

News of Domestic Violence:

Journalistic Imperatives in Television News Reporting of Domestic Violence in Pakistan

Paper Presented to the

International Communication Association Annual Conference, 2021, Denver, Colorado.

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Abstract

In 2018, a nationwide study of Pakistan (with a population of 207.7 million) found that at least 28 percent of women have experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional violence in domestic settings. With a posited high number of unreported incidents, domestic violence in Pakistan is considered prevalent in all social spheres. News coverage of domestic violence plays a central role in communicating the nature and extent of this major social problem and influencing understanding of its causes and consequences. Yet, in Pakistan, changing attitudes toward domestic violence is compounded by the presentation of crime news stories through entertainment orientated rather than 'solution-driven' journalism (Khan et al., 2016). This research set out to form a better understanding of Pakistani television news journalists' knowledge and understanding of domestic violence to gain insight into the way news channels currently address this social problem. The paper reports on interviews conducted with Pakistani news journalists ($n = 11$). All journalists identified physical abuse as a form of domestic violence while only half included emotional abuse in its scope. The issue of sexual abuse within a marriage was considered contentious and complicated topic especially in terms of whether it should be given news coverage. While domestic violence was conceptualized as a problem resulting from and maintained by Pakistan's patriarchal social structures, in news reporting it was largely represented as incident based and minimal resources are set aside for its coverage.

Introduction

Domestic violence is socially endemic in Pakistan (Ali et al., 2020). A Thomson Reuters Foundation (2018) survey consisting of 550 experts on women's issues, ranked Pakistan fifth highest in the world for rates of non-sexual violence which included domestic violence. A national survey of Pakistan in 2017/18 (National Institute of Population Studies, 2019) reported that 28 percent of women between the age 15-49 have experienced physical violence with an additional 6 percent having experienced sexual violence. Among married women, 34 percent reported experiences of spousal violence ranging from emotional to physical and sexual violence. The most common form of violence against married women was emotional (26%), followed by physical violence (23%). Seven percent of women revealed suffering violence during pregnancy.-The prevailing patriarchal structure of Pakistani society reinforces the belief that domestic violence is a private matter (Lari, 2011) creating a powerful barrier against its victims speaking out or seeking help (Niaz, 2003).

Despite the prevalence of domestic violence in Pakistan, it is rarely acknowledged as a significant social problem. Research shows that one in three men living in urban areas believe it is their right to beat their wives to "discipline" them, with 20 percent of women endorsing this view (World Justice Project, 2018). Of the Pakistani women who have reported experiencing any type of violence, 56 percent neither sought help nor revealed their abuse to anyone else (National Institute of Population Studies, 2019).

Media representation is a major determinant in how domestic violence is publicly understood in different social cultures (Bern, 2004; Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Sieffe, 2003; Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff, 2008). Mediated depictions of domestic violence are not passive reflections of reality but social constructions and sites of contestation that reflect differing social

values, beliefs and relations that can shape the perceptions of audiences (Fairclough, 1989; Carter & Steiner, 2004). As Chesney-Lind and Chagnon (2017) state: “many researchers argue such media representations [often] constitute a hegemonic patriarchal ideology, which obfuscates the issue of domestic violence, as well as the underlying social relations that create the phenomenon.”

In Pakistan audiences for mainstream television news programming remain sizeable. A 2017 study involving a nationally representative sample showed that 44 percent of the population watch news on television daily, 32 percent watch it three to four times a week, and 18 percent watch it at least once a week (Gillani Research Foundation, 2017). This broad base of television news viewership in Pakistan is important to acknowledge, as the manner in which domestic violence is discursively framed by the journalists is likely to influence opinions on the nature, extent and causes of domestic violence and the degree to which it is perceived to be a social issue. What Pakistani audiences see in the media regarding domestic violence may constitute the only form of awareness raising they are exposed to. Yet research on domestic violence reporting and representation in Pakistani news media is almost non-existent. While a handful of studies have quantified the proportion of coverage of violence against women in Pakistan print and television news media (Ahmed, 2012, 2014; Agha & Ahmed, 2018); they did not include details on how it was discursively represented. This research therefore set out to form a better understanding of Pakistani television news journalists’ knowledge and understanding of domestic violence to gain insight into the way news channels currently address this social problem.

In the next section we provide a brief review of the literature on news reporting of domestic violence. We then detail the questions which provided the focus of our research

investigation, followed by an explanation of our research theory and method, data analysis and findings.

News Reporting and Representation of Domestic Violence

Feminist researchers have long highlighted how the media largely ignore the fundamental nature and forms domestic violence can take when directed against women, for example, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse perpetrated by men within domestic settings (see Caringella-MacDonald, 1998; Meyers, 1997; Weaver et al., 2000). Carlyle, Slater and Chakroff (2008) analysed 395 news stories involving intimate partner violence published in a representative sample of newspapers in USA. They found that news coverage predominantly required domestic violence to result in a fatality for it to gain attention. A content analysis of a regional Sindhi newspaper (a province of Pakistan) found that among the 70 incidents of violence against women covered over a six-month period in 2016, incidents of honor killing, physical violence, rape and kidnapping received greater coverage (Agha, 2018). The impact and gravity of focusing on loss of life in such reporting has been cited as likely to only further discourage victims of violence from seeking help for fear for their lives (Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff, 2008).

The police are regularly utilised as a key source of information in news coverage of domestic violence, and are preferred over other experts such as counsellors and social workers (e.g., Bullock, 2008; Michelle & Weaver, 2003). Surette (2007) has documented how such expert authority figures get to explain and therefore frame the crime event. Bullock (2008) argues this can be problematic as police are often not equipped to explain domestic violence incidents as part of a larger endemic issue. Using police in news reporting also runs the risk of

leading the public to believe that the crime has been taken care of by the relevant authorities. Furthermore, the role of these figures of authority in the criminal justice system and in contributing to reducing domestic violence as social issue are rarely ever questioned, which in turn can marginalize alternative discourses and perspectives which might seek to highlight the prevalence of domestic violence in society and the social structures that contribute to it (Sacco, 1995).

In cases where domestic violence has received news coverage, research suggests a tendency to blame victims (Berns, 1999; Meyers, 1994; Carll, 2003; Batanchiev, 2008). Victims are portrayed as either 'deserving' or have their lived experiences undermined as not 'real' (Custers & Bullock, 2013). In an analysis of seven segments of US news on *NBC*, Batanchiev (2008) found that domestic violence was framed in such a way as to blame victims for not solving the threat of violence. Similarly, in their analysis of New Zealand documentary coverage of domestic violence, Michelle, and Weaver (2003) identified the burden of explaining perpetual abuse as placed on victims who were asked why they did not leave the relationship earlier. In contrast, perpetrators of violence often have aggressive behaviours causally explained as a response to frustration (Carll, 2003) or the result of individual behavioural flaws or pathologies (Bullock, 2007; Kozol, 1995; McDonald, 1999).

There is a strong tendency for domestic violence to go unacknowledged as a socio-political issue; news accounts of domestic violence rarely attribute it to male power and dominance within patriarchal societies (Kozol, 1995; McDonald, 1999). Instead, domestic violence is frequently framed as an isolated event and an exception to the norm, rather than a continuing experience for many women, affirmed by certain societal patterns and systems that support violence. Framing violence against women in this way fails to register it as a significant

social problem necessitating action and change (Hilton, 1993). The manner in which domestic violence predominantly receives attention is unlikely to increase public support for initiatives to prevent domestic violence (Carlyle, Slater & Chakroff, 2008), and is only likely to decrease the crime reporting, referral to court cases and conviction of domestic violence offenders (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017).

News reporting on violence against women has also been criticized for presenting women's victimization as entertainment (e.g., Alat, 2006; Cuklanz, 2000), applying sensational language (Ahmed, 2014; Alat, 2006; Comas-d' Argemir, 2014, End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2012) and using attention grabbing headlines. Moreover, it is common even within news stories for dramatizations to be included to recount events (Hassan, 2018; Jan, Raza & Sultan, 2012). Half of the respondents in a study conducted by Hassan (2018) were of the view that Pakistani television channels are highly entertaining in the way that they present news. A tendency to sensationalize news ties in with the tendency to report incidents of violence that result in fatalities. Bhatti and Hassan (2016) conclude that frequent exposure to violent and sensational imagery in Pakistani news have been found to contribute towards feelings of desensitization to violence amongst Pakistani youth.

With so little research into domestic violence news reporting in Pakistan, and in light of the prevalence of this form of violence in the country, we set out to answer the following questions:

1. How do Pakistani television news journalists understand domestic violence?
2. How do Pakistani television news journalists represent domestic violence in news reporting?

Theoretical Approach

A social constructionist framework (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) has been used to conduct this research. This approach posits that knowledge is produced through the interactions of individuals with and within society (Schwandt, 2003). It regards communication, language, and the speech as central in the interactive process through which we understand the world and ourselves. (Cojocaru, 2005, 2013). To examine how journalists talk about domestic violence and its news reporting, this study also draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA) that considers language to be a discursive socio-cultural practice (Fairclough, 1995; Janks, 2006).

Discourses are different ways of explaining different phenomena that can be linguistic and non-linguistic (Schiffrin, Tannen & Ehemberger, 2003). These discursive explanations are developed in the history and culture of a region and they can change – they are products of social structures and influence these social structures (Phillipes & Jorensen, 2002). Some of these explanations support each other while others may be in contradiction with each other. Once an explanation becomes prominent, it tends to be taken for granted and accepted as common sense (Foucault, 1980). CDA specifically concerns itself with how culture, power and economics affects the construction and privileging of certain discourses over others, and how discursive practices create and perpetuate social inequalities (Fairclough, 1995). To elaborate, according to Fairclough (1995), socio-cultural practices can be explored across three dimensions: (1) cultural, which deals with values and culture in which the message is embedded; (2) economics, which relates to the financial business models of, for example the media companies; and (3) political, which concerns issues of ideology and power structures. In this research our concern has been to identify the discourses that Pakistani journalists are aligned with in how they understand

domestic violence, and which they draw on and perpetuate and/or challenge in their reporting of it.

Method

In line with the constructivist and CDA approaches that underpin this investigation, qualitative research methods were used to explore how journalists in Pakistan understand domestic violence and reporting on it. Specifically, a semi structured interview method was deployed in order to help build up a deep and rich understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 1998).

We approached television news journalists via the primary author's network of contacts and former colleagues through email, phone and in person, and explained the topic of study to them and requested their participation in the project. The first author interviewed total of 11 Pakistani journalists, including seven males and four females across three professional categories within television news media industry: director news, producers, and crime/social reporters. Interviewees were selected through purposive sampling. Eight journalists were interviewed from six national news channels with the highest viewer ratings. Two journalists were affiliated with the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) and one with Voice of America (VOA) at the time of their interview. All the journalist interviewees had a minimum of 13 years of experience with seven having undertaken overseas assignments. Eight participants held master's degrees in mass communication studies, three had completed an M.Phil in mass communication and one was undertaking a PhD (see Table 1 below). Efforts were made to interview the only female head of news and current affairs appointed in the state television news channel in Pakistan as well as the only female bureau chief associated with a private national news channel in the province of

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Both women declined to participate in the research. The female head of news and current affairs turned down the request via mobile text message, saying that she is not the right person to say anything on “the over-exaggerated issue of domestic violence”.

Interestingly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the only province of Pakistan where a domestic violence bill has not passed yet.

The semi-structured interview protocol devised for this study included questions related to demographics (professional designation, gender, age and years of journalistic experience). Semi-structured interviews are conversational guides and allow the researcher to probe the interviewee when required for further information and/or when the answers are brief (Smith, 2008). Interview schedules were written in both Urdu and English to allow interviewees flexibility in the language for their response - they were informed of this before the start of the interview. All the interviewees used bilingual expressions in their interview responses.

Of the 11 interviews, seven were conducted in the city of Lahore where the head offices of most of the Pakistani television news channels are located. Six of these interviews were carried out in news channels’ offices and one at the private residence of the reporter. The remaining four interviews were conducted in the federal capital Islamabad – all in the participants’ offices. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes and was audio recorded. The interviews were then transcribed from Urdu to English language, providing 141 pages and 46,582 words of data. In the transcribing, pauses, emphasis and non-verbal cues were added from the interview notes to help provide a sense of the context of the response. A thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcripts to identify codes, themes, and discourses in the data. We used both a paper and pen method along with NVivo 12 plus to generate these codes and themes and read and reread the transcripts multiple times as part of this analysis. In reporting on

this analysis, we have quoted extracts from the participant's transcripts verbatim, but have been careful to remove any information that could lead to the interviewees or their employer organizations being identified. We have identified each person in terms of their general news reporting role and gender.

Table 1: Demographical Details of the journalist Participants

Designation and Identifier	Gender	Age (years)	Education	Experience (years)
Director News A	Male	55	Masters	25
Director News B	Male	52	Masters	24
Director News C	Male	45	Masters	18
Director News D (Former)	Male	50	Masters	22
Controller News	Male	39	M. Phil	18
Producer A	Female	43	M. Phil	19
Producer B (Senior)	Male	38	PhD (on hold)	13
Reporter A	Male	47	Masters	24
Reporter B	Female	35	Masters	13
Reporter C	Female	33	Masters	20
Reporter D	Female	43	Masters	14

Findings and Discussion

In this section, we report on how the findings answer our two research questions: How do Pakistani journalists understand domestic violence, and how do they discursively represent it in news media. We first turn to how the journalist interviewees understand domestic violence.

Pakistani Journalists' Understanding of Domestic Violence

Journalist' own understanding of domestic violence can shape how domestic violence is covered in news. Indeed, some have argued that journalists' interpretation of a news event matters more than hard facts. They caution against regarding journalists as passive

communicators of an event and state that reporting may include interpretation of the journalist (Patterson, 1993; Salgado & Strömbäck, 2011). In Pakistan, packaging, placement of news and what information is broadcasted depends on journalists, especially senior producers. Hence, their perceptions of domestic violence may affect how they report it – a factor that has not been explored before in relation to domestic violence.

The Manifestation of Domestic Violence

Physical Violence. All 11 respondents regarded physical violence perpetrated by men on women as domestic violence. For example, a male director of news (male) gave examples stating “Heads are shaved off; faces are burnt for not heating up food. In areas, where feudal system is strong, if the person has more than one wife, then disgruntled husband may throw acid on one of his wives for misbehaving.” (Director News B, Male). This interviewee considered any kind of violence that occurs in the domestic setting to be domestic violence including the beating of children, which, according to him, is considered acceptable practice in Pakistani society. He explained “although, in New Zealand, England, America and some other Western countries, parents cannot beat their children, doing so is not taken as a big issue in Pakistan” (Director News B, Male). This interviewee also referred to corporal punishment in schools as part of Pakistan’s social and cultural norms, which had been encouraged by parents. He stated:

Teachers beat students here or punish them for not learning their lessons. It reminds me of an old-fashioned phrase which is said as “mass belongs to you and bones belong to us”. Usually, parents used to tell this to teachers at the time of admission of children. – (Director News B, Male)

High income countries not only provide data on child abuse, but also offer strategies to identify it and prevent its occurrence (Barth, 2009; Mikton & Butchart, 2009). However, in Pakistan, due to cultural taboos, there is a dearth of data related to child abuse. Results from a study including

274 Pakistani university students showed that 57% of the respondents faced physical abuse while 53% suffered emotional abuse in their childhoods. Alarming, 41% disclosed sexual abuse perpetrated by parents (20%), teachers (14%) and friends (16%) (Abbas & Jabeen, 2020). Here it is important to mention that in February 2021 the National Assembly of Pakistan passed a bill banning corporal punishment of children in education and religious institutions and places of work (Baloch, 2021). However, the long acceptance of violence against children in Pakistan very likely contributes to the normalization of domestic violence in this country.

Psychological and Emotional Abuse. Three female and two male respondents acknowledged that domestic violence includes psychological and emotional abuse. One female news producer believed that 99.9 percent of women in Pakistan experience such abuse, explaining it as the actions of “hurting somebody’s emotions through painful and insulting words.” (News Producer A, Female). Both female respondents, gave specific examples of what emotional abuse may look like and spoke about limiting female choices and “negating their experience.” (News Producer A, Female) Their descriptions also included specific example such as “not allowing someone to dress up or do the work by choice...It is also a kind of psychological torture when a husband or in-laws prohibits a woman from visiting her mother’s house” (News Producer A, Female). The other female respondent referred to mental torture as the beginning of domestic violence. She stated that “I think domestic violence begins with compromises,” acknowledging that “for some people, shouting can be a violent act, and on the contrary, some would consider physical assault as violence” (Reporter B, Female). One male respondent referred to forced marriages of sons and daughters as domestic violence.

Marital Rape. Internationally over the last two decades, campaigns against both domestic violence and marital rape have attempted to challenge those dominant social discourses and power structures which condone these forms of violence. Despite this, both crimes remain vastly underreported (Dalton & Schneider, 2001). This is partly because legal systems are slow to recognize women's rights through laws (Staton et al., 1970), and even slower to implement such laws (Dalton & Schneider, 2001). In the case of domestic violence, legal systems have responded more swiftly than they have to marital rape (Schelong, 1994).

In the interviews for this research, the journalists were asked if they include marital rape in news reporting of domestic violence? A male respondent acknowledged that "it is quite possible that thousands of such incidents are happening in Pakistan. Unfortunately, if a husband forces himself on her wife, I do not think that in our society any wife would come forward to complain about it" (Director News B, Male). A female respondent similarly explained that the "concept of rape does not even exist in marital relationships in Pakistan. No women would ever go to report marital rape because no one would believe in her story and that is the end of the story" (Reporter B, Female). In terms of covering incidents of marital rape on news media, all respondents except one said they would not report on marital rape cases. They labelled this form of violence as "debatable", "religious", "blasphemous" and "sensitive", and tried to close their argument by suggesting that "as a society, we have not reached at that level yet." Only one respondent recounted news stories when victims have reported forceful acts of sexual intercourse, adding "they generally do not report these things because it involves sensitive religious angles and it is a long debate" (Director News A, Male). While respondents acknowledged the existence of sexual abuse in marital relationships, its culturally contentious nature deterred them from covering it. One female respondent explained: "you really do not have

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Commented [KW2]: Who said this? Need an identifier in brackets after the quote.

any idea when the content becomes blasphemous, and you don't want to be a blasphemous as it entails serious consequences in our society" (Reporter D, Female).

Even though, male, and female respondents were aware of the sociocultural norms and beliefs that condoned marital rape, none identified it as criminal and punishable offence in Pakistan. Instead they described it as debatable religious matter. To provide some context for this, it is important to mention that before 2006, Section 6 of the Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance 1979 defined rape as "a man having sexual intercourse with a woman who is not his wife without her consent" (p.5). However, in 2006, an amendment was made to the law and a new section (375) was added in the Penal Code of Pakistan which says, "a man is said to commit rape who has sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent and there is penetration (p. 422; Article 375).

In Table 2 below, domestic violence laws and their clauses pertaining to sexual abuse are identified and in relation to the provinces in which they apply. The discursive features encapsulating sexual abuse in laws enacted in the provinces of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa contradict laws promulgated in other provinces. For instance, according to clause 51 (i) of the Sindh bill, "compelling the wife to cohabit with anybody other than the husband" is classified as sexual abuse. This clause discursively and materially situates women and their sexuality as the property of the man with whom they share an intimate relationship.

Similarly, according to the definition of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa domestic violence bill, "sexual abuse does not include ordinary and natural relationships amongst husband and wife so committed in accordance with injunctions of Islam." This rests interpretation of the law on religion. This contradiction between provisional laws may have had an effect on journalists' decision not to report marital rape.

Commented [KW3]: Omer, are you able to add one sentence explaining why calling a man forcing sex on his wife marital rape can be termed blasphemous? For non-Muslims this is hard to understand?

Table 2: Domestic Violence Laws in Pakistan and Definitions of Sexual Abuse

Domestic Violence Act, 2013, Sindh	Clause 5 (l)	“Sexual abuse” includes any conduct of a sexual nature that abuses, humiliates, degrades, or otherwise violates the dignity of the aggrieved person which may include-
	Subclause (i)	Compelling the wife to cohabit with anybody other than the husband.
	Subclause (ii)	Any kind of sexual abuse including sexual harassment of a member of the family.
Domestic Violence Act, 2014, Balochistan	Clause 4(l)	“Sexual abuse” includes any conduct of sexual nature that abuses, humiliates, degrades, or otherwise violates the dignity of the aggrieved person.
Domestic Violence Act, 2016, Punjab	Clause 2 (r)	“Violence” means any offence committed against the human body of the aggrieved person including abetment of an offence, domestic violence, sexual violence, psychological abuse, economic abuse, stalking or a cybercrime.
Domestic Violence Act Islamabad, 2020	3 (C)	“Sexual abuse” includes any conduct of sexual nature that abuses, humiliates, degrades, or otherwise violates the dignity of the vulnerable person or any other person.
Domestic Violence Act Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 2021	Clause 2 P (iii)	“Sexual abuse” does not include ordinary and natural relationships amongst husband and wife so committed in accordance with injunctions of Islam.

Violence against Domestic Helpers. Besides physical violence against intimate partners and children, eight respondents of which six were males included beating domestic helpers in the category of domestic violence. Five respondents explicitly mentioned covering a news story of a female domestic helper who was abused by a judge and his wife. One male respondent considered journalists’ continuous reportage of incidents of violence against domestic helpers as a source of pride stating “if by any chance, we get our hands on such issues, we do not only highlight it but go beyond our limits” (Director News A). In contrast this same interviewee stated that “domestic violence involving husband, wife and in-laws are not our priority” (Director News A). Whereas occurrence of domestic violence has been ordinarily defined as abuse that happens with people who are related by consanguinity, marriage, kinship, or adoption, only the domestic

violence law of Balochistan (2013) includes violence against domestic helpers within the scope of domestic violence. Nevertheless, the majority of interviewees did not seem to be able to separate **VAW** from violence against domestic helpers. Journalists may also be able more comfortable with covering violence against domestic helpers because it takes place outside of a familial relationship where there is limited chance of abuse to be considered a private affair.

Commented [KW4]: Write this in full – what does it stand for????

Female Abusers and Male Victims. Four participants including two males and two females identified domestic violence as a gender-neutral phenomenon, but one rarely reported to the authorities by male victims. One female reporter stated that “besides inflicting psychological violence on men, women beat them too... I know few women who beat their husbands in their homes. If anything like that get reported, it will make headlines for sure” (Female Reporter B).

Patriarchal society was blamed for men’s unwillingness to come forward as victims of domestic violence because it went against men’s ego to admit there were abused. Both female reporter interviewees (A & B) hinted that patriarchal culture not only puts women at disadvantage, but that men also tend to become victims of their own necessity to dominate. One male respondent stated that given the patriarchal set-up of the country, “we always report violence against women and ignore cases of male victims because we don’t believe them” (Reporter A, Male). Research also shows that media reports tend to reproduce patriarchal myths and stereotyped accounts of interpersonal violence (Carll, 2003; Lindsay- Brisbin et al., 2014).

Explanations for Domestic Violence

Having outlined what the journalist interviewees identified as domestic violence we turn to examine how they explain such violence.

Socio-Systematic Explanations. When journalists talked about causes of domestic violence, socio-systemic discourses were prominent with a majority saying that domestic violence is produced and reinforced by Pakistani patriarchal society. They highlighted familial, social, and institutional structures in how they explain domestic violence. For example, seven journalists noted that families minimize the experience of domestic violence and its negative effects on a victims' overall well-being. Victims were silenced by their families because the families fear stigma and/or regard it as a private matter. One respondent stated:

It is so hard to get access to victims of violence, whether it is their homes or hospitals. Because families of victims tend to consider such incidents as a private matter, and hence, they tend to resist outside mediation and media's attention in that matter. Due to which, if a female victim is willing to say something, she cannot say that. (Reporter C, Female)

Most journalists pointed out that Pakistani society and its practices are structured in a way that maintain domestic abuse - marginalizing females by not giving them equal educational and employment opportunities. They stated that women in general are disempowered and they also fear losing their children. Therefore, they find it hard to escape abusive marriages because they fear loss of economic support. For example,

In Pakistan, due to illiteracy and financial dependency, [the] majority of women are suffering at the hands of their partners. Men feed their dependent women and in return, their women keep on suffering violence. As parents might not be able to afford having their daughters back. (Reporter B, Female)

A female respondent (Reporter C) mentioned having covered a murder story when a husband killed his wife for giving birth to a fourth baby girl. There is a general preference for male

children in Pakistani culture. Therefore, the birth of a daughter can make women vulnerable to abuse (Agha, 2018) as she is blamed for not giving birth to a son (Sudha & Irudaya Rajan, 1999).

Through the social structures that support domestic violence in Pakistan, identified women as being socialized to be submissive, and especially by their parents. They spoke of how women were be raised to not challenge preexisting power dynamics and to rely on male members of their families and not to have opinions of their own. For example, one said “women are groomed as submissive creatures. They are trained to tolerate man’s anger and make sacrifices in life choices, especially when they get married” (News Controller, Male).

Stigma of Domestic Violence. Interestingly, two female and one male journalist contended that educated women are especially vulnerable to domestic violence because they seek to avoid shame and stigma. One female interviewee stated that:

Sometimes, I think educated women, who are aware and having educated family are bigger victims because they would never speak up. They would always feel “why to wash out dirty linen in public? It is better to stay quiet.” I know there are many women who just do not speak up out of fear and public shaming. (Reporter C, Female)

A male respondent provided a similar explanation for why educated women would not want to disclose being the victim of domestic violence:

They do not disclose abuse that they suffer due to family and social pressures. There are many educated women, who get beaten up at night by their husbands, but in the daylight, they never reveal it to anyone (Reporter A, Male).

In these terms shame and stigma of domestic abuse work to maintain its occurrence because it goes unreported and unexposed.

Institutional Patriarchy. Another common way to explain why domestic violence remains prevalent in Pakistan was linked to perceptions of ;police corruption. Three male respondents

talked of how the police do not register cases of domestic violence and will demand bribes from the victims who need their help and/or to settle matters with perpetrators who seek to evade conviction. Interestingly, putting pressure on the authorities was cited as the main reason for covering domestic violence. One respondent commented: “99 per cent domestic violence stories are broadcast with aim to bring justice to victims. We air these stories so that authorities may act” (Director News D, Male). Journalists also said that they often do not wait for police to register the domestic violence case before they put it on-air if there is enough circumstantial evidence to do so. This suggests that the rationale behind much domestic violence news coverage is guided by a socio systemic understanding of its causes. That is, the journalists’ realized that domestic violence victims do not get access to justice easily, and that they face many hurdles in getting their complaints registered. However, one respondent also added that journalists soon forget about their reporting of the story and do not follow up on its outcome simply because of the enormity of their reporting workload. For example, one interviewee stated

We forget about that news story after its police report gets registered. Because, we have always got a huge news flow to look after. And, in most of the cases, abused and abuser reconcile and then perpetrator comes out of the jail. (Controller News, B)

It could be argued that not following up on stories indicates that journalists do not fully comprehend the intricacies involved in gaining justice for victims of domestic violence. They state that they run news reports on domestic violence to force the police to take action, but then fail to report on what the outcomes were of the case.

Domestic Violence as Gendered Issue. Six respondents including two females were of the view that female journalists might be more sensitive towards the issue of domestic violence than males. It was stated that males and females differ in terms of their thinking and within patriarchal

societies like Pakistan, the female voice should be given more prominence because women will have a more nuanced understanding of domestic violence. One male respondent stated:

Feminine sensitivity is very crucial to treat these stories. And in societies like ours, where significance and respect of women is not clearly defined, we must control male's lustfulness and element of self-pleasure. (News Controller, Male)

A female respondent acknowledged that male journalists can be concerned about domestic violence, but stated that: "generally they are not. For instance, I do not want to name anyone, but some shift in-charges consider it [the] routine tantrum of women and they do not want to run such stories anymore" (Producer A, Female). This interviewee explained that women are typically seen as exaggerating issues and being oversensitive. She then went on to say that "But the problem is that in our office, many male journalists themselves are abusers" (Producer A, Female). The context in which female journalists work needs to be acknowledged here. In Pakistan less than five percent of journalists are females and they face many hurdles in the profession (Nusrat, 2018) in the form of sexual harassment, verbal abuse and discrimination (Jamil, 2020). However, it should also be noted that three of the interviewees thought that the reporting of domestic violence had nothing to do with gender, and instead said that how and if it was reported related more to news timing and the drive for ratings.

Victim Blaming. Interestingly there were very few instances of victim blaming in how the journalist interviewees either talked about domestic violence or how they reported on it. The closest respondents came to victim blaming were in instances where they explained domestic violence as linked to poverty. For example, one said the "majority of our women are unaware about their rights and they even do not know what to do when their partners beat them up. And this ignorance contributes to their suffering" (Director News B, Male). In another example of

victim blaming, all three female participants stated that educated women are bigger victims of domestic violence as they tend to keep quiet despite knowing what their rights are. However, comments like this were uncommon and the interviewees' privileged explanations of domestic violence as something that is a manifestation of socio-political structure of Pakistan.

Discursive Representation of Domestic Violence on Pakistani Television News Media

Having outlined how the journalist interviewees discursively understand domestic violence we turn to examine how they talked about their reporting of such violence. The thematic analysis of the interview data identified how socio-cultural factors were dominant in how the interviewees' understood domestic violence. However, when it came to talking about how they reported domestic violence in the news, their discursive priorities were quite different.

Incident Based Reporting. In contradiction to the nuanced understanding that journalists demonstrated in their understanding of domestic violence, how they detailed their approach to reporting this violence lacked depth and connection to Pakistan's social and cultural norms. Most journalists stated that their reporting of domestic violence has been mostly incident based. For example, one noted that he had "never done in-depth inquiry of this phenomenon of domestic violence...I do not think that anyone has gone extra mile to do something about it." (Director News B, Male) This same interviewee went on to state that: "ideally speaking, every domestic violence story should cover [the] incident and [the] previous history of [the] relationship as well." (Director News B, Male). Interestingly, in line with explaining domestic violence as a problem related to social and cultural structures, seven respondents stated that they cover domestic violence incidents to educate the public about the phenomenon, this is despite the fact

that the style of their reporting did not support these claims. Rather, how domestic violence is reported suggests that it is frequently used in efforts to increase audience ratings.

Sensationalism and Tabloidization. Eight interviewees, including four female journalists talked about how the drive towards tabloidization in Pakistani television news media heightened drama and sensationalism in news stories (Glynn, 2000; Ornebring & Jonsson, 2004). Two directors of news talked about this in such a way, with one stating “Unfortunately, adding fiction into facts is the kind of sensationalism, being committed by majority of news channels in Pakistan. Which is wrong” (Director News A, Male). Another raised concerns about how crimes such as domestic violence is reported, asking:

How crime is being reported? That could be a problem. If it is being sensationalized or glamourized, or instead of crime-deterrence, its coverage happens to motivate others, then it is problematic. Such intricacies around coverage of crime have been grossly overlooked in Pakistan. (Director News C, Male).

While interviewees may be concerned about how violence is reported, many felt the pressure to sensationalize stories through emotive language and visuals.

Emotive Language and Visuals. Five interviewees including three female journalists talked about the usage of emotional and sentimental language and visuals aimed to arouse viewers’ attention. A female producer elaborated that “such a sentimental display is adopted to arouse feelings in viewers. In addition to that, emotional linguistic expressions are also used to capture the attention of viewers.” (Producer A, Female). A male senior producer also commented on using adjectives in domestic violence news stories explaining that “Instead of saying that a husband turned into a brutal animal and tortured his wife, we should simply say that a husband tortured his wife. I think by using adjectives, people might feel attracted to that but for me, it

would be very distasteful to hear something like this” (Senior Producer C, Male). Shamsi (2005) has argued that reporters emphasize the use of adjectives and adverbs over facts to make their stories more attractive. Use of name calling such as the example given above - “brutal animal” - also privileges a medical pathology discourse on domestic violence (O’ Neill, 2000). In this discursive approach domestic violence is explained as perpetrated by someone who lost his ability to think and became a monster. This then conveys to audiences that domestic violence is an aberration rather than a daily occurring activity.

Multiple Sources of Information. Given the socio-systemic understanding of domestic violence expressed by journalists, the expectations would be that views of experts on social and cultural structures and norms would be included in news stories. However, most stated that they normally only use testimonies from victims and their families, perpetrators and police reporting on domestic violence. Reliance of police reports is interesting given that the police are blamed for inadequately responding to cases of domestic violence. Voices from experts were only given space when the focus is on explaining the phenomenon of domestic violence to “educate viewers” (Producer B, Male) which only occurs in special programs on domestic violence. One respondent (Director News C) did state that in circumstances where the violent perpetrator provides a religious justification for domestic violence, then religious scholars are invited to provide their opinion on the case.

Limitations of the Research

It is important to understand that there are limitations in this research. Firstly, there was large imbalance between the number of male and female respondents involved in this study – though

this does reflect the gendered nature of the journalism profession in Pakistan. In addition, we were not able to interview female journalists holding positions of director news as the only female director news in Pakistan declined to participate in the study. However, this also reflects gender representation in Pakistani television news media agencies, which are dominated by men in terms of numbers and authority. In another limitation was that due to the fast-paced nature of Pakistani news businesses and their demanding schedules, a couple of participants holding senior positions provided rushed answers to a few questions. A final limitation is in the number of respondents interviewed. A larger study might draw a larger range of responses to the research questions.

Conclusion

It was clear that the journalists interviewed for this research understand domestic violence as a crime that social and cultural structures largely condone. Physical abuse was most frequently cited type of domestic abuse. While half of the participants considered emotional manifestation of domestic violence, almost all of the respondents commented that marital rape is a contentious topic. While the interviewees were critical of Pakistani society for domestic violence, their own approach to news reporting of domestic violence fails to provide in-depth social analysis of the problem for audiences. Coverage of domestic violence on news was mostly incident-based, had elements of sensationalism and was based on reports from limited sources which normally did not include social and religious experts.

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