

Prevalence and Nature of Violence against Women in Pakistan: A Six-month Content Analysis of a Pakistani newspaper

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Abstract

Violence Against Women (VAW) occurs globally and affects women socially and psychologically. Pakistan has a rigid patriarchal culture where women have constrained lives. The global gender gap report (2016) places Pakistan second from last in terms of gender inequality. In such a situation, women in the Pakistani society are expected to experience frequent attempts of violence against them. However, the reporting of such acts remains negligible because of social norms that require women to conform to the patriarchal ideology. This study analyses and discusses findings about reported cases of VAW in Pakistan, in general, and in Sindh, in particular. Through a six-month's content analysis of a Sindhi newspaper i.e. the Daily Kawish, we have recorded the nature and frequency of reported acts of VAW. The results show that the cases of such acts are alarmingly high and in Sindh alone, 156 cases of VAW occurred in six months. Within the 70 reported cases, honour killings top the list of VAW cases followed by physical violence, rape, kidnapping and suicide. However, these are results of just the reported cases, the number of such acts are expected to be even higher in areas where gender based violence is supported to punish women.

Keywords: Violence; women; Pakistan; reporting; honour killing

Introduction

Violence Against Women (VAW), also known as gender-based violence, is the act "that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (The United Nations, 1993). VAW is a global phenomenon and occurs in almost all parts of the world in variable forms and degrees (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Although the frequency of violence may vary from one region to the other, depending upon its culture and gender order, the prevalence of violence is a major public health concern (Critelli, 2010; Nasrullah et al., 2009). It affects the individual psychologically and carries social, physical and emotional consequences (Ali & Gavino, 2008).

Gender relations in Pakistan are based on two basic principles: men are the primary, authority figures; women are subordinates to them (Pande, 2002).

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Male dominance is well entrenched in Pakistani society and has serious implications for women. They experience severe gender inequalities and their rights are violated (Ali et al., 2011). Women bear the burden of restricted opportunities in education and employment. This is further exacerbated by the prevalence of harassment at home and at the work place. It is estimated that about 93% women in Pakistan experience sexual violence in the social sphere at some moment in their lifetime (The Express Tribune, 2017). VAW, which is widespread in the society, adds more to the disempowerment of Pakistani women as it minimizes their mobility and curtails their chances to have an education or job (Siddiq, 2016; Niaz, 2004). Such a situation has not only contributed to gender inequality but has also made Pakistan amongst the worst countries in the world for women to live in. The global gender gap report 2016 places Pakistan on 143 out of 144 countries in terms of gender inequality. Even the countries going through wars and conflicts such as Syria have performed better than Pakistan in the gender gap index (DAWN, 2016a).

It is well documented that VAW is widespread in the Pakistani society, but its reporting is still hugely stigmatized and is considered disrespectful to the family of the victim. Reporting may lead to divorce or separation, which further exacerbates women's situation. This keeps the phenomenon underreported in Pakistan and only the most extreme cases are officially registered (Andersson et al., 2010). Although there are no formal studies or government data to record the exact figure of VAW in Pakistan (Critelli, 2010), it is expected that the rate of such crimes is higher and more frequent in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa because both provinces have been going through conflict, clashes and displacement (Aurat Foundation, 2011).

This paper provides insights into the frequency of the cases of VAW in Pakistan recently. According to Anderson et al. (2010), increased reporting of VAW not only makes the problem more visible but also helps to tackle the issue of violence and to increase awareness about the problem. Addressing the existing issue, this study is an attempt to understand the extent and pattern of reporting on VAW. We address the main research question of how much VAW is prevalent in the society, and also take into account the nature of such crimes against women that include honour related killings, gang rape/rape, physical assaults, robbery, suicide, and kidnapping. We have recorded the reported cases of VAW and assess the prevalence of one act over the other and its location. These reported cases were recorded from the

Sindhi newspaper, the Daily Kawish, and thus the data, analysis and findings only refer to the crimes reported in Kawish.

Background

South Asian societies are marked by patriarchy with patrilocal residence and patrilineal kinship still in practice (Ali et al., 2011; Dube, 1998, 2001). These societies are characterized by male dominance, agricultural economies with feudal and tribal systems (Niaz, 2003). Son preference in such societies is common and results in severe gender inequality (Agha, 2018). Pakistan is no different from other South Asian countries – men have the primary authority and women are secondary to them. Their identity in relation to men (e.g. mothers, sisters, wives) is more acceptable than as an individual (Ali et al., 2011). A rigid and asymmetrical gendered division of labour is followed where men are regarded as breadwinners and women as service providers to their families (Lari, 2011). Women are usually confined to the private domain and their housewifery roles are preferred (Agha et al., 2018). This preference has further deepened gender inequality in the society. Over the recent past, gender inequality reports have been placing Pakistan on very low ranks for women's low enrolment and labour force participation (Kazim, 2016).

VAW is not a new phenomenon in South Asian societies. Women's lives as well as status have been determined by different religious traditions in the region. Male dominance accompanied by rigid cultural values has resulted in lower social status of women. As a result, violence has penetrated women's lives (Niaz, 2003). This is similar in the Pakistani context where women's lives are shaped by religion, family and rigid customs that force them to submit to the male authority. Since the inception of the country, the role of religion in the national politics has been made a barrier to women's development (Niaz, 2003; Pande, 2002). Islam's mythological relation with the state led to undermining women's rights and bore devastating consequences for women, particularly those who belonged to rural areas. Resultantly, women are still facing the problems of violence, traditional practice and discrimination (Saigol, 2016; Mumtaz, 2005).

The restricted life and limited opportunities have serious implications for Pakistani women because violence is used to control their lives and make them conform to the patriarchal authority. Today Pakistani women experience several forms of violence which include: sexual assault, domestic violence including wife beating and murder, acid attacks, being beaten,

threatened and burned, being killed in the name of honour, and abuse and torture by the guardian (Pakistan Today, 2017; PCSW, 2017; Niaz, 2003).

Culture and the perpetuation of VAW

VAW in Pakistani society is prevalent regardless of class, religion or rural-urban divide. Women are considered subordinates of men and their lives are dictated by patriarchal power (Aurat Foundation, 2011). However, VAW in Pakistan penetrates in women's lives through different beliefs, norms and cultural practices: the beliefs that women are inferior to men, men have an inherent right to control women and discipline their life, and that women's sexuality is associated with men's honour. It is considered that the prevalent culture delegates men the power to control women's lives, and violence becomes one of the acceptable means to control the woman who does not conform to patriarchal norms (Niaz, 2004). A woman's existence is thought to be a commodity owned by her father before her marriage and by her husband after marriage. Therefore, the protection of this commodity lies upon the father for a smooth transfer to the husband. It, then, becomes her husband's responsibility to protect this commodity. Her "owners" restrict her space and minimise her access to the public sphere so that she may not damage the family's honour (Lari, 2011; Bettencourt, 2000). The notion of considering women as property contributes a great deal in the perpetuation of VAW because violence and coercion are commonly used in an attempt to control women (Munir, 2002). The prevalent beliefs encourage and motivate men to commit VAW and they justify such acts on the basis of culture, religion and values (Zakar et al., 2013).

'Cultural attitudes towards female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence against women' (Niaz, 2004: 60). Women are believed to carry the family's honour which is damaged if a woman has indulged in a sexual relation with a man. Honour killing is the extreme kind of violence that Pakistani women experience in everyday life. Honour related murders are defined as "...the killing of women for suspected deviation from sexual norms imposed by society" (Faqr, 2001: 66). The acts that could dishonour the family include a woman's involvement in premarital sex, asking for divorce, betrayal, pregnancy as a result of pre or extra marital affair or a woman being victim of sexual assault or rape (Chaudhary, 2014; Dobson, 2009; Hussain, 2006). A woman suspected to have broken the honour code and brought shame to her family is punished with extreme violent acts because she has

injured a man's honour, and killing her or both parties is the only way through which the honour of her family can be restored. This violent act of killing is not restricted to the immediate family members. The woman can also be killed in the name of honour by her uncles, cousins or community members (Lari, 2011; Wasti, 2010; Meeto, 2007).

The practice of honour killing is associated with pre-Islamic Arabia. It has also been exercised in Europe during the Roman empire (Hussain, 2006; Baker, 1999). These killings are reported in different countries in the world, particularly in Muslim majority, and it is believed that about 5,000 women are killed globally every year in the name of honour (UNFPA, 2000). This custom is thought to have initiated in Pakistan from Pashtun and Baloch ancestral practices. It, then, made its way to other areas and became common in Sindh and Punjab (Lari, 2011).

In addition to cultural beliefs and attitudes, marriage practices also play a vital role in the perpetuation of VAW. *Wattasatta* (exchange marriages), dowry and bride price contribute a great deal to women's disempowerment. An increased demand for dowry may lead to the harassment of a woman by her in-laws. In extreme cases, the demand for desired dowry ends up bringing violent physical and psychological consequences for the woman. For example, in India and Bangladesh, violence is used to seek desired dowry or financial benefits from the woman's natal family (Bates, 2004). Such demands are often troublesome to the family and a woman's life can be at stake if parents are unable to fulfil those demands. This may often lead the woman to face abuse and violence by her in-laws. This phenomenon has frequently been in practice in India (Rao, 1997). Dowry related violence in Pakistan is also common; it is estimated that about 2,000 dowry deaths have been recorded in Pakistan which is highest in the world (The Express Tribune, 2016a). Women, who fail to bring a sizeable dowry, are threatened of divorce and tortured. A woman in Punjab was reportedly made to drink acid because she could not bring a handsome dowry (Niazi, 2015). In case a woman is married after taking a bride price by her parents, the parents will have to return the money to her husband if the woman leaves him. Thus, parents discourage women from returning to their parents' home (Niaz, 2004). In such a situation, women are made to carry on with the abusive and violent relationship because divorce is strongly stigmatized in the society and there is hardly any family support available to women on this matter.

Over the past ten years, several reforms to criminal laws, especially on VAW, have been introduced in Pakistan in a bid to minimize discrimination against women and address their issues adequately. Yet the acts of VAW have not seen any decrease. Despite the improved laws and legislation, the state institutions have not adequately moulded their attitude to provide protection to women (Aurat Foundation, 2016). The nation is dictated by the Islamic law which stresses upon traditional family values and influences the legal system. Although Pakistan is a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1996, it has failed to bring sound policies and laws to protect women. VAW is widespread, women still experience discrimination in everyday life due to traditional norms and customs that persist in the society (Pakistan Today, 2017; Niaz, 2003; Bettencourt, 2000).

The prevalent patriarchal beliefs, attitudes and practices accelerate the degree and frequency of violence and add more misery to women's lives. Cases of VAW have been increasing in Pakistan over time. A study conducted by the Aurat Foundation (2011) reveals that the number of cases of VAW were higher in 2009 than in 2008 with a 13 percent increase. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2015) discloses in its annual report the extent of crimes against women: 8,648 incidents of VAW were reported between January 2012 to September 2015 including the incidents of acid attacks, burning, domestic violence, honour killing, rape and sexual assaults (HRCP, 2015). Only in 2015, more than one thousand victims of honour crime were registered, 900 cases of sexual assaults were made on women, 279 cases of domestic violence were reported, 833 women were abducted and about 777 women committed suicide or attempted to kill themselves (HRCP, 2015; Independent, 2016a). A recent report has disclosed that about 51,241 cases of VAW were recorded from 2011 to 2017 only in the Punjab province. The highest number of the reported cases belonged to domestic violence while other cases included rape, honour killing, sexual harassment and other acts of violence against women (Pakistan Today, 2017). The province has witnessed a surge in the cases of VAW with 12% increase (PCSW, 2017)

Such a situation needs extra measures by the state to protect lives of vulnerable women in Pakistan. Yet, the efforts by the different governments have not witnessed a huge success so far. New reforms, bills and acts to improve women's situation in the country often face huge criticism or become controversial (Farooq, 2016; The Nation, 2016). Thus, state's efforts

often meet with failures when it is about intervening with patriarchy and protect women from the abuse they experience in everyday life.

Methodology

In this content analysis, we have sampled print media with a research question that involves an ongoing phenomenon and have checked the frequency of indicator i.e. of VAW. Data was collected from a daily, well-circulated Sindhi newspaper, Daily Kawish. Content analysis is considered a transparent and flexible research method. It has a broad application and allows the researcher to highlight the particular content, clearly set out sampling and coding procedures (Neuman, 2013; Bryman, 2012).

A six months' content analysis was conducted in which secondary data was collected from January to June 2016. During this time, different forms of VAW were recorded. The cases were further categorized on the nature of violence such as honour killing / killing, gang rape/rape, physical violence, robbery, suicide, kidnapping. These cases were usually kept away from the front page and were published on the back pages e.g. page number 2, 12 and 16. In majority of the cases of VAW, at least one picture with the related case was published.

The Daily Kawish newspaper was chosen to calculate the cases of VAW, for the specific reason of looking explicitly for the cases of violence emerging from Sindh. The newspaper is the largest circulating paper in the Sindhi language and has Sindhi readers in every nook and corner of the province. The paper particularly focuses on cases from interior Sindh, therefore, cases of VAW taking place in traditional areas are more likely to be reported in the newspaper.

We acknowledge the primary obstacles that researchers can face while carrying out the research on such subjects such as honour killing or rape. According to Faqir (2001), a common phenomenon involved with honour killings is the inadequate documentation of such crimes. Gender, class, clan and ethnicity determine status in neopatriarchal society and thus the reporting of such acts is not always adequate. In patriarchal societies, like that of Pakistan, it is more difficult to report such issues. Cultural barriers associated with reporting further make cases of violence less visible and only the cases of extreme level can make it to the media (Andersson et al.,

2010). Our findings are also limited to the reported cases that belonged to an extreme level and represent the cases published only in one newspaper.

We understand that including other newspapers to this analysis and extending the period to more than six months would have enriched the study and would have provided a broader view of the problem. Despite this fact, we chose only one newspaper for mainly three reasons: first, the Daily Kawish is the largest and well circulated newspaper in Sindh. It has a vast readership as well as large data. Dealing with this such data along with the data from other newspapers would have made the data collection process an uphill task. Second, the Daily Kawish focuses on entire Sindh and particularly highlights stories and acts from rural areas. Therefore, looking for a single piece of the required information relevant to this paper was a time-consuming task and extending the period from six months would have taken longer. Thirdly, since the Daily Kawish is widely circulated regionally it is highly likely that most of the cases of VAW receive reporting or space in the newspaper. We had also carried out a preliminary survey of three Sindhi newspapers namely the Daily Kawish, the Daily Ibrat and the Daily Sobh to check which newspaper publishes maximum number cases of VAW weekly. We found out that the Daily Kawish out did other two newspapers in reporting cases of VAW. It is because of these reasons that we limited our analysis to only one newspaper and for six months and relied on for the best source of reporting the cases of VAW.

Results

Table 1

Month-wise reported cases of violence against women in the Daily Kawish

Table 2

Province-wise and month-wise reported cases of violence against women in the Daily Kawish

Figure 1

Bar-chart indicating a six-month summary of reported cases in the Daily Kawish

Figure 2

Pie-chart showing the percentage-wise reported cases of violence against women in the Daily Kawish

Figure 3

Graph showing summarised details of reported cases of violence against women

Discussion

Gender-based violence has witnessed a sharp rise in Pakistan making it a serious matter to be addressed (Tasneem, 2016). This six-month content analysis reveals the frequency and nature of reported acts of VAW in Pakistan, in general and in Sindh, in particular. During the survey of the newspapers from January to June 2016, different forms of acts of VAW in print media were recorded and categorized into seven different types namely honour killing / killing, gang rape / rape, physical violence, robbery, suicide, and kidnapping.

The analysis shows that approximately 168 different cases of VAW were reported from January to June 2016 in the Daily Kawish. The maximum number of cases were registered from the Sindh province i.e. 157, thus taking the lead in all sorts of crimes against women. This does not necessarily mean that Sindh has the highest rate of VAW as the newspaper particularly focuses on Sindh and publishes all major and minor reported cases of VAW in the province, whereas the serious cases from other provinces also receive attention in the newspaper. Another reason of low reporting from other regions is that KPK and Balochistan have remote areas where VAW could be higher than other regions but reporting is less likely. Studies also show that in conflict ridden areas of Pakistan i.e. KPK and Balochistan, the rate of VAW is expected to be higher (See Aurat Foundation, 2011).

Among the categorized acts of VAW, honour related killings and murders top the list. 70 cases of young women and girls who were killed in the name of honour were reported from January to June 2016. This is followed by the cases of physical violence with 27 cases, gang rape/rape with 20 cases, suicide and kidnapping with 14 cases each. The cases of honour killing witnessed a surge in the month of June with 44 cases, only in one month.

Killing in the name of honour

Honour killing is formally known as *Karo Kari* (black) in Sindh (Pande, 2002). The woman, who has damaged her family's honour, is declared *Kari*(black) and is liable to be killed by her male family members. The practice of *Karo Kari* is common and frequent in rural and remote areas of Pakistan. It is believed that every day one woman becomes victim of this crime only in Sindh (The Express Tribune, 2016b). The crime usually goes unpunished as the man, who has killed the woman on the suspicion of illicit relations with any male, restores the family's honour by killing the woman (Niaz, 2004). These extrajudicial acts are executed in the guise of what has been known as traditional, or justice done by the tribal elders (Lari, 2011).

Not all honour killings are executed in the name of honour alone. This tradition is often manipulated and perpetrators use it to settle any score or punish the rivals by dishonouring the family through their women. This murder is also a way of increasing personal wealth by blackmailing and extracting money from the rivals (Hussain, 2006).

Honour related crimes have constantly been on the rise in Pakistan (BBC, 2016). Previous reports on honour killing clearly indicate that this problem is increasing in the country with a very fast pace. For example, official statistics on *Karo Kari* reveal that about 4000 have been killed in *Karo Kari* from 1998 to 2004 (Ali & Gavino, 2008). In their study on honour killing, Nasrullah, Haqqi and Cummings (2009) found that honour killing has the highest proportion in all homicides in Pakistan i.e. 21 percent. Our analysis from the reported cases in the Daily Kawishis also in line with this finding; with 43 percent, honour related killing stop the list of all acts of VAW. The analysis shows that about 70 cases of honour killings were reported from January to June 2016 revealing that honour related deaths are becoming alarmingly high in Pakistan. However, the data, analysis and findings are based on reported cases, not actual crimes. Thus, the number of such cases might be even higher, especially in rigid traditional areas.

The act of honour killing was not officially punishable in Pakistan until 2004 (Dawn, 2014). In response to the alarming figures of honour related crimes across the country, a law of honour crime was introduced in 2004 awarding 7 years of imprisonment to the perpetrator. This law had a big loophole as the family of the murdered still had the right to pardon the perpetrator. In 2016, the parliament attempted to fix the loophole and approved the Anti Honour Killing bill. Better than the previous one, this bill also provided the

perpetrators an escape if they were awarded death sentence (Gondal, 2017; Dawn, 2016b; The Guardian, 2016).

Despite the fact that patriarchy is deeply rooted in Pakistan society, gender relations have been going through a change as a result of globalisation and modernisation. Such systems have impacted the status of women positively. However, rigid patriarchal systems have resisted the change which threatens the basic patriarchal ideology (Zakar et al., 2013). Dominating patriarchal and Islamic traditional values have penetrated strongly in the society and are the main hurdles for women in accessing and seeking justice (Niaz, 2003). For example, in a bid to control the excessive cases of VAW, the government of Punjab province passed Women Protection Act which provides women with increased protection from domestic, sexual and emotional abuse. Despite the alarming statistics of VAW cases in the country, the bill faced huge criticism and was rejected by the Ulemas and political leaders who were of the view that the bill stands in contrast to the holy Quran and was a threat to the family system (Dawn, 2016c; Farooq, 2016; Independent, 2016b; The Nation, 2016). The situation necessitates a more committed and stronger attitude from the state so that it may deal with patriarchy and implement the laws. This will help to ensure a liveable life to women.

Conclusion

Religious beliefs, attitudes and cultural practices contribute to women's disempowerment and accelerate the incidents of VAW. This has serious consequences for women; Pakistan women continue to be the victims of heinous crimes against them due to the rigid patriarchal system, which permits the use of force to control their lives and conform them to the patriarchal values. Women are barred from entering education and employment, and violence further constraints their lives and contributes to their disempowerment. The six-month analysis of the Daily Kawish reveals the incidents of VAW and their frequency. Six major types of VAW were categorised which included honour killing / killing, gang rape / rape, physical violence, robbery, suicide, and kidnapping. Frequency of these crimes was recorded in which a total of 168 cases of VAW were reported from January to June 2016. Honour related killings ranked the highest and the maximum number of these killings occurred in Sindh province. This is in accordance with other studies in which honour killings are the major type of homicide in Pakistan. The traditional practice of honour killing is thought to have come

from pre-Islamic Arabia has penetrated in the Pakistani society and takes the life of at least one woman daily. Our analysis is based on reported cases with a focus on a specific region, and it is expected that the frequency of VAW is higher in other regions especially in rigid and remote areas where such acts are culturally permissible and are less likely to be reported. Despite the fact that VAW is widespread in the society, the state's efforts to improve women's lives do not meet success: acts and bills on women's protection often meet with huge criticisms and apprehensions from religious leaders who believe that women are subordinated to men. The situation requires more commitment from the state in order to protect women and provide them a liveable life. Findings of this study are limited to one newspaper only and we suggest that other studies should be carried out to provide a broader view of the problem.

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Table 1

Month-wise reported cases of violence against women in the Daily Kawish

Details other	Honour Killing/ Murder	Gang Rape/ Rape	Physical Violence	Robbery	Suicide	Kidnapping
January 2016	2	8 6	1	6	1	2
February 2016	2	5 3	2	6	0	2
March 2016	0	9 3	6	7	0	2
April 2016	4	14 1	1	3	0	2
May 2016	3	11 0	3	5	0	1
June 2016	3	23 2	7	5	0	5
Total	14	70 15	20	34	1	14

Table 2

Province-wise and month-wise reported cases of violence against women in the Daily Kawish

Details Abroad	Sindh	Punjab	Balochistan	KPK GB
January 2016	22	0	1	0
1				0

February 2016	18	2	0	000		
March 2016	23	1	10	00		
April 2016	23	0	1	0	0	
May 2016	27	1	0	0	0	
June 2016	44	1	2	0	0	
Total	157	5	5		0	0

Figure 1

Bar-chart indicating a six-month summary of reported cases in the Daily Kawish

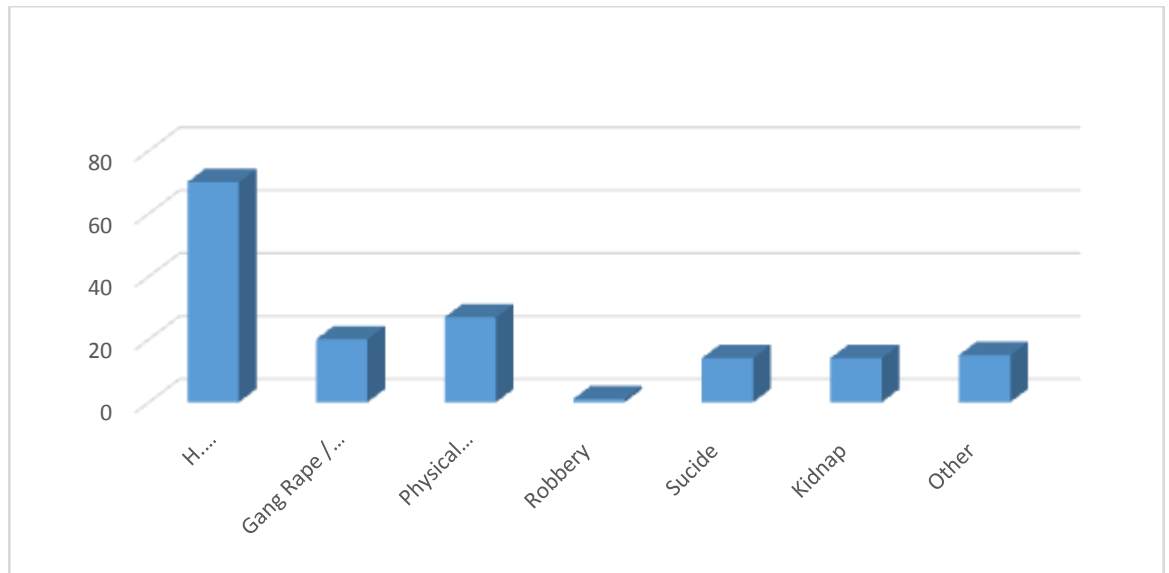


Figure 2

Pie-chart showing the percentage-wise reported cases of violence against women in the Daily Kawish

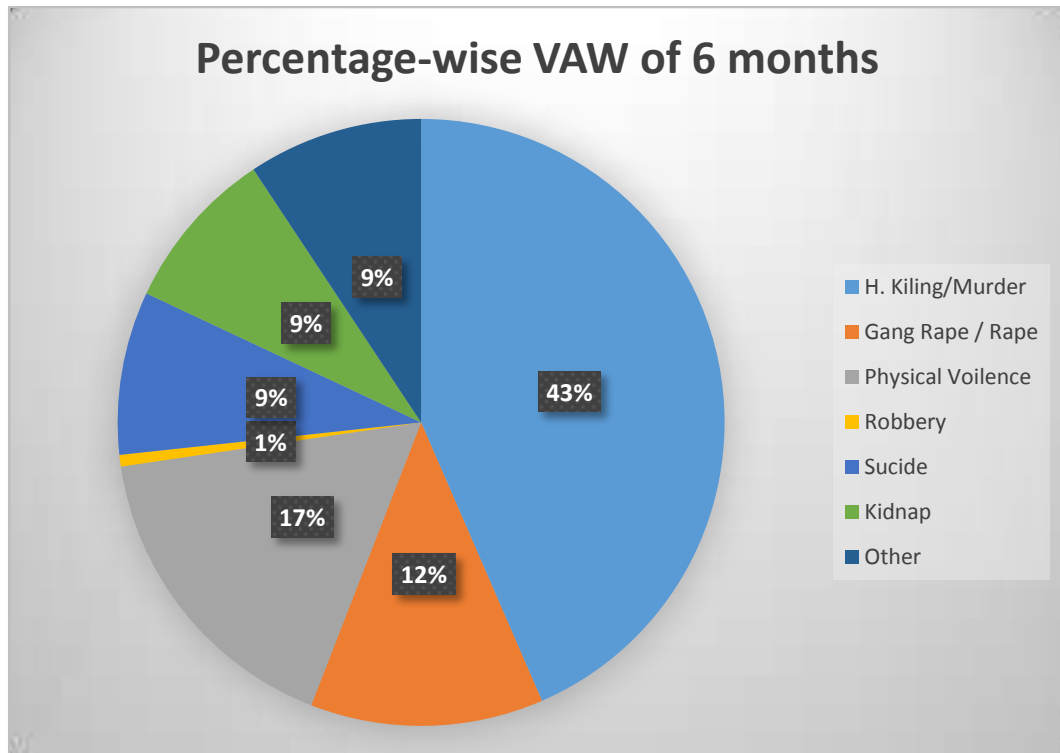


Figure 3

Graph showing summarised details of reported cases of violence against women

