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**Challenges faced by rural women while defending violence:  
With special reference to Malakand division, KPK province.**

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**Abstract**

*The objective of this research was to study violence faced by rural women due to gender discrimination, and to identify what challenges and risks rural women are facing to respond against this violence. What is the role of Government and NGO's in this whole situation that how much effectively they are helping these rural women against challenges and risks faced by them. In this study three villages of Malakand Division which comes under Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were taken under consideration such as Batkhela, Amandara and Alladand Dehri. Total of 150 women were selected, ages between 25-45, 50 from each village, interviews were conducted and through KWIC (Keys words in context) method followed by word count analysis was used for results interpretation. The main challenges reported by these women were, lack of support system, lack of transport system, lack of opportunities, lack of education, early and forced marriages and no ownership in land/property. By interviewing all these women it was easily concluded that government institutions and NGO's (national/ international) are putting very less focus on these areas because these are rural areas which can easily be ignored.*

Keywords: *Gender discrimination, violence, women, and rural areas.*

Basically in a society, gender refers to the differences between men and women social role and status. These roles are specified by the cultural, social and society economic organizations and by their fundamental moral, religious and legal norms. There is difference between sex and gender, Sex is a biological term whereas gender is a socio cultural and psychological one (Anderson, 1988).

In light of Islamic teachings men and women are equal, In Quran the holly book of Islam the creator of entire universe says: "I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors in my way, be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other (3:195)", they have equal rights. Modern societies understand and admit equality of both the genders up to a greater extent, they equally contribute in the betterment of their societies and play a significant role in development of their respective

countries. But unfortunately and unluckily many developing countries don't give importance to gender equality. They always consider women as inferior and this concept is one of the biggest constraints in their development.

As a matter of fact world's half population consists of women and rest is dependent on women in one way or another. Women contributes a very good percentage in the development of civilization still they are considered unequal to men and are given less importance (Rahman & Naoroze, 2007). The main reason that makes women's status weaker in society is less opportunities to acquire land, in getting education, property, skill and paid jobs. In this world round about two billion people are considered poor and women are two third of this poor population (ESCAP, 2002). According to UN report in 2007 women doing more work than men but their earning is less than men because most of women are doing un-paid work.

In developing countries structure of education system, social value, cultural believes and religious traditions make women more weak and recessive to male. These societies are designed in such a way that they are male dominant by default which makes position of women weaker. Mostly in rural areas due to lack of awareness, misinterpretation of religion, tradition and cultural believes, which as a result leads to more discrimination and increase the rate of violence against women on daily basis.

Rehman (2009) states that on every level in our society women faces discrimination and are being neglected. Male chauvinist society which imposes such traditional thoughts which always give them feeling that they are inferior; and this is the reason which exposes women to great sufferings in their homes. Economically weakness and lack of education, these reasons dump the power of women to think about their due rights. Rizvi (1980) reveals in his study that a girl-child experiences lower status and enjoy very few rights from very beginning in under-developed countries, while on the other hand a male-child is treated superiorly. This bad experience of female-child from very young age make difficult for them to overcome this inequality.

Violence caused by gender discrimination is very common in rural areas. Violence is not only to harm someone physically. Violence is physical, psychological, sexual and emotional. There is a type of violence known as child maltreatment, in which children are neglected, ignored and it covers children up to age of 18. This child maltreatment destroy the personality of children. In rural areas females suffers a lot due to gender discrimination and violence. There is other type of violence known as non-physical violence which includes power relationships, neglects and threats, in rural areas mostly marriages are example of power relationship in which male have all the authority due to which females suffers again.

The purpose of conducting this research is to analyze the abuses to human rights of women in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This study will help us to know that what risks and challenges rural women are facing in order to respond to violence done on them. What are the reasons that are making rural women more vulnerable to violence? This study will also explain the effective role of government institution and both national/international NGO's, what role they are playing in order to overcome these challenges and risk factors. Once the challenges faced by rural women are identified, its remedy can be suggested that how effective steps can be made to avoid these challenges and give these women relief from violence.

### **Literature Review**

In Pakistan 32% population lives in urban areas while 68 % lives in rural areas. Besides such great population in urban areas most national NGOs, government bodies and media don't give that level of attention to these areas. Pakistan health care system is effected by problems like fragmentation of structure, insensitivity of gender, scarcity of resources, lack of accessibility and utilization (Anwar & Sheikh, 2013).

Rural communities faces many issues and one of them is lack of emergency maternity health care centers. A survey based on 314,623 women was conducted from May 2010 to December 2011, area targeted in this survey was including 16 facilities in Punjab, Sindh and Islamabad, purpose of this survey was to determine that how the maternal and neonatal problems are managed .Results revealed from this survey was that there is ratio of 299 per 100,000 maternal mortality births in urban areas, which includes 94 miss maternal mortality and 38 maternal deaths. Rural areas give worse results in comparison with urban areas, maternal mortality rate was double (Rizawn, 2010).

Men and women both have their equally significant role as a member of society. God the creator of entire universe have same punishment and reward standards for men and women. In Holy Quran it is mention that," Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, and has faith, verily to him will we give a new life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to their actions".

Ekong (2013) stated in his study that there is a special need of participation of women in development of rural areas. Many organizations are working for it but the result revealed that these organizations are not reaching the actual target. And also that women are willing to do something but they are not able to get out of this poverty cycle because of many constraints.

Volart (2004) in his study on India revealed that greater ratio of female to male managers in non-agriculture area has a very great effect on their overall growth, while in agriculture area increase in ratio have no such effect. This means that where talent and innovation is required, Contribution of females plays a very important role. It also conclude that

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gender discrimination leads to lower economic growth and to overcome this social norm different remedies can be developed like making effective policies etc.

Raju (2014) studied gender inequality in India, he related gender inequality with gender empowerment. He revealed that gender empowerment measures that how much active participation women have in both the economic and political life. In his study he found that in India women are facing social factors like illiteracy, ignorance, unemployment, low wages, low level of participation in politics these all factors leads to gender inequality. These factors make women in India poorer and due to disproportionality they have less power, due to which they are restrained from higher education and forced into early marriages which leads to violence on them.

Hancock (2001) studied from 1997 to 2000 the women of Banjaran a rural area basically. During his study he revealed that during inflation when prices of basic items increases such as oil, food, education and health it really effects the women, it effects the purchasing power of women badly. At household level different behavioral changes were reported by women working in factories for example, their mostly wages were consumed in household budget ,new consumption and spending on habits were observed ,bargaining power was reported very high and also decision making at home was effected.

Kishwar and Akhtar (1982) stated that women in our society are degraded by restrictions, like restriction on education, employment, dressing according to their will. These things suffocate women and take away their confidence and independence.

Adams (1997) concluded in his study that gender discrimination effects the roles of both the male and female, it effects there functioning and managing abilities and it also effects the distribution of benefits which are achieved by the contribution of both the genders. He emphasized on the importance of gender equality in rural areas.

Jalal and Munir (2008) studied the socio-economic and cultural constraints for women in rural areas of Mardan. They concluded that major constraint of women in these areas is education in way of their economic development. Other constraints are lack of opinion, forced marriages and lack of professional trainings.

Sonali Desai (1994) performed his research on gender discrimination and development in state of India. She concluded that females are mostly un-educated because of their parent's concept that they are temporary member of family and there education is of no use to us so why should we waste our money on their education. And in rural areas mostly their profession is agriculture so according to their thinking in field of agriculture there is no use of any formal education. These are major constraints in female education which are effecting there economic development.

Sen and Shivakumar (2001) Stated that in India females are more exposed to diseases and having short lifespan as compare to male. And reason behind this short lifespan is gender discrimination ,females are treated inferior, female babies are given less breast feeding, less amount of good food, if they are ill they are again ignored and rate of visiting a doctor is very low and less parental attention. This lack of nurturing and care which is apparently less visible is really killing the girls in India.

Anna (2006) revealed in her study that in India rural areas are still living there lives bound by traditions and these traditions are particularly for women. In order to avoid distortions within family females are deprived from there lawful properties and lands. The importance and value of having sons in all social classes sets the lifetime standards for girls in India.

Tabassum, kausra, Saghir and Amjad (2010) studied gender discrimination in Faisalabad rural areas. They collected data from three different villages and use SPSS software to analyze their data. They concluded that women can play very important role in economic development but in these areas due to gender discrimination women are less educated with very low rate of professional training. But according to them new generation is in favor of female education and this trend is changing.

All over the world gender disparity is present. In Pakistan it is very visible. Women are deprived from mental, educational and professional status in comparison to their male counterparts. Rural areas of Pakistan are then more exposed to gender discrimination which leads to different types of violence on women (Hassan, 2008). This literature review give us a lot of evidence of gender discrimination in different areas of the world. This gender discrimination is main cause of violence on women, in their home, working places, educational institutions etc. Then in Rural areas this violence is reported more due to backwardness, lack of education, poverty, the old traditions and customs.

### **Research Methodology**

The data for this research comprised of two sets, secondary data (I.E) existing empirical and theoretical literature on the subject; and primary data that was collected from the field. For the literature review I applied the key words title (*Gender discrimination, violence, women, and rural areas*) search by using two data bases, namely, google scholar and science direct.

The primary data was collected by conducting 3 focus group discussions and five subsequent semi-structured interviews. The interviews picked up mainly on the interesting themes identified during the focus group discussions.

For interviews, purposive sampling was applied in order to get the most accurate responses to the question themes identified during the focus group discussions, in the light of the broader question of this

research (what challenges are faced by women while defending violence?). While for focus group interviews, it was ensured that each village (Alladand Dehri, Amandara and Batkhela) have its maximum presentation. Moreover, each participant was paid Rs 400 for their time, and maintaining motivation.

Three villages in Malakand Division are taken such as Dehri Alladand, Batkhela and Amandara. These are neighboring villages. From each village 50 women are being interviewed, Women selected for interview ages between 25-45. So sample size is 150 women. KWIC (key words in context) method was used. It was followed by the word count analysis. (leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Table 1. *Village and Interviewees*

Village Name	Total interviewees
Batkhela	50
Amandara	50
Dehri Alladand	50
Total	150

### Findings

After taking interviews of 150 women, mostly reported child maltreatment that from very early ages they suffered ignorance, their brothers were always superior to them, they always get the parents attention and good treatment. And when they get married their husband have all the rights, they have no decision making power, they can't speak for their rights because if they do so they will be divorced or they will face the physical violence. Following challenges are faced by these women that they can't defend themselves against violence.

#### *Lack of Opportunities*

For rural areas a general concept is applied, "out of sight out of mind". Big institutions pay more attention to urban areas because of the availability of more facilities but on the other hand rural areas are ignored and they have less development projects, no malls, no factories which causes un-employment. If in a place majority of males are un-employed then female's percentage can be imagined. Another very important thing in these Khyber Pakhtunkhwa rural areas as compared to rural areas of Punjab is that, in these areas veil system is very strict and females can't go out alone and a male or a female companion is must. This veil system restrict them to work in fields which is major source of income in these areas. They even can't start any business due to lack of professional training and the restricted environment. Females do things like stitching or selling clothes at home. But due to the whole responsibility of children and family cripple them to work properly or earn properly.

***Lack of Proper Transport System:***

Second thing reported was poor transport links in rural areas. In case of any domestic violence women can't escape .If they go they have to go by foot and that makes them more vulnerable. Secondly their responsibilities to their children and elderly people bound them and for that reason they have to stay in any case and bear all kind of violence.

***Lack of Support System:***

Third issue is a very big issue of geographical isolation and lack of support systems in rural areas. There are no crisis cell, legal aid or women refugees in these areas to which they can go and report there issues or take temporary shelter, for these facilities they have to go to urban areas which is again not possible for them.

***Lack of Education:***

Fourth issue is lack of education. In these areas female education comes in luxury not necessity. Mostly the concept prevails that female education is useless and ultimately they have to get married and have to take care of their children and in-laws.

***Close Communication:***

Fifth issue is that of a close communication. In villages mostly people live very close to each other and a culture of inter marriages exist between them. So if a women complaints against any violence, things get worse among families. Concept of gossiping and rumors is very common and very fast in villages. So to keep honor and dignity of family, females remain quite for rest of their lives bearing all the bad things they don't deserve.

***Early Marriages/Forced Marriages:***

There is general concept in villages that girls must get married at their early ages like 14 or 15 years. Early marriages and forced marriages are also effecting women very badly. At very early ages they become mothers, they have to bear whole responsibility of in-laws as well. This is the main reason that mostly females in these areas are un-educated.

***No Ownership of Land/Property:***

Another irony which is faced by rural women is that they don't get any share in land or property. Due to gender discrimination all the property of family is distributed among the male despite the fact that both Islamic and legal law give the right of women in property. But mostly women are not aware of their rights and those who are aware don't have the courage and resources to fight for their rights. If they do so there life's become more miserable and they are exposed to more violence. This lack of ownership make them economically weak and dependent on others.

***Lack of decision making power:***

Females in rural areas have no right to say anything neither any weightage is given to what they say. From childhood parents take their every decision like their education, marriage etc, and after marriage this power of decision making shifts to their husbands .This thing completely

damages the personality of women living in rural areas and leave them with no confidence.

### ***Role of NGO'S:***

As far as all these women were interviewed, they all said that they have heard names of NGO 'S, but practically they were never benefited by any of these NGO's, like any help in their health related issues or education awareness. There are no such institutes in these villages which give any free trainings, education or support.

### ***Role of Government:***

Government is not doing anything for the stability of females in the rural areas. The female candidate collect votes on the promises of females education, financial stability, women empowerment, small business loans but nothing is delivered once the government is formed. And mostly females are not allowed to vote at all. They are not allowed to leave their homes on the day of voting. And generally there is no trend of casting votes of females in villages.

## **Conclusion**

Violence have become a very common thing all over the world and rural areas are experiencing violence differently because of the conditions. Bringing awareness against violence is very important, because violence on females not only affect them but it effects the entire family, community and country. The whisper against violence should gather and become a voice that everyone can listen to it and address the issue.

After interviewing 150 women of different families and villages their problems were almost the same. Early marriages, lack of facilities, poverty, illiteracy and the cultural values they all are blindly following. They have no decision making power because they are females, they can't go out and do work because their culture does not allow such things. These all things make them economically, physically and mentally dependent on their male partners or males at their families acting as head of their families. Many females complaint that they are not facing physical violence but mental violence. And this violence is mostly due to gender discrimination which is a very common in these areas. And people also don't consider it bad as it's a part of their culture that males are always dominant and they have superiority over everything.

There is also a positive change coming in the people's mentality. They have started to give importance to female education. Their previous generation' females are almost 95% illiterate but there coming generation is statistically better. But again there are constraints like early marriages and girl's mindset that education will bring them no good they have to get married by 15 or 16 so they don't take interest in their studies.

## Suggestions to Stop Violence

After taking interviews of 150 females and analyzing their situations that what are the main causes they are suffering all the violence, in my view following steps can be taken by people, government and NGO's to stop the violence or decrease rate of it up to greater extent.

### **Step 1:**

First and very basic step is to bring awareness. Educate women about their rights and also aware the whole community that how much violence is causing destructive effects on their families, communities and country.

### **Step 2:**

Other important step can be taken by the government. All the talks about women rights in assemblies should be implemented practically and equally both in rural and urban areas. There must be emergency centers which respond to female's complaints immediately. There must be shelters where they can live temporarily in case of violence and it should be assured that proper protection should be provided to the refugees. Such institutions should be made which ensure justice so the morale of women should be boosted. They should be assured if they raise their voice against violence, they will be backed up and supported by the government and there issue will be solved with great concentration and justice.

### **Step 3:**

NGO's both national and international can play a very positive and constructive role in these situations. NGO'S can make women independent up to greater extent by giving them vocational trainings, help them in starting their small medium enterprise's and also NGO's with collaboration of government can also open educational institutes for females. They can also play a very significant role in the awareness.

## Recommendations

This study was based on only three villages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, This can be done on larger scale. Secondly comparison between urban and rural areas can also be done that what are the main reasons which make rural woman more vulnerable to violence. By doing study on larger scale and gathering extensive data can also help to generate such practical models which can help in avoiding violence.

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