

Analyzing Domestic Violence in Pakistan through Social Power Abuse Theory

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims to scrutinize different societal factors involved in domestic violence against women in Pakistan applying Van Dijk's postulates of social power abuse. The contents for the study are collected from some documentaries on the issue of domestic violence. The documentaries were selected through purposive sampling approach. The analysis shows that the discursive techniques used by respondents engaged in domestic violence as perpetrators and victims is investigated and analysis has been done on three aspects of the discourse to cover it thoroughly. It is pointed out that those who commit domestic violence cast the entirety of the blame on the victim's character and propagate the idea that women merely play with their men's dignity. Thus, they ought to compensate for it by enduring such abuse. Agents therefore attempted to justify their actions through language and discourse. Previous studies on similar crimes against women tended to concentrate on the problem and the state of the victims and paid little attention to the language characteristics of the perpetrator and the victim, but this study is significant because it shows how different ideologies are conveyed and power relations are exercised through discourse.

Keywords: domestic violence, social power abuse, documentaries, social factors

Introduction

Women are subjected to a variety of violent acts on a daily basis in Pakistan especially in Sindh province, including sexual assault by close relatives, complete outsiders, and government employees; domestic violence, which includes killing one's spouse while also being burned, deformed with acid, brutalised, and threatened; ritual honour killings; and detention centre abuse and exploitation. Several documentaries have been made on these crimes against women henceforth, this study aims to investigate the role of language used by both victim and perpetrators in the Pakistani selected documentaries on domestic violence against women in Sindh on both micro and macro level and their role in creating and propagating the different ideologies and exercise of power relations by men through different linguistic choices.

This qualitative study aims to scrutinize different societal factors behind domestic violence in Pakistan through Van Dijk's social power abuse theory in the selected documentaries upon this issue. A persistent theme in Van Dijk's work is the relationship between discourse, cognition, and society making it interdisciplinary. His arguments focusing on language and how it is used to exercise power are dispersed across several of his works. His theories primarily explore how discourse shapes and is shaped by social power. In a postmodern world, surrounded by numerous simulations, ideas, and power structures, the lines between reality and fiction have blurred (Wodak, 2009). Hence, discourse is not simply text on paper but rather systems of knowledge that determine what is deemed true and what is not (Belsey, 2013).

Domestic Violence is a worldwide issue that violates people's rights and transcends all societal, cultural and religious borders. As Flury et al. (2010) defines domestic violence as an act of using bodily, mental, or emotional abuse to injure or exert authority and control over another person. The offender is a member of the victim's "domestic setting," which includes an intimate partner, spouse, ex intimate partner, relative, companion, or acquaintance. It is widely recognized as a prevalent type of gender-based violence. Numerous studies indicate that around 10 to 35% of women encounter domestic violence at some stage in their life. The gender imbalance in Pakistan is obvious from the country's rating of 141st out of 142 in terms of economic possibilities and political engagement for women. Gender disparity undermines women's societal standing and exposes them to vulnerability to violence. The fundamental idea motivating gender-specific violence is the notion of male superiority over females. The United Nations' Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines gender-based abuse as any action that causes or is probably to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats, pressure, or unjust denial of freedom, whether it occurs in public or private settings (Hadi, 2017).

The terms "domestic violence" and "violence in the surrounding societal setting" are interchangeable and refer specifically to acts of violence occurring between grownups. The mistreatment of children by their parents or guardians, commonly known as child abuse, is seen as a distinct issue in both judicial and social scientific study. It is not considered part of the term of "domestic violence". Domestic violence typically encompasses a series of abusive acts, instead of a solitary violent incident, and can involve physical, psychological, and sexual aggression. Although the term

"domestic violence" has a generic definition, it mostly consists of abuse that is associated with gender and is rooted in the unequal power dynamics between men and women Flury et al. (2010).

According to Flury and Nyberg (2010), the term "domestic violence" refers to the deliberate usage of bodily force or authority, whether real or perceived, towards oneself, another individual, or a collective entity, with the aim of causing harm or death, or with a significant probability of doing so. Domestic abuse is a well acknowledged social issue that continues to be linked with ambiguity and societal prohibitions. Several women, in their spousal relation or in a social setting may encounter mental and/or physical abuse, which can lead to significant health issues (Owusu Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016).

Violence against women is prevalent in every country worldwide. According to multi-country research conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO), the prevalence of domestic violence varied from 15% in Japan to 71% in rural Ethiopia. Domestic abuse has become widely recognized globally as a serious offence against both human and legal rights. Typically, women are the recipients of domestic violence, which arises from imbalanced power dynamics between men and women. Over three women are killed by their spouses on a daily basis in the United States. In 2005, a total of 1,181 women were killed by their intimate partners. Approximately 2 million women get injuries as a result of domestic violence from partners annually. Approximately 84% of women experience spousal abuse. Females across all age groups are susceptible to experiencing domestic abuse (Semahegn & Mengistie, 2015). According to reports, over 28% of women in the United States experience abuse perpetrated by their partners no fewer than once during their lifetime. Additionally, records indicate that in nations that are impoverished, over 50% of women experience physical abuse from their spouses or partners. The percentage in India is 45%, in the Philippines it is 47.2%, and in Kenya it is 52%.

WA et al. (2016) indicated that Women in Pakistan lack a respected position in society. It is still widely believed that women have been born solely for service to men. Due to this mentality, women have been subjected to societal harassment, institutional undermining, and financial setbacks. Pakistani women are currently encountering various complex social and economic and political challenges that have significantly hindered their growth. Various forms of oppression against women, such as honor killings, acid attacks, domestic abuse, molestation in public places, and forced marriages, are occurring nationwide. Women lack unrestricted opportunity for education, financial independence, involvement in family decisions, property ownership, spouse choice, and employment. According to the 2013 Globe Gender Gap report released by the World Economic Forum, Pakistan ranks as the second worst amongst nations for gender equity and balanced allocation of assets between men and women. lacking the active involvement of women in social and economic affairs, the vision of a more prosperous Pakistan can't be realized.

This inequality based on an uneven treatment of both genders according to their physical and biological traits. No law or culture can justify gender inequity. However, the civil society of educated Pakistanis believes in it. For this, it is a prominent social issue in Pakistani society, especially in the nation's poorer regions. The prevalent view is that women were made only to serve men. This mentality has led to the social

harassment, political undermining, and economic backlash against women. This is the main cause of women's incapacity to contribute positively to Pakistan's progress. Pakistani women in Sindh are currently dealing with a variety of socioeconomic and political challenges that have significantly limited their potential. Across Sindh province, forced marriages, harassment in public spaces, acid throwing, honour murders, and domestic abuse are examples of injustices against women. Women are not granted the freedom to pursue an education, support themselves financially, engage in household decision-making, own property, choose a spouse, or work. According to the 2013, Globe Gender Gap report released by the World Economic Forum, Pakistan ranks second worst among nations for gender equality and equitable resource allocation between men and women (WA et al., 2016).

Moreover, studies on women's attitudes in Sindh reveal a complicated narrative, helps keep running an endless cycle of violence that is often normalized or ignored (Nawaz, 2024). In Pakistan, honour killings are a reality from which none one can disagree. Still, in Sindh this custom is gaining speed. Furthermore, firmly ingrained in inner Sindh are societal norms and cultural beliefs. Therefore, this practice of killing a woman in the pretext of honor is a part of this tribal culture. Behind this mask, people murder their own daughters, sisters, even mothers; they then escape free of charge since the head of the family or another family member eventually pardons the perpetrators while collecting "Diyat, Blood money." Considering the general Sindhi society, local elites have a somewhat significant impact across all of Sindh, especially in rural Sindh. This Rural elite (feudal lord) has several names in the local language like Wadero, Sardar, Raees, and Pir (Ali, 2018).

Pakistani documentaries are effective visual media that may be used to convey the subtleties of social issues and offer a platform for advocacy, discussion, and awareness-raising. Domestic violence is a manifestation of a power relationship, which is produced and reproduced through the way people speak. Additionally, it makes the practice the accepted standard in society. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the language around killings for honor, gender inequality, or other types of attacks against women. This research will concentrate linguistic and communicative techniques that perpetuate and encourage assault towards women along with the victim's narrative. It will explore how patriarchal customs and beliefs are portrayed in Pakistani selected documentaries that deal with domestic assault in Sindh. In order to examine patriarchy in the discourse, gendered language, stereotypes, and portrayals that are maintained by these documentaries require being examined. Examining the ways in which structures of power are expressed and maintained in discourse, the study seeks to clarify the part that patriarchy plays in forming and maintaining the narrative surrounding domestic abuse of women.

Research Method

Sampling Method

Documentaries for this research are chosen by employing purposive sampling technique because it facilitates in the intended selection of such documentaries which specifically utilize the theme of domestic violence against women in Pakistan and role of patriarchy, illiteracy and gender inequalities behind such violence.

Sources of Data

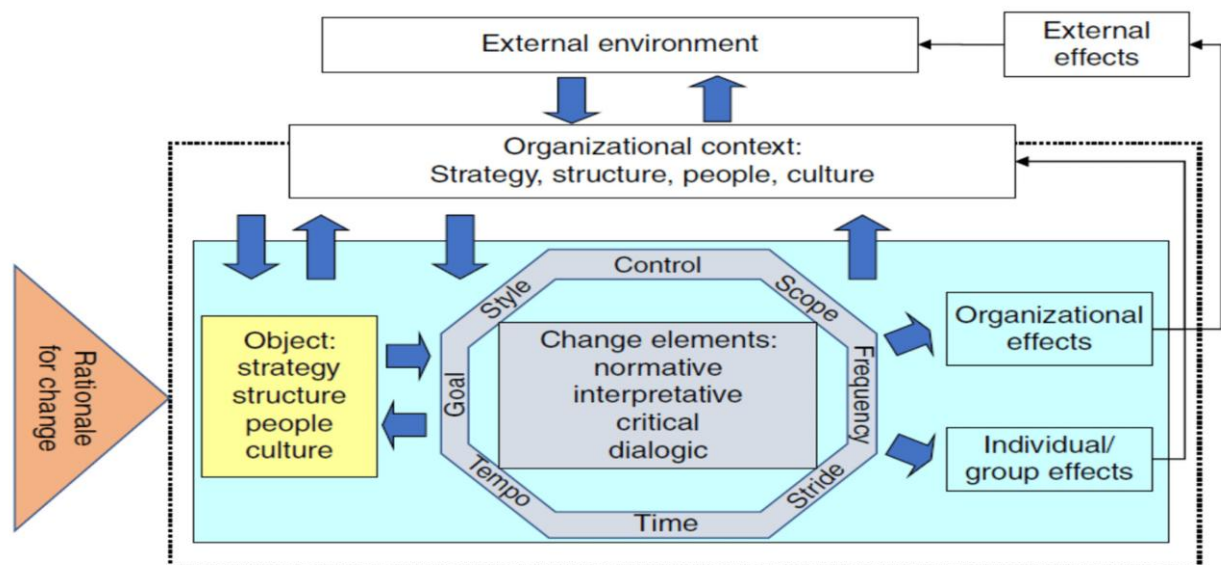
In this study, selected documentaries on prevalent issue of domestic violence against women in Sindh, functions as the main source of data. These documentaries consist of the stories of acid attack and honor killing survivors who narrate the whole incident and their life after these brutal attacks by the men. Such documentaries comprise the communication between the participants and interviews that are helpful in the critical discourse analysis of the victims and perpetrators. Two famous documentaries that function as the main source of data collection for this research is "Saving Face" documented in 2012 and directed by Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy and Daniel Junge's. A tough struggle of two acid attack survivors is highlighted in this Documentary because it focuses on the brutal acid attacks on Women in Pakistan especially in Sindh region. The character of Dr. Jawad, who is a Pakistani Plastic Surgeon comes from London, is also portrayed in the documentary. He rebuilds the damaged face of acid survivors and shows the concern about the underreporting of acid attacks in Pakistan because of the cultural stereotype and inequality. One of the acid attack survivors' foundations showed in film recorded about 100 above acid assaults per year in Pakistan. The Documentary has received the Emmy award and 2012 Academy award for best documentary on this subject. Released in 2013, the second documentary, "Outlawed in Pakistan," is directed by Habiba Nosheen and Hilke Schellmann in Dadu and Karachi. This movie records the horrific story of a 13-year-old Pakistani girl who was gang-raped and her unrelenting quest of justice. Interviews with the victim, her family, her attorney, the Defense attorney, and the claimed rapist provide a whole picture of the legal and societal conflicts survivors of sexual abuse in Pakistan must negotiate. Rich, real stories abound in both films, which are absolutely significant for a thorough CDA and help to highlight the systematic problems and human hardships related with gender-based violence in Sindh, Pakistan.

Analytical Framework

The present research is conducted within the framework of Van Dijk's approach to analyze social power abuse (2015). He emphasizes that power operates not only through coercion but also through control over the production and transmission of discourse. This principle aims to dissect the use of language in maintaining social hierarchies and to understand how those in power manage and maintain their authority by reinforcing existing social perceptions.

Figure

Van Dijk's Approach to Analyze Social Power Abuse



According to Van Dijk, ideologies are primarily acquired, transmitted, and perpetuated through written and spoken communications. Discourses are social practices that serve as the means via which beliefs are acquired, employed, and communicated. Furthermore, ideologies, being forms of societal cognition, are intrinsically social in nature, unlike individualistic beliefs, and are commonly held by individuals belonging to particular social groups (Dijk, 2014).

Analysis

Among the four provinces of Pakistan, Sindh has continuously suffered from high rates of illiteracy, specifically among women. Girls' and women's access to education is frequently restricted by social conventions and financial limitations, which feeds the cycle of illiteracy and destitution. Sometimes it's the lack of facilities that lead to illiteracy in such societies. Apart from insufficient resources, the primary reason for women's bad health and lack of education is an absence of knowledge and focus, which ultimately results from the perception that women are of inferior status, particularly in rural communities. The liberty of women to take their own decisions is put at risk by a lack of knowledge and chances for education and income producing (Tabassum et al., 2013). Women who lack education are more susceptible to domestic violence and other types of abuses because they are less able to exercise their rights and acknowledge their freedoms. Women's conditions in Pakistan, including traditional and social norms, customs, impoverishment religious beliefs, illiteracy, and a high childbearing rate, all contribute to their helplessness in developing countries. Lack of initiatives and programs that help women in education is mainly the result of lack of government action (Bushra & Wajiha, 2015).

In the documentary, titled, Saving Faces, the excerpt from the documentaries shows the threats of perpetrator to victim and his action of throwing acid on the female, for going into court and filing for divorce, his choice of words shows a severe cruelty and his illiteracy which makes him blind towards the victim's rights. He says:

“Jab mene dekha k hmara guzara ab bilkul nahi ho skta to mai court chali gayi toh

kehty hain k tum mujse talaq chahti ho, mai tumhy maza chakhau ga, mai tumhy dunia klie ibratbna du ga, yeh keh k unho ny ek minute nai lgaya, unho ny mujh per tezaab gira dea.”

(When I realized that we couldn't survive anymore, I went to court. He said, you want a divorce from me, I will make you suffer. I will teach you a lesson for the world to see." Saying this, he didn't waste a moment, he threw acid on me. In just one second, he ruined my life)

This excerpt highlights the terrible consequences of questioning patriarchal standards in a society where the majority of people lack formal education. She faces severe punishment for attempting to take legal action, an action that calls for awareness and determination. A devastating act of violence committed by the perpetrator shows the deeply rooted illiteracy and patriarchal mindset. Women like her in Pakistani society are more exposed to this kind of violence due to the lacking of the information and support networks essential to defend oneself in a society that disregards women's education. The violent conduct that followed his resistance to give a divorce shows how societal norms and illiteracy promote masculine dominance and power. The concept of Honor that he associates with his wife is a common practice in such areas that they consider the women just as a holder of their honor. In an illiterate society such dominant ideologies are not questions which results in the suffering of illiterate women. His argument for not giving a divorce shows a lack of regard for women's autonomy and independence, emphasizing the role that illiteracy plays in the continuation of domestic violence.

The discourse of the victim of an acid assault, and her attacker also sheds light on how illiteracy leads to and promotes domestic assault in Sindh. Her account of the violence she endures depicts the level of illiteracy not only of the sufferer but the perpetrator who is the cause of exploitation of Victim.

“Shohar ka ravaiya mere sath thek nahi tha, who mujh per, mujh per tashadud karta tha, mujh ko marta rehta tha.”

(Husband's behavior towards me was not good; he used to... he used to be violent towards me, he used to beat me constantly.)

The language that she uses “mujh ko marta rehta tha” (he used to beat me constantly) to describe her husband's violent behavior is illustrative of the normalization of intimate partner abuse in a culture where women are frequently illiterate therefore unable to leave abusive relationships. Such Victims are stuck in a cycle of violence by their limited choices and expectations of society towards her to hold her onto husband no matter how he treats her.

“Nahi tezaab kisi ne nahi phenka, uska blood pressure itna high ho jata hai, woh ye nahi dekhti kia ho rha hai..kia nahi ho rha. jab usny apny upr tel chirka toh usny apny hath mai dhakan utha rkha tha diye ka, toh woh aag ki lapet mai aa gyi.”

(No, no one threw acid, her blood pressure gets so high, she doesn't see what's happening, what's not happening. When she poured oil on herself, she had the lamp cap in her hand, so she got caught in the fire.)

With his denial and effort to use Rukhsana's “high blood pressure” as a justification for the assault, the second perpetrator demonstrates a deep disrespect for the truth and also an artful use of illiteracy. He is relying on his audience's lack of literacy to agree with his account of events. Stories of this kind can remain unquestioned in a Sindh

culture where there is a significant percentage of illiteracy, which helps perpetrators like the second perpetrator to avoid punishment. This conversation highlights how illiteracy not only has an impact on those who suffer but also gives perpetrators the ability to conceal the truth and defend their acts. Illiteracy often ties women to economic dependence on their husbands, making it even harder to leave abusive situations. In Sindh, Pakistan People typically receive knowledge through education about the rights of others, the negative consequences of aggressive behavior, and the value of taking responsibility for one's own actions through education at school. The second perpetrator attempts to downplay the incident and his inability to acknowledge the seriousness of his offence demonstrates how his lack of literacy prevents him from understanding this. He demonstrates that he is unaware of the reality that it is never acceptable to act in such a way.

Traditional structures like the feudal authority and jirga, which commonly operate outside of official legal frameworks, have an important effect in rural communities. Women are mostly badly affected by these institutions, specifically when they don't have sufficient knowledge needed to inquire or communicate with these hierarchies of power. In the documentary "Outlawed in Pakistan" the illiteracy that surrounds the victims not just affects her life but also the way society views her situation. As noted by Asif (2011), the feudal lords in Sindh claim that women will start to lose their association with their cultural legacy if they acquire an education. In her stance:

"whan per hota hi esa hai, wo larki ko ya to kali kar k mar dete hain, ya ese hi."

(When it happens like this, they either kill the girl by declaring her outlaw or just like this.)

In Rural Sindh, where education is very rare such concepts of "Jirga system" and "Kali" usually dominates. Her casually mentioning of the ritual of killing girls who are labelled "kali" shows how strongly rooted these practices are in illiterate society of Sindh. Lack of education in Sindh promotes this attitude by the community towards Victims of such crime which further devalues the women lives and shows no concern for the sufferings of Victims. So, illiteracy in this context of being raped and honor killing doesn't only mean being incompetent to write or read but it depicts the ignorance of women rights and the victims lack of access to legal resources. This practice of demanding honor killing of the Victim in rape case instead of accusing the P3 involved is upheld by patriarchal societies of Sindh.

"I say that I am innocent. I'm from a respectable family. I'm a married man. Could I rape someone?"

The underlying belief that is depicted by the use of terms "respectability" and "married man" is that P3 is logically not capable of performing a crime like rape because he is married and belongs from a respected household. It shows a deep lack of judicial knowledge and dependency on social indicators in Sindh region to prove an individual's innocence. Such arguments tend to be more likely to be opposed in literate societies where education develops an improved understanding of moral and legal requirements. But in an illiterate community, these claims may be accepted without inquiry, giving violent people an unfair advantage.

Conclusion

This study makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the complex connection between language and social structures, specifically in the context of domestic violence in Sindh. This work sheds light on the associations between language, discourse, power, and society by using T. van Dijk theory of social power abuse. It primarily studies the ways social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political context. By uncovering the rhetoric of both the victimized and those in power, the study of the documentary “Saving Face” and “Outlawed in Pakistan” has highlighted the underlying conceptions that encourage violence against women. Knowledge about this hidden connection raises awareness among the viewers and provides critical framework by means of which these common practices of violence and prevalent traditions can be interrogated and challenged.

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