

Short communication

Domestic violence and consanguineous marriages – perspective from Rawalpindi, PakistanM. Ali Shaikh,¹ A. Kayani² and I. Ali Shaikh¹**العنف المنزلي وزواج الأقارب – نظرة من راولپنڈی، پاکستان**

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الخلاصة: يتسم العنف المنزلي بأنه يتوطن في كل أجزاء العالم، ويؤثر تأثيراً سلبياً على صحة وعافية النساء والمجتمع. وقد استخدمت هذه الدراسة أداة التقييم الموحد والمتحقق من صحتها "أداة تحري إساءة معاملة النساء" لدراسة معدل انتشار مختلف أنواع العنف المنزلي بين النساء المتزوجات. وقد تمت دراسة العلاقة بين العنف المنزلي وزواج الأقارب باستخدام اختبار خي مربع، وبلغ إجمالي النساء اللاتي أجريت معهن المقابلات 1010 سيدة متزوجة. وكانت الإساءة العاطفية من أكثر أنواع الإساءات التي أبلغ عنها، حيث أبلغت 721 امرأة (71.4%) إما بتعرضهن للإساءة الدائمة أو في بعض الأحيان، ويأتي بعدها الاعتداء الجنسي حيث أبلغت عنه 527 امرأة (52.2%)، ثم الاعتداء الجسدي الذي أبلغت عنه 511 امرأة (50.6%). كما أن زواج النساء من أحد أقربائهن لم يحمهن من التعرض لاعتداء أزواجهن عليهن اعتداءً عاطفياً أو جسدياً، وبمقدار يعتد به إحصائياً. وتمس الحاجة لفهم أفضل لحجم وخطورة العنف المنزلي في باكستان باستخدام أدوات التقييم الموحدة لعقد مقارنات ذات مغزى بين مختلف أنحاء البلد عبر فترات زمنية.

ABSTRACT Domestic violence is globally endemic and adversely impacts the health and economic well-being of women and society. This study used the standardized and validated assessment instrument "Woman Abuse Screening Tool" to study the prevalence of various forms of domestic violence among married women. The relationship between domestic violence and consanguineous marriage was studied using the chi-squared test. Cumulatively, 1010 married women were interviewed. Emotional abuse was the most commonly reported abuse, reported by 721 (71.4%) women as either often or sometimes, followed by sexual abuse and physical abuse, reported by 527 (52.2%) and 511 (50.6%) respectively. Being married to one's cousin did not protect married women from being abused either emotionally or physically by their husbands; this was statistically significant. There is a need for better understanding of the magnitude and scale of domestic violence in Pakistan by using standardized assessment tools for meaningful comparisons across different parts of the country over time.

Violence domestique et mariages consanguins : situation à Rawalpindi (Pakistan)

RÉSUMÉ La violence domestique est endémique à l'échelle mondiale et affecte négativement la santé et le bien-être économique des femmes ainsi que la société. Dans le cadre de la présente étude, nous avons utilisé l'outil de dépistage de la violence dirigée contre les femmes (*Women Abuse Screening tool*), normalisé et validé, dans le but d'étudier la prévalence de diverses formes de violence domestique à l'encontre de femmes mariées. Le lien entre la violence domestique et les mariages consanguins a été étudié à l'aide du test du χ^2 . Au total, 1 010 femmes mariées ont été interrogées. La violence psychologique était celle qui était le plus fréquemment signalée : 721 femmes (71,4 %) ont déclaré en être souvent ou parfois victimes ; venaient ensuite la violence sexuelle et la violence physique, rapportées respectivement par 527 (52,2 %) et 511 femmes (50,6 %). Des données statistiquement significatives indiquent que le fait d'être mariée à un cousin ne protégeait pas l'épouse des violences psychologiques ou physiques de son mari. Il est nécessaire de mieux saisir l'ampleur et la portée de la violence domestique au Pakistan en recourant à des instruments d'évaluation normalisés, qui permettent d'établir des comparaisons valables entre les différentes régions du pays et sur différentes périodes.

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Introduction

Domestic violence is a global public health problem that adversely impacts the health and economic well-being of the victims and society [1–3]. WHO defines intimate partner violence as “behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours” [4]. In order to combat the menace of domestic violence, WHO recommends studying the epidemiological profile and quantifying the magnitude of this public health problem for informed policy-making [4].

A study of 500 married women in Karachi reported that 21% had experienced sexual violence [5]. Another study of 373 married women in Lahore and Sialkot reported that 31.9% had experienced severe physical violence, while 34.6% had reported severe sexual violence at least once while being married [6]. A recent national household survey of domestic violence in Pakistan found that one third of 23 430 women reported having experienced physical violence [7]. As results from these recent studies suggest, domestic violence is deeply entrenched in Pakistani patriarchal society, undermining and violating the fundamental human rights of women and relegating them to a culturally dictated lower status.

Consanguineous marriages between blood relatives/cousins are widely practiced in Pakistan and many parts of the Arab world [8]. However, there are no studies on the relationship between domestic violence and consanguineous marriage. This study was conducted to determine the association – if any – between domestic violence and being married to one’s cousin in the city of Rawalpindi in Pakistan, using the standardized and validated assessment instrument ‘Woman Abuse Screening Tool’ (WAST) [9].

Methods

A cross-sectional survey with convenience sampling was conducted among 20–60-year-old women who had been married for at least 1 year at the outpatient departments of various public sector hospitals in Rawalpindi. Four female graduate students, trained in data collection, individually approached potential respondents who were unaccompanied by any adult male or female, and administered the questionnaire to married women from April to May 2011.

A structured, interviewer-administered and pretested questionnaire was used with both open-ended and close-ended questions on demographics, education, whether marriage was consanguineous, and personal experiences with various kinds of domestic violence/abuse. The questionnaire contained all the elements of WAST but the questions were slightly modified so as to refer to the husband rather than the partner. Respondents were told the objective of the study was to determine experience of domestic violence. After obtaining verbal consent, the questionnaire was administered and responses were recorded by the interviewers. Complete confidentiality was assured to all participants; names and addresses were not asked for or recorded, while voluntary participation in the study was emphasized.

Data were analysed using statistical package *Stata* version 12, applying the chi-square test to determine statistical significance of the relationship between proportions of the two married groups, i.e. married to one’s cousin or not, and responses to the questions on various types of abuse, at $P < 0.05$.

Results

Cumulatively, 1091 women were approached and 1010 agreed to be interviewed, giving a response rate of 92.6%.

Table 1 lists the demographic and other characteristics as well as experiences pertaining to domestic violence, disaggregated by either being married to one’s cousin or not. Statistical significance of association between consanguinity and experience of domestic violence is specified using the chi-square test of associations between the two groups of married women. One hundred and ninety-seven (19.5%) respondents had no formal education, while 359 (35.5%) were employed, defined as working outside the home.

Only two characteristics of WAST were found to be statistically significant. Respondents not married to cousins were more likely to report feeling frightened by what their husbands say or do, compared with those married to their cousins; while sexual abuse was more likely to be reported by women not married to cousins.

Discussion

Domestic violence or intimate partner violence is widespread and endemic globally, with Pakistan being no exception. Gender roles dictated, practiced and maintained by societies, regardless of religion, culture, history, traditions and norms, relegate women to higher vulnerability for violence. Results of this study demonstrate that consanguineous marriages, widely practiced throughout Pakistan, do not seem to offer much protection to wives in terms of domestic violence. However, in this study we did not ask respondents whether they were married to their first-degree or second-degree cousins.

This is the first study in Pakistan on domestic violence using the standardized and validated assessment instrument, WAST. Our results show prevalence rates of various forms of domestic violence that are higher than other studies conducted in Pakistan, albeit our sample size was bigger, with the exception of a national survey [5–7].

Table 1 Demographic characteristics and responses to the Woman Abuse Screening Tool

Question	Husband is a cousin?		P-value
	Yes (n = 484) No. (%)	No (n = 526) No. (%)	
Age (years)	Mean = 34 (SD = 9.8)	Mean = 33.9 (SD = 9.6)	
Education?			
No formal education	111 (22.9)	86 (16.3)	
1–5 years	33 (6.8)	32 (6.1)	
6–8 years	56 (11.6)	45 (8.6)	
9–12 years	158 (32.6)	149 (28.3)	
Bachelors and above	126 (26.1)	214 (40.7)	
Have children?			
Yes	112 (23.1)	160 (30.4)	
No	372 (76.9)	366 (69.6)	
Employed?			0.149
Yes	183 (37.8)	176 (33.5)	
No	301 (62.2)	350 (66.5)	
How would you describe your relationship with your husband?			0.102
A lot of tension	114 (23.6)	153 (29.1)	
Some tension	248 (51.2)	240 (45.6)	
No tension	122 (25.2)	133 (25.3)	
Do you and your husband work out arguments with:			0.089
Great difficulty	108 (22.3)	141 (26.8)	
Some difficulty	148 (30.6)	132 (25.1)	
No difficulty	228 (47.1)	253 (48.1)	
Do arguments ever result in your feeling down or bad about yourself?			0.394
Often	97 (20)	123 (23.4)	
Sometimes	265 (54.8)	282 (53.6)	
Never	122 (25.2)	121 (23)	
Do arguments ever result in hitting, kicking or pushing?			0.140
Often	66 (13.6)	78 (14.8)	
Sometimes	131 (27.1)	168 (32)	
Never	287 (59.3)	280 (53.2)	
Do you ever feel frightened by what your husband says or does?			0.009*
Often	107 (22.1)	123 (23.4)	
Sometimes	208 (43)	265 (50.4)	
Never	169 (34.9)	138 (26.2)	
Has your husband ever abused you physically?			0.104
Often	67 (13.8)	91 (17.3)	
Sometimes	162 (33.5)	191 (36.3)	
Never	255 (52.7)	244 (46.4)	
Has your husband ever abused you emotionally?			0.241
Often	108 (22.3)	138 (26.2)	
Sometimes	228 (47.1)	247 (47)	
Never	148 (30.6)	141 (26.8)	
Has your husband ever abused you sexually?			0.043*
Often	83 (17.1)	118 (22.4)	
Sometimes	152 (31.4)	174 (33.1)	
Never	249 (51.5)	234 (44.5)	

*statistically significant at $P < 0.05$. SD = standard deviation;

Cumulatively, emotional abuse was the most commonly reported abuse, reported by 721 (71.4%) women as either often or sometimes. This was followed by sexual abuse and physical abuse, reported by 527 (52.2%) and 511 (50.6%), respectively. These prevalence rates of domestic violence, against the backdrop of 755 (74.8%) women describing their relationship with their husband as either marred by a lot of tension or some tension, are not surprising but they are alarming.

Being married to one's cousin did not protect married women in this study from being abused, either emotionally or physically, by their husbands in a statistically significant manner. However, sexual abuse was only marginally statistically significant, with married women in consanguineous marriages less likely to have been

abused in this manner. The only other statistically significant association observed between being married to one's cousin and the various attributes measured by WAST was on ever feeling frightened by what one's husband says or does. Knowing the man as one's cousin prior to marriage perhaps makes one feel less or not frightened, albeit abuse is still being experienced and endured. However, absence of a relationship in general between emotional and physical domestic violence and consanguinity reinforces the deeply entrenched nature of violence in the context of intimate relationships.

Limitations of the study include the fact that it was hospital based as opposed to community based, and self-determination of the term "cousin". Future studies need to determine association between domestic violence and

consanguineous marriages by the type of cousin relationship.

In 2010, the National Assembly of Pakistan adopted the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, which invites "police cognizance and the legal processes to ultimately punish the offender" for the hitherto legally unrecognized heinous crime of domestic violence, in addition to economic abuse in the context of marriage [10]. However, future studies need to systematically study the knowledge, attitudes and practices pertaining to this law of married women in the country. In addition, better understanding of the magnitude and scale of domestic violence in Pakistan is needed, using standardized assessment tools for meaningful comparisons across different parts of the country over time.

Competing interests: None declared.

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