

## **Exploring Common Perceptions of Educated Youth About 'Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act 2016' - Gender Based Narratives in Focus**

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The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore common perceptions about Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016 through focus group discussions with educated youth from Southern-Punjab, Pakistan. Two homogenous group discussions were conducted with 20 individuals having sufficient awareness of the Act. Both male and female students (Mean age = 25.80,  $SD = 2.02$ ) were engaged. The data was classified into three codes including meaningful verbatim, selective codes and context codes. Two prominent narratives came up including an increase in the female sense of protection and lack of security and frustration among male youth. There was a consensus about the impending danger of potential increase in the divorce ratio in Punjab as a result of execution of this decree. The implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act-2016, gender-based violence, youth narratives, content analysis

Women are integral part of any society. They make the future of any country not only by being the first teacher of the generation, but also contribute to the economic development of a country. In many countries, they are protected and empowered by rights of property, land, financial responsibilities, adequate shares in jobs and business opportunities (Solanki, Sharma, & Bapat, 2016). Whereas in developing countries like Pakistan, the conditions are not the same, women face many hurdles even to survive such as dowry, harrasment, rape, cruelty by husbands and relatives, and so on; these are common experinces of women which may be reported or not (Devi & Jasrotia,

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2013). According to Kethineni, Srinivasan, and Kakar (2016) this environment is rooted in cultural, religious, and economic norms. Centuries-old discriminatory social and legal practices favor men. In many developing countries, one of the biggest challenges is to increase the well-being of its people. One key aspect in achieving and sustaining well-being is the efficient utilization of human capital through equal participation of men and women in development and governance processes. However, women continue to be under-represented and experience discrimination in the development and governance process especially within developing countries. Gender disparities not only diminish the well-being of women but also affect the well-being of children and men (Niimi, 2009; United Nations Development Programme, 2010). One of the most significant consequences of gender inequality is gender-based violence (Ali & Zhuang, 2007; Cruz & Klinger, 2011; Zhuang, 2011). Development partners in developing countries have increasingly acknowledged the role of gender equality and women's empowerment as a powerful means to foster development (Garcia-Moreno & Watts, 2011). According to Zakar, Zakar, and Abbas (2016), violence is very common in Pakistan, especially the domestic violence. Pakistani women living in rural areas are particularly vulnerable to violence because of their relatively weaker social position and lack of awareness about their legal rights. About 64 percent of the Pakistani population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2018) and women living in rural areas are at increased risk of domestic violence than their urban counterparts (Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain, Mozumder, & Khorshed, 2003; Krishnan, Hilbert, & Vanleeuwen, 2001). All over the world, women protection is the core concern of modern women; keeping in view of this concern, the Punjab government of Islamic Republic of Pakistan took a step in bringing the change for betterment of women of Punjab Pakistan by passing an Act entitled 'Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act-2016 (PPWAVA-2016)'.

### **Background of the PPWAVA-2016**

In the present scenario of Pakistan, women wish to actively participate in education, politics, science and technology, trade or services. In the same vein, social conditions have also improved considerably over the period of time. Only the reported lacking were security, protection, and female empowerment which PPWAVA-2016 has tried to give. According to this Act, no matter what type of violence a woman is experiencing, she can raise her voice against it, simply by dialing the toll-free numbers. They would not only be protected, but also the defendant would be punished for that. The

aggrieved women would be given medical and psychological services, along with legal help and shelter.

It was commonly observed that, just after the implementation of PPWAVA-2016 in Punjab, female youth revised their incarcerated image and started feeling more empowered as compared to male youth. Resultantly, this study is designed to explore the common perceptions of Pakistani educated youth about the PPWAVA-2016.

## Method

### Sample

Twenty university students (male students = 10, female students = 10) from the two public sector universities of Southern-Punjab, Pakistan took part in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used and the respondents having knowledge about the Act-2016 were invited through their departmental notice boards, seeking voluntary participation. In total, two homogenous FGDs were conducted in which gender-wise equal respondents were ascertained. To ensure relevance and proper knowledge of respondents, there was one question (Are you familiar enough with the PPWAVA-2016?), upon which 'yes response' was considered as entry point in the study - otherwise respondents were excluded from the study. All participants belonged to post-graduate level of education (i.e., Master & M. Phil.). Their age ranged from 20 to 30 years ( $M = 25.80$ ,  $SD = 2.02$ ).

### Procedure and FGD Protocol

All the steps in design and protocol of focus groups were followed according to the guidelines of Stewart and Shamdasani (2015). The questions posed were *'How would you describe PPWAVA-2016? What do you think, this act would facilitate you? How do you rate this act?'* First, a sampling frame was established, later, the veteran moderator (male, married, 45 years) and observer (female, unmarried, 35 years) with ten years experience in qualitative research and sufficient knowledge of PPWAVA-2016 were selected to conduct the sessions. The persons selected for participation were contacted and informed to participate in a group at the departments of Applied Psychology Islamia University of Bahawalpur and Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan. As an incentive for participation in the study, the participants were offered lunch after the session. The

necessary arrangements were made one day before the sessions were conducted. All the recruited participants were briefed about the nature and scope of discussion; they were also given plenty of time to express on the topic. The data were audio and video tapped along with field notes (memos). On the same day after the session, initial data of moderator and observer were discussed and reported.

### **Approach to Analysis**

Before the start of transcription, one training session was conducted with three trained coders to familiarize with defined coding plan and rules for placing units. This panel of coders checked all audio and video data carefully. Further, behavioral responses and gestures (as a sign - vehicle) were also taken care during the whole process of transcription. Following the guidelines of Krippendorff (2013, pp. 98-111) data were analyzed in terms of three units; meaningful verbatim, selective codes, and context codes - that are collaboratively called assertions content analysis. Two judges (independent trained readers) were involved to examine the reliability and sources of disagreement; their sole job was to identify and correct the discrepancy so that high degree of inter-rater reliability could be maintained.

### **Ethical concerns**

The participants were recruited voluntarily with their consent and aim of the research was briefed to them. Participation was solely for research purpose. Due to it, their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning them participant number and the names of the participants were not disclosed anywhere. Formal permission was taken from ethical review committee.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Based on purpose of investigation, meaningful verbatim has been employed in its standard matrix form.

Table 1

*Generation of Selective Codes from Verbatims of Participants*

No.	Gender	Age	Meaningful Verbatim	Selective codes
1.	F	25	<i>For me, it is a basic right given by the Punjab government to me, I always wanted this for me and for all the females out there, although it has caused insecurity among males, as it has given the right to "US" (women's) to stand against any sort of violence from males.</i>	1. Female empowerment 2. Less-security for male
2.	M	22	<i>I believe it's one of the best Act for protection of women in history. It has empowered the females to raise their voice against male's undue violence.</i>	1. Female empowerment 2. Assertiveness to say no.
3.	F	24	<i>Violence is not acceptable in Islam, not especially for the weaker ones (women, children and old). I think this act will bring some change and peace in the lives of women who have been the target of violence by the male members of their home and society.</i>	1. Appreciation towards initiative
4.	F	26	<i>I believe, this act has given wings to the women to fly from the miserable life, and the very same act has cut down the wings of males leaving them insecure and frustrated as they wouldn't be able to practice their so called rights over females.</i>	1. Female empowerment 2. Frustration for male
5.	M	29	<i>According to my understanding, PPWAVA is a nice move against the beasts of society disguised as gentlemen. But on the one hand, where it is going to protect females, on the other hand, it will increase the rates of divorces.</i>	1. Female empowerment 2. Increase in the divorce rate
6.	M	25	<i>I belong to a family, where violence against female is not considered as violence, it is kind of a norm of our family. This Act, will ruin the environment of our homes, by giving authority to our women.</i>	1. Female empowerment

*Continued...*

No.	Gender	Age	Meaningful Verbatim	Selective codes
7.	F	28	<i>It is a good Act. Based on the teachings of Islam, which favors the protection of women. It has given a power to women to say "No" against her will.</i>	1. Assertion to say "No"
8.	F	24	<i>According to my point of view, if this Act is implemented properly, it would give justice to the females in all sorts of violence cases.</i>	1. Protection against violence for female
9.	M	25	<i>I think this Act is not a good move by the government, this act will make our women go cross their limits. Is it good that our women report against us? Spoiling our name and fame in society.</i>	1. Act is not acceptable for men
10	M	24	<i>Now the government has made women so powerful that they can make us wear bangles? Now we will walk into our very own places with the permission and terms and conditions of government. This Act is nothing more than a way to make us slaves of our females.</i>	1. Women empowerment will harm male supremacy
11	F	26	<i>As a Pakistani girl, I think, it has given us freedom and has allowed us to go outside without fear of being stalked, choose what we like to, ask for our rights, and raise voice against violence.</i>	1. Female empowerment
12	M	26	<i>According to my point of view, this Act will bring change in Pakistan by guaranteeing gender equality.</i>	1. Good initiative 2. Gender equality
13	F	22	<i>Finally, government is with us, to protect us! And has made a place (a shelter home) where an aggrieved woman can go. And there are protection centers to help us!</i>	1. Appreciation towards Government initiative
14	F	27	<i>My point of view regarding PPWAVA is, it's good to a certain level but it would increase the disputes among the family members which might result in breaking families.</i>	1. Divorce rate may be increased

Continued...

No.	Gender	Age	Meaningful Verbatim	Selective codes
15	F	29	<i>It has made our male members frustrated as they cannot practice their unjustified power on us anymore!</i>	1. Female empowerment
16	M	26	<i>As for as I understand, the government has taken a wrong step, it's making our women rule us. How can a man live with a woman who defames him publicly? A strong woman always makes the society weaker!</i>	1. Gender equality is not acceptable for male population
17	M	28	<i>It's a new act. It's good to see women's being protected in our country too. But it will take time... a lot of time to see it functioning properly.</i>	1. Act is good, but will work after a long time
18	M	26	<i>This act will take females to a new level by providing justice, protection and equality in all aspects of life as they are given in our religion.</i>	1. Female empowerment and gender equality
19	F	28	<i>This act has made us secure and the male members insecure. It has given us power to prove ourselves that we are humans too, who deserve to be treated equally and whose rights do matter!</i>	1. Female empowerment 2. Male suppression
20	M	26	<i>This act has secured the females of our country, but it's now on females, how they respond?</i>	1. Female empowerment
			1. Increase in the female sense of protection	
<b>Context Codes</b>			2. Lack of security and increase in frustration for male youth	

From the findings of the FGD about the common perceptions of the youth about PPWAVA following themes were formulated:

### **Theme 1-Increase in the Female Sense of Protection**

Any government is considered to be good and fully functioning when it tries to keep balance between all the genders of society, make laws for them and let them practice their fundamental rights freely. As reported by the youth PPWAVA Act 2016 of government is well-appreciated by them, it has followed the rules of Islam on the basis of

which the Islamic Republic of Pakistan was founded [3: F: 24; 13: F: 22] furthermore, it has also kept the words of the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah who was in favor of women working side-by-side of men and practice their rights.

Youth reported that PPWAVA 2016 has increased their sense of protection for themselves. The youth perceives violence against women not only violates but also nullifies the basic human rights and freedom of women, the implication of this act, would make them protected which will contribute in a peaceful environment and healthy lifestyles [8: F: 24]. According to them a certain level of freedom with protection for women is important in every walk of life and this Act has also tried to protect the women from gender inequalities [12: M: 26], which would turn the country progress by leaps and bounds as our great leader, Jinnah said "No nation could rise to the height of glory, unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners" (as cited in Solanki et al., 2016).

In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subject to physical, sexual and psychological abuse. According to Taylor (2016) Violence against women is experienced globally irrespective of ethnicity, religion and economic status yet it is the least recognized human rights abuse in the world. Youth has reported that this Act has given them protection against all such sorts of violence [18: M: 26; 15: F: 29], which in turn will make us empowered to go out and practice our rights freely [2: M: 22; 8: F: 24].

Youth reports that this act which has tried to protect has not only made women empowered, but also will make them courageous to become assertive and say "no" for what is against their rights or is harmful for them [7: F: 28; 2: M: 22] With the support, of this law, any women no matter to which class she belongs can protect herself from all the odds of the male dominant society. Anthropological research indicates that in settings where women are valued in their own right, and the social position of single women is sufficiently high to make being unmarried or unattached a realistic option (Jewkes, 2002), divorce is relatively easy to obtain and women are less likely to be abused and Women who have respect and power outside the home through community activities, including participation in microcredit schemes, are less likely to be abused than those who do not (Counts, Brown, & Campbell, 1992; Schuler, Hashemi, Riley, & Akhter, 1996).



**Theme 2- Lack of Security and Increase in Frustration among Male Youth**

PPWAVA where on one hand has protected the women of Punjab, Pakistan, on the other hand it has made its male dominant society insecure and frustrated as they will no more be able to practice their so-called undue rights over females. It has hurt the ego of most of the male members of society [16: M: 26]. Cross-cultural research suggests that societies with stronger ideologies of male dominance have more intimate partner violence (Levinson, 1989). This Act will put an end to such undue dominance. According to Kaiser, Amin, Ganepola, Hussain, and Mostafa, (2015) men's attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment of south Asian countries can often be simultaneously resistant to and embracing of changes in masculinities, women's rights and gender relations. The men are frustrated as they would no more have a person to dispose of their aggression on [19: F: 28]. Foreseeing women working with them on equality basis with the rights and protection provided by the government through this Act has made them feel endangered and less-secured [10: M: 24]. The Act for women has put the male population of society in potential danger as no longer they would be able to suppress the pleads of their spouse, as now women can raise voice against their inhumane behaviors and acts, and through this they can easily get free from the keyless locked cages [14: F:27].

In the same vein, the present study further identifies that men can oppose women's freedom when they are afraid of losing male authority. These findings indeed support the propositions of masculine traits as portrayed in the patriarchy theory where men are socialized to maintain their "supremacy" through controlling and restricting women's freedom and rights (Connell, 2002, 2005; Dobash & Dobash, 1979).

**Conclusion**

In sum, Pakistan has deeply embedded violence in the patriarchal structure of its society, which keeps women in a subordinate position in power relations and in terms of basic human rights. There was a need for comprehensive Act/Law to empower and protect women, which is supposed to be fulfilled by PPWAVA-2016. In the light of above-mentioned perceptions of youth, it can be inferred that it's a well-appreciated step taken by the government. If it is truly implicated and functions properly, it will make the Punjab province free from violence against women. Although, it is frustrating and has made men insecure to some extent.

### Limitations and Suggestions

The study is merely based on the FGD data collected from two cities of Punjab, Pakistan. Further research can be extended with a variety of cohorts all over the Pakistan. Since this Act is recently passed and much of the youth is not aware of it. It is suggested to launch the awareness campaigns that would make women well cognizant.

It is worth noting to include other age groups (other than youth) in future studies for better understanding and implications of this Act. Importantly, the perceptions of married and un-married people should be encompassed in prospective studies.

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