

A Survey about Knowledge and Attitudes of People towards Violence against Women in Community/ Family Settings

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Abstract

In this article a very brief history of violence against women in domestic settings is developed. On the whole, 18 Focus group discussion (FGD) (including 4 pilot FGDs), were conducted in southern part of Teheran Capital of Iran among different groups of people (literate, illiterate, married, unmarried, male, female). Further, 30 individual interviews conducted with violence and family affaire experts such as police, forensic medicine experts, psychologists, social-workers, authorities, judges, and sociologists. Findings demonstrated a very traditional problem-solving approach to violence and violence-based issues. Moreover, violence is sometimes justified by natural superiority of men to women. It is also considered as a necessity for some purposes and therefore, it is accepted and may continue to exist among families and community for coming years. Public and private spheres are almost genderly divided and formal institutions and organizations are tried to be kept away from family violence related issues. This is mainly because of a belief that domestic violence belongs to private sphere rather than public one.

Keywords: *Violence, Family transition, Gender, Son-preference, Discrimination, Iran*

Introduction

Despite the very vital and undeniable roles which women play in human beings life and its continuity within families and communities, they did not enjoy an appropriate and suitable social status, and were deprived and discriminated by different ways through history, around the world.

Women, have had an efficient and effective role in fertility, which is defined as the main cause of biological survival of community (1), in providing domestic and health services, in giving care for children, ill and elderly, and in educating (formal and informal) family members particularly children (2). They perform all these functions as an unpaid work. But less attention has been paid to them in social justice domain and they were labeled and downgraded by subordinate titles (3), and even they have

been classified as the second sex (4). It has been said that “men have dealt with women as birds from unknown mountains which lost their way’s, as something more gentle, vulnerable, wild, odd, pleasant, sensitive, ... but should put them in a cage, let them not be escaped” (5). Women have been introduced as “Unknown” and “Crystallized characteristics and values of social classes” from Balzac (6) and Lefebvre (7) point of views respectively and sometimes they have been compared with the “truth” which philosophers were incapable to understand and explain it (7).

However, the relationship between two sexes has become imbalanced through history.

Nowadays, such a situation neither satisfies women, human conscience, nor development of human society as the ultimate objective of all nations and states. Therefore, the women issue

within family and community as a social and health topic has been proposed to be dealt with, by professionals and international agencies.

Change in present situation of women, depends undoubtedly upon change of behavior of groups of people (including male and female, married and unmarried, literate and illiterate and so on). According to theories of behavioral psychology, changes in behavior mainly, not entirely, associate with changes in knowledge and attitudes.

Materials and Methods

For the purpose of improving women’s status and understanding of knowledge and attitudes of community about women’s problems particularly within family, on one hand, and violence against women, on the other, a study was conducted in southern part of Teheran, capital city of Iran. Focus group discussion (FGD) was employed as methodology for the study. FGD is a qualitative method which mainly meets views and dominant attitudes of particular groups about specific issues. Married men and women (literate and illiterate), together with youth/singles (boys and girls), constituted the main groups of interview in this study. On the whole, 14 FGDs were conducted with these groups as the following table demonstrates:

Table 1: Characteristics and number of groups participated in the FGDs

Married & literate		Married & illiterate		Youth /single	
Women	Men	Women	Men	Boys	Girls
3	2	3	2	2	2

Moreover, 30 individual interviews with experts of family affaires (psychologists, social workers, police, lawyers, sociologists, and so on) were included in this study. A different questionnaire was employed for individual interviews (appendix 1). It is worth noting that 6-10 persons participated in each FGD.

Data Collection Data collection process through FGDs was mainly based on recording

and writing of interviewee’s statements with regard to the questions of “guide questionnaire”.

The “guide questionnaire” as the instrument of data collection distributed among facilitators in order to get familiar with the frame of interview.

The “guide questionnaire” consisted of two parts (knowledge, and attitude) with relevant open questions and probe questions. The “guide questionnaire” designed through workshops with participation of experts and facilitators. A copy of it is presented in appendix 2.

Collected data focus on knowledge and attitudes of different groups of community towards gender, violence, tolerance or restriction with regard to relations of both sexes, different forms of violence, sex preference, gender value/importance and status in community gender-related problem solving approaches and so on. The collected data could be utilized as an instrument for provision of convergence between attitudes of both sexes.

In fact the findings of such a study can help policymakers in adopting a more realistic approach to decision making.

Research Team The volunteers of *Family Planning Association of Iran* who had been trained for FGD, together with senior volunteers and experts of family affairs constituted the research team of this study.

“Guidelines for Studies Using the Group Interview Techniques” authored by (8) was one of the major references which employed for training facilitators and research team. A 3-day workshop around the methodology was held. The facilitators and note takers, then selected from among all participants according to an eligibility test.

Pilot Study Four pilot FGDs, (Two with literate and illiterate married women, one with illiterate men, and one with young girls (singles), for the purpose of testing “ guide questionnaire” as well as facilitators and note-takers’ skills, conducted in south of Teheran.

Findings from pilot study were utilized for developing final "guide questionnaire".

Results

However, according to the present study, domestic violence, and violence against women exist in a medium-scale. Violence against women is normally, not exclusively, expressed in physical terms. Younger and more educated groups emphasize on psychological and verbal violence. Violence is not entirely rejected by the respondents, and justified by natural superiority of men to women, and by religious texts and concepts as well. Sex (son) preference even among young-educated generations, strongly exists and justified mainly by socio-economic privileges which belong to boys rather than to girls. Discrimination between sexes also exists, and community pays more attention to men than to women. Women feel defenselessness in confronting with violence either at home or in community. The imbalance distribution of decision-making power, and lion share of husband of it, is an accepted fact. The role and function of violence also (for some purposes) is justifiable and acceptable from the respondents' point of view. An ideal wife/woman is one who tolerates violence and doesn't approach to the police, neighbors, and court. It seems that the respondents have more knowledge about the reasons of violence than about its evidence. Poverty, ignorance, long-hour working and not chatting with family (because of exhaustion), wrong believes, irreligious thinking and so on, each was recognized and emphasized as an influential factor on violence formation by the respondents. Sexual violence (abuse) exists among the families of the respondents. They have quite acceptable level of knowledge about evidence of sexual abuse such as, having forced sex in spite of wife's desire, without considering her physiological conditions and sexual needs, and an inappropriate way, all have been expressed by the respondents. But domestic violence or sexual abuse is not the thing which

forces women to get divorced. Domestic violence, from absolute majority of the respondents' point view, is a phenomenon belonged to private sphere and is preferred to be solved within family, and not taking it to the police or other organizations. Home, even mixed with violence, is recognized as insecure shelter of women victims of violence. Tolerance, crying alone, asking help from the agent of violence, and finally from the parents, are selected ways of dealing with violence. Even in case of confronting with violence in community, approaching to family, dependents, and relatives is preferred. Authorities and governmental organizations face with ineffectiveness and distrust. Even some attribute a negative and opportunistic role to them with regard to domestic violence victims.

Discussion

The existence of domestic violence in a medium-scale and in forms of wife and child abuse is approved. Women and children are the main victims of domestic violence. Nowadays domestic violence as physical violence is very limited. Violence, except sexual ones, is not physical. Therefore, its approval may face a very complicated process, because improvable violence (such as mental or psychological one) has no legal and criminal value for its agents. Violence as a disturbing behavior exists between different individuals, sexes, and age groups. The first years of married life and younger ages are known as starting point of violence. Analyzing domestic violence without regard to marriage as a cornerstone of family formation will not be sufficient. From the experts, point of view, lack of knowledge among young couples about their rights and duties, sense of possession to spouse (as a characteristic of patriarchal structure), arranged marriages or lack of knowledge in configuration of marriages, approaching to marriage because of sexual desire or political-economic benefits, mutual incompatibility of expectations of

spouses, because of volatile socio-economic environment are recognized as contextual factors in favor of violence.

The expansion of poverty and slums, addiction and discrimination in workplace and social life, and lack of social security, are also classified as the contextual factors in this respect. But some of the experts, do highlight familial and educational factors, and state that both enforcement of violence and acceptance of it mainly depend on family life. According to one of the experts: "a girl who has been a witness of her mother's situation as a victim of violence, may easily accept to be abused".

In fact being subordinate and accepting to be abused is known as the characteristics of a quality wife. Violence is justified (occasionally) by "making life tasty" as its function, and men have to start aggression from the very beginning of married life (from nuptial room) in order to establish their power and governance over their views and families.

"Violence has close and strong relationship with addiction and criminality" as the experts stated. Among extended families with employed women, and among immigrants to capital city, violence is practiced more frequently than it is among the others. Domestic violence hides itself (it is almost a hidden phenomenon). Normally a few number of women victims of veiled domestic violence approaches to legal or medical centers. Most victims of domestic violence who approach to, for example, forensic center, normally does not reveal it to their husbands.

They choose this approach only for the purpose of having official document to legitimate their request for divorce (in case).

These women/victims do not complain against their husbands until they can't tolerate domestic violence and are forced to make a determining decision to divorce. The main differences observed between young and old generations with respect to violence, indicate a change in, and transformation of family structure, as well as sexes expectation from each other as spouses.

Increased number of divorce which reflects incompatibility of two different patterns of expectations, together with higher level of educational attainment among girls, expansion of participatory decision-making among young families, and objections to social inequality between sexes, indicate structural transition of family from traditional to modern one.

A relatively consistent traditional characteristic of family among the respondents is sex (son) preference due mainly to community requirement rather than individuals intentions.

"Violence cycle" as transferring an aggressive behavior from a generation to the other through family teachings, is a concept which absolute majority of the respondents had knowledge about. Therefore, they put emphasize on education and training as the most important and effective violence-prevention strategy.

Finally, multidimensional characteristic of violence requires coordination of several institutions and organizations for the purpose of combat against violence. The combat should undoubtedly be planned, long-term, and include the whole process of violence from formation, maturation, appearance and transferring to coming generation, in order to stop vicious circle of violence, and to develop human relations among families and community in a more desirable manner.

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Appendix 1

Definition of domestic violence and violence against women,
Evidence and classification of violence,
Reasons for and prevalence of violence in community and among families,
Socio-cultural, economic and health consequences of violence for both agents and victims,
Strategies for violence reduction among families,
Other relevant issues which you think important with regard to domestic violence.

Appendix 2

Guide Questionnaire

In Knowledge Domain
What is Violence? (Discussion for Definition).
Knowledge about Violence against Women and Girls in Our Community
How are Violence against Women and Girls in Our Community? In Which forms it Appear?
Knowledge about Violence against Women and Girls, Among Families
How are Violence against Women and Girls among Families?
What is/are Violence form(s)?
Is/are there any other form of Violence?
Have you ever been a Witness of Violence (Domestic Violence) around you?
What is evidence of Violence in Sexual Relations? Please Explain More
What Others?
Which Sorts of Behaviors of Men Do Bother Girls and Women among Families?

In Attitude Domain

If Rebirth Were Possible for You, Then, Which Sex Would you prefer to be? Male or Female?
If You Were to Have Only One Child and You Could Determine His/Her Sex, Which Sex Would You Prefer For Your Child? Why?
If You Were A Man /Women, How Would You Behave With Your Spouse? What would be your expectations From Your Spouse?
In Your Opinion Does Community Pay More Attention and Respect to Men or Women? Why?
Who IS/ Are Responsible For Decision-making in Your Family? (Please Explain).
Are There any Necessary and Justifiable/ Acceptable Cases of Violence against Women? What Is/Are Those Cases?
In Case of Confronting With Violence Within Family What Will Women Do? Where Do They Refer/Approach?
In Case of Confronting With Violence in Community What Will Women Do? Where Do They Refer/Approach?