

Covid-19 and Spousal Violence against Women in Pakistan: A Web based Cross Sectional Study on Financial Anxieties and Rising Levels of Intimate Partner Violence during the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Spousal violence against women has emerged as a 'Shadow Pandemic' during these times (Covid-19). This study was designed to investigate the interplay of socio-demographic factors and economic distress with spousal violence during the lockdown in Pakistan.

Methods: A web based cross-sectional study was carried out to test the assumptions. 200 participants (100 women and 100 men) were selected through snowball sampling technique. A questionnaire containing demographic information, a composite abuse scale, and financial stress scale were adapted. Data was collected through Google Forms.

Results: The results of Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship among partner violence against women, financial anxiety ($r=.60, p<0.001$), job insecurity ($r=.48, p<0.001$), and preserving of financial wellbeing ($r=.32, p<0.001$). Hierarchical Regression analysis revealed that financial anxiety and efforts to maintain financial wellbeing to be positive predictors of partner violence against women. The results of the study revealed maintaining financial wellbeing to be a significant positive mediator between partner violence and financial anxiety; whereas, life satisfaction was found to be a non-significant mediator.

Conclusion: The findings of the study conclude that financial anxiety and assuring financial wellbeing tend to increase partner violence during pandemics and beyond.

Keywords: Covid-19, Domestic violence, Economic loss, Public Health

INTRODUCTION

Globally nations have been battling the spread of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), and there is growing evidence indicating a rise in domestic violence among couples due to unforeseen lockdowns and economic distress¹. However, given the time constraints very few studies have been able to explore the role of the emerging socio-economic crises on occurrence of spousal violence in Pakistan. Based on a growing body of literature, the present study hypothesizes that the financial impact of Covid-19 is linked to an increase in spousal violence².

Spousal violence is a serious phenomenon that may result in severe physical, psychological, social, and emotional consequences. Academic scholarship and studies conducted by social organizations have demonstrated that in most cases women are the victims of spousal violence³. Spousal or intimate partner violence against women has been defined as a range of sexually, psychologically, and physically coercive acts used against women by current or former male intimate partners.⁴ The present study investigates the interplay of socio-demographic factors and economic distress with spousal violence against women during the lockdown in Pakistan. The United Nations Organization⁵ has already recognized violence against women as endemic. In the patriarchal setup of Pakistan, the situation is worse for married women who face domestic violence more often. It has been reported that 90% of married women in Pakistan face physical and sexual violence during their married lives⁶. During Covid-19 spousal violence against women increased due to the imposed lockdowns, social isolation, financial crises, job loss, and massive pay cuts². The present study focuses on married urban dwellers who had experienced pay cuts and or jobs loss and largely stayed home during the lockdown. The episodes of spousal violence against women remained persistent in Pakistan even after the first, second, and third waves of Covid-19. Loss of economic opportunities during the pandemic and rising inflation were the major push factors behind this situation⁷. During the pandemic

increasing domestic violence against women emerged as a 'silent pandemic' and a 'shadow pandemic'⁸. This is especially concerning as governments across the globe have been unable to sufficiently tackle the public health emergency caused by Covid-19⁹. A recent study conducted in 2020 that analyzed social impacts of the pandemic revealed that imposed lockdowns to control the rise of covid-19 hit the world's economy badly. Limited economic activity, massive downsizing of employees, and pay cuts along with the social isolation raised overall violence ratios across the globe¹⁰. Similarly, economic instability and social isolation at micro-level has changed the dynamics of family life. In domestic spheres, fear of death, financial crises along with social isolation has increased the instances of intimate partner violence¹¹.

The situation is not different in Pakistan. The rise in the cases of spousal violence is even more evident due to the strong patriarchal norms of the society¹¹. In this regard, a recent studies opine how intimate partner violence also comes from the beliefs that are prevailing in our society, where women's subordinate position significantly increases their chances of victimhood especially when social circumstances lose a sense of normalcy¹². Data from violence complaint cells is also quite relevant in this context. Pakistan's 2020 statistics report of Punjab Unified Communication and Response (PUCAR-15) indicate that they received an increased number of calls for the case of spousal violence in recent time: statistics show that there were 13,478 calls complaining about domestic violence in Lahore were between January and May 2020; 2,096 of these were received in January; 2,360 in February; and 2,853 in March. The helpline received 3,079 calls in April and 3,090 calls in May. This data clearly shows that the number of domestic violence cases was increasing gradually (PUCAR-15). Similarly, HRCP's itemized data sheds light on the prevalent forms of domestic abuse in Pakistan; it reveals that the most common forms of domestic abuse are shouting or yelling (76 percent), slapping (52 percent), threatening (49 percent), pushing (47 percent), punching (40 percent), and kicking (40 percent). These findings are central to rationalizing and further informing the analyses of the current study.

Received on 11-10-2021

Accepted on 25-05-2022

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data Source and Sample: A web-based cross-sectional study was carried out during the period from April to August 2021. The sample consisted of 200 participants including both men and women with the age range 19 to 45 years ($M_{age}=33.06$, $SD=8.83$). Non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used for data collection, which helped select participants based on characteristics of the intended population and objectives of the study¹³. Written, informed consent was taken from the participants before conducting the research. Participants of the study were assured of anonymity and data confidentiality; furthermore, that the data collected would be used for research purposes only. The participants were also given the right to withdraw at any stage of data collection and after.

Instruments: A demographic proforma was prepared including gender, age, and education. A composite abuse scale (Revised) Short Form (CASR-SF) designed by Ford-Gilboe et al.¹⁴ and a financial stress scale were adopted with the permission of their creators for data collection. The scales adopted are discussed in detail below.

The composite abuse scale (Revised)—Short form (CASR-SF): CASR-SF-15 items were designed by Ford-Gilboe et al., and were adopted for use during outbreak of Covid-19 in the study to measure intimate partner or spousal violence as experienced by individuals. The response format includes, not at all=0, 'once'=1, 'a few times'=2, 'monthly'=3, 'weekly'=4, and 'daily or almost daily'=5. Items cover three abuse domains: physical, sexual, and psychological, with questions asked to assess lifetime, recent and current exposure, and abuse frequency. Cronbach's α was 0.97. The internal consistency of each subscale was acceptable (0.93 for psychological abuse, 0.84 for physical abuse, and 0.88 for sexual abuse). The scale was scored by adding all responses together; scores range from 0 to 75; below 30 is low, 31 to 45 is moderate while above 45 is categorized as high¹¹.

Financial Stress Composite: The financial stress composite consisted of several psychological constructs: 5-item depressive symptomatology and negative affect, 7-item financial anxiety, 7-items job insecurity, 5-item life satisfaction subscale, and 10-item financial well-being assessment. Participants were asked to rate the item of each subscale on a five-point rating scale ranging from 1= "strongly disagree" to 5="strongly agree". The Cronbach alpha of the subscales ranged from .87 to .93 reflecting sound psychometric properties¹¹.

Procedure: The department's graduate committee first approved the project for its ethical and procedural steps. Later on, a questionnaire was developed on Google Forms and was sent to prospective participants via their email accounts, WhatsApp, and Facebook. The email accounts were collated from different emails related to conferences, research, and media during the academic semester. The inclusion criteria were the ability to read and write, and being married. The participants who were willing to participate in the study were asked to click the next button after reading the informed consent. Pilot testing was done on a part of the sample consisting of 15 individuals recruited through the purposive sampling technique. The main study data was analyzed after a month of data collection through SPSS.

Statistical analysis: Data were analyzed by SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) 21.0 version. The descriptive section containing frequency and percentages were analyzed to describe the details of the demographic variables. To test the hypothesis, correlation and regression analyses were run.

RESULTS

Results are contained in descriptive analysis to see the detail of demographic information. In addition, to see the strength of the relationship between the variables correlation and regression were applied.

From the descriptive resin in table 1, almost an equal number of participants participated in the study. The higher number of participants was from the age group 31-45. Regarding their educational record, those with graduate degrees participated in a higher number and the lowest number of participants was from inter and below educational levels.

The significance value is 0.05. In the table-2, the relationship value between partner violence and financial anxiety is (.604) at the significance value of (.000) which indicates their strong positive relationship. This value shows that if there is more partner violence they have more financial anxiety.

When we see the relationship between partner violence and job insecurity its value is (.478) at the significance value of (.000), which indicates a strong positive correlation between them. (.478) value shows that when there is more job insecurity there is more partner violence.

When we see the relationship between partner violence and life satisfaction the value is (-.073), which is a negative relationship between these variables. The negative sign shows that when there is more partner violence people are less satisfied with their lives.

The relationship between financial wellbeing and partner violence has the value of (.329) with a significance value of (.000). This is a weak correlation between partner violence and financial wellbeing.

When we see the correlation between financial anxiety and job insecurity the value is (.724) at the significance value of (.000) which is a strong correlation between these variables. It means when there is financial anxiety there is more job insecurity.

There is a negative relationship between financial anxiety and life satisfaction. Its value is (-.097). People are less satisfied with their lives when they have more financial anxiety.

There is an average positive correlation between financial anxiety and financial well-being with the value (.312***). It means when there is financial anxiety there is more financial well-being. In the section on financial well-being, the points are explaining the struggle with people's financial issues. The more they have to manage their finances the more anxiety takes place in them.

There is an average positive correlation between job insecurity and life satisfaction having the value (.310***). It means when there is more job insecurity there is more life satisfaction. In the section on job insecurity, more points are in the favor of job satisfaction so when someone is satisfied with their job they are satisfied with their life.

By seeing the correlation between job insecurity and financial wellbeing the value is (.343***). It indicates a positive relationship between two variables. This shows that when there is more job insecurity there is more financial well-being. People have to struggle to manage their expenses for this purpose many people do side business with their regular jobs. As was mentioned above the job insecurity section is explaining the points, which are in the favor of job satisfaction so their financial well-being is good.

The relationship between life satisfaction and financial wellbeing is (.138) which is a positive value. It indicates that when the financial well-being is good life satisfaction is also good.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N (%)
Gender	
Male	98(49%)
Female	100(50%)
Age	
19-30	96(48%)
31-45	104(52%)
Education	
Inter and below	51(25.5%)
Graduation	81(40.5%)
Masters and above	68(34%)

Table 2: Pearson product-moment Correlation

	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1F1TMP	194	19.24	8.86	---	---	---	---	---
2F2TFA	198	23.77	8.42	.60***	---	---	---	---
3F3 TJI	194	22.89	6.65	.48***	.72***	---	---	---
4F4 TLS	197	15.70	5.40	-.73	-.10	.31***	---	---
5F5 TFW	192	33.58	7.83	.33***	.31***	.34***	.14	---

Note. N= no. of items, F1TMP= Total my Partner (partner violence), F2TFA= Total Financial Anxiety, F3TJI= Total job insecurity, F4TLS= Total Life Satisfaction, F5 TFW= Total Financial Wellbeing

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression

	B	95% CI for B		SEB	B	Sig.	R ²	ΔR ²
		LL	UL					
Step1						.001	.043	.027
Gender	.677	-.068	1.421	.377	.135	.075		
Age	1.40	-1.207	4.02	1.324	.080	.290		
Education	-1.69	-3.34	-.04	.836	-.150	.045		
Step 2						.728	.367	.341
Gender	.445	-.176	1.06	.315	.089	.159		
Age	1.042	-1.152	3.23	1.11	.059	.350		
Education	.240	-1.207	1.68	.734	.021	.744		
Total financial anxiety	.457	.238	.67	.111	.416	.001***		
Total job insecurity	.192	-.087	.47	.142	.140	.176		
Total life satisfaction	-.179	-.427	.06	.125	-.107	.154		
Total financial wellbeing	.162	.016	.31	.074	.144	.030		

In table 3 for step 1, the value of ΔR² is .104, which shows that generally, the indicators of step 1 are 2% contributing to DV partner violence.

For step 2, the value of ΔR² is .341, which means that the indicators of step 2 are 34% contributing toward DV partner violence.

In step 1, by seeing each value of the variable the beta value of gender which is (.445) and age (1.40), it shows that the more women of age (31-45) are victims of partner violence; the other values of step 1 are insignificant and have negative predictors.

The value of financial anxiety is (.000) which is significant having the beta value of (.457); this positive value shows that the more people have financial anxiety there are more chances of partner violence against women. The value of financial well-being is (.03) which is significant having a beta value of (.162) and shows that people having greater financial wellbeing have more chances of partner violence. In the section on financial well-being, the points are explaining the struggle with people's financial issues. The more they have to manage their finances the more anxiety takes place and it results in partner violence. The other values show the negative predictors.

The results of the regression table also show that the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4: Role of Financial Well Being as a Mediator between Financial Anxiety and Partner Violence (N=200)

Consequent		M(FW)			Y(PV)			
Antecedent	B	SE	P	B	SE	P		
FA (X)	a	.33	.06	.001***	.59	.06	.001***	
FW (M)	b	.14	.07	.023*				
	R ² =	.11			R ² =	.35		
	F(1,198)=	23.24	p=	.001***	F(1,198)=	100	p=	.001***

Note. FA=Financial Anxiety, FW=Financial Wellbeing, PV=Partner Violence, β= Beta, *p<0.05, ***p<0.001

The above table represents the results of mediation analysis based on one mediator. The mediation analysis included financial anxiety as a separate independent variable, financial wellbeing as a mediator, and partner violence as an outcome variable.

Figure 1 shows that the mediator of financial well-being partially mediated the relationship between financial anxiety and partner

violence (β=.14, SE=.07, p=.023*). The path between FA and PV was highly significant (β=.54, SE=.06, p<.001***), indicating a direct relationship between financial anxiety and mediator partner violence (β=.33, SE=.06, p=.001***)

The overall effect of the model, showing the role of mediator financial well-being between financial anxiety partner violence, was significant and greater than the direct effect of the predictor variable on the outcome variable. Therefore, the overall results showed financial wellbeing partially mediated the relationship between FA and PV as after controlling the FW as mediator the direct effect of FA on PV is reduced but path c' is still significant.

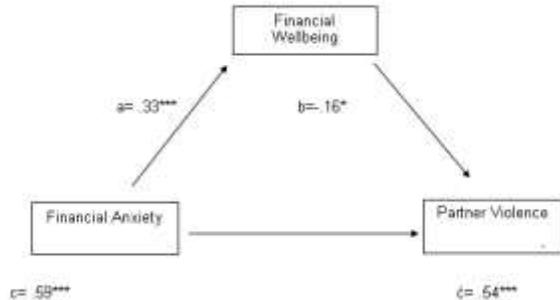


Figure 1: Mediation Path Framework of Intolerance of Uncertainty, Family Social Support, and Student Problem Checklist (SPCL)

DISCUSSION

The current research study was conducted to investigate the relationship between financial anxieties as an aftermath of Covid-19 and spousal violence against women. It hypothesized that there is likely to be a positive relationship between financial anxiety, job insecurity, and spousal violence against women. Four sub-factors comprising financial stress composite, including financial anxiety, job insecurity, life satisfaction, and financial wellbeing, were measured in this regard. By seeing the all variables, we conclude that partner violence is significantly associated with post-Covid-19 financial stressors among partners. Therefore, our hypothesis that there is likely to be a relationship between post-covid-19 financial anxiety and spousal violence against women stands. The correlation value between job insecurity and financial wellbeing is

.34*** (moderate correlation). It indicates a positive relationship between the two variables. This shows that when there is more job insecurity there is more financial wellbeing -- people have to struggle to manage their expenses and so for this purpose many do side business with their regular jobs. Researchers have found that financial constraints may make it more difficult for the victim to abandon the abuser. Financial exploitation could be one of the various methods used by the abusers to keep their partners (victims) under their control¹⁵. In consequence, financial difficulties can heighten stress and damage relationships, as well as limit the victim's ability to leave¹⁶.

The results of the present study correlated with previous studies exploring the similar relationships between imposed lockdown and massive financial disadvantages during the COVID-19 pandemic induced apprehensions and uncertainties, and the incremented need for survival. Consequently, the struggle to live with limited resources, utilizing the best to live for long, fear of death due to disease or hunger overshadowed the need for affection, love, and intimacy and resulted in rising levels of inter-partner violence.

Similarly, the predictive and positive relationship between financial wellbeing and spousal violence seems contrary to literature. A close examination of the set of items of the financial wellbeing subscale such as "struggling to secure financial wellbeing", "giving a birthday gift strains my pocket", "my spouse/partner controls my life" etc., revealed that the subscale assesses the financial wellbeing through putting a control on financial resources. In our traditional collectivistic culture exchange of gifts, spending on others, and supporting and financing relatives is a common practice that put a burden on one's economic conditions. Zhou and Chartrand reported in their research that gifts are not only source of social support and reflection of love but also carry an increased financial burden. To secure one's financial status, conflicts and struggles can be seen among spouses to control each other's expenditures. In such circumstances, violence may be used as a weapon to win the battle. Various studies support the Relationship Stability and Change Model (VSAM), which provides a meta-theoretical paradigm for studying relationship stability and change, combines diathesis-stress and cognitive-behavioral perspectives. It claims that relationship outcomes are determined by three interrelated factors: (1) enduring vulnerabilities (individual characteristics, experiences, and dispositions that impact one's ability to perform tasks within the relationship); (2) life stressors (external stressors and strains); and (3) adaptive processes (thoughts and behaviors enacted by partners that promote positivity in the relationships).

The study further hypothesized that financial anxiety due to the Covid-19 situation is likely to predict spousal violence positively against women. It was found that financial stress is a result of job loss, pay cuts, and market and business closures due to the covid-19's strict lockdowns imposed by the governments to control the pandemic. Similarly, social isolation and work from home policies closed the options of help from social networks of family and friends, which increased financial stress among men and spousal violence against women. The study found that Covid-19 has affected families, relationships, and societies in innumerable many ways.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed a significant connection between the loss of economic opportunities for men due to Covid-19 and an increase in spousal violence against women. It concludes that economic crisis and spousal violence have a direct impact on each other, with women becoming victims of spousal violence due to financial crises and added work burden during COVID-19 lockdowns. Based on its findings, the study recommends increasing access to social welfare for families in distress and women in particularly due to increasingly being confined to the domestic sphere in the post-Covid-19 world and hence, in immense need of being linked to counseling and shelter homes services among others.

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