

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SEXUAL ABUSE OF WOMEN IN PAKISTAN: A VICTIM-PRONE-MODEL OF SEXUAL VICTIMIZATIONSheraz Ali¹, Muhammad Asghar Khan^{*2}, Majid Khan³**Original Article**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify and explain the hidden factors contributing to victimization and revictimization of women in Pashtun society. This study was conducted in six districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, district Peshawar, Nowshera, Mardan, Abbottabad, Upper Dir and Swat. This study applied qualitative research method. A total of 30 victims of sexual abuse were interviewed in 06 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the victims of sexual abuse. In this study, sexual abuse was measured as non-consensual sexual contact that caused physical and emotional harm to the victim. Victims of sexual assault or harassment in the absence of physical contact were excluded from this study. The main findings included inequality, domesticity, poverty and economic dependency that made women vulnerable to victimization and revictimization. The victim-prone-model basically shows these factors that underpin each other and change in a cycle. One factor supports the other and the successive factor is basically the outcome of the former.

Keywords: Sexual Abuse, Gender Inequality, Domesticity, Poverty, Economic Dependency

Introduction

There are various factors that contribute to sexual abuse of women in Pakistan, however, proneness of the victims to sexual victimization is associated to some inherently induced factors as well as external factors. The external factors include poverty, illiteracy, peer-pressure, social exclusion and lack of exposure to opportunities of recreation and skill development. The inherently induced factors include proneness to drugs, alcoholism, frustration and perversion. These factors vary from society to society and every country is ranked on the basis of protection and participation guaranteed to women. Pakistan is ranked 125th on the gender development index (GDI) and 99th on the gender empowerment measure (GEM) while standing 6th most populous country in the world (Aurat Foundation Report, 2011; UNDP, 2010). Despite of the facts that Pakistan has incorporated gender protection measures in its women empowerment programs, however, the incidences of violence against women demonstrate that women are still vulnerable to victimization in the country. Treating women as the subordinate being is a common vogue of the patriarchal mentality which adds more to the problem of sexual victimization and re-victimization of women. Sexual victimization has dire health consequences for the victims. Both physical and mental health are directly affected by the incidence of sexual victimization. Even death of the

victim occurs in sensitive cultural setup in the form of murder for honor, suicide or death caused by sexually transmitted infections.

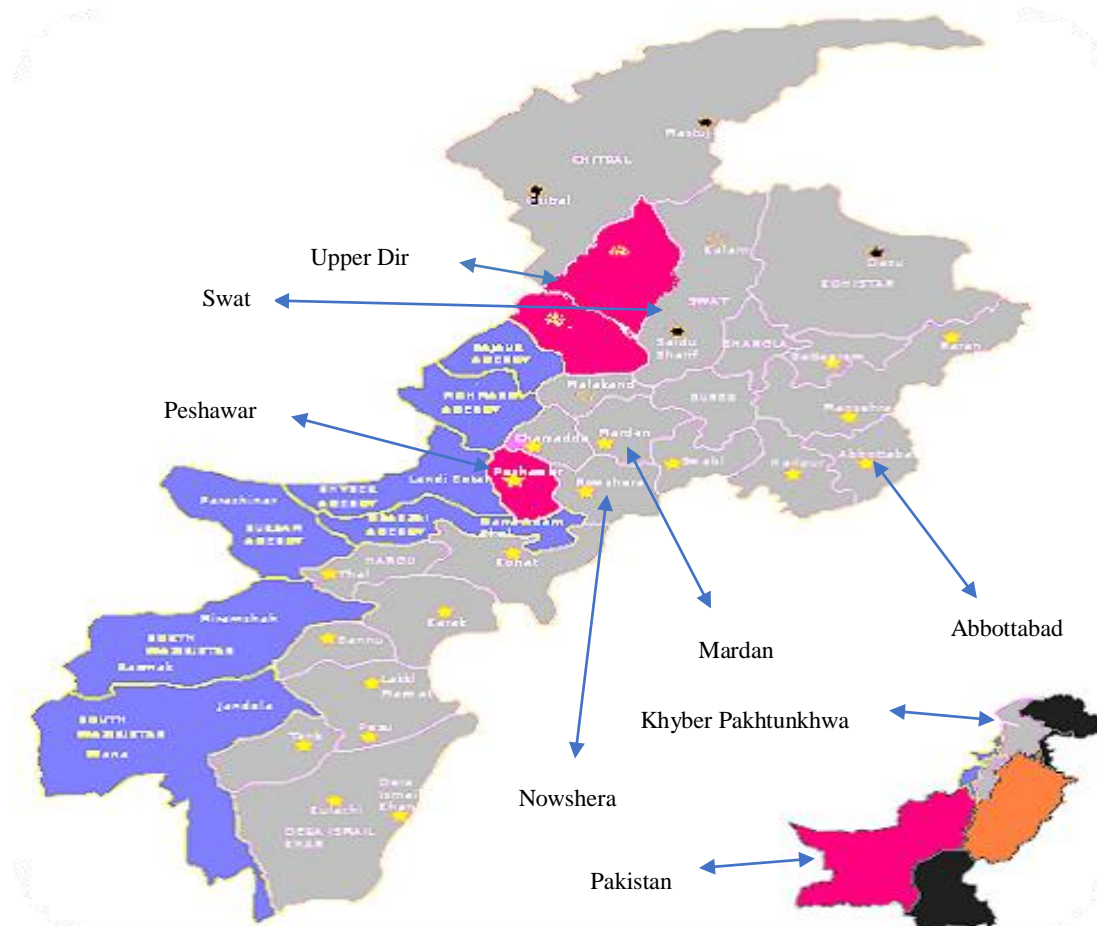
Sexual abuse or violence means an unwanted or coercive sexual intercourse without the consent of the woman (UNDP, 2017; Carr, and Karen, 2004; National Center for Victims of Crime, 2015; UNDP, 2010). According to World Report on Violence and Health, any non-consensual sexual activity that involves physical or emotional force is called sexual abuse or violence (Krug et al, 2003). Sexual abuse or violence is an act that is non-consensual and results in physical or emotional harm (Ayesha, Sadaf, and Elishma, 2016). This definition encompasses many factors across legal and criminological studies. It keeps on tossing with the context. In legal studies the severity of the incidence is measured on the basis of impact or harm caused to the victim (Imran, 2010). Consent or absence of consent is the primary evidence that determines an act either criminal or non-criminal. Similarly, an act, either offensive or unoffensive, is determined by the presence or absence of consent. It means that every act that confiscates a woman's liberty to consent and results in physical or emotional harm is an act of sexual abuse.

In Pakistan sexual violence is a complex phenomenon due to the inherent cultural factors associated with sexual victimization of women such as social ostracization, stigmatization, honour killing and other norms of behavior. In Pakistan, these socio-economic and cultural factors add more to the vulnerability of women to sexual victimization. Around 60 to 70 percent of the victims of sexual abuse do not intend to legal aid or formal justice system due to fear of social ostracization or excommunication (Maliha and Sarah, 2011). A recent study conducted by the Aurat Foundation suggests that approximately 8 women are raped everyday in Pakistan (Aurat Foundation, 2014). Another study conducted by the Aurat Foundation suggests that in 2012 on average 04 women were raped, 04 were murdered, 06 were kidnapped and 03 committed suicide in the country (Ayesha et al., 2016). These figures were reported cases and the data were collected from the police department (Aurat Foundation, 2014). The reasons of victimization in similar incidents are usually ambiguous/obscured. Such as the reasons for committing suicide particularly among women are often unknown, however, incidents of overwhelming stress such as sexual abuse and extreme fear of social stigmatization are the strong contributing factors.

There are numerous factors contributing to sexual victimization of women in Pakistan, however, economic factor reigns supreme as compared to other social and cultural factors. Economic inequality between men and women breeds dependency in women that negatively affects their social role and status. Poverty, low social status, lack of education, domesticity and social exclusion are interconnected variables that give birth to relational health problems (Nosheen, 2011). The origin of these factors is vested in the prevailing patriarchal social structure (Walby, 1990). Patriarchal mentality affects social role of the women negatively (Baber, 2007). In most of the patriarchal societies, women are given the subordinate status which gives birth to many social and economic problems. These economic and social problems make women more vulnerable to sexual victimization. Moreover, the dysfunctional justice system discourages victims from intending to legal courts which adds more to their plight (United Nations, 2006). The main objective of this research study is to investigate factors that contribute to victims' proneness in Pakistan. The following passage consist of a brief research methodology, data analysis and presentation and a brief conclusion drawn upon the primary interviews conducted with the victims of sexual abuse.

Material and Method

In this study the term sexual abuse means a non-consensual act that involves penetration and physical or emotional harm. Therefore, the target population of this study were the victims of sexual abuse and the target area was Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The data for this study was collected from the victims of sexual abuse from 06 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is located in the Northwest of Pakistan. Map of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is given in the following figure with locations from where the data was collected.



Qualitative research method was applied in this study because qualitative research method is comparatively more flexible particularly in sensitive enquiries (Lee, 1993; Mason, 1996; Oakley, 2000). Flexibility of this method could be understood from the degree of its adaptability to local context particularly in delicate enquiries. In addition, qualitative research method gives more space to social actors to interpret the way they define and explain the social world through their experiences (Mason, 1996; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003). The methodological choice we adopted for this study was qualitative research with semi-structured interviews. We were more confident with semi-structured interviews because this method provided us greater space to develop an insight into the problem under investigation (Mason, 1996; Atkinson and Silverman, 1997; Oakley, 2000).

In this study we conducted 30 interviews with respondents who were sexually victimized and arranged 02 FGDs. We conducted all the interviews face-to-face and none of these interviews

were conducted by other means such as phone. While working in a culturally sensitive area, we faced many problems in accessing victims of sexual violence, however, our social network was very helpful and effective in accessing these victims. KhwendoTolena is a social organization that provides legal aid to sexually victimized women in district Swat, helped us in identifying and arranging interviews for us with the victims of sexual abuse. With the help of this organization we interviewed only those victims to whom they provided legal aid while those victims who were involved in commercial sex, were interviewed in places they consented for. Some of the respondents were involved in prostitution and they usually earned from Rs. 500 to 2000 (US\$ 5 to 20) per hour, therefore, we paid them for the time they spared for the interviews. It was unethical to make payment to them, however, the cause for accessing them through these means was far valuable than the harm inflicted to them. Usually in societies divided on gender and ethical lines, access to such women is very much restricted which ultimately affect their status because of obscurity of the real issue (Hornsby-Smith, 1993).

It was really hard for us to talk to victims of sexual abuse in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, however, being male feminists – the advocates of feminism as a movement to end sexist oppression and inequality – we acted in the field with the will and commitment to contribute to feminism by identifying the hidden factors contributing to sexual victimization and revictimization of women.

In Pashtun society interacting with women and particularly with victims of sexual violence was a highly sophisticated and herculean task, however, being male-feminists we were more committed and determined against the general perception that feminist research is by, for and about women (Gluck and Patai, 1991 as cited by Gilbert, 1994). In addition, female-to-male interaction is more productive and informative than female-to-female interaction because of the insult and jealousy factors (Goodwin, 2002; Simmons, 2002) which lack in male-to-female interaction. Moreover, there is a real need for collective struggle and determination to end sexism and sexual exploitation by men and women together and unless men share equal responsibility feminist movement will fail to eradicate the very sexist contradiction (Eunson, 2012; Hooks, 1984).

Data Presentation and Analysis

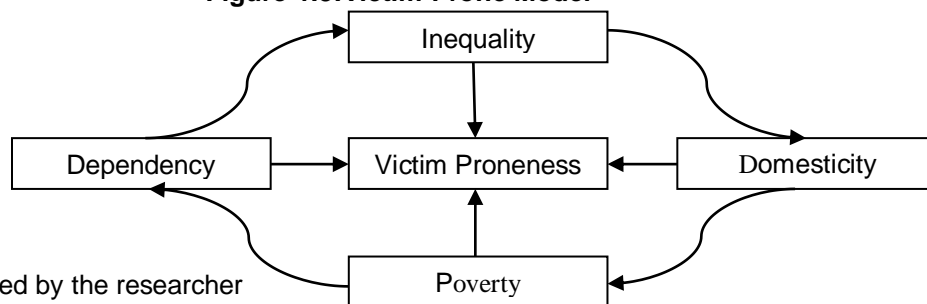
Table 1.2 shows the details of the respondents and the nature of abuse they experienced. The victims were divided into four categories. These categories included fraternal abuse victims, incest victims, rape victims and victims engaged with commercial sex. Fraternal abuse is an abuse where the victimizer is the victim's brother-in-law or father-in-law. Incest is an abuse where the victimizer is close relative of the victim. Rape is either carried out by a stranger or by an acquaintance. In commercial sex the victims were once or twice abused and then forced to prostitute their bodies. In fraternal abuse we found only those women who either trafficked, given in enmity (swara) or bartered (watasata). In this study we found only one victim of incest and the incident was opportunistic. Among rape victims we found three incidents opportunistic and one incident incapacitated. Victims engaged with commercial sex were divided into four sub-categories. There were 08 victims of sexual violence, 01 victim got eloped with another boy who later on forced her to prostitution. Of these respondents 03 were the victims of deception and 01 was induced sexually.

Table-1.2 shows the details of the victims and the nature of abuse

Nature of Abuse	Type of Violence	Nature of Violence	No. of Victims	Total
Fraternal Abuse	Swara	Given in Enmity	03	12
	Trafficking	Priced	07	
		Bartered	02	
Incest	Raped by Blood Relative	Opportunistic	01	01
Rape	Strangers' Rape	Opportunistic	03	04
		Incapacitated	01	
Commercial Sex	Sexual Violence	Physical Harm	03	13
		Sexual Torture	05	
	Elopement	Elopement with Stranger	02	
	Deception	Deception by Stranger	03	

Since, this research study focused on the victim-prone model which means highlighting factors that contribute to women proneness to victimization, therefore, both internally induced and external factors were explained. Factors contributing to the involvement of women in commercial sex are numerous. Among these factors, poverty reigns supreme. Poverty compels women prostitute their bodies. Among the respondents many women reached to this extent because of their economic vulnerability. The perpetrators' intrigue was effective on women who were poor and they did not have any opportunity of protecting themselves or their children against harsh time. In addition, sexual deception or inducement was stronger in cases where economic vulnerability was high. Poverty o increases economic frustration and creates a cycle of humiliation. Every economically vulnerable woman is trapped in this vicious cycle of socio-economic humiliation. When there lacks economic opportunities or opportunities for earning income to sustain a better life frustration reaches to extreme in such situation. In such situation of economic stagnation tendencies towards commercial sex heighten specifically among women (Brents and Sanders, 2010). Similarly, in this study majority of the victims were uneducated and they were from the lower stratum with no opportunities for income earning. The following model (figure-1.3) was developed from the data collected from the victims which show proneness of the victim to sexual violence. This model is named as Victim-Prone-Model which means that in every cycle it makes the victim prone to be victimized.

Figure-1.3:Victim-Prone Model



Source: Designed by the researcher

The victim-prone model shows proneness of the victim to sexual abuse. Inequality, domesticity, poverty and dependency are the contributing factors of victim proneness. Considering woman as the subordinate being is a common problem prevailing in societies plagued by patriarchal mentality. This practice is fundamentally unique and adds more to women victimization. Miller and Burack (1995) are of the view that inequality in male-female power relationship is the fundamental factor for understanding women victimization. The feminist theory argues that inequality in power relations is a fundamental cause of woman victimization (Johnson, 1997; Miller and Burack, 1993). Many interpersonal crimes are consequent upon unequal power relations. Similarly, in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*, the patriarchal social structure has bred inequality specifically in male-female power relationship. Feminist theorists emphasis more on patriarchal mentality as the contributing factor to gender inequality (Franklin, 2011). According to Mama (1996) violence against women in Pakistan is basically a tool of enforcing the unequal distribution of power in male-female relationship. Baber (2007) argues that inequality in male-female socio-economic affairs breeds many problems for women than men. In victim-prone model inequality is one of the contributing factors to victim-proneness to victimization. Denial of share in inheritance, confiscation of the rights to education and employment are common discriminatory practices that make women prone to victimization. In this study, none of the respondents was educated. One of the victims explained that 'man is given priority over woman in the family in all affairs, particularly in choosing spouse and sharing the inheritance while woman is neglected in such affairs'. This inequality and discriminatory behavior is the result of patriarchal mentality prevailing in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*.

Domesticity is the second contributing factor to victim-proneness. Confining woman to the four walls of a house is such a practice that is bred by patriarchal mentality and the unequal male-female relationship (Nash, 2004). Inequality gives birth to domesticity. Since, the power relationship is dominated by male in the family, therefore, the role of a woman is predestined by the patriarch. In patriarchal societies, women are usually confined to domestic sphere while the social and economic affairs are controlled by male. One of the victims elaborated that;

"If a woman does not confine herself to the four walls of a house, she is neglected in relationship choices by male and it affects her social status the most."

Though, women prefer to keep themselves confined to the four walls of a house but this practice is socially imposed on them. Every female child is trained to be pious and pure. For purity can only be maintained by domesticity. This socio-cultural practice makes a woman vulnerable to victimization because it adds more to the conducive situational characteristic of women victimization. Situational characteristics play a significant role in understanding the etiology of women victimization (Franklin, et al., 2011). A woman's proximity and vulnerability to the perpetrator and even routine activities that make her susceptible, all account for her victimization. Spending more time within the four walls of a house in close proximity with the perpetrator, makes a woman vulnerable to victimization. According to Tarar and Pulla (2014), majority of the sexual violence incidents in Pakistan take place within the four walls of the house. In this study, it was found that majority of the victims were abused within the four walls of their houses, particularly those who were the victims of fraternal abuse. Their confinement to their houses made them prone to victimization.

Poverty is the third contributing factor in the cycle of the victim-prone model. Poverty is the inability of an individual to meet the basic needs of life (Todaro and Smith, 2010) but here poverty is not an instinct factor rather it is socially constructed. The practice of keeping women secluded and confined to domestic affairs, make them economically vulnerable. Denial of their share in

inheritance, confiscation of their right to own property, infringement on their right to employment and education are such causes that make women economically very weak and vulnerable. Poverty makes women vulnerable to violence because it limits their access to means of protection (Gurr et al., 2008). According to Gerstein (2000) many women experience pain and sufferings because of poverty. Pain and sufferings usually increase for those women who lack means of protection or income to sustain their life independently. Lacking choices to access means of protection and ability to sustain independent life make women prone to victimization. In this study, 07 out of 12 women were sold for different amounts, where poverty was one of the significant contributing factors for their trafficking. Of the victims engaged with commercial sex, 02 out of 13 victims joined sex industry due to economic factors. One of the respondents replied to a question; why did you start prostitution?

“I started this work because I had no means of protecting my children and myself. I left my family for my husband but he was not capable to give me protection”

It means that poverty is one of the significant contributing factors to women victimization. Poverty makes a victim prone to victimization and re-victimization. In the victim-prone model poverty is the outcome of domesticity and gives birth to dependency syndrome in women.

Economic factor is one of the strong contributing factors in women victimization that makes a woman either dependent on man or independent in social affairs (Lerner, 1989; Mies, 1988). Dependency of women on men for social and economic support affects their role and social status negatively. One main reason accounting for women dependency on men is the sexual division of labour (Annemette and McLanahan, 1986) where domestic affairs are managed by women while the social affairs are controlled and managed by men. Patriarchy is also one of the strong contributing factors of women dependency on men (Bhutta and Haider, 2013). Whatever the etiology of women dependency on men could be, however, it contributes to women victimization. In the victim-prone model dependency is an outcome of poverty – an output of patriarchal social structure. When a woman does not have any income earning opportunities, she remains dependent on man for economic support. Man gives economic support to woman in exchange for obedience and respect (Tarar and Pulla, 2014) rather than resolving her economic problems. Economic support to a woman is associated with obedience that makes a woman more submissive and obedient to man. This mentality and practice increases women vulnerability to victimization more. One of the victims of fraternal abuse explained;

“My parents were dependent on my uncle who used to give them money to spend but when I was sold by my uncle my parents did not say anything in resistance.”

Dependency does not include only economic support rather it covers a range of behavior particularly in decision making, as well as, the sense of femininity and masculinity (Garlick, 2016). Cultural loading in this behavior is more than socio-economic factors. As elaborated by one of respondents that ‘if a woman does not obey her husband, she is known as a bad woman’. This norm of obedience is followed by women because it is patriarchal in nature. This behavior is in fact an imbalanced pattern of male-female relationship that favours men more than women.

Conclusion

Gender inequality, vested in the origin of patriarchal mentality, breeds many problems for women in Pakistan. Inequality is a rudimentary cause of victimization that underpins many social problems for women and affects their social status quite negatively. In this study we identified that

domesticity of women keeps them excluded from the social world and it restricts their participation in education and jobs. Domesticity of women is a strong cultural factor which every woman intends to. Gender inequality is a contributing factor to domesticity and domesticity makes women economically weak because it restricts their participation in economic opportunities. Poverty is the outcome of domesticity and it gives birth to dependency in women because for economic support women always depend on men. This dependency syndrome makes women vulnerable to exploitation and victimization.

Sexual victimization and revictimization is such a trap which never releases women unless they get economic power and independence. Economic factor is comparatively a strong factor that contributes more to their vulnerability to exploitation. In this study, many victims of sexual abuse particularly those who were engaged with commercial sex were economically disadvantaged. Factor that highly contributed to their exploitation was poverty. Poverty made them more vulnerable to victimization and revictimization. Inequality, domesticity, poverty and dependency are those factors identified in this study that underpin each other in a cycle and contribute to victimization and revictimization of women in each phase.

Poverty, inequality, domestic violence or social exclusion are such problems that could be easily abolished from a society through proper mechanism of participation for every woman in the light of the feminist ecology. Every single problem faced by women could be resolved through education and participation so that women could learn from experiences and exposure. Education and skill development programs basically provide an opportunity for women to learn about decision making and expression.

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