

## Daughters witnessing domestic violence perpetrated by fathers on mothers: Case study from a private University of Karachi

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### Abstract

Violence against women is a human rights issue and a major public health problem. The objectives of this study were to determine the magnitude and type of emotional and physical domestic violence perpetrated by fathers on mothers of female students of a private university. A total of 564 questionnaires were duly filled and returned with a response rate of 94.0%. The most common form of violence was reported by 93 (16.5%) of the respondents who witnessed their fathers either saying or doing something to humiliate the respondents' mothers. While the most common physical violence witnessed was fathers slapping their mothers as reported by 39 (6.9%) of the respondents. Empowerment of women, and effective endeavours in education of both sexes are important steps towards addressing and preventing domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, Physical abuse, Human Rights, consanguinity, Pakistan.

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### Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that globally 30% of women in relationships have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, and considers violence against women as a "major public health problem."<sup>1</sup> The 'Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey' conducted in 2012-13 (PDHS 2012-13) is the only nationally representative study on domestic violence in the country to date.<sup>2</sup>

PDHS 2012-13 reported that in the previous 12 months, 32% of women ever married between the ages of 15-49 years had experienced some form of physical violence,

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while 39% had experienced some form of physical and/or emotional violence.<sup>2</sup> Marriages between first and second cousins or among other blood relatives are common in Pakistan.<sup>3</sup> A study based on the secondary analysis of PDHS 2012-13 reported that almost 65% of women who took part in the domestic violence module of the survey, had some type of blood relationship with their husbands. Women in these consanguineous marriages were more likely to report having ever been subjected to marital control behaviors, emotional and physical violence by their husbands, albeit it did not reach statistical significance.<sup>4</sup> Based on a sample of 1010 married women in Rawalpindi, a study on domestic violence in the context of consanguineous marriages published in 2014, reported that being married to one's cousin did not necessarily bestow protection from emotional or physical abuse.<sup>5</sup>

The objectives of this study were to determine the magnitude and type of emotional and physical domestic violence perpetrated by fathers on mothers of female students of a private university in Karachi. The study further explores its relationship with consanguineous marriages.

### Methods and Results

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among female students from April to July 2017, in the main campus of Hamdard University situated in Karachi. Students from four faculties i.e. Medical Sciences, Engineering, Pharmacy and Eastern Medicine were included. A pre-tested, anonymous, self-administered questionnaire with close-ended questions was used to determine the magnitude and type of domestic violence — emotional/verbal and physical — perpetrated by fathers on mothers, as witnessed by their daughters.

The questionnaire comprised ten questions, with three questions on emotional violence, and seven questions on physical violence. These questions were taken from the 'domestic violence' chapter in the 'Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13' report;<sup>2</sup> which were based on modified and shortened version of 'Conflict Tactics Scale'.<sup>6</sup> Using convenience sampling technique, four

**Table-1:** Break-down of students among faculties, and parental familial relationship status of respondents.

Students Profile	Frequency (%)
<b>Enrolment in academic programme</b>	
College of Medicine	192 (34.0)
College of Dentistry	91 (16.1)
College of Pharmacy	147 (26.1)
College of Eastern Medicine	97 (17.2)
Institute of Engineering Sciences	37 (6.6)
<b>Parent's familial relationship</b>	
First Cousin	104 (18.4)
Second Cousin	56 (9.9)
Other familial relationship	89 (15.8)
No familial relationship	315 (55.9)

trained female medical students approached female students from the selected university faculty and invited them to participate in the study. After explaining the objectives of the study and ensuring full confidentiality, verbal informed consent was taken prior to distributing the questionnaires. All ten violence related questions required checking either 'Yes' or 'No' answer options. In

addition, two more questions were asked, firstly regarding the respondent's college enrolment, and secondly to determine consanguinity i.e. whether their parents had any blood relationship. Consanguinity was determined on a three-point scale i.e. first cousins, defined as being son/daughter of one's uncle/aunt; second cousin defined as being son/daughter of one's parents first cousin; and other blood relationship, defined as more distant cousin or other extended family relationship.

To determine the appropriate sample size for our population that had witnessed any act of either emotional or physical violence perpetrated by their father on their mother, we used a 5% margin of error and confidence level of 95%. Since no study has ever been conducted in Pakistan, to determine the proportion of female graduate students having witnessed this violence, we make the assumption of affirmative answers to be 50% i.e. the most conservative estimate to yield the maximum sample size.

Data were entered, cleaned and analysed using the statistical analysis programme R version 3.4.1. Pearson Chi-Square test was applied to assess the independent

**Table-2:** Types of ever having witnessed emotional and physical violence by respondents, perpetrated by their fathers on their mothers.

Type of abuse/violence ever witnessed	Yes (%)	No (%)
Say or do something to humiliate her in front of others	93 (16.5)	471 (83.5)
Threaten to hurt her or someone close to her	45 (8.0)	519 (92.0)
Insult her or make her feel bad about herself	91 (16.1)	473 (83.9)
Push her, shake her, or throw something at her	38 (6.7)	526 (93.3)
Slap her	39 (6.9)	525 (93.1)
Twist her arm or pull her hair	19 (3.4)	545 (96.6)
Punch her with his fist or with something that could hurt her	21 (3.7)	543 (96.3)
Kick her, drag her, or beat her up	22 (3.9)	542 (96.1)
Try to choke her or burn her in purpose	17 (3.0)	547 (87.0)
Threaten or attack her with a knife, gun, or any other weapon	18 (3.2)	546 (96.8)

**Table-3:** Comparison of emotional and physical violence reported by the present study with PDHS (2012-13).

Type of abuse/violence	@This Study	*PDHS 2012-13
Say or do something to humiliate her in front of others	16.5%	25.9
Threaten to hurt her or someone close to her	8.0%	4.8%
Insult her or make her feel bad about herself	16.1%	27.3%
Push her, shake her, or throw something at her	6.7%	16.0
Slap her	6.9%	25.2%
Twist her arm or pull her hair	3.4%	10.9%
Punch her with his fist or with something that could hurt her	3.7%	8.7%
Kick her, drag her, or beat her up	3.9%	5.3%
Try to choke her or burn her in purpose	3.0%	2.1%
Threaten or attack her with a knife, gun, or any other weapon	3.2	1.7%

@ Emotional and or physical violence ever witnessed by respondents that were perpetrated by fathers on respondents' mothers.

\* PHDS 2012-13: Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13. Emotional and or physical violence ever experienced by women, committed by their husbands.

relationships between categorical variables of parental marriage in terms of consanguinity and types of violence witnessed by respondents. Statistical significance was defined by two-sided  $P < 0.05$ .

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed out of which 564 were duly filled and returned with a response rate of 94.0%. Table-1 presents the break-up of faculty participation and parental family relationship status of respondents. Highest number of respondents came from the medical college with 192 (34.0%) students, while the lowest number came from engineering students with 37 (6.6%) respondents. Over half of students, 315 (55.9%) reported no blood relationship between their parents, while 104 (18.4%) reported their parents being first cousins.

Table-2 represents the types of emotional and/or physical violence witnessed by respondents, perpetrated by fathers on their mothers. The most common type of violence witnessed and reported by 93 (16.5%) of the respondents was fathers either ever saying or doing something to humiliate respondents' mothers. The least common emotional violence witnessed and reported by 45 (8.0%) respondents was fathers threatening to either hurt respondents' mothers or someone close to them. The most common physical form of violence reported by 39 (6.9%) respondents was witnessing their fathers ever having slapped their mothers. This was closely followed by 38 (6.7%) respondents having witnessed their fathers ever push, shake, or throw things at their mothers. The least commonly witnessed physical violence reported by 17 (3.0%) respondents was their fathers ever having deliberately tried to choke or burn their mothers, and 18 (3.2%) respondents reported having ever witnessed their fathers threaten or attack their mothers with a knife, gun, or any other weapon,.

Only 30 (5.3%) respondents reported ever having witnessed all types of emotional violence, while 10 (1.8%) respondents reported having witnessed all seven physical forms of violence in the questionnaire, as well as all ten emotional and physical violence questions.

Results of Chi-Square test to assess the independent relationships between categorical variables of parental marriage in terms of consanguinity i.e. any type of blood/familial relationship versus no such relationship, in context to any of the ten types of violence witnessed by respondents, revealed no statistically significant associations.

Table-3 presents a comparison of ever having experienced or witnessed emotional and physical violence reported by PDHS 2012-13 and the findings of the study in terms of percentages.

## Discussion

This is the first study of its kind in Pakistan, looking at the magnitude and types of domestic violence experienced by mothers and witnessed by their daughters in their lifetime. A comparison is presented in Table-3 between our findings and the 'Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey' conducted in 2012-13, provides interesting contrasts. The most common type of violence witnessed and reported by 93 (16.5%) of the respondents in our study was fathers ever having said or done something to humiliate respondents' mothers. While the most common type of emotional violence reported by PDHS 2012-13 was husbands insulting their wives or making them feel bad about themselves.

The least common emotional violence witnessed was fathers ever having threatened respondents' mothers to hurt her or someone close to her in our study, and the same was reported as least common type of emotional violence in PDHS 2012-13 as well. In our study the most common physical violence witnessed was fathers ever having slapped respondents' mothers and the same was true for PDHS 2012-13 as well. The least commonly witnessed physical violence was fathers ever having tried to choke or burn respondents' mothers on purpose. While PDHS 2012-13 reported husbands having threatened or attacked their wives with a knife, gun, or any other weapon as the least common type of physical violence ever experienced by women. The PDHS 2012-13 sample was restricted to women ever married aged 15 to 49 years. While in this study, some respondents' mothers could ostensible be older than 49 years.

Although we did not inquire about the education of respondents' mothers or fathers; ostensibly some of the parents could probably be more educated and economically well off compared to the sample of PDHS 2012-13 respondents. This perhaps also explains the generally low proportions of emotional and physical violence reported in our study, compared to PDHS 2012-13. Fathers/husbands ever having threatened to hurt their wives/respondents' mothers or someone close to her was the exception as this type of violence was more frequently reported in our study. The PDHS 2012-13 report does not provide type of domestic violence reported disaggregated by the educational level of women and/or their husbands education or economic status (wealth quintile) for each of the ten forms of violence studied. Nonetheless, it does provide cumulative percentages of women having experienced any type of physical and/or emotional violence. These cumulative proportions clearly demonstrate that higher level of education and economic status tends to be associated

with lower proportions of domestic violence, albeit with some exceptions.

Our study's limitations include selection of study participants based on convenience, rather than random selection of under and postgraduate students from the list of students maintained by the institution. Furthermore, we could not enforce selection of students from various colleges based on probability proportional to size, to have better represented all colleges of the same university. Thirdly, we did not inquire about the educational and employment status of parents, because it would have added four additional questions which required specific information about the background of an individual respondent making it easy to identify her, and making her potentially reluctant to participate in our survey owing to confidentiality issues. These concerns surfaced during the pretesting phase, and the consensus was to exclude these questions. Finally, the inherent nature of uncomfortable questions asked in this study would have resulted in underestimating the true magnitude of domestic violence reported by the respondents. Understandably, respondents would have been reluctant to report on their fathers as perpetrators of emotional and physical violence of their mothers. Future studies need to find a way — either by using online or mail surveys — to inquire about additional personal characteristics of respondents' parents, and to build upon our findings.

Violence against women is a human rights issue, rooted in

socio-cultural norms and practices of societies. Having laws on the books to prevent domestic violence are necessary, but insufficient in curbing this abhorrent practice. Empowerment of women, and effective educational endeavours targeting both sexes are perhaps more important.

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**Conflict of Interest:** None to declare.

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