

# How Masculine Absurdity Produces Domestic Violence Against Women? An Ethnographic Study In Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Umar Daraz , <sup>2</sup>Dr. Raza Ullah, & <sup>3</sup>Dr. Muhammad Bilal

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Sociology, University of Malakand Chakdara Paksitan, Email: [dr.umar@uom.edu.pk](mailto:dr.umar@uom.edu.pk)*

<sup>2</sup>*Assistant Professor Department of Sociology, Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi Pakistan, [Raza.ullah@f.rwu.edu.pk](mailto:Raza.ullah@f.rwu.edu.pk)*

<sup>3</sup>*Lecturer (Corresponding author) Department of Sociology (Main Campus), Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan Pakistan, Email: [bilal@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:bilal@awkum.edu.pk)*

## Abstract

Men's absurd behavior always leads to violence against women. How masculine absurdity constructs different types of domestic violence against women in a traditional Pashtun society at Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (K.P.), ethnographically explored in this paper. The data collected for this study is based on six months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Malakand, K.P. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Qualitative thematic analysis guided data analysis. The study suggests that masculine absurdity causes domestic violence against women, such as social and traditional violence, physical and corporal violence, psychological and emotional violence, sexual abuse, and forced prostitution.

**Key Words:** Masculine absurdity, domestic violence against women, social, traditional, physical, corporal, psychological, and emotional violence.

## Introduction

Domestic violence against women has been deeply rooted in the discourse of women as men's property and servants (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2004). Generically, this discourse affects half of the population across the countries, as women almost constitute half of the world's population (Bates et. al., 2004). Women being property and servants to men created men's hegemony in the public and private spheres, further producing different kinds of domestic violence against women (Fikree & Pasha, 2004). Researchers are critical of men's hegemony over women and their absurd approach to women. For instance, Archer (2000) argued that men's hegemony over women leads them to ridiculous behavior, creating physical, sexual, and psychological violence against women. These kinds of violence against women further

influence women's health, morbidity, and mortality, leading to psychological trauma, depression, and anxiety among women (Austin, 2001).

Men's absurdity is one of the dominant reasons behind domestic violence against women in different ways across countries (Babcock et. al., 2004). The tendency of domestic violence against women is more prevalent among the tribal societies because of their social structures and cultural orientation that promotes masculine absurdity (Browne et. al., 1999; Campbell & Soeken, 1999). Men's absurd approach to women sometimes leads to extreme physical violence against women, such as honor killing (Campbell et. al., 2000). Honor killing is believed as the murder of a woman to restore a family's reputation that was being stigmatized by a

woman's character (Sheri & Bob, 2006). Syed (2004) also found honor killing as an act where a male family member kills a female to restore the family's honor. Masculine absurdity also causes the dowry system as a form of violence against women as it defames women's status among the people (Clements et. al., 2002). The Dowry system is a social and traditional practice that causes direct violence against women (Douglas et. al., 2006). Dowry, a compulsory traditional marriage ritual, is recognized as one of the common practices in marriages across developing countries (Syed, 2005). Dowry is an amount of money or valuable things the bride's family gives to the groom at the time of their marriage (Gohar, 2004). However, it has become a dominant reason for women's psychological torture and physical assault (Bari, 2007). Women who bring insufficient dowry face daily physical and mental health issues (Barlas, 2002). Reportedly, some brides are forced to commit suicide, and some are burnt alive under cover of stove deaths, also known as bride burning, in which women are burnt alive after being covered with kerosene oil (Veena, 2002).

Masculine absurdity behind domestic violence against women is common among the rural population because women live very miserable life (Ebrahim, 2007). Throwing acid over women is one of the prevalent forms of violence against women. Hossain (2004) reported that men teach a lesson to women by throwing acid over their faces and body because they do not bring sufficient dowry. This kind of treatment of women makes men more absurd, further producing different kinds of violence against women, such as social, physical, and psychological violence (Kutty, 2000). Acid throwing is physical violence against women by which men take revenge on women because they reject men's proposals (Burney, 2005). This happens because men are trained to show absurd behavior to women (Mayell, 2002). Fundamentalism and orthodox thinking are thought to be the significant reasons behind men's

absurd behavior that causes different types of domestic violence against women (Marjorie, 2002). Women cannot think of adopting modern clothes, such as jeans, compared to traditional ones. This situation often becomes the primary source of physical violence against women, especially acid throwing (Nangia, 1997). According to Burney's (2005) report, on average, a woman suffers from acid throwing every week. Though the acid sale is banned in the open market due to a strong reaction from the human rights commission, men still find it, which shows the power of masculinity and leads them to absurd behavior (Human Rights Watch, 2003).

In Pakistan, domestic violence against women, such as beating women and acid throwing, is common. In the (2006) report of the human rights commission of Pakistan, 42 cases of acid throwing during 2004 were reported. Another report by the human rights commission of Pakistan showed that every year almost 400 women across the country have been victimized by acid attacks (Human Rights Commission, 2008). Patel (2003) revealed that this is important to remember that many cases of domestic violence against women go unreported. Women in Pakistan often live with vulnerability because of men's absurd behavior. Women cannot have a proper social and communal relationship with men because of men's absurdity. Cultural and traditional practices within the institutions have legitimized domestic violence against women, such as physical, emotional, and social violence against women (Ellis, 2006). Pakhtun's social institutions and cultural structures revealed domestic violence against women (Seed, 2012). In Pakhtun society, domestic violence against women is common because women are considered men's property (Dutton, 2007). Women live like servants to men because men have to make decisions, and women are bound to follow them (Qadeer, 2014). Baker (2007) indicated that women are not considered human in some parts of Pakhtun's society. Bates et. al., also found that women in rural areas of Pakhtun

society are considered men's property. It is evident from the above discussion that different types of domestic violence against women, such as physical, psychological, and emotional, due to men's absurdity are prevalent across countries, and Pakistan is no exception.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is based on six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Twenty-seven in-depth interviews were conducted with women participants, and their information was cross-verified through living in the community for six months. The fieldwork focused on the masculine absurdity that produced different kinds of domestic violence against women in the community, such as social and traditional violence, physical and corporal violence, and psychological and emotional violence. These types of domestic violence emerged during data analysis after the ethnographic fieldwork.

Looking into the importance of the research questions in a culturally (Pakhtun culture) sensitive context, purposive sampling was used to interview domestic women who lived within the community for six months to cross-verify the information given by the respondents. It is essential to discuss the limitations of our positionality being male members conducting an ethnographic study in a traditional society where Pakhtun society is very rigid regarding women's related issues (Bilal, Ahmad, and Zed, 2017). We accept the limitations of our positionality. However, being Pakhtuns, speaking the Pashtu language, and knowing all the customs and traditions of the community were advantages that supported us in conducting this ethnographic project on the issue. In some cases, we also appointed female research associates to cross-verify some of the information collected during the interviews. They were given enough training on ethnography before sending them to the field to cross-verify some of the information collected during interviews.

The data were collected in the Pashtu language and translated into English. After translation, the data were repeatedly visited to get familiarity with it. Some similar responses on different types of domestic violence emerged and clubbed together under the themes previously emerged from the data and empirical literature. These responses were analyzed and discussed in line with different theories, such as social learning theory. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory argued that human socialization occurs through social learning in which reward and punishment are the central elements. It is essential to mention that masculine absurdity is a learned behavior among Pakhtuns at Malakand that causes domestic violence in many ways. The analysis also draws on Marxist/socialist feminist theory to explore how capitalist patriarchy and sexism mutually produce a discriminatory gender structure in Malakand, leading to the masculine absurdity that produces various types of domestic violence against women. Marxist/ socialist feminism "links the inferior position of women to class-based capitalism and its alignment with patriarchal family in capitalist societies (Lindsey, 2020: 15)". How the analysis of masculine absurdity and women's domestic violence is informed by social learning theory and Marxist feminist theory is part of the discussion in the following section.

### **Discussion and Results**

How masculine absurdity produces different types of domestic violence against women in the traditional Pakhtun society at Malakand is part of the discussion in this section. The analysis revealed that masculine absurdity causes various types of domestic violence against women, such as social and traditional violence, physical and corporal violence, psychological and emotional violence, sexual abuse, and forced prostitution.

#### **Social and Traditional Violence**

The theme of social and traditional violence came up within the responses taken on masculine

absurdity and domestic violence against women. The analysis revealed that men develop absurd behavior in patriarchal families, which strongly predicts social and traditional violence against women, such as beating women and speaking abusive language. This situation is embedded in Marxist feminism, that capitalist patriarchy and private property influence women's familial life by keeping them subordinated (Engels, 1970). Patriarchal families and the private property concept increase men's absurdity as they hold a powerful position in the family. To explain how masculine absurdity causes social and traditional violence against women, a housewife opined:

We (housewives) often face social and traditional violence in domestic life. Men usually shout at us. They disgrace us by using abusive language even in front of guests sometimes. This situation has been a tradition for so many decades.

One of the participants shared that social and traditional violence is common in our community because men always deal with absurd behavior. Similarly, another respondent shared that men are trained in our families to keep hold of women and control them by force if they do not obey men, and this is one of the common examples of social and traditional violence in the community. It is evident here that absurdity is a learned masculine behavior within the families that promote social and domestic violence against women in Malakand. These responses have roots in the social learning theory that masculine absurdity is a learned behavior for which men receive rewards within the family to maintain men's hegemony (Benschop, 2004).

Maintaining men's absurdity is a cultural norm in the traditional Pakhtun society at Malakand that causes social and traditional violence against women. Bandura (1977) argued that men's hegemony is a learned behavior that develops in the family through rewards or punishment, a social process. One of the participants in this

study attests to Bandura's argument that men have always been taught to express a hegemonic behavior and control women. This is a social violence that traditionally prevailed in Pakhtun society. In the same line, another respondent revealed that my father often teaches my brothers how to lead a family while ignoring us being female members of the family, which becomes a source of social and traditional violence against women. Mategeko (2011) also argued that patriarchal families always teach men about leading the family and ignoring women in this socialization process. Pakhtunwali is a patriarchal structure that rarely discusses women's importance in the family and socialization process. One participant claimed that men always deal with absurd behavior transmitted from decades through our culture. Another respondent asserted that social violence against women, such as beating them, is a traditional cultural norm in our community, and this is due to masculine absurdity. It is evident from the discussion that men's absurdity is a learned behavior that causes social and traditional violence against women, such as beating women and speaking abusive language to them.

### **Physical and Corporal Violence**

Many participants reported that physical and corporal violence against women had been normalized in the area due to absurd masculine behavior. Men's dominance is the norm in the area, so men deal with women with such strange behavior. For instance, one of the participants opined, 'My husband sometimes beat me, and I feel body pain for so many days' (Saman, a housewife). One of the commonly shared opinions from the respondents is that men always try to deal with us with physical force, and when we don't obey them, they badly beat us and give us pain. Straus and Donnelly (2005) have defined physical or corporal violence as using physical force against women, causing severe pain. Reportedly, one of the housewives shared her husband uses physical force when I do not obey

him, even for an illogical demand. Explaining physical and corporal violence, Reema Khan, one of the women from Chakdara, shared:

Once, I was busy washing, drying, and pressing the clothes all day and cleaning the house, which took me preparing the meal later than the routine. My husband shouted at me and then beat me harshly, which caused pain for more than a week time.

Many respondents reported absurd masculine behavior behind physical and corporal violence against women. Gershoff (2002) found physical violence against women as physical injuries, such as spank, slapping, punching, kicking, and burning. This finding conforms with the opinion of so many participants who indicated that they often face kicking and punching from male members. For example, one of the housewives evident my husband kicked me in the ribs a month, and I still feel severe pain in my chest. Men's absurdity sometimes gets them into violent behavior, which causes severe physical or corporal violence against women. Gul Naseeba, a local woman from Malakand, reported that:

My husband directed me once to prepare the meal for his friends, but I was feeling the temperature, and I couldn't manage that well on time. I was still busy cooking the meal when he came to the house. He didn't control his anguish and beat me with a hard stick. I was not feeling well for more than a month time.

Feminist thinkers believe that women's victimization in domestic chores is the cultural norm in most countries. Kelly and Johnson (2008) concluded that men are always involved in beating women and victimizing women in domestic life. Respondents pointed out a similar situation in the study area. A participant shared the domestic experience that her husband constantly victimized her, which has been his

behavior since marriage. Similarly, one of the housewives explained:

My husband is the classical example of men's absurdity. He often beat me unnecessarily, and I felt body pain for many days. When I do not respond to him after he beats me, he again gets angry and shouts at me.

Abraham (2000) found physical violence against wives and daughters as the cultural norm, and it was not sanctioned for centuries because women lived very miserable life. Considering the above discussion, it can be argued that masculine absurdity is the cultural norm in the traditional Pakhtun society at Malakand which causes physical and corporal violence against women. Men get anguish at women. They beat women, burn women, and shout at them, which sometimes causes pain among women for so many weeks and months.

### **Psychological and Emotional Violence**

The physical and emotional violence against women is of great importance caused by masculine absurdity. Papp (2010) has linked masculine absurdity with men's economic status, leading to psychological and emotional violence against women. Generally, women face psychological and emotional violence across cultures (Parveen, 2011). Participants stated that men's absurd behavior causes psychological and emotional violence against women. Zuhra, a housewife, highlighted that I often get distressed by her husband's behavior. He (my husband) delas me like a slave, and disturbs me emotionally. A common view among many participants was that women have always been very distressed psychologically and emotionally in Pashtun society and there is a single dominant reason behind this: men's dominance. Men's dominant behavior is the cultural norm among Pakhtuns, which ultimately causes emotional violence against women. Bloom (2008) reported intimate partner violence across cultures,

influencing women psychologically and emotionally. Because men's hegemony influences women emotionally, Aiman, one of the local houses wives spoke:

My husband deals with me in the home like a servant and does not allow me to attend different events among the relatives outside the home. This absurd behavior of my husband has kept me alone among my relatives, which ultimately influenced my mental health, and I am not stable psychologically now.

Psychological and emotional violence is common across countries. Humphreys et. al., (2010) found that across South Asian countries, patriarchy controls women's sexuality not only physically but psychologically affects women. This men-dominated culture and traditions cause discrimination against women in different domains of life (Bilal & Ahmad, 2021). Men-dominance always influences women's mental or psychical health. Many participants indicated that the absurd behavior of the husbands affected wives' psychological health. One of the respondents shared:

I have always received an insulting response from my husband whenever he comes home. When I ask him for a meal or water, he responds rudely. This kind of absurd behavior of my husband often gets me under mental stress.

Because masculine absurdity causes psychological and emotional violence against women, one of the housewives revealed that I work all day to clean the house, wash clothes, and cook meals to keep her husband happy. Still, when he (my husband) comes home in the evening, he behaves rudely, influencing my emotional health (Shabana). Pakhtun culture and traditions strictly socialize its male members to deal with women at house chores. This kind of

training creates an absurd behavior among men that ultimately causes emotional violence against women (Yunis & Hashim, 2020). Yunis and Hashim's finding comes in conformity with one of the commonly revealed responses from the participants in this study that culture and tradition teach men to deal with women with strictness because men are superior. Women have to serve men. Similarly, Jewkes et. al., (2002) argued that men's hegemony in the public and familial forums influences women's mental and psychological health.

Considering the debate on masculine absurdity and women's psychological and emotional health, it can be argued that an absurd man's behavior influences women's psychological health and keeps them in a stressful situation. Women, housewives especially, remain disturbed because of men's absurd behavior which sometimes leads women to serious mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

### **Conclusion**

The above-discussed types of violence against women were caused by masculine absurdity in Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. An absurd men's behavior produces social and traditional violence against women. Men shout at women and disgrace them (women) by using abusive language. Men sometimes speak abusive language to women in front of guests. Moreover, masculine absurdity caused physical and corporal violence, such as beating women, leading to body pain for a long time. An absurd men's behavior also produced other types of physical and corporal violence against women, such as physical injury, spark, punching, slapping, kicking, and burning women.

Furthermore, the analysis concluded that masculine absurdity caused psychological and emotional violence against women in Malakand. Homemakers faced the problem of anxiety, stress, and emotional disorder due to men's illogical behavior. Due to men's absurd behavior,

women sometimes face severe mental health issues, leading them to suicide attempts.

What is crucial in this article is to recognize the role of Pakhtun culture and traditions in producing a men-dominated system in the society that ultimately led to men's absurd behavior. Men/masculine absurdity can be conceptualized by seeking an insight into the patriarchal culture and traditions among Pakhtuns at Malakand. The study suggests comprehensive research on how to deconstruct Pakhtun's customs and traditions and reconstruct a gender-balanced society to defuse the concept of domestic violence against women.

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