

Assessing Knowledge and Attitude in Police Officers Regarding Domestic Violence

MEHREEN FATIMA¹, RAFAY AHMED SIDDIQUI², RAMLAH NAZ³, ARSHAD KHAN⁴, RAVAIL AEMAN JAFRI⁵

^{1,3}Department Forensic Medicine, Dow International Medical College, DUHS Karachi

²Department Forensic Medicine, Baqai Medical College, Baqai Medical University Karachi

⁴Department Forensic Medicine, Jinnah Sindh Medical University Karachi

⁵Student 4th Year MBBS, Liaquat University of Medical & Health Sciences, Jamshoro

Correspondence to Dr. Mehreen Fatima, E-mail: mehreen.fatima@duhs.edu.pk Cell: 0334-3575409

ABSTRACT

Aim: To assess the knowledge and attitude in police officers regarding domestic violence.

Study Design: Cross-sectional study

Place & Duration of Study: Police Training Centre, Saeedabad, Karachi from 1st June to 31st December 2021.

Methodology: A questionnaire based study was conducted on 72 Police officers at or above the rank of ASI selected by simple random sampling.

Results: There were 65 males and 7 females. 72.3% respondents were unaware of definition of domestic violence per WHO criterion. Majority of respondents were against physical violence in all scenarios. However, 70% held wife responsible to be verbally abused for misbehaving with husband/relatives. No significant association was found between knowledge with variables like age, gender and rank. 65% of officers believe that violence should be resolved by family members.

Conclusion: Reform and policy changes are needed to train and create awareness in law enforcement agencies to increase their knowledge and modify their attitudes regarding domestic violence.

Key words: Domestic violence, Police officers, Intimate partner/relative violence.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is considered to be a serious public health concern globally as well as in Pakistan. It not only affects women in the developing countries but also in the developed countries.¹ Domestic violence is defined as any forms of physical abuse, sexual abuse or even emotional abuse that has been inflicted by one family member onto another.² Not only does it include intimate partner violence, but all forms of violence encountered in a household, which includes elderly abuse, child abuse and even marital rape³.

In Pakistan, violence against women is an enormous social problem and its prevalence is increasing at an alarming rate. Physical and verbal forms of domestic violence are more common in Pakistani society.¹ In 2014 a study noted a prevalence rate of domestic violence more than 50% in Pakistan, which has covered almost all the corners of our country from rural to urban areas.⁴ A study conducted in 2012, revealed that 31.5% women experienced physical violence from their intimate partner in Lahore and Sialkot⁵. In 2011, the prevalence of physical violence against wife found to be 34% in Karachi⁶.

In Pakistani society and culture, violence against woman is considered a private family affair and tried to be resolved within the family. Even if police are called and discover assaults, they are expected to mediate disputes among family members. One study revealed that victim blaming is very common in many police officers because of their traditional views of women's role in society⁷. As police remains the first institution the victim call for help, and are expected to provide relief and protection, it is important to understand their perspective towards domestic violence. Therefore, through this study we aim to identify the perspectives regarding domestic violence among police officers in Karachi, Pakistan. This would be an attempt to fill in the research gap with aim of making suggestions for more effective training and policy guidelines. The results of this study will be used to review the state of forensic medicine education for law enforcement personals in Karachi. It also aims to answer the question of how could sound education in forensic medicine be useful in the combating of domestic violence, which remains a bane for women.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

After permission from Ethical Review Committee, this cross-sectional study was carried out at Police Training Centre, Saeedabad, Karachi from 1st June 2021 to 31st December, 2021. A total of 72 police officers at or above the rank of ASI were enrolled.

Received on 09-01-2022

Accepted on 27-05-2022

As it is a feasibility study with limited resources and as police officers are not easily approachable we included all police officers with or above the rank of ASI recently graduated from academy and who were willing to participate. Police Officer below the rank of ASI and those unwilling participate were excluded. Questionnaire was prepared to determine responses of police officers regarding different aspects of domestic violence. Measurements were made using shortened and modified version of conflict tactic scale⁹. Questionnaire was then given to participants after taking informed consent. Data was entered and analyzed through SPSS-21.0. Chi-square test was used to estimate association and significant difference for categorical variables. P-value ≤ 0.05 is considered significant.

RESULTS

There were 65 males and 7 female, 37 Assistant Sub-Inspectors, 22 Sub-Inspectors and 13 Inspectors (Table 1). Regarding knowledge about domestic violence, 72.2% were not aware of the complete definition of Domestic Violence as per WHO criterion. 68.1% Police officers considered not only physical but emotional abuse as Domestic Violence. 75.0% were aware that psychological abuse is also a part of domestic violence. 70.8% included marital rape as a part of domestic violence. Regarding self perception about domestic violence, 77.8% officers concluded that men could also be victims of Domestic Violence. 65.3% of police officers believed that a case of Domestic Violence should be resolved by relatives instead of being reported to police (Table 2).

Table 1: Demographic details of the participants (n=72)

Variable	No.	%
Gender		
Male	65	90.0
Female	7	10.0
Age (years)		
≤ 32	46	61.2
> 32	26	38.8
Rank		
Assistant sub-inspector	37	51.3
Inspector sub-inspector	22	30.5
Inspector	13	18.2

In the case of scenario based questions, majority of the police officers agreed that any physical assault towards the wife by husband in any scenario is the husband's fault (Table 3). However, in certain scenarios, the officers believed that if a wife got verbally abused or cursed by husband then it was in fact the wife's fault. 52.8% of police officers blame the wife for being verbally abused for belittling the husband over his income or refusing intercourse.

72.2% believed that this can also be triggered if wife misbehaves with her in-laws. Similarly, 65.3% held the wife responsible if she misbehaves with the husband and is verbally abused (Table 4).

In all scenarios regarding physical violence, the officers who knew about the definition of domestic violence, held the husband accountable (Table 5). 55% of the officers who knew the proper definition of domestic violence per WHO (n=20); still held the wife

responsible to receive verbal abuse for belittling the husband over income. 50% made her responsible to receive verbal abuse for refusing intercourse, 70% believed that this can also be triggered if she misbehaves with her in-laws. Similarly, 75% held the wife responsible if she misbehaves with the husband and is verbally abused (Tables 6-7)

Table 2: Knowledge regarding domestic violence in police officers (n=72)

Knowledge Items	No	Yes
Knowledge about complete definition of domestic violence-WHO	52 (72.2%)	20 (27.8%)
Emotional abuse constitute domestic violence	23 (31.9%)	49 (68.1%)
Physical abuse constitute domestic violence	13 (18.1%)	59 (81.9%)
Mental abuse/harm constitute domestic violence	18 (25%)	54 (75%)
Sexual abuse constitute domestic violence	21 (29.2%)	51 (70.8%)
Self-perception regarding domestic violence	Family	Police
Can men be victims of domestic violence?	16 (22.2%)	56 (77.8%)
Should Domestic Violence be reported to police or resolved by family elders?	47 (65.3%)	25 (34.7%)

Table 3: Attitudes towards physically abuse among police officers (n=72)

Wife gets physically abused by husband	Husband's Fault	Wife's Fault	Both at Fault	Unsure
After not completing household chores	57 (79.2%)	6 (8.3%)	9 (12.5%)	-
If the children are crying/misbehaving/not under control	53 (73.6%)	5 (6.9%)	14 (19.4%)	-
Over dowry	68 (94.4%)	3 (4.2%)	1 (1.4%)	-
If she is belittling him over his income	47 (65.3%)	17 (23.6%)	8 (11.1%)	-
If she refuses intercourse	45 (62.5%)	21 (29.2%)	4 (5.6%)	2 (2.8%)
If she refuses intercourse	45 (62.5%)	21 (29.2%)	4 (5.6%)	2 (2.8%)
If she misbehaves with his parents/siblings/relative	43 (59.7%)	20 (27.8%)	8 (11.1%)	1 (1.4%)
For a child getting into an accident/hurt	34 (47.2%)	4 (5.6%)	27 (37.5%)	7 (9.7%)
For stopping him from addiction	66 (91.7%)	3 (4.2%)	2 (2.8%)	1 (1.4%)
For stopping him from gambling	64 (88.9%)	1 (1.4%)	6 (8.3%)	1 (1.4%)
For refusing to take up a job	58 (80.6%)	6 (8.3%)	8 (11.1%)	-
For inability to conceive child	62 (86.1%)	5 (6.9%)	2 (2.8%)	3 (4.2%)

Table 4: Attitudes towards verbally abused/cursed among police officers (n=72)

Wife gets verbally abused/cursed by husband	Husband's Fault	Wife's Fault	Both at Fault	Unsure
After not completing household chores	34 (47.2%)	26 (36.1%)	12 (16.7%)	-
If the children are crying/misbehaving/not under control	23 (31.9%)	17 (23.6%)	31 (43.1%)	1 (1.4%)
Over dowry	66 (91.7%)	4 (5.6%)	2 (2.8%)	-
If she is belittling him over his income	19 (26.4%)	38 (52.8%)	13 (18.1%)	2 (2.8%)
If she refuses intercourse	24 (33.3%)	38 (52.8%)	8 (11.1%)	2 (2.8%)
If she misbehaves with him	10 (13.9%)	47 (65.3%)	15 (20.8%)	-
If she misbehaves with his parents/siblings/relative	8 (11.1%)	52 (72.2%)	11 (15.3%)	1 (1.4%)
For a child getting into an accident/hurt	17 (23.6%)	9 (12.5%)	38 (52.8%)	8 (11.1%)
For stopping him from addiction	63 (87.5%)	6 (8.3%)	2 (2.8%)	1 (1.4%)
For stopping him from gambling	61 (84.7%)	8 (11.1%)	2 (2.8%)	1 (1.4%)
For refusing to take up a job	49 (68.1%)	9 (12.5%)	2 (2.8%)	12 (16.7%)
For inability to conceive child	62 (86.1%)	5 (6.9%)	4 (5.6%)	1 (1.4%)

Table 5: Attitudes towards verbally abuse among police officers who had knowledge about DV-WHO (n=20)

Wife gets verbally abused/cursed by husband	Husband's Fault	Wife's Fault	Both at Fault	Unsure
After not completing household chores	11 (55%)	6 (30%)	3 (15%)	-
If the children are crying/misbehaving/not under control	11 (55%)	2 (10%)	7 (35%)	-
Over dowry	19 (95%)	1 (5%)	-	-
If she is belittling him over his income	4 (20%)	11 (55%)	5 (25%)	-
If she refuses intercourse	6 (30%)	10 (50%)	2 (10%)	2 (10%)
If she misbehaves with him	2 (10%)	14 (70%)	4 (20%)	-
If she misbehaves with his parents/siblings/relative	-	15 (75%)	5 (25%)	-
For a child getting into an accident/hurt	2 (10%)	2 (10%)	13 (65%)	3 (15%)
For stopping him from addiction	19 (95%)	-	1 (5%)	-
For stopping him from gambling	17 (85%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
For refusing to take up a job	14 (70%)	3 (15%)	-	3 (15%)
For inability to conceive child	19 (95%)	-	1 (5%)	-

Table 6 Attitudes towards physically abuse among police officers who had knowledge about DV-WHO (n=20)

Wife gets physically abused by husband	Husband's Fault	Wife's Fault	Both at Fault	Unsure
After not completing household chores	18 (90%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	-
If the children are crying/misbehaving/not under control	16 (80%)	-	4 (20%)	-
Over dowry	20 (100%)	-	-	-
If she is belittling him over his income	8 (40%)	8 (40%)	4 (20%)	-
If she refuses intercourse	10 (50%)	7 (35%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)
If she misbehaves with him	13 (65%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	-
If she misbehaves with his parents/siblings/relative	13 (65%)	4 (20%)	3 (15%)	-
For a child getting into an accident/hurt	7 (35%)	-	10 (50%)	3 (15%)
For stopping him from addiction	19 (95%)	-	1 (5%)	-
For stopping him from gambling	17 (85%)	-	2 (10%)	1 (5%)
For refusing to take up a job	17 (85%)	1 (5%)	-	2 (10%)
For inability to conceive child	20 (100%)	-	-	-

Table 7: Associated factor with knowledge regarding domestic violence in police officers (n=72)

Characteristics	Knowledge of domestic violence-WHO		P value
	No	Yes	
Age (years)			
≤32	27 (73%)	10 (27%)	0.884
>32	25 (71.4%)	10 (28.6%)	
Gender			
Male	47 (72.3%)	18 (27.7%)	0.961
Female	5 (71.4%)	2 (28.6%)	
Rank			
Asst. Sub Inspector	25 (67.6%)	12 (32.4%)	0.481
Sub Inspector	18 (81.8%)	4 (18.2%)	
Inspector	9 (69.2%)	4 (30.8%)	
Can men be victims of domestic violence?			
No	14 (87.5%)	2 (12.5%)	0.122
Yes	38 (67.95)	18 (32.1%)	
Should domestic violence be reported to police or resolved by family elders?	Family	Police	0.025
	47 (65.3)	25 (34.7)	

p-value calculated using Chi-square/Fisher's Exact test

DISCUSSION

Domestic violence, in its broadest sense, includes violence against, intimate partner, children or the elderly. However, domestic violence is frequently used as a synonym for intimate partner violence, which occurs when one of the persons in an intimate relationship commits violence against the other person. Abuse can take many forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, financial, religious, reproductive, or sexual. This can range from subtle forms to coercion to marital rape and other violent forms of physical abuse, which can result in physical or mental impairment, or death^{8,9}.

The present study found that only 27.7% (n=20/72) police officers were aware of the complete definition of domestic violence as per WHO. There is a clear cut distinction to the reaction of police officers when dealing with physical and verbal instances of domestic violence. It is of imperative importance that across all scenarios in our study, police officers recognized the husband was at fault than the wife for the domestic violence event. They largely hold the husband accountable especially in all the cases of physical violence. However, the husband is not held totally responsible in case of verbal abuse, an unfortunate fact which leads us to believe that police officers associate part of the guilt to the wife, that is the victim. The study shows that 65.3% police officers consider the wife at fault for receiving verbal abuse particularly when there is misbehavior towards the husband. 52.8% of respondents found women at fault if they received verbal abuse from their husband for refusing intercourse and for belittling the husband for his income. The police officers irrespective of their knowledge of domestic violence or its definition do find the wife at fault when she receives verbal abuse at the hands of her spouse. These findings also coincide with the findings demonstrated in a research conducted by Lavoie et al¹⁰ in Quebec, Canada which also shows that while police officers abhor and are willing to associate the blame of physical violence towards the husband, they nonetheless still hold the wife accountable and are pretty nonchalant during a scenario of verbal abuse i.e. the justification of verbal abuse by the husband for various scenarios. Another study also revealed similar findings to our study where again the police officers believed that verbal abuse by husband towards wife was in fact justified but they reacted negatively to physical violence.¹¹ However, in a different study, the respondents disputed and denounced the notion that wife's behaviour towards husband leads to domestic violence¹².

Another factor the police considers strongly about when addressing the issue of domestic violence is the family system which is the norm in our country. 72.2% of respondent officers believe that if a wife misbehaves with husband's immediate family then it is okay for the husband to verbally abuse her. Interestingly, this number even increases to 75% in respondents who were aware of the correct definition of domestic violence as per WHO.

The most significant finding of the study (p=0.025) shows 68.5% of respondent police officers preferred not to be involved in the matter of domestic violence and that the aforementioned incident be quietly resolved by family elders. These findings showing restraint and hesitancy of police officers when getting involved in domestic disputes were also reported in a study by Qu et al¹³ where Chinese police officers did not give importance or priority to dispensing resources to deal with this issue and would rather have the issue solved by mediation. Similar findings are reported by Wang et al¹⁴ in China where police are more content with giving oral or written warnings to perpetrators instead of adopting a heavier handed approach. However two separate studies attributed this attitude with the country's overall method to resolving domestic violence by using local committees, informal meetings and court systems to mediate and resolve disputes.^{15,16} These findings were also reported in US police officers who also did not feel comfortable in getting involved in domestic violence disputes between spouses⁷. Contrary to the findings demonstrated by our respondents and Chinese police officers, a study in Taiwan found that Taiwanese police officers are more likely to take a pro active approach rather than reactive or conservative in tackling domestic violence¹⁷.

The study also reports that female police officers exhibited the same traits as their male counterparts in showing restraint from getting involved in domestic violence dispute and would rather see the issue resolved through family rather police mediation (42.85% of female officers). Similarly, three studies on US female officers show that they also shared the same belief about not interfering in domestic disputes¹⁸⁻²⁰. However, Taiwanese female officers were more enthusiastic about arresting and solving cases of domestic violence compared to their male counterparts having better understanding victim's emotional and psychological needs¹⁷.

No significant association was found between ages of respondent police officers and their attitudes when dealing with domestic violence. Likewise, studies done by Qu et al¹⁴ and Chu and Sun¹⁷ also showed the effect of age was also not significant on Chinese or Taiwanese police officers' attitude. Contrary to this, three studies from US showed that older police officers are less likely in favor of involving themselves in matters of domestic violence and are less likely to arrest perpetrators compared to their younger counterparts.¹⁸⁻²⁰ However a most recent study on Chinese police officers revealed that older police officers were in fact more likely to take proactive approach in dealing with domestic disputes and make arrests.²¹

In terms of need of training of police officers to deal the cases of domestic violence effectively, two studies conducted in US, found that more training and dissemination of knowledge with regards to domestic violence leads to higher incidence of arrests in agencies^{22,23}. Likewise in India, a study revealed that training improved the knowledge to effectively deal with domestic violence²⁴.

CONCLUSION

The knowledge of police officers about domestic violence is lacking. Therefore, reform and policy changes are needed to train and create awareness in law enforcement agencies to increase their knowledge and modify their attitude regarding domestic violence, to adapt a pro active approach when dealing with domestic violence.

Conflict of interest: Nil

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