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ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

Cover Image - *Pardah.*
Location: Noida, U.P., India.

Keep the veil down, do not go outside after the sunset, do not speak up in the crowd, and be silent when someone speaks against you. You must stay inside for if you speak, you will be judged. For if you speak no one will marry you. You must come back home early to be safe. You must not drink, for people will judge you. The women have complied with it; did the society suddenly become better? Did the rate of rapes suddenly become obsolete? Did you successfully make the women safe? No, you did not. Caging her, cutting her ties from the world does not save her; it just makes her devoid of all the connections from the society. You want women to be safe? Stop keeping them behind curtains and teach them to fight back.

A special thanks to the *Faculty of Law, Jamia Millia Islamia*, since it has been the space which helped foster this idea, and to our Professors at Law School who constantly encouraged us and stood with us through thick and thin and offered unconditional support whenever needed.

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Addressing Gender-Based Violence in South Asia

An open-source, peer-reviewed journal

The South Asian Journal of Law, Policy, and Social Research (SAJLPSR) is an open source journal published online by SSRN. Both Issue 1 and Issue 2 of Volume I are a special edition on the theme of gender-based violence in South Asia. In addition to online publication, the inaugural issue (Vol. I, Issue 1) was also published in a limited print run.

Information on the journal is available publicly at http://www.rochester.edu/sba/.

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A special thanks to Dr. Catherine Cerulli,
who laid the foundation stone of this initiative and without whose
support and guidance this journal would not be possible.

Foreword

The South Asian Journal of Law, Policy, and Social Research (SAJLPSR) was founded to fill a gap. There was no peer-reviewed, open-source journal to address social issues that affect the countries of South Asia. The countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are connected by overlapping cultural and ethnic identities and face many of the same challenges. Our journal—free, peer reviewed, and available to the public—provides a platform for South Asian researchers, while providing fact-based information that can be presented to regional legislative bodies.

The journal is a joint effort between the Foundation for Academia, Innovation, & Thought (F.A.I.T.H.) and the Susan B. Anthony Center at the University of Rochester. The founders of F.A.I.T.H. and the Editors-in-Chief envisioned the journal as a mechanism to share ideas and promote dialogue about social problems, bringing together academics in partnership with legal practitioners and policymakers. We see research as an essential means to advance just social policies and to find solutions for multiple regional issues. The trifecta of law, policy, and social research forms the foundation of our vision.

The first volume of SAJLPSR is dedicated to the topic of Gender-based Violence (GBV), an issue of concern across South Asia. Currently Asia experiences the greatest number of women killed by intimate partners or family members, with 20,000 such deaths in 2017, according to the United Nations' *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls.*

While using rigorous research methods, the articles present the impact of violence against women and girls in stark and vivid terms, as does the accompanying artwork. Personal narratives about GBV in public spaces highlight the challenges for women and girls working to attain education and employment. The technique of qualitative research, using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis of responses, brings to the fore issues of worsened GBV during humanitarian crisis and the challenges of providing culturally competent care to South Asian women of the diaspora facing GBV in the United States. Other articles explore the double impact of facing political and

familial oppression as well as imaginative ways that women are challenging social taboos through feminist "edutainment."

Gender-based violence is a critical public health issue in South Asia. Addressing this problem requires an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach between researchers, activists, and policymakers. We offer this second issue of our journal as a building block for change. Many thanks to Dr. Cerulli for her guidance from 2018 to fall of 2020 in helping launch this journal and connecting F.A.I.T.H. to the University of Rochester Susan B. Anthony Center for what has become a fruitful exchange allowing for mutual learning.

Naseer Husain Jafri and Umair Ahmed Andrabi, Founders, Foundation for Academia, Innovation, and Thought

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South Asian Journal of Law, Policy, and Social Research

Addressing Gender-Based Violence in South Asia

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Violence in Public Spaces Against Women and Girls: Narratives from India

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Introduction

Gender and power differentials have historically been linked to several social phenomena, including Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV), which refers to any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is premised upon the socially ascribed gender differences between males and females (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011). One can trace SGBV to the existence of structural inequalities in power relations; it is linked to existing gender stereotypes and discriminatory norms that legitimize and perpetuate this violence (Edström, Hassink, Shahrokh, & Stern, 2015).

The term "Sexual and Gender Based Violence" is a useful term for it helps locate the occurrence of violence firmly within the predominant discourses surrounding gender roles in society and traces it to the socialization processes that firmly establish the norms and definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman (Lang, 2003). Violence, in this context, emerges as a policing mechanism, to establish, perpetuate, and reinforce gender orders and roles in society, and to punish any perceived transgression using force and coercion (Lang, 2003). However, SGBV is not restricted to women, and in the last few decades frameworks have evolved to

[1] **ENDNOTES**
We are grateful to the Ford Foundation for providing ICRW Asia with the grant to conduct the two studies. We would also like to extend our gratitude to colleagues at ICRW-Asia, Poulomi Pal and Sneha Sharma, who have been part of the research team and have been immensely encouraging.

recognize vulnerabilities of not only women but also of men to SGBV. People use violence as an instrument to oppress both women and men, as well as young boys and girls, if they are perceived to be working against established social norms (Edström et al., 2015). This paper explores the experiences of girls and women within this wider ambit of SGBV and hence we use the phrase Sexual and Gender Based Violence Against Women (SGBVAW) for the purposes of this paper. It foregrounds and prioritizes women's articulations, expressions, and negotiations to navigate public space in the process of training, entering work, accepting offers to work outside the home, regularly commuting to the workplace, and remaining at work.

The deep-rooted prevalence of SGBVAW has been broadly associated with the existing gender norms and beliefs shared by people in terms of desired gender roles. Some people argue that the system of patriarchy creates idealized norms of masculinity and femininity, and any digression from these scripts of norms or roles provokes violence. Thus, existing beliefs and norms interact with experiences and socialization at the individual level to create conditions for violence. For instance, the understanding of masculinity as being tough, unfeeling, and violent leads to men being socialized in this way. Indian society is marked by rigid masculinity attitudes and value systems (Verma et al., 2004). These norms and attitudes govern the lives of boys and girls in India and feed into the cycle of violence that is mostly perpetrated by men and experienced by women. These norms permeate society from households to communities and into larger structures such as public spaces, workplaces, schools, temples, lanes, waiting lines, and so on.

In this context, often it is unquestioningly decided, as part of an overarching culture, what spaces girls and boys occupy from the very beginning, with the spaces for girls being far more limited. These cultural norms raise key concerns on restrictions on women's mobility, visibility in certain spaces versus others, a lack of access to multiple resources and opportunities, and severe concerns on perceptions of safety, barring a few designated "women only" spaces. Women in developing countries fare worse than men on many accounts: lower school retention, higher dropout rates, lower participation in the labour force, and lower wages than men. Women often are unable to realize fundamental rights, such as voting and owning property. In addition, in an exacerbation of these differences, women and girls face

the risk of multiple forms of violence not only in different stages of their lives, from birth through old age, but this risk of violence also intersects with ecosystem domains (individual, household/societal, and institutional) (Solotaroff & Pande, 2014). The male-dominated context that prevails in India is such that boys often grow up with little interaction with their female peers and little or no introduction to comprehensive sexuality education and gender equitable role models. "For boys, in early to mid-adolescence (between the ages of 13 and 17, according to one study), the social and peer pressure to conform to normative attitudes and behaviors is at its peak, as critical reflection is still underdeveloped" (Kato-Wallace et al., 2016, p. 18). Most young boys grow up with misdirected norms of masculinity, characterized by harmful gender attitudes.

In the case of India, we face two worrisome trends: first, there has been an increase in the reporting of incidents of SGBVAW and second, a steady decrease in women's labour force participation. While these are two distinct trends, within this paper we explore linkages between the undercurrents of these trends as informed by our studies as explained in the Methodology section. One of the threads which appears in the data has led us to focus on unpacking what it means for women and girls to step into public spaces within this wider ambit of SGBV. The intersection of SGBVAW and public space forms the core of what the paper attempts to illuminate. The following few paragraphs set the context for our analysis.

Gender and agency are closely intertwined and women and girls "stepping out" into public space challenges the status-quo. This can be read in conjunction with the reality of deeply gendered spaces that have historically curtailed women's and girls' freedom of movement as well as their ability to participate in school, work, and public life. This curtailment limits their access to growth and development opportunities (attending school) and their enjoyment of leisure and recreational opportunities (attending fairs, playing outdoor games). Often, the exclusion that women and girls experience is associated with fear of public spaces due to a high probability of SGBVAW. In addition, women's exclusion from public space is often presented in the guise of righteous desire to protect them. It usually manifests into restrictions of their choice and agency. With mobility and access severely curtailed due to safety concerns, a vicious cycle of low capability is perpetuated, leading to further gender discrimination (Pilot & Prabhu, 2012). India has infamously been

inscribed with labels such as a country with "rape culture" (Patil & Purkayastha, 2017) and cities as "rape capitals" (Durham, 2015).

Violence experienced by women and adolescent girls, when they frequent public spaces to engage in paid work or are aspiring for paid work via schooling, training, etc., has significant influences on the extent of their social and economic participation. This paper rests on this fundamental understanding of differential access to public spaces and explores the relationship between women's fear of violence and their abilities to partake in opportunities outside of home. Women's identities as seekers of economic opportunities and aspirants for financial independence mark an important turning point in their lives. Economic empowerment of women is also linked to wide ranging positive social and economic outcomes (UN Women, 2018) but is still faced with many implicit and explicit barriers, including the fear of violence in public spaces.

It is noteworthy that women's labour force participation has remained an area of much research interest in India in recent times, especially in light of decreasing women's labour force participation (Chatterjee et al., 2018). Recent research strongly "indicates that fear and safety concerns of women outside the home are likely to play an important role in whether they seek outside education and employment in India" (Siddique, 2018, p. 3). For instance, Siddique (2018), in her study of the relation between fear of violence or concerns of safety and participation in the labour force, found, "one standard deviation increase in lagged sexual assault reports within one's own district reduces the probability that a woman is employed outside her home by 0.44 percentage points (or 3.6% of the sample average)" (p. 5). Muralidharan & Prakash (2017) found that providing a bicycle as a means to get to school in the state of Bihar improved secondary school enrolment by making travel to and from school safer. Borker (2018) found a correlation between women's choice of college and their perception of safety. She expounds, "Women are willing to choose a college in the bottom half of the quality distribution over a college in the top half at the University of Delhi for a travel route that they perceive to be one standard deviation safer" (Borker, 2018, p. 1).

Siddique (2018) quotes a study that uses cross-sectional data from the 2005 wave of the India Human Development Survey to find that in "urban neighborhoods where the self-reported level of sexual harassment against women is high, women

are far less likely to seek outside employment" (p. 3). In 2018, Ola Mobility Institute conducted a survey which revealed that 91 percent of women felt that public transport was extremely unsafe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe and safe except at night, and only 9 percent felt it was extremely safe (Shah & Raman, 2019, p. 25). They further add, "crowded, dark, high, uneven, and unshaded footpaths affect women disproportionately, as they may feel unsafe, prone to harassment and are often accompanied by dependents (either children or the elderly)" (2019, p. 19). Additionally, the existing lack of the presence and visibility of women in public spaces adds to this web of decision-making complexity for women to step out of their homes comfortably. These studies point towards the extent of influence that fear of violence has on women and girls in different stages of their lives and the critical decisions that pivot around it.

This paper focuses on how the continuous threat of subtle forms of daily violence, such as lewd comments, sexual jokes, whistling, leering, obscene gestures, being touched, groped, and stalked influence women's decision-making around employment. It brings into light how the microsites within the larger idea of "public space", such as bus stops, public transport, public toilets, and workplaces, pose varying degrees of threat to the daily mobility of women both temporally and spatially. While violent crimes and heinous acts such as rape, battery, and physical assault have gathered increased attention, routine forms of abuse such as these are largely normalized. The danger with this normalization is an onus on women to safeguard themselves and negotiate responsibility for "protection" if they choose to access opportunities outside home. The inclusionary or exclusionary nature of spaces for women is tied to fear of harassment or assault (Fenster, 2005). In the Indian context, this fear is further aggravated with the cultural stigmatization associated with a survivor in an aftermath of such an incidence.

Further, this paper focuses on what strategies women employ to take responsibility for their own safety in public space. Some existing literature brings to the fore the essentialization of location of women at home and in private, and their behaviour as submissive and modest (Griffin, 2015). Increasingly, as more women claim public spaces in the form of leisure, entertainment, romance, and work, this necessitates the understanding of how they manage subverting this deep-seated cultural norm as well as various forms of violence that perpetually shadow them. This research unearthed some of the coping strategies and behaviors that women

have inculcated over time as they face these threats (Valentine, 1989). For example, in their essay Riger and Gordon (1981) classify women's behaviour in two broad categories: isolation and street savviness. The former is behavior in which women avoid unnecessary encounters and steer clear of "dangerous" or "unsafe outside", while being "street savvy" implies application of "coping strategies" in myriad forms, some of which are part of this paper.

Methodology

This paper is based on an analysis of two separate qualitative data sets from two studies called "Learning Review on What Works for Adolescents' Empowerment" and "Vikalp: An Exploratory Study on Non-Traditional Livelihoods" (Anand, Nanda, Pal & Sharma, 2020). These are referred to as the learning review on adolescents' empowerment and the livelihood study, respectively, in the rest of the paper. Both these studies were conducted under the same grant and with the same research team between 2018-2020 in India. The ICRW's Institutional Review Board[2] and Sigma Research and Consulting's ethical review board reviewed the detailed research protocol and consent forms for both the studies. There was an informed consent process for all participants appropriate to the method of data collection; i.e., in-depth interview[3] (IDIs), focus group discussion[4] (FGDs) and key informant interview[5] (KIIs). For participants in the age group of

[2] The ICRW Institutional IRB number for the learning review on adolescents' empowerment is 17-0013A and for the livelihood study is 17-0013B. Sigma Research and Consulting's IRB number for the studies are 10032/IRB/D/18-19 and 10079/IRB/D/18-19 respectively.
[3] In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation.http://www2.pathfinder.org/site/ DocServer/ m_e_tool_series_indepth_interviews.pdf Retrieved on November 1, 2019.
[4] A focus group discussion (FGD) is a good way to gather together people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest. The group of participants is guided by a moderator (or group facilitator) who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion amongst themselves. https://rb.gy/m2pbhg Retrieved on November 1, 2019.
[5] Key informant interviews are qualitative in-depth interviews with people who know what is going on in the community. The purpose of key informant interviews is to collect information from a wide range of people - including community leaders, professionals, or residents - who have first hand knowledge about the community. These community experts, with their particular knowledge and understanding, can provide insight on the nature of problems and give recommendations for solutions. https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/programs/health-data/trainings/Documents/tw_cba23.pdf Retrieved on November 1, 2019.

15-18 years in adolescent programming, we ensured parental consent from guardians/parents with help of the local partners who have been working with the participants. In both studies, no research activity exceeded 90 minutes, including time for all data collection activities. We prioritized the timing, availability, schedules, and comfort of the respondents. The qualitative data collection was led by a small team of experienced qualitative researchers from ICRW, with language interpreters recruited locally where needed. Two researchers conducted the FGDs, including a note taker and an experienced facilitator. One researcher conducted the IDIs and KIIs with one note taker. The team ensured participant confidentiality by not recording identifiers of the participants and following approved data management and storage protocols. The team developed all tools for data collection with the key areas of interest and we pre-tested them. Before analysis, we transcribed all the qualitative activities and translated them into English. We analyzed all the primary data collected as well as key program documents shared by our research partners, using a grounded theory approach. All the transcripts as well as key programmatic documents were coded (using Atlas.ti) which was an inductive process. The coding process included two independent coders going through 10 percent of all transcripts to arrive at a preliminary set of codes that was discussed and agreed upon by all members of the research team and used as a framework for coding the rest of the documents.

The learning review on adolescents' empowerment encompasses selected developmental initiatives working on adolescents' empowerment in India. The objectives of the review included exploring what strategies were employed by organizations to ensure long-term sustainability, creation of an enabling ecosystem, and gaining insights into what remains to be done in the context of creating empowering spaces in the lives of adolescent girls. We collected data from program experiences across eight states in India:

Table 1: Sampling strategy of the learning review on adolescents' empowerment.

Method and numbers	**Respondents**
FGDs- 10	With adolescent girls and boys
FGDs- 10	With parents, frontline workers, and other stakeholders in the community.
IDIs- 23	With program staff and field level implementation teams

KIIs-18	With program managers and experts working on the adolescent programming

The livelihood study was a qualitative study to understand the lived experiences of working women in the current context of India. The focus of the project is on women engaged in 'non-traditional livelihoods' (NTL – sectors and jobs where participation of women is conventionally low or absent) and 'traditional livelihoods' (TL – sectors and jobs where participation of women is conventionally high) in India. This study site was Delhi NCR and the respondents consisted of:

Table 2: Sampling strategy of the livelihood study.

Method and numbers	**Respondents**
IDIs-10	With female workers (working as healthcare frontline workers, corporate managers in apparel manufacturing, salespersons in retail, and programmers in information technology and communications).
KIIs-6	With male co-workers.
KIIs-18	With representatives from the selected sectors; state/government actors, employers, private sector and industry associations, skill development and training institutes, trade unions, and activists.

In the present paper, we utilize coded narratives around adolescent girls' aspirations to study and work, constraints on mobility in acquiring education, skill training, and accessing job opportunities from the first data set, and narratives of young married women on enablers and barriers to pursuing certain jobs (traditional or non- traditional), and specific challenges from the perspective of the impending fear of violence in their daily lives from the second data set.

The authors are cognizant that the age and location of participants in the study varies vastly. However, the grounded theory method of data analysis allowed the research team to draw a relationship between two separate data sets, owing to the overwhelming amount of codes around fear of violence, threat to mobility, and inability to pursue education and training due to fear of gender-based violence. While the two studies did not set out with the primary question of understanding the

nature of SGBVAW, the data strongly suggested this as a crucial determinant to consider in the light of the study objectives, in different life stages of girls and women.

For this paper, we present analysis around themes from data on aspirations for economic empowerment (including aspirations for high education, skill development, professional training, and professional role modelling), barriers on mobility, perception of violence, fear of abuse, fear of early marriage from the first data set (learning review on adolescents' empowerment) and codes emerging around sustenance in current jobs, barriers around entry and growth in jobs, burden of care and unpaid work, family support systems, fear of violence during commute and at workplaces, etc., from the second data set (livelihoods study). We integrated codes from both the sets to come up with meta codes in order to make sense of the continuum of experiences ranging from access to education and skill development and fear of early marriage for adolescent girlsto entering paid work outside home and continuing in employment for adult women.

Results

In this section, using the narratives of women and adolescent girls from studies as described above, we describe the extent of normalization of violence in public spaces, the rationale around it, and ways women subvert it. We thread together an argument to invite a heightened sense of attentiveness to the everyday nature of these experiences and their debilitating effects on the long-term outcomes for women and girls.

Fear of Violence

To promote overall participation of women in work as well as to improve enrolment in education, many policy and programmatic interventions have been rolled out by both state and non-state actors. In our interviews, we came across the voices of not just women and girls, but even those of members of civil society organizations who negotiate the threats of violence on an ongoing basis when working towards the aforementioned goals.

In a particular key informant interview from the learning review of adolescent empowerment, we hear:

> There is a lot of distance between our centre and our field work areas so we conduct the trainings of girls within the village; at present the place where we are located is not safe for girls after 7 pm outside because there is always a fear of sexual harassment… in case anything wrong happens then Kishori [adolescent girl] cannot say it to anybody, and we also have 3-4 cases in a month on sexual abuse, child marriage and early pregnancy of 12-13 years old girls because she keeps hiding about the assaults and further the situation becomes worse. (KII with Program Staff, Jagori Rural, Himachal Pradesh)

In urban Delhi, a respondent from livelihood study shares how employers treat men and women employees differently:

> No, these people (employers) misbehave with both male and female worker equally, but sexual harassment is extra for female worker. In work they treat us equally." – IDI with a woman participant[6] working as a data entry operator.

The sentiment is corroborated by another respondent:

> It keeps happening, sometimes the buses become overcrowded and few people start touching or keep leering or sometimes they use slang which we have to overcome in our daily lives (Ye sari cheezen lakiyon ko mostly face karni padti hai— All these things are reserved for girls). (IDI with woman participant working as a data entry operator)

These instances of violence in public space are often labelled "ordinary" and there is a "normalization" of its everyday nature (Viswanath & Mehrotra, 2007). Some spaces are frequented with a degree of ownership and familiarity with the surroundings, such as workplaces, while others, such as buses or metros, are frequented but with more transitory crowds. For girls and young women to make a transition from school to work, accessing opportunities, resources, and spaces that nurture their capabilities is extremely difficult in this fear-controlled public environment. This is well captured in an IDI with a woman participant working as a corporate manager:

> I think predominantly because you are born into the female gender, so life is effectively a little chessboard of risk and not risk. Because every single day

[6] The protocol of the studies ensures confidentiality of any identifiable information such as name, address (in the event the individual would like to be interviewed at home), place of work, etc. Therefore, no names have been used in this paper. The respondents have signed and authorized informed consent forms before the interview.

> when you step out, at least in our country (India), you are constantly on guard, whether you get into an elevator with a stranger who is a man or whether you get into an auto or a car. You are effectively always assessing your risk in that sense.

Navigating Violent Realities

In India, notions of shame, modesty, and honour remain the dominant concepts in public discourse for justifying sexual assaults on women (Verma, Seth, & Subramanium, 2013). This also adds to the trend of gross underreporting of violent incidents with respect to SGBVAW, along with institutional bias in registering cases by police and lack of swift justice mechanisms. Even where police are available, they may be uncooperative (Nafsarjan Trust, Fedo, & The International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2013). So in a nutshell, in a scenario when more severe instances of sexual assault go under- or unreported, there is little likelihood of resorting to systemic mechanisms for "normalized" instances of violence. The following statements further indicate women's disposition towards this violence that helps them navigate it:

> All of them said this is common in workplace and almost all girl go through these kind of situations, it is better to become strong and learn how to deal these situations and you can't quit job because of these incidents (sari lakiyon ko yahi face karna padta hai, to apne aap strong hona padta hai- All girls have to face this, so we have to be strong). (IDI with woman participant working as a salesperson, Delhi)
>
> If we keep a check on our body language, gesture, posture, attire, personality, volume of speech then no one can dare wrong us". (IDI with woman participant working as a salesperson)
>
> There is a lack of support for vulnerable women in these sectors and it is intentional— the use of gender violence to discipline workers. So, it is not as if a sexual harassment case took place, XYZ supervisor did it. These are not one-off incidents that occur at an individual level. You can see that these are part of management style in disciplining workers. (KII with a labour union activist [livelihoods study])
>
> You will find women shifting jobs across sectors for a variety of reason, one is personal life based situation like care work and the other one is extremely dominated gender based violence that are the part of industrial relations in

this (manufacturing/factory workers) sector. (KII with expert on labour relations [livelihoods study])

This troubled reality, this routine experience of violence in these divided public spaces including the workplace, becomes part of women's ensemble of an ever increasing burden that they "have to overcome" and "become strong" to face to keep open their possibilities of working.

Demarcation of Safe and Unsafe

In public places, women perceive danger from certain people but also in certain spaces and times. Hence, it is least surprising that women plan the roads and alleys of their route and the timing of public transports such as bus, metro, and last-mile services to avoid being a victim of any potential violation, in addition to choosing what to wear, who to accompany, and at what time. "Safety emerged as the primary explanation for the administrators to restrict women's participation in some services and trades" (KII with a representative of an online platform-based service provider, exploring why certain trades are dominated by women versus others). Similarly, a program manager of an adolescent's empowerment program remarked on why girls from smaller towns or villages tend to drop out once they attain puberty or complete schooling only until the level available in their immediate vicinity: "They [community members] fear misconduct with girls if they allow girls to go for higher studies."

This is echoed by a group of adolescent girls while reflecting on barriers for girls to continue education. "Improper transport facilities are one of the reasons [due to which girls stop their education]" (FGD with adolescent girls). Another program manager of a large adolescent girls' program in rural Rajasthan shared the complexities of negotiating more freedom and paid work for girls:

> The biggest concern of parents is what sort of environment they will get in the place they go to work (if they do), whether it will be safe even in computer centers. There is a 9 month course where we train them in all spheres- how to negotiate, their self-confidence, how to keep a trust (pauses) keep trust,… because nowadays there is so much scam of coaxing and luring ("behelena-phuslana"). Even while they think they (girls) are getting into serious relationships [romantic] one must be careful. I also conduct self-defense training to provide them (girls) with tools for self-protection.

"Skilling is in demand, but women and families are still averse to women being in public interactions, in jobs where women will need to be in the public domain," according to a KII with coordinator of a coalition of civil society organizations working on gender-based discrimination. Preserving the safety of women is thus simply a rhetorical device that has put them at a disadvantage at different stages of their lives, ultimately, amongst many things, culminating in their decline in the labour market as well.

Sharing and Reporting of Violence

While discussing the spatial dimensions of violence, the participants were also asked if they expressed or shared about the incidents to either resolve them or simply to share and unburden themselves. Some of the responses were as follows: "Till now I didn't discuss my problems with family members because they also get disturbed along with me" (IDI with a woman participant working as a data operator). Another woman working as a salesperson said, "When I couldn't understand how to deal with such a situation [of harassment] then I analyze the matter thoroughly and discuss with my close friends whether the particular thought is correct or I have some kind of misconception."

The issues around sharing and reporting of violence are compounded by the stigma associated with the victim in incidents of violence, social norms which circle back to the protectionist attitudes within male socialization patterns to include an element of ownership and control over women. This pattern of ownership permeates all relationships between men and women, such as between a brother and sister, or a father and daughter, and at a later stage, between husband and wife. In all these relationships, women become pawns in the maintenance of family honour. There is a breakdown of trust in confiding and discussing SGBVAW, especially within families because it may result in pressures to quit working at the behest of preserving "honour":

> There have been few instances where I have not felt comfortable where a co-worker has looked at me in like a very weird way. Stared at my chest or that sort of thing. Yes, in this organization and even in my previous organization obviously there was a POSH [Prevention of Sexual Harassment] committee. Having said that, I have heard of numerous instances where girls or women have been sexually harassed and no action has been taken against the so-called

> 'perpetrators'. But again, it is hearsay… And I think the biggest risk women face is, different from what men face, you [women] know that there is a fear of being taken advantage of at work, if you don't comply with what you are being asked of. Yeah those would be the risks really. (IDI with a woman participant working as a corporate manager)

After a woman participant working as a computer operator filed a harassment complaint against a senior male colleague, her employment was threatened and her role in the organization was nullified. "The in-charge handed over a letter to me saying 'We don't need a computer operator anymore'. This meant that they (the recruitment agency) could post me anywhere if there was a vacancy for a computer operator," she shared, indicating the precariousness that surrounds workers in contractual roles in the economy where the structures for protection of workers are weak or nearly missing, including in cases of sexual harassment.

However, participants made telling statements that allude to momentum generated about the position of power in different waves of the "Me too" movement in India and worldwide. "Girls should overcome these situations smartly; if one doesn't speak out then she can get frightened which will ultimately make her sit at home so, according to me it is very essential for girls to speak out" (IDI with a woman participant working as a salesperson). Women have also called for bystanders' intervention to shame the perpetrator, created an informal channel in the factories to resolve complaints of sexual harassment (Fear Wear Foundation, 2019); these peers and co-workers discuss instances of any violence which generates belongingness and solidarity. These are some of the ways in which working women have coped and continued to work.

Nevertheless, women's resilience and courage cannot be a substitute to weak institutionalized systems. This is encapsulated in the following statement by a study respondent who works as a salesperson in Delhi:

> If I file a police complaint and later after coming out (of custody), he along with his close aide will start torturing me, that's the fear. It is better that higher management should take care of such incidents and that's the best solution.

Discussion

Gender inequality is axiomatic to unequal power relations and our analysis strongly brings us back to this fundamental flaw in the existing arrangement of social relations. Within a heteronormative matrix of gender relations, this power relation is sustained through the persistence of a set of beliefs and ideologies. For example, men's roles as providers and protectors are idolized and women's roles as caregivers and honour of families and communities are strongly rewarded. In this paper we attempt to underscore these fundamental norms that act out in myriad ways in the context of women's constant fear of violence and their ability to participate in education, leisure, and paid work. While the acts, incidences, and experiences explored are in the public domain, they are often dealt with publicly but by the individual with whatever autonomy is available to them. It concurrently also points towards a conspicuous absence of systemic redressal of SGBVAW in public spaces, despite increasing attention to it in recent years. In the sections below, we discuss implications for policy, programming, and research, around the key themes on which we have reported our findings.

Fear of Violence

Large scale, state-led programmatic interventions such as Universalization of Elementary Education (Government of India, 2019)[7] and Skill India (Government of India, n.d.)[8] initiatives have led to a surge in women's and girls' access to public spaces; these initiatives aim to propel development by encouraging secondary and senior secondary education, as well as specific domains of skill development and training. As these opportunities expand, there is more to be learnt about the fear that persists when girls and women step outside the domestic limits, often after several negotiations within families. If SGBVAW remains ancillary within the theory of change of these policy decisions, the intended outcomes (increasing retention of schools in girls, skill development for more girls and women) may often remain unfulfilled (The United Nation Children's Fund, n.d.). Safety in school and skill centers cannot be separated from the goal of increasing participation of girls and women in these spheres. The goal of improving educational and employment

[7] Https://seshagun.gov.in/rte explains the Right to Education act (RtE) and its application in the public education domain. Retrieved on January 12, 2021.
[8] Https://www.msde.gov.in/ explains the programme to empower the youth of the country with skill sets which make them more employable. Retrieved on May 21, 2020.

outcomes is intricately tied to how safe they feel in accessing these opportunities. Similarly, withing the workforce, women's entry into employment is often distress driven, i.e., they are compelled to work to support themselves and their families (Chaudhary & Verick, 2014). This work is typically semi-skilled and low paid, and offers no growth, given how women and girls have been marginalized from training. Because of the resulting limited employability, their labour is reduced to a resource utilized to generate supplementary income, if any at all. The National Policy for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015) has a strong focus on gender mainstreaming of skill training, keeping in mind the skill gap for sustainable employability options for women. However, it also reiterates gendered assumptions of women's work, predominantly understood to be within the realm of the household and in caregiving and caretaking roles (Pal, Nanda, Anand & Sharma, 2020), which also emanates from a protectionist approach to respond to SGBVAW.

Navigating Violent Realities

It must be reiterated that gender performance in public spaces is constructed and maintained by a larger structure of harmful gender norms, which requires us to turn as well towards the socialization of boys and men in the changing context of women's rights and movements (Rao, 2012). Males have been the predominant occupants of public spaces and the outdoors and of decision-making roles in the private sphere, which creates a continuum of guarding mobility and asserting rules for women's access to resources, including spaces. This brings forth two main issues. Firstly, with mobility and access severely curtailed due to safety concerns, a vicious cycle of low capability is perpetuated for women, leading to further gender discrimination. This discrimination is prominently linked to their ability to participate in the work force. Secondly, empowerment of women and girls tends to disrupt the gender-status quo which may lead to "backlash", creating a new vicious cycle of SGBVAW in public spaces and curtailed mobility of women and girls (Dasra, 2019). These reactions are symptomatic of the disjunction between changing gender roles (and assertions associated with them) and the status quo in social norms which needs to be reconfigured and reinterpreted.

The intended benefits of developmental efforts and progressive policies are harder to achieve as women continue to live significant and productive years of their lives under the threat of sexual or physical harm. This calls for greater focus on enabling infrastructural and gender-equitable design innovations in enabling women's mobility as critical areas of intervention, including last mile connectivity, greater public information campaigns on violence response platforms and services, incentivization of institutions/employers to provide support, and sponsorship to enable girls and women to remain in education, skill development, and work. Therefore, the protectionist attitude that induces fear of public spaces as a response needs to be ruptured. In order to address the inequitable experiences of access to public spaces by women and men, we also propose evoking different roles for men as well as women in the public domain, such as co-passengers, co-workers or colleagues, employers or management staff, and creating new ways of interaction with women by promoting bystander intervention, workers unions, and so on. The power imbalance cannot be redressed only by stricter penalisation of men (PRS India, 2018)[9], labelling them as a threat, or restricting women from accessing opportunities to education and work. The cultural values associated with women who are now in new roles outside the household can be overwritten only by creating a new template of interaction between men and women. Moreover, stronger advocacy on non-punitive measures for cases of serious sexual assault may find an audience, if supported with attention to the structural nature of violence as well as transformative solutions to criminal justice.

Fear is not just a visceral emotion but is reified in spaces, people, actions, and gestures. This reality needs further demystification for effective advocacy, programming, and policy design. As an example, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2013 defined and allocated punishment to "offences such as use of unwelcome physical contact, words or gestures, demand or request for sexual favours, showing

[9] Indian law, specifically regarding the definition of rape, is not gender neutral. "In the case of rape of minors, according to the POCSO Act, the victim may either be male or female (and the offender could also be of either gender). However, in cases of adults under the IPC, rape is seen as an offence only if the offender is male and the victim is female. The Law Commission of India (2000) and the Justice Verma Committee (2013) had recommended that this definition of rape should be made gender neutral and should apply equally to both male and female victims. The Ordinance does not address this issue." (PRS India, 2018)

pornography against the will of a woman or making sexual remarks" into the provision of law following the infamous gruesome rape case in Delhi (Singh, 2019). However, we do not need to rely merely on events that occupy headlines, sensationalizing and arousing public sentiment for justice to create checks and balances not only in law but also within the ecosystem of women at a micro, meso, and macro level (Terry, 2014). The need to generate evidence and address SGBVAW in public spaces, in the context of normalization as described in the results section, has resulted in increased commitment from development actors and governments. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda solidifies global commitments to ending violence in SDG 5 and SDG 11, specifically addressing sexual violence in public spaces. Gendering the Smart Cities research (Datta, n.d.) presented digital stories of mobility and safety as curated by young women living in urban peripheries, posing questions of gender inclusiveness in the concept of smart cities project in India. ICRW's baseline study as part of the Delhi Safe Cities consortium in 2011 was one of the first systematic household surveys (United Nations Women & International Center for Research on Women, 2013) to demonstrate key benchmark indicators to establish perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of women and men on violence in public spaces in India. Several organizations such as Safetipin are using digital platforms to audit the safety of physical spaces in the cities, thus utilizing social experiences to create a gendered safety map of spaces in cities (Shah & Raman, 2019).

Emerging evidence suggests key gaps in understanding what works to address SGBVAW in public spaces. An evaluation of Safe Cities Initiative (SCI) in 250 urban slums across four cities in Madhya Pradesh (Bhopal, Gwalior, Indore and Jabalpur) (Holden, Humphreys, Husain, Khan & Lindsey, 2016) highlights the importance of ensuring partner agencies have sufficient VAWG expertise and that field staff have the capacity and support in VAWG prevention programming to model gender-responsive behaviors and motivate and support communities to tackle such instances.

A good estimate is presented in a study conducted by ICRW and UN Women in the aftermath of the Nirbhaya rape case in New Delhi in 2012, where nearly 73% respondents say that women and girls face sexual violence in their own neighbourhoods. Streets were reported to be the most unsafe (80%), followed by

markets (50%), parks (47%), and bus stops (37%). Moreover, a staggering 63% felt fearful when they went out alone after dark and 21% did not venture out alone at all (United Nations Women & International Center for Research on Women, 2013). Therefore, going outside to work causes considerable effort for women and this is especially true for those who are dependent on public transportation due to issues of affordability or due to access to private vehicles being reserved for male members of the family (Shah & Raman, 2019).

The violence inflicted is not necessarily a direct form of physical or sexual aggression, but it is a continuous presence of threat, insecurity, and harm. Sexual harassment as a tool to discipline women workers in workplaces is a convoluted use of power where supervisors can exploit workers by subjugating their gender. As narrated by several respondents in both the data sets, the concern for safety often amounts to curtailment of rights and freedom of women to education, skill development, or choices of work in many nuanced ways and over a period of time beginning in early adolescence. Women's already limited labour force participation and the declining trend in participation is a cascading problem that begins with their limited access to education imbued with fear of violence, but their fate is often determined by male decision makers.

Additional Burdens

Some of the results have indicated the disposition of women to develop the resilience to "overcome" situations or not "invite" attention. These necessities unfairly burden women. They carry a corrective undertone which applies to the behavior of the self (Basile, Smith, Breiding, Black, & Mahendra, 2014). This resilience and self-monitoring must be inculcated and practiced by women to continue accessing schools and work and to fulfil their aspiration as working women safely. This mode of self-monitoring and auto-correction is part of a cultural legacy that can be traced to the confining forces that act on women when they are socialized to access public space as young girls. Their bodies must be clad in a certain way and their manner of walking, sitting, and seeing must appear as tamed and trained to be behaviorally confined (Krishnan, 2014). These are steps taken to minimizing their presence when they are "outside". As girls transition into new stages of their life, these steps are plastered with new ways of "confinement" when they desire to obtain

training, skills, or work. This confinement marginalizes women's agency, mobility, and control over their decisions. They are often offered rides to work or escorted home by a male family member after work. There are additional costs for this lack of independent mobility for working women which need to be factored in their decision to work. Alternatively, they may also choose to work closer to home to minimize exposure to unknown public spaces. Therefore, women often choose a place of work that is within a zone of familiarity, a local, relatively known and safe environment. Women's decisions to work are not only a function of their skills and abilities but also are often based on an assurance of their safety.

Closely related to these coping strategies to protect themselves, women often self-impose traditional values on themselves and internalize a way of life that limits their freedom primarily because of its convenience and acceptability. For example, women have imbibed the burden of protecting themselves as an internal value system by not venturing out too late, associating high moral worth to certain styles of clothing, and wearing markers of being married to ward off any unwanted attention from strangers.

Long-stated theories hold that gender is a social construction and the female body is perceived to be embodied; it is clear that public space becomes one of the sites where gender is constructed and where female bodies are visible, deciphered, read, and violated, forcing women to intuitively surveil themselves and their desires.

This troubled reality, this routine experience of violence in these public spaces divided along gender lines, including the workplace, becomes part of women's ever increasing burdens that they "have to overcome" and "become strong" to face to keep their possibilities of working open

Limitations of this Paper

- As the studies did not primarily delve into the question of SGBVAW as a research objective, we have limited data to share. But this theme has underscored the responses of all respondents and thus merits a deeper analysis. We have attempted to extract some of the subtexts and give them a form, which should help us in engaging with SGBVAW in the design of intervention programmes and in conceptualizing their evolution in the expansion of digital and public spaces.
- Synthesis of qualitative narratives from separate data sets is challenging because of the issue of compatibility. The two differences are the location of the two studies and the age groups. The study site for the learning review was a mix of rural and urban in eight different Indian states while that for the livelihood study was Delhi NCR. The primary respondent group for the learning review was adolescent girls and boys working in programmes with different adolescent programming organizations in these eight states and that for the livelihood study was working women above the age of 18 years. These differences, however, gave us an advantage in terms of weaving together different experiences of SGBVAW at different life stages of these women and girls in different areas of India.
- Both the studies dive into experiences of girls and women within the heteronormative matrix of gender. The questions and analytical lens of the study did not consider the realities of other gender and sexual identities which deserve attention when we are discussing a holistic approach to violence and fear. SGBVAW in India is also caste or community based where women's bodies are sites of assertion of power. We have not discussed this issue in this paper because it has not emerged from the data, but we acknowledge that the existing marginalization of some castes or community groups prevents them from voicing fears or experiences of this nature. This specific dimension of violence warrants research to study it closely with adequate steps to ensure confidentiality of information and participants.

Conclusion

The appeal to make public spaces, public transport, and workplaces less discriminatory to women is an appeal to alter the cultural make-up of roles that are imposed and expected of women and to apply these changes in all segments of the ecological model (individual, family, community, and societal). It is an appeal for a change in the social order. For women to be breadwinners and carve a place for themselves in schools, playgrounds, metros, local trains, and workplaces, we must turn towards undoing the stereotypes of gender roles, destigmatize sexuality, and create more safe spaces following the same ecological approach. The experiences of violence or the fear of violence which was discussed above is a sensory experience which does not always identify a particular perpetrator yet casts an overarching suspicion on all men.

But these sensory experiences have forms—leering, stalking, lewd comments, dark alleys, lack of public transport, broken locks in public toilets, and so on which need to be turned into evidence. Similarly, the resolution to ensure safety does not end with creating a stricter regime of punishment for perpetrators because of the repetitive and pervasive nature of the problem. This change requires a more systematic engagement that creates a healthy form of communication and interaction that does not rest on unequal power relations. This goal may be ambitious but as the paper has tried to breakdown the elements that build fear, it points us, amongst other things, toward addressing the unequal power relation that surrounds us all.

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Combatting Gender Based Violence in Pakistan through Feminist Edutainment Television

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Abstract

The Urdu serial drama first appeared on Pakistani state-controlled broadcast television in 1960. Over the years, the serial drama format and content has undergone significant changes, but one thing has remained constant: its popularity with female audiences. This article examines how institutional changes have altered the thematic content of these texts to include topics such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and rape. Using the case study of the drama serial *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* (2017), I explore how these serials dramas can loosely be considered Feminist Edutainment (FE), a neologism that intentionally recalls the form of Entertainment Education (EE) associated with Miguel Sabido's work on Mexican television with an educational remit. I draw on my ethnographic research to argue that contemporary serial dramas persist in engaging women in the domestic reception space and in doing so provide Pakistani women with useful tools to combat direct acts of violence such as sexual assault and rape. By creating points of identification, these serial dramas help women negotiate various identities and by implicitly questioning patriarchal structures, including the culture of honour and gender roles, these serial dramas further help women deconstruct and resist underlying notions of cultural violence.

Key Words: Urdu, drama serials, serials, sexual abuse, Entertainment Education (EE), Feminist Edutainment (FE), Pakistan, Pakistani television, Gender-based Violence (GBV), zanaana, televisual commons, enter-educate, Pakistani drama serials, Pakistani women.

Gender Based Violence in Pakistan – A Tripartite Model

According to a poll conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation in 2018, Pakistan ranked as the 6th most dangerous country for women and the 7th in relation to sexual violence and harassment, which includes domestic rape, lack of access to justice in rape cases, sexual harassment, and coercion into sex as a form of corruption. Pakistan also ranked 5th in relation to non-sexual violence against women, which includes conflict-related violence and domestic, physical, and mental abuse. These frightening statistics reflect Galtung's (1990) tripartite model of gendered violence. According to Galtung, there are three forms of violence. The first form is direct violence and includes physical, emotional, or sexual acts of aggression, which in this case would include domestic violence, intimate partner violence, sexual abuse/harassment, and rape. The second form is indirect or structural violence, which in the case of Pakistan can be seen as emerging from governmental institutions and the law. The third form is what Galtungcalls cultural violence, which he defines as relatively permanent aspects of a culture that support, encourage, generate, or legitimize either direct or indirect violence. Galtung further differentiates between direct violence, which he describes as a discrete 'event', and structural violence, which he states is a 'process' marked by the ebb and flow of institutional reform (1990, p. 294). Cultural violence, in contrast, covers the more or less permanent and unchanging aspects of the culture within which direct violence occurs and which also allows patterns of indirect violence to thrive. Galtung gives religion, ideology, language, and art, as well as the empirical and formal sciences, as some of the permanent aspects of a national culture that can become the context within which direct or structural violence may take place (Galtung, 1990). Interestingly, for my purposes, Galtung does not mention media or, more specifically, television.

Like Galtung, I am interested in the cultural support given to various forms of gender- based violence, particularly in Pakistan. Direct acts of violence such as sexual abuse and rape are easily recognizable but can also be seen as symptoms of a larger cultural disease that normalizes violence against women through notions of honour, gender hierarchies, and objectification. These notions are often derived through larger patriarchal structures that gain legitimacy through religion. Previous work on domestic violence in Pakistan (Kidwai, 2001) demonstrates that the patriarchal structure of the

family, the system of arranged marriage, and the concept of honour enables violence against women while also making such violence hard to report or even talk about.

As Khan writes:

> Abuse… is marked by its deeply private, sometimes even intimate nature, and its dependence on beautiful things such as close relationships, trust, friendships, blood ties. To speak about abuse, unlike harassment, then, is to speak also of those things. To speak about abuse is to try and describe a cancer that lives within both the abused and the abuser… it can never happen to us, or even take place in our homes, there can be no narrative about them either. (2014, par.2)

Given this lack of a shared cultural narrative around abuse, it is my argument that Urdu-language television drama serials have recently started to fill a gap by educating audiences in ways that do not disrupt the patriarchal framework of domestic culture but eventually work towards solutions in law.

Feminist Edutainment Through Drama Serials

From its inception, one of the main objectives of television in Pakistan was education. As Nasir (2010) outlines in his history of Pakistani television, in 1958 the President of Pakistan, Mohammad Ayub Khan, set up the Education Reform Commission, which promoted the idea that television can be a useful medium to educate the masses in the service of social advancement and modernity. In this sense, the origin of television in Pakistan is not dissimilar to that in other third world countries. Notably, in Egypt television had a 'direct relationship to schooling… [U]nder a mandate to educate and inform, Nasser's government invested in television' (Abu-Lughod & Carter, 2004, p.10). The Urdu serial drama in particular can be traced back to Urdu theatre in the subcontinent. It is difficult to track down exact dates for the first radio drama, but Alain Desoulieres, in constructing the historical evolution of Urdu theatre drama to radio and eventually to television, identifies that the first radio drama in Urdu was broadcast in October 1937. Ten years prior to this, Ram Babu Saksena spoke about the potential of Urdu theatre drama to bring change in society:

> The Urdu dramatic literature has a value of its own and with the passage of time it will develop and become more rich and important…. Already Urdu drama has shown signs of vigorous growth and development. Men of light and leading will

> surely recognise in it a powerful instrument for the uplift of the people and the next wave of dramatic composition is likely to be historico-political even as it has been in Persia, one of the most backward countries from the dramatic standpoint. (Saksena, cited in Desoulieres, 1999, p. 57)

To be sure Saskena was speaking of Urdu theatre drama and could not have reasonably foreseen its expansion into radio and television but, as Desoulieres rightly points out, the Urdu serial drama on television eventually fulfilled Saksena's prophecy. From the beginning, these television dramas drew inspiration from real-world events and thus incorporated 'social realities (emigration, the problems of the middle class in a consumer society, the consequences of rural exodus, urban poverty, etc.) that are specific to Pakistan (although in no way foreign to India)' (Desoulieres, 1999, p. 67). They were aimed at the 'uplift' of the people, as Saskena had suggested. Televised Urdu drama is thus the heir of Urdu theatre and can be squarely placed in the wider field of Urdu literature. This is one of the distinctions that can be made between the Urdu serial drama and Western soap operas, whose cultural heir is the nineteenth-century American genre of domestic fiction written by and for women (Gledhill, 1992).

The first drama serial aired on the third day of transmission, 28th November 1964, and the format continues to remain hugely popular among audiences. In 2020, for instance, a drama serial finale was screened in cinemas across the country, such was the degree of audience interest. In a country where religious and patriarchal structures often confine Pakistani women to the private sphere, the television drama serial is an easily accessible, culturally-shared narrative format. Previous research on the Urdu drama serial in the 1980s completed by Kothari (2005) puts forward the idea that Urdu drama serials are watched in a sociable space primarily occupied by women. She calls this space 'zanaana'; here women feel safe discussing the ideas and identities brought up through the dramatic form. Kothari also argues that these drama serials depict the lived experiences of Pakistani women in their myriad complexities, thereby creating both points of identification and escape. While I take my cue from Kothari's broad articulation of zanaana's meaning in the modern Pakistani context, I further develop the concept by linking it with the idea of the Women's Commons as articulated by Federici (2019), who suggests that a similar practice of female-centred activity can also be observed in the Western political tradition. Federici, like Kothari, imagines the female

commons less as a space than as a mode of production and a principle of social organisation.

Since the liberalisation of Pakistani media in 2002, several changes have taken place in the televisual landscape of Pakistan, which have led to serial dramas embracing issues that do not just concern women's lives in the domestic sphere but also tackle issues women face in the public sphere. As I will go on to demonstrate, some of these serial dramas have become sites that train women in how to discuss volatile or sensitive issues around gender and sexuality, both privately and publicly. Federici's work on the commons allows me to broaden Kothari's concept of the zanaana to include this new public discourse around gender. Previously, drama serials airing on the state channel, Pakistan Television Network (PTV), reflected a general progressive social education imperative; however, increased commercial motivations have eclipsed or outflanked this ideal in interesting ways.

Elsewhere I have considered the emergence of drama serials funded through transnational aid in 'co-ordination with locally based non-governmental organisations and made by commercial television production houses as providers of much needed social educational content' (Malik, 2020). The idea to educate audiences through television is not new. In the 1970's Miguel Sabido pioneered the Sabido methodology in the development of telenovelas to further causes such as literacy and family planning. This form of television was initially called 'Entertainment with a proven social benefit' but was later simplified by Patrick Coleman to 'Entertainment-Education', which is currently the most commonly used term. Currently, Entertainment-Education (EE) is defined as 'a theory-based communication process for purposefully embedding educational and social issues in the creation, production, processing, and dissemination process of an entertainment program, in order to achieve desired individual, community, institutional, and societal changes among the intended media user population' (Wang & Singhal, 2009, p.272-3). In Pakistan EE has been used by the John Hopkins Centre for Communication Programs (JHCCP), in conjunction with the Center for Communication Programs Pakistan (CCPP), mainly for health-related educational initiatives. JHCCP has experimented with many dramatic forms but the drama serial (both on television and radio) has proven to be the most effective form 'to promote changes in health behaviour and to influence social norms that can reinforce such changes' (Piotrow & Fossard, 2003, p.43).

Feminist Edutainment (FE) entered the Pakistani market in 2013. FE differs from its counterpart EE in its focus on gendered inequality and violence targeted at women. The most recent FE initiative, *Udaari*, tackled child sexual abuse in 2016. It was produced by Kashf Foundation, a non-profit microfinance institution aimed at enhancing Pakistani women's economic role. *Udaari's* success, at least as measured by Television Rating Points (TRPs) and the conversations it generated in the media, became a commercial motivator for other commercial channels and production houses to explore content on gendered violence. Commercially motivated initiatives, like *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* which I consider here, *loosely* follow the FE model, but the process of development differs in crucial ways that are worth exploring.

Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila – Exploring the Edutainment Motive

Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila is an Urdu language serial drama that ran on the channel HUM TV from 8 November 2017 to 25 April 2018. The show had a total of 25 episodes, with one episode playing Wednesday night every week. The serial drama was promoted and spoken about by those involved in its production (the writer, the director, the actors) as raising awareness about sexual abuse against women; this educational motive behind the serial pairs well with the objectives of FE. The serial is also a feminist initiative in as much as it was produced and written by women. The serial was directed by Kashif Nisar, who purportedly decided to take on the project because he has two young daughters and wanted to educate his daughters about the insidious ways child sexual abuse can go unnoticed. He disclosed this motive on HUM TV's morning show Jago Pakistan on 15 November 2017, a week after the airing of the first episode. Morning TV shows like Jago Pakistan are a way to garner publicity for the serial and to introduce the serial to female audiences in particular, who are the target audience for morning shows. On this morning show, HUM TV had invited Sarim Burney to reinforce the importance of the educational motive behind *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila*. Sarim Burney is the founder of Sarim Burney Welfare Trust International, a non-profit trust that provides shelter, legal aid, and financial assistance to women, children, and less privileged members of Pakistani society. By referring within the interview to multiple real cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by family members, currently seeking shelter and advice at the organisation, Sarim Burney highlighted the need for education and awareness on the matter that *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* was tackling.

While everyone associated with the serial highlighted the issue of child sexual abuse, it became clear from my conversation with Bee Gul, writer of the serial, that *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* is about more than just this topic. Serials written by Bee Gul have always been about 'social issues' that concern women in Pakistani society. However, as she told me, in the past she has concentrated her attention on such issues as emotional abuse or gender roles, which she suggests are normalised in our society, and that's why she finds it important to write about them. She went on to tell me that direct forms of violence are 'tangible' but emotional abuse is more insidious and invisible. *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila*, which tackles sexual abuse, is a departure from her previous work because it is a 'loud' social issue. When Gul was approached by producers at HUM TV to write for *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila*, she initially refused. She told me that she was reluctant to write about sexual abuse, having seen its previous sensationalised treatment by other producers and directors.

Besides, she was involved in another project at the time. But the channel assured her that she could handle the sensitive subject matter in a manner that she was comfortable with and she began to feel a social responsibility to take on the project. However, once the channel received her script, it was labelled 'too bold' by the company and shelved.

In 2017, something changed, and the production company brought the script back to the table for production. This change can be traced back to the fact that every year various channels produce an internal graph trying to gauge the 'pulse' of the audience and, as Gul disclosed to me, in 2017 they assessed that 'the time was right' to produce *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila*, since sexual abuse was trending. *Udaari* (2016), the FE serial drama I refer to above, did well in TRP ratings and, while it is difficult to directly link the 'trending' status of sexual abuse to the production of further serials on the matter, it is hard to deny that as measured through ratings there is definitely a market for serials about sexual abuse. For her part Bee Gul was less concerned with sexual abuse as audience-bait and more concerned with the underlying conditions that make the abuse possible in the first place.

> I want to change the culture of silence and shame surrounding sexual abuse…. I also want to talk about the support system that enables this sort of crime. It doesn't happen in a vacuum and that's why it was important for me to talk about

> those underlying elements. We see women as only mothers, daughters and sisters and forget that they are also human beings with emotional, financial, social and physical needs and that's also something I wanted to highlight here. The last thing is that abuse often comes from within the family, from known family members who are pleasant and respectable like Joey [a character in the serial], yet we teach our children to be afraid of strangers. Abusers are not monsters, but they are amongst us and I wanted to expose this insidious natureof abuse from known social networks. (B. Gul personal communication, 26 Feb. 2020)

As Gul layered this understanding into the script, she encountered opposition from the channel producers, the director, and the actors. She also engaged in self-censorship and internal debate while reflecting on her own positionality in relation to the issue of social and familial complicity in abuse. *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* initially presents itself as a family drama, with Sila, a teenager, and her mother Sadia residing in a joint family set up with the eldest sister of the patriarch, Apa, taking the place of mother-in-law. Other members of the household are Sila's paternal uncle Saleem, his wife Nausheen and their daughter Zaynee; and Joey, the adopted son of the matriarch Apa. Sila's paternal aunt Tullo is a widow and lives close by with her son Raheel. The multi-storeyed house in which this family resides is called Noor Manzil, which literally means 'light' or 'purity-filled', but ironically this safe haven of a home is where Sadia and her daughter Sila are subjected to abuse. Sadia's husband and Sila's dad, Sikander, lives in Canada, and Sila's brother Hatim is in a boarding school; the absence of a male protector has made the mother-daughter duo emotionally dependent on their in-laws.

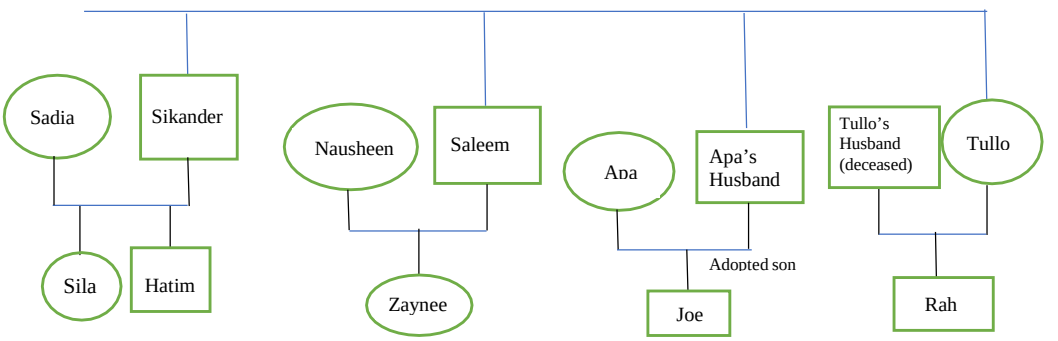

Figure 1: Genogram of the family relationships in Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila.

From the outside, everything seems ideal: in Noor Manzil, Sadia and her daughter Sila are being cared for by their extended family; close by, Tullo and her son Raheel also find considerable emotional support from living close to their family. On a closer look, however, Sadia's teary eyes, Sila's jumpy demeanour, Zaynee's cautious remarks, and Joey's leers all point to something simmering beneath the surface. The central plot of the drama revolves around Joey abusing Sila and her mother Sadia, both of whom are paralysed into silence due to fear and shame. The sexual abuse simmers just below the surface and there are no conversations about it; it only manifests itself in Sila as panicked fright and in Sadia's case as a river of tears. It is made abundantly clear that Sila will not be believed if she speaks out. Even when she understandably reacts to Joey's standing at her bedside in the middle of the night by crying out in panic, he turns it around on her, attributing her cries to mental instability. Sila's mother Sadia is the only one who understands what Sila is going through, having been through it herself, but her inability to do anything about it causes a very tense mother-daughter dynamic. It is later revealed that Joey emotionally manipulated and raped Sadia and it is implied that her son Hatim is the outcome of that rape. Sadia feels a deep sense of shame over the incident and partially blames herself.

Reflecting on the situation elaborated by this plot, one of the reviewers of *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* expresses the thematic crux in a nutshell: 'In a societal setup where family comes first, last and forever, how can one report a family member? How does one walk away from family?' (Desi Rants N Raves, 2017, par.3). The serial drama had considerable difficulty in the pre-production phase, but the challenges did not end there. *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* faced commercial pressure because of low ratings in tandem with censorial pressure as the channel received multiple notices from the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) responding to public complaints that the content of the serial drama was making them 'uncomfortable'. Things changed a few weeks later when the serial drama started doing well in ratings. Interestingly, this upturn in ratings coincided with news of the murder of Zainab Ansari, a 6-year-old Pakistani girl who was abducted on her way to a Quran recital on 4 January 2018. Five days later, her dead body was found with visible marks of torture on her face and evidence that she had been raped, and possibly sodomised, all of which was reported in the national and international media.

This tragic incident caused widespread outrage in Pakistan with large-scale protests calling for justice. Gul believes that these events underscored the social relevance of the serial and connects the tragedy and its coverage to the fact that they never received any more notices of complaint from PEMRA. In the Zainab case, the perpetrator was in receipt of information known only to familiars and he was quickly apprehended, tried, and sentenced to death. It should be acknowledged, however, that most sexual abuse cases in Pakistan are not taken to court. The resolution of *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* is in keeping with this fact. Creatively speaking, the serial was aiming for realism in this space, not sensationalism. When the abuse is finally discovered within the family, Joey receives a slap from Apa and is shunned from the house. When I asked Bee Gul about this ending, she thanked me because this topic is something she has wanted to address:

> I was talking about a middle-class family where honour is everything. When their male relative or someone from within the family is found guilty of such abuse and violence against women, in that moment all they care about is safeguarding their honour. They will never take it to the court. I couldn't see my women going to court, it wasn't relatable. As a society, we are not there. I'm pushing the envelope by saying, at the very least you can kick these men out of your house, out of your family because as we know, most families don't even do that. I also really wanted Joey to be around, I wanted him to be healthy and close by so as to say, these men still exist. I'm sorry to say that our courts, our families and our law doesn't provide women with any protection. So, my resolution had to be, women need to be aware that these men exist and protect themselves. These men will lurk, as in the serial drama, right behind the door, and women need to know this, parents need to know this. (B. Gul personal communication, 26 Feb. 2020)

Watching this serial drama with my participant family (details provided in the next section), was not always easy but it ultimately generated guarded but nuanced conversations that highlighted our various perspectives on these fraught matters.

Assessing the impact of serial dramas is always difficult, especially beyond the terms set by ratings. *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* eventually did very well in terms of TRPs and won multiple industry awards: LUX Style award for Best Director (Kashif Nisar), Best

TV Writer (Bee Gul), and Best TV Actor (Noman Ijaz). Both the lead actors, Noman Ijaz, who played Joey, and Yumna Zaidi, who played Sila, received Best Actor awards from HUM Awards. Impact can perhaps also be assessed by the fact that multiple women reached out to Bee Gul via Facebook after watching the serial drama. Some of these women were victims of abuse, some were mothers of victims. All of them shared personal stories of abuse. Bee Gul also describes moments when people sought her out in public and thanked her for writing about abuse. The participant observation study that follows sits somewhere between these objective and subjective measures of impact.

Measuring Impact Through Audience Reception

It is my contention that, in the absence of legal structures to sufficiently protect women, the feminized space in which these serials are watched provides catharsis, relief, community, and support to their largely female audiences. While those involved in the development and production of these television shows might not be clear about their feminist edutainment value, it is important to note that women are not passive recipients of these texts. Women engage with the themes that are brought out by these drama serials and decode them according to their own lived experiences. Certainly, my participant observation study revealed that these drama serials create discussion and allow women to reflect on their own lives. In this section I want to highlight how women transact the knowledges brought forth by these drama serials through the use of observational vignettes.

I watched *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* with a middle-class family residing in Lahore, Pakistan. The family was recruited through extended social networks. The primary participants were Farhat (50s), her daughter-in-law Komal (30s), and their maid Ariana (late teens)[10]. Farhat's daughter-in-law Komal was UK-born and educated, though of Eastern European descent. This was Komal's first time visiting Pakistan, but it became clear in our conversations that she had some preconceived notions about Pakistani culture. I watched the entire drama serial with Farhat and Ariana. Komal joined us four weeks into our serial viewing as the fifth episode went to air. Komal's husband was also present for parts of the viewing.

[10] All participants names have been anonymised.

Ethnographic research is a unique way to evaluate the use of popular television to influence perceptions on sexual violence and other social issues. This methodology allows for intimate observation of the participants but provides a very small sample size. Prior to conducting participant observations, participant information sheets were drawn out and consent was taken from participants. Participants agreed to be observed and were not paid for their time. They did receive some gifts, which is customary. All participant names have been anonymised.

Week 1-7

The serial begins with a scene of abandoned festivities as gathered from the musical instruments, flowers, and methai (Pakistani sweets) strewn across the floor. The occasion, as we later find out, is Sila's engagement to her cousin Raheel. The camera pans to a girl sleeping on her side as a man in a black shalwar kameez approaches her. He is holding a corsage and mauling the tiny flowers. The man removes a lock of hair from the girl's sleeping face. She wakes and screams in horror. The man is Joey and the girl is Sila. The scene cuts to an exterior shot and we see a large communal house as one by one lights come as the household is awakened by Sila's scream. Sila's mother Sadia comes and stands in front of her daughter like a human shield but Sila pushes her away with contempt. The tension between mother and daughter is tangible.

Apa, the matriarch of the family, also enters the room at which point Joey gestures to the thriller novel Sila was reading before bed as the cause of her screams. Farhat and I watched all of this in silence. In our initial few viewings, even when probed by me, Farhat was reluctant to put a label on the actions insinuated in the drama. The ethnographic notes I took at the time reveal the phrase 'denial'. Farhat's social glazing over of abuse was mirrored on screen as the characters that made up the household also ignored Sila's visceral reaction to the presence of her harasser Joey. For a long time, Farhat refused to address the elephant in the room. This might reflect our generational differences both as women and as watchers of television. When I finally suggested to her that perhaps Sila had reason to fear Joey as an abuser, she dismissed the idea summarily by saying that there was not 'enough evidence' to call it sexual abuse, as if the drama did not trade in sub textual information or nuance.

While *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* thematically pays attention to gender roles, the concept of honour, and the objectification of women as integral parts of patriarchal

Pakistani culture that enable violence against women, the series is designed specifically to expose the vulnerability of women to sexual abuse in joint family homes. In the situation depicted in the series, it is made clear from the outset that some women are more vulnerable than others because of the lack of a male protector in the house. This is something that is repeatedly brought up as both plot point and resolution. Sila's father, Sikander, lives in Canada and her brother Hatim is away at boarding school. That leaves only Sila and her mother Sadia in the communal home, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of Joey. Thus, the issue of male abuse of women is constantly counterpointed to the issue of male protection. Indeed, when the abuse becomes public, the main question is which man will take these two women into his protective custody. This is perhaps a natural corollary of only acknowledging women in roles of wives, sisters, and daughters.

Week 8 – 15

With time Farhat began to open up to me more and revealed that she was no stranger to the vulnerability a single woman feels without the 'protection' of a male guardian. Before marriage she was in the protection of her father and had made a seamless transition into marriage, but that changed when she divorced. The spouses separated in 2000 when Farhat's younger son was only 5 years old and Farhat frankly admits that was one of the reasons why she moved to the UK from Pakistan a year after her divorce. She considers herself lucky that her brother, who lived in UK at the time, invited her to come live with him. Leaving the country under the guardianship of her brother was a big win for Farhat at the time because she was experiencing two-fold harassment, in public places and from extended family contacts. She considers herself a strong woman, and I do not doubt it from the steely emotional armour she constantly wears even when talking about deeply hurtful experiences. 'Men think it's easy to get away with looking at you.' She falters as she says this and lowers her tone even though there is no one else present for this conversation. 'Or whatever their feelings are … you know?' (I nod). She makes this statement referring to the street harassment she experienced, even when married, when men would start tailing her car after seeing her driving alone. In these instances, she always felt secure knowing she hada man in the house who would protect her. This changed after the divorce, when she did not want to lead these men back to the place where she lived alone with her young sons. Farhat lives alone now but says she feels safe, as she's older. Farhat also described another

level of vulnerability, which was considerably more painful for her. In harrowing detail, she told me about phone calls she started to receive at odd hours during the night, with men hurling abuse at her or saying vulgar things which made her feel very unsafe. While Farhat claims that this harassment did not come from immediate family members, she felt it had to be from within known social networks who understood that she had recently divorced. She also told me that after her divorce she did not feel respected in social circles as a single woman in Pakistan. Upon her return to Pakistan, Farhat remarried and while she never explicitly stated to me that this marriage was for security, it was always implied.

Much of the portrayal of Sadia and Sila's vulnerability in the serial drama we were watching was also framed in terms of them needing physical protection against harassment. However, reading between the lines, there is the lingering question of why Sadia continues to stay with a husband who is far away, not meeting her physical or emotional needs. Perhaps she is financially dependent on him? This question was brought to the forefront in my discussions with Ariana, who dreams of one day having ahusband who provides for her financially, so she does not have to be a domestic worker anymore. In her work on violence against women in Pakistan, Kidwai (2001) highlights how the 'emphasis on [women's] sexuality and their reproductive role leads to their seclusion and segregation within the domestic sphere' (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1988, p.30).

Kidwai goes on to adds that 'it is in the spirit of sexual segregation that Pakistani women have traditionally been denied access to education, vocation, and other modes of attaining self-determination' (2001, p. 95). I highlight this statement in relation to Ariana's situation. Ariana comes from the lower socio-economic class and, even though her father works, it is not enough to make ends meet. Ariana has been denied education because her family does not have the means to send her to school and because they do not see education as necessary to prepare her for the eventual role of a mother. Ariana told me that by sending her to work at Farhat's house, her parents hope she will learn basic cooking skills so that one day she can cook for her children and husband's family. Even though Ariana works and earns money, this is not empowering for her but simply framed as obtaining skills necessary for her destined maternal role. Ariana has five siblings, and her two brothers are employed as an apprentice tailor and apprentice mechanic. As this suggests, the focus is on their learning technical skills that will land

them jobs and eventually allow them to provide for their families. It is in this insidious way that gender roles and financial conditions deny Ariana the capacity to imagine, let alone plan, a future for herself outside of marriage. Ariana does not question her situation but seems to accept it as an inevitable truth. Considering this acceptance, it should not surprise the reader that it was with Ariana that I had the most maddening conversations about harassment and abuse.

Week 16 - 21

As I mentioned before, Ariana always sat on the floor as we watched television and eventually I felt welcome and comfortable enough to sit beside her. Ariana was also the most silent member of our viewing party. She would talk very openly with me when Farhat was not around but otherwise she would not voice her opinion unless I specifically asked her. One day, as I arrived early for our viewing, I found Ariana alone and it is then that the following conversation took place. Ariana understood what sexual harassment meant because she described it to me as a normal part of her life:

> Baji, I have to walk to work every day, I don't have money for a rickshaw. When I'm walking, sometimes men will pass comments. Sometimes if they are on a bike, they ride really close and physically touch my ass or grab my hand. What should I do? You know if I complain to my dad, he will just stop me from leaving the house … so I don't say anything.

This conversation with Ariana left me in a state of deep despair, especially because I had no solutions to offer her. It sometimes did feel that Ariana lived in a parallel universe to the one I was present in with Farhat and Komal. These two universes were separated by socio-economic class, but the serials we watched brought us together and prompted us to discuss gender roles and sexual abuse. The conversations that took place between Farhat and Komal were different from the conversations I had with Ariana but no less important. I give the following conversation between Farhat and her daughter-in-law Komal as a way of highlighting generational differences and Komal's perspective assomeone foreign to Pakistani culture.

> **Komal:** I feel like women, especially daughters, are treated as a burden in Pakistan. It's like a game of musical chairs where the woman is the parcel, and she is constantly being handed from one man to another.

Farhat: I don't think this is the case, we place a lot of important on having a family, it's not about daughters being a burden but acknowledging that their rightful place is with her husband and in their role as a mother.

Komal: I'm not opposed to having a family or being a mother (Komal is a new mother to an adorable baby boy), but why can't we recognize women as individuals on their own. Why are they always a man's responsibility?

Farhat: Because we are weak and need protection. When I was unhappy with my husband, my mother used to say to me, *jootey par bhi khana milay, tu khao.*

Once again Farhat frames the protection men provide women in terms of physical vulnerability but the final phrase she uses translates to 'even if you get served food on a shoe, you should take it.' This seems to imply that, as long as a husband is financially providing for you, you should stay. Perhaps Komal sees things differently because she has not been brought up in Pakistan, but it is interesting to note that she had no issue quitting her job and becoming a stay-at-home mother once she married.

Similar gender roles were portrayed on screen as Sila's younger brother Hatim visits. He is not only getting a better education than she is at his boarding school, but he's also served better food than Sila at the same dining table. After dinner, Sila is expected to pick up after her brother, even when Hatim himself insists on washing his plates. These gender roles and expectations are further highlighted through Joey and Nadia's relationship. The harasser Joey eventually gets married to a fiery young and outspoken woman named Nadia, who became Komal's, Ariana's, and my favourite character. Farhat did not take a liking to her. Through the relationship of Joey and Nadia and the powerful dialogue given to Nadia, the serial highlights the heavy burden put on women to satisfy the needs of others without any acknowledgment of their own. From the beginning Nadia refuses to participate in the feminine sphere by doing any household chores, which incurs a lot of disapproval from Apa on screen and from Farhat in our viewing space. Farhat and I had extensive conversations about gender roles and Farhat decisively told me that she did not like seeing men in the kitchen. 'It just doesn't become them.' Interestingly, Komal did not participate in this particular discussion until her husband joined her for a few weeks. I prompted Ariana on the matter as well, but she was not forthcoming in her opinions; when encouraged, she said she often does chores at home for her brothers out of love; she was always careful not to

contradict her employers. Ariana's tone of voice completely changed when she talked to me alone.

Then she was vivacious and chirpy, but in the presence of Farhat she was more subdued, and her tone was considerably lower. Another thing that I noticed was that in Farhat's presence, Ariana would take up a much smaller space, sitting huddled with her legs close to her chest or cross legged. But when we were alone, she would often lie on the floor and be less conscious of her bodily movements.

The television watching space was not only divided by class but also by the hierarchical nature of the family itself. When I watched the serial drama with Farhat and Komal, the mother-in-law always took precedence in expressing her opinion. Komal would always let Farhat speak first but she did not hesitate to disagree with Farhat and often a robust discussion would ensue as is evident above. I believe this is because Komal comes from a different tradition where disagreement does not mean disrespect. The dynamic between the two women changed dramatically when Komal was joined by her husband Sohaib. With him present it became clear that she felt empowered to talk more openly. In keeping with Farhat's status as the head of the household, at least in her husband's absence, she was always the most outspoken of the group and the first one to ask a question.

After Sohaib joined our viewing party, we had interesting conversations about domestic duties. Farhat was of the opinion that the 'modern' woman demands too much of her husband: he leaves his house daily to toil for the family and then, when he comes home, he has to attend to his wife's emotional needs. Farhat was dismayed to learn that Sohaib vacuums the home and helps in cleaning duties, although her disappointment was only visible on her face and never expressed verbally. In the drama serial we were watching, Apa cautions Joey to not become 'zunmureed,' which, loosely translated, refers to someone who is a slave to his wife. It was clear to me that Komal and Sohaib saw each other as equal partners in their marriage, and eventually Komal expressed to me that while she currently does not have a job outside the home, she does want to return to work at some stage. These conversations were directly elicited by the dramatic content of the serial; our long discussions about whether Sadia's fate would have been different if she could provide for herself and her family were laced with hope that none of us would ever have to face such a difficult situation. The stakes of the

situation were made clear by Farhat when she pointed out that Sadia leaving her husband was not an ideal solution. As a single mother who had experienced divorce, she knew that any deviation from the marital norm in Pakistan is punished in one way or another, a point that has been made in more scholarly terms by D. Kamal: 'Divorce is widely considered to be a western ideology. With honour being the backbone of all patriarchal relationships (in Pakistan), marital duties lie solely on women. Divorce is therefore seenas the shameful inability of women, not men, to fulfil their obligations. It is seen as the woman's inability to compromise, her lack of patience and her failure to adjust to the 'norms' of marital life' (Kamal, 2019).

Week 22-25

Sexual abuse is not something one ordinarily talks about in the Pakistani living room. Without *Dar Si Jaati Hai Sila* these conversations would not have happened. The serial took great pains to define sexual abuse in a broad context. The specific case portrayed in the serial drama is about recognising sexual abuse in situations where the perpetrators might be someone you trust or are supposed to trust. The serial drama does not limit itself to defining sexual abuse in such situations but delves into other situations as well. Komal and Farhat often disagreed about the definition of abuse and Farhat chalked this up to cultural differences. Farhat acknowledged that sexual abuse is prevalent, especially in inter-family dynamics, but cautioned that it needs to be dealt with sensitively because there are a lot of other factors involved besides the abuse.

> **Farhat:** Beta, there are different definitions of abuse in Pakistan as opposed to the UK… I mean imagine if your uncle comes and hugs you and you start yelling out its harassment, how awkward would that be?
>
> **Komal:** If my uncle is making me uncomfortable with his hug, holding me too tight or too long, I have every right to yell out, don't I?
>
> **Farhat:** (lowering her voice) Okay, okay, let's not discuss this in front of the child.

Implicit in this exchange is the knowledge that abuse takes place but publicly discussing it has pros and cons. Farhat's perspective on this matter changed significantly when the murder of Zainab was covered in the media and made frontline news internationally. Farhat, Komal, and even Ariana discussed the case at length for a few weeks during our viewings and Farhat admitted for the first time that things had

gone too far and perhaps there was a problem to be addressed publicly. We then embarked on discussions about justice and what can be done to rectify this seemingly endemic problem. In this we were simply mirroring the situation described in the dialogues uttered on screen by the characters.

As to providing for solutions to abuse, the serial drama disappointed. In terms of dealing with the harasser Joey, solutions like engaging the police were brought up and promptly shut down in favour of maintaining notions of respectability. At the end of the drama when the abuse is finally made known within the family, there is no recourse to the law. There is a suggestion of it from Apa, who's the one who had adopted Joey in the first place, but this is promptly shut down by the men of the family. Eventually, Joey receives a slap on his face from Apa and is banished from the house. Earlier, when sexual relations between Joey and Sadia are made public, it is assumed that they are consensual, and blame is placed squarely on Sadia. Sikander resorts to physical violence and beats his disgraced wife. It is not until Sila raises her voice and admits that she was also subjected to harassment from Joey that we see a little sympathy from the family directed at Sadia, who has been beaten black and blue.

All of my participants had a good understanding of what abuse meant before we watched the serial drama, but the serial drama allowed us to have conversations that deepened our shared understanding. It was clear through our discussions that when faced with abuse from within known networks, women are often powerless because they have no recourse to law but are bound by often contradictory notions of honour and familial obligation. In the last few minutes of the serial, Sila sits alone on the steps of a verandah, uncharacteristically smiling. Raheel, the cousin she had previously been engaged to, approaches her. Sila welcomes him but tells him, that for now, she is not interested in a relationship with him because she wants to build a relationship with herself. At this, Komal, Ariana, and I shared a smile.

Conclusion: A Way Forward

As previously mentioned, using television to educate audiences is not new but my research indicates that using this medium to educate women in patriarchal religious societies can be particularly helpful. These drama serials have now spilled on to the online sphere where they are constantly debated, critiqued, and marvelled at on Twitter and Facebook. My ethnographic research also suggests that the serials still manage to

hold the attention of women in the domestic sphere. These drama serials are extremely successful because, as Kothari (2005) notes, they represent gossip and depict verbal and nonverbal codes that are exclusive to women and that in a country with limited female literacy fostering this oral culture is key. Not surprisingly, the media streaming giant Netflix has picked up on the popularity of television in the country and its ability to generate conversations and Pakistan's first ever Netflix original is being broadcast the world over. The short film titled *Sitara: Let Girls Dream* is aimed at educating audiences about the dangers of child marriages (Lakhany, 2020). Lawyers and activists, such as Benazir Jatoi, point to the fact that in a country like Pakistan, laws protecting women are often not enough for grassroot change and that television can fill that gap by becoming a powerfulvehicle for progress (AFP, 2018). With more competitors for FE entering the market, there needs to be more research on how audiences interpret these themes to try to improve the content.

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Violence Against Women and Girls in Humanitarian Crisis: Learning from the 2015 Nepal Earthquake

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Abstract

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) often increases after disasters and humanitarian crises. This article presents evidence from Nepal, a country where notable progress has been made on gender equality, but where VAWG continues to be an endemic. The 2015 April earthquake in Nepal led to an increase in reporting of VAWG, and women and girls in camps and temporary shelters reported fear and insecurity instilled by risk of violence and lack of privacy. Grassroots responses to the earthquake showed how humanitarian aid, emergency health care, and local disaster responses can challenge VAWG while offering safe spaces for women and girls. Research since the earthquakes with activists and non-government organisations (NGOs) indicates how disaster response efforts face continuous challenges posed by VAWG. This article draws on interviews with grassroots activists and NGO staff in Nepal, and shares experiences and lessons learnt that can help in addressing, challenging, and minimising VAWG in emergency situations and humanitarian crisis.

This article is informed by thematic analysis of qualitative data from three separate studies, collected by employing semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and social media interaction with women and girls affected by the earthquake, women activists, and NGO staff.

Our research highlights a number of barriers to addressing VAWG, such as pre-existing vulnerabilities in low-income contexts, the breakdown of social/family networks, and lack of pre-crisis protection mechanisms. Further, our findings indicate that the cultural and socio-economic context influences women and girls' experiences of violence during humanitarian crises. Our findings emphasise the importance of taking

an intersectional and inclusive approach to ensure that all women, including the most vulnerable women and girls (those with disabilities, Dalits, older women, and single women) are included in prevention mechanisms, with a special focus on gender-based violence (GBV) risk assessment and protection interventions.

Based on our research in Nepal, we make recommendations to practitioners and policy makers for interventions which address VAWG in humanitarian crises.

Key Words: Violence against Women and Girls, Humanitarian Crisis, Nepal Earthquake, Gender-based Violence

Introduction

It is well documented that violence against women and girls (VAWG) increases in conflict and post-disaster situations (Bradshaw & Fordham, 2013; Chew & Ramdas, 2005; Global Fund for Women, 2015, Pittaway et al., 2007). The global prevalence of sexual violence against refugees or displaced women is estimated to be over 21.4%, suggesting that approximately one in five refugees or displaced women in complex humanitarian settings experience sexual violence (Vu et al., 2014). Hazards, disasters, and humanitarian crises such as tsunamis, landslides, earthquakes, and flooding—events that are highly prevalent in low-income countries—are indiscriminate in nature and have no regard for socio-economic hierarchy, religion, age, gender, disability, or caste (WHO, 2013; Bista et al., 2018). However, preparedness for disaster, its impact, and recovery from it can largely depend on the individual's pre-existing vulnerabilities and the efficiency in humanitarian relief distribution. Disasters and humanitarian crises impact some groups more than others; research has shown that in Nepal, as elsewhere, women and girls with disabilities, Dalit women, single women, and female heads of households, older women, and children separated from families or without families face certain risks (Fothergill & Squier, 2018; Standing, Parker & Bista, 2016). Ensuring the protection and well-being of women and children, according to the basic principles agreed upon by the international community through the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1981) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC (1990), is a critical human right and fundamental humanitarian concern. However, VAWG in humanitarian crisis continues to be a major issue with a range of long-lasting physical and mental health consequences (Campbell et al., 2002; Ellsberg et al., 2008; Vu et al., 2014).

Nepal suffered a catastrophic earthquake on 25 April 2015, followed by over 300 subsequent aftershocks, including one of magnitude 7.3 on 12 May (referred to as 'the earthquake' hereafter), which severely impacted 14 out of 75 districts of Nepal (Figure 1). The Government of Nepal (GoN) conducted a Post-Disaster Need Assessment (PDNA) and reported 8,790 deaths and more than 22,300 injuries; the lives of over eight million people, almost one-third of the population of Nepal, were affected by the earthquake (GoN, 2015). The impact was more devastating for women than men, as around 55% of casualties were reported to be female (GoN, 2015). The PDNA attributes the higher deaths of women and girls to the gendered roles that disproportionately assign indoor chores to females. The United Nations (UN) estimated that around 40,000 women were at immediate risk of gender-based violence in post-earthquake Nepal (Inter Cluster Gender Task Force, 2015), with reports of increased VAWG and an increased risk of trafficking across the border (CDPS, 2016). People living with disabilities were one of the disproportionately affected groups during and post-earthquake (Handicap International, 2016; WHO, 2015; CBM, 2016).

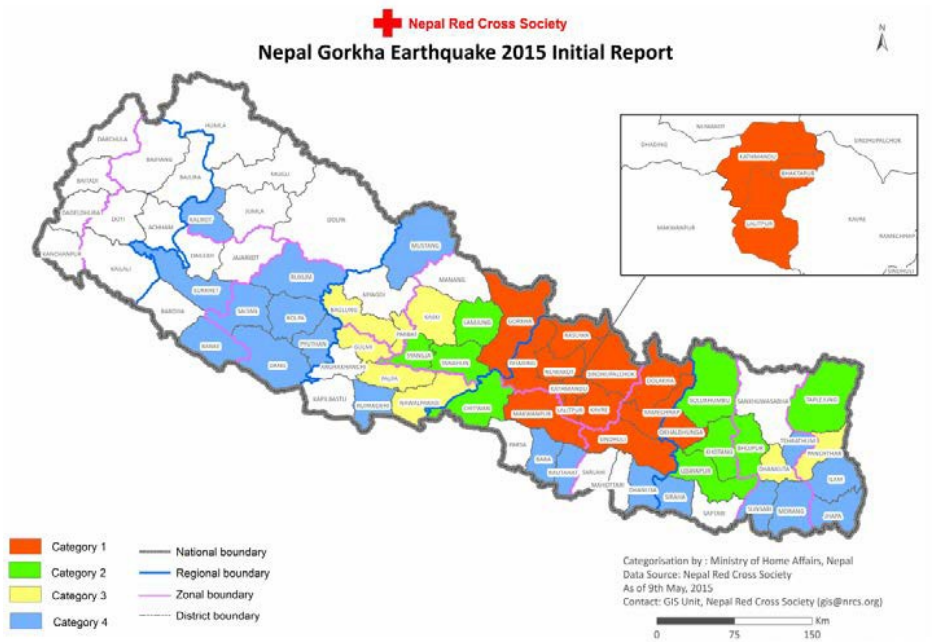

Figure 1. Category of earthquake affected districts. Source Nepal Red Cross Society 2015: https://reliefweb.int/map/nepal/nepal-gorkha-earthquake-2015-initial-report-9-may- 2015

Recently, there has been increased focus on questioning the stereotypical ways in which women and girls are viewed as 'victims' of disaster. This realisation has highlighted the need for socially constructed vulnerabilities to be more visible (Parida, 2019; Bergstrand et al., 2015). Through research and activism, humanitarian workers are now more sensitive to the need to take a more intersectional and broader perspective to ensure that issues such as sexual health and VAWG are included along with other priorities such as providing water, food, and shelter.

Despite the international attention on the impact of 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the intersectional impact of gender-based violence on marginalised groups has not been explored in detail. In particular, the risk of violence against women and girls with disabilities and their lived experiences of devastating disaster and experiences of recovery from it remain under-researched (Bista & Sharma, 2019).

Understanding VAWG during disasters and/or humanitarian crisis needs to be informed by the context of gender-based violence in any particular society in 'ordinary' times. Fisher (2010) argues that post-disaster VAWG is a manifestation of women's pre-existing vulnerability to violence, which is aggravated at times of disaster, intensifying existing social and gender-based inequalities. This article highlights the importance of taking an intersectional and inclusive approach to ensure that all women, including the most vulnerable women and girls with disabilities, Dalits, and single women are included in VAWG prevention mechanisms, with a special focus on GBV risk assessment and protection interventions.

Background

Violence against women and girls is a severe human rights violation and a substantial global health and wellbeing issue. Existing evidence from Bradshaw & Fordham (2013), Chew & Ramdas (2005), Global Fund for Women (2015), Pittaway et al. (2007), and many others strongly suggests that sexual violence increases in emergency situations. Violence against women and girls, especially rape and sexual violence against women and girls, has been associated with war and conflict throughout human history. Violence against women and girls impacts not only the individuals but families and wider communities. However, the reality of VAWG in emergencies is only recently getting the attention of the community of humanitarian actors (Marsh et al., 2006).

Grown and Gupta (2005) report that violence committed against women and girls kills more women globally than the deaths caused by road-traffic accidents and malaria combined. Vu et al. (2014) argue that preventing and responding to VAWG in emergencies remains one of the major challenges for the humanitarian sector. However, many experts such as Stark & Ager (2011) argue that the overall understanding of the issue remains inadequate.

For decades, Nepal has been characterised by relentless poverty, sluggish economic growth, and chronic gender inequality (Standing, Parker & Bista, 2016). The country is ranked 149th on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2019) and has a population of over 27.9 million of diverse socio-cultural, religious, and ethnic groups (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The ten-year-long civil war between 1996–2006 challenged Nepal's traditional social structure of caste and gender hierarchy. This created a new landscape for women and marginalised castes and ethnic groups and intensified their lobby for identity and equality (Parker et al. 2014; Standing, Parker & Bista, 2016). However, persisting poverty and exclusion on the base of gender, caste, and ethnicity remain unchallenged, especially in rural parts of Nepal.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2019) estimates that 25% of the female population aged 15 and older experiences physical and sexual violence from an intimate partner. This figure does not account for other forms of VAWG and/or lifetime non-partner sexual violence and therefore is highly under- representative of the actual figure. The National Demographic Health Survey of Nepal (Ministry of Health, Nepal; New ERA; & ICF, 2017) reports that around 66% of women who experience physical or sexual violence do not report it. United Nations experts report that, despite progress made in GBV laws after the earthquake in Nepal, available data indicates that VAWG was one of the leading causes for deaths of women in Nepal in 2017 (UNOHCHR, 2018).

The Post Disaster Needs Assessment (GoN, 2015) also predicted a much slower recovery from the impact of the earthquake for women and girls because of existing inequality, lack of economic resources and alternative livelihood opportunities, no or very little access to assets, and the burden of domestic duties. This may expose further risk of VAWG in the recovery phase and elevate the existing inequalities in the context of Nepal.

Additionally, it is equally important to consider the existing inequalities and services that exist in situ as these also impact the response to any disaster. For example, existing intersecting inequalities due to geographical location, income, caste, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality all impact gendered experiences. It is well documented that Nepali women's identities are intersectional with caste and ethnicity having a significant impact (Tamang, 2000) and therefore services need to address the diverse needs of all. There are a number of NGOs and government agencies working to address gender inequalities in Nepal and these came into play in post-earthquake in Nepal (Standing et al., 2017). In terms of support for VAWG, one-stop crisis management centres and community health workers serve as vital entry points for survivors of sexual violence (Marsh et al., 2006). This is also true in emergencies and humanitarian crises and it is important that these supports are included in the first response and that gender is addressed from the onset and not seen as an addition. It is also important for multiple agencies and sectors to work together due to the need for an interconnected response. This paper adds to the discourse surrounding GBV in humanitarian crises with insight from the Nepal earthquake and makes recommendations for ways in which GBV can be addressed in these situations.

Methods

This article is informed by thematic analysis of qualitative data from three separate studies, collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and social media interaction with women and girls who lived in temporary shelters, women activists, and NGO staff. All three studies included in this paper received institutional ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores University as well as ethical approval from the Nepal Health Research Council. We started following the impact and response documented in social media, particularly Facebook, in the wake of the earthquake. We subsequently conducted email/online, telephone, and face-to-face interviews (n=20) with NGO staff and key respondents between October 2015 and January 2016, using our established research connections with NGO officials working in the field of gender and development in Nepal. Email and social media interviews in particular have been documented to allow greater access to participants across time zones and geographical distances, giving participants flexibility to reflect and reply (Meho, 2006). Opdenakker (2006) reports the method as useful in contexts such as natural disasters, where it may not be feasible or safe for researchers to enter the field.

Key informants from Kathmandu Valley, one of the hardest hit regions, were selected using convenience sampling.

Two of the authors also undertook semi-structured interviews (n=40) and five focus group discussions, each with eight participants, with women and girls with disabilities from Kathmandu valley (n=16), Dhading (n=8), Sindhupalchok (n=8), and Gorkha (n=8). We recruited study participants using a snowball sampling technique. None of the participants in any of the study were paid or incentivised for taking part in the study.

We also reflect on the outcomes and insights gained in a one-day workshop held in Kathmandu in 2019. A total of 60 stakeholders (Figure 2) from various sectors attended the workshop which focused on developing a contextual, gender-sensitive, and disability-inclusive guideline for emergencies. During the workshop, several group discussions were conducted about the situation of violence against women and girls with disabilities in Nepal and how it can be prevented and addressed.

Representing Category	Total Participants	Female	Male
Government Agencies & LocalGovernment Representatives	10	4	6
Organizations of People with Disabilities	19	7	12
Other Civil Society Organizations (Incl. NGOs, INGOs & Academia)	13	10	3
Humanitarian Cluster leads/ Members	6	2	4
Professionals: Disaster Risk Reduction, Media and Medical	6	3	3
Emergency responders: Nepal Army, Armed Police and Nepal Police	6	0	6

Figure 2. Numbers and category of stakeholders engaged in the workshop.

All studies were conducted in the Nepali language, transcribed and translated into English. Translated data from all three studies were gathered and analysed using an inductive approach (Patton, 1990; Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013) within thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2013; Patton, 2002). In particular, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guidance for undertaking thematic analysis guided the data analysis. We identified five key themes: the rise in VAWG and trafficking of vulnerable girls; relief distribution and VAWG; the role of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in VAWG; menstruation as a neglected issue; and the double impact of violence and stigma on women and girls with disabilities.

Findings

Rise in VAWG and Trafficking of Vulnerable Girls

This study identifies that women and girls who were living in camps and temporary shelters, away from their own families and communities, were at heightened risk of VAWG. They reported feeling isolated, homeless, helpless, and exposed to violence and abuse. Many leading humanitarian agencies also have reported increases in incidents of domestic and sexual violence against women earthquake survivors (UN Women, 2016; The New Humanitarian, 2017; UNOHCHR, 2018). Our previous study reported on the increase in trafficking of women and girls immediately after the earthquakes, and the risk of violence and lack of privacy were major concerns for woman and girls in camps and temporary shelters (Standing, Parker & Bista, 2017).

A female key informant from a women's rights organisation in Kathmandu noted that:

> Girls who live in Kathmandu away from their families in villages are often harassed while seeking shelter with other families. Inappropriate touching and unacceptable comments were key issues outside the tents. But the girls reported feeling afraid to speak out about it or reporting it in fear of repercussion.

In an online interview, a female case worker from the Gorkha district gave this example:

> 14-year-old girl who was looking after her two younger siblings was raped by her close relative while her widow mother had gone to collect relief materials 3 hours walk away from their village. The case worker suggested reporting it to the police,

but mother refused it as she was afraid of further abuse if they report it (Standing, Parker and Bista, 2016).

Marsh et al. (2006) suggest there is strong evidence of opportunistic sexual violence being perpetrated within a climate where there is a breakdown of both social and legal systems for policing and punishing unacceptable behavior. A year after the earthquake, incidents of being threatened and abused, as well as increased domestic violence in camps, were still being reported (UN Women, 2016). One response to this violence was for relief and support agencies to set up private, safe spaces for women to receive much needed psychosocial and legal support as well as providing essential health and wellbeing services.

There was also a rise in trafficking as children were separated from their families as the result of destruction and displacement. Additionally, the loss of livelihoods that resulted in economic vulnerability enabled traffickers to persuade parents to handover their children with false promises of education, food, and a better life being offered.

Focus group discussions with NGO representatives and government officials mentioned elevated trafficking activities in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok districts; for example, a male NGO worker stated, "Young girls from poor families were constantly targeted by the traffickers and we all had to stay alert 24/7 to prevent it."

The National Human Rights Commission (2016) in Nepal reported a 15% increase in the numbers of people "vulnerable" to human traffickers during the first three months following the earthquake. Maiti Nepal, a leading NGO working in the field of human trafficking in Nepal, reported having intercepted 5,700 vulnerable girls from the border between Nepal and India. This figure was 2,900 in 2014, the year before the earthquake (The New Humanitarian, 2017).

Relief Distribution and VAWG

Another key issue that emerged from our research was the violence faced by women when accessing relief supplies. Relief collection was found to be particularly challenging for women who resided in rural areas and far from ward and district offices. Women-headed households and widows reported difficulty in accessing the relief and were often verbally abused by stronger men from the villages near the headquarters while waiting for relief collection.

A female household head with two young children reported that:

> People from my community were very abusive and physically hurt me during relief collection. I had to line up with strong men from village but often got pushed out, fell and got hurt. They asked me to send man of the family to collect relief, but I am a widow.

Women from ethnic minorities and poorer families reported very little access to livelihood rebuilding opportunities and financial support. Women from these backgrounds often reported not getting reconstruction cash grants due to the lack of national identity cards or property documents in their names. A widowed mother of four from an ethnic background in Dhading district recounts:

> My house got demolished by the quake. It was my dead husband's inheritance, so I do not have my name on property paper. Because of that I am still struggling to receive the money. People in the ward office know it was my house but still don't make paper for me or give me the money to rebuild.

Focus group discussions with women from the Sindhupalchok district highlighted the discriminatory behaviour of male members of the community while trying to access help for rubbish removal. A single woman from the Dalit community pointed out the inequalities based on gender and caste:

> All strong men with big houses from the community decided whose rubble was to be cleared first. When we asked for assistance, they shouted saying 'nothing valuable was buried under our old hut' so we will have to wait until their rubble was cleared.

The struggle to get assistance for rubble removal led to not being able to access personal belongings for a long time, and restoration and/or rebuilding work was also massively hampered, in particular for women and members of the Dalit community, highlighting existing intersectional inequalities. The PDNA reports a significant presence of women-headed households in the earthquake-affected districts (GoN, 2015). Women heading the family are doubly burdened by their routine household activities and having to access aid and rebuild without much help. Some of the affected districts such as Gorkha, Dhading, and Sindhupalchok have a much higher female population due to male outmigration. This issue was also raised in connection to access to water

supplies and sanitation issues which we now turn to discuss. It is widely acknowledged that there is an existing vulnerability of women and girls accessing wash facilities (Sommer et al., 2014) and that this problem is heightened in emergency and humanitarian contexts.

The Role of WASH and VAWG

The PDNA (GoN, 2015) reports massive damage and disruption to the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector, presenting several increased risks and vulnerabilities. The assessment acknowledges additional risks of violence and sexual abuse to girls and women posed by the lack of access to gender-specific, safe toilets in schools, by the long distances required to travel to water sources, or by seeking privacy to defecate in the absence of toilets.

Our findings highlight that there were immediate and longer-term incidents of VAWG as the result of damaged and disrupted WASH facilities. Lack of WASH facilities in emergency camps and around temporary shelter was reported by women and girls as an immediate major stressor that impacted the functioning of their day-to-day life. A female community leader shared that "…having to use open space for bathing or toilet only covered by a sheet of plastic was a terrible experience. Men would hang around WASH facilities and often stare and make rude comments at women and girls."

Focus group discussions in some parts of Kathmandu valley highlighted that a severe water scarcity resulted from damaged and destroyed water supply systems. A male member of Armed Police Force recalled, "Many fights broke out around water distribution tanker, many women and girls were pushed or beaten by men who were also collecting water. We often had to get involved to break the fights or to manage queues."

Sexual abuse and the psychological impact of the stress from lack of water at accessible and safe locations were reported as a longer-term impact, especially to adolescent girls and mothers with young children. In areas where the water supply system was seriously damaged, women and girls faced a double impact, as a mother of two young children from Dhading district mentions during a group discussion: "We had to face violent behaviours by male and even female from different communities while collecting water from other areas. In addition, we also got told off by husbands or mothers-in-law for taking so much time to fetch water." A 15-year-old girl added,

"Many boys on the way while fetching water try to tease you with vulgar comments and sometimes try to touch you in wrong places." Another girl from Dolakha district recalled, "Once, one boy took my 'Gagro' (a traditional water vessel) and did not give it back to me until I let him kiss me in front of other boys. I felt humiliated and never went back to that area to get water." A focus group discussion in Sindhupalchok district also highlighted that the lack of water and having to use open spaces for defecation led to compromises in overall personal hygiene, including menstrual hygiene, which impacted women's sense of dignity.

Some of the longer-term impact of disruption to the water supply is reported to lead to restrictions in growing and cultivating cash crops and loss of livestock and poultry. Most women in the Sindhupalchok and Gorkha districts from female-headed households reported physical abuses while trying to access irrigation water for their crops. A woman from Mircot in Gorkha district comments that "Every household was desperate for irrigation water as people wanted to grow better crops for livelihood, so the weaker women had to suffer most for the access." Access to water was also a key issue for the emergency responses to providing resources to menstruating women and girls, which in some cases increased vulnerability to GBV in the camps.

Menstruation: A Neglected Issue

Within the responses it was noted early on in the crisis that lack of access to products and the means of managing menstruation in a dignified manner for women and girls placed them in a vulnerable position. Our findings highlight that immediate relief activities lacked menstrual health management activities. Most respondents reported not receiving any menstrual health and hygiene supplies during the first 3 to 4 weeks and respondents from Kathmandu valley reported receiving a limited supply from small NGOs after the second week following the earthquake. Lack of menstrual products in relief supplies lead to further restriction and stigma towards menstruating girls and women. Some of the women interviewed in a focus group reported that they were told that two re-washable sanitary pads were enough for the whole menstrual cycle, but others disputed this and said they needed more. One girl interviewed did not feel comfortable being provided with menstrual products in a public space saying, "It was a most embarrassing moment to ask for sanitary pads in front of so many men."

Many girls and women from Gorkha and Dhading district reported having to sleep outside their temporary, one-room shelter during menstruation. There are many stigmas and taboos associated with menstruation in Nepal that exclude people who menstruate from public spaces, and in some cases force them to sleep in separate rooms or huts during their period (Parker and Standing, 2019). These practices are referred to as 'chaupadi' and are often associated with being confined to a goat or cow shed.

However, the practices are varied and complex and led to many areas of exclusion. A female NGO representative reports, "Menstruating women and girls were often rejected from spaces in shared tents leading to further risk and stigma at the time of such humanitarian crisis."

Losing access to shelter exposed females to the further risk of sexual abuse by opportunistic perpetrators in the community. A teenage girl from Gorkha district recalls:

> Because we are not allowed to touch anything in the house during menstruation and our family shelter was just one room, my sister and I had to sleep outside of the shelter. We used to be very scared of drunk men and wild animals at night.

A mother of three children from Dhading districts shares her experiences:

> We don't practice 'chaupadi' in our family traditionally. Bur after the earthquake, I was not allowed to sleep inside our tin house because all male members of the family slept there. I had to sleep near the goat shed. This experience was scarier and more humiliating than the earthquake itself.

The intersectionality of stigma around caste, gender, and menstruation meant many women faced more stigma and violence in temporary accommodations. A female community health worker from Gorkha district stated, "Most women in our village survived the earthquake only to face suffering, social stigma, and violence." Women and girls with disabilities reported having been especially affected by violence and stigma while menstruating in emergency shelters. A female amputee and a wheelchair user recounted her experience, "I had to drag my body over urine-saturated mud to use the facility while on my period; I cried so many times. No one had understanding of the needs of women and girls with disabilities." The increased violence against women with disabilities was an issue raised and widely discussed by all stakeholders in the Kathmandu workshop.

The Double Impact of Violence and Stigma on Women and Girls with Disabilities

The vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities intensified after the earthquake, leading to psychosocial trauma and medication longer-term. Women and girls with disabilities reported increased psychological, physical, and sexual violence by comparison with their pre-earthquake experiences, particularly around shelters and camps (Bista & Sharma, 2019). Findings from focus group discussions in Gorkha, Dhading, Sindhupalchok, and Kathmandu highlighted exacerbated physical and psychological violence against women and girls with disabilities in comparison to these incidents prior to the earthquake. This physical and psychological violence was often committed by husbands, other family members, relatives, and community members; whereas sexual violence against these females was reported to be committed by close relatives, family members, or an opportunist stranger from surrounding areas.

Some women with disabilities reported increased intimate partner violence and violence by a close family member after the earthquake. This violence was often excused by other family members as being due to the stress caused by the earthquake, highlighting how violence can become normalised and accepted following disasters. Violence can often be excused due to misplaced frustrations. For example, a female who uses crutches for mobility reported:

> I often get beaten by my husband and mother-in-law for not being able to do heavy work in clearing rubble or in the field. Before earthquake, I was asked to do housework only so there was no problem for me. Now I am constantly scared about the next beating.

Physical and psychological violence against single women with disabilities was also reported in and around relief distribution sites and local government offices. The right to receive humanitarian assistance, and to offer it, is a fundamental humanitarian principle which should be enjoyed by all citizens of all countries (IFRC, 1996). The prime motivation of a disaster response should be saving lives and alleviating suffering, especially to those least able to withstand the stress caused by disaster and to protect human dignity. However, this was not the case for women and girls with disabilities after the Nepal earthquake. As one woman who is blind in one eye recounts:

> My husband was in Dubai; it was me and my two young daughters when the earthquake demolished our house. I went to the ward office numerous times only

> to be verbally abused and humiliated. But I know people with connections to the ward office had received more relief supplies than they needed.

The earthquake experiences were worse for women and girls who were deaf or blind or deaf and blind. A deaf and blind girl reports:

> I got taunted for not being able to hear or see if there is another earthquake. Teachers said I should stay at home during aftershocks as they did not want to evacuate me all the time. I have stopped going to school after the earthquake.

A male member of staff from a disabled people's organisation mentions the sexual assault of a deaf girl while she was collecting firewood. "This deaf girl who was collecting firewood in the jungle was groped and ejaculated on. She tried making noise by hitting a tree with a stick, but her family members were too far to hear."

These experiences highlight the added vulnerability faced by women and girls with disabilities that further silences their voices and violates their human rights. It is important therefore to recognise the intersectionality of issues women and girls in disaster situations face, and for emergency responses to be both gender and disability sensitive. As a female representative from women's organisation said in the interview:

> Nepal's community of grassroots women are capable and ready to offer their leadership, and to help guarantee that reconstruction policies meet the needs of the most marginalised. Their demands centre on a crucial point that women must not be seen only as recipients of aid but also as meaningful participants and leaders in reconstituting their country.

Our findings highlight that being a woman or girl with a disability, with very limited rights and independence, and reduced access to financial resources resulted in increased longer-term violence.

Conclusion

The humanitarian response to the Nepal earthquake highlighted some areas where local good practice existed, but also areas where responses can be improved to prevent and address VAWG effectively. Several practical lessons can be drawn from the research on combating this issue in Nepal and more widely in addressing GBV in humanitarian crisis. On the basis of the research findings, we highlight the need for

contextualised, community-oriented solutions led by grassroot leadership in tackling VAWG.

To combat VAWG in Nepal, in the current challenging situation with a history of political instability, a new constitution, new federal structure government, and the recent earthquake, the only way forward can be through engaging grassroots women's leaders in policymaking and implementation at all levels. Despite the provision of a 33% quota system for female candidates to reduce disparities and address women's absence in the local and national government, women's organisations argue that the political representation is merely tokenistic. The overrepresenting male leadership is heavily criticized for not fostering a capacity-building environment to address the knowledge and skill gap for women. Nepali women, who represent more than 50 percent of the total population, are still left behind in terms of meaningful participation and representation in all aspects of life and are still suffering discrimination induced by patriarchal society. Community-based approaches where all intersections of gender are equally enabled to participate, influence, and make decisionsto address VAWG can reinforce communities' ownership of policies and plans. In particular, in crisis situations where timely and effective response is crucial to save lives and livelihoods, local response is often evidenced to be the first response.

Therefore, it is important that national and international responses utilise the lived experiences and contextual knowledge that grassroots organisations have, in order to deliver effective and appropriate responses to the needs of women and girls. Additionally, to address the issue of the invisibility of the needs of women and girls with disabilities amongst humanitarian actors, it is equally important to engage with the local Organisations for Persons with Disabilities. Having access to desegregated data from the ward office and consultation with local self-help groups of disabled people can help the humanitarian assistance to be inclusive of the diverse needs of women and girls with all types of disabilities. Integration of GBV risk assessment and indicators for inclusive aid in the rapid need assessment conducted immediately after the disaster strikes can help national and international agencies in procuring and distributing need specific relief. This can also help in identifying the risk of violence and addressing safety and security concerns for women and girls who are particularly at heightened risk of VAWG. The need for gender-sensitive humanitarian aid was highlighted by women who worked on GBV issues during the Nepal earthquake crisis. As a result, gender,

GBV, and trafficking indicators were integrated into the Displacement Tracking Matrix developed by the International Organisation for Migration in their role as the Lead Agency in the Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster (CCCM, 2016). However, the indicators of a disability-inclusive response were missed by this intervention.

Shelter design and management teams need to pay particular attention to the WASH and menstrual health management services. Adequate and accessible WASH facilities can save many women and girls from the double trauma of disaster and violence post-disaster. Use of traditional knowledge and local resources can help in providing adequate facilities instead of waiting for limited international supplies to arrive. Safe spaces are also central to supporting women and girls in emergencies. Local providers and grassroots organisations have knowledge and understanding of both the geography and socio-cultural background of women and girls in that area.

While discussing the safety and security of women and girls in disaster and post-crisis settings, it is imperative to understand that their vulnerability is not 'naturally inherited by birth', but social in origin. It is evident from these women and girls' experiences that disasters can have a disproportionate impact along with the added burdens of gendered roles and the tasks associated with reconstruction. To prevent and address VAWG, the population who are already burdened by multiple gendered duties, constrained by patriarchal social values, and with very little opportunities to leadership, we need to include men and boys in the process.

Challenging violence needs to start with changing the attitudes and beliefs of men and women equally. If women and girls need to learn to say 'no' and to report and seek help when VAWG occurs, men and boys need to understand, value, and respect women and girls' roles in family and society, their opinions, and wishes. Violence against women and girls is everyone's issue and so is VAWG with disabilities. Therefore, all parties, including the perpetrators, need to be included in the discussions and educated simultaneously. Many of the immediate responses to tackle and mitigate VAWG, such as self-defence training and safe spaces, while important initiatives, can themselves be problematic, as already burdened women have to stress about learning to protect themselves, rather than men learning about respecting women and not committing heinous acts of rape and abuse.

Additionally, the psychosocial impact of disasters on men as well as women must be addressed through individualised approaches as well as in mixed group sessions where both parties can hear the experiences and struggles of the opposite gender. Violence against women and girls is often used to maintain power and control over women in both disaster and 'usual' times. Mixed group activities can help teach that understanding and respect for one another in the team can yield to better outcomes than power and control. While addressing the issue of VAWG collectively, it is equally important to address the issue of men's mental health, drinking habits, and access to safe spaces to discuss psychosocial health in post-disaster settings.

Finally, VAWG can be best addressed in inter-agency collaborative intervention that supports community-focused and community-led approach with meaningful participation of women and girls at the heart of it. Making further policies and laws will not address the issue unless there is effective implementation and accountability for failure to do so. National and international humanitarian response frameworks and tools need to be adopted and contextualised so every stakeholder involved has a clear understanding of how to prevent and address VAWG, the meaning of 'do not harm', and the right to safety and dignity, and uses this clear understanding to become responsible for providing gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive humanitarian response.

Recommendations

Some specific recommendations for developing gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive guideline for the emergency responders came from the workshop in Kathmandu. These were:

- Disaggregated data should be collected for need specific aid delivery.
- Capacity mapping and need assessment of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities and Civil Society Organisations.
- Rapid need assessment must be gender-sensitive and disability-inclusive.
- Formation of gender balance response team.
- Need-based relief material stockpile at local level.
- Capacity development for household level preparedness.

- Participation of OPDs in the planning of inclusive policies, guidelines, and implementation from local, regional, and national level.
- All the OPDs should have gender-responsive emergency response action plans.
- Mapping, identifying, and sharing of information/data on open safe space.

We acknowledge that men and boys are also subjected to sexual violence, especially in war and conflict settings, and very little efforts can be seen to address the issue.

However, women and girls are subjected to all forms of violence at disproportionate scale. Violence against women and girls continues to create power imbalances, violate human rights, infringe opportunities to recover from crisis, and compromise the dignity of affected women and girls throughout the world, while climate change-induced and human-made disasters are increasingly challenging our lives and livelihoods. Therefore, we recommend that risk assessment for VAWG be a key part of rapid need assessment in any disaster setting and all national and international humanitarian responders undertake inclusive gender sensitisation trainings. We further recommend local and national collaborative efforts to strengthen gender and disability-inclusive violence prevention, reporting, and justice mechanisms. These efforts should include women and girls from all intersections of society, including third gender, as well as men and boys, so that no one is left behind.

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Facilitators and Barriers to Addressing Domestic Violence among South Asian Women in the U.S.

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Abstract

The rates of domestic violence among South Asians in the United States are as high as 40% (Mahapatra, 2012; Raj & Silverman, 2002). In spite of the South Asian image as a "model minority" in the United States due to rapid financial and social success, the community struggles with issues, including domestic violence. South Asians generally do not acknowledge domestic violence as an issue within their community and mainstream U.S. citizens often believe that this community is free of problems. In-depth telephone interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of 20 South Asian women in the United States who were seeking or had sought help for abuse from their intimate partners. We analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis. The current study reports the following barriers and facilitators that the South Asian women experienced when responding to abuse. The barriers are: (1) immigration issues, (2) a culture emphasizing endurance, the stigmatization of divorce, and belief in

maintaining two-parent home, (3) hope of improvement in the partner. The facilitators include: (1) SouthAsian women's organizations, (2) help from natal family, and (3) support from friends and family in the United States. We close with a discussion of the clinical implications.

Key Words: South Asian, Women, Domestic Violence, United States, Abuse

Facilitators and Barriers for South Asian Domestic Violence Survivors in the United States

South Asians trace their lineage to India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. The community also includes members of the South Asian diaspora where past generations originally settled in other parts of the world, including the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, Canada, the Middle East, and parts of Asia and the Pacific Islands. Currently there are 5.4 million South Asians in the United States of America and about 80% trace their lineage to India (South Asian Americans Leading Together, 2019).

Asians in general, and South Asians in particular, in the United States are categorized as a "model minority" due to the rapid educational and financial success they have achieved. However, in spite of this progress, the South Asian community grapples with a number of social problems, with domestic violence being one of them, but is hesitant to publicly admit this issue (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016). The Centers for Disease Control defines domestic violence (DV) as physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse (Breiding, Chen, & Black, 2014). To this definition, we also add financial or economic abuse, which may include controlling household income, ruining the survivor's credit, or making it challenging for a survivor to secure/sustain employment (Sharps-Jeff, 2015). Domestic violence in the South Asian context also refers to violence perpetrated by the extended family or kin, such as natal family or in-laws (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016). In spite of high rates of DV among South Asians in the United States, the issue is widely silenced and shamed (Mahapatra, 2012, Raj & Silverman, 2002).

Literature Review

Domestic Violence among South Asians

While Breiding et al. (2014) estimated prevalence of severe physical violence at 25% and sexual violence at 16% for women in the United States, the rates among South Asians are very high, about 40% (Raj & Silverman, 2003; Mahapatra, 2012). Researchers have conducted a few prevalence studies with the South Asian population in the United States. Mahapatra (2012) screened 215 South Asian women in the United States and the reported rate of DV was 38%. Lifetime prevalence rates of emotional abuse of Nepali women in New York was 54% and physical abuse was 36% (Thapa-Oli, Dulal, & Baba, 2009). In a recent study in Chicago, 116 providers screened South Asian women in community clinics for DV, and the prevalence rate was 31% (Soglin, Ragavan, Immaneni, & Soglin , 2020). In current studies with South Asians in the United States, estimates suggest 21% to 40% of these women have experienced abuse by their current and/or past partners (Hurwitz, Gupta, Liu, Silverman, & Raj, 2006; Raj & Silverman, 2002, 2003; Soglin, et al., 2020; Thapa-Oli, et al., 2009; Yoshioka & Dang, 2000).

South Asians in the United States, like many other immigrant populations, face a number of barriers to seeking help for DV (Sabri et al., 2018; Bhandari & Ragavan, 2020). The barriers range from immigration-related issues, language challenges, and/or cultural values that are explained in the following sections. On the other hand, there are several facilitators that enable South Asian survivors of DV to seek help or sustain themselves when they decide to take actions.

Factors that Make South Asian Women Vulnerable to Abuse

South Asians belong to a variety of religions and speak different languages but share a number of common cultural values (Ayyub, 2000; Jordan & Bhandari, 2016). Cultural values play a big role in how South Asians respond to and/or tolerate abuse. South Asians in general share some common beliefs in values of fatalism, karma (destiny), and collectivism, among others. The value of collectivism can help with DV situations because of the strong social support offered by families and the community in general. However, it can also work against survivors of DV, since they may be reluctant to talk about issues that bring shame and dishonor to their families (Diller, 2015; Jordan & Bhandari, 2016).

From a socioecological framework (Heise, 1998), the risks at the macrosystem level for South Asian survivors include patriarchal cultural norms, gender-based immigration status differences, and language barriers. In general, South Asians hold cultural views and attitudes toward DV that include patriarchal cultural norms supporting the use of violence in intimate partner relationships (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015; Pinnewala, 2009; Sabri, 2014). Notions that men are superior to women are ingrained in South Asian women from a young age and that cultural belief translates into men having more power than women in almost all facets of life (Mangar, 2013). Women are often forced to live in abusive marriages due to the stigmatization of divorce and the dishonor it brings to the family (Gill, 2004; Mehrotra, 1999 & Tonsing, 2014). Because of traditional South Asian gender roles, men often wield more power regarding immigration status. Men usually immigrate first to the United States or the western world, as they are usually the primary breadwinners, while women and children usually follow the men as dependents, or as often happens, children are born in the United States. As a result, in most cases immigration papers are filed by men and women have dependent immigration status (Midlarsky, Venkataramani-Kothari, & Plante, 2006). Of course, immigration status in the United States is not one monolithic category. Depending on whether the abusive husband or the survivor herself is a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or holds non-immigrant visas of H, L, J or F categories, there are separate sets of rules regarding restrictions around work for each category of non-immigrant visa and the means to ultimately have a stable documented status in the United States (Kapur, Zajicek & Hunt, 2017). Along with cultural values and immigration status, language barriers are an additional risk factor at the exosystem level for survivors (Sabri et al., 2018), further isolating South Asian women already marginalized because of culture and immigration status.

At the microsystem level, individual characteristics of both the abusive partners and the survivors, as well as interpersonal issues, create risk factors for DV. The abusive partner's characteristics, such as personality disorders, having experienced abuse as a child, and/or engaging in alcohol abuse act as risk factors for DV (Brem, Florimbio, Elmquist, Shorey, & Stuart, 2018; Heise, 1998; Pinnewala, 2009). For survivors, acculturation is a dynamic dimension that also needs to be viewed in light of risk factors for DV. As women begin to adapt to the host country's culture and assert more egalitarian values, they may be more vulnerable to abuse if the husband's side of the

family, including the in-laws, hold traditional values (Sabri, Simonet, & Campbell, 2018). Further, at the individual level, self-blame and fear of losing the children are risk factors for DV in the case of South Asian survivors of abuse (Sabri et al., 2018). On an interpersonal level, most South Asian women leave their support system back in the home country and do not have the same circle of family and friends to rely on in the United States. In most cases, the abusive husband and his family are the only source of support for them in the United States. This complicates the situation for DV survivors who may not be comfortable seeking help for abuse in the first place, a situation further exacerbated because they lack the required social support (Rai & Choi, 2018).

Protective Factors for DV

The protective factors for South Asian DV survivors range from supportive informal sources such as friends and family and formal sources such as South Asian women's organizations, sensitive legal help, language classes, and the internet, which provide formal sources of help (Ahmad, Rai, Petrovic, Erickson, & Stewart , 2013). At the microsystem level, the safety of children can be a motivating factor for women to seek help for abuse. Children may also help women to be strong and recover from abuse as they may feel that they are solely responsible for their children's welfare (Bhandari, 2018). At the individual level, utilizing safety strategies, being independent and optimistic, and religious belief can help women with their abusive situation (Sabri at al., 2018).

Rationale for the Current Study

Most studies on South Asian DV in the United States describe the prevalence of DV and help-seeking behaviors (Rai & Choi, 2018; Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013). Most researchers have utilized community-based data from one geographical area in the United States for many of these studies (Ahmad, Driver, McNally, & Stewart, 2009; Hurwitz et al., 2006; Raj & Silverman, 2002, 2003). The current qualitative study utilizes a sample from five South Asian women's organizations (SAWOs) across the United States and examines the barriers and facilitators that South Asian women face in addressing DV in their lives. While similar studies on avenues of help-seeking have been conducted before (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019), this study focuses on the following research questions: (a) what are the various barriers that South Asian women experience while addressing DV in the United States? and (b) what are the facilitators that aid abused South Asian

women in addressing DV in the United States? The findings from this study will further enhance culturally informed services offered to South Asian survivors in the United States and will bring to the forefront nuances of barriers experienced and how they could be removed to enable sensitive and supportive help-seeking. The data is a sub-set of the larger study that examined the coping strategies of South Asian women experiencing DV (Bhandari, 2018) and highlighted their patterns of abuse (Bhandari & Sabri, 2018) as well as their lived experiences (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016).

Methods

In this qualitative study, we conducted 20 in-depth telephone interviews with South Asian survivors of DV using convenience sampling methods. We concluded data collection when it appeared that no new findings were emerging. The team recruited participants from five SAWOs across the United States. Eligible women were South Asians above the age of 18 who had sought help for DV from a SAWO in the United States. The mean age of the participants was 38.8 years, (ranging from 26 to 66 years; s.d. 9.35). Their countries of origin were India, n =13; Pakistan, n = 4; Bangladesh, n = 1; United Kingdom, n = 1; Canada, n = 1. The participants from United Kingdom and Canada were also of South Asian descent. The number of years they had lived in the United States ranged from one year to 42 years with a mean of 12.54 years. The immigration status of the women ranged from being a naturalized United States citizen to holding a green card to having a dependent work permit visa. Specific demographics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Procedures

Wright State University's Institutional Review Board approved the study. The eligibility criterion to participate in the current study was that a woman had sought help for DV at one of the five SAWOs in the United States. The staff of the five SAWOs explained the study to potential participants and referred only those who were interested to the Principal Investigator. The mental preparedness and safety of the participants was deemed more important than a universal participation of all the women who sought help at the five SAWOs. Upon receiving the referral, the PI contacted the potential participant over telephone at a safe time that was disclosed by them. After receiving informed consent, the author recruited the women into the study to participate in a one-time, in-depth interview over the telephone. Most participants in the current

study were not in an abusive relationship at the time of the in-depth interview. In the case of participants still living with their abusive partner, they had reached a stage in their relationship where the violence was not life threatening and hence they felt safe to participate in the study. For the purposes of this study, the author has analyzed and presented data pertaining to barriers and facilitators in addressing DV. The author did not exclude participants if they did not speak English. The author conducted all the interviews in English, except one which was conducted in Hindi and was later translated into English. The author tape-recorded and the transcribing agency transcribed the interviews with the participants' consent except one in which the participant refused to be recorded. The author took notes at the time of the interview for analysis. All other interviews were de- identified and transcribed by a transcribing agency. The participants were compensated with a $15 e-gift card of a leading grocery store for their time participating in the interview. Interviews lasted from an hour and a half to three hours.

Interview Guide

The telephone in-depth interview guide focused on women's own experiences in intimate partner relationships, their history of abuse, and how they responded to it. In particular, the interview guide explored what facilitators helped them deal with abuse and what barriers acted as impediments. The telephone in-depth interviews were chosen as a medium so that women could be recruited from several SAWOs across the US and so that women were comfortable sharing their story via telephone where they did not have to face the interviewer, especially when they shared intimate details of their lives which might culturally be considered to bring shame to them as individuals.

Data Analysis

The narratives of DV survivors in the current study provided a reflection of their experience with abuse and what helped or hurt them while seeking help. The author analyzed the data utilizing a theoretical thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The author utilized a constructionist perspective which theorized the larger contexts interwoven in the individual accounts of the participants' experiences of abuse. The data analysis uncovered the barriers and facilitators for DV in South Asian survivors' lives. The author started the analysis with continuously reading the transcripts of in-depth interviews. The next step was open coding of the qualitative

interviews to help generate initial codes. The initial codes were then joined together into themes and sub-themes to view the emerging patterns and similarities between the participants' experiences. The data analysis was recurrent and involved continuous development of new codes as well as constantly comparing the themes to the newly generated codes to ensure there were no new themes emerging (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The author, being of South Asian origin and having worked in India with abuse survivors, had a deeper understanding of the complex issues that South Asian survivors experience. In the current study, the author established credibility by conducting in-depth interviews which is a well-recognized research method. Further, after every interview, the author documented a reflective summary of the participant's story. The author was involved in the actual process of data collection, sampling, and data analysis which was systematically organized into a structured format, further enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. All aspects of the interview that catered to barriers and facilitators for South Asian survivors to address DV were taken into account for the analysis. Thus, the analysis was structured into a sequence of steps and the coding was continuously checked for consistency, with elaborate documentation of how the final codes were reached (Padgett, 2016).

Results

The themes that emerged from the data outlining the barriers and facilitators have been described below. The main barriers are (1) immigration & legal issues, (2) a culture which emphasizes endurance, stigmatization of divorce, and maintaining a two- parent home, and (3) hope of improvement in the partner. The main facilitators are (1) help from the natal family, (2) support from friends and family in the United States, and (3) South Asian women's organizations (SAWOs). Participants are identified by a pseudonym and their country of origin, followed by the number of years they have stayed in the United States to distinguish them from one another.

Barriers

Immigration and legal issues.

Most participants in the current study (about 67%) were either permanent residents or United States citizens. The rest (about 33%) were either on a dependent visa or some form of non-immigrant visa such as L, F, etc. (see Table 1). Restrictions with work permits and the need to maintain documented status were some of the barriers

that prevented South Asian survivors from seeking help. For the participants who were United States citizens or had permanent residency, immigration was not a big hurdle, but they shared their struggles with the legal process pertaining to custody of children and divorce, among other things. Further, an important impediment shared by almost all survivors was obtaining affordable and culturally sensitive legal help for their situation regarding divorce and custody of children. For example, Sita had a very difficult time convincing her lawyers that going back to her home country was not a safe option for her. Her immigration status did not let her work in the United States and the lawyers were pressuring her to go back to her country of origin. The following is her comment about her immigration situation: "I don't have work permit. That's a challenge for me. My lawyers are not very supportive . . . He told me that, "What is the harm if he says that, you know, you have to stay in XYZ city in India" (Sita, India, three years). Others shared similar experiences. Shafalika shared:

> Now I'm broken. I have no place to go to and I don't have any legal status to stay here in U.S. because I'm on student visa and all these things have created so much stress and depression in me. (Pakistan, one and a half years)

Smitha shared the following comment:

> I just got a divorce lawyer who was… basically [was] a tax lawyer. He was not even a divorce lawyer so he didn't advise me right but I refused to change him because he is a friend of a friend, and I felt comfortable with him but he didn't really know how to advise me, he didn't know much about divorce itself, so that is one of the reason I didn't get the alimony or whatever. (India, 42 years)

Even though several participants in the current study were either green card holders or United States citizens, they struggled with filing for divorce, or in acquiring affordable and culturally sensitive legal help. Lack of resources and financial support for an extended period of time prevented women from seeking the right kind of legal help.

Culture of endurance, stigmatization of divorce, and maintaining a two-parent home.

Children played an important role in South Asian women seeking help for abuse or making a conscious decision to not do anything about their abusive situation. While some women mentioned that having children was their biggest mistake, a few others took the step to do something about their situation when they found that abuse was

affecting their children. Due to the stigmatization of divorce in South Asian culture, women tried their best to hold the family together. A number of participants in the current study shared about their resistance and hesitancy to discuss abuse outside of their homes. On the subject of endurance Radha shared:

> So I was like, okay…it is written in my fate, you know what the God intends that wherever I go it [abuse] was not written on my hand? I went to my parent's place, even they hit me. So I think that it is written in the stars for me. So I am just going to stay here and instead of getting beatings from everyone else, I'm going to get beatings from my husband, where I can just take the beatings and not tell anyone and just stay inside the house and take care of my child. (India, 13 years)

Regarding the cultural stigmatization of divorce, Fareena said:

> So I was so… I was living in fear at that, you won't believe it, every minute I was thinking that I will get divorce and then I don't know what's going to happen, divorce is so bad and you know all that stuff. (Fareena, Pakistan, 19 years)

Shafalika shared in the following comment how South Asian culture exerted social pressure on her to continue to live in the abusive marriage:

> And I used to bear all these things because in my culture it is not easy if you, once you're married, you're married. There is no way of divorce. So I was thinking, okay maybe I will adjust myself and I will compromise with this person, over a period of time. . . They [natal family] were saying like, okay things will be fine when you will together it will be okay. So it was kind of social pressure on me because it was not easy to end the relation… because in my culture it is the thing like it creates a shame for the family and for the whole tribe. (Shafalika, Pakistan, one and a half years)

The following participant shared the stages that she went through while undergoing abuse. She shared how she could not gather the courage to leave the abusive husband as she had two daughters with him. Niharika said:

> Of course there were lot of barriers. First was the security and the stability. If I get out [of the abusive situation] especially I had 2 young kids.… Another barrier was because I had daughters I can't leave them with anybody. So I had to protect them and if I leave the house then I had to leave them with babysitters and I have to

> work so that was also a barrier.… And then I'm being judged, like how people will think of me. I would be like someone outcaste, someone not accepted in the society, someone who will not be respected in the society, especially in the community. (Niharika, Pakistan, 23 years)

Another participant shared how having children was her biggest mistake as she would have otherwise left her abusive husband long ago. Radha said, "So my child was actually the biggest mistake at that time I thought that I had made, because I don't think if I had not had a child, I would have stayed with him this long" (Radha, India, 13 years). But Amita shared in the following comment about how her perception of children's safety changed over time. She said,

> First, . . . I always thought my children were safe. And then it occurred to me in 2 or 3 days when I was by myself that, "What am I doing? Tomorrow these children will grow up, they end up in bars, they're going to blame me too, what right had you to put us through this [abuse]?" You were just as equally responsible as him. I realized that I was subjecting my children to something that they didn't deserve, they didn't ask for it. (Amita, India, 32 years)

Thus, women shared how having children was both an impediment as well as a reason for them to seek help for abuse.

Hope of improvement in the partner.

Some women in the study believed that they could provide help to their abusive husbands as they perceived them to be suffering from psychological issues. For some women, the abusive husband was their only source of support in this country and hence hoping to improve him was a coping strategy that acted as a barrier in seeking help for abuse. The following participant explains:

> The thing is because of his [abusive husband's] nature, he had psychological issues, insecurities, actually I saw that from day one but I was with the mindset that, I'll change him, I'll change him with love and affection and all that. (Niharika, Pakistan, 23 years)

Another participant shared how she felt dependent on her abusive partner. Amita said:

> I really didn't want any consequences because I think part of my head was always thinking, Oh things will get better, oh things will get better. It's the foolishness of an abused woman, there's a codependency: a known devil is better than an unknown saint. That type of attitude I had that I was too scared to do anything else. I didn't know where I was to go. I didn't think I had any other option. I didn't think going back to India was an option. And living in this country alone was not an option. I was too afraid. (Amita, India, 32 years)

Another participant shared how she hoped that her abusive partner would improve. Arya said:

> Why, whatever he does makes me sad? You know, why do I end up crying? Why can, you know, why all these things? And, you know, after thinking about all those, it all came down to my expectation that deep down somewhere I still had hope, you know, that things would work out. (Arya, India, 11.5 years)

Thus, hope that the partner will improve, dependency on the abusive husband, and belief that they can help their partner were some of the reasons that delayed help-seeking for abuse.

Facilitators

The facilitators that worked in favor of South Asian survivors of DV were support from the natal family, support from South Asian women's organizations (SAWOs), and social support from friends and community in the United States. The natal family, in most cases, was in the home country and offered emotional and financial support in whatever way they could. In such cases especially, the social support of friends in the United States helped immensely in myriad of ways that are described below. South Asian women's organizations in most cases were the main anchor for women to help them sustain the long legal battle which usually started when women decided to leave the abuser. The support offered by SAWO included both emotional and material help.

Help from natal family.

Most women in our study described their natal family as not being supportive in the beginning of their ordeals but later, as the abusive situation got worse, they provided some form of support. Lavanya shared:

> My parents told me, 'this marriage is not going to work'. I told them, 'give me a chance, I will change this person'. Then we came to the U.S. I thought that after 2-3 years, the person changes. I am not the same person, I was in my 20's, 30's, I thought, he would also change. Things became worse after 2007. (Lavanya, India, six years)

Another participant shared how her sister was supportive and provided her with both material as well as emotional help. Radha shared:

> I would call her [her sister] every night, almost every night. She is my middle sister. She's 10 years older than me. She brought me up like her daughter, you can say that, because my elder sister she was married off and my [middle] sister was the only one who was there. She used to take me to doctors or go to my school for school reports and stuff like that. I called them and my brother-in-law and my sister, they were helping me. They even sent me $4,500, when I was done with the divorce, but I had not started getting any money from my ex-husband as far as alimony and child support is concerned. They sent me money during that time and they did not take it back, even when I had it. They told me that, you are part of our family, so we just help you. (Radha, India, 13 years)

Farah said:

> Indian family. Here, touchwood, I have family support a lot, like all my sisters, my brother-in-law, my parents, they are very supportive for me. In my case they are very supportive and even now they are saying, "Don't, I mean he won't change. You don't have to compromise. We all are there to help you out." They are very supportive, my family. (Farah, India, 8 years).

Some women in the current study had their natal family in the United States and they were very supportive towards the woman's decision to leave.

Support from friends and family in the United States.

Not all participants were fortunate to have the natal family support them. In some instances, the natal family was in the home country and was limited in what they could do due to financial conditions or due to health and mobility restrictions. For some other

participants, due to lack of support from family, the social support of friends in the United States was an important source of help. Neighbors, school teachers of their children, and/or friends were supportive both in terms of emotional and material support. For example Sita shared:

> My neighbor… is an American, she's a director in homeschooling. She was telling me that, Sita, I am willing to go with you to immigration. She said, they are not going to shut me out and you're—and as it is, you don't have a status, well what are we worried about? Let's go and find out where are we. She said, This is America, Sita. Nobody can force you to sign anything. (Sita, India, 3 years)

Sita further added that her neighbors also provided her with material support such as food and transportation. She added:

> Then my neighbors [said], you know, it's Thanksgiving, Sita, it's a big thing for us in United States, they gave me food. So that is how supportive my neighbors are. They used to give me rides at 11:30 in the night. (Sita, India, three years)

Another participant shared how an Indian family in the neighborhood saw her walking alone, sensed something unusual, and called her husband. In some cases, the abused South Asian woman only had the abusive husband as their support system.

Lavanya shared:

> Some Indian family saw me walking on the street. They called another family. My friend saw me and asked me to sit in his car and brought me to his house. My husband called 2-3 friends asking, "Did you see Lavanya?" Nobody knew till then that the marriage was not good. The friend's husband called my husband saying that I was at their place. He came and took me. (Lavanya, India, six years)

Even though social support is enlisted as a facilitator, women talked about instances where certain members in the community were not as supportive as well.

South Asian women's organizations (SAWOs).

All the women in the current study were recruited through South Asian women's organizations and most had very positive things to share about the support and help they received through the SAWO. The women were connected with all kinds of help

including but not limited to legal, emotional, and social support. This was especially true since, in most instances, when women decided to take action and leave the abusive situation, the legal battle spanned a long period of time and it was the support of SAWO that enabled the women to go through the battle. Naina shared:

> I had a couple of friends who were out of town and out of state, there was one who lived in XYZ state. One of the instances that I called her, she did a net search and sent me the number of ABC agency at that time and said that,… "Talk to them and see what kind of help you could get because it would prove to be on the safe side and protect yourself". So I had called the number, and at this time, there was a liaison office, where they would kind of get you connected to attorneys if you needed attorney, counselors if you needed counselors. (Naina, India, 10 years)

Another participant shared a positive experience. Lavanya said, "ABC SAWO, Counselor XX told me, you have to find a job. Find an apartment. Got help from Indian friends. I had found a job—my friend dropped and picked me up from job" (Lavanya, India, six years).

Niharika shared:

> So in the end this organization here, I'm working for I met the representative at some prayer and she told me there's a Muslim organization and I was looking at her, really? Is there a Muslim organization? Would people recognize that? Then we started talking and then she said it's not your fault. I said I know that but how do I do and how do I prove myself that I can do it and especially like the cultural stigma, [thinking to self], "Niharika has 2 girls. She can't do this. It's going to ruin their future etcetera etcetera." So counseling and all that I was able to make my step and walked out of that. (Niharika, Pakistan, 23 years)

As mentioned above, in several cases, it was neighbors and friends who connected the women to South Asian women's organizations. Komal shared the following comment:

> I told everything to XXX SAWO and then my emigration attorney, those volunteers all what was going on. They helped me like, they even paid for taxi. They would tell me, "Take a taxi and come here, we'll pay for the taxi." Then my emigration attorney filed my case, but SAWO XXX like that was back in 2008

didn't have a place where we could stay and they didn't have like a daycare for the kids because I have a small kid. I think there are some restrictions where we need to provide for the kids and all. So they referred me to the women's center. I called them and then I took up the spot for me and my son. (Komal, India, six years)

Another participant, Bindu, shared the following:

Yeah, actually when after that and then I found this XXX organization, I went there and there were so many other women who are in my same situation, but different stories and then I was little bit, I was in worry that I thought okay they are like my kind of women who are from India and that these kind of organizations are supporting them so I was little bit comfortable and from there I found a lawyer and we filed for divorce. (Bindu, India, 11 years)

Sulochna shared:

Because of this place [SAWO], I became stronger and I can say that today I'm standing on my feet in a confident way because of the help from SAWO XXX because they were always there to hear me. And because XXX SAWO was here I was able to survive all this [abuse]. The emotional support that I needed; always there is someone to hear me; always making me feel that whenever I come here or whenever I used to call yeah you are needed, we need you, we want you. That type of support I got from SAWO XXX. (Sulochana, India, 15 years)

Most participants did not have any support system in the United States and were very grateful for the resources and help they received from SAWOs.

Discussion

While the author has attempted to delineate the barriers and facilitators that abused South Asian women experienced in seeking help, there were some facilitators that may have acted as a barrier in some participant's lives. For example, some women viewed children as the biggest barrier as it delayed help-seeking or even talking about abuse outside their homes. They feared that leaving the abusive husband would destroy their children's future or that they might lose custody of the children. But some women also mentioned that when the abuse started affecting their children, they decided to do something about it. Hence, in some instances children were the facilitators that forced

them to seek help for abuse (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson 2013). Similarly, when it came to social support, while most women talked about how supportive family and friends were, some others also talked about the ridicule, lack of support, and further victimization from their social support systems (Yoshioka, Gilbert, El-Bassel, & Baig-Amin , 2003). Stigmatization of divorce and the belief that broken families bring dishonor to the entire family had a role to play in such responses from the community. Research with abused South Asian women in the United States has already stated that both children and support from the community can work both ways (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016; Rai & Choi, 2018), reinforcing that what is essential is to try and convert each barrier into a facilitator. For example, the community in general and South Asians in particular need to come together to help the woman in crisis with immediate material and emotional support as well as to enable her to sustain the long legal battle, especially when she decides to take action.

All the participants in the current study were recruited from SAWOs and about 66% of the participants had either permanent residency or naturalized U.S citizenship while only 33% were on non-immigrant visas. One reason for these statistics could be that women felt safe to seek help when their immigration status was more robust and permanent in this country. Another reason could also be that some women participated in the study after being out of the abusive situation for a very long time and had attained their permanent residency or United States citizenship by then. Women also did not view going back to the home country as a viable option due to the stigmatization of divorce (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016; Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013). Most women in the current study described their natal family as not being supportive in the beginning but later, as the abusive situation got worse, as providing some form of support. The natal family being supportive towards the abused woman needs to be viewed in the context of how South Asian marriages occur as well South Asian values. Most marriages in the South Asian culture occur between two families and within a cultural belief in interdependence; that is, collectivism rather than individualism (Jordan & Bhandari, 2016).

There is ample research to support the excellent work that SAWOs are doing all over the United States (Kapur, Zajicek, & Gaber, 2017). All but one participant in the current study shared positive experiences with SAWOs and all but one were grateful for

the culturally sensitive emotional and material support provided by them. At times the SAWO was the only anchor that women could rely on locally. Therefore, the need of the hour is to fortify the SAWOs both in terms of material support as well as having trauma-informed care staff on board. Abundant institutional support with funding can make a big difference in the kinds of help offered by SAWOs. Most major cities of the United States with high South Asian population have SAWOs. However, mid-sized cities, metropolitan, and rural areas with lesser South Asian population either lack adequate SAWOs or do not have any at all. It is therefore important that in these areas mainstream organizations are able to collaborate with the nearest SAWO to address the needs of South Asian survivors. SAWOs are likely to have more expertise in understanding the South Asian cultural belief systems and practices, while mainstream organizations may be adept in practices and social categories that derive their meaning from the United States context, so it is crucial that the two work together rather than separately. Therefore, both types of organizations can complement each other by working together to address the needs of South Asian survivors of DV.

Clinical Implications

The focus on various barriers and facilitators will enable service providers to work on interventions for South Asian survivors of DV. As stated above, there is an urgent need to augment SAWOs with resources and to provide culturally sensitive and affordable legal help to South Asian women who decide to leave abusive situations. Almost all women in the current study struggled to obtain culturally sensitive and affordable legal help. Pro-bono lawyers with requisite immigration knowledge are needed to help, especially with regard to custody of children, fighting to maintain legal status of women in the US, and advocating for a fair amount of alimony. There is also a need for mainstream organizations to collaborate with the nearest SAWO so that women can receive the required culturally sensitive services. It may also be helpful to provide women with information about SAWOs and other mainstream organizations on small cards and place them in women's restrooms, places of worship, grocery stores, doctor's offices, etc. Public health announcements in Hindi and other Indian languages around what to do when abused may be very important for South Asian women. The South Asian community in general needs to be aware about the complex nuances of DV and to be supportive towards women who decide to take action about the abuse in their lives. Since women expressed the desire to continue to stay in the United States, rather

than returning to their home country, it is all the more important to bolster up the services and legislation in this country to support abused women (Mahapatra & Rai, 2019).

Conclusion

When abused South Asian women decide to speak out and seek help for abuse, they put their entire life at stake, as they are vulnerable to losing custody of their children and their middle class lifestyle and to further bring a bad name to themselves and their family in the South Asian community both in the home country and in the United States. Yet, these brave women decide to seek help and hence the least the South Asian community can do is to come together and support these women rather than distance themselves or ridicule the survivors.

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Special Thanks

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Special Edition Editorial Board – In Alphabetical Order

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