

## **Socio-economic Status and Domestic Violence: A Study on Married Women in Urban Lahore, Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper examined the association between women's socio-economic status and their exposure to domestic violence in urban Lahore, Pakistan. The data was collected from married women through household survey of various socio-economic neighbourhoods of Lahore in 2012. The findings of the present study showed significant relationship between women's socio-economic status and their exposure to domestic violence. Women's age, educational attainment and economic dependence were associated with their exposure to domestic violence. The findings of the present study underscored the importance of women's educational attainments and increased access to employment opportunities in lessening their vulnerability to domestic violence.

**Key words:** Socio-economic status, Domestic violence, Violence-endurance, Legal aids

### **Introduction**

Domestic violence against women is widely recognized public health issue across the globe. Domestic violence covers a range of physical, psychological and sexual coercive acts used against adolescent and adult women by current or former male intimate partner (WHO, 2005). Women's exposure to domestic violence, amidst other factors, could be attributed to their socio-economic positions (Weaver et al., 2009), particularly in patriarchal culture where they are relatively disadvantaged (Barnett, 2000).

Socio-economic factors intertwined with patriarchal culture put the women in subordinate position, which in turn have repercussions for three important spaces of women namely; the bodily space, the personal space and the cognitive space (Burlae, 2004). Women's bodily space is violated through physical and sexual violence, while violation of personal space refers to women's experiences of restrained movement in society compared to those of males.

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When women are verbally abused they lose the protection of their cognitive space and suffer psychological disorders. These three important spaces of women seem to be invaded across the globe in one way or the other. However, violence against woman may also be attributed to her husband's socio-economic status. Various researchers (for example, Smith, 1990; Hoffman et al., 1994) documented that husbands with low educational attainments, low income and low job status are more likely to perpetrate violence against their respective wives compared to those with high socio-economic status. It may be argued that gap between household income and expenditure levels could prod many husbands to behave violently. In other words, women who entirely depend on their husbands and make no financial contribution to their respective households are more likely to experience domestic violence. Some researchers, for example Kocaciket et al., (2007) observed positive relationship between family income level and violence against women. Similarly, Rani and Bonu (2009) noted that women's education and income levels were associated with the prevalence of violence. Thus, women with more education and income are less likely to be vulnerable to domestic violence. The present study was conducted on married women to see whether or not their socio-economic status was associated with their vulnerability to domestic violence.

## Methods and Materials

The present study is based on first author's M.Phil research project. A household survey from different socio-economic neighborhoods of urban Lahore was carried out in 2012. The selected localities were:

- Green Town (a lower socio-economic neighborhood) where houses were built on a plot size of three to five Marla (1 Marla= 272.25 sq.ft) with a purchase value of Rs. 1 million and a rental value of Rs. 6000- 9000/- (US \$ 67-101). It is important to mention here that approximately 89 Pakistani Rupees (local currency) were equivalent to 1US Dollar at the time of interview.
- Ferozianwala (a middle socio-economic neighborhood) where houses were built on a plot size of five to eight Marla with a purchase value ranged from Rs.1.5 to 2.0 million rupees and rental value ranging from Rs. 10,000-15,000/-
- Askari Flats (an upper middle socio-economic neighborhood) where flats were built on a plot size of ten Marla with a purchase value of Rs.6.0 to 8.0 million and a rental value of Rs. 18,000- 24,999/-
- Defence Housing Authority Villas in Phase 8 (a posh area) where houses were built on a plot size of twelve Marla and above with a purchase value ranging from Rs.10.0 to 25.0 million rupees and rental value of Rs.30,000-70,000/-

The selection of the neighborhoods was done on the basis of discussions with the local property dealers and local administrators by using the indicators such as the size of the residential plots, purchase value and rental levels of the selected areas. Households were

selected by using census 1998 definition of a household that stated a household consist of a person, or a group of persons, who occupied a common dwelling (or part of it) for at least four days a week and who provided themselves jointly with food and other essentials for living. Purposive sampling procedure was used to select the final sampling units (currently married women) from every 5<sup>th</sup> household of the selected localities of urban Lahore.

Total sample of the present study comprised 151 currently married women (30 respondents from DHA Villas, 21 respondents from Askari Flats, 47 respondents from Ferozianwala and 53 respondents from Green Town). Interview schedule was used to attain information from the respondents available at the time of interview. Socio-economic status was measured through indicators like education, profession, income and personal holding of the respondents. Domestic violence in the present study referred to verbal insults (such as name-calling, humiliation); not allowing female spouse to meet/contact her parents; surrendering property in favor of husband; physical violence (such as slapping, hitting and beating) and sexual violence (such as coercion to conceive and abort pregnancy).

## Major Findings

Table 1 provides information about characteristics of the respondents. The findings emanating from Table 1 show that a substantial number of the respondents was young and majority of the women were not out of child bearing age. The data showed that larger proportion of women was younger than those of their respective husbands. Table 1 indicates that more than three-fourth of the respondents married at a younger age.

The data regarding educational attainments of the respondents and their husbands show that 31.8 percent of the respondents and 26.5 percent of the husbands were not literate. Most of these respondents were from lower socio-economic neighbourhood (Green Town). However, larger proportions of the respondents and their respective husbands from middle and upper socio-economic strata were literate with varying levels of educational attainments. Overall, male spouses appeared to score better on educational attainments. This finding clearly implies the disadvantageous position of females compared to their male counterparts with regard to their educational status.

Table 1 Percent Distribution of Respondents by their Characteristics

Age categories(in years)	Respondents' Age N=151	Age of Husbands	Respondents' Age at Marriage
≤20 <sup>a</sup>	2.7	2.0	77.5
21-25	17.2	4.0	9.9
26-30	24.5	20.5	11.9
31-35	13.9	19.2	0.7
36-40	20.5	14.8	0.0
41+	21.21	39.7	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Education</b>			
Education Categories		Respondents' Education	Respondents' Husbands' Education
Illiterate		31.8	26.49
Primary		5.3	6.6
Matriculation		10.6	17.2

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Intermediate	16.6	7.3	
B.A and above	33.1	38.4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Monthly Income</b>			
	Respondents' monthly income <sup>b</sup>	Husbands' monthly income	
≤ 10,000	37.0	11.0	
11000-20000	26.5	13.4	
21000-30000	17.2	20.0	
31000-40000	13.3	25.0	
41000 and above	6.0	30.6	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Economic status of the Respondents</b>			
Response Categories	Yes	No	Total
Personal Income	39.7	60.3	<b>100.0</b>
Title to Personal Property	46.4	53.6	<b>100.0</b>
Contribution to Household Budget	23.8	76.2	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>a</sup>Minimum age of respondents was 17 years<sup>b</sup> Monthly income of earning respondents

The data in Table 1 shows disparity between income levels of the respondents and their male spouses. Only 39.9 percent of the total respondents were earning and most of these respondents came from upper middle and posh areas of urban Lahore. This finding clearly indicates economic dependence of women, particularly in low and middle socio-economic strata of Lahore. About 60.3 percent of the respondents had no source of their personal income, 53.6 percent of them did not own property and 76.2 percent of them made no monetary contribution to their respective households. Table 2 presents percentage distribution of respondents by their perceptions and awareness about various types of violence. Although surrendering property in favor of husband is not considered an act of violence, it could be viewed as financial abuse which in turn might increase economic dependence of women. The data indicated that almost one-fifth of the respondents viewed surrendering property in favor of husbands was an extreme form of violence. Almost similar proportion (21.2 percent) of the respondents did not perceive it as an act of violence. They were of view that surrendering property in favor of husbands enhanced their integrity and respect in the families of the grooms. Arguably, surrendering property in favor of husband might not be viewed as financial abuse in patriarchal culture where male is considered the key bread winner.

The data in Table 2 shows ambivalent response with regard to respondents' views about verbal insults, restriction to meet/contact parents, coerced conception and abortion as forms of violence against women. However, considerable proportions of respondents did not perceive verbal insults, restriction to meet parents, coerced conception and abortion as acts of violence. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of the respondents viewed slapping, beating and throwing women out of house as extreme forms of violence.

Table 3 provides information about respondents' advice to the potential victims of violence. In cases of financial abuse (surrendering property in favor of husband), verbal insults, slapping and under reference sexual violence; potential victims were suggested to take help from their parents/neighbors or keep silent. It is interesting to note that a considerable proportion of the respondents from lower and middle socio-economic strata expressed that at the time of marriage their parents advised them to keep silent in situations when their respective male spouses or in-laws verbally abuse or slap them. Such a suggestion by the parents was to keep their matrimonial relationship intact.

Table 2: Percent distribution of respondents by their perceptions about various types of domestic violence

Types of domestic violence	Perceptions				Total
	Not a violence	Mild	Moderate	Extreme	
If a woman is made to surrender her property in favor of husband	21.2	30.4	26.5	21.8	100
verbally insulted by the husband	22.0	30.0	21.0	27.0	100
disallowed to meet her parents	14.6	26.0	31.6	27.8	100
coerced to conceive	12.7	30.0	27.0	30.3	100
coerced to abort the pregnancy	10.0	22.0	33.0	35.0	100
not allowed to seek ante-natal treatment during her pregnancy from an appropriate facility	13.3	28.0	36.7	22.0	100
not allowed to seek an appropriate facility for her safe delivery	15.6	23.4	37.8	23.2	100
slapped by the husband	0.0	2.7	5.3	92.1	100
beaten by the husband	0.0	0.0	3.3	96.7	100
thrown out of the house	0.0	2.0	8.0	90.1	100

Some of the respondents viewed economic dependence of women was linked with women's silence over verbal abuse and slapping by their respective male spouses. It implies that women's socio-economic status has strong bearing on their exposure to domestic violence.

Others, particularly the respondents from middle and posh neighborhoods, believed that mutual discussion between husband and wife should be a good option for resolving the tense situation. In cases where the rights to access the highest standards of health care were denied, significant number of the respondents suggested that the victims should take help from the doctors. It is important to note that use of legal help was considered as a viable option in case of severe physical violence (such as throwing out of house, burning and physical battering by spouse or in-laws). Most of the respondents viewed that resorting to police or legal help in minor instances of violence may put the victim in embarrassing situation and jeopardize spousal relationship. Moreover, legal procedures were viewed as expensive and difficult in the face of poverty, illiteracy and patriarchal culture of Pakistan. However, using legal help was the most supported option in life threatening situations.

Table 3 Percent distribution of respondents by their advice to victims of violence

Types of domestic violence	Proposed Advice						Total
	Mutual discussion between husband and wife	Keep silent & take it as fate	Seek help from the Parents and Neighbors	See a Doctor	Report to police	Approach judiciary	
If a woman is made to surrender her property in favor of husband	8.0	54.3	34.4	0.0	0.7	2.7	100
verbally insulted by the husband	10.0	30.5	57.3	0.0	0.7	1.3	100
not allowed to meet her parents	9.3	29.1	56.3	0.0	0.7	4.6	100
coerced to conceive	8.6	19.2	51	18.5	1.3	1.3	100
coerced to abort the pregnancy	8.6	18.5	19.2	52	1.3	0.3	100
not allowed to seek ante-natal treatment during	9.3	11.3	40.4	37.1	0.7	1.3	100

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her pregnancy from an appropriate facility							
not allowed to seek an appropriate facility for her safe delivery	7.3	11.3	41.1	39.7	0.7	0.0	100
slapped by the husband	0.0	11.3	49.7	8.6	20.5	9.9	100
beaten by the husband	0.0	10.6	46.4	4.0	27.8	11.3	100
injured by the husband	0.0	6.6	35.8	2.0	38.4	17.2	100
thrown out of the house	12.0	10.6	64.2	0.0	13.3	0.0	100
exposed to burning	0.0	0.0	22.5	2	60	15.9	100

Table 4 presents percent distribution of the respondents by their exposure to domestic violence during the past six months. The findings revealed that most of the respondents experienced verbal abuse, slapped, beaten with hands or shoes and were thrown out of their houses. It was interesting to note that husbands were the main perpetrators in 80 percent of the cases. However, in few cases the perpetrators of violence were mothers and sisters-in law.

Table 5 provides information about reasons for spousal quarrel. The data shows that 37 percent of the respondents expressed insufficient income as major cause of spousal quarrel. A little more than one-fifth of the respondents reported that spousal quarrel resulted in physical violence and in almost all such cases the female spouses endured the violence considering it as their fate. Nearly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> (32 percent) of the respondents tried to rationalize husbands' aggressive behavior because they were economically dependent on their respective husbands. In other instance of quarrels, female spouses apologized from their respective husbands, whilst few of the respondents informed their respective parents about the violence perpetrated by their male spouses.

Table 4 Percent distribution of respondents by their exposure to various types of domestic violence during Past Six Months

Exposure to types of domestic violence	Yes	No	Total
Made to surrender your property in favor of husband	0.7	99.3	100
Verbally insulted by the husband	31.8	68.2	100
Not allowed to meet parents	7.3	92.7	100
Coerced to conceive	4.6	95.4	100
Coerced to abort the pregnancy	1.3	98.7	100
Not allowed to seek antenatal treatment during pregnancy from an appropriate facility	1.3	98.7	100
Not allowed to seek an appropriate facility for safe delivery	16.6	83.4	100
Slapped by the husband	16.6	83.4	100
Beaten by the husband	9.3	90.7	100
Injured by the husband	7.3	92.7	100
Thrown out of house	13.3	86.8	100

Exposed to Burning	0.0	100	100
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Most of the victim of violence reported that their respective husbands were unapologetic and showed no concern after making violent attempts. Few respondents expressed that they were blamed for making their respective husbands violent. In almost all cases where victims of violence tried to seek support from their parents were advised to stay quiet and kept their matrimonial relation intact. It clearly implies that women were at disadvantageous positions with regard to their strategic needs.

It is important to mention here that the respondents exposed to violence reported poor academic performance of their children. This is an important finding which clearly warrants policy intervention to help reduce psychosocial consequences of domestic violence on children.

Table 5 Percent distribution by reasons of quarrel with husbands

Response categories	Percentage
Insufficient income	37.1
Poor share in decision making	8.6
On issues related to inheritance	2.7
Husband's poor attention towards children's needs	2.7
Husband's violence over children	2.7
When any of need is neglected	6.6
Husband mistrust on your moral character	4.0
Restriction to step out of home	3.3
Lack of husband's employment	2.7
Lazy working attitude	8.6
Husband's drug addiction	4.6
Husband being a womanizer	4.0
Quarrel with in laws	8.0
Because of my poor attention towards children	4.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 shows that domestic violence was significantly associated with the age, educational attainments of both the spouses and personal earning of the respondents. The data showed that young women were more exposed to domestic violence compared with those aged 35 years and above. It may be argued that younger women shoulder disproportionate burden of household activities (such as cooking, cleaning, laundry work, and providing care to the elderly members in the families of their respective grooms) apart from motherhood role which could expose them to domestic violence. It could also be argued that younger women have not yet adjusted in their in-laws which might have ramifications for their exposure to domestic violence. It is important to note that literate and

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working women were less exposed to domestic violence compared to illiterate and non-working respondents. It clearly implies that women's monetary contribution to the household may reduce their vulnerability towards domestic violence. This is an important finding which clearly shows that increasing the life-chances of women through enhanced educational and employment opportunities could help to reduce domestic violence against them.

Table 6 Association between socio-economic variables and exposure to domestic violence

Characteristics	Verbal insults OR (95% CI)	Physical Violence OR (95% CI)	Sexual OR(95% CI)
<b>Respondent's age</b>			
35 years and above	1	1	1
34 years	1.90 (1.75-3.50)*	1.78 (1.25-4.07)*	0.96 (0.54-1.04)
<b>Respondent's Education</b>			
Literate	1	1	1
Illiterate	2.73 (1.75-5.45)**	2.34 (1.87-3.91)**	0.89 (0.74-1.33)
<b>Husband's Education</b>			
Literate	1	1	1
Illiterate	1.66 (1.77-2.97)*	2.26(2.30-5.19)**	0.78 (0.9-1.08)
<b>Respondent's Occupation</b>			
Working	1	1	1
Housewife	1.20 (1.98-3.06)*	1.04(2.01-4.21)**	1.31 (1.54-2.61)*
<b>Economic status of respondent</b>			
Earning	1	1	1
Not earning	1.76 (1.87-3.96)**	1.66 (1.45-2.88)*	0.93 (0.68-1.24)

\*= P≤ 0.05, \*\*=P≤ 0.001

## Discussion

The present study showed that a significant proportion of women experienced verbal insults during the past six months. Small percentages of the respondents reported that they were slapped, beaten, injured and thrown out of the house by their respective husbands during the past six months. Although women were interviewed in isolation from other members of their respective families by trained female researcher, fear or feeling of embarrassment might not have let many of the respondents disclose information about extreme physical violence by their respective male spouses. This is the major limitation of the present study. Another limitation of the present study is that it has not covered broad range of domestic violence and its linkage with various social, psychological and cultural domains.

However, the data of the present paper indicated that women's socio-economic status had strong bearing on their exposure to domestic violence. This finding is in agreement with previous researches (Weaver et al., 2009; Rani and Bonu, 2009 and Kocacik et al., 2007). It is necessary to mention here that most of the literate and earning respondents were from middle and upper socio-economic strata and relatively less exposed to domestic violence compared to those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Consistent with previous researches (for example,Smith, 1990; Hoffman et al., 1994) husband's socio-economic status, particularly his educational attainment, was linked with his violent behaviour. It implies that educated husband may recognize the contribution of his wife in the household affairs and less likely to be violent compared with that of illiterate. However, the findings of the present study underscored the importance of educational attainments of both the spouses in lessening domestic violence.



It is important to mention here that an overwhelming majority of the respondents reported working and positive relationship with their in-laws. A substantial number of the respondents reported insufficient income as a major cause of quarrel with their husbands, which in turn led their husbands to behave violently. This finding dispels the general perception that in-laws, particularly mothers and sisters-in-law are the main inciters of violence against women.

Against this backdrop, it may safely be concluded that violence could not only be attributed to traditional patriarchal cultural of Pakistani society rather it could be understood in terms of socio-economic disparities among men and women resulting in domestic violence against women. In other words, it may not be sheer socio-cultural construction of male dominance contributing to violence against women. However, patriarchy could partly be attributed to disadvantageous positions of women in Pakistan. The findings of the present paper warrant the need of addressing women's strategic issues in reducing their vulnerability to domestic violence.

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