

Comparative Study of Coverage of Violence against Women in Print Media

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This study is designed to check and investigate the assertion by various research studies worldwide that violence against women is rarely reported in the mainstream media. The findings of the current study make the above assertion abundantly clear. The study contently analysed the nature, extent and treatment of the violence against women in three Pakistani elite newspapers including Dawn, The News and The Nation. The issue got minimum coverage in the press. The stories reported were placed in the lower portions of city pages and only physical violence was reported and other manifestation of violence were ignored. The three newspapers also differed from each other in various forms while reporting the issue.

1.1 Introduction

Violence against women is present in every country. Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women's human rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets. No society can claim to be free of such violence; the only variation is in the patterns and trends that exist in countries and regions.

Like elsewhere, women in Pakistan are severely disadvantaged and discriminated against. And even more disturbingly, violence against women at home and community as well as in the custody of law enforcement officials is on the rise. According to The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan's (HRCP) report of 2008 a woman was raped every two hours, and that hundreds were victims of "honour" killings, domestic violence, burnings and murder.

While a few positive changes have taken place over the last couple of years, the government is still failing to protect women from these abuses. Many cases receive media attention and

the involvement of human rights organisations, but they are quickly forgotten. Other women suffer abuses in silence for years, die violent deaths and get buried in unmarked graves.

The purpose of writing this thesis is to analyse the different forms of abuse to the human rights of women as covered in the print media. It also aims to understand what kinds of social, psychological, cultural and economic problems women are facing. The paper will address what the governmental response is towards gender-based violence in which women are the main victims.

1.2. Statement of the problem

This study has been designed to analyse qualitatively and quantitatively coverage given by elite newspapers to the issue of violence against women. It will focus on coverage of various kinds of violence against women, its frequency, amount, placement and treatment in terms of slant and frames.

1.3. Research questions

1. Whether and to what extent elite newspapers give coverage to violence against women?
2. How far the selected three newspapers differ from each other in the nature and treatment of coverage of violence against women?

1.4. Significance of the study

This study is primarily designed to discuss the nature and extent of the reportage of the violence against women in the Pakistani mainstream media. Other studies in the discipline have confirmed the shortage of space given to the subject. It will be interesting to study how the Pakistani media discuss the malaise of violence against women, what factors of the nature of violence are highlighted and how they are received.

1.5. Objectives of the study

This research study focuses on the following two objectives.

1. To find out and investigate the extent, nature and treatment of the coverage given to violence against women in the elite newspapers of Pakistan.
2. To determine the differences in coverage; in terms of space, place, amount and treatment given by the three specified newspapers (Dawn, News and Nation).

2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to a United Nations Development Fund for Women report (2006) one out of three women are likely to be sexually assaulted during their lifetimes. In Pakistan alone during the months of April-July (2008), as many as 1700 cases occurred and only 10 percent of incidents were reported in the mainstream media (Daily Times, 2009).

According to a report by Human Rights Watch (2005) violence against women goes unchecked because of an unjust legal system that leads to unfair settlements and custodial violence against women. The brutalisation and torture of women has several negative impacts that start with the continuous fear and feelings of worthlessness among the victims.

The Human Rights Watch Report (2008) while discussing the state of affairs of violence against women in Pakistan states the malaise has acquired institutionalised form due to the social apathy and state negligence. Deep-seated customs and hatred of women rights make it impossible for the state machinery to provide solace to the aggrieved persons and provide justice to the victims.

Pimpek (2007) analysed Turkish Newspapers' Coverage of violence against women to provide an overview of the issue of women's victimisation in events related to personal violence in terms of the analysis of the news taking place in a three-month period in five Turkish daily newspapers. The newspapers were selected having different ideological tendencies and widespread readership.

Anderson (2004) examined factors for violence against women and explored why women do not report domestic violence. Nearly one third of the 23,430 women interviewed had experienced physical violence. Only 35% of them had told anyone about it, almost always someone within their own family. Several personal and family factors were associated with disclosure.

Babar (2006) in his study “Violence against women in Pakistan: current realities and strategies for change” analysed the issue from various perspectives. He concludes that in Pakistan violence is a serious threat to women’s basic human rights and that requires coordinated solutions, involving the participation of both the state and civil society.

Pisa & El-Bushra (1992) while discussing the issue, says gender based violence is perpetrated at many different levels, i.e. at the family, community and state level, and in many different forms.

Schuler (1992) argues physical dimension of gender violence may be the most readily identifiable, psychological abuse, the deprivation of resources for physical and psychological



needs, and the commoditisation of women, through trafficking and prostitution, are also important dimensions of gender violence.

Brohi (2004) conducted a sociological analysis of honour killing in the Sindh province. He argues that honour killing cannot be simply attributed to honour but a host of cultural, political and social factors make and shape it. Brohi suggests government efforts must be supplemented by other bodies to check this problem.

Sultana (2008) et al., analysed factors responsible for female trafficking and prostitution and found that poverty, unemployment, lack of education, and discriminatory customs were the factors that helped the exploiters to lure women into better socio-economic conditions. They suggest that by improving legislation, policy and programs pertaining to women issues, violence against women in all its forms can be checked and their condition made better.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This research study is primarily a content analysis study of the three selected newspapers to discuss the nature and extent of violence against women in our society. The three newspapers under study are The News, The Nation and Dawn. They will be contently analysed for violence against women.

3.2 Universe/Sample

The universe of the study is three months during which the contents were analysed from January 2008 to the end of March 2008. To add more quality to the study, the universe of the study is same as the sample. Hence the population and the sample of the study is same ranging from January 2008 to March 2008. The three newspapers selected are Dawn, News and Nation.

3.3 Variables

The main variables in the study are:

1. Domestic violence
2. Political violence
3. Socio-cultural violence
4. Workplace violence

3.4 Coding units:

The coding units for statistical application are:



3.4.1 Newspapers

1. The News
2. The Nation
3. Dawn

3.4.2 Placement

Stories in each newspaper were selected in placement-wise. The coding was:

- Front page upper: Code assigned is 1
- Front page lower: Code assigned is 2
- Back page upper: Code assigned is 3
- Back page lower: Code assigned is 4
- City page upper: Code assigned is 5
- City page lower: Code assigned is 6

3.4.3 Columns

Each story in the selected newspapers was also notified in terms of number of columns. The coding was:

1. one column
2. two columns
3. three columns
4. four columns
5. five columns
6. six columns

3.4.4 Total space

Total space for all the stories in the selected newspapers was recorded. The length of the headline was also included in this space. The total space was calculated by multiplying the recorded length with the breadth of the story and is calculated in centimetres.

3.4.5 Heading space

Each story was also recorded in terms of space given to the headlines and was calculated in centimetres.

3.4.6 Heading font size

For each relevant story, font size of the headline was also measured.

3.4.7 Image space

Image space of the relevant story was also measured in terms of space in centimetres.

3.4.8 Nature of violence

The main variable in the study is violence which was further categorised in the following four sub-variables. These variables were both conceptually and operationally defined. The stories were selected on account of their operational definitions. The following four values were assigned to these sub-variables in the study.

1. domestic violence
2. political violence
3. socio-cultural violence
4. workplace violence
5. others

3.4.9 Extent of violence

To determine the extent of violence, different manifestations of violence were also recorded in the study. As well the “other” category was also included to account for the added forms not included in the original table of categories as is done by Dr Siraj in his study (Portrayal of Pakistan in the elite US newspapers, 2008).

The coding units for these are:

1. gazing
2. chasing
3. scolding
4. body injury
5. threat
6. acid throwing
7. Vani
8. force prostitution
9. sexual assault
10. mutilated body

11. rape
12. gang rape
13. honour killings
14. murders
15. forced marriage
16. physical assault
17. kidnapping
18. others

4.1 FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The study contently analysed violence against women in the three selected newspapers: The News, The Nation and Dawn from January 2008 to the end of March 2008. The research study yielded a total of 43 stories on the subject.

In terms of nature of violence: 20 (46.5 percent) stories were recorded in the domestic violence category, 4 (9.3 percent) stories in the political violence category, 9 (20.9 percent) stories were recorded in socio-cultural violence category, just 1 (2.3 percent) were recorded in workplace violence category, and the other category consisted of 9 (20.9 percent) stories.

Table 2: Distribution of stories in newspapers in terms of violence

Nature of violence	Dawn	The News	The Nation	Total
Domestic Violence	12	3	5	20
Political Violence	2	1	1	4
Socio-Cultural Violence	4	3	2	9
Workplace Violence	0	0	1	1
Others	3	1	5	9
Total	21	8	14	43

As Table 2 shows Dawn gave more coverage to the incidents of violence against women as compared to The News and The Nation. It was quite expected that Dawn being a more independent newspaper and having a social watchdog approach will devote more space to the issue. Amazingly, stories of domestic violence led the categories and the category of workplace violence had no story. This again points to the fact that Pakistani media is oblivious to violence that is perpetrated against women other than domestic violence. While the policies of the selected newspapers call for gender equality and have sizeable female workers in their offices, this lukewarm coverage is primarily due to the preponderance of politics in our media. Even the city pages carry more news stories relating to the



announcements and conferences by local politicians and other interested groups. Issues of social importance, also including stories of violence against women, are relegated to side columns or killed due to space consideration and sub-editors' disenchantment for those. As many human rights activists believe in Pakistan, violence incidents against women get less coverage is proved by the fact that the newspaper of the standards of Dawn does not report workplace violence though very few working organisations have signed a framework for stemming violence against women.

The News on the other hand, though the second larger newspaper, only published 8 stories in all the categories. News being a chain publication of Jang group, the largest publishing company in the country, with this scarce coverage point to the other gravest factor that the Urdu newspaper Jang would also minimise the issue of violence against women.

At this point, both Dawn and The News make an interesting comparison. Dawn has the maximum coverage and The News minimum. Now, a general perception of The News is that it covers the issues that touch people, with a little regard to the nature of issue whether it is of system level or local level. Opposite to that is Dawn, which focuses on system level issues of national significance. Our national discourse suggests that the issue of violence against women is a local level issue and not systemic though the evil is widespread. So, The News must have greater coverage than the Dawn but the study suggests the opposite. One possible reason for this contention may be preponderance of politics as discussed earlier in the study. As all the selected newspapers focused on the metro-cities for the issues, and now politics also reeking in these cities, The News was covered by those issues and sidelined issues relating to the violence against women.

The Nation on the hand, having readership in the metro-cities also gave less coverage to the issue. The Nation is also supported by a widely circulated Urdu newspaper Nawa-i-Waqt and Waqt TV channel and hence this means that this sizeable publishing company would have also ignore this severe problem. This clearly contradicts the report that in Pakistan alone during the months of April-July (2008), as many as 1700 cases occurred and only 10 percent of incidents were reported in the mainstream media (Daily Times, 2009).

Moreover, as far as the placement of the stories is concerned, the three newspapers Dawn, The News and The Nation gave the following placement in their formats while discussing the four forms of violence: domestic violence, political violence, socio-cultural violence and the other category consisting of violent incidents not mentioned in the aforementioned three categories. The whole sample contained just 1 (2.3 percent) story on the front page upper, 4 (9.3 percent) stories were published on the front page lower, 3 (7 percent) stories were published on the back page upper, 2 (4.7 percent) stories were published on the back page lower, 19 (44.2) stories were published on the city page upper and 14 (32.6 percent) stories were published on the city page lower.

Table 4: Distribution of stories in terms of placement vis-à-vis newspapers

Placement	Papers			Total
	Dawn	The News	The Nation	
Front Page Upper	0	1	0	1
Front Page Lower	1	2	1	4
Back Page Upper	2	0	1	3
Back Page Lower	1	0	1	2
City Page Upper	9	4	6	19
City Page Lower	8	1	5	14
Total	21	8	14	43

Moreover, in terms of extent of the violence, stories relating to the Body Injury were 1 (2.3 percent), Threat 1 (2.3 percent), Vani 1 (2.3 percent), Forced Prostitution 3 (7 percent), Sexual Assault 3 (7 percent), Mutilated Bodies 1 (2.3 percent), Gang Rape 6 (14 percent), Honour Killing 1 (2.3 percent), Murder 9 (20.9 percent), Forced Marriage 3 (7 percent), Physical Assault 2 (.7 percent), Kidnapping 7 (.3 percent), and Others 5 (1.6 percent).

Table 6: Distribution of stories in terms of extent of violence

Extent	Papers			Total
	Dawn	The News	The Nation	
Body Injury	1	0	0	1
Threat	0	0	1	1
Vani	0	0	1	1
Forced Prostitution	2	1	0	3
Sexual Assault	3	0	0	3
Mutilated Bodies	0	1	0	1
Rape	2	0	0	2
Gang Rape	2	0	6	8
Honour Killing	1	0	1	2
Murder	5	1	3	9
Forced Marriage	1	2	0	3

Physical Assault	0	1	1	2
Kidnapping	4	2	1	7
Total	21	8	14	43

The three newspapers contently analysed for three months from January 2008 to the end of March 2008 yielded only 43 stories. These show that in 90 days, only 43 incidents of violence against women were committed, which is a huge simplification of the proven facts that not a single moment passes where women are not subjected to different kinds of violence. They also show that only one act of violence against women is committed in Pakistan in more than two days.

According to reports by different organisations as also mentioned in this study, 90 percent of crimes against women are not reported. The issue of violence against women is usually trivialised and not set in the media agenda. Also, as the study shows only domestic violence grabs media attention, while the other manifestations of violence like political, socio-cultural and workplace violence is seldom discussed in the mainstream media.

In terms of nature of violence: 20 (46.5 percent) stories were recorded in the domestic violence category, 4 (9.3 percent) stories in the political violence category, 9 (20.9 percent) stories were recorded in socio-cultural violence category, just 1 (2.3 percent) were recorded in workplace violence category and the other category consisted of 9 (20.9 percent) stories.

Similarly, as far as the extent of violence is concerned, only visible violence like murder and kidnapping are reported while the invisible violence like gazing, threats and other acts that may cause anxiety are usually nor reported. Stories relating to the Body Injury were 1 (2.3 percent), Threat 1 (2.3 percent), Vani 1 (2.3 percent), Forced Prostitution 3 (7 percent), Sexual Assault 3 (7 percent), Mutilated Bodies 1 (2.3 percent), Gang Rape 6 (14 percent), Honour Killing 1 (2.3 percent), Murder 9 (20.9 percent), Forced Marriage 3 (7 percent), Physical Assault 2 (.7 percent), Kidnapping 7 (.3 percent), and Others 5 (1.6 percent).

Likewise, very few stories relating to violence against women make it to the front or back pages of the mainstream newspapers. Just 1 (2.3 percent) story was published on the front page upper, 4 (9.3 percent) stories were published on the front page lower, 3 (7 percent) stories were published on the back page upper, 2 (4.7 percent) stories were published on the back page lower, 19 (44.2) stories were published on the city page upper and 14 (32.6 percent) stories were published on the city page lower.

All the three newspapers significantly differ from each other in terms of their coverage relating to the nature of violence, placement of the stories and extent of the violence.

Dawn published 12 stories on domestic violence, 2 stories on political violence, 4 stories socio-cultural violence and 3 stories on the other category (nature of violence not mentioned in our categories). No story was published by Dawn relating to workplace violence against women in its coverage.

The News on the other hand, published 3 stories on the domestic violence, 1 story on political violence, 3 stories on socio-cultural violence and just 1 story in the other category (nature of violence not mentioned in our categories). Not a single story appeared in the workplace violence category.

Similarly, The Nation published 6 stories on domestic violence, 1 story on political violence, 2 stories on socio-cultural violence, 1 story on workplace violence and 4 stories on the other category (nature of violence not mentioned in our categories).

As the finding shows, Dawn gave more coverage to the issue as compared to The Nation and The News. The coverage in Dawn was dominated by the domestic violence stories unlike the other two newspapers.

Likewise, in terms of newspapers vis-à-vis placement of the stories, Dawn published not a single story on the front page upper, 1 story on the front page lower, 2 stories on the back page upper, 1 story on the back page lower, 9 stories on the city page upper and 8 stories on the city page lower.

Similarly, The News published 1 story on the front page upper, 2 stories on the front page lower, not a single story was published on the back page upper and similarly not a single story was published back page lower, 4 stories on the city page upper and 1 story on the city page lower.

As far as The Nation is concerned, not a single story was published on the front page upper, 1 story on the front page lower, 1 story on the back page upper, 1 story on the front page lower, 6 stories on the city page upper and 5 stories on the city page lower.

As the placement study shows, The News published 3 stories on the front page unlike the other two newspapers that published most of the stories in the city pages. Dawn published more stories on the city pages and back pages as compared to other newspapers.

Similarly, in terms of extent of violence vis-à-vis newspapers, Dawn published stories relating to Body Injury were (1), Threat (no story), Vani (no story), Forced Prostitution (2), Sexual Assault (3), Mutilated Bodies (no story), Rape (2), Gang Rape (2), Honour Killing (1), Murder (5), Forced Marriage (1), Physical Assault (no story) and Kidnapping (4).

Likewise, for The News, stories relating to Body Injury (no story), Threat (no story), Vani (no story), Forced Prostitution (1) story, Sexual Assault (no story), Mutilated Bodies (1) story, Rape (no story), Gang Rape (no story), Honour Killing (no story), Murder (1), Forced Marriage (2), Physical Assault (1) and Kidnapping (2) stories.

Similarly, for The Nation, stories relating to Body Injury (no story), Threat (1) story, Vani (1) story, Forced Prostitution (no story), Sexual Assault (no story), Mutilated Bodies (no story), Rape (no story), Gang Rape (6) stories, Honour Killing (1) story, Murder (3) stories, Forced Marriage (no story), Physical Assault (1) and Kidnapping (1) story.

As the above data shows, Dawn gave more coverage to the physical manifestation of violence, The News gave more coverage to the symbolic manifestation of violence and the Nation was somehow divided between the two types of violence.

In a nutshell, the study confirms the common criticism of media that the issue of violence against women is not highlighted to the extent that it needs. This is exactly what a number of stories conducted by a number of researchers including (Leyla 2007; Lucinda 2004 and Sarah 2006) have demonstrated earlier that violence against women is not properly reported in the mainstream media.

This study analysed the different forms of abuses of human rights of women with the aim to understand what kinds of social, psychological, cultural and economic problems women are facing.

This work builds on the literature that violence against women is under-reported in mainstream media. According to Carolyn Waldron lack of appropriate media coverage of an issue leads to the implication that the topic is not important. And obviously, if a story is not reported, public awareness is significantly lessened. And, the rest of coverage is usually sensationalised instead of covering the issue as a human problem.

As Zahiruudin Babar in his study concludes that in Pakistan violence is a serious threat to women's basic human rights and that requires coordinated solutions, involving the participation of both the state and civil society. There is a strong and urgent need for mobilising and adequately utilising all allied sectors of society for formulating policy and programs. According to Babar, regressive social practices, entrenched deeply in tribal and feudal customs and traditions, coupled with an obscurantist interpretation of religious leaders, are the main hurdles in the way of women demanding their rights. He argues that only through the education of women and by making them leaders and equal participants in decision-making and in deciding their own future, that Pakistan will ever free itself from the bonds of illiteracy, inequality and poverty



It is hoped by the end of the study, we will be in a better position to make suggestions for our policy makers, academia and researchers on how to approach the malaise of violence against women in Pakistan and better the current inhuman ordeal.



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