

## **Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices of Violence (A Study of University Students in Pakistan)**

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### **1. Introduction**

This study was aimed to find out the prevalence of violence in Pakistani society and the factors behind its prevalence. This is also an attempt to assess the knowledge level of educated Pakistani youth about different forms of violence. The data will show if the prevalence of violence has any relationship with the socioeconomic conditions of the individuals.

In recent years the problem of defining 'violence' has occupied a growing number of political philosophers, political scientists, and peace researchers. Unfortunately, thinking in this field has been vitiated by the methodological shortcomings. None or too little attention has been paid to the problem of clearly stating the conditions of adequacy that, relative to a given context, it is reasonable to demand that a definition of violence should satisfy in order to be acceptable (Giuliano Pontara, Journal of Peace Research, 1978).

Today the presence of violence in our lives has been well established as a universal phenomenon. Violence can be in different forms and can result in different kinds of behaviors. The question that arises is why we accept these behaviors as a society.

Recent reports (Garcia-Moreno, 2000; World Health Organization, 1997) estimate that one in every three women around the globe has experienced violence in

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an intimate relationship at some point in her life. A significant impetus for international initiatives to prevent violence against women is provided by reports on the economic costs of violence. The World Bank (1993) estimated that in developing countries rape and domestic violence reduce by 5% the healthy years of life for the reproductive age women.

A large body of literature documents variations in the incidence of violence against women, which suggests that there are culturally unique factors. Increased migration, globalization of economies, and the rapid cultural diversification of nations have made understanding sociocultural differences even more imperative. Violence prevention and intervention strategies must address culture-specific factors that support continued violence against women. Sociocultural theories of violence focus on social structures including systems and institutions and on shared beliefs and behaviors in these social systems (Gelles & Straus, 1979). For instance, the culture of violence theory (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967) proposed that beliefs that legitimize the use of aggression support the use of violence in relationships.

Today it is a well accepted fact that violence causes different negative effects on the social as well as individual development of people. These effects depend upon the exposure level of individuals to violent situations. The effects of violence can range from depression to Post traumatic stress disorders (PTSDs) and from minor injury to death. On the other hand the repeated exposure to violence can make the victim violent and deviant as stated by Ken Mc. Master (1992).

On the basis of daily observation in Pakistan, we can say that the prevalence of violence is very high. According to 1998 census of Pakistan, 23 % of total population lies with in age group of 20-34 years. Other 54% population of Pakistan is younger than the age of 19 years. This shows that Pakistani population consists of a large representation of children and youth. To assess and target any phenomenon youth is the most crucial group of individuals because it is always most receptive to different types of social change. This age group is also considered the best source for long term behavioral change of the whole society. Young individuals, if guided properly, can easily move away from prevalent unacceptable behaviors.

The most feasible to target, the most influential, and strong group for advocacy in the future are university graduates. These youngsters are more likely to attain influential positions, so they can become the major decision makers in the long run.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

There is a need for researches to examine the presence of violence in Pakistani society. To understand violence as a prevalent phenomenon, it is imperative to understand the factors behind it. The present study, explores the presence of different forms of violence and its dynamics in Pakistani society. The target group of this study was the postgraduate students from the five major cities of Pakistan.

### 1.2 Objectives

Following were the major objectives of the study:

- To assess the prevalence of violence in daily lives
- To explore the factors behind violent behavior
- To find out the cultural construction of violence
- To assess the gender role socialization that may lead to violent behaviors

The study has tried to identify the reasons behind violent behavior of individuals. The findings of this study will help society and decision makers to adopt effective strategies and to design programs for dealing with the issue of violence.

## 2. Methodology

The study was carried out from September 2009 to December 2009. This was a survey study based on the interviews conducted by the field researchers. In this section, the area of study, population, sample and the methods used are discussed.

### 2.1 Area of the Study

Pakistan is a country with many different cultures and geographical regions. The Pakistani society can largely be divided on the basis of provinces.

Every province has its own language, traditions and other cultural traits. The four provincial capitals can be considered the cities with populations, having representation from almost every area of the province. The population of federal capital Islamabad is also very heterogeneous and persons are from many different areas of Pakistan. On the basis of this very nature of the population of these cities, it can be assumed that these cities provide the best available sample for the study. In this study, universities in the five major cities of Pakistan (Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta) were considered as the area of the study.

### 2.1.1 Selection Criteria for the Universities

Universities with regular classes of masters degree were selected to reach out to the postgraduate students. Total 13 universities were contacted for permission to conduct the survey. In a couple of cities, the administrations of two private universities were unable to give permission for data collection due to previous commitment. They also had reservations on talking about violence, due to the fear that it would lead to violence.

Following 11 universities were selected as the target area of the study.

- Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad
- Comsats Institute Islamabad
- Karachi University, Karachi
- SZABIST Institute of Information Technology, Karachi
- Balochistan University, Quetta
- Al-Khair University, Quetta
- Women University, Quetta
- Peshawar University, Peshawar
- Iqra University, Peshawar
- University of the Punjab, Lahore
- Superior University of Management Sciences, Lahore.

## 2.2 Methods

This research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Keeping in mind the aim of the study, survey method was selected to conduct this research through semi structured questionnaire. It was decided that respondents will be approached at their universities.

Field teams were hired for the data collection purpose in five cities. A team of four interviewers was hired in each city. To avoid delay in data collection because of upcoming holidays, six interviewers were engaged for data collection at Peshawar. All the interviewers were having postgraduate degrees in social sciences. A comprehensive training was conducted for them. In training of field teams, the aims and objectives of the study and the tool of data collection (questionnaire) was discussed along with detailed methodology of the study.

The convenient sampling technique was used to select the study subjects. Every interview was taken individually and it was assured to every respondent that his/her identity will be kept confidential. Written consent was taken from every respondent before starting the interview. Each interview lasted for an average of 45 minutes. During data collection observations were also recorded and were considered during the data analysis. The data collection took 7 to 8 days for each city.

## 2.3 Population

For this study, all the Masters level students in their first year of postgraduate degree from the selected universities were considered the target population of the study.

## 2.4 Sample

The total sample size for the study was 500 postgraduate students from the selected universities. Students, who were in their first year of postgraduate education, were selected. The equal representation of both the genders was assured. Therefore, 250 male and 250 female students were interviewed.

In each city, the equal units of study were selected from two different universities (1 Public university + 1 Private university). The sample size was 100 from each city and the breakup of public and private university was 60 and 40 students respectively.

The rationale for selecting first year students as the units of study is their comparatively limited interaction with awareness raising programs and liberal environment of universities as compared to final year students.

## 2.5 Tool for Data Collection

The tool for the data collection was the questionnaire based interviews.

### 2.5.1 The Questionnaire

A detailed questionnaire was designed for data collection purpose and the interviews were conducted by field researchers. The interview questionnaire comprised of both open and closed ended questions. The first section included questions about demographic variables, such as age, sex, income, and educational status. Following this, their knowledge and perception towards different types of violence, prevalence of violence in their lives and its effects were asked. Then there were questions regarding their own practices of different types of violence. In the interviews, power structures of the social life were also explored.

The pretest of the tool was conducted and the ammendments were made as per observations and the issues faced.

The entire questionnaire was first constructed in English and was then translated and printed in Urdu.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

The data was arranged and the variables were defined for open ended questions. The quantitative data was transferred to electronic form and was analyzed on SPSS. The qualitative analysis was done for the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In this part, results from the collected data are presented and discussed.

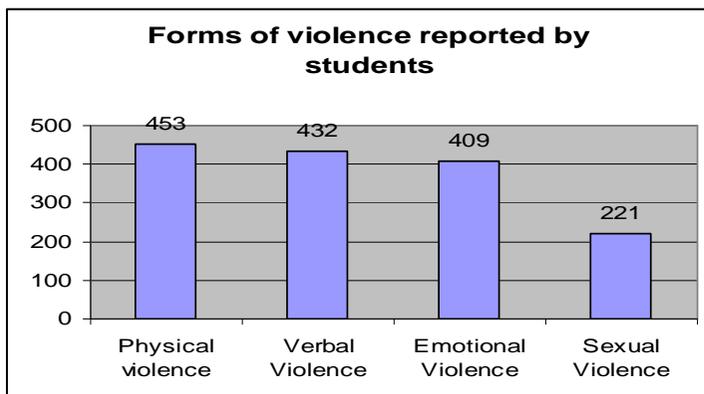
Age: The age of the respondents was ranging from 18 to 28 years. Mean age of the sample was 21 years. The data show that almost half (49%) of the respondents were within the age group of 18 to 21 years and other 39% were lying within the age group of 22-24. Only 12% of the respondents were above the age of 25 years. These findings show that 88% of the respondents in the university were in the average age for university education.

Employment Status of the Respondents: The results of the study show that a very vast majority (458- 92%) of the students were full time students and were not doing any job.

This shows that in this society the students are mostly from economically stable background and they were able to continue their studies without having to earn for their expenses. Only 42 respondents were working and most of them were working part time to get experience in their professional fields. Only ten respondents reported that they are employed to bear their own expenses and the expenses of their family. These findings present a situation that higher education has students with a stable economic background.

#### 3.1 Knowledge about Different forms of Violence

It was asked from respondents to tell about the different forms of violence. Data in graph 10 show that most of the respondents mentioned emotional, verbal and physical violence. The percentage of respondents, who mentioned emotional, verbal and physical violence, was 82, 87 and 91 percent respectively. The number of students who mentioned that sexual abuse is also a form of violence was much lower than other forms. There can be many different reasons behind this. In Pakistani society it is very difficult to talk about sex and sexuality, so they may not respond about it. Finally, in an interview the respondents usually avoid tabooed issues.



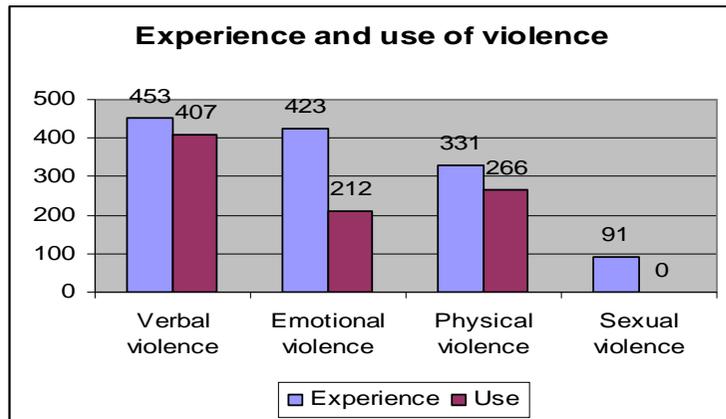
### 3.2 The Prevalence of Violence

The results of the study show a very high level of prevalence of violence among the target group. Before asking about different kinds of violence, respondents were given general guidelines to differentiate between different kinds. This was also made clear to all the respondents that any gestures, words, comments, or interaction of discrimination by which you feel humiliation or some one tries to feel you inferior is all considered emotional violence. It was further briefed that loud, anger full, abusive statements, or screaming which make you sad, is considered verbal violence. Physical violence consists of slapping, beating, kicking and any other physical punishment. Any advancement for sexual gains was considered as sexual violence i.e. bad touch, exhibitionism, fondling, and sodomy, rape.

Both the level of experiencing the different forms of violence and using these forms showed a high number. Comparing the level of experiencing violence with the level of using shows that 85% respondents reported ever experience of emotional violence and 43% reported that they use it also. The verbal violence was reported highest among all. A total of 91% students said that they face verbal abuse and 82% admitted using it. As far as the issue of physical violence is concerned 66% reported that they have experience of facing it and 54% said that they use physical violence.

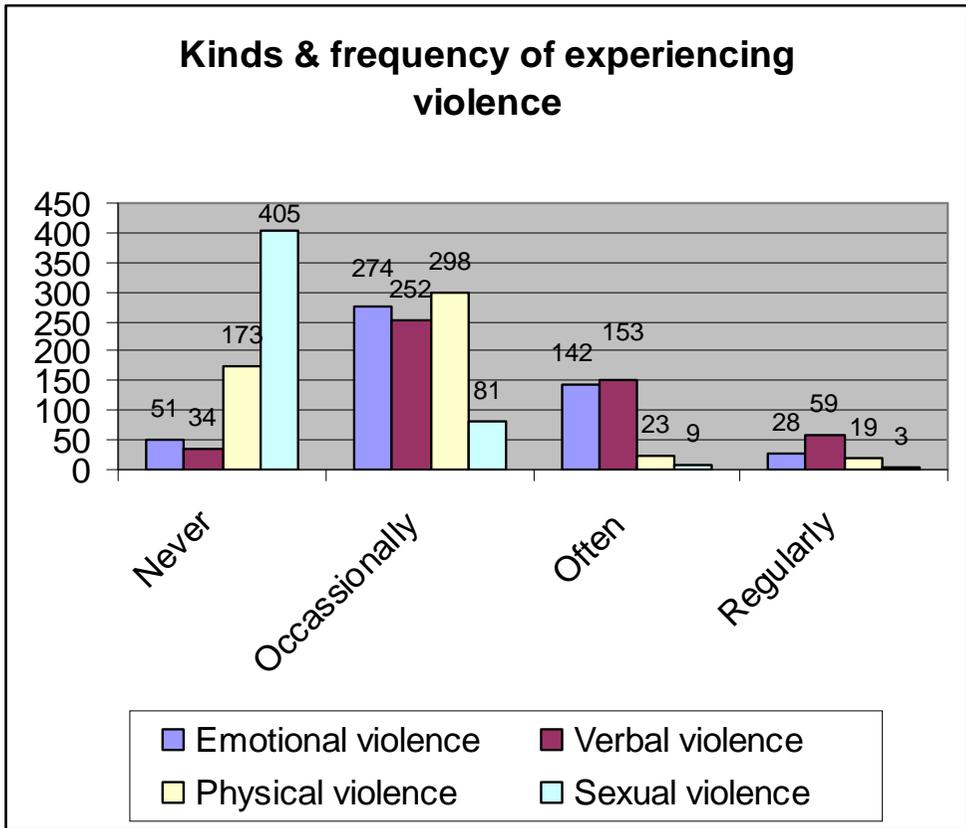
The finding about ever experience of sexual violence shows that 19% reported this. The issue of sexual abuse is very much disguised and tabooed and it is very difficult to accept this experience in just a single conversation. During interview, one respondent accepted being sodomized by some one.

None of the respondents reported that they have used sexual violence ever in the life. This shows a general tendency of denial for being involved in sexually harassing some one.



### 3.3 Kinds and Frequency of Facing Violence

It was very important to know about the frequency of facing different forms of violence. Following graph shows that only 10% students reported that they have never faced emotional violence. Other 55% reported that they occasionally face it and 29% and 5% reported often and regular exposure to emotional violence. The prevalence of verbal violence remained even higher than the emotional violence and only 7% respondents said that they have never faced verbal violence.



The prevalence of physical violence remained 65% with the frequency of 59% occasional incidence and 5% and 1% reported often and regular incidence of physical violence. As far as the sexual violence is concerned, it was reported that 81% never faced it. 90 respondents out of total 500 accepted often and regular presence of sexual violence in their lives. Considering the taboo of talking on this issue a very high number of respondents revealed that they experienced the sexual violence.

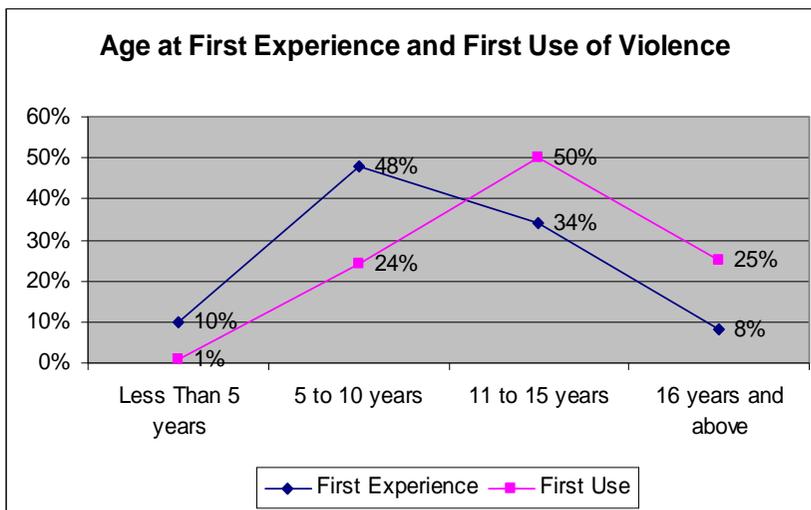
### 3.4 Age at First Experience and First use of Violence

It was tried to find out if there is any correlation between the minimum age of first experience of violence and the age of first use of violence. Results of the study show that 51 respondents reported that they first faced violence at the age of less than five years. This situation is an eye opener that children start facing violence at such a young age. The first experience of facing violence was between the age of 6 to 10 years for 240 students.

It was reported by 167 students that their first experience of violence was in the age group of 11 to 15 years. The age group of 6 to 15 years is off school going children and the first experience of violence is highest in this age group. Data in the graph presents that with the increase in age the incidence of experiencing the violence decreases.

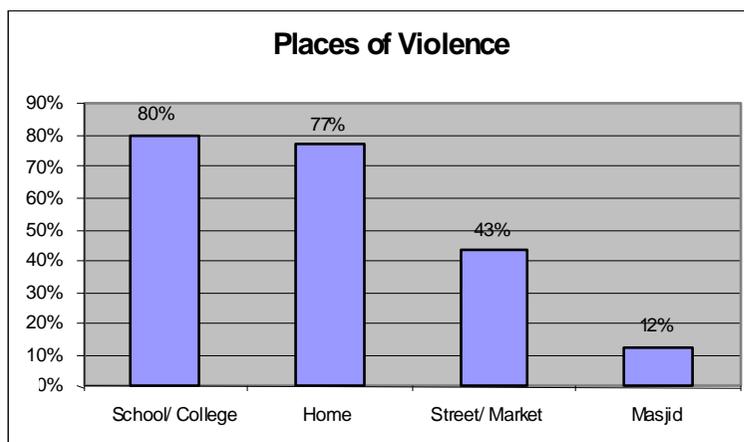
The corporal punishment to young children is also contributing to their dropout from schools. In Pakistan, a survey was conducted in 1999 and it was found that 15% of students between the ages of 10-18 who have ever attended primary schools have dropped out. Corporal punishment was cited to be the most common reason for students to drop out from school (Jeelani Anees, SPAARC, 2000). Runaways are also documented for the same reason. According to Regional Children and young People's Consultation July 2006, due to physical and psychological punishments education is affected as the child can lose interest and can also drop out of school. Sometimes children also run away from home. This can result in child labour and criminal activities.

On the other hand 120 and 251 students reported that they have first used violence in the age group of 5 to 10 years and 11 to 15 years respectively. The use of violence continues with the increasing age. Analysis of the data shows that every respondent used violence after his/ her experience of facing it. In age group 11 to 15 years, the experience of violence leads to greater use of violence as compare to other age groups. It shows that this age group is more prone to being violent. Respondents of 16 years age and above age use violence more than experiencing it. This shows that violence is manifested by the difference of power.



### 3.5 Places of Violence

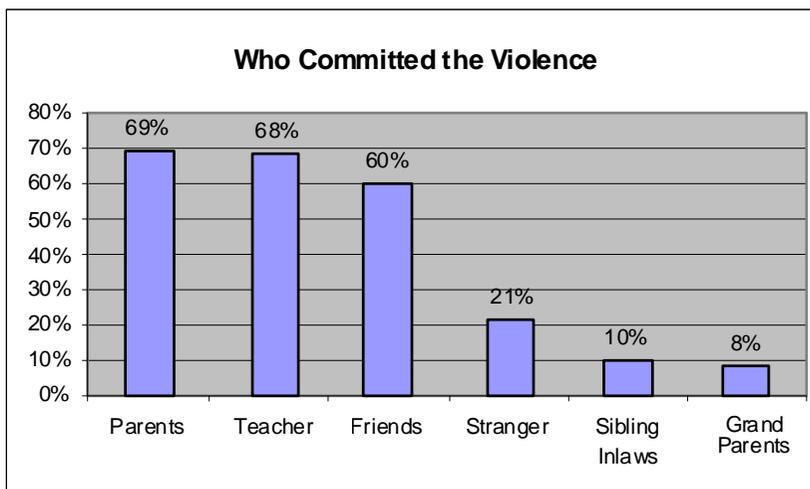
The results of the study show that most of the violence is occurring either in school or at home. It was reported by 401 respondents that they face violence in their school/ college and 384 said that they face violence in their homes as well. In addition, 213 students reported that they have faced the violence on streets and in markets also. It was observed through responses of the students that they start facing different types of violence at their homes and schools from a very small age. 59 respondents reported that they have faced violence at Masjid. It was reported in the study by both male and female respondents that they received different types of punishments at their schools and masjid. Punishments received at Masjid and schools include "humiliating remarks, slapping, kicking, hitting on hands and back by stick, e.t.c". Another important finding of the street violence reported by females was that they face humiliating behaviors and sexual harrasment while at street without a male. These include steering, bad touch, and shouting e.t.c.



### 3.6 Who Committed the Violence

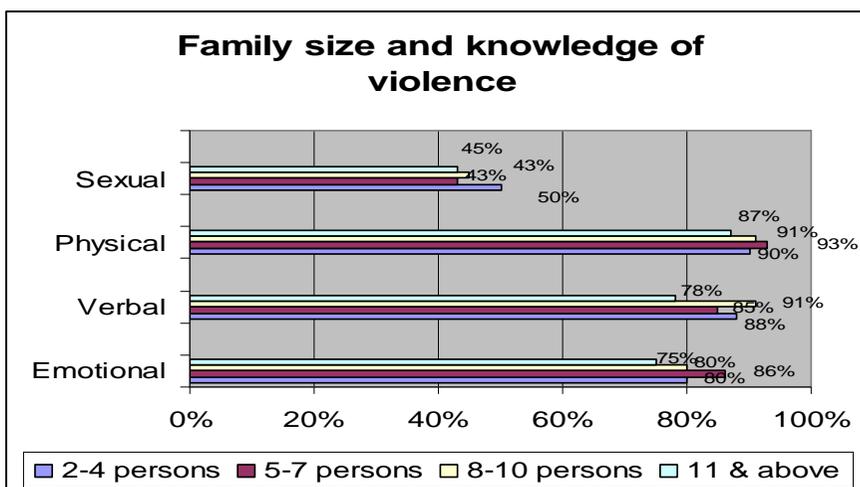
Results of the study show that maximum violence is done by parents and teachers. It was reported by 346 and 339 students that they have faced violence from their parents and teachers respectively. According to respondents, both the teachers and parents believe that through violence they can discipline their children and stop them from doing wrong. This fact was even presented by students themselves that the punishments they received were for the betterment of their own selves. A few respondents were of the view that it is not violence because of positive intention behind it.

A high number of Respondents (298) reported that their friends committed violence against them. Among them a major difference was felt on the basis of gender. Males said that their friends verbally abuse them and also physically beat them. In cases of female students, it was reported that their friends most of the times emotionally hurt them or some time use verbal comments as violence against them. Some of the respondents reported that they have faced violence from their siblings inlaws and grand parents. The violence from strangers was reported by 107 respondents. The verbal and sexual violence by males in the market or at the road side was reported by women. In a few cases, male respondents told that they have faced verbal and physical violence from other males at the road side.

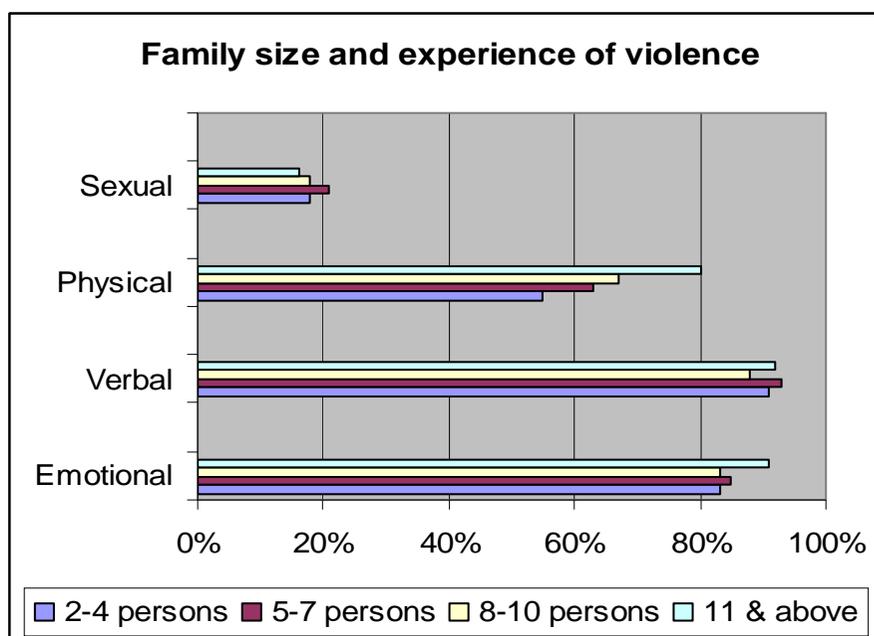


### 3.7 Family Size and Knowledge & Prevalence of Violence

Mean family size of the sample was 7.4 persons. The knowledge of emotional violence remained high in all groups of family sizes but it was lowest among the largest family group. The number of students knowing and facing the emotional violence was almost same in all other groups except the persons with families of more than 11 persons. They reported the maximum incident of facing emotional violence. It could be due to their regular practice of facing emotional violence that they take it as normal.



The same situation was found in case of verbal and physical violence as well. This means that the verbal and physical violence is more in the larger families but its recognition, as violence is least among them. In case of sexual violence the incidence was more reported in the smaller families. In smaller families children get more attention so the chances of disclosure are more.



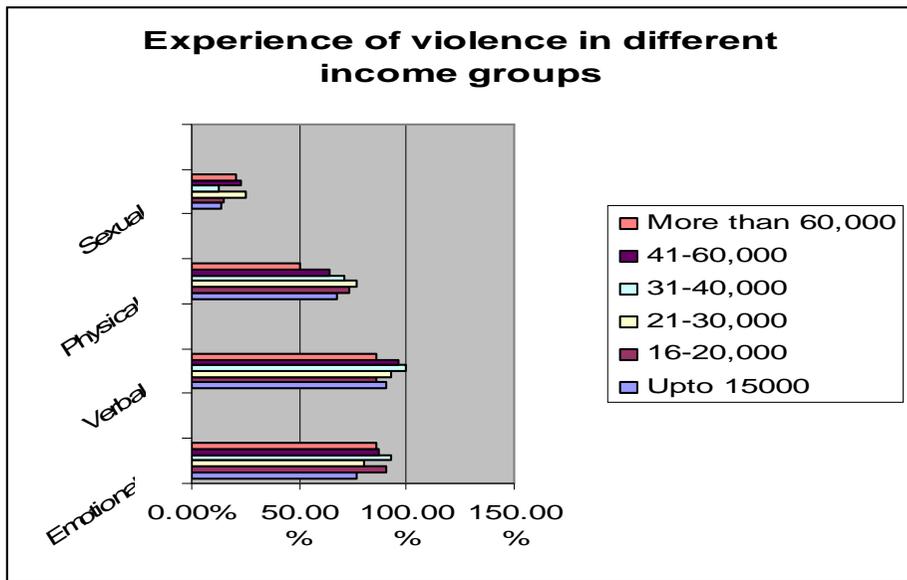
### 3.9 Violence in Different Income Groups

The findings present the fact that a vast majority of respondents were from economically stable backgrounds and there were very few individuals of low income families. So the role of economy in seeking higher education is crucial in Pakistani society.

In this study, it was further tried to find out if there is any relation ship of economic background with the knowledge of violence and the exposure to it. Before discussing the results it is important to mention that the definition and intensity of different types of violence may vary in different income groups and also person to person. Some one may not consider the verbal abuse as violence and some one else may consider the loud pitch of voice as violence to them.

The results show that the knowledge of emotional violence was almost same in all income groups but it was highest among respondents with 30 to 60 thousand/month family incomes. The knowledge of verbal violence was more reported in low-income groups but the difference was not significant. The knowledge level of sexual violence was also almost same with maximum reporting in 20 to 40 thousands income group.

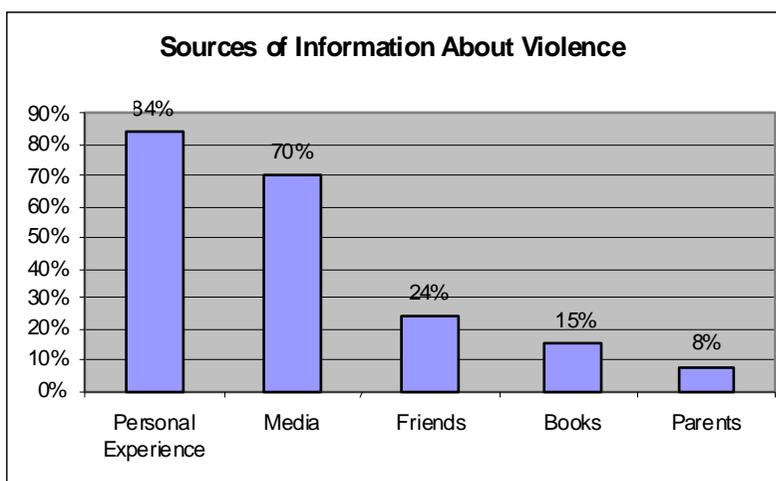
The almost same pattern continues as far as the experience of violence is concerned. The role of economy did not present any significant effect on the knowledge and experience of violence. However, further in-depth studies are required to find out the effect of economy on knowledge and practice of violence.



### 3.10 Sources of Information

Responses show that highest number of students (421) reported that the source of information about violence was the personal exposure to the situations. Another major source of information for the 348 respondents was media. 122 students reported that they have come to know about the violence is on the basis of information provided by their friends. The media throws open information to every one irrespective of one's age and mental level. Personal experience is the most reported but it can be most dangerous as well. The effects of violence are maximum in the situation of direct exposure.

Only 38 respondents reported that their parents have told them about violence and its types and other 76 respondents told that they have read this from the books.



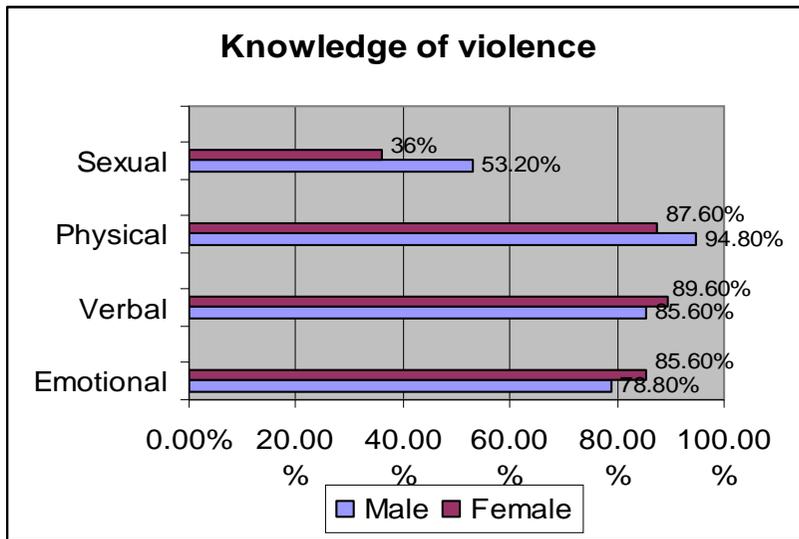
### 3.11 Factors that Lead People to Violent Behaviors

The perception of students regarding factors that lead people to possess violent behaviors was asked to assess their understanding of the phenomenon. Most (75%) of the respondents were of the view that violence is mostly done to impose their own will upon others. Many (60%) others said that the exposure to violent situations lead individuals to be violent. They said that when some one faces violence in his/ her life it is more likely that he/ she will use the same with others. Many (60%) respondents told that when some one remain in the situation of tension and depression, patience level is reduced resulting in violence on very minor issues. It was opined that the violent people are mostly psychologically ill. People commented that it is due to lack of awareness about effects of violence. Respondents also mentioned that violence is done when there is no other way to deal with the situation.

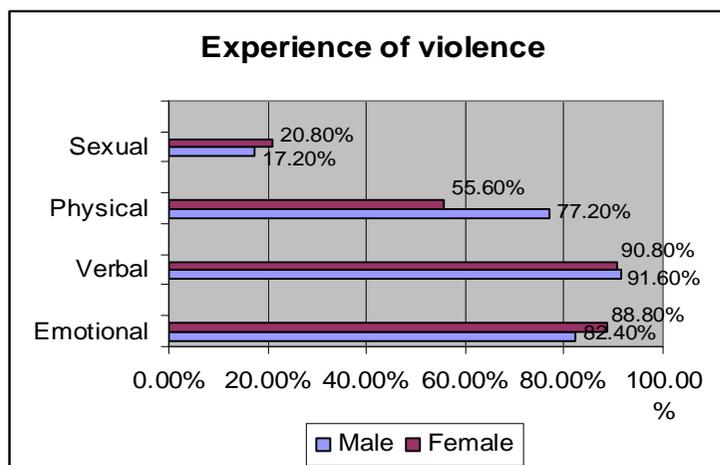
### 3.12 Gender Comparison for Knowledge and Experiencing Violence

Results of the present study show that slightly higher number of females showed knowledge of emotional and verbal violence. Knowledge of physical violence was more in males.

But there was no significant difference in the responses of males and females as far as the knowledge of emotional, verbal and physical violence is concerned. A clear difference in knowledge of sexual violence was observed in responses of both genders. Knowledge of sexual violence was more reported by males. This may be due to comparatively open responses of males because females usually avoid talking about tabooed issues in front of others.



Comparatively more females reported that they have faced emotional violence but the difference is not significant enough. Experience of verbal violence was also same in both genders. The physical violence was more faced by males. In cases of females the physical violence was not only less reported but it shows a different pattern as well. The females said that their experience of experiencing the violence has slightly increased with their increasing age. It was reported by females that now they have more restrictions on their mobility. Now their parents and elder brothers are much more concerned about their dressing. They receive more humiliating comments from their elder brothers. On the other hand most of the males reported that they have face more physical violence in their childhood or early adolescent age. They said now no one can openly violate them because now they can respond accordingly.



The prevalence of sexual violence shows a different picture. The females reported experience of facing it more than males. The females said that males do the violence and the sexual harassment. In the cases of males also the sexual advancement was mostly by other males. On the basis of this finding it can be concluded that males are more likely to use sexual violence with others. The girls said unlike their childhood now they receive more harassment at streets/ markets. Even the incidents of aggressive attempts of sexual assault were also reported.

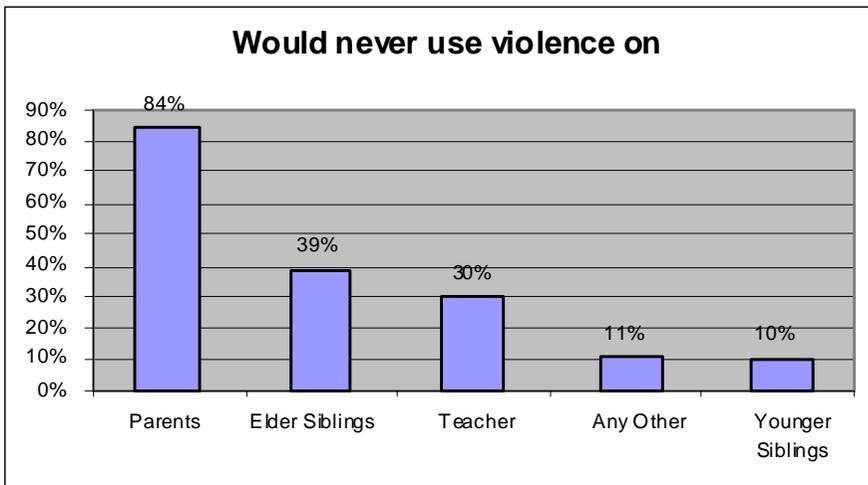
### 3.13 Reasons for Accepting others' Violence

When respondents were asked why they accepted violence from others, the following responses were given. Most (84%) of the respondents said that they accept violence because they cannot do any thing, or do not know what to do in this situation. The following responses were mostly reported *"we are bound, what else we can do, we have to face it"*. It was reported by 80% respondents that they accept violence to avoid a worsened situation. The responses include *"issue will worsen if I did not remain quite, it will result in our own insult, it will be ludicrous, and it will be of no gain"* They said that their resistance could cause more harm. They feel helpless in the situation and that's why they want to let the issue go. Another major reason given by 65% respondents for accepting violence was, they respect the people who use violence. In this category parents and teachers were reported. It was further reported that they have to live in the same house and go to the same school, so there is no other option.

Some others said that often the person who uses violence against them is more powerful and they cannot do any thing even if they want to.

### 3.14 Violence and Power Dynamics

On the power dynamics of violence, responses show that a vast majority of respondents (421) reported that they can never use violence against their parents. This shows the authority pattern of society which gives much respect and power to parents. The results of the present study show that 196 and 149 respondents said they can never use violence against elder siblings and teachers respectively. So the trend shows that it is less likely to use violent behavior with some one in role of authority. Other responses show that they can never use violence against younger siblings, special people, grand parents and old persons. This is reflective of the protective side of socialization where the weaker section of society is treated with gentleness. However the findings show a contradiction between these responses and their actual practice of violence. They think that they cannot beat/ hit younger children but more than half reported their practice of using violence with children.



### 3.15 Reasons for being Violent

Most of the respondents said that they become violent only when some one crosses the limits. Their violent behavior is most of the time a reaction and when they think there is no other way to stop some one from misbehaving, they use violence.

The following responses present the above described finding "When some one irritates us by misbehaving, we have to be violent to show our assertiveness, to stop others' violence, when some one do not understand by just asking". Majority of the respondents responded that " we use violence to guide others about right, to stop others from doing wrong, for betterment, to instruct others". These responses were given to present that they use violence only for corrective purposes. When they see some one doing some thing wrong only then they become violent. Many others said that they behave violently to do what they want and to make others accept what they want. They were of the view that in this society if you are soft spoken, no one will give you even what you deserve. Few males said that they use violence on others to show their strength and superiority. This could be found in following statements of respondents "We use violence to show our atrength, I do violence to keep control on others, I use violence to show, I am a grown up male now" .

Responses on the direct questions about using violence to solve conflicts and to discipline others show that more than half of the respondents (271), use it to solve their conflicts. They said that without being violent the conflicts would never be resolved. Other were of the view that violence does not solve conflicts rather increases the intensity of the conflicts. It was found that violence is used by majority to discipline others.

This means that either they do not know about non violent disciplining techniques or they do not have capcity to practice such techniques. This is mentioned on the basis of 327 responses presenting use of violence as disciplining technique.

### 3.16 Vulnerability to Violence

An equal number of respondents with the frequency of 244 for both males and females reported that women and children are more vulnerable to violence. The reasons for vulnerability of children include, they are most weaker portion of society, they cannot protect themselves and they face violence because every one tries to keep them in control. Some responses showed that every one express their anger to children because it is difficult to use with elders.

The reasons regarding women for being vulnerable to violence were again relating to power structure. Many respondents said that women are weaker so they are facing more violence. Many other said that males are having control over economy and property and females are dependent upon them. So, females have to accept violence without resisting to it. Few responses present that women have less rights and privileges given by religion that's why they are subjected to neglect and humiliation. They said, as per religion males are leaders and decision makers in the family. Female is required to obey her father or husband and in case she did not, they can use violence. Many respondents said there is no such distinction in our religion.

Responses of only 12 students indicate that males are more vulnerable to violence and they receive it more. They said, males are more vulnerable because they physically face the practical realities more than women and children.

#### **4. Conclusion**

From the results of the study, we can say that the demographic variables are playing an important role on education of the individuals. This is mentioned because of very low representation of economically poor in the university education. Data regarding knowledge and prevalence of violence indicates the high incidence of violence among the educated youth. Lesser reporting of knowledge and prevalence of sexual violence means it is still a taboo and people are reluctant on talking about it.

As far as the sources of information about violence are concerned there is no proper source available. A dire need for awareness raising regarding violence, its prevalence and the effects is felt. Almost all the students reported that they got to know about violence either through personal experience or by mady. Many others said their peer group provided them with the information. All of these sources cannot be trusted for appropriate transmission of information and can cause harm to individuals.

Gender also turned to be a very influential fact of Pakistani society. Results of the study affirmed the gender roles and gender stereotypes. It is much required to target the socialization patterns and masculinity attached with almost every part of life. The privileges attached with the gender again present the same. All the assertive and authoritative roles were labelled with men and the softer and passive roles were reported an association with female gender.

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