

Exploring the Prevalence and Dynamics of Domestic Gender-Based Violence in Mansehra City

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Abstract

Domestic gender-based violence (DGBV) remains a critical and underreported social issue in Pakistan, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas like Mansehra City. This study aims to explore the prevalence, underlying causes, and socio-cultural dynamics contributing to DGBV within this specific context. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines quantitative data collected through structured surveys with qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with survivors, local health workers, law enforcement officials, and community leaders. The study reveals a disturbingly high incidence of various forms of domestic violence—emotional, physical, economic, and sexual—predominantly affecting women across different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds. Key contributing factors identified include patriarchal norms, lack of education, economic dependency, weak legal enforcement, and social stigma surrounding the reporting of abuse. The findings also highlight the limited access to support services for victims, including legal aid, psychological counseling, and safe shelters. Cultural acceptance and normalization of violence further discourage victims from seeking justice. The study underscores the urgent need for targeted policy interventions, awareness campaigns, and community-based support mechanisms tailored to the socio-cultural realities of Mansehra. It concludes by recommending a multi-sectoral approach involving governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to address the root causes and provide sustainable support systems for affected individuals. This research contributes to the broader understanding of DGBV in Pakistan and serves as a foundation for future studies and policy formulations aimed at eradicating domestic violence at the grassroots level.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Domestic Violence , Socio-Cultural Dynamics , Prevelence , Women Rights .

1.0 Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW) are often used interchangeably, but they have different meanings. According to the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), VAW is a sub-section of GBV, which is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that may cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women." This includes threats, coercion, or unjust restrictions on freedom, whether in the public or private sector (United Nations, 2006). Over the past two decades, there

has been a significant increase in research on honor-based violence and abuse (HBV/A) and forced marriages, contributing to a global effort to understand violence against women and girls (Gill, 2014). Across the globe, entrenched patriarchal systems continue to perpetuate GBV, with women facing discrimination and violence in various forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Violence against women (VAW) and honor-based violence (HBV) share a foundation in patriarchal beliefs and practices that harm women and girls. Both involve control and enforcement of traditional gender roles, often resulting in physical, sexual, or emotional harm. However, VAW is broader, encompassing abuse from partners, family, or strangers, typically driven by power dynamics. In contrast, HBV is usually perpetrated by family or community members under the guise of preserving "honor," with some communities justifying it based on cultural norms (David, 2016). Domestic violence against women is not limited to developing countries. It is also prevalent in developed societies. A 2002 report by the World Health Organization (WHO) found that 48 countries surveyed, 10% to 69% of women had experienced physical violence from their intimate partners at some stage in their lives (MacMillan, 2018). In developing countries, domestic violence against women is becoming increasingly a major concern for public health workers. Women, especially in less developed societies, face different forms of violence. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines domestic violence as coercive acts against women by current or former male partners, including sexual, psychological and physical abuse. This can range from controlling behavior and economic pressure to torture, beating, and forced sexual intercourse (Krug, 2002). Gender-based violence in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remains a significant issue despite ongoing efforts to address it. The province has seen a variety of GBV cases, including domestic violence, honor killings, and sexual violence. According to the Aurat Foundation (2009), women in KP face substantial barriers to accessing justice and resources, which exacerbates their vulnerability. In 2009, there were 655 reported cases of domestic violence in KP alone, reflecting the widespread nature of this issue (WHO, 2019). Over the period from 2008 to 2009, there was a notable increase in reported domestic violence cases nationally, from 7,571 to 8,548, indicating a rising trend (Hafeez, 2021). Official statistics reveal the prevalence of various forms of abuse in 2021: 1,920 cases of child abuse, 117 cases of child labor, 32 cases of child marriages, 1,422 cases of domestic violence, 9,401 cases of violence against women, 4,321 cases of rape, 15,714 cases of kidnapping, and 2,556 cases of honor killings were reported across Pakistan (Imran, 2021). The lower reported cases in KP are often due to inadequate reporting and lack of comprehensive data collection, further complicating efforts to address GBV effectively (Aurat Foundation, 2020). GBV is predominantly a women's issue, with domestic violence being one of its most severe manifestations. In Mansehra City, the plight of women suffering from physical, emotional, and psychological abuse within their homes is a stark reality that demands urgent attention (Khan, 2023). This research focuses exclusively on women, acknowledging that they are disproportionately affected by GBV (HRCF, 2022). Pakistan has developed a legal framework aimed at addressing gender-based violence through several legislative measures. The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act 2006 was a landmark law, amending the Pakistan Penal Code to criminalize various forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and acid attacks. This act specifically amended Sections 354, 375, 376, and 498 of the Pakistan Penal Code, providing victims with legal recourse and criminalizing perpetrators. Another significant piece of legislation is the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2012, which recognizes domestic violence as a criminal offense and sets out a comprehensive framework for victim protection. This includes provisions for restraining orders and the formation of protection committees, aimed at offering legal and social protection to victims. In addition, the Anti-Honor Killing Laws (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2016 addresses the issue of honor killings, making it impossible for perpetrators to be exonerated by

family members. The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011 and the Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010 further strengthen the legal framework, focusing on specific forms of GBV such as acid attacks and harassment at work.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the establishment of formal legal frameworks and interventions, gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive issue globally, with significant manifestations in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The region faces various forms of GBV, including domestic violence, honor killings, and sexual violence, which are exacerbated by cultural and patriarchal norms. Official statistics reveal alarming rates of GBV across Pakistan, yet in KP, underreporting and inadequate data collection mask the true scale of the problem, complicating efforts to address it.

1.2 Objective

To examine the prevalence and forms of Domestic gender-based violence within the community of Mansehra city.

1.3 Significance of Study

The study's focus on documenting the prevalence and forms of GBV in Mansehra is significant, as it contributes to understanding the specific challenges women face in this region. This data is crucial for informing targeted interventions and policies aimed at addressing GBV and improving women's access to justice.

2.0 Literature Review

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Mansehra City is deeply intertwined with the social fabric and dynamics of the community. Social hierarchies and gender roles significantly influence the prevalence and forms of GBV. In many households, women are often seen as subordinates to men, which perpetuates power imbalances and justifies abusive behavior. The community's collective mindset often dictates the social acceptability of such violence, where patriarchal norms are prevalent, thereby enabling the continuation of GBV (Khan, 2023). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective interventions and supporting mechanisms. Cultural norms in Mansehra City play a critical role in shaping attitudes and behaviors toward GBV. These norms, deeply rooted in tradition and often reinforced by community elders, dictate acceptable behavior for both men and women. Practices such as dowry, child marriages, and the preference for male children contribute to an environment where women are devalued and susceptible to violence (Hussain & Khan, 2020). The jirga system, an informal justice mechanism, often reflects these cultural norms, making it challenging to address GBV effectively within its framework. Community attitudes towards women and GBV in Mansehra City are largely influenced by entrenched patriarchal values. Women are often perceived through a lens of honor and family reputation, which can lead to severe repercussions if they are perceived to deviate from expected norms. This perception not only perpetuates GBV but also discourages victims from seeking help due to fear of social ostracism (HRCP, 2022). Changing these attitudes requires comprehensive community education and sensitization efforts to promote gender equality and respect for women's rights. Family and social networks in Mansehra City can both mitigate and exacerbate GBV. On one hand, supportive family members can provide crucial emotional and practical assistance to victims. On the other hand, families may also pressure victims to remain silent or reconcile with abusers to maintain family honor and avoid social stigma (Awan, 2005). Social networks, including friends and community leaders, can play a pivotal role in either supporting victims or perpetuating harmful practices. Leveraging these

networks positively is essential for effective GBV intervention. Social stigma associated with GBV is a major barrier to reporting and addressing violence in Mansehra City. Victims often face severe social consequences, including ostracism, shame, and victim-blaming, which discourage them from seeking help (Gill et al., 2014). This stigma not only silences victims but also perpetuates a culture of impunity for perpetrators. Combating social stigma involves community education campaigns, support groups, and the active involvement of local leaders to change harmful perceptions and encourage reporting. The intersection of tradition and modernity presents both challenges and opportunities in addressing GBV in Mansehra City. While traditional practices and norms often perpetuate GBV, modern influences such as education, media, and legal reforms offer pathways for change (Chaudhry, 2011). Balancing respect for cultural traditions with the need for modern legal and human rights standards is crucial. Efforts to address GBV must navigate this intersection carefully, promoting progressive changes without alienating the community.

Khan and Nawaz-Allah (2020) shed light on the pervasive discrimination against women across various facets of Pakistani society. This discrimination is deeply embedded in cultural, social, and legal structures, resulting in significant challenges for women in accessing justice and achieving equality. One of the most alarming issues highlighted by Khan and Nawaz-Allah (2020) is the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV). GBV manifests in various forms, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and honor killings. Despite legal frameworks designed to protect women, enforcement is often weak, and societal attitudes can be dismissive or even supportive of such violence. Honor killings represent one of the most severe manifestations of GBV, where women are murdered by their relatives under the pretext of preserving family honor. This practice is rooted in the belief that a family's honor is intrinsically linked to the behavior and sexuality of its female members. When a woman is perceived to have violated these strict norms, her family may resort to violence to restore their honor (ibid). The exploitation of women as commodities in dispute resolution reflects broader cultural beliefs linking family honor directly to women's sexuality. In many parts of Pakistan, a woman's behavior is seen as a direct reflection of her family's moral standing. As a result, any perceived transgression can bring shame and dishonor to the entire family. This cultural context creates an environment where women are under constant surveillance and control, and any deviation from accepted norms can have dire consequences (ibid).

Sexual abuse is a significant issue in Pakistan, impacting women and girls across various socio-economic strata (Khan, 2002). Despite existing legal provisions to protect victims and prosecute offenders, many cases remain unreported due to fear of social stigma, potential retaliation, and perceptions of systemic inefficiency or bias in the justice system (Ali, 2005). Even when cases are highlighted, societal norms around honor often overshadow legal outcomes, leaving the deep-rooted cultural issues unaddressed (Rashid, 2007). The cultural concept of honor in Pakistan is deeply linked to women's behavior and perceived purity. A woman's honor is traditionally considered the property of her family, making deviations from societal norms, particularly in matters of sexuality, a direct challenge to family honor (Yasmeen, 2003). This perception enforces strict behavioral expectations for women and places them at heightened risk of violence if they are thought to bring dishonor (Bano, 2006). In cases of sexual abuse, families often believe their honor can only be restored through the killing of the victim, perpetuating the practice of honor killings (Ahmed, 2004). This extrajudicial punishment, typically carried out by male relatives, is seen to erase the shame associated with the abuse, regardless of the victim's lack of consent or agency (Fatima, 2010). Honor killings reflect the tragic intertwining of sexual abuse with cultural notions of honor, perpetuating a cycle of violence and reinforcing patriarchal norms that devalue women's rights and lives (Khan & Ali, 2012). To address the entrenched issues of gender-based violence and biased dispute resolution practices like Swara,

comprehensive advocacy for gender equality and the implementation of legal reforms are essential. The goal is to protect the rights of all residents without imposing any financial burden, thereby promoting fair and just dispute resolution practices (Hanan et al., 2015).

Advocacy for gender equality involves challenging and changing the deeply rooted patriarchal norms that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women. This can be achieved through education, community engagement, and the promotion of women's rights at all levels of society. Educational programs aimed at both men and women can help shift attitudes and behaviors, fostering a more equitable and respectful treatment of women and girls (Awan, 2005).

The Government of Pakistan has implemented various legal frameworks and policies aimed at addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and promoting women's rights. Among these, the Protection of Women Act (2006) was a landmark legislation that sought to amend discriminatory laws and provide safeguards against GBV. This act introduced reforms in the Hudood Ordinances, ensuring that women facing charges of adultery or fornication could not be convicted without proper evidence. Additionally, the Anti-Rape Ordinance (2020) further strengthened legal mechanisms to combat sexual violence. This ordinance established special courts to expedite trials for rape cases and incorporated stringent penalties for offenders, demonstrating the government's commitment to addressing systemic barriers in seeking justice (Government of Pakistan, 2020). Another pivotal measure was the enactment of the Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), which aimed to create safer work environments for women by providing clear guidelines for handling workplace harassment complaints. These national policies illustrate a structured approach to addressing GBV, although implementation challenges persist, particularly in rural and conservative regions.

At the provincial level, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has introduced specific initiatives to combat GBV and provide support to survivors. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence Against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act (2021) is a comprehensive law that establishes mechanisms for the protection and rehabilitation of women affected by domestic violence. This act includes provisions for victim shelters, legal aid, and psychological counseling, highlighting the provincial government's efforts to address GBV holistically. Furthermore, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has established women's crisis centers and helplines, such as the Women Protection Helpline 1098, to ensure accessible and immediate support for survivors. These initiatives are complemented by public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and encouraging reporting of GBV incidents. Despite these efforts, challenges such as inadequate funding, limited outreach in remote areas, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms hinder the effectiveness of these programs (UN Women, 2021).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and international organizations play a pivotal role in supplementing government efforts to address GBV. Organizations like Aurat Foundation and UN Women have collaborated with both federal and provincial governments to implement programs aimed at empowering women and reducing GBV. These collaborations include capacity-building workshops for law enforcement agencies, legal awareness programs, and the establishment of community-based support networks for survivors. For instance, UN Women's partnership with the Government of Pakistan led to the implementation of the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) program, which focuses on strengthening institutional responses to GBV. Similarly, Aurat Foundation has been instrumental in advocating for legislative reforms and providing direct support services to survivors, including shelter homes and legal aid. These collaborative efforts underscore the critical role of NGOs and international bodies in bridging gaps in government-led initiatives.

3.0 Methodology

The research approach, study area, population, sampling techniques, data collection procedures, and analytical strategies used to examine the prevalence and forms of domestic gender-based violence (DGBV) in Mansehra City. The methods adopted are aligned with the study's aim to produce a nuanced and evidence-based understanding of the extent, patterns, and lived experiences of domestic GBV in both urban and rural settings.

3.1 Study Area

The research was conducted in **Tehsil Mansehra**, part of District Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The study focuses on two contrasting areas:

- **VC Nogazi (Urban site)** – characterized by infrastructure, educational institutions, and access to formal law enforcement.
- **VC Labarkot (Rural site)** – marked by strong reliance on cultural norms and traditional dispute mechanisms.

Mansehra was selected due to its **hybrid socio-cultural structure** and the prevalence of Domestic Gender .Based Violence Issues .

3.2 Population and Sampling

3.2.1 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised individuals and professionals with direct or indirect experiences related to Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (DGBV). Specifically, the following groups were included:

- Women (aged 18 and above) who have experienced DGBV
- Health workers
- Social workers
- Police personnel
- Community leaders
- Disaster Risk Committee (DRC) members
- Legal professionals
- Religious scholars

3.2.2 Sampling Techniques

Two non-probability sampling techniques were employed:

- **Purposive Sampling:** This method was used to select professionals, officials, and survivors based on their expertise and direct relevance to the topic.
- **Snowball Sampling:** This technique helped identify and reach survivors of gender-based violence, who may be hesitant to participate due to fear, stigma, or privacy concerns. Participants referred others in similar circumstances, facilitating access to otherwise hard-to-reach individuals.

3.2.3 Sample Size

A total of 80 participants were included in the study. The sample comprised:

- **60 GBV survivors**, equally divided between urban and rural settings (30 urban, 30 rural)
- **20 Key Informants**, including lawyers, police personnel, Disaster Risk Committee (DRC) members, religious leaders, and other relevant professionals

This distribution ensured diverse perspectives from both survivors and stakeholders involved in addressing Gender-Based Violence.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Quantitative Phase

Structured questionnaires were administered to 60 women survivors of DGBV to gather standardized data on the following dimensions:

- **Frequency of abuse** (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly)
- **Types of abuse** (physical, emotional, financial, sexual)
- **Perpetrators** (e.g., spouse, in-laws)
- **Reporting behaviors and perceived barriers** to reporting

3.3.2 Qualitative Phase

To gain deeper insights into the lived experiences and socio-cultural context of DGBV, qualitative methods were employed, including:

- **In-depth Interviews (IDIs)**
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

These methods explored key themes such as:

- Personal experiences of domestic and gender-based violence
- Cultural normalization and social acceptance of abuse
- Perceived causes, coping strategies, and resilience mechanisms

My sister, a clinical psychologist, provided **trauma-informed interviewing**, creating a safe space for disclosure. In particularly sensitive cases, she led interviews alone to ensure psychological safety and ethical rigor.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from structured questionnaires were entered into **Microsoft Excel** and analyzed using **descriptive statistics** (percentages, frequencies). Visual tools like **bar graphs and pie charts** were used to illustrate prevalence patterns.

3.4.1 For Qualitative Data

Thematic analysis was applied using the **Braun & Clarke (2006)** framework:

1. Transcription of audio-recorded interviews
2. Coding of narratives
3. Theme identification (e.g., “Normalization of Abuse”, “Barriers to Reporting”)
4. Interpretation through the lens of gender theory and socio-cultural norms

4.0 Results and Discussions

4.1 Prevalence and Forms of Domestic GBV

4.1.0 Nature and types of GBV Cases

This section presents an analysis of the different forms of gender-based violence (GBV) reported by the respondents. The types of violence identified include physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual violence. The distribution of these forms of violence highlights the varied and complex nature of GBV in the community.

Type of Violence	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Physical Violence	20	33.3
Emotional Violence	9	15.0

Psychological Violence	7	11.7
Violence of Rights in Financial access	13	21.7
Sexual Violence	11	18.3
Total	60	100

The data reveals a diverse range of gender-based violence (GBV) experienced by respondents, categorized into physical, emotional, psychological, economic, and sexual violence. Physical violence was the most reported, with 33.3% of respondents indicating experiences such as physical harm, often linked to disputes within joint family structures or financial tensions. Emotional violence, reported by 15% of respondents, included behaviors such as threats, humiliation, and psychological manipulation, highlighting the emotional toll of abusive relationships. Similarly, 11.7% of respondents faced psychological violence, often manifesting as mental stress caused by control, isolation, and gaslighting.

Economic violence emerged as a significant issue for 21.7% of respondents, financial dependency and control over income restricted women's autonomy and decision-making abilities. Instances such as withholding resources and denying financial independence were frequently noted. Sexual violence, reported by 18.3% of respondents, included cases of marital rape and forced intimacy, reflecting deep-seated power imbalances and cultural taboos around marital relationships. These incidents highlight the lack of awareness and legal protection surrounding marital rights, leaving many women unable to seek justice or support. The stigma attached to reporting such cases further silences victims, perpetuating the cycle of abuse and reinforcing societal norms that prioritize male authority in marital relationships.

4.1.1 Comparison of GBV Prevalence in Joint vs. Nuclear Families

Family Structure	Prevalence of GBV	Common Forms of GBV	Key Contributing Factors
Joint Families	Higher	Physical, Emotional, Economic, Psychological	Interference by in-laws, competition for resources, power struggles, control over decisions, lack of autonomy, financial control by extended family members, pressure from family
Nuclear Families	Moderate	Emotional, Economic, Psychological, Sexual	Economic pressures, emotional neglect, financial dependency, isolation from extended family support, lack of emotional intimacy and communication

Table 4.1.1 Household structure

The prevalence and nature of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) vary significantly between joint and nuclear family structures, influenced by distinct family dynamics. In joint families, GBV is more prevalent due to complex power imbalances and interference from in-laws, especially the

husband's family. Women often feel pressured to conform to the demands of extended family members, leading to emotional and physical abuse. Competition for limited resources within a large family unit also intensifies conflicts, which can escalate into violence. The hierarchical nature of joint families means authority figures, such as older male family members or in-laws, often control key aspects of a woman's life, resulting in feelings of powerlessness and victimization. Disputes over finances, household responsibilities, and decision-making can lead to emotional, economic, and physical violence, further perpetuating unhealthy gender norms. In nuclear families, GBV often stems from economic pressures and emotional neglect. Financial strain on husbands, as primary earners, can lead to frustration, manifesting as physical or emotional violence. The lack of extended family support leaves women isolated, increasing vulnerability to psychological abuse. Financial dependency creates power imbalances, and economic challenges can escalate into violence, while neglect from overworked husbands compounds emotional and psychological harm.

4.2 Perpetrators of GBV

Perpetrator	Contextual Reasons	Percentage
Spouse	GBV by spouses often stems from financial issues, mistrust, and power imbalances within the relationship.	58
Parents	Parents may perpetrate GBV due to cultural expectations, forced marriages, or efforts to maintain family honor.	7
In-Laws	Cultural norms and control over family matters contribute to violence, particularly toward daughters-in-law, who face patriarchal oppression.	27
Brothers	Brothers may perpetrate GBV due to power struggles within the family or traditional gender norms that assign authority to male relatives over females.	8

Table 4.2 Perpetrators of GBV

Spouses are identified as the most frequent perpetrators of gender-based violence (GBV), with incidents often rooted in financial issues, mistrust, and power imbalances within the relationship. Women who are financially dependent on their husbands are particularly vulnerable, as this dependence often leads to control and manipulation. Disputes over money, infidelity, or perceived threats to male authority frequently escalate into physical or emotional abuse, making intimate partner violence a significant concern.

Parents and in-laws also play a prominent role in perpetuating GBV, driven by strict cultural expectations, forced marriages, and efforts to uphold family honor. Daughters-in-laws face emotional and physical abuse as they navigate patriarchal family structures that demand compliance with family demands. These dynamics are further exacerbated in cases where in-laws exercise control over financial or household decisions.

Brothers and brothers-in-law contribute to GBV through financial disagreements and power struggles. In many families, traditional gender roles dictate male authority over female relatives, leading to abusive behaviors aimed at asserting control over women's autonomy. Similarly, extended family members and community members can perpetuate GBV by reinforcing patriarchal norms and traditional practices. Practices such as dowries and gender-based

restrictions are often socially accepted, creating an environment that normalizes and perpetuates GBV within communities.

4.3 Causes of Domestic Violence

4.3.1 Joint Family System

The joint family system is a significant contributor to domestic violence, as tensions arise from disputes over authority, resources, and household decisions. Women in joint families often feel their autonomy is limited by in-laws, who exert influence over financial matters and household management. For example, in the case of (WV-1), a 28-year-old woman from a joint family, the constant interference from her mother-in-law in decisions regarding her children's upbringing and financial matters led to frequent verbal and emotional abuse. Sara felt emotionally isolated and powerless in managing her own family.

4.3.2 Financial Dependency

Financial control and dependency on male family members are major factors in perpetuating domestic violence. Women in financially dependent situations may feel trapped, unable to leave abusive relationships due to lack of resources. (WV-2), a 35-year-old woman from a middle-income family, was financially dependent on her husband, who controlled all financial decisions. Despite enduring emotional and physical abuse, (WV-3) found it difficult to seek help or leave her husband due to the financial constraints imposed on her.

4.3.3 Incompatibility and Marital Dissatisfaction

Marital dissatisfaction, often fueled by incompatibility, is another leading cause of domestic violence. In many cases, women feel neglected or undervalued when their husbands prioritize family or financial obligations over their relationship. (WV-4), a 32-year-old woman, experienced emotional neglect as her husband devoted most of his time to his extended family. This lack of emotional support led to feelings of isolation and frustration, eventually escalating to verbal and physical abuse.

4.3.4 Emotional and Psychological Abuse

The use of emotional and psychological abuse, including humiliation and control, is a common trigger for conflict. (WV-5), a 40-year-old woman, was frequently subjected to verbal insults and public humiliation by her husband in front of extended family members. This led to a deep sense of shame and diminished self-worth. Her emotional health deteriorated, and she was left feeling powerless and resentful within her marriage.

Women in these situations often feel trapped, as societal and family expectations make it difficult for them to express their discontent or seek alternatives.

4.3.5 Forced Marriage and its Consequences (WV-6) Story

(WV-6), a 22-year-old woman from a rural area, became a victim of forced marriage, a situation that profoundly impacted her mental and emotional well-being. Her experience is emblematic of the deep-rooted societal and familial pressures that women in some community's face, which often lead to severe consequences, including domestic violence (GBV), mental health issues, and a lack of control over personal choices, including property rights.

(WV-6) grew up in a conservative family where traditions and cultural expectations played a central role in shaping her life. From an early age, her parents instilled the belief that marriage was a woman's primary goal, and it was expected that she would marry within their circle of influence. (WV-6)'s parents, particularly her father, were highly involved in making decisions regarding her marriage.

At the age of 19, (WV-6)'s parents arranged her marriage to a man whom she had never met before. The marriage was viewed as an alliance that would benefit the family socially and financially, as the groom's family had significant property holdings and influence within the

community.(WV-6), however, felt no connection or affection towards her husband. Despite her reservations, the pressure from her family was overwhelming, and she felt that her voice and desires were disregarded.

4.3.6 The Forced Marriage:

The decision to marry (WV-6) off was made without her consent, with little regard for her feelings or personal aspirations. She was told that the marriage would secure her future and that of her family. In her case, the "marriage contract" seemed to revolve around property rights, with her dowry being a significant aspect of the arrangement. Her emotional well-being was not a priority, and her parents' involvement in the decision-making process was pervasive, disregarding her autonomy.

4.3.7 Early Marital Life:

After the marriage, (WV-6) moved to her husband's home, where she was expected to take on traditional roles as a wife and daughter-in-law. However, the reality of her new life was far from what she had imagined. She felt isolated and disconnected from her husband, who was emotionally distant and indifferent to her needs. As time passed, the situation deteriorated. Her husband's family, especially his mother, took control of the household, leaving (WV-6) with limited authority or freedom. This dynamic fueled her frustration and emotional turmoil.

4.3.8 Emotional Toll and Domestic Violence:

(WV-6)'s emotional well-being began to deteriorate as she experienced the weight of being in a marriage that she had not chosen. Her lack of agency, combined with her increasing isolation, led to feelings of depression and hopelessness. Over time, she became the victim of emotional and physical abuse. Her husband's indifference towards her needs was compounded by verbal insults, and she was subjected to physical violence for perceived transgressions such as not fulfilling household duties in the way her husband's family expected.

She was also pressured into accepting these abuses as part of her marital duties, a viewpoint that was reinforced by the societal norms surrounding marriage and family honor. She was told that a woman's role was to tolerate hardship for the sake of her family's reputation.

4.3.9 Attempted Suicide:

The emotional toll of forced marriage and the constant abuse led (WV-6) to contemplate ending her life. One night, feeling overwhelmed and trapped in her situation, she attempted suicide by ingesting poison. She survived the attempt but was left deeply scared, both physically and emotionally.

4.3.10 Intervention and Awareness:

(WV-6)'s family, including her parents, were initially unaware of the extent of her suffering, as she had been conditioned to keep the abuse hidden. However, after her suicide attempt, Fariha confided in her mother, who was devastated by the revelation. Her mother's reaction was one of guilt, as she recognized that her own involvement in the forced marriage had contributed to (WV-6)'s despair.

In response, her parents sought help from local community leaders and, in some cases, from the informal justice system, the Jirga. The Jirga, traditionally a gathering of community elders, was called to mediate the situation, as (WV-6)'s husband's family was unwilling to intervene. However, the Jirga was not able to provide the relief (WV-6) needed. While some elders sympathized with her, they ultimately advised her to reconcile with her husband, framing it to preserve the family's reputation.

4.3.11 Property Rights and Family Dynamics:

A key issue in (WV-6)'s case was the control over property. Her dowry, along with the marital property, was central to the dispute. Despite the abuse, (WV-6)'s family, especially her father, was hesitant to let go of the marital alliance, as it represented a significant social and economic

arrangement. This created additional pressure for (WV-6) to remain in the marriage, even though her emotional and physical well-being were compromised.

Her husband's family was also protective of their property, and they viewed (WV-6)'s rights as secondary to the family's financial interests. The lack of autonomy over her own life, compounded by her limited access to property and finances, made it even harder for Fariha to escape her circumstances.

Many women reported the psychological impact of constantly being compared to other members within the household, a common occurrence in joint family systems. Such comparisons, whether related to household responsibilities, behavior, or achievements, often left women feeling marginalized and undervalued. This emotional stress, combined with the pressure to conform to familial expectations, created a sense of being perpetually judged, leading to further dissatisfaction and conflict.

Overall, the causes of domestic violence identified in the data are multifaceted, encompassing structural, economic, social, and emotional factors. The joint family system, with its inherent power dynamics and expectations, appears to be a critical factor, but issues such as economic control, relationship incompatibility, and societal norms surrounding marriage also play a significant role. Addressing these underlying causes requires comprehensive strategies that not only support women in joint family settings but also provide education and resources to promote healthier, more equitable family dynamics across different household structures.

5.0 Conclusion

By integrating trauma-informed interviewing techniques and engaging community stakeholders, the research upheld ethical standards and fostered trust among participants. The inclusion of both urban and rural perspectives within Mansehra City enriched the findings, highlighting variations in how domestic gender-based violence is experienced, perceived, and addressed across different settings.

Overall, the study presents a holistic understanding of DGBV in Mansehra City, shedding light on the complex interplay of cultural norms, power structures, and institutional responses that shape both the prevalence and the dynamics of this critical issue.

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