

WOMEN, WORK, AND VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

PAKISTAN

Exploring the relationship between women's income generation and their experiences of violence.

APPROACH

Data was collected applying an intersectional approach capturing a range of women from diverse backgrounds and life experiences.

HEADLINE FINDINGS

This briefing sheet outlines some of the key findings from the research into the experiences of women from different economic backgrounds, working as professionals, or in the informal sector. The research draws out a number of key differences across context and groupings:

- The studies reveal a complex relationship between women's involvement in paid employment and their experiences of violence.
- Paid employment brought both costs and benefits.
- Earning and income meant women could leave or consider leaving a violent marriage, though social pressures often countered this.
- Engagement in paid work often led to increased tensions within households.
- Most women from professional backgrounds enjoyed their jobs, whilst home-based workers and those from poorer communities would prefer not to work.
- Women faced a range of pressures, particularly psychological and emotional stress as a result of disapproval from their extended families or communities and an increased risk of sexual harassment.
- A secondary analysis of Pakistan DHS data showed that lack of assets increased the likelihood of women working.

THE PAKISTAN CONTEXT

Society

- There are quotas for women in political positions: 60 seats in the National Assembly and 129 (of 758) in Provincial National Assemblies.
- Women have equal voting rights, but are poorly represented in formal governance. Although illegal, women within certain cultural and geographical boundaries are often stopped from voting.

Law

- Sex-based discrimination: Pakistani law has been shaped for more than thirty years by a religious legal structure which has operated alongside the existing penal code. Although changes have been made in recent years (such as a move to prevent raped women being tried under religious law for adultery), the law has not yet been refashioned sufficiently.
- The Punjab government passed the Women Protection against Violence Bill 2016. This has come under scathing attack by the religious political leaders and clerics declaring it a conspiracy to destroy the family.
- Rape and honour killing: despite recent legal reforms, a woman's testimony is still given half the weight of a man's in rape cases. In addition, other legal ordinances essentially make honour killings viable under the law.
- A specific domestic violence law is lacking at the national level, but some regional laws have been passed.
- The most important change in Pakistani law has been the Workplace Harassment Law.

Community and household

- The formal governance system is often sidestepped, especially in rural areas, to be replaced by the jirga system, whereby the elite of the community form a council to set local rules and deal out punishments.
- The free movement of women is often linked negatively with issues of personal and family honour (izzat).
- The ease of educational access for females varies significantly by location.
- Patriarchal norms maintain household decision-making and economic control as masculine preserves.

141st

out of 142 in the The Global Gender Gap Index for 'economic participation and opportunity'. Gender equality in the workforce is low (WEF 2014)

COMMUNITY STUDY IN LYARI, KARACHI

Twenty-seven in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in the community mainly with women. In addition, a survey was carried out with approximately 400 residents focusing on trends related to employment, education and violence.

KEY FINDINGS

- Access to independent income made the option of leaving an abusive situation more feasible for women.
- Involvement in paid work increased pressures within the household and could contribute to violence.
- Some experienced violence as a result of conflicts over the control of their earnings.
- Women who were engaged in work outside of the home before marriage were often the subjects of gossip, taunts, disapproval and scorn within their families and communities.
- No women reported experiencing physical violence in the workplace. However, a few women spoke about experiencing sexual harassment while working.
- Age also played an important role in determining women's experiences of earning and violence.

INSIGHTS FROM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE AS PROFESSIONAL WORKERS

The second part of our study focused on the experiences of professional middle/upper-class women. Four interviews were conducted with women employed by firms who had adopted the code of conduct established under the Anti-Sexual Harassment Law of Pakistan (GEO Television Network, Attock Refinery Limited (ARL) and Fauji Foundation (FF)). We also interviewed eight women entrepreneurs in Lahore and Islamabad.

KEY FINDINGS

- All the four women working in organisations did so because they wanted to have a career. One of the women left her husband when she encountered difficulties, and received support from the company.
- Women entrepreneurs earn some fame and recognition for the services or products that they delivered through their businesses and generally these businesses are perceived favourably.
- Women in these categories gain self-confidence and have more control over their lives and their children were free from involvement in labour at home.
- The introduction of the anti-harassment at work law has made a positive difference.

HOME-BASED WORKERS FROM SHADIPURA AND GULBERG TOWN, LAHORE

This part of the study involved a qualitative focus on women home-based workers who fall under HomeNet Pakistan (HNP). HNP is a network of organisations working for the recognition and labour rights of home-based workers since 2005. Ten women from Shadipura and ten from Gulberg town were interviewed. Women in these areas live below the poverty line and experience structural violence and exclusion.

KEY FINDINGS

- Women were typically sub-contracted, exploited and paid very little money for hours worked.
- Most participants worked because it was necessary due to poverty, and worked in small spaces under unhealthy conditions.
- In some cases, women started working after marriage when the husband's income was not enough to sustain the family.
- Given a choice, most of these women would not work.
- Women who had worked outside their homes often reported sexual harassment, scrutiny and judgement on their way to work.
- In every interview, violence was a part of life. The violence mentioned was not just from husband to the wife, but from the woman to her children, the in-laws to the wife, and even the wife to her mother-in-law.
- The most common forms of violence mentioned were physical and verbal. Economic exploitation as a form of violence was not mentioned.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Promote local women's organisations to build capacity at this level to challenge violence against women (VAW), and extend support to professional women.
- Programmes to challenge the gendering of work are crucial and specifically need to target male attitudes.
- More work is needed to challenge the normalisation of violence with women and men, and in particular those at the lower end of the economic spectrum.
- Work-based harassment policies and procedures work and should be rolled out more comprehensively.
- Women-only transport schemes are clearly needed.
- VAW-sensitive police training is needed.
- Introducing social mobilisers (drawing on the Nepal model) could help to build better support for suffered of violence.

12.1m

women are in the labour force, 8.3m work in agriculture/ fisheries, 2.2m in other elementary occupations, & 1.4m in crafts & related trades

22%

of the labour force in Pakistan are women. This figure has been consistent for the last 15 years (World Bank, 2014)

