

## Intimate Partner Violence and Its Under-Reporting in Pakistan

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### Abstract

Intimate Partner violence is not a culturally limited practice, but prevails in every country, irrespective of culture, class, and ethnicity. Violence is one of the mechanisms used by men to control and subjugate women; and is a manifestation of unequal power relationship sustained by patriarchy. Patriarchy makes violence necessary for the sake of its existence. Intimate partner violence, the most common forms of gender-based violence entails the exertion of power over a partner in an intimate relationship through a behavior that is intimidating, threatening, harassing or harmful. The spouse can be harmed physically, as well sexually, emotionally, and psychologically, the violence can occur multiple times. Intimate partner violence in Pakistan persists almost in every family because women have subjugated and vulnerable status and are generally treated as second class citizens. Generally, the occurrence of violence at home is effectively condoned and regarded it as 'private matter' which does not require any intervention. it is seldom recognized as a crime socially unless it takes an extreme form of murder or attempted murder which could range from driving a woman to suicide or engineering an accident (frequently the bursting of a kitchen stove). This study aims to find out the factors which precipitate Intimate partner violence in Pakistan and what are the factors which preclude the reporting of Intimate partner violence and seeking legal redress. This study has found that strict cultural and patriarchal system and values precipitate intimate partner violence and also preclude victims to report the incidences by not giving them appropriate moral, cultural and legal support.

**Keywords:** Intimate partner violence, Domestic Violence, Patriarchy, Gender-based violence, Pakistan

### 1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence is not a culturally limited practice, but prevails in every country, irrespective of culture, class, and ethnicity. Gender-based violence, the most pervasive violation of human rights, denies equality of women and girls, their security, self-esteem and their right to enjoy basic liberty and freedom. It produces far-reaching physical, psychological, and economic impacts. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is 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 in private life" (United Nations, 1993). Despite being proscribed in every country, violence against women is perpetrated under the garb of cultural practices and norms or through the misinterpretation of religious tenants. Most often the occurrence of violence at home is effectively condoned and regarded it as 'private matter' which does not require any intervention.

Intimate partner violence, the most common forms of gender-based violence, has received the attention of researchers and scholars since the 1970s; however, violence within the four walls of families occurred long before these studies. Intimate partner violence entails the exertion of power over a partner in an intimate relationship through a behavior that is intimidating, threatening, harassing or harmful. The spouse can be harmed physically, as well sexually, emotionally, and psychologically, the violence can occur multiple times.

Intimate partner violence is a global phenomenon occurring in both developed and developing countries. Despite under-reporting of the incidence of intimate partner violence, existing statistical data, from across the world, reveals that one out of every three women experienced intimate partner abuse (WHO, 1997). In 48 population based studies conducted by Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, and Zwi, (2002) revealed that 10 to 69 percent of women faced Intimate partner violence during

their lifetime; Similar result were found in another study carried out in 36 countries by Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottmoeller, 2002). The occurrence of Intimate partner violence is much higher in developing countries due to rigid cultural and patriarchal values. In the review of literature Nasir and Hyder (2003) revealed that 18 to 67 percent of women in developing countries are reported to experience intimate partner violence in comparison with 28 percent of those in developed countries. Such as in Canada and US, 29 percent and 28 percent of women respectively experienced intimate partner violence (UNICEF, 1999 as cited in Khan et al. 2000); whereas, in Bangladesh varies from 35 to 42 percent (Bates, Schuler, Islam, & Islam, 2004) in India and Kenya, this rate is 45 and 52 percent respectively (UNESCO, 2000, as cited in Kocacık, et al., 2007); Egypt, Palestine, Israel and Tunisia at least one out of three women experience physical violence by their partners (Douki, Nacef, Belhadj, Bouasker, & Ghachem, 2003; Haj-Yahia, 2002).

Intimate partner violence in Pakistan persists almost in every family; since extended family system is common, in-laws are also common perpetrators of violence in relation to dowry issues or petty family disputes. Human Rights Watch (1999) and Aurat Foundation (2013) estimated that 70 to 90 percent of Pakistani women are subjected to Intimate partner violence; however, the incidences of Intimate partner violence are grossly under-reported. This study aims to find out the factors which precipitate Intimate partner violence in Pakistan and what are the factors which preclude the reporting of Intimate partner violence and seeking legal redress. However, before that this paper presents the available data of the incidences of Intimate partner violence in Pakistan and will put light on Intimate partner violence through the feminist perspective.

## 2. Intimate Partner Violence in Pakistan

The occurrence of Intimate partner violence in Pakistan is generally a common phenomenon prevailing almost in every home. However, the incidents of Intimate partner violence are grossly under-reported. Below is the table indicates the occurrence of violence against women during 2008-2014.

Table shows the numbers of reported cases of VAW across the country between 2008 and 2014.

Categories of Crime	Year 2008	Year 2009	Year 2010	Year 2011	Year 2012	Year 2013	Grand Total
Abduction/Kidnapping	1,784	1,987	2,236	2,089	1,607	2,026	2,170
Murder	1,422	1,384	1,436	1,575	1,747	1,425	1,610
Domestic violence/ Intimate Partner Violence	281	608	486	610	989	498	494
Suicide	599	683	633	758	575	668	931

Honor Killing <sup>1</sup>	475	604	557	705	432	487	713
Rape/gang rape	778	928	928	827	822	956	1,515
Sexual Assault	172	274	74	110	58	38	74
Acid Throwing <sup>2</sup>	29	53	32	44	83	43	65
Burning	61	50	38	29	71	42	55
Miscellaneous	1,970	1,977	1,580	1,792	1,134	1,669	2,443
Total	7,571	8,548	8,000	8,539	7,516	7,852	10,070

Source: Annual Report January-December 2014, Violence Against Women in Pakistan: A Qualitative Review of Reported Incidents. Aurat Foundation.

Statistics for 2008-2014 show that there were only 3966 cases of intimate partner violence reported across the country; whereas 14,572 incidences of murders and 'honor' killings were reported during the same period. The total murder and

<sup>1</sup> The killing of a relative, especially a girl or woman, who is perceived to have brought dishonor on the family

<sup>2</sup> Acid throwing, also called an acid attack, is a form of violent assault defined as the act of throwing acid or a similarly corrosive substance onto the body of another "with the intention to disfigure, maim, torture, or kill".

'honor' data is sufficient to know that Intimate partner violence is grossly under-reported. Since the crime of murder being the most serious one under law, it is often too difficult to hide. A total of 14,572 murders and 'honor' killings during 2008-2014 are giving proof enough that Intimate partner violence is not reported as often as it takes place.

Violence against women including intimate partner violence remained pervasive and intractable in 2017 also.

Honor Killing	390
Rape	3,238
Gang rape	257
Incest	14
Domestic Violence/ Intimate Partner Violence:	
Murder	1,266
Beating	694
Other	533
Acid Burning	18
Stove Burning <sup>1</sup>	4
Vanni/Swara <sup>2</sup>	15
Sexual Harassment at workplace:	
Physical	37
Sexual	21
Psychological	0
Any other kind of VAW	4,146

Source: HRCP 2018

Technical experts agree that the reported cases in 2017 were yet again simply the tip of a huge iceberg, especially in the rural areas, where violence against women remains largely unreported. Women were attacked, burnt, set on fire and killed for reasons ranging from petty quarrels to matters of dowry, property, second marriage and marriage choices (HRCP, 2009). Below are the few examples of the situations which incite culprits to exercise violence (in some instances intensity of violence caused to death) to their wives.

Husband killed her wife on a refusal to give him a cup of tea

On bringing less dowry than her in-laws expected, Shumaila Bibi was beaten to unconsciousness by her in-laws

Zeenat Rafiq was burned to death by her mother for bringing 'disgrace' to the family by marrying a man of her own choice

The body of Amber was found inside a vehicle that had been set on fire on the orders of traditional assembly of elders/Jirga.

Maheen was burned to death by her husband because she wanted to visit her parents.

A woman was murdered solely for giving birth to girls.

The worst form of intimate partner violence is stove-burning perpetrated by husband and in-laws considering it as an easy and safe way to get rid of wives. Deaths by stove-burning are generally attributed to be accidental bursting of stove with onus on either manufacturer or the carelessness and ignorance of victim using the stove. Among the stove burning incidents, the doctors at Burn Unit of one hospital in Pakistan estimated, at least sixty percent of women have been burnt by their spouses or in-laws. Aurat foundation has attributed 50 percent of these deaths to murder or suicide. It is reported that every year not less than 500 women in the country meet such a horrible fate (HRCP, as cited in Bhatti, et al. 2011). In some instances, Women are so much suppressed and depressed that rather than fighting for justice, they commit suicide to end the unbearable torture. Suicide rates of women are on the increase.

<sup>1</sup> The practice of stove burning takes different forms. Sometimes a woman is burned alive through deliberate tampering with a gasoline stove by her in-laws, causing an explosion. Other manifestations of stove burning include incidents where a husband or his family members douse his wife with kerosene oil and set her on fire. Stove burning may be motivated by anger over a wife's failure to fulfill dowry demands or to give birth to a male child, but it is also frequently the culmination of a larger pattern of domestic violence.

<sup>2</sup> cultural custom found in parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan whereby a young girl is forcibly married as part of punishment for a crime committed by her male relatives.

### 3. Feminist Perspective on Intimate partner Violence

Feminist theorists especially being effective in bringing public attention to the violence against women view that intimate partner violence is a reflection of unequal power relationship among genders and should not be seen as isolated cases emanating from psychological or criminal roots. Intimate partner violence reflects the unequal power between genders in society or within their personal relationships. There is a consensus among feminist theorists that intimate partner violence is fundamentally a gender issue and cannot be grasped without taking gender as the central component of analysis (see Anderson, 1997; DeKeseredy & Dragiewicz, 2007; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hadi, 2017; Johnson, 1995; Kurz, 1989; Ökten, 2017; Yllo, 1993). Patriarchal societies grant privileges to men and permit or encourage their domination, oppression, and exploitation over women. In patriarchal system women are perceived as an 'object' rather than a 'subject' and are given low status in society. The deep rooted ideas about low status of women and male supremacy enable men to exercise unlimited power over women and legitimize that power and domination too. Women are kept in control through internalized patriarchal conditioning that provides men the right to perpetrate violence against women on their whim/wish and women having internalized patriarchal norms often do not perceive themselves as abused unless they suffered severe physical assault.

The theme that runs through the literature on violence against women is women's unequal power between genders in patriarchal society. Patriarchy, is both ideological (the beliefs, norms, and values about the status and roles of women in a society) and structural (women's access to and positions within social institutions) (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Violence is one of the mechanisms used by men to control and subjugate women; and is a manifestation of unequal power relationship sustained by patriarchy. Patriarchy makes violence necessary for the sake of its existence. Dobash and Dobash (1979) asserted that physical violence against wives is used as a mean to control and oppress them and it is the clear and visible manifestation of patriarchal domination. Walby (1990) having been identified violence as a mechanism to keep women subservient to men, stated that some men employ violence to assert their authority and other men exercise violence to reassert their declining authority, power and status (Reiser 1999; Meltzer 2002; Xie et al. 2011).

### 4. Causes of Under-reporting of Intimate partner Violence in Pakistan

Traditional values and patriarchal attitudes which make women subservient to men and devalue the role of women still prevail amongst the people across Pakistan due to institutionalized restrictive codes of conduct, rigid gender-segregation, and a strong ideology linking family honor to female virtue. Global Gender Gap 2014 report put Pakistan in the list of the second lowest performing country with respect to equality of gender.

Pakistani patriarchal society embraces cultural and religious norms that breed discrimination and gender-based violence on a daily basis creating situation that violate or devalue women's human rights and their ability to benefit from their basic freedom. In Pakistani patriarchal society men regard that to threat of violence or exercise any form of violence on their wives is their right and can be used to 'correct their behavior' because men are often brought up to believe that nothing is socially wrong with beating of defiant women. In Pakistan, people usually live in extended families, where in-laws also either cause or perpetrate violence in relation to dowry issues or petty family disputes. In a study conducted by Fikree, and Bhatti (1999) demonstrated that 30 percent of participants stated that in-laws are the common factor leading to intimate partner violence. According to a 2011 poll of experts by the Thomson Reuters Foundation Poll, Pakistan is the 3<sup>rd</sup> most dangerous country for women in the globe where every year more than thousand women and girls are killed in 'honor killings', and ninety percent women experience intimate partner violence (Jamal, 2012). Even increased access to education and information has often not succeeded in uprooting the deeply ingrained attitudes and concepts resulting in the widespread occurrence of violence against women.

Intimate partner Violence in Pakistan is seldom recognized as a crime socially unless it takes an extreme form of murder or attempted murder which could range from driving a woman to suicide or engineering an accident (frequently the bursting of a kitchen stove) (HRCP, 2000). The state's response to Intimate partner violence in Pakistan is so minimal that, despite the staggering levels of intra-family violence against women, it is widely perceived by the law enforcement system and society at large as a private family matter which cannot and should not be interfered with. The failure of the justice system to provide women with adequate venues for redress against their perpetrators continues to leave women with little justice (Bettencourt, 2000)

The problem with this form of violence against women is that such cases are seldom reported, often treated as private

household matters. Incidences of Intimate partner violence are grossly under-reported. Structural factors including a weak criminal justice system and a dearth of societal support for women make it difficult to seek justice. Women who try to report violence face serious challenges. In Patriarchal society of Pakistan, this study has found following major factors preclude victims to come to the fore and seek help from state apparatus.

Women are socialized to accept intimate partner violence including physical, verbal, and emotional violence, but not limited to, as the matrimonial right of husband. Women grown up in such socialization internalize the patriarchal norms and value and view certain abusive conjugal conduct and behavior as normal.

Instead of seeking justice, women remain silent on the abuse inflicted on them on account of (a) real or imagined fear of harm by their intimate partner or in-laws; or (b) concern for the safety and future of their children; or (c) lack of support from the family and friends; or (d) hope that one day their partners will mend their behaviors.

Issues and problems triggering/precipitating intimate partner violence are tried to resolve amicably within family. Women experiencing intimate partner violence prefer to allow family and intermediaries affect a compromise between them and the offender and settle the matter within family. Getting help from state apparatus may end the marriage. Divorce, although permitted, is generally considered taboo and stigmatizing and is, therefore, discouraged.

Seeking legal redress for intimate partner abuse is socially disapproved on account of bringing private matter into public. The attached social stigma with taking one's case to court generate feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment and make women feel uncomfortable to seek justice through legal system.

Women victims are reluctant to bring their cases into court for seeking legal redress because they do not have adequate knowledge and information about the legal process.

Viewing intimate partner abuse as private matter, Police and judges being plagued by gender bias are reluctant to interfere with the issue and dispense justice to the victims. Police being reluctant to file charges against abuser partner, often encourage and convince women victim to make reconciliation with abuser husband. Abused women are often sent back to their abusive husband. In this circumstance, laws enacted to protect women become ineffective.

Women who overcome all internal and external aforementioned hurdles and end up taking their cases to courts have to undergo numerous obstacles and humiliations before a conclusion is reached in their dispute. Ironically, women surmounting all hurdles and reaching to the court for legal redress do not get satisfactory relief at the end of the day. Experiences of women victim of getting unsatisfactory reliefs lead other victim women to avoid seeking justice through legal system.

Those victims, who do not get family and social support, endeavor to seek justice through judicial system, but the lack of Protection by the police and punishment by the courts exemplifies that women in Pakistan are often left to live in fear and subjugation. Women who are victims of violence often have no place to turn.

## 5. Conclusion

Intimate partner violence is a form of gender-based violence that like many other crimes lies in all about, control and domination. It reflects the unequal power between genders in patriarchal society. Intimate partner violence is a common occurrence in the 3rd most dangerous country for women in the world, Pakistan, where it is seldom recognized as a crime socially unless it takes an extreme form of murder or attempted murder which could range from driving a woman to suicide or engineering an accident (frequently the bursting of a kitchen stove) (HRCP, 2000).

Gender equality is guaranteed in several articles of Pakistan's constitution. For instance, article 25 says: "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law" and article 27 states: "There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone". But the elements of practical implementation of rights are missing. Pakistan is also the signatory of several international commitments which make Pakistan oblige to protect basic human rights and ensure gender equality. These commitments include but not limited to, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); Beijing Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995; and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1996. Pakistan does not appear to have taken domestic commitments to ensure gender equality and its international legal obligations to exercise due diligence in preventing, investigating and punishing violations of rights of girls and women. It has failed to ensure that legal provisions, law enforcement and judicial

structures ensure the full enjoyment by women of their human rights.

In Pakistani patriarchal society where rule of law is not prevalent in entire society so just making laws and signing international laws without proper implementation will not eradicate gender inequality and gender-based violence. Violence against women including intimate partner violence is a human right issue and by taking the human rights approach, the mechanism of state and state actors can be made responsible for such violation of rights even if they occur in the private domain of family and community (Hadi, 2017). The serious and firm actions of status apparatus and state actors can reduce somehow the occurrence of violence against women. However, In order to eliminate violence against women, patriarchal system has to be changed which can be achieved by strengthening the social, political and economic position of women.

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