

November 25 - International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

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Introduction

Violence against women is not a limited curse – it travels like a disease with generations. The kids who witness violence against women are most likely to have a disturbing future and in many documented cases, continue to pass violence to the women they meet in the later part of their lives. As many as 275 million children worldwide are exposed to domestic violence but the actual figure is incredibly higher than reported. Violence transmits using the weaker channels of society and sadly remains largely unnoticed and underreported. It's more likely that the person who commits violence against women is influenced by the abuse he had seen in the childhood against his mother or the women close to him; hence his violence contains the severity of revenge, anger and flashbacks. The number of women's death resulted by physical and emotional violence is so enormous that it can't be numbered.

A UN report reveals an approximate 200 million girls are globally listed as “missing” with India and China eliminate more female infants than the number of girls born in the US each year.

Dejectedly, violence against women is also widespread in many developed countries. In Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police – RCMP confirms that 11017 indigenous girls and women murdered between 1980 and 2012, and numbers could be much higher. 62% of these women were murdered by the intimates or family members. According to “NO MORE STOLEN SISTERS,” A project by the Amnesty International Canada, indigenous women are going missing and murdered at a much higher rate than other women in Canada.

In all, 67% of Canadians have known a woman who has experienced physical or sexual abuse, 66% of female victims of sexual assault are under 24 and 11% are aged under 11, with less than 10% of sexual assault are reported to police.

Honor Based Violence – HBV has also found its way into Canada. In 2007, the murder of 16-year –old Aqsa Pervaiz by her father and in 2009, Muhammad Shafia killed his first wife and three daughter with the help of his son and second wife.

In the UK, an average of 12 honor killings reported annually.

Reported numbers available of honor killings are shamefully as high as 5000 per annum around the world.

In European Union, an estimated 13 million women experienced physical violence with 3.7 million suffered sexual abuses during a cycle of 12 month.

Central/ Latin America

14 out of top 20 countries for murdering women rates are located Central and Latin America. In Latin America, women are commonly caught in the middle of the gang wars. They have to choose between bad and worst to survive. In Brazil, an average of 15 women killed every day.

Female infanticide – murders of baby girls

Again, India has the highest numbers of female infanticide followed by China. China's infanticide linked to the recently lifted "one child family" policy but the Indian female infanticide associated with poverty, dowry, sex-based abortions, marriage cost, pre marriage births, defacements, food paucity and mental illness.

Gender based murders of women in Central America or "Femicide" rose to 1,813 in 2012. The region is plagued by widespread sexual violence. 1,726 were killed last year just for being "women." Femicide carries impunity for the women's murders and 98 percent of the alleged killers walk free. In Brazil, 15 women are killed every day. El Salvador has the highest of women's murdered in the world with 12 murders for every 100,000 women. In 2013, more than 700 women killed in Guatemala. In Bolivia, 440,000 were targeted in gender based violence (Femicide) between 2007 and 2011.

India – Pakistan

India tops the spot for discrimination, rape, violence and violence related deaths of women. The bustling city of Mumbai is infamously known as the rape capital.

Shockingly, thrashing and ignoring women is taken as manly pride in many parts of the world and the situation is grave where poverty prevails – religion dominates.

This complex region combined with Afghanistan and Bangladesh, enslaved women in the name of religion, culture, honor and subjugation. Women are construed as divine property, incubators and moron creatures. This is the region where women face extreme misogyny, mistrust and prejudice.

Every year in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, hundreds of women commit suicides because of emotional damages and sexual abuse. Only 9 percent of such cases are reported. There are random counts available about physical violence but not emotional. There are some common and ages old vicious practices in this region against women.

Mental Health and Depression is also an increasing but unidentified challenge. We study the cases of 2700 women from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, who agreed to break their silence and reported that they have gone through physical and emotional violence. The account and evidence of 92% suggested that the violence they endure is/ was the outcome of husband's depression, mental health or personality problems. The most shocking segment of this study is that 98 percent of women continue to live with violent husbands because of kids, fear mongering, and the government's inability to house and relocate victimised women. 94 percent of the effected women's families have knowledge of this abuse. 48 percent of women studied were economically independent, educated and professionals.

2700 hundred is not yet close to the one percent of the women living in these three countries. But the biggest challenge is to reach the victims. Even if approached, they opt to stay tight lipped under the cloak of fear, religion and culture.

There are many reasons and pretexts for the violence against women causing eventual deaths in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. This may have caused the demographic

disproportion in this region as 9 out of top 10 countries with more males than females are the Asian countries. Honor killings claim an estimated 2300 women in India and 1000 women annually in Pakistan.

A very cruel form of violence against women is acid attacks. These attacks are used for the victims to suffer as long as they live. The victims suffer not only in physical and emotional pain, but also go through isolation, anguish and repeatedly bullied because of defacements or the loss of eyes and hearings. Every single day goes by with physical pain and emotional sufferings. Pakistan has an annual average of 150 – 400 cases each year with 70% of the attack victims are teen girls and 98% of the attackers never punished by the law.

This year alone, there are 166 reported acid attacks in India and the last year count was 349 with majority of women.

Dowry and Death: dowry is another evil responsible for the deadly violence against women. The poor women and families are the obvious victims of this greed-laden culture. The devil of dowry is found in many parts of the world but India is notorious with dowry related deaths. In 2012, 8,233 young women killed for dowry in India. According to The Telegraph UK, every hour a woman killed for dowry in India. The women organizations in India, claims that the dowry deaths figure is as high as 16,000 to 19,000.

Witchcraft: this age's old ghastly practice still exists in its atrocious form and almost all of the victims are women. Indian government, always allegedly underreporting heinous crimes puts the number of people 2000 killed between 2000 and 2012. Witchcraft victims are painfully beaten or burnt to death as a needed part of this hexed ritual. Witchcraft subsists in the parts of the world where sorcery and black magic is believed upon.

An estimated 89 percent of kitchen related deaths caused by the knives, Fire and stoves explosions in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan are not the accidents but intentional murders. 86 percent of such killings are committed by the in-laws. India has the highest kitchen related deaths as 3900 women are killed every year in kitchen related mishaps.

Polygamy carries unspeakable and ceaseless emotional damages which has turned women into disposable pleasure or unpaid 24/7 slaves who, in many cases not only cares for the man, kids, and family but also earns a living. In predominantly Muslim countries, Polygamy is common and endorsed by the religion as the state constitutions protect polygamy under the Islamic jurisprudence. The women under thick influence of religion have accepted polygamy as part of their lives without knowing the rights of women or the depth of nuptial bindings. Many of these unfortunate women are not the victims of poverty, illiteracy or rural but wealthy, influential and educated.

The committal of polygamy by the Mormons carries the same unbelievable pains for women. But the wide majority of the Mormons reside in the developed countries, where polygamy is prohibited and the women are protected. Stiffer penalties are in place for women's predators.

In 2006, polygamist Warren Jeffs, the leader of the Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, was arrested in the USA and put behind bars forever. Mainly based in Utah and Arizona, he arranged marriages between his followers and under aged girls. In 2008, police

raided his church in Texas and rehabilitated more than 500 children. His arrest widely exposed the abuse and humiliation of women and under aged girls in polygamist's families.

In 2002, Mukhtar Mai was gang raped at the order of a tribal council in Punjab – Pakistan. She later rose to the international fame for speaking out loud. In 2009, The US and internationally recognized women's right advocate, Mai entered in a consented polygamist relationship.

Women's rights are swept under the religious rug and criticising polygamy is considered an attack on religion. On repeated occasions, I drew political heavyweight women's attention towards endless and disastrous ramifications of polygamy but they never denounce it.

The probability to establish close to exact numbers is impossible in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. 79 percent of violence against women and resulting deaths are hiding under the deep mystery of culture, honor and religion and never reported. This disdain becomes a new normal after marriage

Pakistan

In 2013, a bright 17-year-old cricketer, Halima Rafique committed suicide when Pakistan Cricket Board failed to give her justice after she had complaint about sexual harassment against individual(s) from Multan Cricket Club. In another brutal occurrence, a woman, Shughra Brohi buried alive by her family in Sindh's Sanghar District after she returned home to reconcile.

Pakistan twice had a woman Prime Minister but it did not make any difference to the draconian cultural practice like Karo Kari, gender equities likewise with India and Bangladesh. Indra, Sonia Gandhi, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wajed turned complete blind eye to empower women.

According to the international labor organization – ILO, Pakistan ranks worst bottom for countries with women managers amongst 108 countries. Women have only 3% presence in management positions. Now there are many so called powerful women in Pakistan's politics like Sherry Rehman, Shehla Raza, Firdou Awan, Sharmila Farooqi, Hina Khar, Nilofar Bakhtiyar, Marvi Memon, Fauzia Kasuri, Shireen Mazari and Maleeha Lodhi, but they are used to present a soft image of the political parties, not the real empowerment as none of these women have emerged as real advocate protecting women's right in Pakistan. Privileged women have failed for the sustainable women empowerment in Pakistan and their leadership is not instrumental for women empowerment.

In 2013 elections in Pakistan, the women's voters increased 40% and for running the office fell from 12 to only 3%.

The notion that the women are possessions of their husbands has been strongly deepened by the culture and religion that even the privileged women controlled so bad by their husbands that they have to sacrifice their career, freedom of opinion and sadly, life too if they refuse to hand the power over to husbands; either it's the political fight or domestic lead. Deceased prime minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto and former speaker of the Pakistan national assembly Fahmida Mirza are best suited to support this argument.

We can study the case of Benazir, where the real power chartered on her husband who later rose to the presidency which was mission impossible for him if Benazir would still be alive. Even

though the circumstances, motive, evidence and history made Zardari, Benazir's husband a prime suspect but none of the party women ever demanded independent inquest.

According to a survey conducted by the centre for social research and UN women, 55% of Pakistanis are unconvinced about the managerial abilities of women and want to keep them supervised by the male guardians. Centre also discussed the rising violence against women in politics in India Pakistan and Nepal citing Benazir Bhutto and Zille Huma Usman killed in front of the large crowd, but we can also add Sabeen Mehmood.

According to AURAT Foundation, since 2008, more than 3000 women killed in deadly violence against women in Pakistan. The killings are made as painful as possible to show the honor and possession. The case of ill-fated Farzana Parveen is still haunting the memories who were stoned to death outside Lahore High Court.

Human rights activist Asma Jehangir admits that judicial biased and gender discrimination is a constant threat to women. The Geneva Based world economic forum placed Pakistan on 141 out of 142 countries, second worst, in gender equality global ranking for their inaccessibility to health care, education and work.

Department like police and judiciary has extremely tattering numbers of women in Pakistan.

Conclusion India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan

Women in politics can demand their parties for equal share in the parliament, advisories and party positions. Women politicians should immensely introduce the legislations in the parliament for women protection, repealing outdated family laws and stiffer penalties for women's predators.

Press clubs, media outlets, private sector and multinational companies working in Pakistan can play a significant role to minimize gender disparities.

The cultural and religious barriers to voice against husband's violence are as criminally immoral as the violence itself and encourage violence. Mute female victims of violence suffer from depression, mental health, low self-esteem and pathetic end.

Governments, NGOs and donor countries can establish pro bono, legal aid, women trauma and rescue centres, rehabs and relocation facilities for the victims of violence and single mothers. This all should be needed at a very large scale and accessible to the women living in slums and remote rural areas.

The outdated MEHAR (money paid to the divorcée according to the Islamic laws) be amended. Spousal, child support and compensation for the emotional damages should be calculated in accordance with the current worth of the husband and if the woman is also the victim of violence, she may be granted the majority of the property and the transfer of funds from the husband's retirement and pension plan following the model of the western countries. This may be added in the marriage certificate or prenuptial agreement.

Women should never hide or ignore any kind of abuse or violence from family, friends or the people they trust. Take action right from the start of the minor abuse before it reaches to the point of no return.

If possible, keep the evidence of such abuse like recording audio or video, remember the people who witness/ heard that abuse.

Maintain a diary and keep it safe.

You must also share with family, friends or the people you trust the personality problems, infertility, drugs, infidelity, sexual abuse, hitting, shouting, possessive behavior and money problems of your husband or the in laws if sharing house with you.

Always take advice from professional councillors, mediation or the people with wisdom and experience. Don't take advice frivolously, because I have seen number of cases where women or families believed "it takes time to adjust after marriage" but ended up in women's death, disability or an abusive life resulting in the sufferings of herself, kids, family and friends.

Conclusion

Violence Against Women is the universal delinquent and fighting against it is our shared responsibility and should be a global goal but there are many things where women can do a lot to keep the violence and emotional damage to its minimum by standing up against polygamy, forced/ early marriages, rape, and don't rush to make swift decisions about the man of their/ family choice. In order to achieve that, women need extensive participation in Police, Judiciary, Public Service, Social Work and Governing bodies with a powerful "say." Women could bring abuse to the spotlight so your story can save other women from potential unforeseen dangers. Educate your sons about the dignity of women and amicable exit if the relationship does not work out.

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