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The Care Economy in Rural Context: A Gendered Perspective

Abstract

Domestic care work has historically been ignored and not calculated in national or international statistics. The study intended to investigate the time spent by both men and women on domestic care activities and calculate the economic value of these activities. The sample size included 495 participants (248 females and 247 males) from rural Chakwal using a purposive sampling technique. The results revealed significant gender differences in the time spent on domestic care activities, with females spending 87,060 hours on all domestic care activities, such as children, elderly, domestic care, and people with special needs. Meanwhile, males spend only 25,795 hours on domestic care activities monthly. The economic value calculated for care activities for females is 13.4 million rupees, and for men is 4 million rupees in a month. The study emphasizes promoting shared family domestic care responsibilities and increasing societal recognition of the importance of caregiving activities.

Keywords: Domestic Care, Economic Value, Gender Analysis, Unpaid Care Work

INTRODUCTION

Domestic care encompasses all everyday activities conducted mainly inside the home, including unpaid domestic tasks such as house cleaning and grocery shopping and caregiving for individuals like newborns and the elderly. The care economy encompasses paid and unpaid labor and services that facilitate caring in its many manifestations. Care labor includes direct tasks like feeding an infant or tending to a sick individual and indirect tasks such as cooking and cleaning (WEF, 2022). Beyeler (2019) mentions that these caregiving activities enhance the health and efficacy of people and communities. Despite its essential function, domestic caregiving has historically been neglected, marginalized, and unrecognized in family, community, and national economies, perpetuating conventional gender stereotypes despite its significant value (UN Women, 2016). Moreover, though care is an important resource for society, the major responsibility of delivering care labor increasingly rests on families, and within families, on females. These gender disparities are central to the controversy around domestic care obligations, where women and girls are the predominant responsibility for these caregiving tasks (UN Women, 2020). According to the International Labor Organization (2018), women dedicate many more hours per week to unpaid care work than men, regardless of demographic or cultural conditions. Compared to 30% of men with children, about 91% of women spend at least an hour daily on housework (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023). The unequal distribution of labor results from deeply ingrained cultural norms and expectations surrounding gender roles, which place men in subservient roles within the home sphere and define women as the primary caregivers and housewives (Kolovich et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2016). This inequality in gender roles endures and is firmly rooted in historical, cultural, and structural elements that impact society's expectations

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and conventions around gender roles, even in the face of societal developments and the progressive development of gender norms (UN Women, 2016). Gender-based labor divisions have existed for generations, with women being allocated caregiving and domestic activities and men being expected to provide for and defend others (Zhu & Chang, 2019). The conventional concepts of femininity and masculinity that assign women to submissive positions within the domestic realm and give men dominant positions in every decision-making activity were reinforced by cultural norms, religious beliefs, and legislative frameworks (Huberman, 2023; Dietrich et al., 2021). Limiting women to household chores was not just a result of cultural expectations; it is also reflected in broader economic and power relations. Moreover, the prevailing societal perspectives regarding masculinity and femininity additionally function to uphold conventional gender roles, thereby sustaining the belief that providing care is intrinsically feminine and, consequently, of lower social significance (Sharma et al., 2016).

Furthermore, there are no clear boundaries defining women's care labor, and neither national nor international indices recognize the contributions made by women in this role. Nor are women considered workers in the economy (ILO, 2018). Caregiving labor is frequently undervalued from an economic standpoint in terms of financial pay and recognition. Compared to jobs in industries with a predominance of men, caregiving responsibilities are often undervalued in most nations (Oxfam, 2020). The marginalization of women's labor and gender inequality in the workforce have been sustained by the absence of acknowledgment and discussion of domestic care work in economic discourse (Schulz & Eden, 2016). Thus, in addition to perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization, this reinforces already-existing gender disparities in terms of pay, access to resources, and employment prospects (UN Women, 2018).

As women make up most caregivers, the lack of financial recompense for these responsibilities undermines their social standing and economic autonomy (Shohel et al., 2021). Thus, for their financial security, they might have to rely on others, usually male wage earners (Balabanova, 2007). Even with recent advancements in the campaigns to advance gender equality and question conventional gender norms, women are still disproportionately burdened by domestic work (Shao & Lee, 2023; Smith & Sinkford, 2022). While there has been some success in closing the gender gap in domestic care allocation, there are still significant discrepancies, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and policy interventions (Beach et al., 2022; Smith & Sinkford, 2022). Despite these global pledges and further endeavors, the actual execution is still restricted and unexplored. Only the government statistical agencies in the United States and the United Kingdom have partially integrated the periodic and systematic measurements of the amount of time spent on unpaid work at the national level into their GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and have taken these measurements seriously. Despite efforts to quantify and evaluate unpaid care work across national borders, an increasing amount of scholarly literature has done so (Dorji et al., 2020). Addressing the root causes of gender inequality in domestic care allocation and building a more inclusive and equitable society can be aided by programs like equal parental leave laws, reasonably priced childcare options, and campaigns to dispel gender stereotypes (Beach et al., 2022; Meulenbroeks et al., 2021).

Problem Statement

Keeping the above situation in front, understand Pakistani men and women in rural settings, it is crucial to investigate how much time men and women spend on domestic care activities in rural areas and how to calculate the economic value of domestic care activities against time spent by men and women in rural settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative survey research design to explore the gender differences in the time spent by both men and women in the household and gender differences in the market-based economic values for these activities. The population of the study comprised the rural area of Chackwal, where Balkassar was chosen as the targeted area for this study. The purposive sampling technique was used to employ a total of 495 participants, where 247 males and 248 females of the age range 18-60 from all the marital groups took part in this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data was collected using a survey tool developed by Tabassum et al., (2023) in their recent study on 'Measuring Women's Contribution in Care Economy: Constructing Survey Based Indexed Questionnaire. Domestic care has 20 items encompassing different domestic care activities like cleaning the house, preparing food & serving meals/guests, washing & ironing clothes, shopping, collecting household supplies, livestock care & payments of household bills. The collected data was entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). For the demographics part, descriptive analysis was done. At the same time, for the contribution of both men and women to the care economy, the average time was calculated to reveal the gender differences in the time spent on domestic care activities. It used a formula to calculate economic value against time spent on domestic care activities.

Ethical considerations

Throughout the whole study, ethical issues were of utmost importance. The participants gave informed consent before data collection, guaranteeing their voluntary participation, and they were well-informed about the study's goal. Their responses were anonymized to preserve their privacy, and the participants' identities were kept secret. The information was securely saved, and only researchers with permission may access it. The researchers ensured their prejudices and assumptions did not affect the procedure used to collect or analyze the data.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This part of the study shows significant results: descriptive demographic statistics, gender differences in the time spent on domestic care activities, and gender differences in the market-based economic value. These variations between genders in terms of the amount of time spent on domestic activities demonstrate the contribution that both men and women make to the care economy.

Table 1:
Descriptive Statistics of Demographics of the Participants

Variables	Obs.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	495	18-28	183	37.3
		29-38	144	29
		39-48	85	17
		49-60	83	16.8
Gender	495	Male	247	49.9
		Female	248	50.1
Education	495	Matric and below	314	63.4
		Matric above	181	36.6
Marital Status	495	Never married	143	28.9
		Married	328	66.3
		Divorced	4	.8
		Widowed	20	4.0
Employment Status	495	Employed	109	22.0
		Not working	249	50.3
		Self-employed	137	27.7
Monthly Income	495	32 thousand and below	196	39.6
		32 thousand above	299	60.4
Family System	495	Nuclear	193	39.0
		Joint	302	61.0
Type of household earners	495	Dual earner	72	14.5
		Single male earner	407	82.2
		Single female earner	16	3.2
Feeling while doing these activities	495	Fresh	39	7.9
		Better	139	28.1
		Fine	82	16.6
		Fatigued	120	24.2
		Drained	115	23.2

Table 1 depicts the participants' demographic information, such as age, gender, education, marital status, employment status, monthly income, family system, types of household earners, and overall feelings of participants about performing domestic care work. Participants' gender distribution reveals that 50.1% are women and 49.9% are men. The age distribution has four categories. The largest age group was 18–28, accounting for 37.3%. The second largest group was 29–38-year-olds (29%). The sample included 17% of participants aged 39–48, while 16.8% were aged 49–60. Most of the participants, i.e., 66.6%, are married. Next in line are those who have never married and those who are widowed (28.9% and 4.0%, respectively), with the lowest percentage, i.e., just 0.8% being divorced. Among education, 63.4% of participants had only completed Matriculation, indicating a high percentage of low-educated people. In contrast, 36.6% of participants had finished schooling above the Matriculation level, showing a lower percentage of those with higher education. According to the participant's employment status, 22% are employed, 50.3% are unemployed, and 27.7% work for themselves. Sixty-one percent of the participants belonged to joint family systems, while 39 percent were in nuclear family systems. Monthly income distribution shows two main groups in the group. 39.6%, a tiny number, reported a monthly income of 32,000 PKR

or less, while 60.4% reported a monthly income of 32,000 or more. This income distribution shows the sample's economic profile, with more individuals in the top income bracket than in the prior group. Regarding the household earner, 82.2% of the participants belonged to the single male earner category, while the remaining 14.5% and 3.2% belonged to the dual-earning and single female earner categories. When performing domestic care duties, most participants—28.1%—feel better, followed by those who are exhausted and drained—24.2% and 23.2%. Only 7.9% of the individuals felt fresh when completing domestic care tasks, compared to 16.6% who said they were fine.

Figure 1:
Gender Difference in Mean Time Spent on Domestic Care Activities

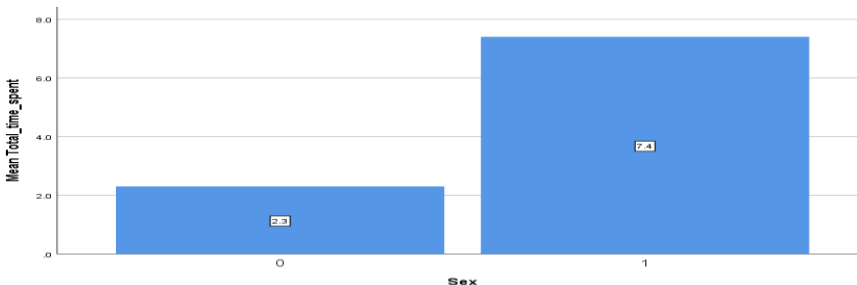


Figure 1 shows the gender difference in the meantime spent on domestic care activities, on average. The average time women spent providing domestic care was 7.4 hours per day. On average, men dedicated 2.3 hours out of 24 hours to household care tasks. It is important to note that women engaged in home caregiving tasks for nearly three times as long as men.

Figure 2:
Gender Differences in Time Spent on Cleaning Activities in Domestic Care Dimension

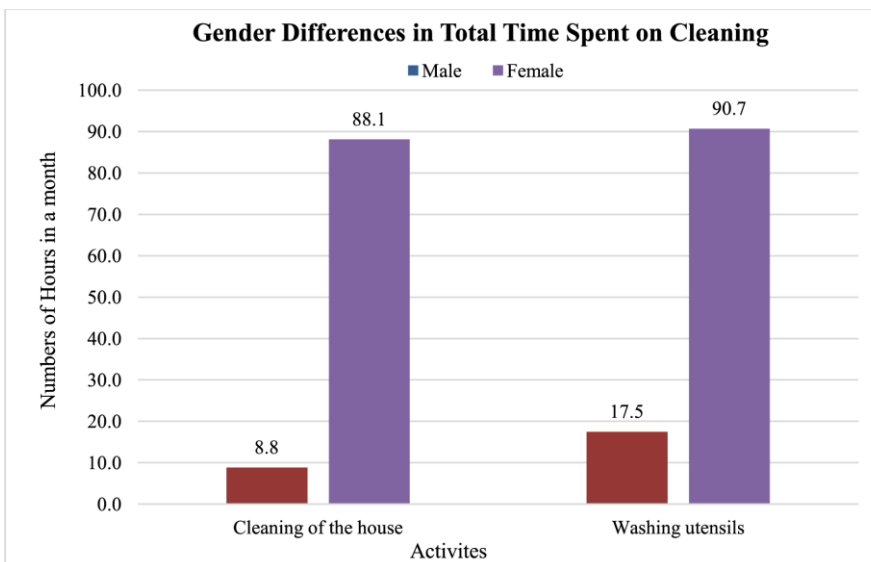


Figure 2 shows the gender differences in the average time spent cleaning the house under domestic care in one month. In comparison to men, who devote very little time to these activities—spending an average of only 17.5 and 8.8 hours per month on cleaning of house activities and utensil washing, respectively—females are more likely to devote 90.7 and 88.1 hours per month to these tasks, indicating a greater amount of time spent on domestic care tasks.

Figure 3:

Gender Differences in the Average Time Spent on Preparing Food and Serving Meals/Guests in Domestic Care Dimension

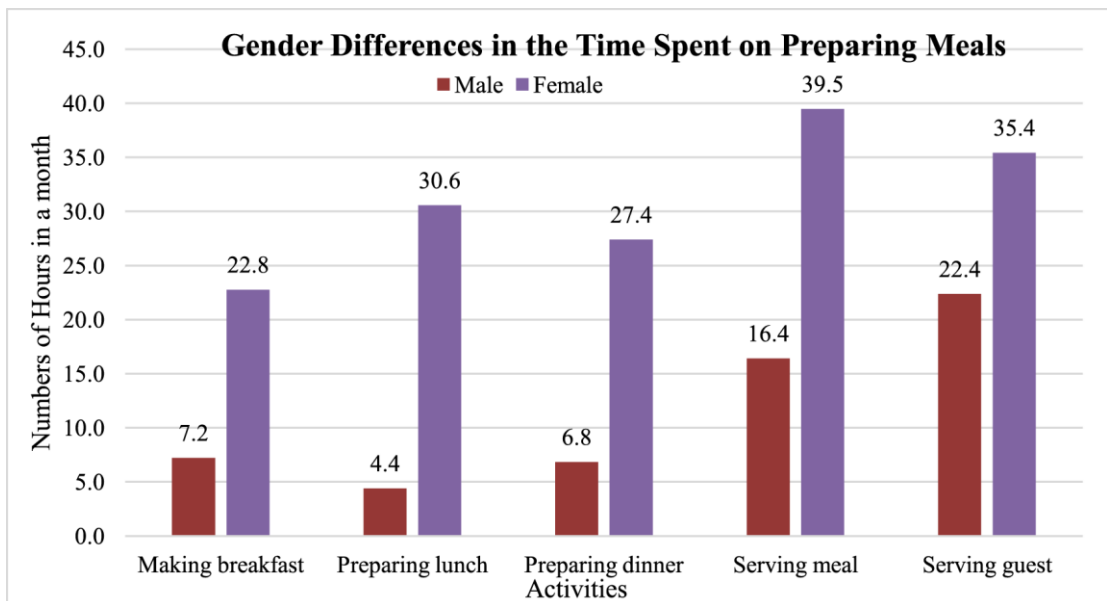


Figure 3 shows gender differences in the time spent on activities related to preparing and serving food to families in the domestic care dimension. Regarding meal preparation and serving, the figure unequivocally demonstrates that women devote more time to these tasks each month than men. Most of the time is spent by women making breakfast, lunch, and dinner (with an average of 30.6, 24.9, and 22.8 hours per month), respectively. Conversely, men spend an average of 4.4, 6.8, and 7.2 hours a month preparing breakfast, lunch, and dinner, respectively, indicating that in Pakistani households, these tasks are exclusively assigned to women. In a month, the time spent serving meals to families for males and females is 39.5 and 16.4 hours, respectively. Males spend 22.4 hours, and ladies spend 35.4 hours serving guests each month, significantly higher than preparing food for families.

Figure 4:
Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on Washing, Ironing, and Mending of Clothes in Domestic Care Dimension

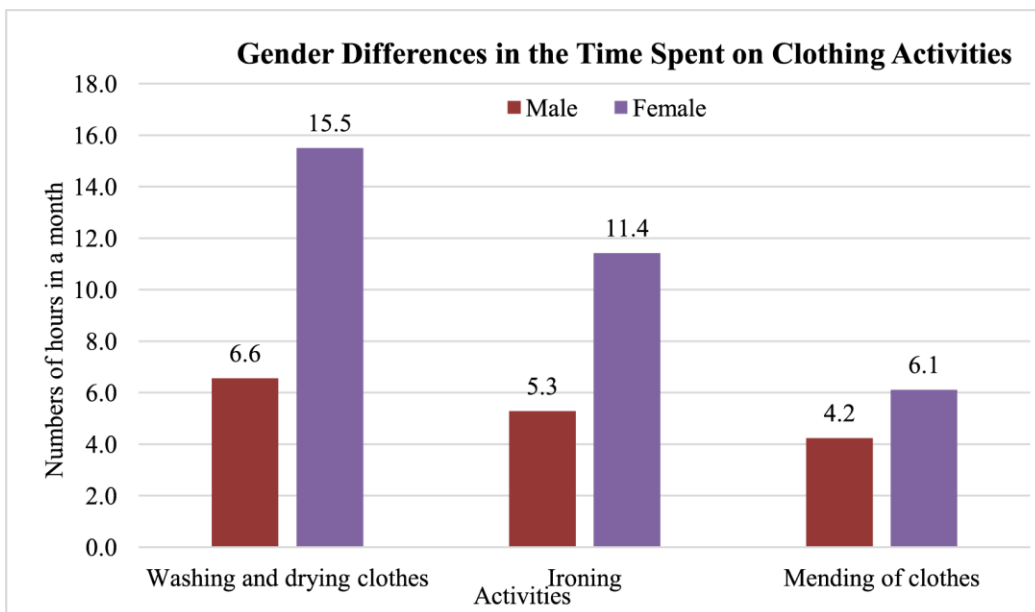


Figure 4 shows the gender differences in the time spent washing, ironing, and mending clothes over a month. In comparison to men, women devote more time to each activity: 15.5, 11.4, and 6.1 hours per month to clothing washing, drying, and mending. Conversely, men devote less time, which is 6.6, 5.3, and 4.2 hours each month, to these activities.

Figure 5:
Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on Shopping for Domestic Care Dimension

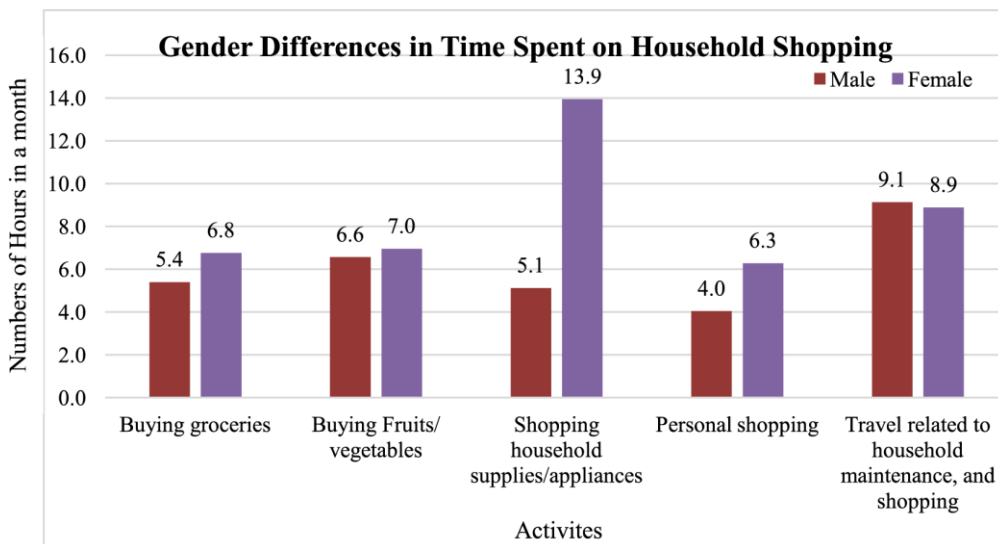


Figure 5 shows the gender differences in the time spent on shopping-related activities for the domestic dimension in a month. When it comes to shopping, women spend significantly more time each month than men do. These include purchasing food, fruits, and vegetables, shopping for appliances and supplies for the home, personal shopping, and traveling for home-related activities. Males dedicate 5.4, 6.6, 5.1, 4, and 9.1 hours a month to the activities. In contrast, females devote 6.8, 7, 13.9, 6.3, and 8.9 hours per month to the activities. Compared to men, women spend more time shopping for appliances and household goods.

Figure 6:

Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on the Collection of Household Supplies for Domestic Care Dimension

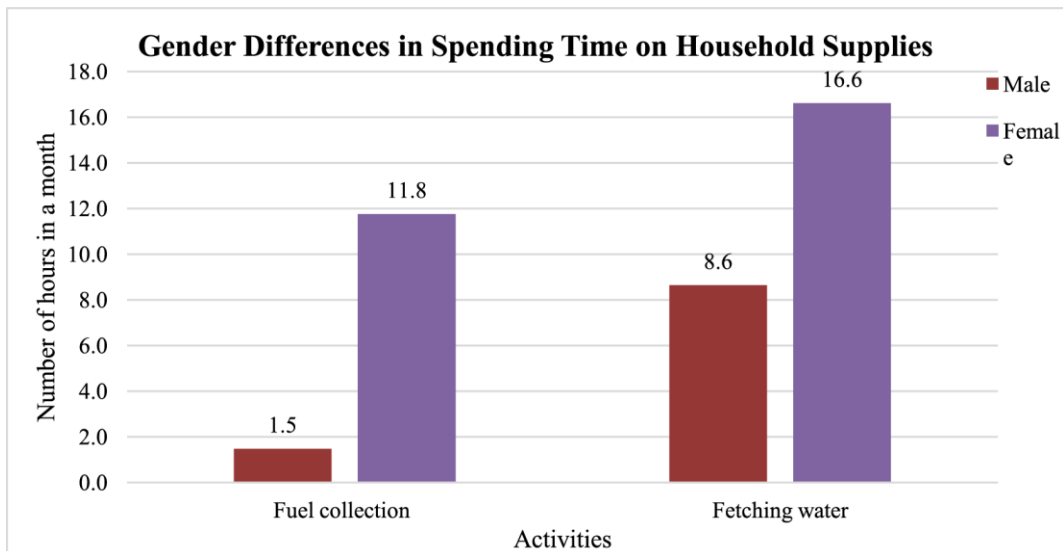


Figure 6 shows the gender differences in the time spent collecting household supplies for domestic care in a month. Even though these tasks—such as gathering fuel and obtaining water—are associated with outdoor activities, women spend more time doing them than men. While women spend 11.8 and 16.6 hours a month collecting fuel and getting water, men spend 1.5 and 8.6 hours on similar tasks.

Figure 7:
Gender Differences in Average Time Spent on Gardening, Livestock Care, and Paying Bills in Domestic Care Dimension

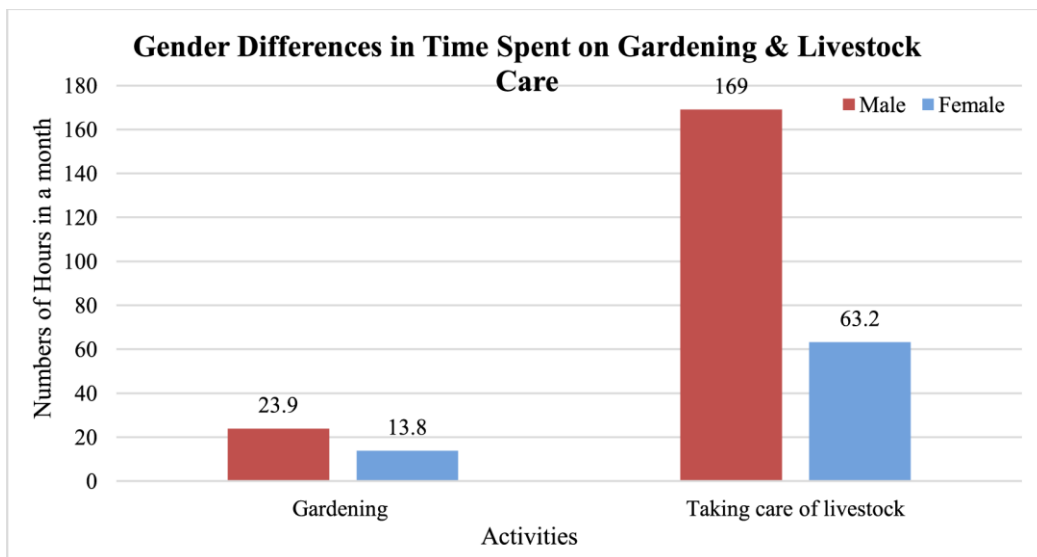


Figure 7 shows the gender differences in the time spent on activities covered under domestic care, including gardening, taking care of livestock, and paying bills. Spending 23.9 hours a month compared to 13.8 hours by females indicates that they have a stronger inclination to gardening. Males devote 168.4 hours a month, compared to 62.3 hours for females, to caring for their livestock, which is a greater amount of time than females. Spending less than an hour a month paying bills is the average for both genders.

Figure 8:
Gender Differences in Total Time Spent on Different Domains of Domestic Care Dimension

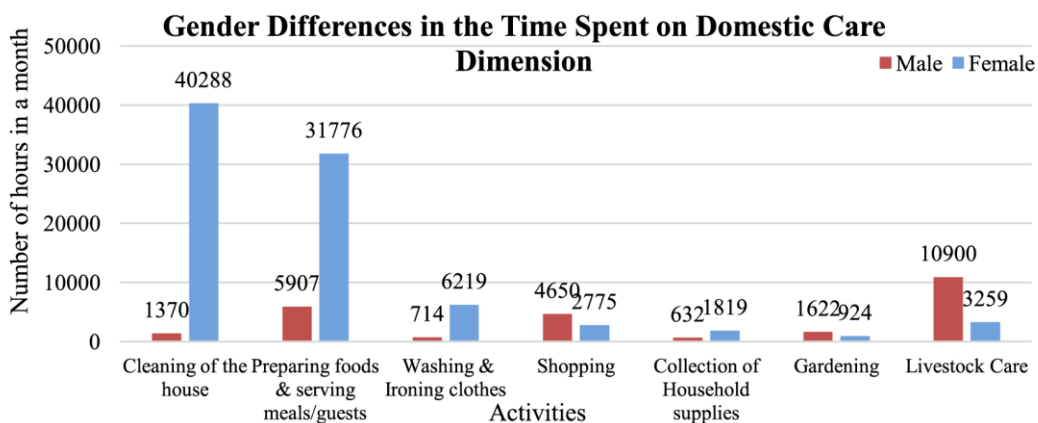


Figure 8 illustrates the gender differences in the total number of hours spent on different

dimensions of domestic care in a month. Cleaning the house takes up the most time for women, followed by cooking, serving meals to guests, washing and ironing clothes, livestock care, shopping, collecting household supplies, and gardening. These aspects of household care have 4028, 31776, 6219, 3259, 2775, 1819, and 924 hours a month. The men's time was highest when it came to caring for the livestock (10900 hours), then food preparation and serving (5907 hours), shopping (4650 hours), gardening (1622 hours), house cleaning (1370 hours), laundry and ironing (714 hours), gathering household supplies (632 hours), over a month. Men dedicate more time than women to those aspects of household maintenance, which are associated with tasks carried out outside the home (e.g., shopping, gardening, caring for animals, and bill payment). Conversely, women outnumber men in time spent on inside chores such as cooking, cleaning, and pressing clothes.

Figure 9:

Gender Differences in Total Time Per Month Spent on Domestic Care Activities

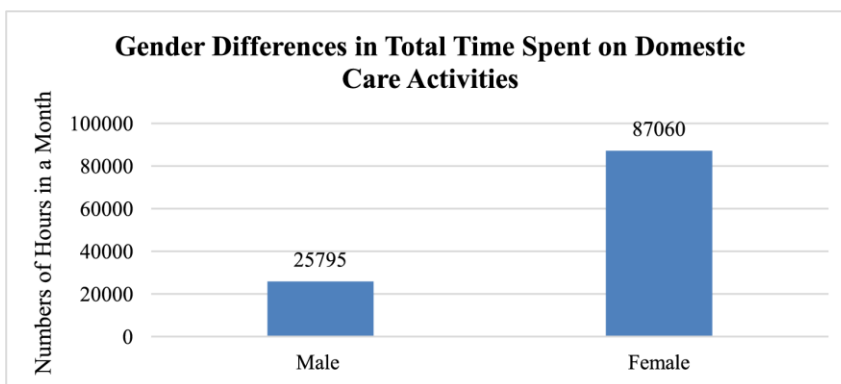


Figure 9 shows the total time males and females spend monthly on 20 domestic care activities. It reveals that females spend around 87060 hours monthly on all domestic care activities. Meanwhile, males spend 25795 hours on domestic care activities in a month. It is pertinent to mention that females spend almost 2 times more time on domestic care activities than males.

Table 2:

Contribution of Males and Females Towards Care Economy

S#	Time Spent on Domestic care work	Male	Female
1	Average Time Spent in a day (in hours)	2.3	7.4
2	Total Time spent in a month (in hours)	25795	87060

Table 2 presents the time both males and females spend on domestic care activities and clearly reflects their contribution to the care economy. Women allocate an average of 7.4 hours per day to domestic tasks, while males allocate 2.3 hours per day. This pattern is evident in the total monthly contributions, where men and women devote 25,795 and 87,060 hours to domestic care responsibilities each month. These statistics underscore the gender disparities in contribution to the care economy by emphasizing women's greater time commitment to domestic care.

Gender Differences in the Economic Values of Domestic Care

Calculation of economic value:

Following the study of Suh (201), the economic value of domestic care activities was calculated by using the following formula:

$$V = \sum_{i=1}^N [D_i f_i (H_i * 60 + M_i) / 60] * W_j$$

Where V is the total economic value of all respondents for performing composite domestic and care activity,

D_i = No. of days performed a certain activities in a month by a respondent

f_i = frequency of doing certain activity

H_i = Hours spent on a certain activity in a day

M_i = Minutes spent on a certain activity in a day

W_j = wage per hour

The wage rate for calculating the economic value for domestic and care activities is considered the minimum wage, i.e., 32 thousand (w.e.f. July 2023, as announced by the Government of Punjab).

A worker is required 40 hours to work in a week, using the minimum wage, we've converted per hour wage using the formula below:

$$W_j = \frac{32000 \text{ minimum wage in a month}}{(40 * 4) \text{ hours in Month}} = 200 \text{ Rupees per hour}$$

Figure 10:

Gender Differences in the Perceived Economic Value of Domestic Care Dimension

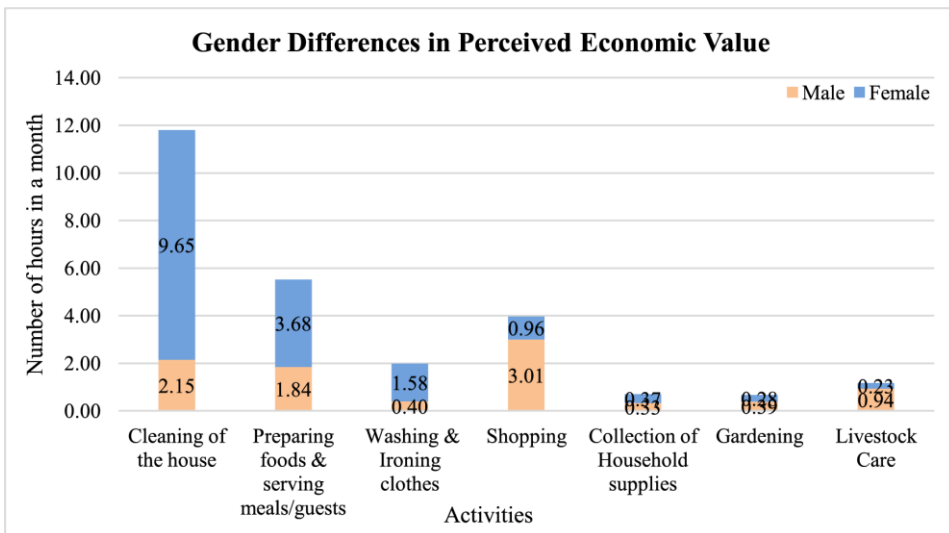


Figure 10 shows the gender differences in the perceived economic values of domestic care activities. Women perceive higher economic values than men for tasks like housecleaning,

cooking and serving guests, laundry and ironing, and gathering household supplies. These values are 9.7 million rupees by women versus 2.1 million by men, 3.7 million rupees by women versus 3.7 million by men, 1.6 million rupees by women versus 0.4 by men, and finally 0.4 million rupees by women versus 0.3 million rupees by men. The difference indicates that women devote a disproportionate amount of time to these pursuits, making them more financially valuable. Men place a higher value on activities performed outside the home, such as gardening (0.4 million rupees for men and 0.3 million for women), shopping (3 million rupees for men and 1 million for women), and taking care of livestock (0.6 million rupees for men and 0.2 million for women). Since men perform most of the responsibilities involved in bill payment, the perceived value of men is demonstrated in this action, amounting to 0.3 million rupees.

Figure 11:

Gender Differences in the Market-Based-Economic Value of Domestic Care Dimension

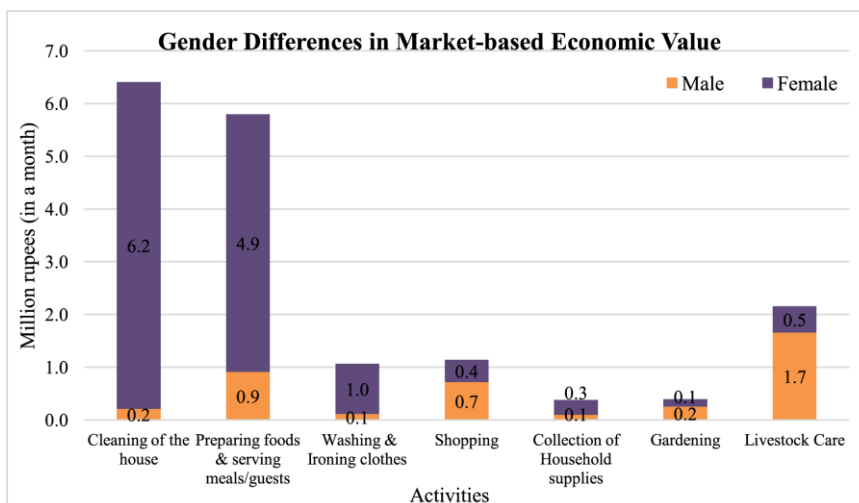


Figure 11 shows the gender differences in the market-based economic value in domestic care activities calculated at 153.85 rupees/hr. In comparison to men, women's market-based economic values are higher in the following areas: housecleaning (6.2 million rupees versus 0.2 million by men), food preparation and guest service (4.9 million rupees versus 0.9 million by men), laundry and ironing (1 million rupees versus 0.1 million by men), and gathering supplies for the home (i.e., 0.3 million rupees by females and 0.1 million by males). Males in this market have higher market-based economic values than females for activities like shopping, gardening, and caring for livestock. These values are 0.7 million rupees for males versus 0.4 million for females, 0.2 million rupees for males versus 0.1 million for females and 1.7 million rupees for males versus females. Males here have higher market-based economic values than females for shopping, gardening, and livestock care. These values are 0.7 million rupees for males versus 0.4 million for females, 0.2 million for males versus 0.1 million for females, and 1.7 million rupees for males versus 0.5 million for females. The market-based economic value of domestic duties women perform is higher than that of men, indicating a substantial gender division of labor in the household. This is because women execute these tasks daily.

Figure 12:
Gender Differences in the Market-Based and Perceived Economic Value of Domestic Care

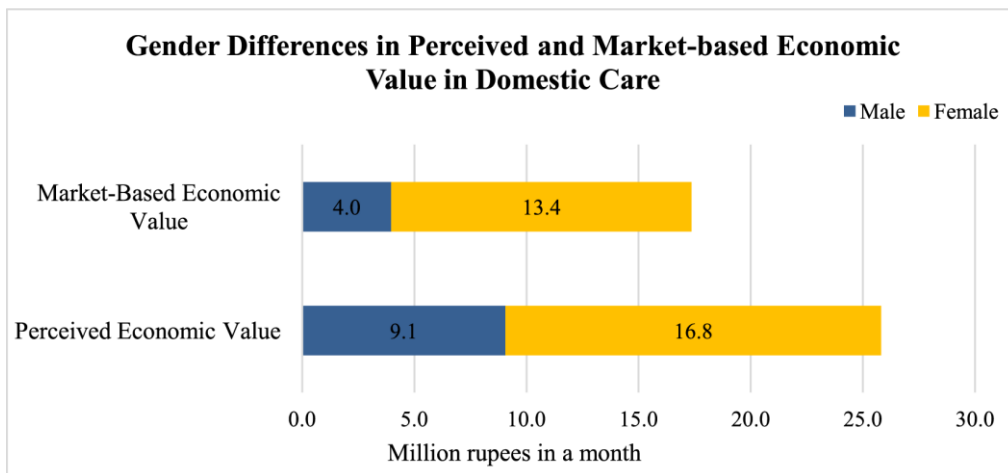


Figure 12 shows the gender differences in the perceived and market-based economic value for different activities in the domestic care dimension. Men and women place a higher overall value on domestic care than market-based economic values, indicating that people who provide it daily recognize its significant worth. The value that women place on domestic care is 16.8 million rupees, compared to 9.1 million rupees for men. The discrepancy indicates that women, who are typically the primary caregivers, know the time, effort, and significance of these duties. Females have a higher market-based economic worth than males, with 13.4 million rupees compared to 4 million rupees.

The discussion of the study is based on the responses to the study's research questions. The first query concerned how much time rural men and women spent performing household care duties. When it comes to all unpaid care duties, women generally spend more time—7.4 hours on average per day—than men, who only spend 2 hours on average. Robles (2010) indicates that women in Ethiopia allocate 36 hours weekly to domestic tasks, whilst men contribute just 7 hours weekly. Fontana and Natali (2008) found that Ghana exhibited the lowest percentage of time allocated to housekeeping. The gendered division of labor arrangement is based on social norms that designate women for caregiving responsibilities. According to Jung & O'Brien, (2017), this story represents various forms of unpaid caregiving and the preservation of society's fabric, placing further pressure on women and girls to perform domestic and caregiving tasks for the benefit of others. In the realm of domestic care, women are performing over three times as much work as men. Specifically, women perform an average of 87,060 hours per month on all domestic care tasks, compared to men's 25,795 hours. The prevalence of conventional home roles, which view household chores as exclusively the responsibility of women, is supported by the predominance of women in the workforce. Even though care is a valued resource for society, families are now primarily responsible for providing care labor. In households, women and girls are primarily responsible for these caregiving tasks (UN Women, 2020). The significant gender difference in the amount of time spent on these has been highlighted by several studies. Several studies

have highlighted the significant gender difference in the time dedicated to these domestic care tasks, with women typically handling most of the burden (Rubiano-Matulevich & Viollaz, 2019).

The study's second research question was about calculating the economic value perceived by the participants and the market-based economic value of all the domestic care activities. The results indicated that the perceived monetary value for the domestic care dimension is highest, with women having a higher monthly value than men (9.1 million rupees against 16.8 million rupees) for females. Caregiving activities are often excluded from economic assessments since they occur in domestic settings and do not provide direct income (Dhungel, 2022; Schulz, & Eden, 2016). Regarding market-based economic value, the value of care activities for women is higher than that of men—13.4 million rupees per month vs 4 million rupees for men. This demonstrates how much the women who perform these tasks regard their contribution to domestic care duties. Despite their critical importance, domestic care activities have historically been marginalized and excluded from the domestic, communal, and/or national economy. This has resulted in perpetuating structural injustices and reinforcing traditional gender norms (UN Women, 2016; Oxfam, 2020). That, in return, not only sustains cycles of poverty and marginalization but also strengthens pre-existing gender inequalities concerning access to resources, employment opportunities, and wages (UN Women, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This research found substantial gender inequalities in time spent and perceived and market-based economic values. The data show that rural women care for their homes for 7.4 hours daily, while men spend 2 hours. According to societal standards, women are supposed to care for others, which explains this inequality. This poll shows that women undertake more than three times as much domestic care as men, averaging 87,060 hours per month compared to 25,795 hours for males. Despite men's rising involvement, traditions that assign home tasks to women preserve this division of labor. The perceived economic advantage of home caring makes women spend more time and appreciate their efforts more. Women think domestic caregiving is worth 9.1 million rupees per month, compared to 16.8 million for men. Market-based assessments value men's caring at 4 million rupees per month and women's at 13.4 million. It is essential to resolve these disparities to promote gender equality, improve the well-being of carers, and recognize the economic value of caregiving activities. Establishing a more equitable and equitable distribution of care work among genders can be facilitated by promoting shared caregiving responsibilities, implementing supportive policies such as flexible work arrangements, and enhancing societal recognition of the importance of caregiving. These results emphasize the need to address the social and economic effects of domestic work gender allocation. Recognizing women's disproportionate burden and the huge economic benefit of their caregiving should help policymakers and society promote fair distribution of caring duties and rules that reflect the true value of domestic labor. This research contributes to the gender parity and structural changes in the caring perception and appreciation debate.

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Violence against Women in Nepal: Exploring Challenges and Strategies for Women Empowerment

Abstract

This research investigates the dynamics of violence against women in Nepal and proposes strategies for women's empowerment within this context. Drawing on secondary data from the Annual Report of Nepal Police, INSEC, WOREC, and newspapers, the paper offers a nuanced analysis. Methodologically, qualitative analysis is employed, utilizing thematic analysis to discern patterns and challenges. The study is grounded in the feminist theoretical framework, which examines power dynamics and gender inequality as central to understanding violence against women. Findings highlight the pervasive nature of violence, compounded by socio-cultural norms, legal inadequacies, and economic disparities. While existing mechanisms face hurdles, promising strategies such as legal reforms and community mobilization offer avenues for progress. Through investments in education, economic opportunities, policy reforms, and grassroots advocacy, Nepal can create environments enabling women to fulfill their potential. In conclusion, addressing violence against women necessitates a multifaceted approach, emphasizing empowerment through interventions and policy reforms.

Keywords: Empowerment, Exploitation, Strategies, Violence against Women

INTRODUCTION

Violence against Women (VAW) is a pervasive human rights violation that transcends geographical, cultural, and socio-economic boundaries (UN Women, 2023). The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that nearly one in three women globally has experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, a figure that underscores the alarming prevalence of gender-based violence (WHO, 2022). In Nepal, gender-based violence (GBV) remains a deeply ingrained issue, exacerbated by entrenched patriarchal norms, socio-economic disparities, and inadequate law enforcement mechanisms (National Women Commission, 2023). Historically, women in Nepal, as in many other societies, have been relegated to domestic roles, confined to caregiving and household management (Dahal et al., 2020). However, recent shifts in societal dynamics have seen women increasingly participating in the workforce, politics, and activism, challenging traditional gender norms (Shrestha, 2023). Despite these advancements, structural barriers and cultural resistance continue to perpetuate violence and discrimination against women.

Gender-based violence is defined as any act that results in physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion, or deprivation of liberty (WHO, 2022). In Nepal, common forms of violence against women include domestic

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violence, marital rape, dowry-related abuse, trafficking, and sexual harassment (Nepal Law Commission, 2023). Although Nepal has enacted laws such as the Domestic Violence (Offense and Punishment) Act of 2009 and the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act of 2007, enforcement remains inconsistent, and many cases go unreported due to fear, stigma, and lack of legal awareness (National Women Commission, 2023). Recent studies highlight the complexity of VAW in Nepal. A 2021 report by the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) revealed that 22% of women aged 15–49 had experienced physical violence, while 7% had suffered sexual violence (NDHS, 2021). During the COVID-19 lockdown, cases of domestic violence surged by 24%, exposing systemic weaknesses in the protection and support mechanisms available to survivors (Garthe et al., 2023). The persistence of such violence necessitates a deeper examination of its socio-cultural, economic, and legal dimensions to formulate effective intervention strategies.

Statement of the Problem

Despite legislative progress and advocacy efforts, violence against women in Nepal remains a critical concern. Legal frameworks often fail in implementation, leading to impunity for perpetrators and a lack of justice for survivors (Poudel, 2023). Factors such as economic dependency, lack of awareness, and weak institutional responses contribute to the problem, making it imperative to assess the effectiveness of existing legal mechanisms and explore sustainable solutions (Shrestha, 2023). Given this context, this study seeks to investigate the socio-cultural and legal factors contributing to the persistence of VAW in Nepal and evaluate the effectiveness of current legislative and policy measures. Doing so aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen institutional responses and enhance protection mechanisms for women in Nepal.

Research Objectives

1. To identify the various forms of violence against women prevalent in Nepal.
2. To explore the socio-cultural, legal, and economic factors contributing to violence against women in Nepal.
3. To assess the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional frameworks in addressing violence against women in Nepal.

Research Question

What are the underlying factors contributing to the persistence of violence against women in Nepal, and how effective are current mechanisms in addressing this issue?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to contextualize the study within the broader academic discourse on violence against women and women's empowerment. Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports from international organizations such as UN Women and the World Health Organization (WHO) were reviewed to identify patterns, challenges, and gaps in the existing research. The review highlighted key themes, including the socio-cultural determinants of violence, the effectiveness of legislative measures, and the role of economic empowerment in reducing women's vulnerability to violence. This process

ensured the study was grounded in a robust theoretical framework and built on the latest scholarly contributions.

Theoretical Framework

The study of violence against women in the Indian subcontinent and Nepal has drawn upon various theoretical frameworks and empirical research to illuminate the multifaceted nature of this pervasive issue. However, there is a need to bridge the gap between broad theoretical perspectives and Nepal's specific socio-cultural and legislative context. This section clarifies these theoretical perspectives and their relevance to this study's objectives.

Feminist Theories and Intersectionality

Feminist theories, including Radical Feminism and Intersectionality, have been pivotal in highlighting the structural and systemic nature of violence against women (hooks, 1981; Crenshaw, 1989). These theories emphasize how gender intersects with other axes of oppression, such as caste, class, and ethnicity. In Nepal, scholars have underscored how patriarchal norms intertwine with socio-cultural traditions to perpetuate gender-based violence (Maharjan, 2017; Tamang, 2009). However, feminist frameworks alone may not capture Nepal's historical and legislative challenges, necessitating a localized feminist approach that integrates socio-cultural specificities.

Social Learning Theory and Behavioral Conditioning

Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory posits that behaviors are learned through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Studies in South Asia highlight that exposure to violence in family and community settings normalizes violent behaviors, increasing their perpetuation (Singh & Kapur, 2020). In Nepal, socialization within patriarchal family structures and cultural traditions reinforces gender norms that justify violence against women (Ghimire et al., 2015). Critics argue that while Social Learning Theory explains behavioral transmission, it does not fully address the structural inequalities that sustain gender-based violence, necessitating an integrative approach.

Patriarchy and Structural Oppression

Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) seminal work, *The Second Sex*, critiques patriarchal structures that define women as secondary to men, limiting their autonomy. In Nepal, traditional norms often relegate women to subordinate roles, reinforcing their vulnerability to violence (Tamang, 2009). Virginia Woolf's (1929) exploration of women's economic independence in *A Room of One's Own* is also relevant in Nepal, where economic dependence on male family members restricts women's ability to escape abusive relationships (Acharya & Bennett, 2019). These theories, though valuable, require adaptation to Nepal's caste and ethnicity-based hierarchical structures, which further complicate gender-based violence. While existing theories offer valuable insights, a notable gap exists in their application to Nepal's specific socio-cultural and legislative environment. Prior research largely focuses on gender-based violence as a structural issue, but fewer studies address how caste, ethnicity, and local governance systems shape women's experiences. This study aims to fill this gap by integrating intersectional feminist perspectives with contextual realities of caste, ethnicity,

and state mechanisms in Nepal.

Common Forms of Violence against Women in Nepal

Violence against women in Nepal manifests in various forms, influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and legal factors.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse within intimate relationships. Studies indicate that deep-rooted patriarchal norms, economic dependence, and lack of legal enforcement sustain this violence in Nepal (UN Women, 2021; Acharya & Bennett, 2019). During the COVID-19 lockdown, Nepal's National Women Commission reported a 24% rise in domestic violence cases, underscoring the need for urgent intervention (NWC, 2020).

Dowry-related Violence

Although dowry is illegal in Nepal, cultural practices persist, leading to dowry-related harassment, abuse, and even deaths (Puri, 2003). Weak enforcement and deep-seated socio-economic traditions fuel this issue (Duvvury et al., 2013).

Sexual Violence

Despite legal reforms, sexual violence remains prevalent, often unreported, due to stigma and legal inefficiencies (HRW, 2020). The unresolved Nirmala Panta case exemplifies systemic failures in Nepal's investigative and judicial processes.

Trafficking

Women and girls in Nepal face trafficking for forced labor and sexual exploitation (UNODC, 2021). Organizations like Maiti Nepal and Kailash Satyarthi's Foundation combat trafficking, yet systemic issues persist, necessitating stronger international cooperation (Dhungana, 2019).

Acid Attacks

Cases like Sangita Magar's 2015 acid attack highlight the brutality of gender-based violence in Nepal. Legislative changes have been enacted to impose stricter penalties, but enforcement challenges remain (Nepal Law Commission, 2020).

Cyberbullying

Online harassment targeting women, including defamation, threats, and non-consensual image sharing, has increased, exacerbated by weak cybercrime laws and a lack of digital literacy (Bhattarai & Maharjan, 2022).

Witchcraft Allegations

Women, especially from marginalized communities, are often accused of witchcraft, leading to social ostracization, violence, and even murder (INSEC, 2021). A study found that 23

women were accused of witchcraft in Nepal in a single year, with two being burnt alive (INSEC, 2021).

Caste and Ethnicity-Based Violence

Women from lower castes face compounded discrimination due to entrenched hierarchical structures (Gurung, 2018). Dalit women, in particular, experience violence both from within their communities and from dominant caste groups (Kisan, 2018). According to the Nepal Human Rights Commission (2021), caste-based violence is often underreported due to fear of retribution and lack of legal accountability. Ethnic minorities, such as indigenous women, also face systemic marginalization, limiting their access to justice and social protection (Tamang, 2009).

Socially Entrenched Harmful Practices

Several harmful traditions continue to pose threats to women's rights in Nepal:

Chhaupadi (Menstrual Seclusion)

Despite legal bans, the practice of isolating menstruating women persists in some rural areas. Reports indicate that in 2023 alone, 15 women died due to snake bites or suffocation while confined to menstrual huts (NHRC, 2023).

Kamlahari (Bonded Domestic Labor)

Despite being outlawed in 2013, the practice of young girls being sent into domestic servitude continues in some areas due to economic vulnerabilities (Sharma, 2020).

Deuki System (Temple Servitude)

This historical practice, where young girls are dedicated to temple service, has largely declined but still exists in isolated cases, with former Deukis facing economic and social exclusion (Adhikari, 2018).

Sati (Widow Burning)

Although outlawed for centuries, social pressures still lead to widow discrimination, limiting their rights and social mobility (UN Women, 2021).

Dowry System

Continued dowry practices contribute to financial strain, gender disparities, and domestic violence (Puri, 2003).

Child Marriage

Nepal has one of the highest rates of child marriage in South Asia, with economic hardship and cultural norms driving the practice (UNICEF, 2020). Early marriage has been linked to poor educational outcomes and increased vulnerability to domestic violence (Ghimire et al., 2015).

Despite extensive literature on gender-based violence, there remains a critical gap in understanding how caste, ethnicity, religion, and legal structures shape women's experiences in Nepal. By addressing these intersections, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender-based violence and inform targeted interventions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach to explore the intricate dynamics of violence against women in Nepal and to propose strategies for women's empowerment within this context. While the primary focus is on qualitative analysis, including both secondary and primary data sources ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. The methodology addresses the limitations identified in the reviewer's comments, particularly the lack of a thorough literature review and the absence of women's voices in the analysis.

Data Collection

The study utilizes **secondary data** from reputable sources, including the Annual Report of Nepal Police, reports from the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), the Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), and relevant newspapers. These sources provide valuable insights into the prevalence, types, and regional variations of violence against women in Nepal. To ensure inclusivity and representativeness, data were selected to reflect diverse geographical regions (urban and rural areas), ethnic groups, and socio-economic backgrounds.

To address the gap in primary data, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women who have experienced domestic violence in Nepal. Participants were recruited through partnerships with local NGOs, including WOREC and INSEC, ensuring ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study. The interviews focused on understanding the lived experiences of women, the barriers they face in seeking justice, and their perspectives on existing support systems. This primary data collection enriches the study by incorporating the voices of those directly affected by violence, providing a more nuanced understanding of the issue.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis techniques were employed to analyze both secondary and primary data. Thematic coding was used to categorize and interpret the data, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to violence against women and women's empowerment. To ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis, multiple coders independently analyzed the data, and inter-coder reliability was assessed. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, enhancing the credibility of the findings. For the primary data, narrative analysis was used to explore the personal stories and experiences shared by the participants. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the emotional, social, and institutional challenges faced by women experiencing violence. The integration of secondary and primary data provided a holistic perspective on the issue, enabling the identification of both systemic and individual-level factors contributing to violence against women in Nepal.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to protect the rights and well-being of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all interview participants, and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. Data were stored securely, and participants were provided with information about support services. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study, ensuring compliance with ethical research standards.

Strengths and Limitations

The inclusion of primary data through interviews with women who have experienced violence is a significant strength of this study, as it provides firsthand insights into the issue. However, the study is limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Additionally, while sufficient for qualitative analysis, the sample size for interviews may not represent all women in Nepal. Future research could expand on these findings by incorporating larger-scale surveys or longitudinal studies.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Prevalent Forms of Violence Against Women

The findings of this study reveal a spectrum of prevalent forms of violence against women in Nepal, ranging from physical and sexual abuse to psychological and economic coercion. These manifestations of violence often occur within the confines of intimate relationships, households, and communities, perpetuated by power imbalances and entrenched gender norms. Incidents of domestic violence, including marital rape, are distressingly common, highlighting the vulnerability of women within familial settings. Additionally, instances of sexual violence, harassment, and trafficking further exacerbate the pervasive nature of gender-based violence in Nepalese society.

Table 1

Types of Violence and Recorded Number of Cases in Nepal

SN	Types of Violence	Number of Cases
1	Rape	2380
2	Attempt to Rape	655
3	Child Sexual Abuse	314
4	Unnatural Intercourse	31
5	Abduction and Rape	72
6	Murder after Rape	9
7	Polygamy	809
8	Child Marriage	52
9	Domestic Violence	17000
10	Human Trafficking	145
11	Illegal Abortion	17
12	Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability	15

*Source: *Annual Fact Sheet of Nepal Police (2023- 2024)*

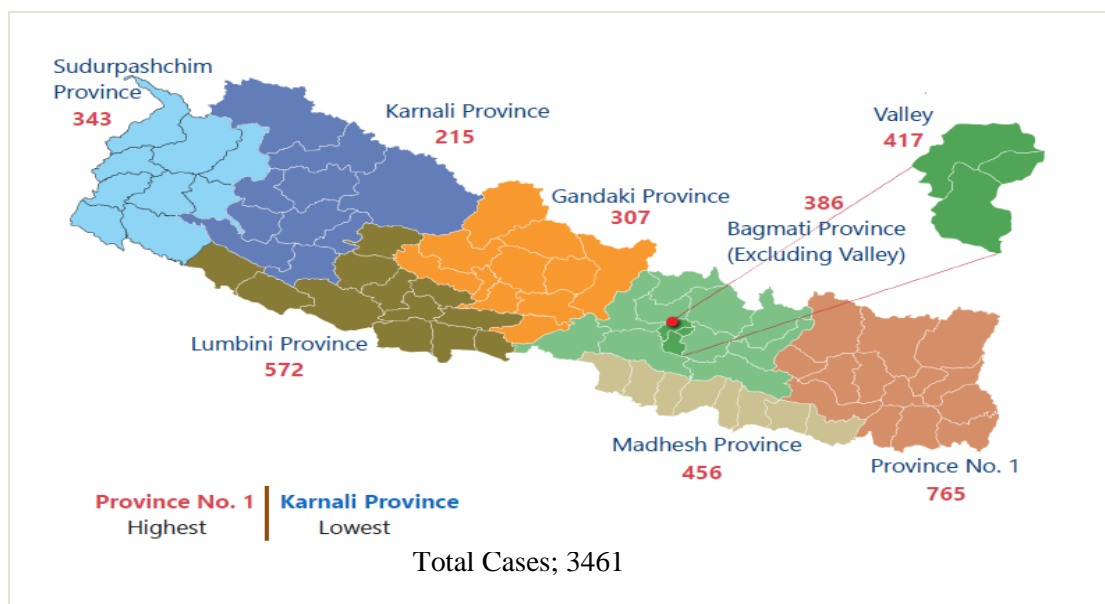
Table 1 presents the types of violence recorded in Nepal and the corresponding number of

reported cases. The types of violence include a range of offenses, from sexual violence, such as rape and child sexual abuse, to other forms of violence, such as domestic violence and human trafficking. With a staggering 17,000 cases reported, domestic violence emerges as the most prevalent form of violence in Nepal. This indicates a pervasive issue within households, affecting a significant portion of the population. The combined total of reported cases of rape (2380) and attempted rape (655) underscores the alarming frequency of sexual violence against women and girls in Nepalese society. The significant number of cases (809) involving polygamy suggests a systemic issue of gender inequality and marital coercion, with women often subjected to exploitative marital practices.

Overall, the trends in reported cases of violence against women in Nepal reflect deep-rooted societal issues, including gender inequality, cultural norms that perpetuate violence, and systemic failures in addressing and preventing such violence. Efforts to combat these issues require comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of violence while providing support and protection for survivors.

Figure 1

Sexual Violence (Rape, Attempt to Rape, Child Sexual Abuse, Abduction and Rape, Murder after Rape) Recorded Cases in Nepal

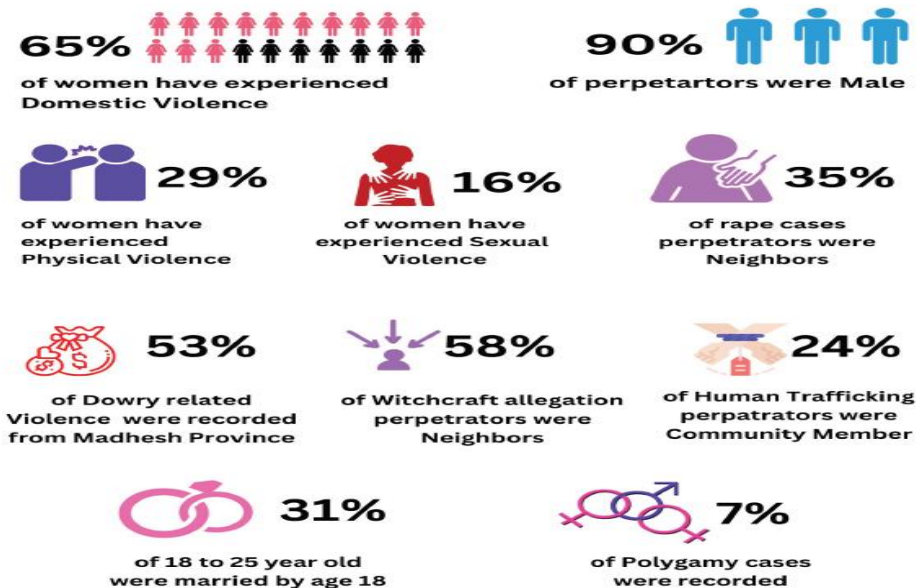


**Source: Annual Fact Sheet of Nepal Police (2023-2024)*

Figure 1 shows that the highest rate of sexual violence was in province no 1, and the lowest rate of the recorded cases was in Karnali province of Nepal. Due to geographical remoteness and lack of access for all rural people to file the cases, the recorded cases number is smaller in some provinces.

Figure 2

Domestic Violence /Gender Based Violence (GBV) against Women in Nepal



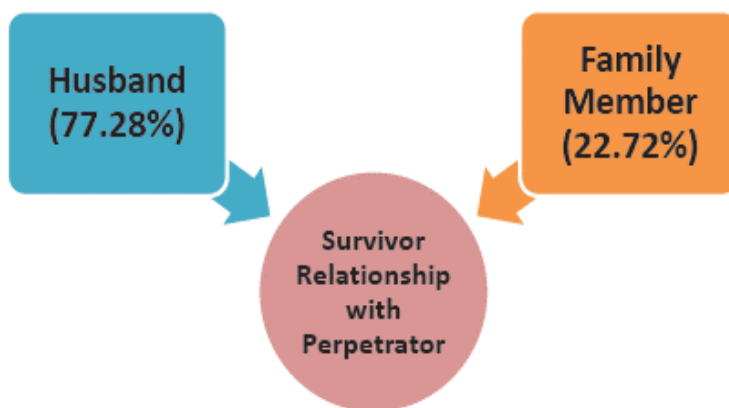
**Source: Annual Fact Sheet on GBV by WOREC (August 2023 – July 2024)*

Figure 2 shows that among the recorded cases, 1831 on G.

BV in that year, 65% of women experienced domestic violence. The neighbors commit rape and witchcraft allegations in most of the cases.

Figure 3

Domestic Violence (Survivors' Relationship with Perpetrator)

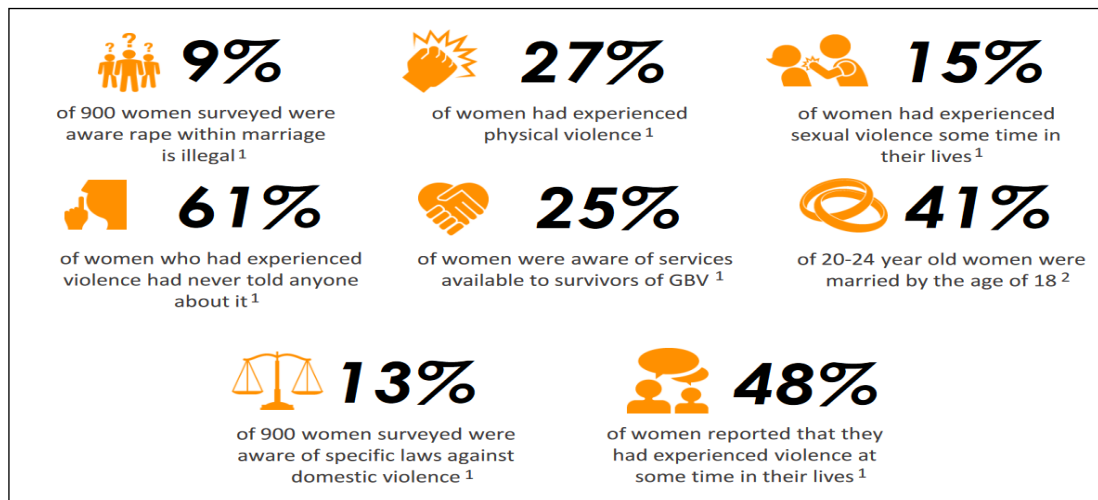


**Source: Annual Fact Sheet on GBV by WOREC 2023-2024*

Figure 3 presents that in domestic violence, 77.28 % of the women were tortured, beaten, killed, and burnt by their husbands, and other family members committed 22.72% of the cases. Dowry, extra-marital affairs, polygamy, poverty, inability to be a mother, and not having a baby boy are the significant reasons behind the domestic violence in Nepal.

Figure 4

Common GBV Issues in Nepal



*Source: UNFPA Nepal 2012

Figure 4 illustrates common gender-based violence (GBV) issues in Nepal, including domestic violence, marital rape, dowry-related violence, child marriage, polygamy, female infanticide, witchcraft accusations, Chhaupadi, and trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation. Survivors often endure both physical and psychological distress, along with sexual and reproductive health consequences such as forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, sexually transmitted infections including HIV, and mortality.

Girl Trafficking in Nepal

In the past two years, approximately 40,300 Nepalis, predominantly women and girls, have been trafficked, with around 1.9 million people remaining vulnerable to trafficking (National Human Rights Report, 2022). Most trafficking victims from Nepal are transported to India, facilitated by porous borders and cultural similarities. On average, 50 women are trafficked to India daily, which serves as a transit point for trafficking to numerous other countries. Maiti Nepal, an organization dedicated to rescuing and rehabilitating trafficked individuals, has safeguarded 52,047 women and girls from potential trafficking risks along the Nepal-India and Nepal-China borders.

Challenges to Women's Empowerment in Nepal

Women's empowerment in Nepal faces numerous challenges stemming from deeply ingrained societal norms and structural barriers within political, economic, and cultural

spheres. This section elucidates some of the key challenges hindering women's empowerment within the Nepalese context:

Gender Discrimination

Gender discrimination remains a pervasive obstacle to women's empowerment in Nepal, perpetuating inequalities and limiting their opportunities for advancement. Institutionalized sexism manifests in hiring practices, wage disparities, and limited opportunities for career advancement, thereby impeding women's economic and social empowerment. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment, remains a significant barrier to women's empowerment in Nepal.

Socio-Economic Barriers

Limited access to quality education and healthcare perpetuates gender disparities and undermines women's empowerment in Nepal. Discriminatory practices, cultural norms, and economic barriers restrict women's access to education and healthcare services, thereby limiting their opportunities for personal and professional development. Lack of support for work-life balance, including affordable childcare and parental leave policies, reinforces gender inequalities and limits women's economic and social empowerment.

Political and Legal Constraints

Political and legal constraints undermine women's representation, participation, and rights in Nepal, perpetuating gender inequality and marginalization. Women in Nepal are underrepresented in political institutions and decision-making processes, limiting their ability to advocate for their interests and priorities. In Nepal, even within the mandated quota system, wherein a 33% reservation exists for women in political representation, nepotism and favoritism often prevail. Political leaders frequently opt to select their wives and relatives for these positions, even in cases of proportional representation. This phenomenon extends to various levels of political leadership, including the selection of mayors and deputy mayors, where one male and one female candidate must be chosen, with the latter often relegated to subordinate roles. These political and legal constraints significantly impede women's representation, participation, and rights in Nepal, perpetuating gender inequality and marginalization. In 753 local units, only seven are mayors and 11 chairpersons. The number of women vice-chairpersons or deputy mayors stands at 718.

Cultural and Social Norms

Cultural and social norms in Nepal shape attitudes, behaviors, and practices that perpetuate gender inequality and constrain women's empowerment. Patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes in Nepal reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, limiting women's opportunities and agency. Gender norms that valorize masculinity and denigrate femininity perpetuate inequality and discrimination, undermining women's empowerment and autonomy.

Patterns of Violence: The study highlights the alarming prevalence of domestic violence, which accounts for 65% of gender-based violence cases in Nepal. Sexual violence, including rape and child sexual abuse, also remains a significant concern, with 2,380 reported cases of rape in 2023. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address

violence within households and communities.

Root Causes: The research identifies socio-cultural norms, such as dowry practices, polygamy, and caste-based discrimination, as key drivers of violence against women. Economic dependency, limited access to education, and political underrepresentation further exacerbate women's vulnerability.

Effectiveness of Interventions: While Nepal has made strides in enacting laws such as the Domestic Violence (Offense and Punishment) Act and the Human Trafficking and Transportation (Control) Act, implementation gaps and cultural inertia continue to hinder their effectiveness. The study emphasizes the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and community-based awareness programs to bridge these gaps.

Voices of Survivors: Including primary data through interviews with survivors provides a nuanced understanding of the emotional, social, and institutional challenges women face. Their narratives highlight the importance of economic independence, access to justice, and psychosocial support in breaking the cycle of violence.

CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the pervasive and multifaceted nature of violence against women in Nepal, underscoring its deep entrenchment in socio-cultural norms, systemic inequalities, and institutional failures. Through an analysis of secondary data from reputable sources such as the Nepal Police, WOREC, and INSEC, as well as insights from primary interviews with survivors, the research has identified key patterns and challenges that hinder women's empowerment and perpetuate gender-based violence. The findings reveal that domestic violence, sexual violence, dowry-related abuse, and trafficking remain the most prevalent forms of violence, with 17,000 reported cases of domestic violence alone in 2023. These forms of violence are exacerbated by patriarchal structures, economic disparities, and weak enforcement of legal protections. Addressing violence against women in Nepal requires a multifaceted and sustained effort that prioritizes women's empowerment at its core. By dismantling patriarchal structures, amplifying women's voices, and fostering inclusive development policies, Nepal can pave the way toward a safer, more equitable society. This study underscores the urgency of collective action—by policymakers, civil society, and communities—to create an environment where every woman and girl can live a life free from violence and exploitation. The recommendations outlined here provide a roadmap for achieving this vision, emphasizing the need for holistic, evidence-based strategies that address both the symptoms and root causes of gender-based violence.

Implications and Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy and practice in Nepal. To address the root causes of violence against women and promote sustainable empowerment, the following recommendations are proposed:

Strengthening Legal Frameworks:

- ❖ Enhance the enforcement of existing laws by training law enforcement officials and

judiciary members on gender-sensitive approaches.

- ❖ Introduce stricter penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking to deter future offenses.

Economic Empowerment:

- ❖ Expand access to microfinance programs and vocational training for women, particularly in rural areas, to reduce economic dependency and enhance financial autonomy.
- ❖ Promote women's entrepreneurship through grants, mentorship programs, and market access initiatives.

Education and Awareness:

- ❖ Implement nationwide awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality early on.
- ❖ Integrate gender-sensitive curricula in schools to foster a culture of respect and non-violence among future generations.

Healthcare and Support Services:

- ❖ Establish more shelters and counseling centers for survivors of violence, ensuring they have access to medical, legal, and psychosocial support.
- ❖ Train healthcare providers to identify and respond to cases of gender-based violence effectively.

Political Representation:

- ❖ Strengthen affirmative action policies to increase women's participation in political and decision-making processes at all levels.
- ❖ Address nepotism and favoritism in implementing quota systems to ensure genuine representation of women's interests.

Community Mobilization:

- ❖ Support grassroots organizations and women's self-help groups to empower women locally and advocate for their rights.
- ❖ Engage men and boys in gender equality initiatives to challenge patriarchal attitudes and behaviors.

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Urinary Tract Infections and Vulnerability of Women: A Socio-Medical Review using Gender Lens

Abstract

The current research studies public health concerns about Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) in Islamabad. The study's main objective was to assess the frequency of UTIs, the bacteria responsible, and their patterns of Antibiotic resistance among UTI patients. The design for the research on antimicrobial resistance in UTI patients is correlational and comparative, where 1000 lab reports were obtained from 5 renowned verified and registered Laboratories located in Islamabad by visiting them in person. Two hundred fifteen lab reports (out of 1000) showed positive microbial growth on culture indicative of Urinary Tract Infection. Furthermore, this paper presents a gendered review of the trend analysis of antibiotic resistance in UTI patients in the capital city of Pakistan (Islamabad). The research paper extensively analyzes UTI trends in male and female patients. It offers a gendered analysis of women's greater vulnerability to develop UTIs compared to men, beyond bio-medical reasons.

Keywords: Gender Lens, Medical & Social Analysis, Urinary Tract Infection

INTRODUCTION

A Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) is a common bacterial infection affecting the urinary system, including the bladder, urethra, ureters, and kidneys. It typically causes symptoms such as frequent urination, burning sensation, and cloudy urine, which are mainly associated with cystitis or bladder infection. The UTI, if not treated well, can lead to more severe issues like pyelonephritis, kidney infection, etc., and its consequences can be more dangerous, such as significant morbidity and increased healthcare costs. Therefore, prompt diagnosis and appropriate antibiotic treatment are essential to prevent complications and ensure the patient's recovery (Wagenlehner et al., 2020). Most recently, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in UTI-causing bacteria has become a significant public health concern worldwide. The increasing resistance of Uropathogens to frequently prescribed medicines has made conventional treatment increasingly ineffective, requiring a shift in UTI management approaches (Zavala-Cerna et al., 2020). Therefore, the current study focuses on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) patterns among UTI patients, especially in Pakistan, to understand the pervasiveness of multi-drug resistant (MDR) stresses and related risk factors.

A significant body of literature has revealed that *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) and *Klebsiella* bacteria are predominantly responsible for Urinary tract infections (UTIs). Unfortunately, the emergence and rapid dissemination of multidrug-resistant (MDR) strains have become a growing concern, posing a significant threat to human health worldwide. The emergence of

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antibacterial resistance among UTI-causing bacteria has complicated treatment options and led to increased morbidity and healthcare costs. The rise in antibacterial resistance has also necessitated a shift in UTI management strategies (Zavala-Cerna et al., 2020). Although urinary tract infections (UTIs) can occur in both men and women, they are more frequently observed in women. Much of the research on UTIs has primarily concentrated on young, sexually active women with a heightened risk of developing such infections. UTIs risk factors include frequent sexual activity, urinary tract abnormalities, hormonal changes, and weakened immune systems (Harrington & Hooton, 2000). UTIs are a significant public health concern, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan, where healthcare services and access to effective antibiotics are very limited. Therefore, public health interventions like antibiotic monitoring, improved diagnostic strategies, and patient awareness of preventive measures are vital to addressing this growing issue (Zavala-Cerna et al., 2020). Thus, the literature on UTI points out the urgent need for monitoring and mitigating the increase of antimicrobial resistance in UTI-causing pathogens. By measuring the susceptibility of UTI pathogens to different antibiotics, researchers and healthcare professionals can understand the resistance patterns and develop effective treatment techniques. Therefore, the current study aims to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by examining the antimicrobial resistance trends in Pakistan's UTI patients, providing insights to inform future clinical and public health practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study design for the research on antimicrobial resistance in UTI patients is correlational and comparative, where 1000 lab reports were obtained from 5 renowned verified and registered Laboratories located in Islamabad, named Islamabad Diagnostic Centre (IDC), Hearts International, Excel, Bangash, and D. Watson, by visiting them in person. 215 lab reports (out of 1000) showed positive microbial growth on culture indicative of Urinary Tract Infection. The reports helped in setting variables for statistical analysis. A total of six variables were included in the analysis, namely: the "date" on which the test was conducted, the "age" and "gender" of the patient, the "laboratory" from which the report was collected, the "type of microorganism" that exhibited growth in the culture (comprising 12 types—9 bacteria and three fungi), and the variable representing "drugs" that indicated susceptibility and resistance against the specific microbe. Among these drugs, 46 were considered, including 40 antibiotics and six antifungals. The data collected for this research was a secondary type of data. This implies that the type of data collected was in either documented or recorded form. Patient data was collected, and already compiled data and reports were utilized to reach qualitative research. The Ethical Committee of UOL (University of Lahore) was approached for the sake of approval and authorization of gathering data from private labs with the consent of protecting the sensitivity of the reports collected, as well as the perseverance of credibility and integrity of the labs and data of all labs involved. The data analysis was done using a T-test. All values above 0.05 are considered insignificant, and all values below 0.05 are considered significant, with results for males and females drawn separately.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 1:
Frequency and percentages of chemicals on UTI

Organism	N	%
E. coli	139	64.65
Citrobacter_ Koseri	1	0.47
Pseudomonas's	11	5.11
Burkholderia Cepacia	1	0.47
Klebsiella	22	10.23
Enterococcus	8	3.72
Coliforms	4	1.86
Candida	12	5.58
Serratia	1	0.47
Morganella	1	0.47
Streptococcus Pyogenes	8	3.72
Total	215	100%

Table 1 reveals the frequency and percentages of bacteria/microorganisms of UTI. The results also show the three most prevalent organisms, i.e., **E. coli** (64.65% of the total 215 reports) was the most prevalent organism. **Klebsiella**, the second most abundant organism, appeared in 22 reports, 10.23% of total cases. **Candida** was found in 12 reports in 5.58% of the patients. The presence of other bacterial species, including pseudomonas (5.11%), Enterococcus (3.72%), and streptococcus pyogenes (3.72%), points out that there is a diverse microbiological spectrum of UTIs in the studied population.

Table 2:
Gender analysis of UTI disparities considering the prevalence in men and the rate of positive cases in women

Organism	N		%	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
E. coli	113	26	81.3%	18.7%
Pseudomonas's	7	4	63.6%	36.4%
Klebsiella	16	6	72.7%	27.3%
Enterococcus	6	2	75%	25%

Table 2 presents a gender-based analysis of UTI cases and reveals a significantly higher percentage of infections among women as compared to men. Of all the reports showing positive microbial growth of **Klebsiella** organism, 72.7% were females, and the rest of 27.3% were males. Female susceptibility to infections was also found in most females, more so than men, because of positive microbial growth of **Enterococcus**, i.e., 75%. Similarly, 63.6 % of

female and 36.4% of male patients represented positive microbial growth of *Pseudomonas* organisms. A similar pattern was observed in positive microbial growth of **Enterococcus** organisms; 75% were females, while the rest of 25% were males. **Pseudomonas** organisms were represented by 63.6 % female and 36.4% male patients, reported having almost 50% more susceptibility for female UTI patients. Likewise, other positive reports of **Escherichia coli** organism constituted 81.3% females and 18.7% males and again showed a significant %age of female UTI patients.

The current study's findings align with the existing literature, which consistently suggests that women have a higher susceptibility to UTIs due to biological and physical factors (Foxman, 2010). The short length of women's urethra and its proximity to the rectum enable bacterial transmission, especially of *E.Coli*, the primary agent that causes UTIs (Hooton, 2012). The study's findings further explain that females accounted for most UTI cases, especially those caused by *E.Coli* (81.3%). It is also aligned with previous research, which explains that both biological and socio-cultural factors make women more vulnerable to UTIs. The reproductive life cycle plays an important role in making women more vulnerable to UTIs. Hormonal instability during pregnancy, period of postpartum recovery, and menopause can be the cause of increasing infection risks (Raz & Rozenberg, 2012). Previous research also suggests that estrogen insufficiency in post-menopausal women leads to changes in vaginal flora, which reduces the protective lactobacilli and increases colonization by uro-pathogens (Gupta et al., 2013).

From a socio-cultural perspective, gender disparities in access to healthcare, nutritional deficiencies, and unhygienic practices further contribute to higher UTI prevalence among women. In patriarchal societies like Pakistan, women's health is often not prioritized, especially in communities with low-income and scarce healthcare resources (Ahmed et al., 2019). Research also highlights that girls who marry at a very young age and experience multiple and frequent pregnancies without adequate health care are at high risk of recurrent UTIs because of repeated exposure to pathogens and compromised immunity (Brog & Schmidt, 2016). The rise in antibacterial resistance has also necessitated a shift in UTI management strategies, and a general preventive line of action for women to protect them from UTIs can help women and girls minimize their vulnerability to these urinary infections. It is a known fact that after urinating, wipes from back to front can cause a UTI infection from bacteria like *E. coli*, and wiping from front to back can cause bacteria to spread. One can use the blotting technique by using clean, folded toilet paper and gently blotting the exterior portion of the vagina. Blotting instead of wiping can prevent bacteria from entering the urethra.

Avoiding and using scented feminine hygiene products is another way of preventing infections. Daily, one can wash in front and back with soap and water. Drinking a lot of water daily may help urinate frequently and continue to flush out bacteria (Nicolle, 2008). It is also suggested to urinate frequently and empty the bladder to reduce bacterial build-up. Women should be encouraged to be aware of UTI symptoms and risk factors to empower them to take proactive measures to safeguard their health.

CONCLUSION

This study goes deep into the issue of urinary tract infections (UTIs), notably focusing on the growing problem of drug resistance. Based on 1000 test reports from well-known laboratories in Islamabad, the study shows how drug-resistant bacteria, especially Klebsiella and E. Coli, are becoming more common. The gender disparity in UTI susceptibility is noteworthy, with women being more susceptible than men. One of the leading causes of female cases is E. Coli, and the reasons behind several factors like physical variations, hormone fluctuations, and social factors, including young marriages and a lack of knowledge about reproductive health, increase women's susceptibility. The study provides practical solutions and highlights the issue. It emphasizes how crucial it is to take preventative action to lower the incidence of UTIs, particularly in women. Even small changes like using good hygiene, avoiding particular products, and drinking plenty of water can have a big impact. One noteworthy feature is the emphasis on consciousness, which encourages many young women to be aware of UTIs and seek medical attention.

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Amplifying Female Voices in Pakistani Primetime Drama: A Cultural Feminist Analysis of the Drama Serial 'Udaari'

Abstract

This research unveils the sexual abuse against women and children in Pakistan through a cultural feminist perspective, which highlights the inequalities and disparities women face in patriarchal societies. It critically analyzes the Urdu drama serial Udaari's role in women's empowerment. The content analysis was used as a data collection method. The results of this research reveal that despite being a part of a patriarchal society, women direly scuffle to take a stand for their fundamental rights. They expose the abusers, and instead of considering themselves as victims, they consider themselves as survivors. Furthermore, it also highlights that when survivors and their families take a firm stand against sexual abuse, it becomes inevitable for the judiciary to provide justice to oppressed women. This drama also concludes that despite several challenges in the judicial system, the judicial system in Pakistan can still be trusted to seek justice for women in society.

Keywords: Cultural Feminism, Patriarchy, Sexual Abuse, Udaari.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is one of the countries where men have immense social, economic, and political powers. The social structure does not permit women to demand their rights explicitly. Women's suppression had widely been witnessed during the dictatorial Islamic regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. However, subsequent regimes have given attention to addressing women's rights in Pakistan. Nevertheless, many local and international NGOs have been at the forefront of protecting women from oppression. During the 1980s, the WAF (Women's Action Forum) organization was beneficial for women in Pakistan, advocating for women's rights. WAF was also successful in bringing small improvements by resisting the Islamization policies. Women's active participation in the organization further reinforced its agenda. The organization stood still against Zia's unfair Islamization policies (Alavi, 1328-1330). Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed were the WAF's leading figures. These powerful ladies fought against gender discrimination. Hudood Ordinances law, which aimed to contradict women's social and legal rights, was severely criticized by them. Mumtaz and Shaheed, in their work, "Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back?" presented women's position during the Islamization process in Zia's regime. They daringly presented the challenges women of Pakistan faced due to societal constraints. Subsequently, multiple organizations advocating women's rights brought about the resistance and the changes at that time, which promoted women's empowerment. Their constant struggle reinforced the intellectual foundation of the movement (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987).

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Although feminist movements have yet to start in Pakistan, many organizations besides NGOs and influential individuals have taken the plea for women's rights in Pakistan. Furthermore, children and women's sexual abuse is one no-go area where one cannot discuss openly. These conditions have put Pakistani society on the back foot. Notwithstanding, the Pakistani infotainment industry has taken a few steps to highlight this issue. One such example is the Urdu drama serial *Udaari*, which was telecasted by Hum TV. Before we deeply dig into the problem, it is crucial to understand feminism. As per Cambridge Dictionaries, "The belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state" is called feminism. Another definition by Britannica is, "Feminism is the belief in the social, economic and political equality of the sexes." Mary Wollstonecraft is widely regarded as the founder of the feminist movement. Feminism is very diverse and encompasses several sub-movements. Each type illustrates disparate ways in which women are being subjugated and marginalized at the hands of men. Since this research analyzes the drama through the lens of cultural feminism, it is necessary to understand the concept and how it is applied to this research.

Cultural Feminism:

Cultural feminism emerged in the 1970s. It seeks to unbridle, reconceive, and reevaluate the feminine traits associated with women. Its main emphasis is on the nurturing and essential qualities of women. Females are the complete embodiment of care, nurturing, peace, and cooperation. Cultural feminism critically examines the disparities between men and women in the culture and society. It seeks to gain equal rights and then dominance of women over men in such patriarchal societies because of their caring and loving nature. For them, by doing so, we can achieve an ideal society. Two prominent cultural feminists are Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly. Adrienne Rich's poems were a product of feminism. She wrote several books, novels, and poems talking about feminism. Instead of saying feminism, she used to say Women's liberation. Rich was of a progressive and liberal mindset. She was a believer in intersectionality when it came to feminism. Rich's views on females' positive contributions to the world stem from cultural feminism. Contrarily, Daly had somewhat radical and stronger viewpoints regarding feminism. Her works epitomize bravery by incorporating a confrontational and challenging tone to her narratives advocating for women's freedom in patriarchal frameworks. Her prominent works, including *Beyond God the Father* (1974) and *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), condemned religion for promoting patriarchy.

Cultural feminism acknowledges that both men and women divergently view the world around them. Nevertheless, women's approach to perceiving the world is of more excellent value. Women's view of the world is diverse, all-inclusive, and patently preeminent. Cultural feminism celebrates the positive traits of women and acknowledges their positive contribution to the culture. It aspires to construct an all-women society and culture where women can take a deep breath and be free from the manacles of patriarchal society. It challenges the existing structures of patriarchal society by envisioning a women-owned and dominated world. It propagates that women and men are different by nature and actions. The main intent of this theory and movement is to bring all women of different races, cultures, and religions under one roof for the same common objective. (Alcoff). Cultural feminism

strongly presents the fact that women and men are different in speaking, ways of thinking, and acting. Their way of fighting against patriarchal forces was to establish all women's centers and institutions. Naturally, women are deemed paramount and supreme over men by proponents of this movement. The ethos of care and nurturing power brings peace, harmony, and sanguinity to the world. Male traits are unfavorable, toxic, and detrimental to society. This argument has been fostered and validated by the fact that men tend to show aggression and be engaged in vehement and ferocious activities. This eventually leads to the world's destruction, negatively influencing society and culture. (Ghodsee, n.p) Women's solidarity, sisterhood, and shared identity are reinforced through cultural feminism. If women are granted power, they can rule the world more adeptly and make it a better place through altruism and delicacy. (Keohane & Nannerl, 1994)

Summary of Drama

The setting of Udaari was affected by Pakistan's sociopolitical climate in 2016. Pakistan has struggled since its founding against a dominant society dominated by men, Gender roles, and women's exploitation. Women can't access political opportunities, clinical workplaces, preparation, or different assets in distant spots. In Pakistan, where patriarchy is deeply ingrained, women's autonomy and independence continue to be criticized despite numerous legal advancements. With its conveyance, Udaari disproved these considerations of a male-controlled society, a necessary improvement for Pakistani women. Udaari discussed taboo subjects like child sexual abuse, gender-based discrimination, and domestic violence. The topic of rape and the rights of women came up more frequently during this discussion. The portrayal of Udaari by society was criticized in Udaari.

Udaari contributes to the development of gender and feminism-related debates. By advocating for women's agency, liberty, and autonomy, Udaari appears to add to the rapidly expanding modern feminism. Udaari focuses primarily on women's identity and self-discovery. Udaari advocates for women's autonomy and independence. Udaari also discusses gender, class, and privilege in greater detail. Providing an intersectional perspective on the narrative contributes to the critique of social injustices. Udaari is the seminal drama serial, directed by Muhammed Ehteshamuddin and written by Farhat Ishtiaq. This drama aired in 2016 and proved to be a groundbreaking work in the history of Pakistani dramas. Its powerful performances by the actors, compelling storyline, and core themes had an enduring impact on the audiences. The setting of the drama is rural Punjab. This story progresses with two main families including those of "The Tora Khels" and "Shedans". Bushra Ansari plays a character called *Sheedan*, who is shown as a tenacious single mother raising her only daughter named as *Meeran*. Patriarchy is seen as a leading influence in the village where they dwell. *Sheedan* is a singer who is the breadwinner of the family. She sings and entertains people at their weddings, which causes them to be shunned and stigmatized. They are also called as *Miraasi*.

On the contrary, Sajida (a neighbor of Sheedan) works as a housekeeper at different places. She has been widowed and thus is living a miserable life. She has a daughter named Zebo who is only ten years old. Concurrently, four friends' lives are shown in the city of Lahore. Arsh, Maleeha, Farwa, and Haris. They all have a band and long to embrace music as a career. Sajida's nephew and *Meeran* are involved in a perplexing relationship with each

other. Ilyas (Sajida's nephew) is against *Meeran's* singing and wants her to quit singing to pursue their relationship further. The story then progresses further as Imtiaz, shown as a friend of Pervaiz (Sajida's husband), proposes to her for marriage. Sajida initially rejects but then accepts the proposal for the security of her only daughter, Zebo. Imtiaz marries Sajida. After the death of *Meeran's* father, Imtiaz tried to assault Meeran sexually. *Meeran* runs away and tells her mother afterward. This incident resulted in an altercation between *Sheedan* and *Sajida*. Sajida blames Meeran for her false intentions towards Imtiaz. This leads to breaking all ties between them, and consequently, Ilyas also breaks his relationship with Meeran. In Lahore, Farwa is manipulated by her parents to leave music as a career. Milli and her mother visit a wedding in a distant village, and Milli watches *Meeran* sing mesmerizingly and boldly. With her whole band, Milli approaches Meeran, stunned by her voice, and agrees to take her on board in their musical band. Arsh is initially despondent and underconfident about Meeran, but both gradually turn their seclusion into friendship. This Band then aces a music competition, leaving the entire Meeran village flabbergasted and astonished. Back in the village, Imtiaz grows his sexual desires for Zebo, and in the absence of her mother, he rapes her and asks her to remain silent. Sajida, after knowing this all, submits herself to silence to avoid the repercussions bore by Imtiaz. Sajida starts working and earns independently. Lastly, Sajida, after several years of living in the city, files a case against Imtiaz and wins the case. Zebo gets justice as Imtiaz goes behind bars. Arsh and Meeran decide to get married despite all the hardships and odds. Meanwhile, Meeran sings for the women who undergo rape and molestation, empowering them.

Apart from child rape and abuse, Udaari also sheds light on some of the most paramount agendas like social disparities, Gender inequality, and how justice is chased. A major notable factor behind this drama's popularity is the star-studded and versatile cast. Bushra Ansari steals the show with her powerful performance. Her role as Sheedan mirrors her diversity as an artist. She has presented a blend of confident, brave, and strong women in the form of Sheedan, who goes against all the patriarchal norms and male dominance exercising free will and power. She also presents the role of a compassionate and strong mother. Ahsan Khan also leaves nothing to stun the audience with his performance as Imtiaz. Meeran also serves as a powerful character who defies all the societal norms and conservativity to pursue her dreams. In a similar line, Zebo is presented as an example of a strong girl who, despite being the victim of rape and abuse, stands firm and resilient, showcasing the idea that a woman's life doesn't end with a tragedy like this.

Overall, Udaari is an influential work in the history of Pakistani dramas, highlighting sensitive yet important topics. With its powerful message and strong performance, the drama continues to captivate the viewers' hearts and educate them in the best way possible. This drama has patiently given voice to the voiceless and presented a taboo subject to raise awareness among the Pakistani masses. This drama not only advocates for awareness but also for a just Pakistani judiciary system aiming to provide justice to all the victims.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

The existing Literature delves into the child and women sexual abuse in Pakistan. It also gives insight into the Pakistani entertainment channels' coverage of this issue. Pakistani

Dramatization, however, of much publicity, spread customary gender roles and stereotypes. Women are predominantly found in aloof jobs and as being reliant upon their male partners, while men are portrayed as strong, autonomous, and controlling (Zaheer 47). Wajiha Raza Rizvi and Maheen Imran (Wajiha Raza Rizvi) emphasize that Pakistani dramas like *Udaari* and *Cheekh* specifically shape public opinion about sexual abuse in far-off regions. Pakistani dramatization partakes in the engendering and scattering of such talks, fortifying the man-centric standards and guidelines. Women are frequently seen and displayed as enslaved, smothered, and minimized by men. Women's full contribution to homegrown errands bears no appreciation from men. Rather, they are supposed to play out their obligations daily, with practically no rest. Mostly, women are not allowed to do a job or do groceries independently.

The females acknowledge male-driven thoughts and subjects because of an absence of organization and power. Society sees the dramas projecting women's empowerment and independence from a wary focal point. Pakistani society, in general, does not accept women's empowerment and considers it against religious and social principles. It is believed that women cannot survive without men's support. Therefore, sexual violence against women and children is prevalent in Pakistani society, with the least reported cases. Stark and Flitcraft divulge the further association between child abuse and women's concealment attesting that both come from the man-centric framework when men go out for specific reasons and practice their male power on feeble people including women and children. (Flitcraft 100) Nisha features the requirement for investigation of the etiology of child sexual abuse to consolidate preventive techniques. (KP) Patriarchal social orders have consistently strengthened the authority of men.

Men like to practice their power and show their authority through predominance and control. The men have forever controlled children and Women and consider them as their right. Flitcraft and Nisha explain how ladies are displayed as reliant upon their male partners, who are likewise portrayed in the infotainment industry. Women are treated as delicate beings. Nisha gives an insight into investigating the reasons for sexual abuse of children by men and devising systems as needed. She gives an alternate hypothetical focal point to understanding this matter while discussing how androgens assume control over men as indicated by the natural hypothesis and how the fight between the Id and superego attracts men to that specific point according to the psychodynamic hypothesis explained by Freud. How social learning impels men to perform such demonstrations depends on their perceptions and interactions with peers. They try to fulfill their sexual desires while abusing children who are always vulnerable.

The exploration of Nisha, Stark, and Flitcraft also portrays man's mind as prevailing creatures and trackers. Shuchi propounds that Pakistani dramatization restricted women's public appearance and persuasion of their interests during the rule of Zia-ul-Haq. She describes that Zia's regime considered women's 'controlled' appearance on television as a savior of men from evil 'sexual' motivation. There had been voices against that control over females on TV. Not only women but many men also confronted that policy by the Zia regime. Interestingly, in protest of that control, many women writers started writing dramas where feminism was given prominence (Kothari 295). Aisha Malik states that the contribution of NGOs and Global foundations has brought a change in Pakistani dramas and other shows.

That change has had positive impacts so far, as far as the feminist perspective in the Pakistani entertainment industry is concerned. Delicate subjects like assault, badgering, and sexual abuse have been introduced widely on the screens for awareness purposes. This galvanization of progress is visible through the *Udaari* drama, which means flying. This dramatization grandstands wonderfully how the survivors of assault ought to know their true capacity and fly, meaning they ought to keep ascending high and radiate brilliantly with practically no trepidation. Their lives don't end on this specific demonstration experienced by such bold ladies. Such dramas have brought the shift from traditional family issues and conspiracies to real social issues (Malik 100). Saima Salman is of the view that *Udaari* has fundamentally contributed a lot in bringing women and child sexual abuse issues to light among the majority. It also highlights, if taken stand, the judicial system also helps women against male abuse. The drama teaches the viewers to be resilient against such unwanted moves by the men and raise their voices whenever necessary. It also gives a message to Pakistani mothers to take a stand against sexual and otherwise abuse of their kids, and they must not remain silent. Featuring this drama's most famous and followed actors has also been fruitful (Salman). Ikram and Mushtaq appraise this drama for not only highlighting the women and children's pleas but also showing them the right legal path to handle the violence (Ikram and Mushtaq). Sadaf thinks casting bold and strong female characters can create immense viewership. She thinks such strong characters help the female in Pakistani society to raise their voices against violence and abuse.

The two important female characters in the drama, **Sheedan, and Meeran**, are examples of two self-independent ladies who stand against Imtiaz's unwanted moves. They had been shown as role models for other women (Haider). Fatima Azhar likewise draws on a comparative story of both these women, highlighting the meaning of women standing firm for themselves against the wrongs (Azhar). Sheeba Khan complements this narrative by featuring mothers' jobs in empowering their children, particularly females. (Khan.) Khan, Haider, and Ikram are the promoters of a similar subject.

William, Pamela, David, (Turnier et al.) Linda (Alcoff) and Deborah (Gordon 370) stated that women and men are socially isolated and separated into pre-laid obligations and roles that they should fulfill within a society. Women are supposed to be more detached and engaged with house tasks, though men are considered to be the providers of the families, accommodating and overwhelming them. They accept that ladies ought to be given similar authority as ladies can outshine men and improve in every aspect of life. They view what is happening of ladies' underestimation through a cultural feminism lens. Although there are a couple of studies that address the feminist perspective in Pakistani dramatizations, there is an absence of appropriately coordinated exploration to distinguish how Pakistani shows address savagery and sexual abuse against children and women. This study takes the Pakistani drama "*Udaari*" as a contextual investigation that not just features the fundamental explanations behind the abuse but also grandstands how women can be empowered by giving them disparate opportunities. This study examines the explanations behind children's and women's sexual abuse while applying the cultural feminism theory.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Women's oppression through a cultural lens is the main argument of this research. Women have been marginalized for decades, and this concept has always sparked controversy due to the patriarchal nature of society. Cultural feminism rose to prominence during the 20th century. Celebrating females' values, perspectives, and experiences are integral to cultural feminism. This research explores how cultural feminism can be applied to the Pakistani drama *Udaari*. This drama is one of the great specimens of the entertainment industry that promotes women's empowerment in diverse ways. Amidst all the dramas with the traditional notion of presenting womanhood as either fragile, dependent, morally corrupt, or deceiving, *Udaari* comes forth as a spectacular work challenging conventionalism. It is important to explore what exactly women's empowerment is. It centers on empowering women to understand their true virtue and seek their basic human rights. Women empowerment aims to mitigate women's frailness and dependence, empowering them to gain social, political, and economic rights.

In the social domain, it seeks to empower women in various ways, including having access to education and health facilities and protecting women's reproductive rights, healthcare autonomy, and well-being. It also seeks to battle against violence, be it any sort of violence. Economically, it endeavors to cater to fair wages, financial independence, and equal employment opportunities for women. Furthermore, politically, it strives for women's political appearance, active participation, and influence. Multitudinous women empowerment movements, including the famous #MeToo movement and Aurat March (in Pakistan), are carried worldwide. (Sustainable Development Goals)

Women's and Children's Sexual Abuse

Children and women have always been vulnerable to abuse, especially sexual abuse by male perpetrators. The horrible repercussion of such abuse includes physical and mental instability. Sexual abuse is any immoral or unwanted activity that encompasses touching, exploitation, and penetration. Numerous laws have been passed in Pakistan to put this evil practice to a halt. Nevertheless, the prevalence of such heinous activities seems not to end. Considering their feeble nature, men have greatly exercised their power and dominance over women and children. The same is projected in the drama *Udaari*, where Imtiaz, a male figure, exerts his power over Zebo and takes control of her. Feminism considers rape and sexual abuse as a "pseudosexual act." Unequal power distribution, lack of awareness, and education are the causes of such acts. According to Kalra and Bhugra, Culture plays a significant role in understanding women's suppression and subjugation sexually and physically. (Kalra and Bhugra 245). Women's and children's sexual violence also expeditiously escalates a sense of inferiority complex, timorousness, and less public appearance by such individuals. Such victimized individuals tend to demarcate themselves within the premises of their homes, considering themselves as they feel safe inside their premises. They also think of themselves as alien to the rest of the people around them. The cultures that promote the objectification of women tend to exhibit such acts more. Overall, sexual abuse and violence among children and women spring up multiple evils in society and culture. Victims are often silenced, and they suffer various allegations by the society.

In the Pakistani context, due to patriarchal structures being deeply embedded into the roots of the society and culture, somewhere, there has been a dearth of women's empowerment. Gender roles have always been in full swing in Pakistani culture, where men are often expected to be formidable, prepollent, and authoritative. Women are expected to be entangled in house chores and have zero participation in life's social, political, and economic aspects. Society, culture, and religion play a significant role in perpetuating such imbalanced norms. Nevertheless, against all the odds, the Pakistani state has been fully involved in promoting women's empowerment over the past few years. Women's notable and increasing participation in multifaceted aspects of society and culture paved the way for women's empowerment. Numerous personalities, including Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah and Benazir Bhutto, represent women's resilience and empowerment as a historical cornerstone. Both figures are the signs for women's inclusive participation and representation in politics.

Women's empowerment is incomplete without the discussion of education in particular. Pakistan has made multiple efforts and strategies to educate Pakistani women, especially in far-off, distant, and remote places. Benazir Bhutto Income Support Program provided multiple scholarships to Pakistani female students. Despite all these endeavors, socio-economic barriers and lack of education among the parents of indigenous people still serve as a barrier to receiving fundamental education by girls and women. On the same grounds, economically, women should be independent too. Women's inclusion in multifarious fields of medicine, technology, and business is essential to their grooming and independence. "Kashf Foundation" is a prominent name in empowering women financially. Political representation of women, though less, is still promising. Women have a fixed number of seats in National and Provincial assemblies, empowering them politically. Gender-sensitive issues are also seen through organizations like "Aurat Foundation." Despite all these efforts and steps, there are still many barriers to achieving women's empowerment in Pakistan. Patriarchy still lies ahead of all the barriers. Cultural norms and societal structures promote male dominance and control, restricting females' mobility and liberty. Numerous evil practices, including honor killings, early marriages, etc., hinder women's growth and equal participation in all the affairs of life. Limited economic resources also serve as a worsening factor in women's empowerment.

Women's appearance and involvement in informal sectors escalate their vulnerability to receiving lower wages, exploitation, and sexual harassment. Conservative rural areas still see women's education as unacceptable, which makes women destitute and dependent. The formulation of laws to protect women's interests does not guarantee their essence due to weak enforcement and foundations. A weak judicial system is also another factor in this regard. These barriers collectively serve as a blockade or hurdle in achieving women's liberty and freedom. Women are still marginalized, subjugated, demotivated, considered weak and dependent, and treated worse due to the prevailing above situations. Cultural feminism also raises fingers on such aspects, demanding all women's liberty and freedom, focusing on women's nonviolent and peaceful nature as compared to men's violent, controlling, and dominant nature.

Children and Women's Sexual Abuse in Pakistan:

Children and sexual abuse have been a hot topic during the last decade in Pakistan due to the increasing number of such cases, which serves as an alarming factor. Awareness and reporting among people have significantly multiplied and increased during the last few years despite being taboo. This awareness and reporting highlight the prevalence of such issues in Pakistan and serve as a call to action. Rape, sexual abuse, domestic sexual violence, and sexual harassment are a few of the forms of sexual abuse in Pakistan. Social pressure often silences the voices of the victims of such abuse in Pakistan. A few examples are Zainab's case as a child sexual rape case. Zainab was brutally raped by a suspect Imran Ali on her way to attend a Quran class in Kasur. Talking about women's rape cases, a notable example is that of Noor Mukadam, a 27-year-old woman from Islamabad who was raped and murdered by her childhood friend, Zahir Jaffer. She was tortured physically by him. Zahir was arrested immediately and was finally sentenced to death in 2022. These two cases impacted Pakistani women a lot in a way that they demanded stronger law enforcement against such perpetrators. Mental health issues also came into the spotlight because of these two prominent cases.

Pakistan decreed multiple laws for the protection of women and children, including The Protection of Women Act of 2006, The Child Protection Act, the Anti-Rape Ordinance 2020, etc. These laws have proved to be a facilitating factor for women and children. However, poor law application still hinders the actual progression of the legal system and resistance to such immoral acts.

Pakistani Infotainment Industry's Role in Women's Empowerment and Against Sexual Abuse:**Role in Women's Empowerment:**

Pakistani dramas, music, films, and digital platforms play a prominent role in educating audiences about several things. Pakistani infotainment industry has recently been very vocal regarding women's empowerment. This industry has greatly contributed to resisting conventionalism and promoting gender equality through powerful characters, impactful storylines, and compelling plots.

Historic Background:

Pakistani infotainment industry has mainly shown women in passive roles, being indulged in domestic chores and as dependent figures. Historically, women had less appearance and were confined to limited roles with almost no autonomy and agency. With the shift in society's attitudes, the infotainment industry's narrative witnessed a significant shift and change. Complex, independent, and powerful female characters are presented today (although not essentially a lot, they are still shown). Within this context, Pakistani dramas have played a dominant role since they are the most watched medium in the infotainment industry in Pakistan. Multiple dramas with compelling, strong female characters have challenged the existing stereotypes and gendered roles and positively shaped the public's opinion in this regard. The major themes of such dramas were women's empowerment, education, legal rights, career choices, and domestic violence.

Udaari is worth mentioning in this regard. These narratives designed and penned down by the Pakistani infotainment industry have proven to reshape peoples' attitudes toward gender equality and women's empowerment through multifaceted ways. Awareness has been disseminated among the viewers regarding the ability to take steps against injustices and to break the shackles of such taboo subjects. Powerful, resilient, and strong female characters became the role models for Pakistani females and children aspiring to pursue higher education and independence. *Udaari* has also advocated for legal changes to provide justice to the oppressed.

Role (Infotainment Industry) in Children and Women's Sexual Abuse:

The infotainment industry, over the last few years, has shown narratives about children and women's sexual abuse. The media has presented the conditions of such oppressed individuals and the societal impact on their lives, and it has advocated for a just legal system in this regard. In this way, the media and infotainment industry has significantly played a prominent role in bringing such subjects to the screens and providing people and viewers with food for thought.

Udaari comes again as a narrative embodying such themes and empowering women to take a stand for themselves. The drama also raised awareness regarding the prevalence of such issues and the need for justice in the legal system. Reporting such incidents is a prominent message delivered to the audience, proving to be a groundbreaking drama. Notwithstanding the reforms and variations, the Pakistani infotainment industry is still dominantly grappling with the idea of gender roles, stereotypes, and conventional *Saas bahu k jhagre* and love stories. Many producers still produce such stories despite all the empowerment and changes because such content generates more revenue. The Pakistani dramas' audience is housewives who fancy viewing such content. Pakistani dramas, in particular, perpetuate stereotypical notions of presenting women in control of men and men being independent, dominant, and controlling. These narratives further help in strengthening already existing gender inequality, power imbalances, and sexual abuse and violence. Women are portrayed as nurturing figures, obedient daughters, and dutiful wives, sacrificing their wishes for their fathers, husbands, and sons. contrarily, men are projected as decision-makers, protectors, and breadwinners of the family. During times of hardships and adversities, women are shown as patient and noncompliant. On the contrary, men are depicted as resilient and assertive. Summing up, although the Pakistani infotainment industry has taken several measures to combat the evil of sexual abuse by spreading awareness, the presence of conventional narratives shown dominantly still captures the attention of the audiences. Pakistani infotainment industry needs to produce more dramas and films like *Udaari* to educate men and women regarding women's prestige and gender equality.

Since this research delves into the application of cultural feminism to *Udaari* drama, the aspects of *Udaari* drama in this regard will be discussed.

Few dialogues have been extracted from the drama that can be analyzed through a cultural feminism lens.

Dialogue 1: “Nahi Ammi Ji, mene nahi jana, Ami ji, mene Doctor k nahi jana.” (Zebo)

Translation: “No, Mom, I don’t want to go, Mom, I don’t want to go to the doctor.”

This dialogue highlights how Imtiaz’s abuse of young Zebo leaves her so terrified that she does not want to visit the doctor by Imtiaz. When Imtiaz tells Sajida to take Zebo to a doctor because of her illness, she resists, saying that she doesn’t want to go.

Dialogue 2:” Aurat ka maqsad sirf shaadi nahi, balke apne sapne bhi hone chahiye.” (Meeran)

Translation: “A woman’s sole purpose should not be marriage only but also pursuing her dreams.”

Viewing it through a cultural feminism lens, which advocates for women’s inclusivity in all affairs of life, this dialogue has a strong grip on women’s lives. Meeran’s message strongly presents the idea of women pursuing their dreams and that a woman should not restrict her life to marriage only. This message allows women to dream big and think about meeting their future goals and dreams.

Dialogue 3: “Aurat ki izzat uski apni hoti hai, kisi aur ki di hui nhi.” (Sajida)

Translation: “A woman’s dignity is her own, not given by someone else.”

Through the lens of cultural feminism, this dialogue strongly opposes the idea that women’s dignity is dependent on others, especially on men. Rather, it permeates the concept of self-reliance and self-worth among women. Women’s dignity is not dependent on men but on themselves.

Dialogue 4: “Teri jhurat kewi hui, meri dhii nu hath laya tu.” (Sheedan)

Translation: How dare you touch my daughter.

This dialogue spoken by Sheedan highlights her character as a strong mother. Imtiaz’s evil intentions for Meera, foretold by Meeran to her mother, make her take a stand for her daughter. Instead of sitting silently, she goes to Sajida’s and Imtiaz’s house to talk to Sajida about Imtiaz’s actions. This dialogue educates the audience about the role of mothers in taking a stand for their daughters. Sheedan’s stand for her daughter protects her dignity and protects her from Imtiaz.

Dialogue 5: “Allah di zaat nu puri Umeed hai menu, insaaf desi Allah.” (Sheedan)

Translation: “I have complete hope in Allah. Allah will grant justice.”

This dialogue, spoken by Sheedan when Imtiaz abruptly enters their home in Lahore, highlights how Sheedan puts her faith in Allah. This faith gives her the strength and resilience to fight against Imtiaz's brutality and strive for justice. This also serves as a message to all the victims not to be hopeless when seeking justice.

Dialogue 6: “Abba tu darwaza q band kar raha hai.” (Zebo)

Translation: “Why are you closing the gate dad.”

This dialogue, spoken by Zebo, is right before Imtiaz rapes her. This dialogue, if viewed through cultural feminism, again highlights the power imbalance between Imtiaz and Zebo. Imtiaz, being a male figure, can easily control Zebo. Contrarily, Zebo is innocent and does not know how to protect her without her mother.

Dialogue 7: “Baat sun meri, Aaj jo kuch bhi hua haina, apni maa ko ya kisi aur ko bataya na to mujhse bura koi nahi hoga.” (Imtiaz)

Translation: “Listen to me. If you tell your mom or anyone about what happened today, there will be no worse than me.”

This dialogue, spoken by Imtiaz right after the rape, silences Zebo regarding the act. This shows how victims are always silenced. This dialogue raises awareness among the audience to stand with such victims of abuse and seek justice.

Dialogue 8: “Aur jo ilzaam lag raha haina mere pe, kia hai, kia hai, aik wari nahi do wari kia hai.” (Imtiaz)

Translation: “And the acquisition being made against me, I did it, I did it, it has happened not once but twice.”

This dialogue highlights how Imtiaz speaks up in court for his evil in the end, enraged at his friend, who gives evidence for his act. Again, this comes up as a light of hope for all survivors to stand firm and resilient. Justice might serve late but will surely be served.

Dialogue 9: “Main victim nahi hoon. Main survivor hoon. Main Bechari nahi banungi, Main apne mujrim ko saza dilwaungi. Sharam mujhe nahi, usse karni chahiye.” (Zebo)

Translation: “I am not a victim. I am a survivor. I will not be helpless; I will make sure my culprit is punished. He should be ashamed, not me.”

Zebo delivers a speech that has a lot of impact during this exchange. Zebo serves as a model of hope and encouragement for all survivors to seek justice for themselves and put their abusers behind bars because she places a strong emphasis on doing so rather than feeling helpless and ashamed of what happened to her. The possibility that casualties ought to keep quiet because doing so would sell out their respect is additionally projected into uncertainty by this discussion. Cultural feminism can also be applied to the drama's female characters. Zebo, Milli, Sheedan, Sajida, and Meeran are among the notable female characters in the drama. Sheedan is depicted as a brave, tough, courageous woman who doesn't feel bad about dancing at weddings to make money. Sheedan is an exceptionally strong woman.

Sheedan embodies a progressive mindset. Sheedan is a perfect blend of traditions and modernity. She is not shown as a static character. Rather, she is presented as a dynamic character. She is shown as a nurturing figure as a mother. However, her actions sometimes defy traditional norms, underscoring her character's perplexity.

Sheedan's character resonates well with the ideology of cultural feminism, which believes in women's superiority and women's leadership because of her caring, nurturing nature. She extends support to Sajida after the death of her husband during times of adversity, presenting herself as a true embodiment of a virtuous female character who can surely bring revolution and peace as per cultural feminism. Sheedan also embarks on protecting her daughter after Imtiaz's brutal and immoral act of harassing Meeran. She does believe in Meeran and makes her way to his house to talk to Sajida about her husband's actions. Sheedan is quite an influential figure as she strongly advocates for the arts and fights against all injustices. Her profession as a singer and a dancer explores the tapestry of celebration of arts and the freedom art grants. Despite the fun made of her and her daughter because of her profession, she does not consider her profession as bad or as making her less dignified in front of anyone. Sheedan's relationship and conductance with the male figures of the drama are varied and complex. Her relationship with her husband shows dynamism as she respects her, but Sheedan denies any oppression posed on her. Sheedan relies on male figures but also maintains her agency and dignity.

Sajida is another prominent character that transforms the drama. Initially, she is shown as passive, naïve, and a weak lady, and then she rises into a strong and protective motherly figure. She marries Imtiaz, who turns out to be an alcoholic and drug addict and abuses her. She grapples with the shackles of societal chains while being in an abusive marriage with Imtiaz. Her outstanding evolution from a helpless lady to a strong, resilient woman underscores the dynamic nature of her character. She is a true representation of both courage and pain. The primary role played by Sajjo (Sajida) is a motherly role to protect her only orphan daughter, Zebo. When Imtiaz rapes Zebo, and she gets to know them, she does not seek justice and remains silent initially. Afterward, she shifted from passiveness to an active role and involved herself in community chores, aspiring to help others. Sajida, like Sheedan, also shows variation and diversity in her relationship with the male characters of the drama. Her connection with Imtiaz is all toxic and abusive. Contrarily, her relationship with Arsh (the lawyer who grants Zebo justice) is quite good and supportive. Given Sajida's socio-economic status, she becomes empowered and fights against her daughter's abuser. This concept again aligns well with cultural feminism, which seeks to empower women and grant them equal status as men.

In Udaari, Meeran, a young child, is another notable individual. She is talented and steadfast in her determination. Music is a significant piece of her character, much like her loved ones. She longs to pursue a music career, defying the norms of her village. Her love of music reflects her yearning for freedom and self-discovery. All through the show, her personality likewise goes through a change. Her character embodies multifacetedness because she symbolizes strength, vulnerability, and self-discovery. She challenges the customary jobs that women are all normal to play and embraces music to satisfy her longing. Yet, she isn't considered a lady since she partakes in family errands and exercises. Meera's love of music allows her to express her interests and gives vulnerable people a voice. She uses her voice as a vocalist to warn of dangers and participates in friendly government assistance programs.

Meeran has a complex and varied relationship with the male characters in the play. She is compared to her mother, who respects men while exercising her agency and influence. She

and Arsh, in particular, have a conscious relationship. Arsh is regarded as a reliable male role model who stays by Meera's side every step of the way, especially during her musical journey. Arsh is a selfless man who encourages coexistence between men and women. When she talks about her father, there are a lot of arguments and fights. There is pressure between Meeran and her dad, given the divergence between her dad's customary standpoint and her dynamic thoughts. When viewed through the lens of cultural feminism, Meeran's independence and willingness to follow her desires despite social pressures and expectations align with this movement for women's liberation and autonomy. This is yet another illustration of cultural feminism. However, her trip also shows how important it is to value and respect women's ideas and perspectives. Her desire to follow her passions and rejection of conventional wisdom are examples of cultural feminism's call for autonomy.

The main character of the story is Zebo, a nine-year-old. The agony of child abuse and the search for equity and value are both embodied in her persona. Despite the challenges she has encountered, she is shown to be a strong and determined character. She changes from being a wordless child to a girl with a voice. A young, naive girl whose life drastically changes because of her stepfather raping her. The heart-wrenching and realistic delineation of her trauma mirrors the harrowing results of child molestation and abuse. From a victim to a survivor is marked by continuous struggle and strength within Zebo. As she says, "Main victim nahi hoon. Main survivor hoon. Main Bechari nahi banungi, Main apne mujrim ko saza dilwaungi. Sharam mujhe nahi, usse karni chahiye."

Translation: "I am not a victim. I am a survivor. I will not become helpless; I will make sure my culprit is punished. I am not the one who should be ashamed; he should be."

Zebo symbolizes justice and optimism with her progressive strengthening. As she resists Imtiaz's brutal attacks, she is a representation of bravery, strength, and perseverance. Zebo's character aims to empower the victims of child abuse by highlighting the widespread problem of child abuse in Pakistan.

Double-crossing and complexity characterize Zebo's relationship with men. Zebo's stepfather reflects on her traumatic past. The abuse leaves her powerless and devastated. On the other hand, her relationship with Arsh is a symbol of support and empathy. Arsh gives her strength and aids in obtaining justice. The dual natures of Imtiaz and Arsh, according to Zebo, are a sign that both good and evil people are present in the world. Her trauma finally gives her a moment of relief when she meets Arsh.

Zebo is an excellent illustration of cultural feminism because she simultaneously advocates for Imtiaz's retribution and justice. As the story centers on Zebo's transformation from casualty to survivor, it investigates the possibility of social woman's rights supporting women.

THEMES OF UDAARI:

Udaari, a groundbreaking work in the history of Pakistani dramas, can be analyzed through the lens of cultural feminism. Self-discovery and identification are a very important theme within this narrative where women exercise them. Women in this drama are presented as

tough and resilient women striving to empower themselves within the shackles of cultural expectations, trying to maintain a healthy balance between the norms and their longings and aspirations. The drama also unapologetically presents how women exercise their autonomy and agency in a society where patriarchy is deeply embedded in its roots. Meeran is an example of independence and autonomy. Her rediscovery as she enters the realm of music reflects her agency and independence. Zebo also embodies the aspects of agency, autonomy, and freedom as she progresses from a helpless child to a strong and independent girl who relabels herself as a survivor and seeks justice. Her rediscovery is marked by self-reliance, autonomy, and agency. Gender norms are another theme in the story, and gender roles are common in the rural Punjab where the story is set. In Pakistan, individuals' lives are represented by customary orientation jobs. In a male-centric culture, for example, the one found in Udaari, women are supposed to assume the roles of compliant spouses, well-trained daughters, and unselfish individuals. Men, on the other hand, are depicted as imposing, in charge, and making decisions. One illustration of how gender stereotypes are enforced is Sajida, a mother initially depicted as a selfless, devoted lady attempting to protect her orphan daughter. Imtiaz and Sajida are seen as submissive partners in an unhealthy relationship. One of the main themes is that Sajida's transformation from a submissive to an independent woman challenges rigid gender roles in patriarchal societies.

Meeran, a young girl with many dreams, is another strong woman. Meeran is expected to focus solely on performing her gender-specific responsibilities, suppressing her ambitions. Be that as it may, Meeran battles against these set standards to accomplish freedom and self-assurance. Because of her newly discovered individuality and personality, she can finally realize her dream of making music her career.

Sheedan is portrayed as a determined, strong woman. She exemplifies the ideal of a woman who was born to challenge all incorrect gender norms and prejudices based on her gender. Sheedan is a resilient lady who uses her abilities as an artist and vocalist to earn enough to get by without having a blameworthy outlook.

Autonomy and power are two additional significant concepts woven into the narrative. The objective of the whole play is to engage women and allow them to coordinate, oversee, and shape their own lives. Marriage and the family are two institutions that are thought to be trying to limit women's freedom and quality of life. Sheedan is a great example of power and control. Sheedan is worth discussing and featuring due to her solidarity in declining to follow normal practices and submit to them regardless of the obstacles. Zebo and Sajida are the two women who use their autonomy and power to speak out against sexual abuse despite the numerous power disparities between men and women. The significance of a woman's power is emphasized in the drama's conclusion, which sees Zebo receive justice.

The path to independence, self-governance, action, and dependability is music. Music as a fine art accentuates the meaning of human expressions in offering women independence and opportunity. Meeran's insatiable thirst for music shows her freedom from social pressures and self-expression. Women's support and admiration are a profound theme in the narrative. The three powerful ladies, including Meeran, Sajida, and Sheedan, work collaboratively to resist the patriarchal framework. This solidarity and unity for the shared purpose and goal finally

assists them in achieving their goals.

CONCLUSION:

Sexual abuse against women and children is a reality in our society. Despite having laws and institutions to combat this menace, this heinous crime goes on in society. Ironically, such incidents have increased over the past few years. There are several reasons behind this, which include social taboos, corrupt judicial and police systems, family pressures, and threats to the victims/survivors. Drama Udaari has given hope to the oppressed segment of society to raise their voices against such acts. It has also suggested to women that once they stand firm for their rights, the system will also help them. However, there is a need to telecast such dramas as a regular feature on all Pakistani entertainment channels. State and NGOs must also encourage and support them in this regard. There is a dire need to revise the curriculum so that respect for women can be taught to students at the school level. Furthermore, news channels must also make it a regular transmission feature in the shape of talk shows and documentaries. The religious community, particularly the clergy, must step forward and convince their followers to give due respect to the women as instructed by the Quran and Sunnah. We hope, with such initiatives, that our society will be able to reduce sexual violence as well as other kinds of violence against women and children.

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Rape and Culture of Silence in Pakistan

Abstract

The study explores the culture of silence regarding rape in Pakistan over the last decade. The study is qualitative and uses a purposive sampling technique. The data was collected in two forms: first, annual reports from the HRCP of 2013-2023, and second, Dawn News reports from 2013-2023. The system theory of violence and the Gramsci theory of hegemony were used to analyze the data. The results from HRCP reports show a yearly increase in rape cases. The findings further show data discrepancies and missing information, fixing reporting in the next few years and acknowledging data issues. The results from newspaper analysis reveal a yearly increase in reporting of rape cases, crimes alongside rape, language construction in reporting, location of the rape incidents, as well as the identity of victims and perpetrators. The findings also concluded that a lack of correct and consistent data is a limitation for further studies of rape in Pakistan.

Keywords: Culture, Crimes, Hegemony, Rape, Violence, Victims

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan gained independence in 1947 from the British Empire, but the laws left them still hold a firm place in the country's current circumstances regarding violence against women. These laws and systems of oppression from the history of British-ruled Pakistan created a domino effect, which led to more potent indigenous forms of violence that we cannot seem to eradicate anymore. According to the Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (2022), Pakistan was ranked as the second worst country in the world. Although there is a debate and various questions on such reports, it is still pertinent to notice the journey Pakistan took in the last 75 years to reach here. Similarly, according to a report by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2021), 11 rape cases are reported every day in Pakistan. To understand these circumstances in Pakistan, this case study will try to determine the factors that have contributed to this prolonged culture of silence about rape in Pakistan. It is not possible to track all these factors and changes in laws throughout the whole history of Pakistan; hence, for the most part, the history of Pakistan and the culture of silence will be explained through a literature review, and only sources from the recent decade will be used as primary and secondary sources to determine the social change that came about. The study is also limited in its understanding of only involving adults, which means all the data laws and literature discussed throughout the study will only pertain to adults. Although such violence is not limited to adults only, to narrow the scope of the study in all respects, the focus is explicitly on adults. This study will be used to help track the culture of silence about rape in Pakistan over the past decade to see if any changes could potentially help reduce rape in the future.

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Significance of Study

The importance of the study is linked to the well-being of adults in Pakistan, as the frequency of violence like rape keeps increasing, and there are no to very few measures being taken to reduce this form of violence. Hence, the overall well-being and productivity of adults is affected. This is affecting the life quality of individuals as they would live in fear of violence.

Research Question

How has the culture of silence changed regarding rape over the last decade in Pakistan?

How do documents (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan reports) demonstrate this change in the culture of silence regarding rape?

How does the media portray this change in the culture of silence regarding rape?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The culture of silence is not a new concept in the context of rape in the world, but especially not in Pakistan. It is because rape itself silences women for several reasons, most among them being shame and stigma (Aghtaie, 2011). This shame is often strongly associated with some cultures, mainly Muslim or South Asian (Aghtaie, 2011). At the same time, such cultures where sexual violence is the norm and blame for assault is thrown on the victim help create a culture of violence, and inquiring from the public about their actions and behavior during assault traumatizes them (Armstrong & Mahone, 2016). This is potentially another factor that contributes to the culture of silence. Kakon (2020) has argued that this being quiet should not be taken as silence, as people are just trying to avoid the shame and stigma, and that is because sexual assault is not understood by society.

Although the literature is evident on the factors of silence by the people who get raped, it does not give a clear idea of why, as a society, this culture of silence seems to persist despite the enormous adverse effects. Burnett et al. (2009) argue that rape culture encourages silence, and the factors that normalize rape are the ones that work together to create silence. In Pakistan, rape culture consists of hardly any discussions on rape, despite the number of rape cases of crime being committed (Adil, 2021). This can be tracked in two ways, through the history of rape laws in Pakistan and the variety of rape crimes that exist, particularly in Pakistani culture.

As mentioned, the Pakistani legal system was inherited from the British colonial era and was based on Victorian principles. These laws were not very explicit about rape among adults; hence, they did not garner much attention concerning laws being implemented as well. It was when the law of 'The Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance,' 1979, came into force that the laws and punishments about rape and adultery became explicit and harsh. Section 6 of the Ordinance was particularly the worst situation for adult women, as for them to get a conviction of rape, they had to produce four male witnesses to prove their rape case; otherwise, they would be tried under the crime of adultery and punished for it. In 2006, the 'Women Protection Act' replaced the Hudood Ordinance in the Pakistan Penal Code. Section 375 of the Pakistan Penal Code now does not rely on the testimony of four male witnesses to

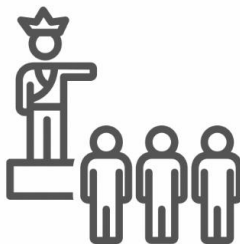
prove rape but keeps the five conditions for it to be constituted as rape.

In 2016, further amendments were made, and ‘The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offence Relating to Rape) Act 2016 came into force, which made things more straightforward. It also added a restriction on publishing and disclosing the identity of the victim to help with stigma, shame, and many other consequences faced by people for reporting. It also added medical examination as a key part of legal proceedings, which was not a regular legal practice. In 2020 and 2021, laws were amended again in the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2021, which included more types of rape and harsher punishments. As well as the ‘Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act of 2021, which expanded the definition of rape, speedy trials, special courts, and many other things to change the ever-increasing number of rape reports coming in the last decade. Khaliq (2022) mentioned that even though the current and latest Anti-Rape Act 2021 is the best yet, through which Pakistan's legal system has produced to compensate rape victims, this Act has several substantive and procedural shortcomings, as well as significant challenges in the implementation process. He also shared that issues include the overworked police and prosecution departments' lack of training, the absence of any evidence of the creation of anti-rape crisis cells (ARCCs), the formation of special investigation officers and joint investigation teams without any intention of helping the victim, the severe lack of resources needed to implement the Act, the creation of multiple forums rather than expanding upon the pre-existing legal infrastructure, and the Act's omission of any mention of sexual molestation (Khaliq, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

Cultural Hegemony (Gramsci)

- Control through perpetuating cultural norms
- Norms created by those who it benefit
- Passed through education, media, religion, social customs
- Unquestioned nature of hegemony



Stigma Theory (Goffman)

Negative behaviour because of particular attributes, situations, characteristics, etc.



Moral Theory (Wikstrom & Treiber)

Violence as a moral act where a certain set of rules are always followed.



Rational Theory (Nagin & Paternoster)

Humans think in terms of costs and benefits when they consider violence



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative in nature. The study uses a purposive sampling technique, and the sampling size consists of annual reports from 2013 to 2023 of the ‘Human Rights Commission Pakistan, which was used for document analysis. Similarly, news from the Dawn newspaper from 2013 to 2023 was available online on the Dawn News website.

Data Collection Methods & Procedures

The data is collected in three ways. Firstly, documents, particularly the annual report of the ‘Human Rights Commission of Pakistan from 2013 to 2023, to see the changes in the last decade. Secondly, newspaper cases, particularly ‘Dawn News’ of Pakistan, a well-known newspaper case, are tracked from 2013 until 2023. Only cases related to adults were included, and cases involving children from either documents or newspapers were not. The keyword ‘Rape’ was used to find it in the newspapers as well as the documents.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using different methods for each research method. For the documents, critical discourse analysis by Van Dijk (1993) was used, where discourses were analyzed after converting the data into different themes and were analyzed on how language use exposes different power dynamics and cultural factors that contribute to a culture of silence regarding rape. The documents were around 3300 pages, and only chapters and pages about topics of rape were used. The data from these pages was later converted into tables and graphs to give a holistic understanding. Themes were also created by analyzing the data on those pages through discourse analysis. The topics of rape that were analyzed were only about adults, and data on children was not included in the study. For the newspaper, a list of all news available online from 2013 regarding rape was made. That list was later translated into a table, and half of the reports from each year were analyzed. The codes were made from the news content and later categorized and made into themes for this case study. All the news considered was about rape in cases involving adults. No data on minors or children was used in this study.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The results were divided into two parts, according to the subdivision of the research questions. The first is a document analysis of the Human Rights Commission Report of Pakistan (HRCP) report, and the second is a content analysis of the Dawn newspaper.

Part A - Document Analysis

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is an independent, non-political, not-for-profit organization established in 1986 and is committed to highlighting human rights for all citizens. They believe that the goal of fundamental human rights under the Pakistani constitution should be without any discrimination based on gender, race, religion, sect, ethnicity, disability, economic status, or marginalization. To fulfil this purpose, publish an annual report on various topics, particularly the ‘State of Human Rights,’ which includes detailed documentation of the country’s state of human rights. For this study, all the annual report data for rape from their reports have been taken, as they are one of the only documents right now in Pakistan with such a detailed account of rape cases.

Following are the tables that are compiled given the data from HRCP reports. The missing places are the data that was also unavailable in the reports.

Table 1:
Province Wise Yearly Rape Cases (As per HRCP Reports)

Provinces	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Punjab	3656	4329	3773	3881	3300	2608	2942	2737	2734	2576
Sindh	140	217	344	95		156	165		191	
KPK	277	370	278	172	72	72	163		133	127
Baluchistan	40	30	39			4	5		19	32
ICT	60	49	46	487					162	
AJK	21	14	4	9						
GB	5	1							4	

KPK=Kyber Pakhtun Khwa, ICT=Islamabad Capital Territory, AJK=Azad Jammu Kashmir, GB=Gilgit Baltistan

The table illustrates the annual rise in rape case reports, particularly in the province of Punjab. However, in 2022, there was an abrupt and significant decline in reported cases. This is presumably caused by confusion over the new Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act of 2021. The blank areas show that nothing has been reported for those years and areas in the reports.

Table 2:
Province Wise Yearly Gang Rape Cases (As per HRCP Reports)

Provinces	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Punjab	311	269	219	190	151	156		223	263	32
Sindh	9	13	54	7			13		35	27
KPK	2	0					1		11	3
Baluchistan	0	1					1			
ICT	5	1	5						17	
AJK	0	1	2	3						
GB	0	1					1			

The table indicates an upward tendency, particularly in the Punjab province, because of increased public knowledge of rape crimes relative to other regions where there have been no reported occurrences in recent years. The blank areas show that nothing has been reported for those years and areas in the reports.

Following were the themes from the data from reports from 2013-2023 of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

Theme 1: Discrepancies in information

There have been various discrepancies in different reports over the year. One example of that is from the report of 2014 (HRCP, 2015), where on different pages and parts of the report, the number of rapes and gang rapes overall and for each province is different. On page 23, it mentions 828 rapes and 597 gang rapes, and later, for each province, it mentions figures like 2734, etc. The more common statistics are mentioned again in the report under another different heading, which might lead people to believe that they may be true. In the report of 2014 (HRCP, 2015), it says in the ‘Highlight’ part of the report under the heading of ‘Women’,

‘According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in 2014: 597 women and girls were gang-raped; 828 rapes....’ (p. 23).

In the same report, under the heading Crimes against People and Property, it is said,

‘Some 326 gang-rape cases were also reported in the country, including 263 in Punjab, 35 in Sindh, 11 in KP, and 17 in Islamabad, according to the official crime figures in 2014. As many as 3,243 rape cases were reported — 2,734 in Punjab, 191 in Sindh, 133 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 19 in Baluchistan, 162 in Islamabad, and four in Gilgit-Baltistan.’ (p. 75 & 241). Even when they talk about minor girl rape, the numbers are different. Although this study was excluded to check if it was not a mistake on the researcher’s part, it was confirmed by other statistics on rape as well throughout the report. According to the HRCP database, 290 minor girls were raped, and 139 gang members were raped during 2014.

The discrepancies continue each year when they try to fix or rewrite the last year’s report mistake. For example, the report for the year 2017 (HRCP, 2018) is written about 2016 for KPK.

‘In comparison, in the previous year, there were 211 murders, 44 ‘honor’ killings, 163 rapes, and one gang-rape incident, besides 24 cases of domestic violence and one acid attack.’ (p. 68)

While in the 2016 report (HRCP, 2017), it is mentioned,

‘In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, police registered 2472 murder, 148 rape...’ (p. 48)

Another major discrepancy is that the number of rape cases reported for the capital city, Islamabad, on pages 216 and 225 were different. The wording was also different from assuming that one is reported by police, and they compile another. Still, then it also states that police completed 70 cases while previously only mentioning 35 cases being reported.

‘According to data obtained from the Islamabad police through a Right to Information request by the Sustainable Social Development Organisation (SSDO), the number of cases of violence against women (VAW) in the capital increased from 79 in 2018 to 109 in 2019—43 VAW cases, 31 cases of kidnapping, and 35 cases of rape.’ (p. 240)

‘According to their statistics, the police had traced 23 out of 97 murder cases. Of a total of 186 incidents of attempted murder, the police had submitted challans in 93 cases.

In the capital, 487 incidents of rape took place, but the police completed investigation in 70 cases.’ (p. 225)

These persistent discrepancies in reported rape cases underline concerning pattern of inconsistencies that raise concerns over the efficacy of data collection and reporting methods in addressing the seriousness of crimes against women.

Theme 2: Missing and combined information

Throughout the last decade, there has been a trend of missing information on rape data. Sometimes it is ignored, and sometimes it feels intentional. For example, in the report of 2015, only a total of 244 overall cases of rape were mentioned. It was also made through reference to the Ministry of Human Rights. Every other time rape is mentioned, it is generalized with statistics of violence of different kinds. There is also no information on specific places in Pakistan. At the same time, they also mention a report by War Against Rape (WAR), which mentioned that four women are raped every day. Both reports are contradictory and are not directly linked with HRCP. Still, they did not clarify any of their data on the report and just stated two conflicting reports by different organizations for this year.

Similarly, in the report of 2016 (HRCP, 2017), the generalized information in most provinces is there about violence, but specific to rape is only mentioned for Punjab, KPK, and one gang rape in GB.

Theme 3: Ignoring missed information

Starting from the 2013 (HRCP, 2014) report, one can see that attention to the part about rape is not efficient. There is a lack of data regarding many areas in Pakistan. Even if the areas are mentioned, such as Sindh, many other crimes and violence are discussed, except rape. One could argue there is no rape, but it would be difficult to believe as the nearby province of Punjab had 2576 reported rape cases. As well, in a later part of the report, it is mentioned that there were 27 gang rapes in Sindh, which should have at least been mentioned in discussion with other parts. It seems as if that information is ignored or missed intentionally or accidentally. This can be seen from this excerpt from the 2013 report.

‘According to Punjab police crime statistics, 2,576 cases of rape of women were registered in that province alone in 2013. According to official crime statistics in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 127 cases of rape and three cases of gang- rape were registered. In Sindh, 27 cases of gang rape were reported.’ (p.192)

In conclusion, there appears to be a serious lack of emphasis and uneven reporting on rape cases, which raises concerns about the quality and openness of data presented and shows a large gap in the dependability of the data used to comprehend sexual violence in Pakistan.

Theme 4: Fixing reporting in next year

There is also a trend toward fixing reports next year, specifically regarding numbers. In the report for the year 2015 (HRCP, 2016), they did not mention any specific province and only gave an estimate of the total. The next year's report came with a specific number for Punjab, which was not present in last year's report. Similarly, the statistics of rape in the 2016 year were mentioned in the 2017 report (HRCP, 2018).

'In 2016, rural Sindh had witnessed 100 incidents of 'honor' killing, 165 rapes, 13 gang rapes, five acid attacks, and six forced marriages, while the total number of crimes against women was 2,817...' (p. 68)

It also happened by KPK, as written in the report of 2017 (HRCP, 2018), statistics of 2016,

'In comparison, in the previous year, there were 211 murders, 44 'honour' killings, 163 rapes, and one gang-rape incident, besides 24 cases of domestic violence and one acid attack.' (p. 68).

As well as for Baluchistan

'The previous year, the province had seen 371 crimes against women, including 43 murders, 31 'honor' killings, five rapes, and one gang-rape.' (p. 68)

As shown in the cases of provinces like Punjab, KPK, and Baluchistan, the trend of revisions and adding more detailed data in succeeding reports is consistent and reflects an attempt to rectify past reporting problems and enhance accuracy and transparency.

Theme 5: Acknowledging data issues

It was only in the 2018 report that HRCP acknowledged that the data reported was not entirely correct but estimation and shared their estimation of the number and their struggles regarding it. On this page, they shared the numbers of rape 3238 and gang rape 257.

'The following categories and types of VAWG data used to be collected independently by the national NGO, Aurat Foundation, which was widely used as a credible source. This data is no longer being compiled. As a result, collecting and compiling this data proved immensely challenging. It is presented here with the caveat that it depicts only the incidents reported by the provincial police/LEAs to the federal government at the end of 2017.' (p. 184)

They were also able to correctly anticipate next year as the report of 2018 (HRCP, 2019) only had data regarding Punjab and KPK rape. All the other data they mentioned came from newspaper articles and TV channels. The Punjab Foundation provided the Aurat data only until September 2018.

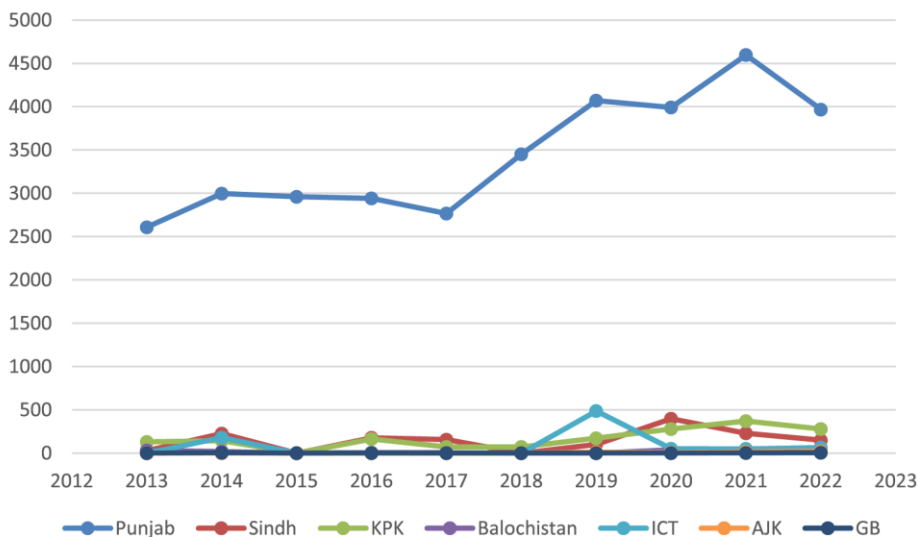
The following table shows the data compiled during research to put it together for holistic and visual understanding.

Table 3:
Province Wise Yearly Combined Data from HRCP Reports

Province	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Punjab	2608	2997	2960	2942	2767	3451	4071	3992	4598	3967
Sindh	27	226	0	178	156	0	102	398	230	149
KPK	130	144	0	164	72	72	172	278	370	279
Baluchistan	32	19	0	6	4	0	0	39	31	40
ICT	0	179	0	0	0	0	487	51	50	65
AJK	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	6	15	21
GB	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	5

The yearly combined data from HRCP reports for Punjab (2013–2022) shows erratic trends, peaking in incidents in 2017 and 2018. While recent years have shown a decline, the overall number of cases has increased from 2608 in 2013 to 3967 in 2022, indicating the need for additional research into the factors that contribute to these incidents.

Figure 1:
Data over the last decade in different parts of Pakistan



The above graph also shows a trend where Punjab is being highlighted with only a consistent source of information and the only major decline in 2022, which could be attributed to the Anti-Rape Act (2021) and lack of awareness surrounding it. Apart from Punjab, there is a lack of consistent data reporting to take away any trend, and the main thing to take away is

only the lack of focus and information that exists, which shows the institution's lack of care about issues such as rape.

Part B - Newspaper Analysis (Dawn News)

Dawn News is published by Dawn Media Group, a Pakistani media company based in Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan. It is the oldest English-language newspaper and one of the most popular news outlets in Pakistan, as well as various other magazines, broadcast media, and internet media. It is used in this study because of its popularity and because the medium is English.

Table 4:
Yearly Rape Reported Cases & Sample Case Analysis

Years	Reported News (Dawn)	Sample Case Analysis
2013	2	1
2014	12	6
2015	8	4
2016	5	2
2017	2	1
2018	14	7
2019	14	7
2020	10	5
2021	20	10
2022	24	12
Total	111	55

The following themes were compiled from the newspaper analysis.

Theme 6: Crimes alongside Rape

There is a common theme among the media news that various crimes are being reported when rape is discussed. Almost all news reports regarding rape either start with physically assaulting the person or during or after physically assaulting them to the extent of it being considered attempted murder. In recent years, instances of intimidation or threat have also been used for rape, such as at gunpoint. Although the intention of hurting before was mostly to physically disable the person for some time, in more cases, it is reported that women are either thrown, assaulted physically, or born to assault with the intent to kill them. Over 8 cases also shared the kidnapping or abduction of women with rape. The use of drugs has become more prominent in recent years in the news as well. Over 10 cases reported different instances of different types of torture, from fire to weapons to cutting tongues, with reports of rape. There were also various reports of threats of consequences or threats of death with rape to multiple women. It also included some instances of blackmail for keeping quiet and some threats of consequences for not adhering to it. In recent years, there have also been reports of recording or taking pictures of the person being raped for blackmail or other threats. Over 9

cases were reported for murder, which ended with the victim being killed either right after the rape or succumbing to their injuries after a few days in the hospital.

‘After allegedly raping the girl, the police constable threw her down from a hilltop.’ (June 11, 2014)

Theme 7: Rape and its types

As all the cases were of rape, the word rape was used in all the reports. While few types of rape were mentioned more frequently than others, over 10 times, gang rape was mentioned in the reports. Comparatively, the reports of revenge rape, custodial rape, statutory rape, Panchayat that is a group of elder and wise people chosen by the local community for the resolution of family disputes, and ordered rape were relatively few (Rajamanickam, 2016; Eidson, 1980). Attempted rape was mentioned only twice in the news that was analyzed. At the same time, there were instances of rape during surgery that were not categorized with other rapes and were reported shockingly. Similarly, Panchayat-ordered rape was reported in such a manner that it seemed unique, as the law has banned these types of rape cases, but they are still existing in some areas.

‘A woman was allegedly gang-raped by four people on Monday’ (Nov 23, 2021)

Theme 8: Construction of language in media

The language used by the newspaper reports for people raped was mainly represented as they were victims, depicting the individuals as helpless and subjected to harm, as seen in over 14 news reports, even if the person is alive and in legal process. There was hardly any other word used for people who were raped. Gender was the only common theme among all the news that was reported. The words such as ‘Alleged rape’ were also used commonly in many reports, as many as six times. There was also a trend of legal or medical terms in the news from words like ‘FIR Registered,’ ‘Registered Case,’ ‘Arrested,’ and ‘DNA Reports.’ There was also an everyday use of the words ‘Suspects,’ ‘Accused,’ and ‘Allegation’ in all the reports. In the cases of using the word allegedly or allegation mentioned in the report, the cases were still open and not completed by the police. At the same time, the structure of language and sentences is always focused on the victim and not the one who committed the crime.

‘The victim alleged that she was raped by the government officer in a hostel’ (July 15, 2021)

Theme 9: Identity of victims, perpetrators, and their families

The names of the accused, victims, survivors, and their families mainly were kept from the news. Apart from a few news reports that were heavily reported or were cases of murder, names were not mentioned. The only things identifying people were their locations, their relationship to each other (if any), and the age of the victims (for the most part). There was also a pattern of giving an alphabet, such as A, B, etc, to the person referred to in some reports. In some circumstances, marital status is also mentioned. As well as employment status, it is mentioned if the employment place creates a link with the rapist.

'She said at the house, both 'H' and 'J' raped her in the presence of their friend, and the suspects made a video clip of the crime.' (September 6, 2017)

The themes in the above part are all correlated. Every news contains more than one element of the themes mentioned above, which we can conclude as a pattern of how this news is written.

This discussion tries to answer the question raised in this research that surrounds the case study as well as the theoretical framework and literature if the culture of silence has changed regarding rape over the last decade in Pakistan. Two different types of data gave an insight into this culture of silence. Burnett and his colleagues (2009) argue that rape culture encourages silence, and the factors that normalize rape are the ones that work together to create silence. Before the discussion, it is noted that this data does not have a holistic understanding and represents certain people, reports, and news interpreted in this study.

Given that the first data that was to be analyzed was the HRCP reports of the last decade, The reason those reports were chosen is that these were the only official reports in Pakistan that have the most accurate statistics of rape in Pakistan. There were no official government documents that compile such data on rape, which shows the government's priority and stance on this culture of silence. Hence, gathering this data from independent organizations spread all over Pakistan is a step toward understanding this culture. At the same time, when we look at the best version of data available in Pakistan regarding rape, it is seen that it is incomplete, not comprehensive, and has some errors. It is to be believed then that nobody in Pakistan, as of this point, has realistic data gathered on rape that has been reported. It is not to include the many unreported cases, an issue worldwide. Understanding this, we can see the way Gramsci's hegemony (1995) is working in Pakistani culture for rape, and this silence exists at various institutional levels. It was also discussed by Adil (2021) in his study that rape is not a topic of discussion in daily life, and even media reports do not discuss rape as a routine point of discussion. This is also evident from the government's inability to collect or ask for data, police ineffectiveness, and the helplessness of independent organizations. The silence is so deeply rooted that no organization or institution can help break it. At the same time, given the data we have, we can see there is no decline in the number of rapes that are reported, which has been entered into the reports database. Either it is static because of the lack of data, or it is increasing, but there is no decline. Georg (2003) explains that violence is repetitive and, therefore, a social process. This could potentially argue for rape cases not declining even after years, and it has become part of our culture now. But this trend is particular in one province where data has always been available over the last decade, unlike all the other areas of Pakistan. It can be assumed that similar patterns exist in different parts of Pakistan. Still, the reason for the silence, or particularly the lack of data in those spaces, is a question that has yet to be answered.

The newspaper analysis gave two hypotheses regarding the silence. According to most of the reports in the newspaper, it is seen that there is a pattern of crimes overlapping whenever rape has happened. For example, blackmail, torture, and attempts to murder are frequently mentioned in rape news reports. This can lead people to believe that reporting is not just about telling what has happened but rather a constant fear for the future, which could lead to

the silence of survivors. While the cases of murder with rape make it impossible, over the years, murder has become a part of rape culture in some circumstances. The shame, stigma, and avoiding shame because of rape is attached in Pakistan, which is supported by the studies (Aghtaie, 2011; Kakon, 2020). Furthermore, this shame can be explained by not speaking, even if one understands that rape is a crime. This also explains cultural practices like Panchayat rape, which is deliberately done and ordered by village elders if the family does not conform to the norms of the system, and raping women of the family, which takes away their reputation and brings shame associated with it. Aghtaie (2011) mentioned that the shame of rape is mainly related to Muslim or South Asian culture.

The cultural and country contexts require a solution that is not only long-term but works short-term for the current climate as well. Although the history of the laws of rape in Pakistan gives some hope regarding the change that has occurred over the last fifty years, it is still not enough to see a drastic change. The themes of the results from experts indicated that even though they think the recent laws of the Anti-Rape Act (2021), as well as amendments to the Women Protection Act (2006), have made some strides in breaking the cycle, the lack of implementation of these laws is still a factor towards silence. Specifically, the law that was made to prompt the cases of rape still struggles with the system in itself; hence, despite having a law that mandates courts to have a ruling, it does not always happen. Similarly, the breakthrough of recent laws that prohibit bringing the sexual history of women into the context of rape is a revolution in the context of the shame and stigma attached to rape, as well as the questioning of the character of women who do come forward. Even though the cultural practices still exist, the law makes it harder for such things to be used against women in court.

Adult education can play an influential role in both elements by including families (which will have older adults) in this conversation about reducing shame around rape as well as starting conversations about masculinity and violence through various formal and informal forms with men in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION

The case of the culture of silence regarding rape is not a specific issue that exists in Pakistan. It exists on different levels because of the cultural layers of Pakistan. As the cultures within Pakistan also vary, the change in this culture can be seen differently in other parts of Pakistan. Various theories of violence and culture explain the silence of rape, and it has tried to bridge those gaps with the data available in Pakistan and the theoretical understanding of violence, specifically rape. Despite the variety of data sources, there exists a unifying theme. The culture of silence regarding rape is a real phenomenon that exists currently in Pakistan. The repercussions of this silence are not only for the people living in Pakistan right now, but they will also be for future generations, as the implications of our last decades can be seen in our culture right now.

The secondary data of this study come together to showcase the geographical and political places where the change has occurred. While some areas of Pakistan have experienced less change compared to others, it is evident that there has been a trend of silence in those regions

over the past decade. This shift indicates that change is not always positive. The situation could deteriorate further if governments and society continue to overlook these issues.

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