

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology
of Egypt / Egyptology

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN HEALTH WORKERS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON CAUSES, MOTIVES AND MITIGATION FRAMEWORK

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Dr. Muhammad Zulqarnain, Asim Muneeb Khan, Ms. Latafat Aziz, Dr. Zaheer Abbas, Beenish Ambereen, Amna Afzaal, Violence against Women Health Workers: A Qualitative Study on Causes, Motives and Mitigation Framework-Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 18(4), ISSN 1567-214x

Abstract

The violence against health-care workers has become one of the serious global issues as between 8% and 38% of health workers faced physical violence during their service careers. The purpose of this research work was to look into the issue of violence against women healthworkers in Pakistan. The authorsintended to addressfourassociated questions in this research paper: **a)**What were the contemporary forms of violence faced by women health workers? **b)**What were major motives and causes which triggered the attitude of violence and extremism against women? **c)**How various forms of violence produced adverse effects on Psycho-social and economic aspects of society? **d)**What could be an appropriate framework to reduce and mitigate the frequency of violence?Qualitative research approach was employed for the collection, analysis and dedmonstration of data.The systematic review of literature revealedthat there had beenobserved a remarkable increase in the ratio of violence which put the health profession at risk as well as threatened the lives of women workers. The most common forms of violence werephysical and verbal and the main motives were psychological and social.The research also concluded that international organizations including WHO, ILO, ICN and PSI conducted research to diagnose reasons, develop framework, and suggest strategies but remained failed to handle the issue. It was therefore recommended to revise SOPsandmake comprehensive theoretical and practical framework in context of geographical, social, political, economic, religious and cultural condition of Pakistan. It would also be beneficial if government would chalk out a separate plan to deal both: emergency and non-emergency situations. By keeping in view all dimensions of issue.

Keywords: Violence, Extremism, Woman, Health care, society

❖ Introduction & Background

Protection of human life is accepted by every individual, nation, society, and religion. Researchers, academics, legislators, social activists, and reformers have given utmost importance to human life, dignity and social well-being. The article three (03) of Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person”.⁽¹⁾

In religious context, Islam has given particular emphasis on protection of human life as Allah Almighty made amazing arrangements for the safety of life. The Noble Quran stated the stages of human development in Surah Al-Hajj;

“O People, if you should be in doubt about the Resurrection, then [consider that] indeed, We created you from dust, then from a sperm-drop, then from a clinging clot, and then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed - that We may show you. And We settle in the wombs whom We will for a specified term, then We bring you out as a child, and then [We develop you] that you may reach your [time of] maturity”.

The above verse of Holy Quran clearly demonstrates that Allah Almighty has made miraculous preparations for the preservation of life. Due to such importance, Islamic scholars have considered the protection of life one of the five objectives of Islamic Shariah. In keeping view the above lines it can easily be concluded that life preservation is the most sacred act in the world.

Similarly in philosophical explorations, the life of human beings seems the matter of utmost important as everything wants to

¹<https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

protect itself and its existence. The philosophical poet Allama Iqbal says in this context;

زندگی محبوب ایسی دیدہ قدرت میں ہے
ذوقِ حفظِ زندگی ہر چیز کی فطرت میں ہے⁽¹⁾

“Life is such a beloved in the eye of nature; life’s preservation is in everything’s nature”.

Health workers are considered the saviors of life as they provide health facilities to human beings. But unfortunately, the violence against health-care workers has become one of the serious global issues as between 8% and 38% of health workers faced physical violence during their service careers.⁽²⁾ It would be correct to say that health professionals are at risk of workplace violence.⁽³⁾

In Pakistan, Lady health worker program was started by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1994 to ensure health care facilities to the community. Approximately, 110,000 health care workers are doing their field job today. Despite such strength, Polio eradication campaign is failed because of negotiated access and security interests. Many of workers, policemen and volunteers feel insecure.⁽⁴⁾

By keeping in view the seriousness of this issue, this academic work aimed at uncovering various forms of violence, looking into its causes, and highlighting the effects of violence against health-care workers. Moreover, the authors chalked out a proposed framework to encounter the violent attacks on health-care workers in Pakistan.

¹Baang-e-Dara, Allama Iqbal, Walida Marhooma ki Yaad mey, Iqbal Academy, 2018, pg. 260

²https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/workplace/en/

³ Workplace violence directed at nursing staff at a general hospital in southern Thailand. Kamchuchat C, Chongsuvivatwong V, Oncheunjit S, Yip TW, Sangthong R J Occup Health. 2008; 50(2):201-7.

⁴World Health Organization. Declaration of Alma-Ata. Adopted at the International Conference on Primary Health Care, Alma-Ata, USSR, 6–12 September 1978

❖ Methodology

The main purpose of this academic work was to address the issue of violence against health-care workers in Pakistan. Qualitative and descriptive research methodology was employed for the collection, analysis and demonstration of data. The authors gave a systematic review to existing literature including books, articles, and documentaries. Some statistics were also taken from internet after careful assurance and validity. For comprehensive understanding of underlying theme, the essay was divided into seven (07) sections. *The first section* provided a brief introduction to the importance of human life and its protection, *second section* dealt with the methodology, *third section* uncovered the contemporary forms of violence against health workers in Pakistan, *fourth section* investigated the psycho-social causes of violence, *fifth section* analyzed the consequences of violence in family system, community, and society, *sixth section* suggested a framework to diminish the ratio of violence into the society, and *seventh section* gave the conclusion and presented some recommendations to deal with the situation on both: theoretical and practical grounds.

❖ Contemporary Forms of Violence against Health Workers

In Pakistan, Health workers are not secured and are facing social resistance which affects their professional efficiency. Sometimes they face physical violence and sometimes verbal aggression. The research shows that many health workers are being threatened verbally as they face aggressive attitude of patients and visitors. Due to mismanagement of hospitals most of the violence is observed in the emergency departments where patients are brought in critical situations and saving their lives became almost impossible. Sometimes they become target of political and social violence particularly in natural disasters including earthquake, floods,

and storms. Some of the contemporary forms of violence are given below;

Visual Presentation of various forms of violence



Figure: 1

❖ An Insight into Causes of Violence

The current social, economic, and political condition of Pakistan is very pathetic. Unemployment, poverty, economic crisis, inflation and political instability has created anger, frustration, aggression, and impatience in common man which ultimately led him towards violence and criminal activities. What to say about other professions, health care workers are being treated by violence of patients in government hospitals. The survey demonstrated that 77% physicians of Pakistan faced physical and

verbal abuse.⁽¹⁾which caused injury, death or psychological harm
(2).

There are many causes which lead towards violence against health-care workers. These causes are emotional, psychological, social, political, and economic. Some of them are listed below;

- Frustration, sadness and anger
- Influence of one' peers
- Lack of respect and attention
- Experiencing neglect and abuse
- Gender discrimination
- Aggression and bellicosity
- Ageism, racism and ableism
- Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia
- Use of drugs and alcohol
- Socio-economic discrimination and inequality

❖ **Psycho-Social and Economic Effects of Violence**

Violence against healthcare workers is one of the leading factors that affect human rights. It stimulates harmful psychological, social, and economic effects. On one hand it put the health profession on risk while on the other hand devalues the health sector. It often leads towards physical injuries and deaths as well.⁽³⁾

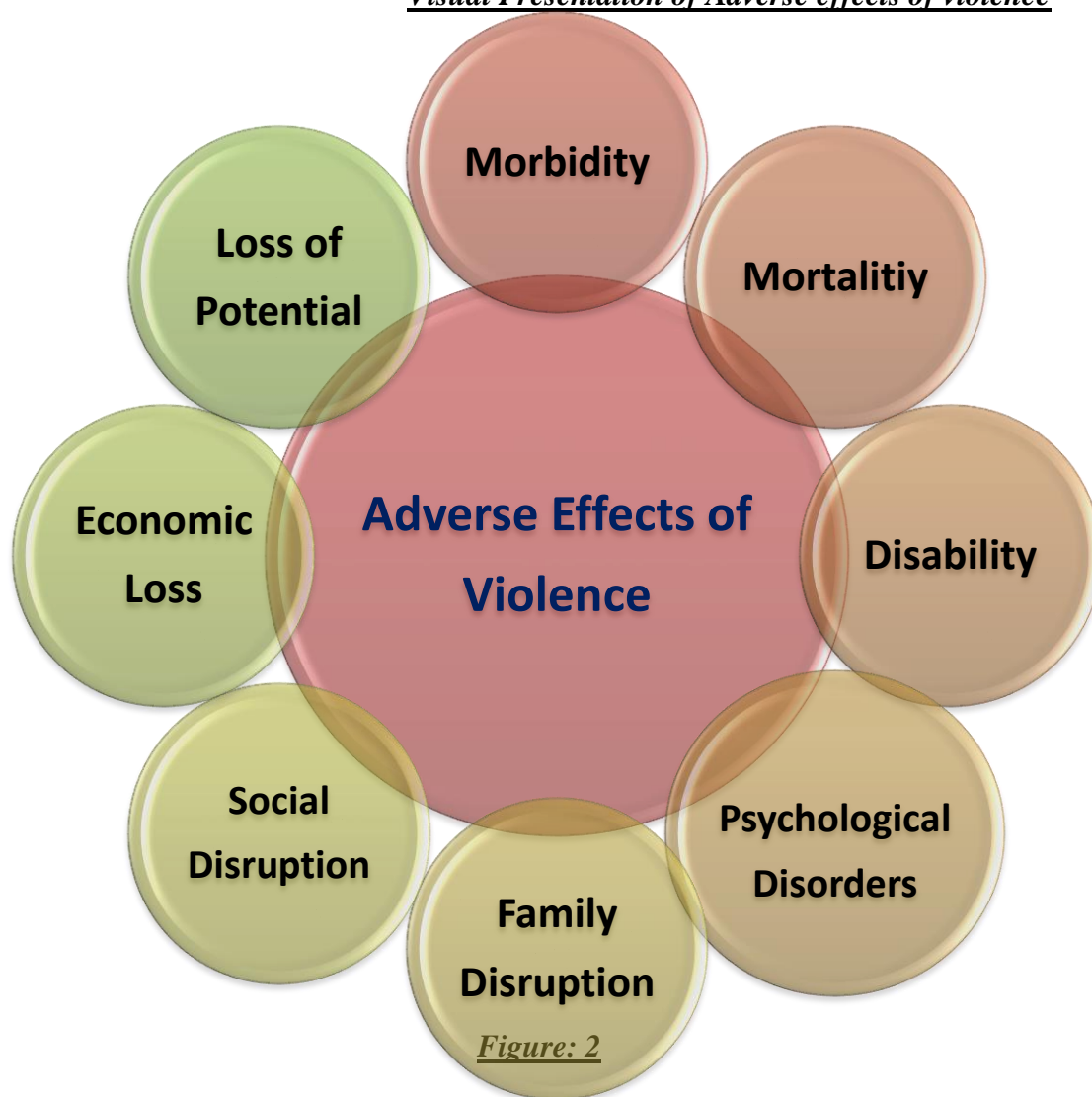
¹<http://blogs.jpmonline.com/2016/01/05/violence-against-healthcare-in-pakistan-social-and-humanitarian-implications/>

²World Health Organization. Youth violence. World report on violence and Health. Geneva: World Health organization 2002.

³Aggression and Violence against Health Care Workers in Germany-cross sectional retrospective survey, Franz S & et. al, BMC Health. Serv Res 2010;10: 51.

It also produces adverse effects on the performance of workers, outcomes, and smooth functionality of the whole health profession.⁽¹⁾ It does not affect only an individual but leaves uncountable harmful effects on children, family, community and social institutions. In financial context, it becomes the reason of loss in workplace in terms of new employment, insurance, and other financial transactions. Some of the harmful consequences are listed below.

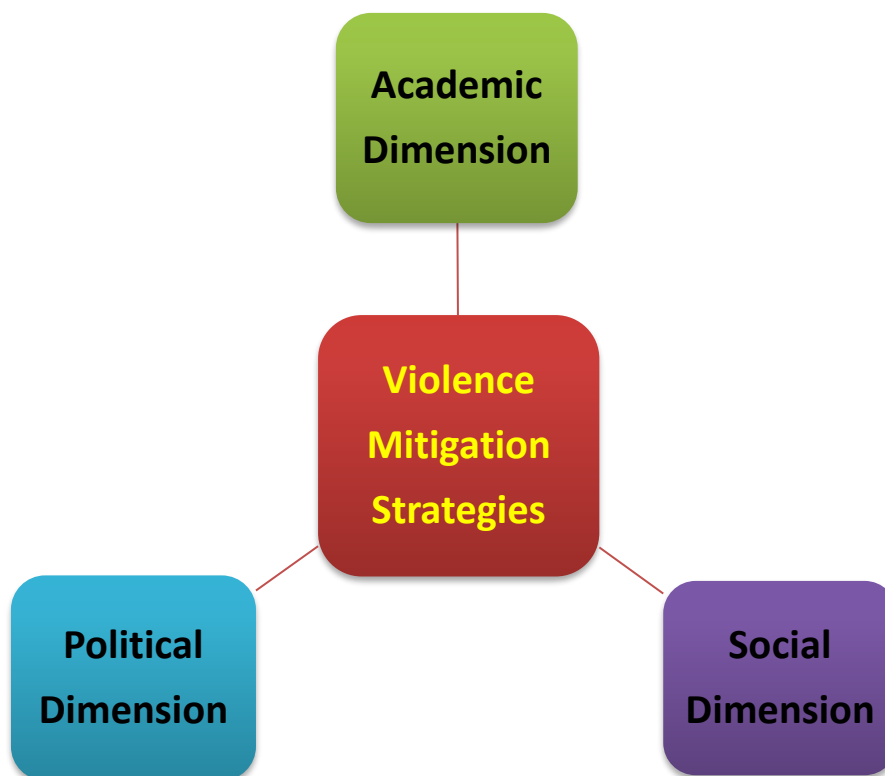
Visual Presentation of Adverse effects of violence



¹Addressing violence against health care in peshawar, a mixed methods study, International Committee of the Red Cross, Islamabad.

❖ Proposed Framework for Violence Reduction in Pakistan

The researcher have established that there is a remarkable increase in violence against health-care workers around the globe. The state seems badly failed to protect the health staff from different kinds of violence. There are multiple reasons for the failure and the most important reason is the lack of comprehensive strategy to encounter this issue. In this connection, the author proposed inclusive framework to diminish the ratio of violence and provide protection to health workers. This strategy is consisted of academic, social and political dimensions. It is the dire need of



time to make comprehensive plan for protection of health workers by keeping these dimensions as illustrated indiagrambelow;

Figure: 3

Academic Dimension includes the theoretical framework, research, and public awareness through education. Educational institutions, professor, researchers, thinkers and intellectuals of society should make their contribution in their domains in the form of research papers, documentaries, journals, books, and magazines. They should wisely look into the current psychological and social paradigm in order to make their efforts and contribution practical. They should find the motives, forms, and effects of violence in an academic way.

Social Dimension includes the contribution of social tools to eradicate the violence. Social sources are the most powerful tool to control and diminish the ratio of violence. Particularly, social and electronic media can play a cardinal role in this regard by launching a campaign of awareness into the society. A variety of TV programs, documentaries, talk shows, special programs, commercials, ads, flyers, posters, pamphlets, brushers, hand bills, banners, sign boards, short movies and lectures can be arranged for public awareness about health and health care staff. NGOs are also important in this regard as they can equally contribute in this campaign.

Political Dimension is the most powerful aspect of the whole plan. Political power is the master key which can open the doors towards protection of life. The state should take a serious notice about the sensitivity of this issue by designing a panel of people to ensure the protection of health workers. In addition to that the workers should be trained to handle the emergency and critical situation by saving themselves from others. The state should also release some special funds for the protection of health staff. It would be a wonderful step if state arranges a think tank which monitor and revise the health protection policies from time to time according to new developments in socio-cultural paradigm.

❖ **Conclusions & Recommendations**

The study concluded that in Pakistan, it is very common to experience workplace violence among health professionals especially against nurses. In recent years a remarkable increase in the ratio of violence has been observed. The violence puts the health profession at risk as well as threatened the lives of people. The violence is of different forms and the most common are physical and verbal. The research established that there are multiple factors of violence and psycho-social causes are observed most common among others. The research also concluded that different international organizations including WHO, ILO, ICN and PSI invested huge amounts and conducted research to diagnose reasons, develop framework, suggest strategies in order to diminish the ratio of violence against health worker. But unfortunately despite of huge amounts, time, and energy these organizations badly failed to handle the issue. It is therefore strongly recommended that state should seriously look into the matter in order to inquire the reasons, develop SOPs, and comprehensive theoretical and practical framework to handle this serious issue. Moreover it is important to revisit and revive the strategy of handling this issue by keeping in view geographical, social, political, economic, religious and cultural condition of Pakistan. It would also be beneficial if government chalk out a separate plan to deal both: emergency and non-emergency situations. By keeping in view the whole phenomenon, the authors proposed a framework for violence reduction in contemporary condition of Pakistan.

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