

Perceptions and Realities of the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016): A Qualitative Study of Domestic Worker Women in Lahore

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the perception of domestic worker women in Lahore on the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016. Qualitative research methodology based on an exploratory research design was selected for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seventeen domestic worker women and five legal professionals. The respondents were short-listed and approached using purposive sampling. Thematic analysis was made on the collected data. Qualitative data analysis revealed diverse perceptions on the implementation and effectiveness of the PPWVA 2016. Some participants considered the Act as a threat to traditional family system while others considered it a developing step towards the safety of women. The study further found a great lack of awareness about the act among the primary participants and the role of age as a significant factor in the diversity of ideas. The study concludes that regardless of legislative measures, domestic violence is still persistent due to lack of awareness, limited institutional capacity, and socio-cultural norms of the Pakistani family system. The study suggested extensive awareness campaigns, reforms in administrative machinery and the adoption of arbitration at the council level.

Keywords

Domestic violence, Punjab Protection Act, qualitative study, gender policy, women's rights

Introduction

Domestic violence is a disturbing incident that is subject to complex social, psychological, and cultural factors. It is usually referred to as violence between husband and wife. The problem of domestic violence has been occurring across all cultures, religions, ages, ethnicities, and economic statuses (Pyles & Postmus, 2004).

Domestic violence is usually described as a family-centered issue and generally viewed as a trend of coercive and abusive behavior that could cause emotional and psychological disorders, physical injuries, sexual threats, and financial repression. Domestic violence is defined in many ways depending upon the perspective of the definer. According to the World Health Organization (2021), domestic violence is “a major public health issue” that involves any behavior in an intimate relationship that results in physical, psychological or sexual harm. Likewise, domestic violence is defined by the United Nations (2020) as a variety of behaviors patterns intended to exert control and authority over close companions. These behaviors could include economic coercion, intimidation, emotional abuse, and physical violence. Domestic Violence is used throughout this study with these definitions as they comprehensively address the nature of the problems that fall into the heading of domestic violence.

Domestic violence can take place in different forms; whether it is emotional, physical or of any kind, it usually follows an increasing pattern showing the worsening of controlling behaviors over time. According to the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre, Gold Coast Queensland (Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc., n.d.), some types of violence that can be seen repeatedly are: Creating fear, Intimidation, Verbal abuse, Emotional Abuse, physical abuse, social abuse, financial abuse, sexual abuse, controlling behaviors, spiritual abuse, separation violence, and domestic homicide.

Sociological Significance of the Study

This investigation is aimed at understanding perception of domestic worker women about the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016 and the dynamics of their families with violent relationships and rectifying the problem so as to address this sensitive issue more efficiently in the future. The findings are based on data gathered from qualitative interviews with the abused women and the professionals who work in related service sectors. Through this study, the perceptions of these abused women about this law for their safety against domestic violence were captured and their stance became clearly visible for others to see.

Objectives of the Study

The present study may add information in relation to the perceptions of people, especially women from the lower sections of society, about the government policies for their protection against domestic violence and the reason why some of them are reluctant to disclose the violent incidents. The desired objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the perceptions of domestic worker women regarding the Punjab Protection of women against Violence Act 2016.
2. To examine the extent to which the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act has been helpful in terms of support and protection of domestic violence victims.
3. To identify the consequences faced by women while accessing the services mentioned in the provisions of the Act.

Literature Review

According to International Labor Organization (ILO, 2024), the domestic workers are subjected to around one quarter of all the paid work globally and are still excluded from their care

policies, labor rights and social protection. To attain a descent and gender equated work, it is important to include this segment of the society in the protection systems.

Recent studies show that domestic worker women from urban centers such as Lahore face discrimination and violence and have the most less access to legal protective institutions. Research highlight women's vulnerability to abuse, their experience of long working hours and underpayment (Butt, 2020). Research by Ali and Sultana (2018) highlights the lack of awareness of domestic workers facing gender-based violence.

In the same way, Perveen (2021) describes how domestic workers continue to be vulnerable and excluded from institutional and legal protection while analyzing the relationship between informal labor and gender inequality in patriarchal culture. According to the study, women's empowerment requires legal changes along-with preventative and educational measures. Despite the fact that the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016 was introduced to safeguard women from domestic abuse, it has been noticed that women who work in informal employment still lacks sufficient knowledge of the Act's deliberate objective to safeguards women due to institutional and sociocultural barriers (Ahmad, 2023; Alam, 2021).

Literature on domestic violence has been done in significant amount from around the world. Authors with very different perspectives have written about the appropriateness of mediation in cases where domestic violence has occurred. The studies of Lahore and Southern Punjab stress that the patriarchal norms, economic dependency, and property normalize the domestic violence and limit the women's ability to seek help (Nasrullah et al., 2015; Ali et al., 2020).

According to the Domestic Violence Policy Brief (Perveen, 2021), weak institutions, social stigma and lack of resources are the reasons behind domestic violence in Pakistan. The policy brief

suggests that budgeting of relevant departments, training of law enforcement staff and extensive awareness campaigns must support the policies related to women protection.

A study by Yeasmeen (2014 in India focused on the history and current conditions of domestic violence in India, its types, and causes. The article also highlighted the legislation made by the Indian government regarding domestic violence, and also the duties and appointments of protection officers under “Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code”. The article concluded that domestic violence is one of the hidden but most prevalent form of violence. It is an issue of health, education, legality, development, economics and most importantly human rights issue. The evidence shows that policies at the institutional level in India have gone one step ahead regarding domestic violence. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code could work as a relief for the women who are victims of domestic violence in India.

Through another study on domestic violence from (Paz, 2015), the researcher tries to bring to light the importance of recognizing young people and children in the domestic violence context. To do this, the researcher had given a background on the role of children in the domestic violence context, also discussed the effects of witnessing domestic violence on behaviors of young people and children and the effects on the schooling of children. The researcher concludes that sufficient training and resources were not given to relevant staff for identifying the victimized population.

A study was conducted by Pakeeza (2015 where the researcher examined the legal response to domestic violence in Pakistan to explore the attitudes of various mindsets towards gender issues in Muslim societies. For this purpose, the researcher shed light on Violence against women in the historical context and in Pakistan, distinguished between violence and disciplinary acts and also emphasized the Shariah philosophy to be the basis for future legislations, and finally the

legislations against domestic violence in Pakistan. The researcher then concluded that dealing with domestic violence in Pakistan needs coordinated, systematic and sustained efforts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is exploratory, and the design complements it as domestic violence is still under research in Pakistan. According to Marican (2006), “an exploratory study is carried when little is known about an issue or situation”. Similarly, exploratory research was also suggested by Polit & Beck (2021) for the investigation of areas that still have room to be explored. Therefore, exploratory research with qualitative methodology was conducted as there was still a lot to dig in the area of Pakistani women’s lived experiences on domestic violence.

Instead of quantitative methods, qualitative methods would be a better fit for exploring the lived experiences of abused women in Pakistan. Although researchers have used quantitative methods for the investigation of the same domain, in this study, it may have put restraint on the achievement of study objectives. “Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to explore and interpret meanings, experiences and perspectives rather than to quantify statistical relationships” (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a qualitative approach allows the participants to express emotions and contextual factors, therefore this approach is feasible for researchers that intend to explore personal issues such as domestic violence. Supporting this view, Braun and Clarke (2021) stress that when the researcher is interested in exploring experiences of people, their interpersonal meanings and intimate partner relationships, then qualitative methods are most suitable.

The semi-structured interview approach allows the chances of interactive communication between participants and the researcher. But this approach also has drawbacks as lower participation rates and more time consumption.

Data Collection

The participants were recruited on the basis of convenience from an urban area of Ghaziabad near Mughalpura in the district of Lahore. The participants were recruited by approaching their workplaces or homes. The lawyers were also interviewed and were approached from their offices.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the Participants (N=17)

Participant Group	Number of Participants (n=17)	Professional Background / Description	Recruitment Source
Domestic Workers	17	Women employed in household labor, engaged in cleaning, cooking, and caregiving tasks within private homes. Representing the informal employment sector and lower-income social class.	Local communities and households in Lahore.
Lawyers / Advocates (Key Informants)	5	Legal professionals from Lahore Bar Court and Supreme Court of Pakistan.	Professional legal networks and advocacy groups.
Total Participants	22		

There was a satisfactory response rate from the sampling as it was 85%. Total of 20 women showed interest in participating in this research and 17 actually did participated. The three women out of twenty initially expressed their interest but later withdrew.

In short, the participants of the research sample was drawn from the following resources:

- Fifteen domestic worker women, one hospital worker and one factory worker woman.
- Five lawyers dealing with the issues of domestic violence advocates from both Lahore bar court and the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

All women participants were interviewed in “Punjabi” while the officials were interviewed in “Urdu” language.

Ethical Issues and Considerations

The areas of personal spheres, such as experiences of domestic violence, usually are burdened with rigorous ethical responsibilities. In this research, the participation was completely voluntary and all participants were beforehand informed about the responsibility of confidentiality. Furthermore, the objectives of the research and the methods of information gathering was clearly describes to get their consent.

Qualitative Analysis

In this study, thematic data analysis approach is used to investigate the dimensions of perceptions of women on the PPWVA 2016 as this method is appropriate for identifying, analyzing and reporting of qualitative data (themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017). The data for this analysis was gathered by interviews with the women and the lawyers. As Braun and Clarke (2006: 78) state: “The thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data”.

Data Analyses

Seventeen interviews were conducted from the single prescribed category of the respondents that was domestic worker women of urban Punjab. The analysis was divided on basis of five themes regarding the interview guide. These themes are: 1) Is domestic violence a family

issue? 2) Attitude towards Domestic violence: Is the Act helpful or harmful? 3) Can state protect the women in the walls of home? 4) Knowledge about the Act. 5) What could be done to improve the situation about domestic violence?

Table 2*Thematic Analysis of Participants' Responses*

Theme	Sub-themes / Codes	Description / Interpretation	Representative Quote(s)
1. Domestic violence as a family or personal issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of privacy and family honor • Fear of public exposure • Generational difference in attitude • Legal vs social resolution 	<p>Most women viewed domestic violence as a matter that should be reported when it becomes unbearable; younger women favored legal action, while older participants believed such issues should remain private. Lawyers were divided—some saw public reporting as harmful to family integrity, while others defended it as a legal necessity.</p>	<p>“I called my father to come for my rescue... I wanted to report against him at that time.”</p> <p>“That is entirely a personal issue of husband and wife... how could we involve outsiders in our personal matters.”</p>
2. Attitude towards Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act (2016): Helpful or harmful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive perception of legal intervention • Age as determinant of attitude • Legal criticism vs support among professionals 	<p>The majority of women (especially those under 40) perceived the Act as a positive and needed step, while some lawyers criticized it for disturbing family structure. Younger women viewed it as a safeguard, whereas older women and some legal professionals doubted its practicality.</p>	<p>“Women who are the victim of domestic violence must avail the protection given by the Act.”</p> <p>“Being a student of law, I do not consider this act useful. It has a great risk of disturbing family system.”</p>
3. Can the state protect women within the walls of home?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of retaliation and divorce • Lack of trust in state protection • Government 	<p>Respondents doubted the state's ability to protect women in domestic settings. Many feared violent</p>	<p>“By doing so, we will get beaten up by our husbands even more... he will hand over the divorce</p>

	<p>inaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political motives of legislation 	<p>backlash or divorce if they sought help. Lawyers critical of the Act highlighted delays in enforcement and questioned governmental intent, while a few defended the state's protective role.</p>	<p>paper to us.”</p> <p>“According to Sec 1(3)... this notification has not been issued yet. This clearly shows the intentions of the government.”</p>
4. Awareness about the Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge about provisions • Media misinformation • Legal literacy gap • Awareness as precondition for empowerment 	<p>None of the domestic workers knew the Act's detailed provisions. Many had only heard of it through rumors. Lawyers emphasized that laws are ineffective without public awareness and criticized the government's poor outreach.</p>	<p>“Nine women out of seventeen came to know about the Act for the first time by the researcher.”</p> <p>“Even when the Qur'an was revealed in Arab, it came in the Arabic language so people would understand. It is important to be aware of the thing in order to understand it.”</p>
5. What could be done for victims?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptance and endurance • Victim-blaming attitude • Call for freedom and safety in public spaces • Cultural preference for Panchayat system • Need for awareness and legal education 	<p>Respondents' suggestions varied widely. Some normalized violence and advised tolerance; others sought better protection laws and freedom from harassment. Lawyers mostly emphasized awareness and preferred community-based dispute resolution, such as a reformed Panchayat system, over formal legal measures.</p>	<p>“Women have to bear. By standing against men, they will beat us even more.”</p> <p>“Government should make all citizens know their rights. Only that way they can protect themselves.”</p>

Domestic Violence as a Family or Personal Issue

The purpose of this theme is to know the responses about a very important question that whether the issue of domestic violence should be solved inside the walls of home or should it be taken publicly to the official agencies dealing the issues.

The responses did differ regarding whether the issue should be taken public or not. Most of the respondents were in favor of taking the issue to the relevant authorities and risking its secrecy. According to them, the acts of domestic violence must be reported to the relevant departments if the issue becomes too difficult to solve at home. According to a twenty-nine-year-old respondent:

A couple of days before me my husband and had a very severe fight. He abused me verbally so much and loud that neighbors gathered outside our house. He pushed me on the shelf and slapped me on my face. I got so upset and disturb that I called my father to come for my rescue. My father came next morning and told me that I do not have to worry now because now I can complain against my husband. I so much wanted to report against him at that time.

But the perception of keeping the issue personal was not the same of all the respondents. Five respondents out of seventeen were against taking the issue of domestic violence outside the walls of house. According to a forty three year old woman:

That is entirely a personal issue of husband and wife. It only takes a minute before things get back to normal. During a fight if an outsider may enter accidentally into our house, the matter would turn into a joke at the spot, so how could we involve outsiders in our personal matters.

Most of the respondents who were against taking the issue out of the house were of old age. Mostly they were in forties and one of them was sixty five.

Lawyers being professionals dealing the issues related to law consider the issue of domestic violence entirely personal, but their remarks on the way of addressed it did differ. One group of lawyers, three out of five, entirely opposed the provisions of the Punjab Women Protection Act. According to them, the way in which the matter would be exposed and the abuser would be treated, it will cause more harm to the family system than protecting it. The after effects of the temporary treatment could be disastrous for the victim women.

The other group of lawyers defended the Act by the remarks that most of the families are strong and united and if a woman invokes a provision, she only does that in a dire need. According to them the law does not affect the integration of the family.

Therefore, most of the women that were interviewed were supporting to take the issue of domestic violence to the relevant authorities. They believed that these problems could not be resolved at home.

Is the Punjab Women Protection Against Violence Act (2016) beneficial or detrimental?

The opinions of women about the Punjab Women Protection from Violence Act also diverges/varies in this regard. Most of the women, i.e. ten out of seventeen women had a positive attitude towards the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act. According to them, The Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act is a better move from the government towards addressing the issue of domestic violence and this law should be implemented.

According to one of the respondents, “Issues like this (related to domestic violence) should be solved with the help of the law. We have seen that men, who do this, cannot be changed by simple means”.

Those respondents who were in favor of the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act were mostly of the view that the men who keep their women in the abusive relationships, should be brought to the law, that is the only way to end domestic violence.

The age factor played an important role in the attitude of the respondents. Those respondents in favor of the Punjab Women Protection Act mostly were below 40s, this means that they belonged to the younger and middle age groups mostly. Hence, here also, the diversity of responses on the basis of ages again showed that age does play a vital role towards the perception of the women towards the issues related to domestic violence.

A View of a 17 year old respondent towards the Act was, “Women who are the victim of domestic violence must avail the protection given by the Act, or they will spend their lives beaten up like that”.

A very significant thing to note here is that the attitudes of the respondents towards the Punjab Women Protection Act do not show their willingness to avail the protection or practically using the benefits given by the Act to the women. The factors or reasons about actually availing the protection by the respondents have an entirely another dimension that is discussed in the next theme of the data analyses chapter.

As the lawyers were interviewed for their perceptions about the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016, they were asked about their professional remarks rather than personal, as it was demanded by the study. Among five lawyers that were interviewed, three had a negative attitude towards the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016. They did not find the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act useful and consider it a major cause for family disintegration. On asking about their professional attitude towards the Act, one of the respondent

replied, “Being a student of the Law, I do not consider this act useful. It has a great risk of disturbing family system.”

Among the five lawyers, two had a different point of view regarding the Punjab Women Protection Act. They were quiet positive towards this step from the government. According to them the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act is very accurate and beneficial when taken through true perspective. They claimed that on looking through the legal perspective, the basic protection provided in the Act for women is exactly as it should be. According to a respondent, “It is not as it looks like (the Act), if we look at it through legal perspective, it contains all the basic protections a women should have.”

Can the State Protect Women within the Walls of Home?

This theme contains the analyses of the crust of the study. The data may answer the most basic question of the study that, Is the government of Pakistan being any successful on reducing the issue of domestic violence from lives of the people? Or this attempt merely put the women who try, into more danger than before? One of the respondents on getting the details about the Punjab Protection for Women against Domestic Violence Act responded as:

Is that so? By doing so, we will get beaten up by our husbands even more. He is going to hand over the divorce paper to us and will through us out. Women have to bear. Yes, only special women can do this. Women like us who have children cannot do this. Husband will beat us even more or give us divorce. Uneducated people cannot be disciplined like that.

This statement shows a clear mindset of most of the respondents that were being interviewed. Even if some of the respondents did showed their positive response at first towards the enactment of the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act, but did show other reasons for not using the opportunity against the abusers.

The reasons for not reporting against the abusers varied. Some respondents considered being victim of domestic violence the fate of women and some mentioned other reasons like family respect and concerns about people. All these respondents were not able to report against the abusers one way or the other despite of the new and shiny features of the brand new Punjab Protection for Women against Violence Act.

On the other hand, interviewing lawyers revealed another dimension that opened new aspects to perceive the whole scenario. Three out of five lawyers, who opposed the Act and considered it an act for political scoring, were of the view that the government does not really wants to help the battered women in the current case. They believed that the government has no intentions to free the women from the issue of domestic violence rather it only endangers them even more one way or the other. According to a respondent:

According to Sec1 (3) of the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016, the Government has to issue the notification about the enforcement of the Act. This notification has not been issued yet. This clearly shows the intentions of the government.

On the other hand, the other two lawyers favored the Act by the views that the State is the custodian of the rights of its citizens and domestic violence is an international phenomenon. So the state is giving them protection even in their houses.

Awareness about the Act

Awareness is the foremost thing specially in claiming the rights by any person. This theme revealed the awareness level of the women about the Act for their own protection, which would lead the researcher to know about the government's efforts towards protecting the abused women through the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act.

From the seventeen women that were interviewed, not even a single woman knew exactly about the provisions of the Act. Most of them only heard about its extreme actions of using tracking bracelets against the abusers or taking the abusers into detention by the police for a couple of days. On the other hand, nine women out of seventeen came to know about the Act for the first time by the researcher. This shows that most of the women were not aware about the Act that is legislated for their betterment.

On the other hand, the lawyers laid great stress on the element of awareness. They were of the view that the laws are useless unless the citizens are aware of their rights in the laws. According to them, the laws protect the citizens in every way, but most of the people could not avail them just because they are not aware of them. Criticizing the Punjab Women Protection Act, one of the lawyers said, “Even when the Qur’an was revealed in Arab, it came in the Arabic language so people would understand. It is important to be aware of the thing in order to understand it.”

Thus, awareness being the most significant element in knowing the rights and obligations of the citizens in any society, seems to be missing at a great extend in the case of Pakistan. The domestic worker women that were interviewed were not aware of their rights that the Government of Punjab is trying to give them. Some of them only knew a bit only because of its hike by criticism, otherwise that would also be unknown to them. Most of the lawyers criticize the government about the present condition of the level of awareness of the people, while the other considered the Punjab Women Protection Act an effort by the government to make women aware about their rights.

What could be done for Victims?

Some questions were asked from the respondents to get to know about their own opinions that what they want to be done for the victims of domestic violence. This theme analyzed the data gathered from respondents to find out their own needs and opinions.

The response of the respondents regarding suggestions for domestic violence victims was very diverse. Very few respondents were of the same point of view here, others had entirely different things to suggest each. Some even did not know what to suggest or what they wanted to happen. They were not ready for their own opinion yet.

Those women who were in favor that domestic violence is a family / personal issue, most of them were to the point of view that women are responsible for the situations of extreme violence or at least they could control it. Some of the respondents suggested the women to solve the issue by bearing the consequences that could ease the anger of the abuser. According to one of the respondents, “Women have to bear. By standing against men, they will beat us even more. He (the husband) will give the divorce paper in hand and will tell me to leave the house”.

Moreover, some of the respondents besides holding women responsible for the cause, they were more interested in suggesting any policies and laws that protect them and their daughter for moving out and going for work freely. According to them they were most annoyed by the boys and men from their own “muhallas” who stare them when going to work or even follow them around. In their opinion, the issue of domestic violence could be solved within the house but they cannot control the men outside their houses.

Lawyers were also asked their opinion about the innovations that could be done for making things right or focusing on the aspects which hinder the desired outcomes of the laws for the protecting the women from domestic violence. The group of lawyers i.e. three out of five, considered the whole act and its provisions flawed and impractical as it will only create more chaos in the present tensed situations that the women face in the form of domestic violence. They believed that the whole system of providing protection and safety to the women is useless. They

were in the favor of the Pakistan's old "Punchayat" system and considered that the best for our patriarchal society.

Despite of the differences in opinions, the lawyers did stand at the same stage on addressing some issues that must be dealt while dealing with the issues like domestic violence. All the lawyers put the element of awareness of the people about their rights at foremost place. They were of the view that the people, especially the women, are not aware of their rights, which is the reason that they do not know how to protect themselves. According to them, government should make all the citizens to know their rights. Only that way they can protect themselves.

Discussion

Analysis of the data gathered from the in-depth interviews conducted with seventeen domestic worker women from 17 to 65 years of ages and five lawyers revealed five themes, namely; 1) Domestic violence as a family or personal issue? 2) Attitude towards Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act (2016): Helpful or harmful? 3) Can the state protect women within the walls of home? 4) Awareness about the Act. 5) What could be done for victims? These themes were designed to gain maximum data on every aspect related to the experiences of women in abusive relationships and the barriers they face in gaining protection by the Punjab Women Protection Act 2016.

The women belonging to young and middle age groups mostly want their husbands or the abusers to be punished against their violent acts. But on the other hand, those women who belonged to the older age groups, mostly above forties, have the mindset related to old customs and norms of the society. Most of the lawyers also supported the view that going to the authorities and risking the secrecy of the issue may cause more damage to the family than safety. Most of the women

showed positive response towards the Punjab Women Protection Act and consider it a ray of light for the women who have been the victim of domestic violence.

Mostly young or the middle age women supported the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016 and showed a positive response. Most lawyers strongly opposed the Punjab Women Protection Act 2016, stressing that it could only create more chaos in the existing violent situations faced by the women in violent relationships.

Despite of the fact that most of the women had a positive attitude towards the enactment of the Act, they seemed unable to avail the protection through this Act by themselves. They mentioned several reasons and barriers that made those women unable to go to the relevant authorities. That showed that supporting the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act was their personal opinion but the Act does not work for the same women practically. Most lawyers believed that this Act is merely an act for political scoring by the government. The government has no intentions of enforcing any law or protecting the battered women.

The respondents of the study i.e. the domestic worker women, were not aware of the act and the protection that the Punjab government is trying to give to the battered women through this Act. Some of them only knew a bit only because of its hike by criticism, otherwise that would also be unknown to them. Most of the lawyers criticize the government about the present condition of the level of awareness of the people, while the other considered the Punjab Women Protection Act an effort by the government to make women aware about their rights.

The women from the higher age group believed that the women of the house are the key to peace and respect in the family. Some women suggested controlling the men on the streets because they were more concerned about them. And some women did not suggest anything because they

were not able to think out of the box. Despite the differences regarding the provisions of the Act, all the lawyers did agree that there is a dire need to aware the people about their rights. The state needs to educate its citizens to protect them.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a disturbing incident which is subjective by complex social, psychological and cultural factors. It is usually referred to as the violence between husband and wife. Violence against women is present in every country and society can claim to be free of such violence; the only variation is in the patterns and trends that exist in countries and regions. Discussion concerning the magnitude of the domestic violence problem is also misty by the reality that domestic violence is a crime that is under recorded and under-reported.

The research aimed to understand the perception of the women about the laws made to protect the women against violence particularly the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016 so as to consider this sensitive issue more efficiently in the future. It also revealed the reasons why some of the women are reluctant to disclose the violent incidents, furthermore the factors that inhibits abused women from seeking outside help.

The present study is exploratory and descriptive in nature. This design is suitable because in Pakistan the problem of domestic violence is still under-researched. The study used qualitative approach as the qualitative method is one of the more practical ways of exploring the living experiences of abused women in Pakistan rather than quantitative measures. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in this regard. The participants for the interviews were recruited on basis of convenience from an urban area of Ghaziabad near Mughalpura from the district of Lahore. There were 20 women altogether who expressed interest in the study and 17 of them were actually involved as participants. Another five interviews were also conducted with the lawyers

from Lahore bar code and the supreme court of Pakistan to have their professional remarks regarding the Punjab Women Protection Act.

The data from the interviews revealed that most of the women did not know about any Act or law made for the protection of the women against domestic violence. On being briefed about the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016, most of the women had a positive attitude towards the Act and supported to take the issue of domestic violence to the relevant authorities. They considered the Act helpful for the abused women. But on asking for availing the protection by the Act for them, most of the women neglected the opportunity and gave different reasons for not availing the protection. These women belonged to the lower age groups i.e. 17 to 40 years of ages. The most senior women in ages i.e. above forties opposed the Act in every way. This showed that most of the women, besides considering the Punjab Women Protection against Violence Act 2016 useful for battered women, were unable to avail protection under the Act. On the other hand, most of the lawyers were against the Act as they considered it being a major factor for the disintegration between families and spoiling the family institution in the future.

In Pakistan, domestic violence is conceived as a personal matter and women have to face discrimination and violence due to the cultural and religious norms. There are clear provisions in the constitution of Pakistan regarding provision of equal rights to all the citizens and providing them equal opportunities before the law. But this ideal is yet to be achieved due to many hindering factors like to reach for justice or raising voice for their rights including lack of awareness, costly law procedures and gender insensitive attitude towards women.

Recommendations

Keeping in mind, the findings and the gaps, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Extensive awareness campaigns of stakeholders is essential for the effectiveness of the protection measures for the women:

Awareness campaigns should be conducted to educate all stakeholders including law enforcement personnel, policy makers and community leaders. The focus of these campaigns should be to introduce a paradigm shift in the mindset of all relevant members of the society. Media, Education systems and civil society can be the key contributors in this regard.

2. Reforms in Administrative machinery to make it more gender sensitive:

Reforms in the administrative structures and machinery are essential for the effective performance and implementation of the policies. The trainings of all relevant staff shall be conducted to develop a gender sensitive approach and to open the liaison between the departments including social welfare, police and judiciary.

3. Arbitrations at council level:

Arbitrations at council level are suggested to deal with the issue of domestic violence. The somewhat “Panchayat” system that inherently belongs to the culture of Pakistan, if altered properly into an arbitrary system, could do a lot better than the Punjab protection act. This could keep the privacy of the family issues while solving them.

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