Violence against Women in Southern Punjab: Altering Trends

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Abstract
It is essential for sustainable development that the women should be onboard and they must enjoy the same opportunities, outcomes, rights and obligations in all spheres of life. They must have ability to control their own lives according to their own wishes. But in Pakistan the women are living in miserable conditions and they are visible marginalized group that need an urgent consideration. In this article the situation of women in South Punjab has been discussed quantitatively specially with reference to the customary practices. Violence against women is discussed and the elements of the society that are responsible for this are also elaborated. There is a comparison of two important years 2007 and 2008 and the outcomes of the initiatives that were taken in this time period are elaborated. The article also discusses the media coverage and its response to the evils of the society. It also shows the varying trends of the violence against women in South Punjab. The situation of gender sensitive issues and their reflection in the society is also a main concern of this article and the quantitative data analysis methodology is adopted in this paper.

Keywords: Purdah; Kara Kari; Vani; Watta-Satta; Southern Punjab

I. Introduction
Violence against women is an act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or mental harm of suffering to women, including threats of such acts, compulsion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Social and economic cost of violence against women is massive and has wrinkle effects on all over the society. Women can suffer isolation, powerlessness to work, loss of wages, lack of contribution in regular activities, and limited ability to care for themselves and their children (WHO 2008). According to WHO report gender-based violence, or violence against women, is a major public health and human rights problem throughout the world (WEF 2009).

In Pakistan situation of violence against women is not good and the women are facing bad conditions. 7571 events of violence against women were reported in the year 2008 throughout the country. In these incidents 1897 women were killed and 1784 were abducted, 778 women were raped and 29 women suffered acid burning (PHDF, 2009). In Pakistan hundreds of women killed in the name of honour in every year almost in all part of the country and many cases go unreported and almost all go unpunished (Amnesty, 1991).
II. Situation of Southern Punjab

In Pakistani conventional society violence against women is a normal practice especially in village areas. Heavily populated province Punjab has multi dimensional approach in the society about this important issue. Violence against women considered as a routine matter and people don’t bother to give it due consideration in the villages. In the southern part of this Province most of the population lived in village areas where women folk are facing miserable conditions. Feudal system, weak law implementation and lack of awareness in male dominated society are the major reasons of that. (Mai, 2007) Purdah (veil) creates big differentiation between men and women and most women spend their lives in their homes and courtyards and go outside only for male approved reasons. Due to these conditions their social life remained in a specific circle created by men. This is why the men decide what is good and evil for women and if a woman is being tortured it is not considered a big offence. People think that it is a right of man to handle their women in this way.

So the domestic violence is widespread in this area and acid throwing, burning, killing, rape and physical abuse is usual practice. Most of these cases never reported in media and women have no independent access to the police and judiciary. Some customary practices like Watta Satta, Kala Kali, Vani, are applied on the name of honor that is vested in men. Early and forced marriages and harassment of women in the property matter is pushing women behind and behind. Sexual harassment is also a big issue where 70% cases remained unreported and women remained silence due to the fear of men. Even the women cannot share this problem with their own husband and family heads. Due to these conditions a perpetrators is established that being women is itself a curse and this atmosphere is damaging women mentally and physically (Mukhtar, 1998).

With this discussion it is clear that picture is not good. The public and private sector is also aware of these conditions and working for betterment, but the result is not encouraging. Numbers of non-governmental organizations are working for the improvement of women in this area but still the violence against women is a big threat to the society and is not under control. New shapes of violence against women are introduced in the new millennium that is curtailing the true development of society.

III. Institutional Efforts to Combat Violence

However the media in Pakistan is emerged as a powerful sector to curb the evils of the society and highlighted this matter as an issue but the women are still in stress. In year 2007-2008 media of Pakistan were getting a new shape and were facing extra ordinary circumstances. President Musharraf declared a state of emergency on November 3, 2007, the constitution suspended, a popular politician assassinated and media censorship enforced. So these two years were very difficult for Pakistani media but these bad conditions gave a new force for media. When the government banned news channels during the November 2007, private television channels uploaded their news clips to the internet and motivated Pakistanis to go online. So in spite of all these handicaps the Pakistani media were fighting against the evils of the society and the cases of violence against women were reported continuously in print and electronic media. The assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007 also shocked the women of Pakistan because she was a symbol of courage in this conventional society. This unfortunate incident demoralized the women fighting against the gender based violence in the country.
In Pakistan, year 2008 was more unfortunate for women facing violence then year 2007. The reported cases of violence against women increased in most areas in 2008. However, the capacity of media also increased to report these cases and played a role of pressure group to restrain the violators. It also created pressure on the public sector to fulfill its responsibilities to control the violence against women but the cases of rape, gang rape, attempt to rape, kidnapping, murder, attempt to murder, torture, attempt to torture, harassment, women trafficking and organs mutilation of women were increased. In the year 2007 almost 2700 cases of violence against women were reported in southern Punjab but in 2008 this figure rose to 3750 cases (PHDF, 2009). In 2007, 252 cases of gang rape were reported in National Dailies. Rape cases were 219 and the events of attempt to rape were 191 that were reported in national dailies Nawa-e-Waqt, Jang, Express, Khabrain and Ausaf. In 2008 the reported cases of gang rape were 346, the rape cases were 376 and attempts to rape cases were 237. This figure shows alarming increase in the rape cases. Kidnapping of women in 2008 was also increased then 2007. Cases of kidnapping in 2007 were 580 and 2008 were 1041 almost double in the next year. The cases of attempts to kidnapping in 2007 were 71 and in 2008 this figure reached to 104 cases. However the cases of murder of women in Southern Punjab decreased in 2008 with the comparison of 2007. In the year 2007, 211 cases of murder were reported and attempts to murder were 38, in the year 2008 the murder cases of women were 193 and attempts to murder were 39 (PHDF, 2009).

Torture of women is a normal practice in the village area in Southern Punjab, which is the focal point of public and private sector. But the figures show that in spite of all efforts the incidents of violence against women were increasing. In 2007, 885 cases of torture were reported in Newspapers and in 2008 this figures rose to 1150 cases (Chaudhary, 2009). Same cases were with the harassment of women and with women trafficking. In 2007, 120 cases of harassment were reported but in 2008 the numbers of these cases were 160. In 2007 the figure of women trafficking was 27, which rose to 38 in 2008. In 2007, 113 women attempted for suicide and 82 were succeeded to commit it. In 2008 100 women tried for suicide and 52 were succeeded (PHDF, 2009). However the events of suicide decreased little in 2008 then 2007 but the figures of attempts were increased which also shows failure of reducing violence against women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rape</th>
<th>Gang Rape</th>
<th>Kidnapping</th>
<th>Murder</th>
<th>Suicide</th>
<th>Torture</th>
<th>Harassment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>857</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>1041</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1118</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected by National Dailies

Comparison in the lower chart shows the increasing trends in violence against women in Southern Punjab and the situation is alarming for the agencies working on this issue.
A study conducted by the Awaz Foundation shows that from May 2004 to May 2006, 2,017 cases of violence against women, including 20 rapes in police custody, 80 burning cases, 65 acid attacks, 126 honor killings, 51 Kala Kali (Karo-Kari) cases and 619 rapes, were reported in Southern Punjab. In this report it is said that the conventional customs and practices reciprocal marriage (Watta-Satta) is a common practice in Tehsil Taumsa and Jatoi. However, it is least practised in Multan and Muzaffargah. But on the other hand the situation of violence against women in Multan is not good. In Tehsil areas Watta-Satta is common and the ratio is 64%. Divorce is significantly high (31 per cent incidents) in tehsils but it is very common in Jatoi where Watta--Satta is considered a fashion. Dowry is largely practised in Shujabad followed by Rajhan and DG Khan. Rape incidents are common in Jatoi from Tribal Area(AtF, 2008).

IV. Comparative Ranking of Violence in 13 Districts

In 13 districts of Southern Punjab, District Multan remained high ranked in violence against women. In 2007 the incidents of violence against women in Multan were 704 and in 2008 it jumped to 1099. Pakpattan District remained lower in rank in Southern Punjab in violence against women. In 2007, only 6 incidents happened in Pakpattan and it rose to 12 in 2008. In Districts Bahawalpur, Rahimyarkhan, Sahiwal and Rajanpur a slight reduction in violence against women were noted in 2008 with compare to 2007 (AtF, 2008).
Women are discouraged in public life especially in decision making process in South Punjab. They lived under threat of violence and pushed out from the political sphere. Ghost voters in the name of women are registered in the village area and these votes are used in election to enhance the number of votes in the favor of landlord. In this way, the name of women is used by men for their political activities and to increase their authority. So, it resulted in the deprivation of women for their political rights and that is the deprivation of decision making also. In this situation men are more encouraged to boost their authority and to suppress the women in the daily life. Forced and early marriages are also a big source of the suppression of women. When a girl forced to marriage in the early age, she lacked here confidence in the childhood and this lack of confidence remained in the whole life of that women and this encouraged the men to make him more authoritative. But it is strange that the forced and early marriages are not considered as a crime or sin in the village area. Father or head of family assume that he has authority to do so, because this is not his right but his duty to arrange marriage of her dependent according to his wish and liking. The will of a girl is totally neglected and even not asked by her in marriage process. This is why the cases of early and forced marriages are not reported in the press and police exact as the situation is. Normally there is no complainant because the wishes of all stakeholders in this process are already include and the suffering girl has no right and access to justice. (Chaudhary, 2009).

This is reflecting that the situation of early and forced marriages in South Punjab is critical. This type of crime is so common that it is not considered as crime and even no body feel guilty for doing so. Although it is against the teaching of Islam and violation of basic and fundamental rights people practice it commonly and women have no way to avoid it. The structure of the State as well as, State law and the Courts are far away from unbiased and because of their close linkage to culture and custom reflect the leading ideology of the time. So the various organs of the State come together to protect the status quo and the women remain excluded from the center of powers whether of the formal State Law or of customary practice their rights are neither safeguarded nor protected (Ahmad, 2004).
Here it is important to discuss that Honor Killing, Kara Kari, Vani and Forced marriages are reported in the press to some extent but the early marriages are totally ignored. The reason behind this is, no body objects on these type of events because all the participants think it logical and legal. However, now these types of cases are getting space in the national press due to the enhancing capacity of reporting of the media (Qazilbash, 2004).

In 2007, 167 cases were reported of violence against women in the name of customary practices. In 2008, the figure was almost same as 165 cases of violence in the name of customary practices were reported. However, a little bit increase in honor killing was seemed as it was 73 cases in 2007 and it rose up to 83 cases in 2008. The cases of Vani were decreased from 9 to 5 in 2008 then that of 2007. Same reduction were seemed in the cases of forced marriages, as it was reported 7 in 2007 and reduced to 5 in 2008. This may be due to the campaign of media that was launch consciously to curb the evils of the society in name of norms (Chaudhary, 2009).

V. Stove and Acid Burning

The other change of violence against women in south Punjab is that the cases of stove burning are almost ended and it is converted into the acid burning. It means the violence of burning women is still there but it is in a new shape now. In 2007 there were 2 cases of stove burning but in 2008 there was no case like this. On the other hand the cases of acid burning in 2007 were 22 and in 2008 this figure remained even and there was no big change. Acid is now a quick and safe weapon for violators because it is easily available and the women are more vulnerable for this. Although the government has taken a serious step to control this kind of violence but still there is no visible and drastic change because the acid is easily available in the shops and any body can purchase it with no legal threat.

VI. Conclusion

Succinctly, it can be easily concluded that the situation of violence against women is alarming in south Punjab. Women are suffering more in this area and in spite of all efforts by the public and private sectors women are still living in miserable conditions. In 2008 the situation is more critical then 2007 and it needs more attention of the agencies working on this issue. The women are facing violence in their home and they are also subject to violence by the guardians and head of the family. The situation required that a campaign should be launch for the elimination of these kinds of violence and it should be long term and should have long lasting effects.

So, analyzing the situation of women in this paper, some recommendations are presented for the betterment of women and to provide them safe and healthy environment in the society.

i. To reduce the numbers of kidnapping and torturing, there should be urgent law amendments and special courts of law should be established.

ii. People are selling acids in shops and everyone has easy access to purchase it and use it as weapon. They system of acid selling should be under control of the public sector.
iii. A massive campaign should be launched by the non governmental organizations to develop new mind set up in which women should considered as an active and necessary part of the society.

iv. Special rescue organization in public sector should be established which will provide the rescue to the women suffering torture by men.

v. There should be a helpline organized by government where women may register their complaint on urgent basis.

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