

PHYSICAL ABUSE IN PAKISTANI TELEVISION DRAMAS: PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AND VICTIMS

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Abstract

The study was conducted to find out the perceptions of women regarding physical abuse in Pakistani TV dramas. The purpose was to observe the consumption patterns and level of awareness of female viewers about women rights through physical abuse in TV dramas. It also aimed to study perceptions of women victims about physical abuse in TV dramas. Social learning theory was used as theoretical framework. A sample of 300 women was surveyed from Lahore and questionnaire was developed to collect data after pretesting. Six victims of physical abuse were also interviewed to understand their perceptions and experiences regarding physical abuse in TV dramas. The findings of the study revealed that consumption of TV dramas regarding physical abuse increased level of awareness about women rights among female viewers.

Keywords: Physical abuse, Pakistani TV dramas, consumption patterns, level of awareness, women rights.

Introduction

TV dramas are one of the most popular forms of mass media which portray negative and positive aspects of our surroundings (Hadi 2017). TV dramas in the modern era play a significant role to reach out people and challenge their thinking as well as answer questions that individuals fail to respond. They highlight sensitive and important content to develop perceptions and create awareness among audience. They help to pin point inhumane acts and struggles of the oppressed segments of the society. Dramas like Surkh Chandni, Cheekh and Ruswai are some examples of recent TV dramas from 2019 that throw light on this issue. Media is playing its role an important role in society where its helps the viewers to build perceptions and make beliefs. People learn their learn behaviors from their observation and media is one of the crucial instrument of learning.

Violence against women is a serious issue which traumatizes women despite their caste, colour, creed or ethnicity. It can be physical, sexual, psychological or emotional in nature. Domestic violence is seen as a problematic issue for South Asian women. 85% of physical abuse victims are female, and 15% are male all over the world. It is shocking to discover that every 1 out of 3 women face violence in their lifetime (World Health Organization, 2017). According to Thomas Reuters Foundation, Pakistan is the third most dangerous country in the world for women where 90% of the women undergo domestic violence. There is legal protection against women violence in Pakistan like The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act-2011, Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act-2011, Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offense of Rape) Act-2016, Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the name or pretext of Honour) Act-2016 and Protection against harassment of women at workplace Act- 2010. Pakistan's legal structure regarding domestic violence focuses on two components i.e. the shariah and the constitution (Pakeeza, 2015).

It is alarming to know that ever since the outbreak of COVID-19; physical abuse against women has arisen all over the world. China, USA and UK have also observed a rise in physical abuse towards women during the lock down (World Health Organization, 2020). Pakistan has witnessed 25% increase in physical abuse towards women during lockdown. The Women Safety app by PSCA has been launched to deal with these situations in the times of Corona virus. In the current context Pakistani television dramas are projecting the issues related to women violence. Television dramas are very popular genre as 89% women watch dramas on TV and use them for their means of information and entertainment (adnan et al., 2018). Considering the importance and popularity of dramas among women this particular study examined the perceptions of women viewers regarding physical abuse in Pakistani TV dramas. The study covered not only covered the perception of

general women but the victims of physical violence were also approached to know their experiences and perception regarding its role specifically in creating awareness of women rights.

Aim and Objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions of women viewers regarding physical abuse in Pakistani TV dramas whereas the primary objectives were to observe the consumption patterns, to find out the level of awareness of female viewers about women rights through physical abuse in TV dramas. It also attempted to know the perceptions of victims about physical abuse in TV dramas.

Research Questions

1. What are the consumption patterns of TV dramas regarding physical abuse among women viewers?
2. What are the reasons that women watch TV dramas regarding physical abuse?
3. What do women feel after watching TV dramas with physical abuse?
4. Does the consumption of TV dramas regarding physical abuse create awareness about women rights among women?
5. What are the perceptions of physically abused victims about TV dramas depicting the issue?

Review of Literature

There have been a lot of research studies which focused on gender based violence in Pakistan. Hadi (2017) aimed to bring the subject of gender based violence into notice by highlighting the sufferings of women in Pakistan. Naveed (2012) reported that 30 to 40 percent women in Pakistan went through domestic violence and suffered due to lack of education, poor economic status and male dominance in the society. Tariq's (2013) work aimed to study the impact of violence of intimate partners on self-worth of women. Ali (2009) highlighted about the depression among women due to marital rape and lack of reproductive rights and argued that most women underwent depression in developing countries. Gulrez (2016) discussed the lives, problems and entire story of nine females who were victims of acid attack and are living with facial disability.

This is not only the issue in Pakistan but the women are facing violence throughout the world. Guruge, Roche and Catallo (2012) in their work regarding mental and physical health of Canadian refugee women described that domestic violence was an alarming health and social issue for women all around the world. Kaur and Garg (2008) talked about the importance of speaking up about violence faced by women which is an unfinished agenda discussed the findings of Indian National Family health survey and stated that more than 30% women went through physical abuse after their marriages during 2005 to 2006. Miller (2011) reported that physical abuse in colleges is associated with dating. Follingstad et.al (1990) discussed that emotional and verbal abuse was the first step towards physical torture. Montemurro (2003) draw the attention towards workplace harassment and discussed that jokes revolving women were not considered serious in American culture.

The media representation of women violence is much debated in literature where TV dramas are considered as an important genre in this regard. Fatima (2019) in her study focusing on critical analysis of TV dramas to study women's representations and roles discussed that women's lives in Pakistan had always been affected by the notion of honour and affected their families. Roshan and Parveiz (2013) in their study discussed verbal, physical and other forms of violence that was shown on PTV and how it affects the behavior of youth. Andersson et al (2010) in their work discussed that majority of the women who went through domestic violence kept it private and were hesitant to share it with others. Only 14 out of 7,895 women feel courageous enough to report physical abuse towards them to the police in Pakistan according to a survey. Hence, it was a need of time to conduct a research on this issue.

The gap identified after reviewing literature indicated that many studies have been conducted on physical abuse in various forms like honour killing, acid attacks and marital rape through discourse analysis, comparative study of newspapers, in-depth interviews and content analysis of dramas. But, none of the studies included the perceptions of women consumers (general public and victims together) regarding physical abuse in Pakistani TV dramas so present research study extends to know the perception of the women viewers regarding physical abuse in Television dramas.

Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory provides the theoretical umbrella to this research. Social learning theory asserts that individuals learn through their observations and experiences. In the light of the theoretical assumption, this study focused on the learning of women as TV acted as a symbolic model to build people's opinions and helped them learn about the common issues that are still a taboo subject in the society. Portrayal of acid attacks, rapes, marital abuse, forced marriages and all other forms of violence like beating, pushing, choking and kicking etc. in TV dramas determined how the audience viewed such content and how their minds were set to form a particular point of view. Social learning theory emphasized that learning didn't necessarily lead to behavior change so this study aimed to find out what women learnt from dramas regarding physical abuse and whether consuming media for watching TV dramas brought any awareness about their basic rights or not.

The theory focused on four keywords including attention, retention, reproduction and motivation respectively where the study examined the consumption and attention level of women towards TV dramas with

physical abuse, the storage level of such information in their minds, awareness about basic rights and motivation to adopt them as well as courage to condemn physical abuse. On the other hand, this theory also helped to identify the relationship between TV dramas and victims' observation. It helped to identify the learning patterns and thoughts of victims, their feelings about such TV dramas and most importantly what they learnt from TV dramas representing physical abuse. The following hypothesis was derived from this theoretical framework that consumption of TV dramas regarding physical abuse increase level of awareness regarding women rights among women viewers (H1).

Methodology

A mix method approach was opted that included both qualitative and quantitative research methods to obtain diversity and clearer point of view about the research issue. A **Survey** research method was used to know the perceptions of women. Survey helps to collect the data by asking questions to people and is most effective way of discovering public's opinion (Visser, Krosnick, & Lavrakas, 2000). The **population** of survey method was female television viewers of Lahore age 18 to 40 years. The purpose of choosing this age group was based on Gallup Pakistan survey 2017 where this age group was identified as the highest percentage (73%) television viewers. A **sample** of 300 female TV viewers was selected through purposive sampling. **Pre-testing** was conducted on 30 females who were television viewers and watched dramas depicting physical abuse. Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.89 showed the strong reliability of tool. Qualitative part included **In-depth interviews** as research method. In-depth interview extract rich information and use open ended questions (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2001). In-depth interviews were conducted to understand the perspective of physical abuse victims, to dig out its role in building opinion about physical abuse in Pakistani TV dramas. The role of such dramas in the lives of victims was also identified through in-depth interviews. So, the **population** of the study for in-depth interviews was the women who were violence victims in Lahore. A sample of six women was selected by **snowball sampling** method. The inclusion criteria was experiencing violent attacks of acid, case of honour killing of immediate family, rape, marital abuse, physical torture in the form of beating, choking, and workplace harassment. The tool of data collection was cue sheet with 19 questions that highlighted the problems of physical abuse victims and their opinions about dramas regarding physical abuse.

Quantitative Findings

The collected data helps like building blocks as it becomes information and then transforms into knowledge (Rossman, & Rallis, 2003). Data was collected to analyze the perceptions of female viewers regarding physical abuse in Pakistani TV dramas.

H₁: Consumption of TV dramas regarding physical abuse increase level of awareness about women rights among women viewers.

H₀: Consumption of TV dramas regarding physical abuse doesn't increase level of awareness about women rights among women viewers.

Table 1: Chi square test for measuring association between variables

Test	Df	Asymp. Sig.(2 sided)	Conclusion
Chi-square test	4	0.000	Significant. (Alternative hypothesis accepted)

The alpha value was significant with 0.000 as it was less than 0.05 therefore alternative hypothesis was accepted which was consumption of TV dramas regarding physical abuse increase level of awareness about women rights among women viewers and hence null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2: Pearson Product Correlation

Correlations		Consumption of TV Dramas regarding physical abuse	Awareness among the women viewers.
Pearson's Correlation	Consumption of Pakistani TV Dramas regarding physical abuse	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000 .
	TV dramas representing physical abuse create awareness among the viewers.	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	.636** .
		N	N
		300	300

The table 2 showed association between independent and dependent variables. According to results, consumption of Pakistani TV dramas regarding physical abuse and level of awareness regarding women rights were positively correlated ($r = .636$)

Qualitative findings

Identifying the type of physical abuse and first incident

The findings of in-depth interviews revealed many kinds of abuse that the victims faced and shared their life experiences. The victim women faced slapping, beating, punching, emotional abuse, verbal abuse, marital abuse, threats of honour killing, acid attacks and rape. The respondents said:

"I've been a victim to marital abuse. I faced abuse for the first time right after the birth of my twin daughters."

"Recently I left my job for my dignity. Well, everybody goes through verbal abuse in workplaces and it is unfortunately considered as a NORMAL part of this journey. I have faced issues too while working. I had very calmly tolerated verbal abuse but things got worse when a senior colleague threw a file over my face out of aggression."

"I faced slapping, beating, punching and emotional abuse. I've been threatened of honour killing. My father has been emotionally abusive in the past but it would also turn into a physical one once or twice a year."

"I am a victim of acid crime. A guy from my E-CAT coaching centre threw acid on my face because I refused to his proposal. My left cheek portion has these ugly scars that are going to stick with me till I breathe my last."

I still find it difficult to put this into words but I was raped by my fiancé. I remember it happened just some days after my engagement. I was forced; my consent meant nothing to him. I had always believed that he was my protector and saviour.

"My sister was killed in the name of honour because my sister married a man of his choice and rejected the guy father had chosen for her. But I believe it was a murder. My father was highly controlling and hated my educated sister who was not afraid of this male dominant society. Somehow, our father didn't like losing his monopoly"

Reasons for physical abuse

The results from in-depth interviews depicted that physical abuse in majority of the cases were a result of male dominance and ego. The most common reason was being a part of patriarchal society where men had the power and authority to control women. All of the interviewees faced physical abuse because they were considered inferior by men; they were oppressed because men saw them as a threat and couldn't stand independent women taking their own decisions. The alarming fact was that 4 out of 6 interviewees faced abuse from their closest relations that were father, husband and fiancée. The women who tried to speak up against physical abuse faced backlash not only from men but also women around them. They had to put in extra efforts to be regarded as individuals rather than a man's property or dignity.

The respondents said:

"Nobody can ever understand why they are being abused or mistreated. But, I believe that abuse towards me was a combined effort by my husband and my mother in law. Majority of the people see women as a public property and believe that they can treat women the way they want to."

"We are living in society where it's always a woman's fault. He knew, no one's going to blame or question him. Apart from male privilege, women are treated as delicate objects that can be overpowered by a man's will. I took help from a psychiatrist when everyone abandoned me."

"The reasons were clear that she didn't obey my father and hurt his ego. She was a disgrace to the family and his so called honour. He couldn't stand her presence and existence. One day she told me that she was just going to the market nearby. But, returned next day with her husband. My father didn't take a second to think, rushed to his room, brought the revolver and shot her dead. We were thrown out of the house and had no place to go."

Feelings and perceptions regarding physical abuse in TV dramas

The interviewees had mixed opinions and perceptions regarding the portrayal of physical abuse in TV dramas. They shared a similar belief that portrayal of weak and fragile women left a bad impression on them and gave a negative message for the audience as well. Stronger women in dramas gave them hope and helped them to see a better future. They aspired to be like them and change their situation. Their opinions also varied regarding what they felt after watching such dramas. They felt well informed, their level of awareness increased but on the other hand they also felt triggered, hurt, traumatized and enraged after watching them in some cases as they were reminded of their pains and struggles. The respondents shared their experiences as:

“TV dramas about physical abuse are really appealing or entertaining for people who’ve not faced such things in real. I can highly relate to Ghalti on Ary Digital. It reminds me of all my sufferings and gives me pain.”

“It is a positive as well as a negative initiative because people can interpret and take ideas the way they want to, which can either bring positivity or make a society worse. Dramas are providing information in excess, which is not healthy. Somehow, they are highlighting the problems that women are facing every single day. I have watched a serial named Darr Khuda se which covers workplace harassment.”

“I felt that media was responsible for making women fragile through weak characters but women with strong roles inspired me to be like them. I have watched dramas like Udaari and Cheekh which I still can’t forget.”

Role of TV dramas with physical abuse in empowering women and highlighting women rights

Television dramas built a strong relationship between real life and reel life. Women found characters in TV dramas that they could relate too. They also found antagonists like their own relatives and abusers. All the interviewees believed that TV dramas can play a strong role in empowering women (and they are trying to do it) but they require help and support from other mediums as well like strong legislation, support cells, helplines for women, awareness campaigns and most importantly well-educated families especially mothers who can teach their daughters to speak up for themselves. Five out six interviewees believed that TV dramas were somehow creating awareness about women rights among women but the dilemma was that they were not pointing out those rights. They were neither naming them nor explaining them. Generalization was not enough and serious discussions were required by addressing all rights one by one to actually play an effective role in informing women about their rights

Lastly, all the interviewees advised other women going through a similar situation to speak up, not letting their oppressor defeat them, seek support, talk to friends, confront family members, use social media to take possible help, consult a therapist and connect with religion to find solution to their problems. Respondents commented:

“TV dramas alone can’t help as long as the mothers are educated and the society starts supporting women. We are living in a patriarchal system where men are free from all blames and every mistake is put in a women’s basket.”

“I think the issues of divorce and extra marital affairs are still more popular in TV dramas with fragile and handicapped women. Empowerment has little ratio even till now. Women rights are discussed in some dramas but talking about them extensively is still neglected.”

“Portraying physical abuse in TV dramas can’t really help to empower women as much as legislation can do. Such laws need to be fully implemented and discussed in TV dramas.”

“Yes, absolutely, Some dramas are educating women about their rights and that is one of the reasons I started believing that it was not my fault, I didn’t do anything wrong and I should not be the one to feel guilty instead I should stand for myself and my rights. On the other hand I feel that abuse can only be minimized when women are seen as equal beings, when they stop oppressing each other.”

Discussion and Analysis

Physical abuse is a prevailing problem in Pakistan. The study indicated that 59.33% respondents had witnessed physical abuse around them. They were well aware of this problem of the society that was making lives of women difficult. 89.67% participants were watching dramas that depicted physical abuse in one way or another as it was an important problem and it was being highlighted by media. 45.33% participants described that they witnessed various forms of physical abuse very often in TV dramas. It was a part of most of the dramas and they were incomplete without hitting women and using power over them. The type of physical abuse that they witnessed the most was slapping and beating with 70.67%. It was seen as a common form of physical abuse that could be pointed out easily in most of the TV dramas. 63.33% of the viewers watched TV dramas with physical abuse at least once a week. While tendency of watching and consuming such content varied from person to person. 9.33% watched every day, 14.33% watched 5 to 6 days a week and 13% spent 3 days in a week, watching such content on TV. These consumption patterns then helped to determine the perceptions and feelings of the viewers. They were helpful to analyze why such content was being viewed and what were the main reasons of choosing these dramas over the other ones.

The main reason of watching these dramas according to the respondents was that they were able to attract the audience and were able to highlight the issues of our society effectively. The figures showed huge concentration of responses in agree, strongly agree and neutral on the likert scale that was used to analyze the results. 56.67% respondents (based on agree and strongly agree) collectively stated that their major reason of watching TV dramas regarding physical abuse was that they were a huge source of information to them.

Women understand the seriousness of physical abuse and view it as an issue which needs to be solved to make them secure a stable and safe place in the society. Majority of the respondents felt that such dramas are

neither watched for entertainment, nor time pass as they revolve around a sensitive matter. 61.66% respondents (based on agree and strongly agree) also felt that such dramas portrayed victims' feelings to the audience and narrated their story too which gave them a deep insight of the struggles faced by such women in the society. 45% respondents felt scared and victimized after watching TV dramas catering physical abuse and they had a difficult time dealing with it. It was astonishing to reveal through findings that 53% women felt hatred towards men after watching such TV dramas and viewing women being tortured and abused. Majority of the respondents i.e. 36.67% felt neutral while deciding whether TV dramas were being manipulative for them or not. On the positive side, 60% women felt inspired to talk about women rights after watching TV dramas with physical abuse. These dramas were making women stronger, sharper and more cautious as they were able to understand and interpret the message of drama effectively as interpreted by 53.33% of the respondents. 55.33% also pointed out that such dramas were helping women to save themselves from bad experiences. They also felt a need to on air more such dramas to educate women. 51.66% respondents felt strongly that such dramas can bring a positive change in the society.

The research indicated that 58% of the respondents believed TV dramas were a great source of creating awareness among the public about the issue of physical abuse in general. 62.99% of the respondents felt that such dramas were helping women to understand their worth, stand tall and say no to violence. 58% also expressed that TV dramas with physical abuse were educating and informing women regarding their rights. The findings of this study also revealed that TV dramas showing physical abuse helped women to stand for their rights according to 57% respondents.

The victims had mixed opinions and perceptions regarding the portrayal of physical abuse in TV dramas. Some of them believed that showing the issue on TV was just a game of ratings and others believed that they saw the dramas positively and felt thankful that their issue was being addressed on TV. Their opinions also varied regarding what they felt after watching such dramas. They felt well informed, their level of awareness increased but on the other hand some of them also felt triggered, hurt, traumatized and enraged after watching them in some cases as they were reminded of their pains and struggles. They shared a common belief that portrayal of weak and fragile women left a bad impression on them and was a negative message for the audience as well. Stronger women in dramas gave them hope and helped them to see a better future. They aspired to be like them and change their situation.

Conclusion

The study concluded that women were witnessing various types of physical abuse while watching TV dramas. Slapping and beating was the most commonly witnessed abuse for them. They were feeling well informed and well educated after watching such dramas on physical abuse on TV and were developing a perception not to tolerate abuse in any way. They were stronger and more cautious than before after watching such dramas and had a strong perception that on airing such dramas on TV was an ideal way to educate the public. Similarly, the victims who were interviewed shared a similar perception about TV dramas but they also emphasized on development and understanding of legislation for protection of women against abuse and awareness campaign to play their roles side by side with TV dramas to perform their role effectively.

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