physical health and mental health is often permanently damaged. Domestic violence is an economic, educational, legal and development and above all, a human right issue; the term “domestic” includes violence by an intimate partner and by other family members.

It is suggested that government should take proper measures through utilizing print and electronic media for the eradication of miscommunication against women at all levels. The state and NGO’s should undertake a national campaign to raise awareness among women about their rights. All necessary steps should be taken to improve women’s social and economic status. All legislation, which discriminates against women, should be repealed.

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Table II. Extent of physical victimization of respondents by their husbands and other family members

| | Extent of Physical Tension (%) | | | Total |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Often | Sometime | Never | |
| By husbands | 27 (24.5) | 21 (19.1) | 62 (56.4) | 110 (100) |
| By other Family members | 16 (14.5) | 4 (3.7) | 90 (81.9) | 110 (100) |

Table III. Respondent’s perception of causes of domestic violence

| Perceived causes | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Poverty | 38 | 34.5 |
| Illiteracy | 36 | 32.7 |
| Dowry | 6 | 5.5 |
| No male issue | 30 | 27.3 |
| Total | 110 | 100.0 |

Table IV. Association between the age of the respondents and their extent of victimization

| Extent of victimization | Age of the respondents (in years) (%) | | | | Total (%) |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|-----------|
| | 20-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50+ | |
| Low | 0 | 7 | 10 | 16 | 33 |
| (5-6) | 0.0 | 21.2 | 30.3 | 48.5 | 100.0 |
| Medium | 3 | 7 | 15 | 21 | 46 |
| (8-10) | 6.5 | 15.2 | 32.6 | 45.7 | 100.0 |
| High | 10 | 14 | 4 | 3 | 31 |
| (11-14) | 32.3 | 45.2 | 12.9 | 9.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 13 | 28 | 29 | 40 | 110 |
| | 11.8 | 25.5 | 26.4 | 36.4 | 100.0 |

$\chi^2 = 34.3$ Significant D.F. = 6 P<0/05

Table V. Association between the educational level of the respondents and their extent of victimization

| Extent of victimization | Educational of the respondents (in years) | | | Total |
|-------------------------|---|----------------|-----------------------|--------|
| | Illiterate | Primary-Middle | Matriculate and above | |
| Low | 10 | 15 | 8 | 33 |
| (5-6) | 30.3% | 45.5% | 24.2% | 100.0% |
| Medium | 34 | 9 | 3 | 46 |
| (8-10) | 73.9% | 19.6% | 3.6% | 100.0% |
| High | 20 | 8 | 3 | 31 |
| (11-14) | 64.5% | 25.8% | 9.7% | 100.0% |
| Total | 64 | 32 | 14 | 110 |
| | 58.2% | 29.1% | 12.7% | 100.0% |

$\chi^2 = 25.55$ Significant D.F. = 4 P<0/05

Table VI. Association between family income of the respondents and their extent of victimization

| Extent of victimization | Annual Family Income of the respondents (Rs.) | | | Total |
|-------------------------|---|--------------|-------------------|--------|
| | 25000- <75000 | 75000 125000 | < 125000- 175000+ | |
| Low | 12 | 2 | 19 | 33 |
| (5-6) | 17.9% | 12.5% | 70.4% | 100.0% |
| Medium | 35 | 6 | 5 | 46 |
| (8-10) | 52.2% | 37.5% | 18.5% | 100.0 |
| High | 20 | 8 | 3 | 31 |
| (11-14) | 29.2% | 50.0% | 11.1% | 100.0 |
| Total | 67 | 16 | 27 | 110 |
| | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100.0 |

$\chi^2 = 31.58$ Significant D.F. = 4 P<0.05

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