

# Level of Awareness Regarding Domestic Violence: Comparison between Working and Non-working Women: A Case Study of Lalazar, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

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## Abstract

*This study was carried out to compare the level of awareness about domestic violence among working and non-working women. The tool used to conduct the research was self-constructed semi-structured questionnaire including both close- and open-ended questions. The findings indicate that there is a significant difference in the level of awareness about domestic violence between housewives and working women. The research has revealed that working women have a clear idea about the definition of domestic violence and that different forms of abuses, like physical, verbal and mental abuse, fall under the category of domestic violence. They are also more aware of their rights. On the other hand, the majority of housewives are not well-aware of what constitutes domestic violence and consider only physical and verbal abuse as domestic violence. The findings indicate that housewives are more at risk of domestic violence because they are financially dependent on their husbands. The results indicate that, because of economic empowerment working women have a greater role in decision making when compared to non-working women. Therefore improving job opportunities for women may be a contributing factor in deterring domestic violence.*

**Keywords:** domestic violence, working and non-working women, economic (in)dependency of women.

## Introduction

Domestic Violence has been described as the most pervasive violation of human rights. Many women do not realise that they are living in abnormal conditions and normally blame themselves for problems in their relationship. Many victims believe that their partners have a right to use violence against them.<sup>1</sup> According to the Encyclopedia of crime and justice, "violence is a general term referring to all types of behavior either threatened or actual that result in the damage or destruction of property or the injury or death of an individual"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Misra, P. (2007), Concept of Violence against Women, in *Domestic Violence against Women: Legal Control and Judicial Response*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, pp.42-100

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice (1983) as cited by Misra, 2007.

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".<sup>3</sup>

Violence against women serves to control and restrict women to preserve social order and becomes a means of reproducing and reinforcing male dominance at home and at the state level. Violent means are used where there is little risk of being penalized, and in patriarchal societies like Pakistan men are encouraged to use physical violence against women where they do not risk retaliation. Domestic violence is the most common form of violence and the most common form of domestic violence is wife assault.<sup>4</sup>

Domestic violence may include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and economic abuse.

Physical abuse includes inflicting or attempting to inflict physical injury and/or illness, for example, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hitting, hair pulling, biting, arm twisting, kicking, punching, hitting with blunt objects, stabbing, shooting, withholding access to resources necessary to maintain health, for example, medication, medical care, wheel chair, food or fluids, sleep, hygienic assistance, forcing alcohol or other drug use. Sexual abuse includes coercing or attempting to coerce any sexual contact without consent, for example marital rape, acquaintance rape, forced sex after physical beating, attacks on the sexual parts of the body, bestiality, forced prostitution, unprotected sex, fondling sodomy, sex with others, use of pornography. Attempting to undermine a victim's sexuality, for example by treating her in a sexually derogatory manner, criticising her sexual performance and desirability, or accusing her of infidelity and withholding sex. Psychological abuse includes instilling or attempting to instill fear, for example, intimidation, threatening physical harm to self, victim, or others, threatening to harm, black mailing, or harassment. It also includes isolating, attempting to isolate victim from friends, family, school, and/or work, for example, withholding access to phone, and/or transportation, undermining victim's personal relationship, harassing others, constant checking up, constant accompaniment, use of unfounded accusation, forced imprisonment.

Emotional abuse includes undermining or attempting to undermine victim's sense of self worth, for example, constant criticism, belittling victim's abilities and competency, name-calling, insults, put down, silent treatment, manipulating the victim's feelings, and emotions to induce guilt, subverting a partner's relationship with the children, repeatedly making and breaking promises.<sup>5</sup>

Economic abuse includes deprivation of all or any economic or financial resources to which the aggrieved person is entitled to under any law or custom whether payable under an order of a court or

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<sup>3</sup> Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 as cited by Jilani, H. and Ahmed, E.M. (2004) "The Legal System & Institutional Responses in Pakistan," in S. Goonesekere (ed.), *Violence, Law and Women's Rights in South Asia*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

<sup>4</sup> Haroon, A. and Zia, A. S. (1995), *Unveiling the Issues: Defining, Understanding and Challenging Violence against Women*, Lahore: ASR Publications.

<sup>5</sup> Chez, N. (1994), Helping the Victims of Domestic Violence, *The American Journal of Nursing*, Vol.94 No.7, pp.32-37.

otherwise or which the aggrieved person requires out of necessity including, but not limited to, household necessities for the aggrieved person and her children, or in the case of any property, jointly or separately owned by the aggrieved person, payment of rent related to the shared household and maintenance; disposal of household effects, any alienation of assets whether moveable or immovable, valuables, shares, securities, bonds and the like or other property in which the aggrieved person has an interest or is entitled to use by virtue of the domestic relationship.<sup>6</sup>

In the article "Women, Victims of Social Evils", Hayat is of the opinion that there are many reasons for violence, but the biggest reason is economic dependence. If a woman is economically dependent then she can be exploited in many ways. As housewives, financially dependent on their husbands, they are mentally conditioned and resigned to accept all mistreatment. If they have children, women are prepared, for their sake, to be abused and maltreated for fear of breaking up the family and exposing the children to financial hardships, such as lack of education, lack of a home and more, resulting in a dark future for the children. Women who decide to leave a violent husband are very reluctant as they have seen the fate of others who had placed their confidence in their own family (father, brother, mother) or taken refuge in women's home like Edhi, Daar-ul-Amaan<sup>7</sup>, which made them even more vulnerable. Returning to the woman's family is not always secure. There could be economic stringencies, family disputes, burden of the children's upbringing; all lead to an un-endurable life and eventually being forced to return to the abusive relationship.

Hayat further states that if women seek refuge in women's organisations, the management of these organisations is more inclined towards reconciliation with an abusive husband through pressure and persuasion even if it could lead to more violence.<sup>8</sup> Rehabilitation of abused women is not the first option. Owing to lack of support from her parent's family, she is coerced to accept reconciliation.

Women's economic status is a significant predictor of the likelihood of abuse. More educated women and women who live in high-income households are less likely to be victims of abuse. Younger women, women with young children, and women who live in low-income households are more likely to be victims of intimate-partner abuse. Farmer and Tiefenthaler found that a woman's own formal schooling (college degree) and the educational attainment of women in her community lower the likelihood of being subjected to abuse. Therefore, improving women's education will likely play an important role in eliminating domestic violence.<sup>9</sup>

Women whose dependency on marriage is high tend to experience more physical violence at the hands of their husbands, because wives who are highly dependent on their marriages are less able to discourage, avoid or put an end to abuse than women in marriages where the balance of resources

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<sup>6</sup> Misra, P. (2007), Magnitude and Forms of Domestic Violence, in *Domestic Violence against Women: Legal Control and Judicial Response*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, pp.167-193.

<sup>7</sup> Edhi is a charity organisation while Daar-ul-Amman is a State Department.

<sup>8</sup> Hayat, A. A. (1995), Domestic Abuse, in *Women: Victims of Social Evils*, Karachi: Press Corporation of Pakistan, p.29

<sup>9</sup> Farmer, A. and Tiefenthaler, J. (2001), Explaining the Recent Decline in Domestic Violence, *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp.158-172.

<http://www.nasams.org/DMS/Documents/1195248210.25/Explaining%20Decline%20in%20Domestic%20Violence.pdf> [accessed on 20 March 2012]

is nearly equal between spouses. Dependent wives have no alternatives to marriage and less power to negotiate with their husbands to change their behaviour. Thus marital dependency reinforces the likelihood that women will tolerate physical abuse from their husbands. This dependency is of two types, one is subjective dependency (emotional and psychological dependency) and the other is objective dependency (economic dependency). Married women who do not work and thus have no potential for economic self-sufficiency are objectively dependent on their husbands, even if they are not aware of this dependency.<sup>10</sup>

The inferior status of women and their economic dependency confine women to a situation, where they can hardly escape domestic violence and abusive relationships. And if the family is living under economic stress then the women of the family become more at the risk of domestic violence. Violence against women particularly violence in the family is often accepted by the community at large on the basis of family honor, tradition and religion.<sup>11</sup>

It has been documented that women's greater mobility, decision-making power and control of resources reinforce the changes in gender relations and rules, which govern women's behavior within the family and the community more broadly. These changes also facilitate transformations in men's behavior vis-à-vis women, including the unquestioned rights of a husband to resort to physical violence. Koenig, Ahmed, Hussain, and Muzamadar,<sup>12</sup> discussing the issue of domestic violence in rural Bangladesh, are of the point of view that even the participation of women in savings and credit groups not only enhances solidarity among them but also reinforces changes in gender relations, including the right of men to resort to violence.

The economic structure of a society is an important determinant of women's subordinate status at home. Wife abuse is linked to the economic structure of a society in which men hold power. Gender inequality persists because control over important resources is largely determined not by personal factors but structural conditions and by the overall gender ideology that prevails in a particular society. Furthermore, gender inequality at home translates into gender inequality in the labor market and vice versa.<sup>13</sup>

This study aimed at understanding and distinguishing the levels of awareness about domestic violence among working and non-working women. Are working women in a stronger position than non-working women to take any steps against domestic violence? To what extent are housewives, dependent on their husbands, unable to take any steps against domestic violence? Additionally, the

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<sup>10</sup> Kalmuss, S. D. and Straus, A. M. (1982), *Wife's Marital Dependency and Wife Abuse*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol.44 No.2, pp.277-285

<sup>11</sup> Skrobanek, S. (1993), *Violence Against Women: Forms and Remedies*, Paper presented at an NGO Symposium Workshop *Violence Against Women Manila*

<sup>12</sup> Koenig, A. M., Ahmed, S., Hussain, B. M & Mozumder, A. K. (2003), *Women's Status and Domestic Violence in Rural Bangladesh: Individual and Community Level Effects*, *Demography*, Vol.40 No.2, pp.269-288

<sup>13</sup> Lupri, E., Grandin, E and Brinkerhoff, B. M. (1994), *Socio-Economic Status and Male Violence in the Canadian Home: A Reexamination*, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, Vol.19 No.1, pp.47-73

research explores the impact of education, economic empowerment and financial situation on levels of awareness about domestic violence.

For the purposes of this paper and based on the literature and theoretical framework set out thus far, the researcher had hypothesised that economically-independent women become more aware of domestic violence and are less at the risk of being abused than housewives.

This research has used both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to determine the difference in levels of awareness about domestic violence between economically-dependent and economically-independent women. It has also explored to what extent education as a factor plays a role in reducing or increasing the level of awareness about domestic violence in the locality of New Lalazar (Rawalpindi).

The sample size used was 40 females, who are from New Lalazar in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Of the 40, 20 were working women and the rest were housewives. In order to draw comparisons between working women and housewives regarding their level of awareness about domestic violence, the researcher got easy access to both categories of respondents, i.e., those who were involved in paid economic activity outside the home, and housewives. The educational status of these women is given in table 2.

To obtain the data non-probability purposive convenient sampling technique was used. The reason for using purposive sampling was that the data was not available on working women in the area from census or the local council records; therefore probability sampling could not have been used. To obtain data the researcher gained access to enterprises, like colleges, schools, beauty parlors and tailoring centers in the area, to collate a list of women working there. From this extended list of working women, another list of 20 women was generated who were conveniently accessible. The selected 20 women were then interviewed. To compare working women with non-working women interviews from 20 housewives were also taken. A semi-structured questionnaire was developed to conduct the research. The interviews focused on the respondents' points of view about domestic violence, and assessed to what extent economic independence impacted on the level of awareness about domestic violence.

The operational definitions of variables used in the study are as follows:

- *Economic Independence*: refers to a condition where individual women and men have their own access to the full range of economic opportunities and resources, which enable them to shape their lives and enable them to meet their own needs and those of their dependants. It recognises that women are economic players who contribute substantially to the household budget.<sup>14</sup>
- *Domestic Violence*: in the present study domestic violence is taken as, physical, verbal and psychological abuse committed by the husband against the wife.
- *Level of Awareness*: is operationally defined as how well the respondents were aware about domestic violence. The indicators to assess the level of awareness were:

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<sup>14</sup> Federal/provincial/Territorial strategic framework, 2001.

- a) Opinion of respondents about domestic violence
- b) Reasons of domestic violence given by respondents
- c) Opinions of respondents regarding the right of husband to be violent
- d) Responses regarding reporting incidents of domestic violence to concerned authorities
- e) Opinions of respondents regarding their reaction in case of physical violence by their husband
- f) Responses about the steps to be taken to curb domestic violence

The responses to these indicators were assessed qualitatively. For example indicator (a) was assessed against 3 types of responses (i) Physical Abuse (ii) Physical and Verbal Abuse (iii) Physical, verbal and Psychological Abuse. Those who opted for response (i) were least aware, whereas those who opted for (iii) were most aware. The results of these indicators are shown in tables 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10.

- *Higher Education*: Higher secondary school certificate or above (12 years of schooling or above).
- *Less Education*: Secondary school certificate or below (10 years of schooling or below).

## Results and Analyses

### Demographics of both working and non-working women

**Table 1: Percentage and frequency distribution of age of respondents**

Age	Housewives		Working women	
	F	%	F	%
20-25	15	75	13	65
25-30	3	15	4	20
30-35	2	10	3	15

**Table 2: Percentage and frequency distribution of education of respondents**

Education	House wives		Working women	
	F	%	F	%
Below Matriculation	6	30.0	6	30.0
Matriculation	4	20.0	4	20.0
Intermediate	3	15.0	3	15.0
Graduate	3	15.0	3	15.0
Post Graduate	4	20.0	4	20.0

**Table 3: Percentage and frequency distribution of opinion about domestic violence**

	Housewives				Working women			
	Less Educated		Highly Educated		Less Educated		Highly Educated	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Physical Abuse	5	50.0	3	30.0	3	30.0	2	20.0
Physical and Verbal Abuse	3	30.0	4	40.0	5	50.0	2	20.0
Physical, verbal and Psychological Abuse	2	20.0	3	30.0	2	20.0	6	60.0

The majority of respondents were from the 20-25 age-group to see the level of awareness of social issues among the younger generation.

The above table indicates that the women who work outside their homes and who are comparatively more educated are more aware about the issues of domestic violence. Sixty percent of women who had higher education and were involved in paid employment considered psychological abuse as domestic violence too, while only 30 percent of highly-educated housewives considered psychological abuse as domestic violence. On the other hand, 50 percent of less-educated housewives considered physical abuse as domestic violence.

**Table 4: Percentage and frequency distribution of the reasons of domestic violence**

	Housewives				Working women			
	Less Educated		Highly Educated		Less Educated		Highly Educated	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
Financial Pressure	2	20.0	2	20.0	1	10.0	0	0
Incompatibility of thoughts	1	10.0	1	10.0	1	10.0	2	20.0
Joint Family System	2	20.0	2	20.0	3	30.0	1	10.0
Forced marriage	1	10.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Illiteracy	4	40.0	5	50.0	5	50.0	7	70.0

Table 4 indicates that 20 percent of less-educated housewives and 20 percent of highly-educated housewives, 10 percent of less-educated working women and none of the highly-educated working women considered financial pressure as a reason for domestic violence. About 10 percent less-

educated housewives and 10 percent highly-educated housewives, 10 percent less-educated working women and 20 percent of highly-educated working women considered mental compatibility as the main reason for domestic violence. Meanwhile 20 percent of less-educated housewives and 20 percent of highly-educated housewives, 30 percent of less-educated working women and 10 percent of highly-educated working women considered the joint-family system as the reason for domestic violence. Only 10 percent of less-educated housewives considered forced marriages as the reason for domestic violence while none of the other categories of women considered forced marriages as reason enough to instigate domestic violence. More than anything else, illiteracy turned out to be a big culprit. Forty percent of less-educated housewives and 50 percent of highly-educated housewives, 50 percent of less-educated working women and as much as 70 percent of highly-educated working women considered illiteracy as a reason for domestic violence.

The role of illiteracy in increasing domestic violence and education enabling a decline in domestic violence is supported in the 2001 study by Farmer & Tiefenthaler. They state that a lack of education can become the reason of domestic violence. The researchers further state that a women's own formal schooling (college degree) and the educational attainment of women in her community lowers the risk of her being abused.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 5: Percentage and frequency distribution of opinions regarding the right of a husband to be violent**

	Housewives				Working women			
	Less Educated		Highly Educated		Less Educated		Highly Educated	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No	9	90.0	10	100	10	100	10	100
Don't Know	1	10.0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Surprisingly a very small percentage of the less-educated or none of highly-educated housewives believed their husbands have a right to misbehave with his wife. Only 10 percent of the less-educated housewives were not sure about it. Every single working woman interviewed also believed their husbands do not have the right to misbehave with them. This is indicative of the respondents' awareness of their rights and that they wanted their husbands to treat them with respect.

<sup>15</sup> Farmer, A. and Tiefenthaler, J. (2001), Explaining the Recent Decline in Domestic Violence, *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp.158-172, <http://www.nasams.org/DMS/Documents/1195248210.25/Explaining%20Decline%20in%20Domestic%20Violence.pdf> [accessed on 20 March 2012]



**Table 6: Percentage and frequency distribution of responses about the effect of working on the occurrence of domestic violence**

	Housewives				Working women			
	Less Educated		Highly Educated		Less Educated		Highly Educated	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	8	80.0	9	90.0	9	90.0	10	100
No	2	20.0	1	10.0	0	0	0	0
Don't Know	0	0	0	0	1	10.0	0	0

A majority of women whether they were involved in paid economic activity or not, were of the opinion that economic independence of women can play a very effective role in reducing domestic violence. The above table indicates that 80 percent of less-educated housewives and 90 percent of highly-educated housewives and less-educated working women and 100 percent of highly-educated working women believed economic independence of women can play an important role in reducing domestic violence. Only 20 percent of less-educated housewives and 10 percent of highly-educated housewives thought economic independence has no impact on the occurrence of domestic violence.

A woman's economic independence enables her to make important decisions by and for herself; also enabling her to take action (like going to police, or leaving the house of husband) against domestic violence. This could also be because of the awareness she gets from the outer world. Economically-empowered women are relatively at less risk of being the victims of domestic violence. Farmer & Tiefenthaler also discussed that women's economic status is a significant predictor of the likelihood of abuse. Therefore, continuing the trend of improving the opportunities for women to get jobs can be a key factor in reducing domestic violence.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 7: Percentage and frequency distribution of opinions about the wife's income as a perceived threat for husband's status as bread winner**

	Housewives				Working women			
	Less Educated		Highly Educated		Less Educated		Highly Educated	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	6	60.0	5	50.0	4	40.0	2	20.0
No	4	40.0	5	50.0	6	60.0	8	80.0
Don't Know	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

<sup>16</sup> Farmer, A. and Tiefenthaler, J. (2001), Explaining the Recent Decline in Domestic Violence, *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp.158-172, <http://www.nasams.org/DMS/Documents/1195248210.25/Explaining%20Decline%20in%20Domestic%20Violence.pdf> [accessed on 20 March 2012]

Table 7 shows that a majority of housewives consider a wife's income to be a threat to a husband's status as the bread winner, but a majority of working women were of the opposite opinion. Majority of housewives considered wife's income as a threat to the husband's breadwinner status because they say that if the wife is earning then the husband would feel that his status is decreasing because of wife's earning, and when he will feel that his status is decreasing then he will use violence to maintain his status. A study by Macmillan & Gartner supports this argument. According to their research, if a wife is also earning or earning more than the husband then it becomes a reason for spousal violence. Some working women also responded that a wife's income is a threat to the husband's status but a majority of them felt it is not a threat as long as the wife earns less than the husband. And as their findings indicated almost all of them were earning less than their husband so the husbands did not have any problem with their earnings.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 8: Percentage and frequency distribution of responses regarding reporting an incident of domestic violence to concerned authorities**

	Housewives				Working women			
	Less Educated		Highly Educated		Less Educated		Highly Educated	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Yes	3	30.0	4	40.0	6	60.0	7	70.0
No	7	70.0	6	60.0	4	40.0	3	30.0
Don't Know	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The table shows that majority of housewives whether less- or highly-educated thought that women should not report incidents of domestic violence to the police or any other organisation. On the other hand, the majority of working women, both less- and highly-educated, were of the opinion that women should report any act of domestic violence to the concerned authorities. This indicates that women involved in paid economic activities are more aware about domestic violence and are willing and bolder to act immediately. Working women are independent and they can fulfill their basic needs of life; so they can act against domestic violence. But housewives are totally dependent on their husbands. Therefore housewives feel they are not in a position to take any action against domestic violence. This argument is supported by a study by Skrobanek, which states that a woman inferior status and her economic dependency confine her to situations where she can hardly escape from domestic violence and an abusive relationship. Therefore housewives consider it to be dangerous for their marital relations to go to police or any other organisation.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Macmillan, R. Gartener, R. (1999), When She Brings Home the Bacon: Labor Force Participation and the Risk of Spousal Violence against Women, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol.61 No.4, pp.947-948

<sup>18</sup> Skrobanek, S. (1993), Violence Against Women: Forms and Remedies, Paper presented at the NGO Symposium Workshop *Violence Against Women*, Manila

**Table 9: Percentage and frequency distribution of opinions regarding respondent's reaction in case of physical violence by their husband**

	Housewives				Working women			
	Less Educated		Highly Educated		Less Educated		Highly Educated	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Don't take any action	4	40.0	3	30.0	2	20.0	1	10.0
Go to police	2	20.0	4	40.0	5	50.0	7	70.0
Tell parents	4	40.0	3	30.0	3	30.0	2	20.0

The findings indicate that a majority of housewives would either do nothing, or would tell their parents if they were physically abused by their husbands. But a majority of working women said that they would go to police. As housewives are financially dependent on their husbands they say that if they would take any action then it will create financial problems for them and for their children. But as working women don't have the fear losing their economic stability they were confident about reporting domestic violence to the police or telling their parents.

## Conclusion

This research concludes that working women are comparatively at less risk of domestic violence because of independent control over resources, and also because of better awareness about domestic violence, as compared to housewives. Education has a great effect on the level of awareness about domestic violence. Highly-educated working women are more aware of their rights regarding domestic violence than the less-educated women who participated in the research.

This consciousness gives them the confidence to fight for their rights. However, housewives are not fully aware of their rights and they (in case of domestic violence) are hesitant to take any action. The government should take measures to provide information about the rights of women and the local media should also play a role to make this possible and empower women to fight domestic violence.

This study shows that working women are less at risk of domestic violence and have more awareness regarding it. Therefore women should be given opportunities to get higher education and jobs, especially in patriarchal societies like Pakistan. Because by going outside the home they can not only be more aware about domestic violence and related issues, but also can work to solve these issues.

This study can be a baseline for future researches on the topic, and can be helpful to explore the other areas and issues about domestic violence in Pakistan.