



Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan - a Critical Analysis

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Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan - A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Over the past seventy odd years since its independence, Pakistan has struggled in investing the right focus and resources towards improving its people's lives. One particular challenge as part of this broader scheme of problems is gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is a global menace. Although this problem has some common socio economic root causes, each country has its own unique challenges as well. Pakistan faces high incidence of gender-based violence not only due to lack of education, poverty and lack of awareness but also because there are severe shortcomings when it comes to state priority that will drive the right cohesive effort to improve women's lives. Secondly, all measures taken by civil society and non-governmental organizations are often frowned upon as liberal and anti-Islamic values and hence the society level support needed for the success of each remedial program is often found to be very weak.

This thesis explores the reason for gender-based violence in detail and underscores the effort already being taken in Pakistan with the realization that this effort is far from enough. The paper also explores unique actions being taken elsewhere in the world that can possibly be reapplied in Pakistan.

Finally, the paper demonstrates that there are two key areas which will have the significant impact on the fight against gender-based violence in Pakistan. The first is to channel the international concern into clear and result oriented political pressure on the Pakistani government in order to get all state level challenges in order. The second is to engage the clergy and Islamic scholars with clear accountability to drive public opinion against all forms of gender-based violence with supportive Islamic narrative.

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Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread violation of human rights. Nearly six out of ten women around the world suffer from some kind of violence in their lifetime - physical or sexual (UN Women, 2019). Although countries have been encouraged by international and regional legal instruments to take the necessary steps required in fighting the problem, GBV continues to occur worldwide in many forms, ranging from domestic violence and sexual abuse, to more severe forms such as honor killings, acid attacks and other forms of femicide. The global prevalence of GBV indicates that the issue is yet to fully be tackled and this has far-reaching consequences. Studies have revealed that GBV leads to physical injuries, disability and even death, while victims also suffer from mental and psychological disorders. According to a World Bank Study, some women fear GBV more than other risks such as war and cancer. In addition to being a violation of human rights, GBV impacts the productivity, human capital and economic growth of societies (UN Women, 2019). An increasing number of countries have made attempts in the form of national plans of actions and legislations to address the ongoing issue of GBV yet in some nations, gaps still remain. One such country is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

In 2011, over 8,539 cases of violence were reported nationwide of which a substantial number accounted for cases of rape and acid attacks (Hadi R. , 2014). Attacks associated with acid have more recently caught the attention of people throughout Pakistan and the media since the end of 2011 when The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill was unanimously passed by the Senate of Pakistan. This monumental bill, recommending fourteen years to life imprisonment for perpetrators of this crime, was followed by another historical bill, The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill, which also concentrated on women-specific issues (Government of Punjab, 2011). Such efforts made by national

authorities somewhat indicated the changing status of women in Pakistan. Nevertheless, gender-based violence continues to remain a challenge in the country, endangering the lives of Pakistani women. It has a social as well as an economic fallout and raises its ugly head in various forms and shapes. In context of GBV being a global phenomenon, this study will discuss and explore possible solutions with a special focus on women in Pakistan

A Brief History of Pakistan

Pakistan has had a tumultuous past since its partition from Bangladesh in 1971 (International Commission of Jurists, 1972). Out of the two major wars with India, the second one happened in 1971. Kashmir, the eastern border and the Bangladesh fiasco all made Pakistan focus on external issues as a nation. The seventies were a decade of reconciliation with the partition. At the same time, a new constitution was rolled out and the political fabric was coming to terms with the new executive structure (Choudhury, 1974). The eighties were when Pakistan fought the real hot war amidst the cold war. Being the direct neighbor to Afghanistan, it suddenly found itself on the frontline. The eighties were spent in Islamization of the state, mostly for political reasons, with an aim to stoke religion as the potent force to enable the nation in rallying against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Now the western border also became an issue as Afghanistan was colloquially labeled as the fifth province of Pakistan (other than its four provinces that made up the country's geographical area). This was a time when the state was intensely externally focused. The country spent the whole of the 80's under direct military rule. And within the military, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was the strongest sub institution that had its tentacles reaching all the way up to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the East, and to India and Sri Lanka in the West (Sirrs, 2016, pp. 125, 148).

With the downfall of the Soviet Union in 1988, the focus shifted towards fixing issues and governance with Afghanistan. The nineties experienced the strong emergence of the Taliban, a militia of amateurs brought up and trained in Pakistan. Pakistan now had a new job - to settle Afghanistan. In 1999, the nation went on to test its nuclear arsenal and as a result, the world imposed sanctions against Pakistan for not agreeing to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) (Sirrs, 2016, p. 175). Post 9/11, the 'War on Terror' started and now Pakistan was again embroiled externally with the Afghan war (khan, 2016). The impact of this intervention by the U.S. and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) on the Afghan side, as well as by Pakistan on the Pakistani side of the border, shifted the bloodshed towards Pakistan (Sirrs, 2016, p. 264). Between 2003 and 2015, there were up to 65,000 casualties in various gun and bomb attacks (Crawford, 2018). The Pakistan Army conducted major war-like operations in the country's rural as well as urban landscape. With the Taliban almost ready to sign a deal with the U.S. on the Afghan side in 2019 and Kashmir talks also very strongly visible in the shorter horizon, for the first time in so many years, Pakistan sees an opportunity to focus on its own internal issues that have gone unchecked and unattended.

Thus, the military, often purported to be the real ruling class in the country, is increasingly focused on internal matters of the country; this is a pivotal indicator of the direction the country has taken. The Inter Services Public Relations, commonly known as the ISPR, or the communications and media wing of the military, is now sometimes seen more important than the ISI, the Pakistani equivalent to the CIA. The ISPR was set up in 1949 with a colonel, a junior to mid-level officer, as its Director General. Today the same platform has a two-star general as its chief (Adache, 2014). In the wake of the recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan a new

economic council was evolved in which one of the members apart from the Prime Minister, is the Army Chief. Pakistan is now focusing on areas such as per capita financial inclusion, internal revenue generation, polio elimination, rights of religious minorities, realignment and resizing of an overarching military and gender issues (tribune , 2019). Take child marriage as an example. It is only now, after 90 years that Pakistan took priority to amend The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929, changing the minimum age to marry to eighteen (Wasim, Child marriage restraint bill sails through Senate, 2019). Marriage without consent at a premature age of less than eighteen is one type of indirect violence against women and a major constituent of gender-based violence in Pakistan. Due to the focus on internal issues over the past couple of years GBV and women rights have taken center stage in Pakistani sociopolitical discourse.

Gender-Based Violence – The Term

Gender-based violence has become one of the most commonly discussed issues of the present time. When it comes to understanding the causes of GBV, its impact and solutions, it is important for one to understand what the term stands for. Gender-based violence is an umbrella term used to refer to the types of violence that affect women. There are several ways to define it.

The term “gender-based violence” was first officially defined as any act 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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/ 104, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (Parveen R. , 2011). This definition is all-encompassing as it describes the types of gender-based violence (physical, sexual and psychological) and

includes both private and public spheres of life. Private acts of violence such as marital rape is often not considered to be as “harmful” and “serious” as other acts of violence because they occur behind closed doors (Gelles, 1977). Thus, this definition specifically highlights that acts of violence taking place in private also fall under the category of GBV.

According to the UNHCR, the term “sexual and gender-based violence” is used to distinguish individuals based on their gender from other types of violence. It includes violent acts such as honor killings, rape, physical and mental torture, mutilation, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, and murder. According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the term “gender-based” offers a new context for understanding abuse against women and girls as it reflects the “unequal power relationship between women and men in society”. Moreover, since the term gender-based violence is often used as a synonym for violence against women, this research uses both terms interchangeably (Parveen R. , 2011, p. 12)

Causes and Risk Factors

Gender-based violence has common causes across societies. Analyzing the causes from different researchers’ lens reveals similar conclusions.

Victoria Rumbold, a consultant to the Population Council, highlights some of the general causes of gender-based violence and sexual abuse in her work, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Africa. She recaps certain evidence-supported factors, identified by the World Health Organization which include:

- “Traditional gender norms that support male superiority and entitlement
- Social norms that tolerate or justify violence against women

- Weak community sanctions against perpetrators
- Poverty
- High levels of crime and conflict in society more generally" (Rumbold, 2008, p. 9)

Gender-based violence is common because of perceived vulnerability of women with a myriad of cultural, social and religious reasons. As we see in the detailed report on the subject by Reuters, the reasons vary. These reasons vary from war and civil unrest to a weak and fractured legal system. Other reasons include poverty and restrictions in freedom of women due to religious values and norms (Belinda Goldsmith, 2018).

In the study conducted by Reuters, it is war and subsequent exploitation of women in the wake of it in Syria and Somalia. The war areas are prone to lawlessness and criminal gangs exploit this opportunity to have women and young girls trafficked into child marriages, slave trade and bonded labor.

The absence of a working legal system is another factor that strongly correlates with GBV prevalence. For instance, rape often goes unreported due to it being taboo and due to lack of trust from the local justice system. This in turn gives offenders more confidence to repeat the crime. Some of the reasons why people do not get caught for violence against women even when their identity is known is because either they are influential people, or the legal system is weak in general, or the crime against women is not considered a crime socially and hence ignored collectively. A case in point is South Africa, where less than 15% accused of rape are taken to trial and less than 5% of the rapists who are tried are convicted (Nagtegaal, 2019).

Similarly, another reason why women may be victimized more is economic instability of the society, where women may be exploited for sex and forced into work they do not agree to. Families in Bulgaria have moved to Greece to work as bonded labor because even that meagre

sum of money would be enough to avoid abject poverty back home which would have led the women into prostitution (AFP, 2008). A third reason that may enable this situation is the incidence of broken families. Young girls who are out in the open and have run away from home due to any reason are more vulnerable than others. A research showed that daughters were seven times more vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence in broken families (Wilson, 2001).

Some societies have high prevalence of gender-based violence due to curbs on individual freedoms on religious or social grounds. In their case study based on Karachi, Pakistan, Rabbani et al emphasize the social causes of domestic violence, specifically asserting that social factors associated with this form of violence stem from “economic backwardness, insufficient protection by laws, a patriarchal society and the low social status of women” (F. Rabbani, 2008, p. 416). They thus support some of the factors identified by the World Health Organization in Rumbold's case study. Countries like Saudi Arabia are constantly in the limelight for not allowing women to drive or travel alone without a male family member accompanying them. In some areas and localities, women in South Asia and Pakistan are discouraged from education or having a job. Although religion is normally labeled as the reason for this, in most cases it is the social interpretation of religion that leads to such practices. FGM in North Africa is also such similar case (Belinda Goldsmith, 2018).

Types and Forms of GBV

While we keep in mind the universal and economic context to GBV, we must appreciate the vastness of the topic. GBV constitutes battering or beating, marital rape, forced abortions, forced births, harassment due to issues of dowry, sexual violence, sexual abuse of female

children in their own house, workforce harassment, trafficking, female genital mutilation and forced marriages. All of this is generally perpetrated by their male partners. In most cases men use their physical power on the women around them (Sell, 2010). All these issues affect women's physical, mental and emotional health (Shrier, 1990). While both genders are a target of gender-based violence, women are affected significantly more and are considered the target (Merry, 2009). The term GBV is used interchangeably with violence against women because most research involves the consideration that women are the weaker sex and are more often discriminated against (United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) , 2019).

The victims face both short and long terms effects in terms of their health, ability to go out and earn their self-respect (Green, 2018). The universality of the issue can also be explained by the fact that gender-based violence exists in offices and homes, in public and private places; it is an issue which is experienced by women from all walks of life. A study found out that violence against women existed in almost all educational institutes around the world (Thomas, 2015). Reports and findings presented by UN Women states that, one of three students aged 11 to 15 years have suffered from bullying at their schools by their peers. Boys were more likely to experience physical bullying while girls were subjected to psychological and emotional bullying. The report further explains the meaning of psychological bullying stating that the girls were ignored, they felt left out, and they were mentally harassed. GBV in school is a hindrance in the right to education and schooling of girls (UNESCO, 2018). Females studying in universities have also faced violence such as sexual assault on campus. It has been found by UN Women (2018) from a survey the organization conducted which comprised of 27 universities of the United States in 2015, that 23 percent of the women reported sexual misconduct and sexual assault. (UN Women, 2018).

Sexual harassment is the most common form of gender-based violence around the globe. Sexual harassment is unwelcome, offensive conduct of a sexual nature that may make people feel humiliated, intimidated or uncomfortable. Several researches have focused on sexual harassment and GBV which takes place at workplaces. It is a violation of workers' rights and may affect them psychologically. Sexual harassment creates a climate of fear inside the workplace and may cause physical and mental ill health; workers may have to apply for sick leaves or at worst be obliged to leave their jobs so they do not have to bear continuous eve teasing and unwanted sexual advances. United Nations concluded that GBV in workplaces is increasing over the years, regardless of the strict policies that have been implemented to overcome it. Four out of ten women in the survey were harassed in one form or the other at their workplace (UN Women, 2018).

Apart from private companies and organizations, there is also distinct GBV and discrimination against women present in the government sectors all around the world. A whopping 83 per cent of female parliamentarians who took part in a study which was conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 39 countries said that they experienced psychological violence which included offensive remarks, sexist or insulting comments, threats made for their gender or gestures and images of sexual nature. Forty-four per cent of the women had also been threatened with rape, death, and sexual assault. (UN Women, 2018).

The increase in GBV is also occurring because of the growing use of technology and social media. This has made cyber harassment increase rapidly over the years with thousands of women being affected due to cyber bullying and online verbal sexual harassment. According to the Government of Canada, for instance, cyber bullying and online sexual exploitation,

particularly sexting, is dramatically increasing as youth relies more on technology than ever before (Government of Canada, 2016).

Cultural Differences

Although gender-based violence is a universal problem, it is still very important to note that like every other social phenomenon, this issue is also influenced by and affected by culture, religion, and social conditions. Different religions around the world view women differently, thus one can say that there are inherent differences regarding GBV where one religion such as Islam gave women the right to inherit property as mentioned in the Quran (4:7), but in accordance to the Hebrew culture, this was not possible unless and until their fathers had no sons (Numbers 27:1-11). This example makes clear the fact that countering gender-based violence needs to happen along religious, cultural and social lines so that the change being promoted is willingly accepted by people.

Guiding people about the reality of GBV cannot happen without the complete knowledge of the cultural, social and geographical context because this will only make people reject notions of change and will cause them to move far away from efforts which cater to ending GBV.

An example of this could be of the traditions of the Israelite religious community where only men were admitted to the court of Israel. Men were not only considered to be superior beings as compared to women, but religion differentiated between the two sexes based on circumcision. According to Genesis (17:10), women were not included in the religious community because they were not circumcised. In addition to that, menstruating women were denied entry into holy places such as temples and mothers after the birth of their child, were also

not allowed to enter temples for a few days (Mananzan, 1998). In such cases, all efforts to end discrimination would go to waste if they challenged and chose to abolish the rigid traditions of society.

Thus, it is important to understand that although solutions are necessary, there is no universal approach to take gender-based violence. This is because appropriate actions need to be taken and these actions must be culturally and socially acceptable. An understanding of behaviors and attitudes of people are required at every stage of intervention including design, development and implementation of policies and efforts which will cause an end to GBV.

Another example can be of countries where marital rape is not recognized as a serious crime. In Tanzania, marital rape can only be reported to the court of law if the couple is separated (Stefiszyn, 2008). In such conditions, where there are cultural differences between cities of one country, it is important for one to keep in mind that actions to counter GBV can only be implemented when adequate awareness is raised over an issue. Without making sure that the people truly realize how serious the matter of marital rape is, it is impossible for groups working against GBV to bring about a change in laws of the land.

Thus, one can say that cultural differences are a crucial factor when discussing GBV. Where in one part of the world, marital rape is a serious offence, in another part of the world, this might not be the case. Any viable solution needs to factor in cultural and religious norms – any solution without this consideration is bound to fail.

GBV - An Economic Issue

Both for Pakistan and the world at large there is greater reason why GBV needs immediate attention. GBV is not only a human rights issue, research suggests that it is also an

economic drain. This is because the World Bank's study on GBV suggests that domestic violence has a significant link with a country's GDP (Nata Duvvury, 2013). Perhaps this is the reason The World Health Organization has concluded that if countries fail to recognize the issues of GBV, it will impact global poverty rates and eradication targets related to poverty will be compromised (World Health Organization, 2005). Thus, GBV impacts the economic productivity, economic growth of societies and human capital of countries (UN Women, 2018). Dr. Farzana Bari explains in her publication, *Gender based Violence in Pakistan: Response in the Perspective of Health Sector Devolution*, that GBV undermines the ability of victims to participate in the social, economic and political sphere; GBV is in fact a major hurdle to development in the case of Pakistan. On the other hand, GBV has also been called a public health issue as research has indicated a causal relationship between abuse and the health status of women. The consequences of GBV, namely the physical and psychological impacts, result in increased social and economic costs not for the victims but also the society (Bari, 2011, p. 6). The impact of the epidemic of GBV is far reaching and this is the reason an increasing number of countries have made attempts in the form of national plans of actions and legislations to address the ongoing issue. However, gaps remain when it comes to eradicating and abolishing the ills and consequences of GBV. This is because it is mostly hidden, rarely talked about, and the perpetrators are not brought to justice. This can even be said for countries where there are strict laws about GBV yet acts of violence are unaddressed and underreported.

GBV – A Global Phenomenon

Abuse of women's rights and violence against women is not just a threat to the Pakistani society. It is a global crisis. Around the world, nearly six out of ten women suffer from some

kind of violence in their lifetime - physical or sexual (UN Women, 2018). According to the European Union, 1 in 3 women have experienced physical and sexual violence, 1 in 2 has experienced sexual harassment, 1 in 20 women have been raped (European Union, 2014). Studies such as the Thompson Reuters Foundation Annual Poll for 2018 lists the top ten most dangerous countries for women in the world coming from across Asia, Africa and North America. Just to elaborate on the point, the US ranked third worst country for rape and sixth worst for non-sexual violence. One out of three women are affected by GBV globally. Although the international and regional legal instruments and other law-enforcement bodies have been encouraging countries to take necessary steps to fight the problem of GBV, the issue still exists. It is a world-wide problem which takes many forms ranging from sexual abuse to domestic violence. It even includes harsh and severe forms of violence such as honor killings, dowry killings, acid attacks, female genital mutilation and femicide. The global prevalence of GBV indicates that the issue is yet to be fully tackled; an issue which has far-reaching consequences. Studies have revealed that GBV leads to physical injuries, disability and even death, while victims also suffer from mental and psychological disorders as a result of it. Some women fear GBV more than other risk factors such as war and cancer, a World Bank study reported. In addition to that, gender-based violence accounts for as many deaths and ill-health in women as cancer does. GBV causes more ill-health than malaria and traffic accidents combined (Sarah Venice, 2002). Thus, as alarming as this may sound, GBV is as fatal as cancer and as dangerous as traffic accidents. The United Nations has repeatedly tried to deal with the issue of gender-based violence and this is the reason the issue is legitimized because all member states recognize it as a global large-scale human rights problem and a public health issue because gender-based violence can lead to high rates of mortality, several health-related problems and even suicide.

Prevalence and Frequency in Pakistan

Gender-based violence is highly prevalent in Pakistan. According to the Aurat Foundation's collected data between January 1 and December 31, 2009, cases of GBV increased when compared to the previous year. There was an increase of 13 percent in the total number of cases from 7,571 in 2008 to 8,548 in 2009. Punjab, the largest province by population in Pakistan, topped the list with 5,772 cases reported. Sindh was the second highest with 1,762 cases, followed by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (655 cases) and Baluchistan (237 cases) while Islamabad, the Capital Territory reported 172 cases of GBV during the year under review (Parveen R. , 2011, p. 5). The same report claims that GBV is grossly under-reported in the country, particularly in conflict-ridden provinces of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, although no formal studies have taken place in this regard. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan shares similar claims in its study which goes further by stating that a number of cases do remain unreported due to cultural pressures (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2012: 166).

In Aurat Foundation's work, Violence Against Women (VAW) Annual Report 2014, there is a year-wise comparison of violence against women cases in Pakistan including offense-wise break down of kidnapping/abduction, rape/gang rape, 'honor' killing, domestic violence, sexual assault, acid throwing and burning. The year-wise comparison, covering the period 2008 to 2014, shows a stable trend of 8300 cases yearly in Pakistan with no drastic increase or decrease (Hadi R. , 2014).

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has the sixth highest population in the world (Bureau, US Census, 2019). According to the around the globe and it is ranked at the position of 150 out of 189 based on Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (UNDP, 2018). Keeping these statistics in mind, it will not be wrong to say that Pakistan has a long way to go when it comes to countering gender-based violence in the country. However, recent developments have shown that the country is on its way to raising awareness about the issue and bringing about social change needed to tackle the issue.

To understand the issue of gender-based violence in Pakistan, one also needs to understand the social and cultural context of the country. Pakistan is an Islamic republic which means constitutionally it debates, albeit superficially and more as part of populist politics, influence of Islam in gender related law. There have been several attempts by extremists to malign the religion and justify their own wrong doings in the name of Islam, but currently, NGOs are working to raise awareness about this issue and obliging people to rethink their traditional and conventional beliefs which they thought were related to religion. An example is of the issue of inheritance of women. Islam promotes the idea of inheritance of females but the cultural norms of parts of the country suggest otherwise. Most tribal heads deny this right when it comes to their daughters and sisters. According to the results of a survey conducted in Punjab, out of 1,000 rural households, of thirty-six percent women who had property rights, only nine percent had control over their property (Punjab Commission on the Status of Women. , 2016). This is one example where religion advocates a right to women but the cultural norm in the country is in a diametrically opposite direction.

In order to understand the current situation of gender-based violence in the country, one also needs to consider recent cases and statistics. The most common types of violence against

Pakistani women include but are not limited to, acid throwing, kidnapping, sexual violence, burning, physical assault, trafficking and forced prostitution. An article titled, *Years After Acid Horror, Suicides Stir Pakistan*, from the New York Times, reveals that men favor acid-throwing over other forms of violence since the substance itself is widely available. Furthermore, even though this form of violence attacks the victims physically and mentally, it doesn't take away their lives in most cases, leaving the survivors able to continue performing household work such as taking care of children (Walsh D. , 2012).

As mentioned earlier in the introduction, multiple laws have been passed in Pakistan in recent history to protect women from various forms of GBV including acid attacks and child marriages. Such efforts made by national authorities somewhat indicated the changing status of women in Pakistan. It also depicts that growing attention is being paid to the issues of Pakistani women. Changes in legislation are symbolic and present the view that the country is taking the issue of gender-base violence in a serious light. Nevertheless, GBV continues to rise in the country, endangering the lives of Pakistani women. Constant efforts are being made to deal with all forms of GBV in the country.

Domestic violence is also increasing at an alarming rate in the country and this type of violence particularly relates to family violence or abuse that takes place within the household. Most sources in literature agree that the perpetrators of domestic violence are usually husbands and the in-laws of women. However, in some cases, the victims' brothers and fathers were also responsible. Pushing, slapping, punching, kicking, suffocating or hitting with an object, are all forms of domestic violence (Samuels, 2017). Parveen also points out that cases of acid-throwing were on the rise (Parveen R. , 2011, p. 4).

Sexual harassment of women occurs on the streets and at workplaces throughout Pakistan as indicated in SEMIOTICS' work, *Sexual Harassment: A Primary Data Research Study*. The study confirms the belief that victims of this form of violence are usually women while the offenders are mostly men. Sexual abuse and harassment takes place within all age, economic and ethnic backgrounds. Non-verbal forms such as whistling, standing close, staring or winking, are also considered harassment in the public sphere and this form of harassment is very common in all provinces of Pakistan (SEMIOTICS, 2012, p. 13).

Extensive research has been conducted about honor killings. Honor killings, along with early marriages, *Watta Satta* (a Pakistani tribal tradition to exchanged brides between two families) and denial of property rights, are the most prevalent customary practices that result in gender-based violence (University of Punjab, 2012, p. 27). These practices are deeply embedded in the cultural framework of the country with thousands of people justifying acts such as these to be 'normal' because they have been going on for such a long time.

Family disputes and poverty are the major causes of the prevalence of gender-based violence led by customary practices. Moreover, the strong influence of local communities and families make it difficult to question the customary practices that exist in a region (University of Punjab, 2012, p. 34) Moreover, a research found out that GBV in Pakistan was a combination of several factors because of which it is impossible to clearly suggest one or two reasons related to the issue. Some of the factors include poverty, low education, low participation of women in the political sphere, low empowerment of women, high levels of crime and insufficient protection by laws (F. Rabbani, 2008, p. 416).

The violence against women in Pakistan is also prevalent because of the misguided and misinterpreted local teaching of culture and religion. Religious and cultural values are often

abused as a means to control women in the family. Such influence and control of men over women has brought up many issues related with gender-based violence such as domestic violence, sexual violence, traditional harmful practices which include dowry, genital mutilation, etc.

A Cross Examination of Solutions for GBV

Solutions already proposed in Pakistan

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. It articulates under Article 4(e) that states should ‘consider the possibility of developing national plans of action to promote the protection of women against any form of violence, or to include provisions for that purpose in plans already existing, taking into account, as appropriate, such cooperation as can be provided by non-governmental organizations, particularly those concerned with the issue of violence against women’. Thus, all members of the United Nations have reason enough to work on solving the issue of gender-based violence in their respective countries.

Pakistan, being a prominent member of the United Nations has also demonstrated a sense of urgency when it comes to dealing with gender-based violence. However, an important fact which needs to be considered before the types of solutions that can be implemented in Pakistan should be discussed is that dealing with the problem of GBV involves deep-rooted and reforming social change which can target rigid pressures such as culture and patriarchal social norms as discussed earlier in the section ‘Cultural Differences’.

It should also be remembered that no one solution can work in isolation rather the involvement of all levels of society need to come together to deal with the problem of GBV.

Working simultaneously with individuals, families, couples, communities and state machinery using a combination of techniques which cause prevention of GBV and are a response to it will enable the country to successfully deal with the issue. All members of the community need to be kept it mind even if they reject or condone reforms related to gender-based violence. Collective involvement of governments, non-governmental organizations, local communities and even the international community in some cases is necessary. This includes engaging boys and men together with girls and women, as well as religious leaders, traditional leaders, government officials and civil society leaders, to address and challenge the underlying norms, customs, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions linked to violence. In addition to that, working at all levels will not only help cater to this problem in a more holistic way, but it will also make possible some initiatives that organizations and groups cannot take independently.

In Pakistan, one of the main problems is that civil society organizations work in isolation and compete with one another, rather than cooperate. This is mostly done for the donor's attention. Similarly, NGOs usually do not reveal their donors and they also do not reveal information based on funding which creates confusion. This chaos and confusion results in projects which are merely considered as short-term interventions with inefficient management teams conducting them because of the mismanagement of funds and the fact that civil society organizations want to work independently. In addition to that, donor requests are also met and the wishes of the donors are considered more important than the problem itself (CARE International, 2013).

Collectively working with the community is an important part of changing the narrative related to gender-based violence because communities do not exist in isolation. They are made up of different groups of people which need to be taken into consideration. Below are some of

the key actions and approaches Pakistan as a country has taken or already explored to reduce gender-based violence.

Individual awareness and education

Acknowledging the fact that change starts from grass-root level is essential to creating a revived dialogue about GBV in Pakistan which will help bring about substantial change in the form of actions taken to counter violence against women. This strategy can include offering workshops to community members, raising awareness about important social issues related to GBV such as prevention of domestic violence, the need to report cases of harassment and reproductive health issues. This will not only help alter the values and cultural expectations of both the genders but will also open doors to dialogue and subsequent action taken to deal with GBV in the country. A change in the attitudes and thoughts of people is the first step towards a change in behavior of the masses. Education is a very important medium of socialization and enables the training of the masses in a very subtle but necessary way. There are several ways education can be used to deal with the problem of gender-based Violence.

Significant work has been done in Pakistan when it comes to education of women. Recent developments have shown that there is an increase in the number of girls and young women going to schools and colleges respectively but sending boys to school is still preferred over girls (Aslam, 2007). In a country where this was culturally looked down upon, this is a substantial shift towards the right direction. Under its constitutional obligations under Article 25A, The Government of Pakistan is fully committed to education for girls, recognizing that education is one of the long-term solutions in dealing with discrimination, GBV and other social issues in the country (RTE, 2017). For the success of this policy, actions need to be taken revolving around the education of girls in a manner which ensures that girls of school-going age

are sent to educational institutes and remain there during their study. The State through its various organs such as provincial and local governments should make sure that this is made possible.

In an interview, two prominent members of the Youth Assembly for Human Rights in Pakistan suggested that significant work is being done in small cities to increase awareness amongst families that girls should be allowed to pursue education (Hashmi, 2019).

Youth Assembly for Human Rights conducted awareness programs for the students as young as 13-yearold up to the age of 16 and guided them on how to react to these sort of violations. The program also involved self-defense exercises. They believe one of the key challenges is to make people accept and get convinced about their rights. According to their experience, women are still unaware of their legal rights. For instance, they are still unaware that post 2006 Women Protection Bill, the Police cannot stop them to snap check a woman travelling with a man for marital relation documents without courts orders. Similarly, people are still unaware that under the provincial Bill of Under-age Marriage 2010 anyone caught marrying a woman of less than 18 years of age can get arrested (Hashmi, 2019). Shirkat Gah – The Women’s Circle adds in to mention that most women are not even aware of the law that if raped they don’t need to go to the police station but can directly go to the district magistrate to initiate legal proceedings (Altaf, 2019).

More can be done in Pakistan when it comes to education of women. Various techniques to make education a way to promote ideas against GBV can be adopted to spread awareness related to the issue. Teachers’ training should be conducted keeping in mind that they will be promoting change in the long run. Thus, they need to be trained in a way which helps them how to subtly raise awareness about gender roles, acceptable and unacceptable behavior. The

curriculum of schools can be revised to include gender sensitive material which promote ideas of equality and discourages against discrimination, harassment and violence. This curriculum can be made compulsory in all educational institutions regardless of the programs students which to opt for themselves. Moreover, educational institutes can set up systems to support children who have been harassed and abused in order to cater to their needs and respond to them in a learned manner preventing the effects and consequences of abuse. Apart from counseling these children, partnering with legal teams to help them fight against their abusers can be an important way of combating GBV. A ‘zero-tolerance’ approach against abusers and perpetrators of violence can be adopted and promoted so that children also understand the need to take public action against offenders.

Influencing the social norms

Challenging social norms that perpetuate acts of violence is necessary in order to bring about substantial change in the community. This is because thinking beyond traditional and cultural notions of violence and discrimination will enable the community to become prepared to act against it. Working with both genders is equally important because men and boys will challenge discriminatory gender norms making the situation easier for women. Simultaneously, working with women will help them increase knowledge about their rights and reduce their vulnerability related to violence. Activists and community leaders share that significant work has happened over past decades in Pakistan in targeting social change to help eliminate GBV.

The Youth Assembly members for Human Rights in Pakistan shared that in cities of Interior Sindh (province of Pakistan) efforts are being made to raise social support and awareness by giving proper lessons to men on the importance of education and empowerment of women (Hashmi, 2019).

In interviews with most of the participants to the study, key emphasis was on importance of working in the community instead of just focusing on the GBV victim. Hasan Ur Rehman and Mubeen Hashmi of Youth Assembly of Human Rights highlighted that elimination of GBV in a society is a transformation process. They emphasized that education and conceptually addressing the issue in a community is important to change the mindset towards GBV (Hashmi, 2019). ShirkatGah – The Women’s Circle also involves community because they believe families’ involvement in this regard is very important. The NGO believes that collectively all should work constantly with communities inclusively so that we can effectively combat against GBV. Even when making laws to help prevent GBV, the Women’s Circle believes that we should be inclusive with all the communities as each community has different values (Altaf, 2019). Anwar Jaffery of Tehrik e Niswan, the Movement of Women, has similar views on importance of engaging the community as a preventive and systemic measure to address GBV (Jaffery, 2019).

Supporting survivors

It is important to understand that enabling an effective system to respond to survivor of gender-based violence is essential to reducing the overall rates of GBV in the country. Multiple sectors need to be involved in making this process easy so that survivors do not feel ashamed or singled out. Rather, they should be made to feel that they are part of the community. An example can be of domestic violence survivors who can be supported by collective action such as building safe houses for them. Watch groups can also be enabled to help them feel secure. The legal system, medical services, police, social groups and other services all need to work together to ensure that survivors are protected and looked after to reduce the rates of GBV occurring with them repeatedly because of their vulnerability. The Aurat Foundation has done extensive work in this regard in Pakistan (Hashmi, 2019).

Public policy against GBV

A change in the laws and policies of the country is necessary to deal with the problem of GBV. The need to create, revise and implement these laws and policies is essential. Keeping in mind international agreements such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Security Council Resolution 1325, the country needs to make sure its legal system is according to the international standards promoted by Human rights organizations. To enable this, approaches such as public-mobilization, lobbying and raising awareness about the issues related to GBV should be used. Transforming policies will bring about substantial change at all levels of society.

A reformation of the laws and policies of a country also includes changes at political levels where an increase in the number of political participation of women can help bring about changes in the rates of gender-based violence (Bauer, 2012). When women begin to become politically aware and politically active, their issues will be brought to the limelight. In 2008, the appointment of Dr. Fehmida Mirza as Pakistan's first female speaker of the National Assembly was a historic moment for the country as it paved the way for several important legislative changes which brought about a decrease in the rates of GBV. When interviewed, Dr. Mirza took out time to bring to light many of the successful legislative changes which were pro-women such as 'The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act' and the 'Acid and Burn Crime Act' (Mirza F. , 2019).

Examples of changes which are needed at all levels of the state include the move by the provincial government in Punjab where the establishment of the first Center for addressing violence against women was opened. This was not only a massive change in the Multan, a district of the region, but it also became a national topic of discussion as it was one of its kinds.

The center made it possible for women to register a first information report (FIR) on violence which was not only difficult before but now it was being encouraged. This was a crucial step taken to ensure that that violence was addressed legally and through the justice system. In addition to that, the center also made it possible for women to be linked with other organizations which made it possible for them to review economic and social help. The province of Punjab has also successfully established women desks at almost every police station depicting the shift from being a male-dominated society to one which is working actively to cater to women and their needs.

The government of Punjab also plans to provide housing facilities to women and survivors of GBV. These are some of the efforts which need to be taken at other provincial levels to respond to the survivors of GBV.

Moreover, apart from policy changes to help survivors, action to prevent GBV was also taken by the province. Anonymous hotlines were established so that women could easily complain and report incidents of gender-based violence. A smart phone application was also designed to help women report incidents of violence and harassment. Such changes show the importance of speaking up about policy changes which in turn will make it easier for the country to act directed towards reducing GBV in Pakistan (D'LIMA, 2017).

Economic empowerment

Research has shown that women who are financially sound and economically empowered are better at speaking up against harassment and violence as compared to those who are not financially strong (Dalal, 2011). Research findings such as these present important lessons in support of economic empowerment of women as a method to prevent GBV. Economic empowerment not only makes women confident but enables them to take control of their lives

lessening their chances of being silent victims of harassment and discrimination (Srivastava, 2009). Moreover, it has been proven that lessening economic dependence on male partners helps women to leave toxic environments where they are discriminated against and made subjects of violence. Madiha Altaf from Shirkat Gah – the Women’s Circle endorses this viewpoint and believes that chances of GBV decreases as women get more financially independent (Altaf, 2019).

Thus, the country should concentrate on improving conditions where women can easily explore their economic talents and can be supported financially and socially. This can be done through providing job opportunities for women and providing them economic aid so that they can set up their own entrepreneurial ventures. Training programs can be arranged for women for them to learn about the basics of entrepreneurship and the management of finances. Moreover, awareness can be raised about issues such as the right to inherit property so that women can speak about these issues.

However, it is essential to understand that improving the financial position of women in a country like Pakistan can also have dire consequences because of the power shift in households and the ego of men who are culturally taught to be the leaders of the patriarchal society. Thus, along with improving the economic conditions of women, the views of men need to be addressed and ideas of equal economic opportunities need to be promoted. Youth Assembly for Human Rights echo this factor and point out the textile and pharma industries as heavily biased to hire only female workforce, adversely affecting the economic relationships within the Pakistani urban society (Hashmi, 2019).

Moreover, the reduction of the gender wage gap should also be dealt with at all levels in society. This is because even if women become financially strong, they are still discriminated

against and are paid lower than what men are paid. This contributes to gender inequality which weakens the position of the woman making her prone to acts of violence conducted against her.

Legal protection

Pakistan has had a very vibrant history when it comes to laws related to women. Not only did Pakistan become the first Muslim majority country in the world to have a female elected head of state but also one of the first to have an elected speaker of parliament. According to Dr. Fehmida Mirza, in general the law considers gender-based violence a crime. As a result, in today's Pakistani polity, GBV is not a private affair of two individuals but a crime against the state. This realization, in itself, is a great success story of Pakistan (Mirza F. , 2019).

Zia ul Haq, a military dictator associated with using the Islam card to initiate and support the Afghan Jihad against the soviets in the 1980s, has been widely criticized for wrongly introducing laws in name of Islam which were against women rights. The Hadood Ordinance, as the legislation was collectively named, provided legal space for abuse of women rights such as rape. Although the Parliament has taken important steps in 2006 and later in 2010 and 2016, whereby legal definitions of "rape" and "adultery" have been re-addressed thereby focusing on critical and complex issues of honor killings and other anti-women practices, still much more needs to be done (Mirza F. , 2019).

The Federal and Provincial Legislatures of Pakistan have managed to pass numerous acts to address the impending issue of gender-based violence. The Code of Criminal Procedure Amendment Act 1994 opened the doors for female judges in the Civil Courts of Pakistan. In 2004, the Pakistan Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code was amended and the act of "Karo Kari" (honor killing) was penalized as murder; The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006 redefined rape, criminalized abduction, prostitution and amended the

Hadood Ordinance adding safeguards to protect women in regards to the law of Zina, Qazf, fortification; The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010, The Anti-Women Practices Bill of 2012 prohibited practices of forced marriages, Acid and Burn Crime Prevention Bill of 2010 which was further amended 2014 and 2018, National Commission on Status of Women Act 2012 which made the commission autonomous and empowered the commission to collect data regarding gender-based violence cases in Pakistan to assist government in addressing GBV, The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences Relating to Rape) Act, 2016; The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the Name or on pretext of Honor) Act, 2016; The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2018. On the other hand, the provincial legislatures have also passed laws regarding domestic violence, forced marriages, harassment at workplace and acid prevention.

There have been significant developments along the judicial and legislative lines which serve as examples for the future of GBV in the country.

1. In 2000, the National Commission on the Status of Women was set up as a follow up to the Beijing process.
2. In 2006, Gender Crime Cell was established in the National Police Bureau. Three main functions were given to this cell which included data collection of cases related to GBV, advising victims on legislation accordingly and investigating these cases.
3. In 2012, Women Development Department was formed which is an organization responsible for making of the policies which support women and advocates for their rights.
4. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill 2009 was passed which substitutes section 508 of the Pakistani Penal Code 1860 more effective and accountable text. (Parveen R. , 2011).

Key challenge to finding legal solution to GBV is implementation of law and access to legal protection. Inexpensive legal protection should be offered to survivors of gender-based violence so that the rights of women are protected. In Pakistan, it is extremely expensive to pursue cases in terms of finances and time consumed to approach the legal system. Thus, a

serious re-examination of the judiciary is a dire need of the time as it will help protect the rights of women. In addition to that, governmental intervention is important to regulate issues such as harassment by placing strict punishments for perpetrators of violence.

Social media

In the recent years, the importance of social media has been highlighted very often as the world witnessed several online movements which left a great impact on the lives of people. In Pakistan, the growing use of gadgets, technology, internet and social media makes it possible for awareness about GBV to be raised through this medium. Prominent examples of youth-led movements showed promise when they were publicized online and gathered much support from the national and international community. Perhaps, it will not be wrong to say such movements may not be the solution for change, but they have initiated dialogues and conversations within the country about important issues which were avoided earlier.

A prominent example of one such thought changing movement was the Aurat March which took place in 2019 and left a national impact. This is because it was a movement not only supported and promoted by females but also by males suggesting that there is little, but growing involvement of both the genders to deal with this issue.

Another example is Girls At Dhabhas - a popular social media movement led by young, urban Pakistani women in an attempt to start the conversation about gender equality. The campaign took its breath when young women went to male-dominated 'dhabhas' or roadside eateries and tea stalls. They posted pictures of themselves in these spaces affirming their right to partake in the public space equal to men. This may not be the solution to end GBV, but it is indeed the start of a conversation against male dominance in public spaces.

According to a prominent member of the Tehrik-i-Niswan (NGO), Anwar Jaffery, social media is a very important tool when it comes to the dealing with gender-based violence. This is because it does not only help spread awareness, but it also connects the people of Pakistan to different people around the world. This connection is important for the country so that it can learn from other countries causing a gradual increase in the shared sense of responsibility amongst the citizens of Pakistan (Jaffery, 2019).

However, at this point, it is important to note that statistics may not suggest high rates of improvement when it comes to the decline in the number of cases of violence against women. In fact, it may seem alarming to note that despite the awareness and efforts conducted to decrease gender-based violence, reports suggest that there may be a decrease in the overall rates of improvement and/or at times stagnation in statistics when data over the years is analyzed. An example can be of the report published by Aurat Foundation suggested that when cases of violence against women were compared over the years of 2008 to 2014, it was alarming to note that the year 2014 actually saw the highest number of cases as opposed to the previous years (Hadi R. , 2014). It is necessary to understand that these rates may not necessarily mean that there is an increase in the overall gender-based violence in the country, rather it may point to the fact that cases are now more frequently being reported because of the overall improve in awareness. One may even consider the fact that although there may not seem a drastic improvement in the rates of GBV, at least cases are now being reported more frequently and Pakistan as a country is trying to make efforts to reduce the number of cases every year. According to Dr. Mirza in her interview violence against women becoming mainstream debate in Pakistan is the biggest achievement of the collective work of the legislative and the civil society over the last two decades (Mirza F. , 2019).

The same can also be concluded by a report published by the Government of Pakistan (2016) which highlighted that when the year 2010 and 2011 were compared, 2011 saw a rise in the crimes reported against women perhaps because of the awareness which women were developing regarding the reporting of incidents of violence being conducted against them (Tabassum, 2016). However, it is important to note that the same report highlights a significant drop in the crime rates the following year, 2012 which again points to the fact that the country is making sincere efforts to deal with gender-based Violence.

Anwer Jaffery of another local NGO by the name of “Tehrik e Niswan – The Movement of Women” believes that social media is a real sword in the fight against GBV, it connects peoples from different corners and creates a sense of responsibility and awareness in society (Jaffery, 2019). However, Madiha Altaf from “ShirkatGah – The Women Circle”, another NGO operating in Pakistan on GBV issues, highlights that the real problem then becomes access to social media. Even today with Pakistan having smartphone penetration of 32.43%, far higher than India of Bangladesh (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, 2019), there is limitation in access to social media by rural women (Altaf, 2019).

Global Case Studies

Gender-based violence is a universal problem which almost all countries of the world aim to tackle. Being a global menace, there is much action being taken to deal with it and reduce it worldwide. There are many examples of countries with high rates of violence against women which have successfully managed to reduce the rate of GBV over the years. However, it remains an issue as women are discriminated against and harmed in several ways. The initiatives taken to deal with this problem have been taken in many forms. Some initiatives are legal in nature, while

some aim to alter the growing rates of GBV by education and spreading awareness through the media.

Examples of countries who have taken successful initiatives to deal with this problem and have developed policies and laws to cater to the growing issue of GBV present models of action that other countries can take to reduce the problem of violence against women.

Malawi – local leadership engagement in eliminating child marriages

A prominent case study related to eradicating child marriage in Malawi demonstrates the power of working with local leaders, the youth and the community to bring about positive change related to reducing GBV. Child marriages have been considered as acts of violence because forcing a child who is not of legal age to get married to someone older to her is harassment. Thus, in Malawi, Rise Up which was an initiative taken by Deliver For Good in partnership the Girls Empowerment Network (GEN), the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation helped to deal with the problem of child marriages by advocating for laws and policies that protect the rights of the girls, improve their opportunity to receive a good education and encourage gender equity in their communities. Enabling Girls to Advance Gender Equity (ENGAGE) was the broader name of this initiative and it began to train more than 200 girls in advocacy, public speaking and leadership skills. The training allowed these girls to mobilize the community as they convinced their peers along with sixty chiefs to pass laws raising the minimum marriage age to 21 (Dunning, 2016). After many years of advocacy, Malawi passed the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill in 2015, which prohibited child marriage countrywide and increased the national age of marriage to 18 years. Finally, in April 2017, President Peter Mutharika signed a constitutional amendment into

law that made marriage before age 18 punishable and illegal providing increased protection to Malawian girls (Girls Not Brides, 2017).

Community support – Burundi

Women counselors supporting women survivors in partnership with local organizations, CARE Burundi has established a network of community support to enable GBV survivors have access to services quickly and efficiently. The network includes trained legal assistants, counselors and elected leaders supported by community activists. These activists play a leadership role in their local area and are recognized for providing direct legal, medical and emotional support to GBV survivors. As part of the program, health care workers are provided with ‘sensitivity training’ in treating survivors. Most of the programs’ counsellors are female. This has greatly encouraged female victims to come forward since most women, when asked, prefer to discuss abuse with another woman. Effective referral systems are in place to allow GBV survivors to receive emergency medical care, including the post-exposure prophylaxis within 72 hours to prevent HIV infection. CARE research with Ministry of Health staff has confirmed that the project has been effective in strengthening the technical capacity of health centers to provide safe medical and emotional support to women survivors in line with the National Protocol. Women now feel more informed of their rights and where to access support services; the reporting of GBV incidents has increased (CARE International, 2013).

Brazil – football tournaments

In Brazil, a local initiative targeted adult men who were participating in a football tournament to raise awareness about the issue of domestic violence. This was done through the distribution of material related to the issue and by conducting group sessions which raised awareness related to the issue. General discussions about gender-based violence took place and

this was all focused on increasing the knowledge and awareness of men regarding the issues of domestic violence, marital rape and gender-based violence. Videos based on GBV were also shown in order to engage the group of men. The team in charge hoped to improve the ability of men when it came to denouncing GBV in their communities. At the end of this process, it was found out that fewer men thought that a woman deserves to be beaten and more men believed in the fact that violence in a relationship needed counseling and discussions by third- parties as well as the couple's effort to end it. In addition to that, it was an interesting fact to find out that men who were part of this initiative also reported as being more considerate of women rights and they also believed that touching of women without their consent was wrong (Promundo, 2012).

Brazil – Women police stations

Another important case study which demonstrates the importance of being supportive and considerate towards survivors of gender-based violence can serve as a reminder that after-care of violence against women is as important as preventing it in the first place. This is because the higher the protection and support offered to survivors, the less the perpetrators of violence against women will be spared. In Latin America, an approach to help, support and motivate survivors of sexual violence involved improving quality of women's police stations. Women's police stations give women the opportunity to be open about the horrors they have gone through and they allow women to report crimes more than the stations that are run by men (Walsh S. D., 2016). In Latin America, women police stations are very common and as of 2016, there were 500 police stations run by women. This attempt shows the country's initiative towards dealing with survivors. However, a problem that remained was that the quality of these police stations was not up to the mark. Thus, the quality of these police stations was improved to serve women and children with a high degree of gender- responsiveness, and a close link with women rights

organizations guiding them and teaching the staff how they can be more open and approachable to women in the country (UN Women, 2018).

Senegal – Female Genital Mutilation

One of the key solutions to this unique problem with Africa, North Africa and parts of Middle East is to create community “pledge associations” where families ensure that they will not demand FGM nor will they inflict FGM. The fundamental driver to this culture is the aspect of marriage. People were doing FGM on their own girls because they feared that if they do not the groom’s family will not accept them. With a pledge association the groom’s family pledges that they will not mandate the bride to have FGM so that other families can have the comfort that there are families which do not expect such an act from their brides-to-be. This in turn allows the groom’s family to also secure an FGM free life for their daughters (Mackie, 2000).

Africa has also dealt with this menace by other supporting actions. They include raising awareness of the medical implications of FGM, thus discouraging people to undergo the process by knowing how detrimental it can be for the woman’s health. Secondly, societies in Africa have tried to financially re-settle people who are associated with FGM as an occupation. Thirdly, the society has tried to address the root cause of FGM – if FGM was taken as an initiation rite for women, the societies have tried to find alternate initiation rites or drive communication within society that the FGM is not to be associated with any initiation rite. A combination of these efforts culminating with propaganda and shaming of the practice publicly has led to reduction in FGM. A lot of parallel can be drawn between the success story of FGM reduction and foot-binding practiced in China (Mackie, 2000).

The Way Forward

Available data shows that the incidence of violence against women has not decreased (Hadi R. , 2014). The participants to the interviews have spoken of some common challenges faced when combating gender-based violence in Pakistan. Something different needs to be done in order to foresee a decrease in prevalence of GBV in Pakistan.

Converging global influence to local focus

To understand what exactly needs to be different, we need to further understand the root cause of the challenges currently faced. Let us take the legislative progress of Pakistan as an example. As pointed out by Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Pakistan has made great progress in legislating women focused laws (Mirza D. F., 2019). Pakistan has also progressed significantly in repealing laws that were anti women or had loop-holes that encouraged violence against women. One example that was already mentioned earlier was The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006, which repealed much of restrictions brought on by Hudood Ordinance, 1979 (The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006). It is not a coincidence that the Women Economic Forum as well as UN Women both identify legislation of laws to protect women as a unique and called-out indicator in their statistical reports which indexes gender equality across the world. On all such scorecards Pakistan looks deep green. All kinds of women supportive laws have been made in recent past (UN Women, 2016). It is, therefore, not surprising that women have abortion rights by law in Pakistan (World Economic Forum, 2018) but not in Panama (World Economic Forum, 2018), or for that matter not even in some parts of the developed world. Making laws has been a lower hanging fruit for Pakistan to turn itself green in global scorecards (Pacific, 2019) versus focusing on proper implementation of the same. That

is why the civil society working at grass root level collectively believes implementation of law a huge challenge in tackling GBV.

It is very surprising to see that there is very little push from the international community in terms of implementation of laws. So much so that even statistical data for violence against women in Pakistan is unavailable, whether from any international body such as United Nations or from the Government of Pakistan (UN Women, 2016). There is no mention of Pakistan in the *Violence Against Women Prevalence Data: Surveys by Country*, last published in 2012 (UN Women, 2012). The only data set available right now is from a non-governmental organization, the “Aurat Foundation,” or The Women Foundation. Although sponsored by the US Assistance for International Development, USAID, the data is not endorsed by it. Hence violence against women data is not available from after 2014 and that too from a private and non-endorsed agency. Similarly, there is no publication specifically on violence against women in Pakistan from UNWOMEN since 2005 (UN Women, 2016). A quick look at the official data publications shows that from data collection perspective UNWOMEN mostly focuses on reproductive health, economic participation and population control in Pakistan (UN Women, 2019). Not only is this startling but also has a direct impact on how local leadership prioritizes the topic of GBV amongst a myriad of social issues. The pressure and involvement of the international community is key to driving action in Pakistan.

This can be understood in far greater detail by analyzing the focus and attention polio vaccination receives from the same Government of Pakistan. An analysis of few events chronologically will reflect the global attention Pakistan receives on polio and the effectiveness with which the state machinery functions in response to the international pressure.

For instance, very recently Bill Gates, trustee and co-chairman of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, wrote a letter to Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan. The letter dated August 16, 2019 conveys Bill Gates' concern at the rising number of polio cases in recent past (Bill Gates writes to PM Imran Khan, pledges support in polio eradication drive, 2019). Within a matter of five days the Imran Khan government brought all stakeholders under one roof including all representatives of the provinces, national and international experts to ensure a singular and cohesive effort at the recommendations of, as the letter phrased it, "an independent management review" (Junaidi, PM calls meeting to take stock of polio situation in light of continuous rise in cases, 2019).

Another example of how significant role the international pressure plays in the politics and state priorities of Pakistan is the nomination and appointment of an ex-United Nations staffer who was with the United Nations for eight years at a senior position (Former UN official tipped as polio programme chief, 2018). Despite departmental and ministerial politics, the appointee has held ground since his appointment. The Federal Minister for National Health Services sent a summary to the prime minister on March 15, 2019, to dismiss Babar bin Atta, the Prime Minister's Focal Person on Polio Eradication grounds of incompetence (Junaidi, Minister moves summary to remove PM's focal person on polio, 2019). However, it was not surprising to see that by April 18th the minister himself was shown the door (Wasim, PM Imran reshuffles cabinet less than one year into government, 2019). Not only did the United Nations staffer hold ground, within a month he acquired the additional portfolio of Advisor to the Prime Minister on Tobacco Control by May 15, 2019 (Babar to assist PM's Special Assistant on health for tobacco control, 2019). This illustrates that even in a government mired by bureaucratic red tape fragmented and divided power structure, a person who is understood as competent by the international

community is provided with the right support and help from the government establishment (Baloch, 2019). Another very interesting feature of this case is the designation “Focal Person”. There is no office of government in the entire Pakistani Executive by a similar name. Even the title of this apparently influential position is coming from a Standard Operating Procedure of the Geneva based Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) (STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES - RESPONDING TO A POLIOVIRUS, 2019), a combined initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The SOP states on page 59 that the Focal Person on Polio can only be appointed by the respective state after the agreement of WHO and UNICEF country offices.

A third practical manifestation of international pressure to ensure cohesive ownership from multiple stakeholders in fight against polio is the effective partnership with media. Up until recently there was a huge amount of anti-vaccination content on Facebook that was hindering the vaccination drive and community ownership of the important activity. The Pakistani government put up its pressure on Facebook to delete all such content. However, on March 11, 2019, Facebook declined such request, stating no reason as explanation of their stance (Facebook refuses to delete “anti-vaccine” videos, 2019). Upon pressure exerted by the Focal Person on Polio, Babar bin Atta, via WHO and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Facebook finally agreed to take down all content by August 28, 2019 (Junaidi, Facebook blocks 31 pages over propaganda against polio vaccine, 2019). In their fight against GBV, most NGOs complained of lack of media support. Yet here we see a collaboration success story in tackling the Polio virus.

There is great reapplication possibility between the polio case study and addressing GBV in Pakistan. Firstly, there is need of global influencers like politicians and big businesses to drive the fight against GBV as a top priority for the government of Pakistan. This will enable us to get over the red tape and bureaucratic hurdles within the executive structure. Second, the global community should demand capable leadership specifically responsible for tackling GBV with clear goals, funding (both from government and abroad) and influence in order to push the agenda through. With the right capability and leadership partnering with other influencers of the society such as media will not be a challenge at all even if the media is international.

Engaging the clergy

The polio case study is also very interesting as it shows how international pressure has made resolution of this issue a top priority for the government and how the government in turn has made it a priority for every other opinion leader in the country. Clergy in Pakistan has a leading role to play in shaping the narrative on any issue. In the case of polio vaccination campaigns their biggest challenge comes from a common social understanding that this vaccine is “haram”, or Islamically unlawful (Lab tests show polio vaccine is not ‘Haram’, 2015). In response to this the government asked the clerics to give all out support and endorsement to the anti-polio campaign. Maulana Sami ul Haq, dubbed as the father of the Taliban (Jibran Ahmed, 2018) and a strong opponent of polio campaigns in the past gave a nod of support in 2013 to the vaccination program (Pakistan cleric Maulana Sami ul-Haq backs polio campaign, 2013). Such endorsements are crucial to push any activity in the Pakistani society which is being looked down upon with religious controversy or taboo (Ulema pledge support to anti-polio campaign, 2019).

It is clear from the Sami ul Haq example in the case of anti-Polio campaign that the current leadership, both in Pakistan as well as within the international community, very clearly understands the pivotal role the clergy plays in convincing people towards a particular action at the community level. All the interviewees identified religion and religious misconceptions as a major challenge in their fight against GBV. Many forms of GBV, exist in the first place because of some perceived association with a tenet of Islam. Islam is a strong topic of discussion and moral compass for most people of Pakistan. According to a PEW research done in 2013, 84 percent people responded that they would support the implementation of sharia law in their country, one of the highest figure among all countries surveyed (The PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2013). Islam cannot be omitted from any solution packaged to the Pakistani masses. Due to the unchanging nature of its source, such as the Quran, Islam is also very difficult to change with time (Piser, 2018). Therefore, when addressing any social problem, the only strategy that remains an option is the use of clergy in the interpretation of the injunctions of Islam.

The Afghan Jihad is a classic example of this phenomenon at play on a massive scale. The Afghan Jihad was fueled and fanned by the Pakistani clergy (Roy, 2002). Even the name “Taliban” literally means “group of students” in local language. The Taliban were originally students of Pakistani seminaries led and run by religious clergy. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, support of the United States against the godless soviets was portrayed and interpreted as a holy war. Individuals such as Maulana Sami ul Haq were pivotal in setting up a whole generation of seminary students who would go fight in the Afghan War (Roy, 2002).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 the fundamental element that helped people disown the so-called jihadist fighters was not the abandonment of jihad itself. Indeed, that would have been

taken as anti-Islamic and would not have gained traction among communities. On the contrary, parallel Islam related debates were initiated that diverted attention from jihad. For example, one confusion that was leveraged was whether these armed men, who have come from other areas to fight in Pakistani tribal areas, are Muslim or non-Muslim. For perspective, male circumcision is a common practice in Muslims but not followed in Sikh and Hindu communities. News, propaganda and the pulpit were used to stir a heated controversy on why some dead bodies of such self-claimed Jihadi fighters were uncircumcised, a tangible fact that raised questions on these fighters being Muslim. This confusion and propaganda raised by media on this disassociation of terrorists from Islam is what enabled communities to stand up against such fighters (Hoodbhoy, 2016).

Another example to consider is the dress code restrictions for women in Pakistan. On the topic of public dress code for women, a deeply emotional and personal topic for mainstream Pakistanis, the debate will be difficult to win if questions are raised to challenge the injunctions of Islam. Rather, it is the focus of the traditional clergy, the “Conservative Traditionalists,” as a RAND corporation report categorizes them, on bringing up individualism and personal choice from within Islam that has helped reduce social limitations on women dress code over the past two decades (Benard, 2003).

The successful repeal of Hudood Ordinance, 1989, a bill fervently associated with Islamic Penal Law, by the Women Protection Bill of 2006 is a classic and most relevant case study from within the ambit of GBV. The text of women protection bill states that this is in fact being introduced to support the right implementation of Islam and not against Islam. The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006, mentions “Any offence not mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah or for which punishment is not

stated therein is (known as) Ta'zir which is a subject of State legislation. It is for the State both to define such offences and to fix punishments for these. The exercise of such authority by the State is in consonance with Islamic norms. Accordingly, all these offences have been removed from the two Hudood Ordinances” Had the amendment been portrayed as anti-Islamic it would have become impossible to pass this law (Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006, 2006).

Population control is another topic which demands endorsement from the clergy. In Pakistan the clergy is already being engaged to make contraceptives more acceptable for people. The prime minister recently hosted a conference of clergy in Islamabad on the topic of population control (PM, CJ, Maulana Tariq Jameel to speak at conference on population control, 2018).

Perhaps the most glaring and actionable case that should be discussed as a way forward is that of female genital mutilation, or FGM. FGM is not practiced by majority of Muslim communities. However, the Dawoodi Bohra community, with global following more than 2.5 million people, ardently practices the abhorrent tradition (Chohan, 2011). Dawoodi Bohra community exists in India, Pakistan, Egypt and Yemen. The Dawoodi Bohra community is distinct from mainstream Muslim communities in that they allow the current spiritual leader to be the final authority in any topic related to religion. In other words, the religious verdict or declaration of the spiritual leader surpasses in priority over injunctions laid out in traditional texts. This gives them an unprecedented level of flexibility in handling different challenges faced in today's world. This is the kind of flexibility the Christian clergy enjoys where edicts can be passed to endorse a new interpretation of religion. For instance, in the Catholic faith it is up to the pope to allow married priests (Why Pope Francis may open the door to married priests,

2019). The topic of FGM for the Dawoodi Bohra community, on the same lines, is ultimately a matter of choice of their supreme clergy, Syedna Saifuddin (Chandran, 2017). The challenge remains in engaging the Dawoodi Bohra clergy in denouncing FGM. Despite a lot of noise from within the Bohra community, especially from Bohra women, nothing can change unless the clergy is engaged.

Driving the right narrative and drawing adequate support from the community in tackling GBV is only possible by putting the responsibility on the clergy with a clear accountability model. This is what we saw worked in the case of polio, in stoking Jihad in the Afghan War as well as in stopping and criticizing Jihad from within Islam in the aftermath of 9/11. It was the traditional clergy who played a significant role in enabling change in women's dress code by justifying individualism from Islam. It was the clergy that helped the masses digest the women reforms under the Women Protection Bill of 2006 under the Musharraf era, and it is yet again the clergy who is brought forward and made to share the stage with the Pakistani Premier to justify population control through the Islamic lens.

If the clergy has used the Islam card in all these areas, there is no reason why the clergy cannot support and endorse the end of FGM in the Dawoodi Bohra Community. In fact, the clergy can play an even broader role in GBV in justifying the fight against it on a community level across the nation, drawing justification and explanation from within Islam and such sermons, talks and debates broadcasted and shared over mass and social media.

Conclusion

Gender-based violence is a challenge for Pakistan as well as for humanity at large. While we explored multiple reasons and causes of GBV being similar across geographies, the socio-political dynamics of Pakistan demand a unique solution to effectively work against this challenge.

Pakistan has done a lot of work in legislating laws for the protection of women. Pakistan has also done some work in the areas of education, social engagement, protecting and supporting the victims, financially enabling women and making it easier for them to work and earn a living but significant improvement and progress still needs to be made. However, the key challenge faced in executing on all these avenues as cited by people interviewed revealed lack of social support due to religious misconceptions, lack of funding, lack of coordination with other social influencers such as the media, lack of effective implementation of laws and lack of initiative and ownership of this issue at large on the part of the government.

Analysis of some unique solutions from the world reveals ideas such as having women only police stations, social engagement on GBV via sport and engaging families to form groups that shun FGM both for the daughter as well as the bride. Some of these solutions are already being experimented in Pakistan, such as women cricket to fight GBV (Govt urged to take steps to end violence against women, 2018), or have been attempted on paper but non-existent in reality, such as the women police stations (Azeem, 2008). Others, such as the community drive to tackle FGM cannot be fully reapplied first because FGM is not an issue in most of Pakistan, and second because its proponents strongly associate it with a religious edict.

Focusing on two areas can radically improve our performance in fight against GBV. The first area to focus on includes better engagement on GBV by the international community in

exactly the same way there has been on the program to eliminate polio from Pakistan. The Polio example reveals in detail how all challenges related to execution including government focus and initiative, bureaucratic red tape, coordination with media and funding can be eliminated by this one action. The second area to focus on is active engagement of the clergy with clear expectation and accountability. The examples from Afghan war, War on Terror post 9/11 and population control all prove that this partnership has yielded results in past and will be an effective action to take to tackle all social and religious confusions and misconceptions that limit community support in the fight against GBV.

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