



PHOTO: PARTICIPANTS AT PROJECT WORKSHOP IN NEPAL DISCUSS RESEARCH FINDINGS

Women, Work and Violence In South Asia Newsletter

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

Project findings



Dr Tamsin Bradley, the academic lead for the project shares the key thematic findings from the study.

I am pleased to say that the findings from the Women, Work and Violence in South Asia are now being published and released in the form of a range of knowledge products on the project website, gendersouthasia.org

There are an important range of findings from the study exploring the relationship between women's economic opportunities and experiences of violence in all three countries (Myanmar, Nepal and Pakistan), and across different demographic groups. Here I highlight the key thematic findings across the study.

Thematic findings

EXPERIENCES OF TRAVELING TO AND FROM WORK:

Women in all countries reported feeling physically unsafe while traveling to and from work. This impacts directly on their productivity.

HONOUR AND SHAME:

In all three countries women, even when they have personal economic resources, are likely to remain in violent domestic environments because of social constraints linked to honour and shame.

WORK BASED HARASSMENT:

Gendered harassment at work is high across all job types, and has dire impacts on concentration and productivity.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING:

Mental health is negatively affected by increased levels of violence related to work (having to get to work, and harassment whilst there). However, it is also positively affected by women reporting that they feel more confident and independent as a result of earning an income. Women in each country speak of having decision-making powers that they link directly to income.

BACKLASH AT HOME AS A RESULT OF ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT:

Women who earn an income in Nepal are 40% more likely to experience intimate partner violence than economically inactive women.

ENGAGEMENT WITH WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS:

Engagement with women's organisations is the single most important factor driving women's willingness to challenge violent behaviour.

Cut the roots of the poisonous tree, not the fruits!

Suti Sahariah discusses the work of Akhya in Myanmar.
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Multi-Stakeholder Involvement: Key to successful research

Dr Smita Premchander, country lead for the Nepal and Myanmar identifies some of the key ingredients that have helped this research project to achieve its aims.
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Reflections on the Pakistan VAW Study



Laila Ashraf and Fatimah Ishan from the Pakistan research team share some of their personal reflections from the research process and on the study findings.
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By way of reminder the main research questions for the study are provided below.

Research Question

Our overall research question is as follows:

HOW CAN APPROACHES TO INCREASE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT ALSO TACKLE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?



Menka Thapa, Raksha Nepal CEO with Dr Tamsin Bradley and Jon Gregson from the VAW in South Asia project team

Sub Research Questions

Based on our current understanding, our sub research questions include:

- In each field site, how does VAW affect women's economic engagement (attendance, performance, type of job pursued etc.)?
- Under what conditions or in what contexts does wage work exacerbate VAW?
- Under what conditions does wage work become empowering for women (i.e. facilitate their agency, resources, achievements) and thereby decrease violence?
- What can employers do to improve women employees' productivity while at the same time increasing their wellbeing in the workplace and at home? (wellbeing includes reduction of violence).

Cut the roots of the poisonous tree, not the fruits

by Suti Sahariah

Naan Sandi Moon (aged 25), is optimistic about the role that women of her generation are likely to play in Myanmar's development. The English-speaking aviation professional says she feels empowered because she has been taught early in life that as a woman she is not inferior to men.

"When I was younger, I faced a lot of harassment in bus. I tried to discuss this with my mom but she said as a girl it's common to face such problem. I didn't get it." says Moon

In 2008, she came across Akhaya Women, a NGO and a women's rights organisation that empowers women by making them aware about their bodies. The teaching was an eye opener for Moon because for the first time she learnt about her sexuality and was told to stand up against violence.

The founder of Akahya Women, Htar Htar says that in the Burmese society women are told that they are inferior to men because of their menstrual cycle. Such ideas come from the prevalent belief in Burmese society that a woman's body is dirty and impure owing to her menstrual cycle. The gender disparity, she says, is apparent in every other sphere of life:

"our clothes cannot be washed or ironed with men's clothes; there are many prejudices that constantly reinforce that a woman's body is dirty and that we are inferior." says Htar

Htar empowers women at the grassroots level through a sexuality dialogue programme. She believes that once a woman becomes confident about her sexuality, she can start thinking about the other disparities in the system, family and society. She also conducts workshops on gender issues with police, parliamentarians and religious leaders. In summer 2016, she launched a "She-smith" programme, which trains

women from economically poor background to make women's jewellery, an occupation traditionally reserved for men and considered unsuitable for women.

"We are determined to break such stereotypes. If women can wear jewellery, why can't we make it," says Htar

In 2012, she spearheaded the "whistle for help" campaign, which was an instant success. The whistle became a powerful tool for a woman to raise an alarm whenever she felt she was being stalked or harassed by someone either inside a bus or in public places. Htar uses creative and unconventional means to spread her message.



The Whistle for Help campaign

Htar says in Myanmar, terms "women empowerment" "peer education" are relatively new and there is a lot excitement to implement fresh ideas without fully understanding the implications of such programmes on the intended group. For example, "women's empowerment" in Burmese language literally means "skill building of women" but for Htar empowerment means addressing social and cultural barriers that prevents women from having her own voice and be in decision making position in her family and community.

Htar believes that in Myanmar local cultural sensitivities and context must be considered while designing any intervention programme so that people can relate to it.

Htar says that a normal peer education programme in Myanmar means to recruit people, train them and to replicate the training to raise awareness but such programmes rarely achieve the desired outcome. Her focus is to identify a natural peer leader from within the community whom the group can relate to. Once the leader understands the issues he or she can communicate with the group in a manner

that is far more organic and effective. There is no emphasis on meetings and skills development. The idea is to bring about a gradual behaviour and social change by addressing attitudes, value systems, perceptions and cultural barriers.

"My objective is to cut the roots of the poisonous tree rather than to cut the fruits.", says Htar

Multi-stakeholder involvement:

Key to successful research



By Dr. Smita Premchander, Country Lead for Nepal and Myanmar

A research project like the Women, Work and Violence project is complex not only in terms of its implementation, but also for it to be of use. As the country lead for Nepal and Myanmar, I share some insights from the experience of involving many stakeholders in the research.

Involvement of the donor organisation is key to engaging others

This project was funded by DFID's South Asia Research Hub. One of the key objectives of the research that is undertaken by this hub is that it should be used by multiple stakeholders in each country. Naturally, the first stop for advice is the donor. The response from the in-country donor offices was critical in getting buy-in from other partners. For instance, DFID in Nepal engaged with the selection of the programme for our in-depth research, ensured that heads of different projects within DFID were invited to the stakeholder

workshops, and participated in inviting a wide range of stakeholders in Nepal to the dissemination workshop. DFID played a very important role in getting the government on board, and also ensured the participation of private sector and non-government sector organisations in Nepal.

Expect team change along the way

Research projects that involve international teams put the teams together at the bidding stage. By the time the bidding process is over and contracts awarded, some team members find other assignments, and others are not able to keep their commitments for various reasons. Teams get shuffled, with those taking responsibilities appearing as key to the project success. This is a reality of research projects that last for over 12 to 18 months, and getting new people to hit the ground running becomes very important for project management.

Engage multiple stakeholders in all phases of the research

Organisations can put into practice only what they know. Informing people about the project results is critical to the uptake of findings. For this, the project set up stakeholder workshops in Nepal and Myanmar, at the launch of the project, and at the end. The earlier workshop brought stakeholders on board to inform them about the research and seek suggestions about shaping the research questions, deciding locations, etc. The workshops at the end of the project aided dissemination, and as they were held before the final report was prepared, they provided an opportunity for taking feedback from stakeholders to refine the final report. Stakeholders in each country were also involved during the project by constituting a Country Advisory Forum, through which they could provide linkages and advice to the research teams. The stakeholder involvement spanned all phases of research.

Involve Doctoral Students in the team

Doctoral students can be very valuable assets in research projects, as they understand research rigour, can contribute to high quality data collection, have the patience and mind-set to do repeat interviews to overcome initial information gaps, and uptake is ensured, as the data will be used for doctoral research. During this project, the research scholar became an integral part of the project, and as he is also a journalist with linkages, he could enable dissemination of information about the project, and the

findings arising from it, in international journals, both printed and on-line.



Suti Sahariah, a Doctoral student presents findings from the study of the informal entertainment sector in Thamel, Nepal at the final workshop

Get the government on board

National governments are the single most important stakeholders in terms of the uptake of any development-related research findings. In Nepal, the government participated in the research by including one of its programmes, the Integrated Women's Development Programme (IWDP) as part of the research. The Government of Nepal (GoN) was in the process of reviewing and revising IWDP and welcomed the opportunity created by this project to conduct in-depth research on it. At the request of the government 9 districts were covered, with a quantitative survey being conducted in 7 districts, with over 937 respondents. A further 100 women and men were reached with in-depth qualitative interviews. The GoN's engagement in the research should result in ownership and use of the findings.

Government engagements also pose some challenges. The first one is delays that arise from the need for approvals, communication with district offices, and aligning with government's work schedules. This can easily extend a project's original timeline. Another feature of official collaboration is that governments usually demand high sample sizes and coverage of geographical areas, which demands high budgets. This can become particularly difficult to negotiate if a project has a limited budget and a short time frame. The benefits, of course, are that if the government engages with a research project, and uses the findings and analysis,

there is very high potential for impact of research in policy formulation and programme design.

Partner with UN projects

United Nations agencies are great impact multipliers. Their partnership and support has been extremely useful in this research project. UNDP Myanmar's project for capacity building of a national federation of women's Self Reliance Groups provided an opportunity to ask rural women about Women, Work and Violence, and take their perspectives on board. Later UNDP Myanmar ran a phone survey through their iPhone app, during the "16 Days of Activism" week, which served to raise awareness and gain insights into the experiences of the respondents.



The iWomen team in Myanmar

The UNDP office in Nepal organised a separate meeting for dissemination of the research findings amongst its officers from different departments and projects. With the project information finding its way to these well informed officers, the project received feedback for fine tuning its analysis and recommendations.

The ILO office in Myanmar was engaged through a place on the Country Advisory Forum of the research project. The advisory forum member provided insights into how to engage the government in Myanmar, an offer extended also by UNDP Myanmar. The ILO's South Asia office in Delhi engaged through its project on Women and Migration, and helped spread the project findings too.

UNWomen in Nepal has offered to spread the findings of the research through a Gender and Social Inclusion focus group of donors and UN agencies in Nepal.

The lessons: dissemination and policy support being a key objective and forte of UN agencies, what could be better for uptake than engaging with UN agencies? For both efficiencies and impact, make partnerships with UN agencies.

Disseminate widely

In addition to stakeholder workshops, the project plans to disseminate its findings through any conferences, events, and other windows of opportunity to influence policy and practice that may arise in the near future in the three countries of research: Nepal, Myanmar and Pakistan.

Results will also be spread through knowledge sharing networks on the topics of Women, Work and Violence. Stakeholders provided information and suggestions about spreading the messages through libraries, NGOs, media organisations, social media, networks and their mailing lists, newsletters and phone apps of different organisations.

Different knowledge products have been suggested and used, such as newsletters, policy briefs, and dissemination through champions and leaders such as the women leaders of the May Doe Kabar in Myanmar.

The key lesson is that multi stakeholder involvement takes planning, effort, care, and a listening attitude. The benefits are immeasurable in planning, implementation, dissemination and usage of results.

often engaged as Home Based Workers (HBWs) provided our main focus.



It is very apparent when discussing this study with researchers who have been involved in the VAW project in all three countries that it is almost impossible to not be personally affected by discussing very sensitive issues, and having to do this in unfamiliar communities where levels of poverty are also extreme. The researchers bring their own views and potential experiences of violence, but have had to be objective and try to distance themselves from the personal circumstances of the women they are meeting. This can be challenging, and in lots of cases the situation is so difficult that tears are inevitable. The study has been a very real learning experience and through the study we all hope we are at least giving a voice to those we have met, and honestly conveying their situations in a way that will challenge and inform those who have the power to act and make a difference.

Laila was involved in interviewing 8 women from the Shadipura town, and was introduced to these women by staff from HomeNet Pakistan who provide support for the wellbeing of home based workers (HBWs) in towns around Lahore. This introduction was seen as critical in helping to build trust, and enable the women interviewed to share their stories openly. In many cases they were shy and afraid to share the harsh realities of the violence they nearly all encountered.

Some of the women live in a single room shared by several family members, in which they cook, sleep and wash. The living conditions are harsh, unhealthy and, in some cases, squalid. The women are engaged in domestic work and home based economic activities brought to them by middlemen, who may be their husband, or in most cases, total strangers. They face the challenges of

Reflections on the Pakistan VAW Study

In conversation with Laila Ashraf and Fatimah Ishan from the research team

The Pakistan component of the VAW study involved a community study in Lyari in Karachi, interviews with professional women in Lahore and Islamabad and with home based workers in the Shadipura and Gulberg towns around Lahore. During the conversations with Laila and Fatimah, Laila shared her personal experience in conducting research with women in Shadipura, and Fatimah discussed the overall findings. In both conversations, the women from poorer economic backgrounds,

extreme poverty, and take on sub-contracted work such as stitching, embroidery and making paper envelopes, cotton birds (sparrows). The middlemen come door to door, and negotiate prices with women individually, so they end up competing for meagre wages. They may get anything from 1 to 5 rupees for stitching trousers, and have to survive on as little as Rs 350 per week. This work is neither permanent nor reliable.



Living conditions in the Shadipura community where the Home-based workers are based

This lack of negotiating power leads to exploitation and extremely low reward for what Laila saw as usually a very good quality of work. This economic violence is just the start of their misery, as failure to bring in money leads to tensions and often psychological or physical violence perpetrated by husbands who, in some cases, may be drug addicts, and not bringing any income into the home. Poverty and related household dynamics mean that arguments often arise, and mothers-in-law can also often be more supportive of their sons. Quarrels can arise leading to beating and verbal abuse if a wife has not looked after the mother in law during the day.

Fatimah has categorized the findings of the different study activities in Pakistan under four themes.

1. The nature, type and perceptions of conditions of work

For the HBWs, such as those that Laila met, the main reason for working is poverty. One person's income is not enough to run the household. They work from the home due to social constraints on working in the public sphere, with women who go out to earn not being considered of good character. There is no joy in working and many of the women feel angry, stressed and, at times, blatantly cheated. For example, one HBW was

deceived by a man who placed an order for embroidery for weddings which should have earned her Rs35K, but after 9 years the shop keeper has not paid her. The cost of legal action, lack of power in negotiating and fear of police were all reasons why she could not get her money, and access to authorities is seen as an absolute last resort.



Community living conditions around Shadipura

2. Household and community reaction to women's work

Among the entrepreneurs from better economic backgrounds one woman was running a business selling uninterrupted power supplies, one was a gym owner, one a ceramist, one a beauty salon owner, one a restaurant owner and another did hair removal and massages. Earnings ranged from Rs10,000 to Rs 300,000 per month.

A big difference between the HBWs and entrepreneurs from strong economic backgrounds was that the work carried out by the entrepreneurs was recognised as quality services and rewarded accordingly. Whilst one of the women interviewed was unmarried and two were separated or divorced, all the entrepreneurs typically had support of their families who are often investors in their businesses.

By contrast HBWs are not supported by their families or communities. One woman whose knee was broken when she was beaten up by her husband was forced back by her parents. She was also almost fatalistic viewing her lack of good looks relative to her siblings as a factor that would inevitably lead to bad things happening to her. Women, in this situation, are regarded as a burden by their

parents who cannot afford to keep them, and to illustrate this one woman was told "only your dead body can come back to this home".

Patterns of normalisation of violence and interpretations of religious teachings worsen the situation, further reinforcing a perception of male superiority. Lack of education also is a limiting factor in relation to livelihood choice and earning potential, contributing to women's decision to engage in HBW.

3. Nature and type of violence and women's resilience

Sexual, physical and psychological abuse are all part of the HBWs life. This is not only Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) but also involves in-laws, children, and other women, so it is multi-focal and multi-dimensional.

Resilience to violence takes different forms. In three or four cases women left their husbands, but is this resilience or desperation? Violence and oppression for these women is so hard to escape, and also has links to the effects of globalisation with men losing their jobs.

Over 80% of HBWs across the country are women, and all HBWs in Punjab are connected to HomeNet Pakistan (HNP). HNP is not focussed on violence, but on unionisation and an HBW policy is in the making. Many policies and laws have been given to Provinces to develop. Sindh now has a policy and there is a Union in Punjab, but benefits from this are not being seen as yet in terms of resilience to violence.

Level of education was also observed as a critical factor, and the entrepreneurs interviewed typically had bachelors or masters level education and a much greater range of opportunities for earning a living. Family sizes and responsibilities were also much less with typically 1-3 children for entrepreneurs, and 4-8 for HBWs.

TRANSGENER WOMEN, WORK AND VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

During the study one transgender person was interviewed, which also provided an interesting insight into their experience of violence and work. There are a significant number of transgender people in Pakistan, and an increasing level of activism due to a spate of recent murders.

For a transgender person in Pakistan the perception is that if the family doesn't accept you then you go to live with 'guru' or you are adopted by a community of transgender people. The interviewee, in this case, was very nervous and fearful, and she didn't want the guru to find out she was giving an interview. She discussed what the guru was doing and what was happening to her in the community. She explained that a guru typically 'buys' a transgender person for Rs400,000-500,000 and makes money from engaging them in dancing, sex services and begging. When she was a new person in the community she was in demand, but as she got older the guru, who is typically also a transgender person was less nice to her.

She wishes now that she had listened to her family and been 'normal', but whenever she did anything more female related she would be beaten. In one case, she went dancing and got beaten so badly by her brothers that it took 6 months for her to recover. So why doesn't she leave the guru and do HBW embroidery or domestic work? The answer to this was that she makes more money doing what she does in the transgender community.



Transgender dancer performing at an event in Pakistan

4. The link between economic engagement and violence

All HBWs stated that economic engagement does not stop violence – it still goes on, though from a few of Laila's interviews it may also lead to some reduction. Economic activity is not seen by HBWs as empowering due to the economic violence they encounter, and their reasons for getting work is driven more by the need for money to take care of their children's education or wedding, than by any aim to improve their situation or

reduce their experience of violence. There are a lot of micro credit initiatives in the community that target women, so women could in theory 'take a loan and run', but many give the money to their husbands or brothers in law.

The situation faced by entrepreneur women is very different as they can choose to do different work. Along with women working in organisations, they are often focussed and ambitious, whereas HBWs are not ambitious. Entrepreneurs and professional women encounter arguments over money, and husbands who would want to take control. Psychological stress and abuse was reported by some interviewees, so violence is still evident. A number of companies where interviewees worked adopted anti sexual harassment laws, which are totally absent for HBWs and there was also an example of a company that had provided significant support, in terms of accommodation and childcare when a woman employee's marriage came to an end as a result of the infidelity of the husband who happened to work for the same company.

A job is not enough: what can be done for HBWs?

There is no obvious escape route for HBWs from a cycle of different forms of violence. Clearly money is a factor and the need to survive and get through the next couple of days leads to quarrels and tensions. So what can be done? Laila's own reflections are that reliable employment organised by NGOs who pay a fair wage is an essential starting point for change in this type of community. This then needs to be supported by training on gender and rights, so that the women can know how their voices can be heard and how they can best respond to violent situations. These suggestions support the wider findings from the VAW study that women support groups are needed that are well designed. Solutions need to be genuinely empowering and challenge the economic exploitation that pervades the informal sector. Economic, psychological and physical violence are endemic and inter-connected and all need to be tackled.

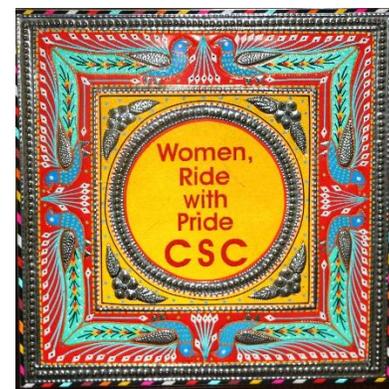


Image promoting safe mobility for women in Punjab State, Pakistan

FAST FACTS

- Key facts from the study carried out in Pakistan

141st

Pakistan rates 141st out of 142 on the global gender gap index for 'economic participation and opportunity'. Gender equality in the workforce is low (WEF, 2014)

22%

22% of the workforce in Pakistan are women. This figure has remained the same for the last fifteen years (World Bank, 2014)

8.3m

8.3 million of a female labour force of 12.1 million women in Pakistan work in agriculture and fisheries; 2.2 million in other elementary occupations and 1.4 million in crafts and related trades.

>80%

More than 80% of home-based workers across Pakistan are women

The project team

Implementing Organisations

The project is being implemented by **IMC Worldwide** (lead), the **University of Portsmouth**, and the **International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW)**.

Additional institutional collaborators are the **Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)** and the **University of Delhi**. The main country partners are:

- In Myanmar we are working with **Myanmar Survey Research (MSR)**.
- In Nepal we are working with **Health Research and Social Development forum (HERD)** and **Social Science Baha (SSB)**
- In Pakistan we are working with **Homenet Pakistan**



Participants from NGOs, Government and stakeholder organisations at the final project workshop in Kathmandu, Nepal, March 2017

The team

The project team is made up of:

Management Team

- Pallu Modi, Project Director
- Emma Sauvanet, Research Manager
- Tamsin Bradley, Academic Lead

Research Support

- Suti Sahariah, Research Assistant

Core Team Specialists

- Smita Premchander, Country lead for Myanmar and Nepal
- Fatimah Ishan, Pakistan Country Lead
- Zara Ramsey, Project Coordinator
- Neetu John and Daliya Sebastian, Quantitative Research Specialists
- Jon Gregson, Research Uptake Lead
- National research team members and Partners

Technical Advisory Group

The project also benefits from a strong international advisory group, bring together a broad range of specialists

Country Advisory Forums

In each of the three countries we have brought together in country experts from a wide range of stakeholder groups who advise on how best to develop the project activities within the different country contexts.

Staying in touch

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