

**FAMILY VIOLENCE IN MIGRANT PASHTUN COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA:
PERPETRATORS, CAUSES, IMPACT, AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS**

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Abstract

Family violence (FV) is a serious problem in Pakistan, and women of all socioeconomic backgrounds are said to be at risk. Feminist scholars have argued that gender-based violence is in part attributable to oppressive patriarchal systems in which men are perceived to be inherently superior to women. The overall aim of this study was to explore Pashtun women's understandings and experiences of FV, which occurred when they were living in Khyber Pukhtun Khwa Pakistan. Using a socio-ecological framework it sought to examine the systemic, structural and cultural factors that contribute to FV in Pashtun families. It also examined the impact of FV and the support systems available to women. This study employed a qualitative study design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Pashtun women who were living in Australia. Interview data was thematically analysed and revealed that entrenched patriarchal norms, cultural practices, and socio-economic dependencies contributed to the perpetration of FV. The study identified in-laws, social norms, and financial conditions as key factors influencing FV, with mothers-in-law frequently instigating abuse. The findings also highlighted the profound psychological and emotional toll on women and their children who often endured social isolation, inadequate access to healthcare, and both verbal and physical abuse.

The study's findings indicate that a multifaceted approach is required to help combat FV in the Pashtun community. This includes education and collaboration with government and non-government agencies to raise awareness of the issue of FV in the Pashtun community and to help develop strategies to better support women. It may also involve working with religious leaders to help facilitate a cultural shift away from patriarchal attitudes that perpetuate violence, towards greater respect and equality for women. This study gives voice to experiences of Pashtun women who have experienced FV, and it will potentially contribute to better understanding of the underlying causes of FV in the Pashtun community and can guide efforts to help prevent FV in this community.

DECLARATION

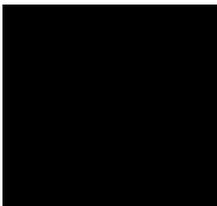
I, Nargis Gulab, declare that the Master of Research thesis entitled Family Violence in Migrant Pashtun Communities in Australia: Perpetrators, Causes, Impact, and Support Mechanisms is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (See Appendix A: Application ID: HRE20-0679).

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Signed:



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not just an academic endeavour, but a six-year journey marked by profound personal experiences, including moments of happiness, struggle, and resilience."

"Beyond the individual achievement, this research signifies a significant milestone for my entire family."

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research thesis to my hero, my Father Haji Khair Ali and my Mother Noor Fatima whose unwavering support and sacrifices have enabled me to achieve my goals in life. My Father's strength and perseverance amid numerous challenges in a tribal area of Pakistan continues to inspire me. The values and determination you instilled in me have shaped who I am today. My Mother's unconditional love and encouragement have been my guiding light throughout this journey.

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
DECLARATION	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
DEDICATION	7
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	11
LIST OF FIGURES	12
LIST OF TABLES	13
LIST OF APPENDICES	14
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	15
Problem Statement.....	15
Context of FV among Pashtuns in Pakistan	16
Context of FV among Pashtuns in Afghanistan	17
Aim and Research Questions.....	19
Scope	20
Significance of Study.....	20
Thesis Overview	20
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	22
Introduction	22
Definition of Domestic violence and FV.....	22
FV Theories.....	23
FV in Pakistan	27
Factors Contributing to FV.....	29
Religious Factors, Traditional and Cultural Factors	29
Social, Socio-demographic and Legal Factors.....	30
Familial Factors: The Role of In-laws	31
FV in Pashtun Communities.....	33
Socio-Ecological Models.....	35

Rationale.....	38
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	40
Introduction	40
Methodology and Theoretical Framework	40
Participant Recruitment	42
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria	42
Participant Demographics.....	42
<i>Sample Size Considerations</i>	43
Method.....	44
Development of Interview Schedule.....	45
Procedure.....	45
Analysis Approach	46
Familiarisation with the Data.....	46
Generating Initial Codes	47
Searching for Themes	47
Reviewing Themes.....	47
Defining and Naming Themes	47
Producing the Report	48
Rigor and Trustworthiness of Data Collection and Analysis.....	49
Researcher Bias and Reflexivity.....	49
Ethical Considerations and Management of Risks	50
Conclusion.....	52
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION	53
Introduction	53
Awareness and Understanding of FV	54
Ignorance and Misconceptions I have added this subtheme	54
Awareness and Informed Understanding.....	55
Factors Contributing to FV in Pashtun Community	56

Culture and Religion	56
<i>Familial Relationships</i>	58
Financial Dependency.....	65
Nature of FV in Pashtun Community	66
<i>Uncontrolled Dynamics of FV</i>	66
<i>Cultural Norms and Patriarchal Structures</i>	67
Impact of FV.....	69
Physical Impact.....	69
Emotional and Psychological Impact.....	71
Social and Work-Related Impact	72
Impact on Children	74
Challenges in Seeking Support during Experiences of FV.....	79
Lack of Familial Support and Silencing of Victims (Social Isolation).....	79
Societal Pressure and Fear of Shame	81
Strategies to Address FV in the Pashtun Community	82
Education	82
Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGO) Interventions	84
Religious Leaders’ Roles	86
Changing Patriarchal Mindset.....	87
Financial Independence for Women	88
Transformation of Marital Lives: Pakistan vs. Australia.....	89
Influence of Nuclear Family Structure	91
Conclusion.....	93
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	95
Limitations.....	97
Contributions and Future Research Recommendations.....	97
REFERENCES	100
Appendices.....	114

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Full Form
FV	Family Violence
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
WHO	World Health Organisation
RTP	Research Training Program
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
NVivo	Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
UNSDF	United Nations Sustainable Development Framework
VAW	Violence Against Women
HRE	Human Research Ethics (e.g., HRE20-0679)
Jirga	Traditional Pashtun Council

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Socio-ecological Framework for Understanding FV	37
Figure 2 Impact of FV on Children.....	75

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the Respondents	43
Table 2: Thematic Table	53
Table 3: Husband’s Educational and Employment Background and Attitude	91

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A University Ethics Approval

Appendix B Information to Participants Letter (English)

Appendix C Information to Participants Letter (Urdu)

Appendix D Semi-Structured Interview Schedule (English)

Appendix E Semi-Structured Interview Schedule (Urdu)

Appendix F Consent Form (English)

Appendix G Consent Form (Urdu)

Appendix H Approved Safety Plan

Appendix I Approved Support Ethics

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Family Violence (FV) is prevalent in the Pashtun community, particularly in rural areas of Pakistan and within some regions such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). This investigation focuses on women, who experienced FV in these communities and are now living in Australia. FV is defined as violent, threatening, or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a family member or causes them to be fearful. Examples include assault, sexual abuse, stalking, derogatory taunts, property damage, harming animals, financial control, and social isolation (Family Law Act (1975) (Cth), section 4AB). Using data from the Pakistan Demographic Health Survey (2012–13 and 2017–18), [Shaikh \(2024\)](#) reported that the prevalence rates of intimate partner violence—both emotional and physical—vary across provinces, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) exhibiting notably distinct trends compared to other regions. For emotional violence (rural and urban combined), KPK exhibited persistently high rates, with 47.27% in 2012–13 and a slight increase to 48.25% in 2017–18. This rate was consistently higher than Punjab (34.92% down to 23.33%), Sindh (14.43% down to 12.94%), Balochistan (42.93% down to 28.70%), and Islamabad Capital Territory (33.88% down to 25.68%) over the same period. For physical violence (rural and urban combined), KPK again had the highest prevalence, recording 50.70% in 2012–13, though this decreased to 35.15% by 2017–18. Still, this reduction retained KPK above other provinces: Punjab (23.15% down to 21.25%), Sindh (19.84% down to 11.94%), Balochistan (39.26% up to 44.36%), and Islamabad Capital Territory (24.24% down to 17.09%).

When disaggregated by rural and urban areas, KPK rural women there was a sharp increase in reported emotional violence prevalence from 35.52% to 51.05%, while KPK urban women saw a reduction from 49.52% to 35.97%. Physical violence among KPK rural women remained high, shifting slightly from 39.21% (2012–13) to 37.57% (2017–18), whereas KPK urban women reported a substantial drop from 52.91% to 24.58% in the same period. However, among all provinces, KPK stands out with both the highest or among the highest rates of emotional and physical partner violence, with these risks being especially pronounced among rural women for emotional violence in the most recent data ([Shaikh, 2024](#)).

Context of FV among Pashtuns in Pakistan

Pashtun communities in Pakistan predominantly reside in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and parts of Balochistan, regions characterised by a deeply entrenched tribal code known as Pashtunwali. This cultural framework emphasises honor (nang) and dictates stringent gender roles, especially regarding women's behavior and social mobility. The prevailing patriarchal norms normalise FV as a disciplinary measure to preserve family honor and social order ([Iqbal et al., 2026](#)). Geographically, these communities are mostly rural and affected by ongoing conflicts, which exacerbate women's vulnerabilities by limiting their access to education, legal recourse, and social services ([Gondal et al., 2024](#)). The local justice system often operates through jirgas—tribal councils dominated by men—which frequently uphold patriarchal customs, often dismissing women's grievances ([Ahmed et al., 2024](#)). Women's subjugation is reinforced through socialisation processes that teach obedience and sacrifice, and deviations can invite severe repercussions including physical abuse and ostracism ([Aziz, 2022](#)). Despite these barriers, some women employ subtle resistance strategies to negotiate their agency within these restrictive environments. Pakistani Pashtuns follow a distinct cultural code with principles such as nang (honor), ghayrat/tureh (courage), loyalty, righteousness, and hospitality that define social order ([Jan et al., 2021](#)). The formal legal system interacts with tribal customary law, leading to a plural legal framework impacting how FV cases are addressed ([Khan, 2015](#); [Ledvinka & Donovan, 2023](#)).

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is based on patriarchal and religious standards that reflect significant structural inequalities in the country. As a result of this prevailing gendered power, men enjoy a disproportionate number of privileges ([Murshid, 2017](#)) and they are the ultimate arbiters of women's rights and sexuality ([Lodhia, 2014](#)). The perpetuation of the perception of women's psychological inferiority is reinforced by a patriarchal perspective on gender roles ([Amir-ud-Din et al., 2021](#); [Ullah & Naz, 2017](#)).

FV is a serious problem in Pakistan, and women of all socioeconomic backgrounds are at risk ([Amir-ud-Din et al., 2021](#)). This study also analysed the data from the Pakistan Demographic Health Survey (2012–13). Feminist scholars have argued that gender-based violence is in part attributable to oppressive patriarchal systems ([Davis, 2023](#); [Hadi, 2017](#)) in which men are perceived as inherently superior to women ([Kgatla, 2020](#)). Researchers ([Alsawalqa et al., 2021](#); [Cooper-White, 2011](#); [Walby, 1990](#)) have further argued that violence is a societal mechanism used by men to oppress women in order to maintain their authority and traditional power structures. FV has other causes related to traditional patriarchal and cultural

practices such as child marriage which, in comparison to adult marriage, was found to be significantly related to higher rates of spousal violence ([Nasrullah et al., 2014](#)).

Previous studies have investigated the phenomenon of FV within the Pashtun community of Pakistan. For example, [Dadras et al. \(2021\)](#) conducted twenty-seven in-depth interviews in six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The research revealed that women in Malakand were subjected to psychological and emotional violence, often driven by unreasonable masculine behaviour. Those who were homemakers experienced anxiety, stress, and emotional disorders as a result of men's violent and unreasonable actions.

Other researchers have explored the specific role of patriarchal value systems in the incidence of FV. [Qasim \(2023\)](#) investigated non-compliance with domestic violence laws in the district of Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study found that the patriarchal way of life, culture, norms, traditions and even the translation of Islamic faith for personal benefit were the major reasons for the non-compliance with laws which sought to prevent domestic violence against women. [Sanauddin et al. \(2015\)](#) examined patriarchal systems within Pashtun patriarchy. The study highlighted how gender relations in the Pashtun ethnic group in northwest Pakistan were constrained by traditions and norms like seclusion, family dynamics, and cultural practices of the veil and confinement within the home which limited women's participation in broader society.

Another qualitative study examined patriarchal oppression, focusing on Pashtun women in Pakistan's Swat Valley ([Wahyono, 2021](#)). It identified cultural dominance, powerlessness, exploitation, violence, and marginalisation as forms of oppression. The regime of General Zia's government and Taliban rules were said to have contributed to this oppression, marginalising Pashtun women and enforcing strict gender roles. Cultural traditions, favouring sons over daughters, have exacerbated the issue.

Context of FV among Pashtuns in Afghanistan

Pashtun populations in Afghanistan predominantly live along the Afghan-Pakistan border and are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan ([Saikal, 2010](#)). The Pashtun cultural code, Pashtunwali, is similarly central to social organisation, placing high importance on honor (nang), chastity, and patriarchal authority ([Afrouz et al., 2023](#)). Women experience profound socio-economic dependence on men, shaped by entrenched patriarchal norms and cultural expectations, including strict gender roles and seclusion practices (purdah) that restrict women's mobility and social participation ([Jan et al., 2021](#); [Saeed, 2012](#)). The ongoing conflict,

weak governance, and Taliban influence increase women's vulnerability to FV ([Akbery et al., 2022](#)). Traditional justice via tribal councils and customary law perpetuates gender inequalities and enforces the social discipline of violence ([Shams-ur-Rehman, 2015](#)). Geographic isolation and insecurity further limit women's access to education, healthcare, and legal protections, resulting in underreporting of abuse and inadequate formal support ([Afrouz et al., 2023](#)). Despite these oppressive circumstances, Afghan Pashtun women display resilience by leveraging cultural idioms and informal networks as forms of resistance.

[Gibbs et al. \(2018\)](#) conducted a cross-sectional study and found 11.8% of married Afghan women reported having experienced emotional IPV while 23.1% experienced both physical and emotional IPV. [Stokes et al. \(2016\)](#) investigated abuse and care seeking among Afghan women victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in Afghanistan. Thematic analysis revealed that the women had experienced diverse forms of abuse. While most sought medical treatment for abuse-related health issues, fewer than half disclosed abuse to healthcare providers or were asked about the context of their injuries. In addition to adherence to traditional gender roles, there is a high prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) towards married Afghan women, including physical, emotional, and sexual violence. This further highlights the continued violation of women's rights and violence against women in Afghanistan ([Shinwari et al., 2022](#)). The study found that over half (55.54%) of Afghan women reported experiencing some form of IPV from their intimate partners, with physical violence being the most prevalent, affecting 50.52% of participants.

[Afrouz et al. \(2021a, 2021b\)](#); [Afrouz et al. \(2023\)](#) examined the perceptions and personal experiences of domestic violence in a group of Pashtun women who relocated to Australia from Afghanistan. They explored Afghan women's encounters with domestic violence and their beliefs about the prevalence of domestic violence within the Afghan community in Australia. The research included semi-structured interviews with 21 Afghan women who had resided in Australia for between six months and a decade. The researchers found that participants who faced domestic violence were victims of abuse by their spouses. Moreover, as some participants stayed with relatives and in-laws in Australia, family members and in-laws also engaged in violence in certain situations. [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) investigated newly arrived Afghan women's perceptions of domestic violence and its acceptability. They reported that participants possessed a strong understanding of domestic violence and rejected its normalisation or acceptability. The analysis suggested a comprehensive awareness among informants regarding various forms of violence against women. Furthermore, [Afrouz et al.](#)

(2023) investigated barriers to seeking help for domestic violence among newly arrived Afghan women in Australia.

No study to date has specifically focused on the instances of FV experienced by Pashtun women from the Parachinar region of Pakistan and examined the potential shifts in FV occurrences among their spouses following resettlement. Although some research has addressed FV within this population in Pakistan, and a limited number of studies have explored Pashtun women who migrated to Australia from Afghanistan, these investigations have yet to thoroughly examine critical dimensions such as changes in spouse attitudes post-resettlement, the subsequent impact on children, and the adequacy as well as perceptions of available support systems. This study aims to fill these significant gaps by providing an in-depth exploration of FV within Pashtun communities across migration contexts, thereby offering valuable insights into the cultural continuities and transformations shaping experiences and responses to FV.

As a young scholar from the Pashtun community in Pakistan, the researcher has a personal connection to the issue of FV, having witnessed the suffering of her mother and other women in her community who were victims of FV. These early experiences deeply influenced her commitment to investigating this pervasive problem, aiming to shed light on the serious and often deadly consequences women face. Previously, the researcher herself was a victim of domestic violence and had to escape her in-laws' house to start anew in Australia with her husband. This personal history provides her with empathy and insight into the plight of survivors, although she critically mitigates potential biases through the involvement of a trusted friend reviewing her questions and participant responses. Through this study, she endeavors to raise awareness about gendered violence toward married women within her community and advocates for meaningful social change.

Aim and Research Questions

The overall aim of this study was to explore Pashtun women's understanding and experiences of FV which occurred when they were living in Khyber PukhtunKhwa Pakistan. It sought to examine the systemic, structural and cultural factors that contributed to FV in Pashtun families. It also examined the support systems available to women. The study's research questions were:

1. What is the level of awareness and understanding of FV among Pashtun women?
2. What are the causes of FV within the Pashtun community?
3. What is the impact of FV on the participants and their children?

4. What support systems are available for Pashtun women, and what are potential modifications to enhance their effectiveness in addressing FV?

Scope

This qualitative study explored Pashtun women's lived experience of FV. Pashtun women living in Melbourne, Australia, who had past experiences of FV while residing in Khyber PukhtunKhwa, Pakistan participated in the study. The researcher recruited participants by utilising her wide professional connections and implementing the snowball sampling method. The semi-structured interviews were carried out in the participant's native language (Urdu/Pashtu), which was also the primary language of the researcher. This study adopts Social Ecological Model (SEM) developed by [Heise \(1998\)](#) to explore the causes and impacts of FV, which builds on [Bronfenbrenner \(1977\)](#) Ecological Systems Theory. While Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises the interaction of individuals with multiple layers of their social environment, providing a foundation for analysing complex social phenomena through interconnected systems, Heise's model specifically adapts this framework to focus on violence against women (VAW), particularly intimate partner violence (IPV).

Significance of Study

Although there has been previous research examining FV in the Pashtun community, there is relatively limited research exploring the lived experiences of women who have been impacted by FV whilst in Pakistan and who subsequently migrated to Australia. There is also limited research that has adopted a socio-ecological framework to explore Pashtun women's understandings and experiences of FV. Adopting a socio-ecological framework in this study allowed an examination of the systemic, structural and cultural factors that contribute to FV in Pashtun families. It also explored the impacts of FV and what was needed to help inform culturally appropriate support for Pashtun women and strategies for addressing FV.

This study gives voice to experiences of Pashtun women who have experienced FV, and it will potentially contribute to better understanding of the underlying causes of FV in the Pashtun community and can guide efforts to help prevent FV in this community.

Thesis Overview

The present study is structured into five chapters. This section provides an overview of the contents of each chapter.

Chapter 1: In this chapter, the context of the study, the problem statement, aims, scope, and significance of the study are presented. It also provides an overview of each of the subsequent chapters in the thesis.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature: This chapter presents a critical review of the literature on FV, with a focus on FV in Pakistan and specifically the Pashtun community. It presents an overview of conceptualisations and definitions of FV, followed by a review of theories on its potential causes of. Since no single theory can adequately explain FV because it is multi-faceted, key theoretical frameworks are presented and reviewed. In the next sections of the chapter, a review of literature is presented which examines FV in Pakistan and its causes and preventative factors. This is followed by a review of literature that specifically examines FV in the Pashtun community. Finally, the chapter provides the rationale for adopting [Heise \(1998\)](#)'s Social Ecological Model (SEM) as the most suitable framework for exploring the study's aims and research questions, which builds on [Bronfenbrenner \(1977\)](#) Ecological Systems Theory.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology:

This chapter describes the qualitative research methodology employed in the current study. It provides the rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach to explore the participants' lived experiences. It also outlines the specific research strategy, data collection methods, and analytical techniques.

The next section provides an in-depth description of the participants and recruitment strategy. The final two sections of the chapter outline the data analysis approach and steps to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the analysis process. As this study used thematic analysis, this approach is outlined to indicate how the themes were arrived at through the analysis process.

Chapter 4: Finding and Discussion: This chapter presents key findings regarding Pashtun women's experiences and perceptions of FV. This study identified several themes that illustrate the lived experience of women in the Pashtun community regarding FV.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: This chapter provides an overview of the main conclusions in relation to the overall aims of the research and research questions. It also outlines potential limitations of the study and key contributions and recommendations for better supporting Pashtun women who experience FV, as well as strategies to help prevent FV.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of literature on FV, with a focus on FV in Pakistan and specifically the Pashtun community. It provides an overview of conceptualisations and definitions of FV, followed by a review of theories on the potential causes of FV. As no single theory can adequately explain FV because it is a complex and multi-faceted issue, key theoretical frameworks are reviewed. In the next section of the chapter a review of the literature on FV in Pakistan and its causes and preventative factors is presented. This is followed by a review of the literature on FV in the Pashtun community. The chapter concludes with a rationale for adopting the socio-ecological framework to explore the study's aims and research questions.

Definition of Domestic violence and FV

The terms "domestic violence", "FV", "spousal violence", and "intimate partner violence" are frequently used to characterise acts of violence against women that take place within the household ([Hindin et al. \(2008\)](#)). The World Health Organisation (WHO) has defined spousal violence as:

“Violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence 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 in private life ([WHO \(1993, p. 2\)](#)).

Similarly, [WHO \(1997\)](#) defined intimate partner violence (IPV) “as a range of sexually, psychologically, and physically coercive acts used against women by current or former male intimate partners”. In contrast to the definitions of intimate partner violence, [Gelles and Straus \(1979\)](#) defined FV as “...the action of a family member that will very likely cause physical pain to another family member”. The Family Law Act of Australia provides a broader definition of FV which includes any violent or threatening behaviour by a family member that causes fear or seeks to coerce or control another family member (Family Law Act, [\(1975\)](#)),

section 4AB). This study uses the term FV to refer to acts of violence perpetrated against women by various family members, including intimate partners, parents, and in-laws.

FV Theories

FV is a complex phenomenon that cannot be sufficiently explained by any single theory due to its multifaceted nature ([Naz & Malik, 2018](#)). This argument is further supported by [Riger and Krieglstein \(2000\)](#), who stated that the phenomena of FV is considered complex because of numerous causal factors. A comprehensive review of all FV theories is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, key theoretical frameworks will be critically reviewed. These theories include social exchange theory, psychological theories, feminist theories, and ecological frameworks.

Social exchange theory ([Thibaut & Kelley, 1959](#)) focuses on the decision-making processes within relationships, where individuals weigh the costs and benefits of their interactions. For example, in a relationship marked by FV, a partner might decide to stay in an abusive situation because they perceive the benefits (such as financial support or cultural expectations) outweigh the emotional or physical costs. However, [King \(2012\)](#) critiques this theory by asserting that it does not account for broader systemic factors such as cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality or institutional barriers such as a lack of legal support for victims of domestic abuse. [Hamby \(2013\)](#) offered a further critique of social exchange theory within the context of IPV, which focused on how it may overlook the emotional and psychological complexities of abusive relationships. She further argues that social exchange theory, with its emphasis on rational decision-making processes and cost-benefit analyses, fails to fully account for the psychological manipulation, fear, and trauma experienced by victims of IPV.

In contrast, psychological theories, such as attachment theory and trauma theory ([Bowlby, 1982](#); [Finkelhor & Browne, 1985](#)) and social learning theory. For example, social learning theory, proposed by [Bandura \(1973\)](#), offers valuable insights into the transmission of violent behaviour across generations..

Attachment theory posits that the emotional bonds formed between infants and their primary caregivers create the foundation for psychological development and relational patterns throughout life. Secure attachments are formed when caregivers are sensitive and available to children's needs, while insecure or disorganised attachments can emerge in abusive, neglectful, or violent home environments. These early relational patterns influence future capacity for intimacy, trust, and emotional regulation ([Bowlby, 1982](#)). This theory has been widely applied

in research on FV, revealing that children exposed to IPV or parental abuse often develop insecure or disorganised attachment styles, leading to difficulties in trust and emotional regulation in later relationships ([Gustafsson, 2016](#)). However, critics note that attachment theory sometimes underestimates the role of cultural and environmental factors that shape FV dynamics ([Flaherty & Sadler, 2011](#)).

Trauma theory explains how exposure to acute or chronic traumatic experiences—including FV—can seriously disrupt psychological, behavioral, and cognitive functioning. The impact of trauma is contextualised through concepts such as betrayal, helplessness, and complex stress responses, which can manifest as depression, anxiety, dissociation, and difficulties in forming secure attachments or relationships in adulthood ([Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2005](#)).

Social learning theory asserts that aggressive and violent behaviors are learned through observation and imitation of role models—particularly within the family context ([Bandura & Walters, 1977](#)). Children who observe violence among family members or peers are more likely to internalise such behaviors and may reproduce them later in life. The theory emphasises the importance of reinforcement and modelling in supporting the transmission of violent attitudes and actions across generations ([Bandura, 1973](#)). Social learning theory is supported by robust evidence showing that children exposed to violence are at heightened risk for aggressive and antisocial behavior ([Khadka, 2024](#)). Nonetheless, [Sellers and Akers \(2018\)](#) have critiqued the explanatory power of this theory, arguing that not all exposed children reproduce violence, suggesting the influence of resilience, broader social forces, and individual agency. The theory also tends to overlook the complexity added by internal psychological processes and diverse cultural norms ([Wareham et al., 2009](#)).

The cycle of violence theory, developed by [Walker \(1979\)](#), describes a recurring pattern within abusive relationships that typically involves three phases: the tension-building stage, the acute violent incident, and a honeymoon or contrition phase. This sequence repeats, with violent episodes generally increasing in severity and the interval between them shrinking over time. The model helps explain why victims may remain in abusive relationships, highlighting mechanisms such as periods of kindness and apology (honeymoon phase) that can foster hope and attachment, as well as the effect of learned helplessness. Walker's theory was pivotal in changing perceptions—challenging the view that victims stay out of masochism or pathology—and instead focusing attention on the cyclical, manipulative nature of abuse and its psychological impacts ([Wilson, 2025](#)).

This cyclical pattern of violence also reflects deeper structural issues of power and control within intimate relationships. Feminist theories provide a critical framework to understand FV as rooted in gendered power imbalances rather than isolated incidents, explaining how coercion and domination perpetuate cycles of abuse. Feminist theory is not monolithic but consists of multiple perspectives—such as black feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, lesbian feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist/materialist feminism, socialist feminism, and postmodern feminism—each with unique explanations for women’s oppression and strategies for empowerment ([Mohajan, 2022](#)). Core assumptions include the centrality of gender to social life, the embeddedness of women’s oppression in social structures (not just individual attitudes), and a focus on power disparities and social change. Many strands analyse intersections with race, class, and sexuality, emphasising local and relational knowledge and the importance of valuing women's lived experience as a basis for theorising and activism ([Lay & Daley, 2007](#)).

Feminist research on FV fundamentally reframes it as a product of patriarchal power rather than private conflict. [Dobash and Dobash \(1979\)](#) emphasised that violence against wives reflects systemic male dominance enforced by legal, religious, and cultural norms that legitimise control and minimise women's experiences. Their work demonstrated that domestic violence is deeply gendered, rooted in coercive control rather than mutual conflict. Later, [Johnson \(2011\)](#) refined this perspective with a typology distinguishing coercive, controlling "intimate terrorism"—primarily men’s violence against women—from situational couple violence, often more gender-symmetric but less severe. This distinction addresses empirical contradictions, showing feminism’s core claim that the most damaging forms of FV are tied to gendered power inequalities. Feminist research methodology stresses centring women’s experiences, empowering participants, and challenging hierarchical researcher-subject relationships, often employing qualitative, participatory, or mixed methods to capture the nuanced realities of violence while advancing social justice. Together, these approaches situate FV within broader structures of gender and power, shaping feminist theory, policy, and intervention strategies in this arena.

Feminist analysis revealed gendered assumptions operating in legal and restorative contexts. By interviewing women undergoing IVF, [Denny \(1994\)](#) explored the intersection of reproductive technology and radical feminism. Diverse experiences and views emerged regarding power, control, and pro-natalism, demonstrating how radical feminist critiques both illuminate and are sometimes resisted in such contexts.

[Connell \(1994\)](#) theory of gender and power examines the social structures that sustain gender relations, including the sexual division of labor, power, and cathexis. It posits that gender is a historically constructed pattern of power that shapes social structures and defines masculinity and femininity. The sexual division of labor refers to the roles and responsibilities assigned to each gender in both paid and unpaid work. The sexual division of power addresses how authority and control are distributed, including in institutions and domestic settings. Cathexis involves the emotional and social attachments that define appropriate masculine and feminine behaviors. Connell's concept of "gender order" describes how these structures maintain the gender relations in society. The theory also introduces the notion of hegemonic masculinity, which represents the dominant, socially constructed form of masculinity used to legitimise male dominance.

In contrast, the ecological framework developed by [Bronfenbrenner \(1977\)](#) emphasises the interconnectedness between individuals and their social environment. It identifies multiple nested layers of influence, including the microsystem (individual's immediate environment), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (external environments indirectly affecting the individual), macrosystem (cultural context), and chronosystem (changes over time). However, its broad scope can make it challenging to apply in practice and may overlook individual agency and accountability ([Neal & Neal, 2013](#)). It has also been argued that Bronfenbrenner's ecological model can oversimplify complex interactions and fail to consider dynamic changes over time ([Neal & Neal, 2013](#)). Critics also assert that it may not adequately address the role of power dynamics and structural inequalities in shaping environments ([Coll & Magnuson, 2012](#); [Swick & Williams, 2006](#)).

Despite these critiques, it is argued that an ecological framework is essential when trying to understand multi-level causes of FV. Various factors can impact FV, making it a difficult phenomenon to study. Personal, economic, political, and cultural variables can all have a role ([Khan et al., 2009](#)). To fully understand the phenomenon of FV, a conceptual framework must be capable of addressing a wide range of factors at multiple levels and be able to connect these levels when necessary ([Khan et al., 2009](#); [Tekkas Kerman & Betrus, 2020](#)). Therefore, an ecological framework will be used in this study.

Since [Bronfenbrenner's \(1977\)](#) Ecological Systems Theory emphasises the interaction of individuals with multiple layers of their social environment, it established a foundation for analysing complex social phenomena through nested and interconnected systems. Heise's Social Ecological Model (SEM) builds on and adapts Bronfenbrenner's framework by specifically focusing on violence against women (VAW), and particularly intimate partner

violence (IPV), highlighting how personal, relational, community, and societal factors combine to create risk and protective environments for abuse. As this study seeks to understand FV through multiple, layered influences rather than isolated individual or cultural factors, Heise's SEM is adopted as the primary analytic framework... Her model specifically highlights the dynamic interaction between personal vulnerabilities, such as socioeconomic status and cultural norms, and external factors, including community resources and societal attitudes towards violence.

FV in Pakistan

FV is a serious problem in Pakistan, and women of all socioeconomic backgrounds are at risk ([Amir-ud-Din et al., 2021](#)). Feminist scholars have argued that gender-based violence is in part attributable to oppressive patriarchal systems ([Davis, 2023](#); [Hadi, 2017](#)) in which men are perceived to be inherently superior to women ([Kgatla, 2020](#)). Researchers such as [Alsawalqa et al. \(2021\)](#); [Cooper-White \(2011\)](#); [Walby \(1990\)](#) have further argued that violence is a societal mechanism used by men to oppress women in order to maintain their authority and traditional power structures. FV has other causes related to traditional patriarchal and cultural practices such as child marriages. Child marriage, in comparison to adult marriage, has been found to be related to higher rates of spousal violence ([Nasrullah et al., 2014](#)).

Patriarchal societies around the world place high importance on family honor and traditional gender roles. In addition, in a patriarchal society, women are often devalued and treated as "objects" rather than "subjects" ([Lashari, 2023](#)). The perpetuation of the perception of women's psychological inferiority is reinforced by a patriarchal perspective on gender roles ([Amir-ud-Din et al., 2021](#); [Ullah & Naz, 2017](#)). The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is deeply based on patriarchal and religious standards that reflect significant structural inequalities in the country. As a result of the gendered power disparities in Pakistani society, men enjoy a disproportionate number of privileges ([Murshid, 2017](#)) and they are the ultimate arbiters of women's rights and sexuality ([Lodhia, 2014](#)).

The United Nations Sustainable Development Framework for Pakistan ([UNSDf, 2018-2022](#)) found that gender inequalities persist in the accessibility of education throughout Pakistan. On the World Economic Forum's Gender Inequality Index, Pakistan in 2024 was ranked 145th out of 146 countries([Channar et al., 2019](#)). This gender imbalance is also apparent in the incidence of gendered violence.

Approximately 90 percent of women in Pakistan are said to experience FV in their lifetime, with the most common types of abuse being hitting, punching, and kicking (Human

Rights Commission, (2019). One in every four women is subjected to emotional, physical, or sexual assault on a regular basis, amounting to eight million women every year in both public and private life (UNFPA, 2020). In addition, more than 80% of Pakistani women have been psychologically abused at some point in their lives, according to a study based on an urban sample from the country's capital city (Ali, Asad, et al., 2011). Women in Pakistan who participated in a national household study on domestic abuse revealed that one third of 23,430 women had been physically assaulted by a loved one at least once (Shaikh, 2016). Over 83,000 cases of violence against women were unresolved at Punjab's Top Court at the close of 2019, according to Khatri (2020), while the provincial court was still dealing with 177,880 cases filed across Pakistan. Very high gender-based assault acquittal rates testify to inadequate application of laws and ineffective prosecution (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, (2019).

FV against women and girls is a top issue, according to UNFPA Pakistan Country Representative Lina Mousa, especially in view of the COVID-19 crisis, the Sustainable Development Goals for Pakistan, and the Program of Actions (UNFPA, 2020). Hence, Pakistan has been working hard to modify its marriage rules in order to help minimise domestic violence. For example, one such attempt is known as the FV (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2012 (Zakar et al., 2016). This legislation makes violence against women and children a crime, subject to imprisonment and monetary penalties. However, researchers have found that many Pakistani women do not consider domestic abuse to be a crime (Andersson et al., 2010), and women who disclose assault face the consequences of losing their children and living under constant terror from the husband's family (Tabassum, 2016).

In addition, Pakistani women residing in rural regions face heightened susceptibility to violence due to their comparatively disadvantaged social status and limited knowledge regarding their legal entitlements (Zakar et al., 2016). Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social factors all have a role in the incidence of domestic violence experienced by married rural women (Zakar et al., 2016). Peek-Asa et al. (2011) contend that the factors contributing to domestic violence in rural areas encompass the poorer social status of rural women, their low literacy rates, and their limited understanding of their legal and societal responsibilities. Rural women also face barriers that limit their ability to expand their capability and access to economic resources, leaving them largely reliant on men for their basic needs (Koenig et al., 2003). They can also be physically isolated and lack community support and legal resources if they become victims of domestic violence (Krishnan et al., 2001).

Factors Contributing to FV

This section discusses how traditional beliefs, cultural, religious, social, economic, ecological, and familial factors contribute to or may help prevent the occurrence of FV. Given the limited research on FV specifically within Pashtun communities, this section reviews studies that have investigated the factors contributing to FV in Muslim societies, particularly in Pakistan and Afghanistan, where Pashtuns predominantly reside.

Religious Factors, Traditional and Cultural Factors

The complex relationship between religion, patriarchy, tradition, and culture contributes to and exacerbates women's subjugation ([Aghtaie, 2016](#)). Religion is a significant component in people's life since it encourages a certain philosophy that instructs individuals on how to live ([Ram, 2004](#)). In addition, religious institutions can play an important role in shaping the views and values of individuals ([Alkhateeb et al., 2001](#)).

Many people are impacted by religious ideas, customs, and sacred books ([Alkhateeb et al., 2001](#)). However, there is a misunderstanding about women being compelled to be restricted under Islam, which is the primary religion of Pakistan. Islam does not restrict women's education, empowerment or liberty ([Khatri, 2020](#)). However, in the context of FV, religion may sometimes be used to excuse violence, as evident in cases where perpetrators justify their actions by citing religious texts or interpretations that condone male dominance and control over women. For example, some interpretations of religious doctrine have been used to rationalise spousal abuse, arguing that it is a husband's duty to maintain control over his wife. In contrast, religion can also be used to manage FV and offer healing for women who are FV victims, as observed in many faith-based programs where religious leaders provide counselling and support to victims of FV, encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation. Moreover, religious organisations have also often played an important role in supporting women to leave abusive situations or seek emotional and spiritual healing ([Nason-Clark et al., 2018](#)).

In addition to religious factors, cultural norms in Pakistan prioritise family honour and traditional gender roles, often using women's sexuality and independence to maintain patriarchal control over them, a pattern commonly found in faith-based communities ([Ali, Krantz, et al., 2011](#)). Women's subjugation is achieved through a complex web of socio-political and economic arrangements in both public and private places, as well as widespread violence against women and a culture of fear ([Murshid, 2017](#)). According to Fikree et al. (2005) patriarchal concept that males have greater authority and privilege than women has persisted throughout history. Honor cultures value a family's social standing ([Brown, 2014](#)), and females

and males are expected to follow rigid gender norms which are collectivist and patriarchal ([Rivera et al., 2008](#)). Women must demonstrate their worth to their male relatives by demonstrating loyalty, humility, absolute acquiescence, and submissiveness. Men, in contrast, gain honor by acting strong and, if necessary, use aggressive action to maintain or restore their own and, by extension, their family's honourable reputation ([Vandello & Cohen, 2003](#)).

In addition, the collectivist cultural system supports an ideology in which community and family urge married women to submit to their husband's authority, support his decisions, tolerate his acts, and remain faithful ([Vandello & Cohen, 2003](#)). In Indo-Pak tribal and rural societies, women have always been viewed as men's property. A woman's role has been one of submission, of serving as a commodity, and of being sacrificed for the benefit of man-made principles ([Niaz, 2013](#)). Traditionally marriages were arranged to maintain political and tribal harmony. Similar customs persist today, with many families refusing to allow their daughters to marry outside the family, fearing that it could result in the loss of ancestral property.

As a result of religious and cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and financial and emotional reliance, women may be forced to tolerate and may even rationalise domestic abuse ([Koenig et al., 2006](#)). Cultural traditions may also contribute to the reluctance of women disclosing and seeking help to leave an abusive relationship. Domestic violence is regarded as a private concern in Pakistani society, as it happens within the family, and hence is not an acceptable target for evaluation, intervention, or policy reform ([Fikree & Bhatti, 1999](#)). [Afrouz et al. \(2020\)](#) conducted a critical systematic review to identify barriers faced by Muslim women in disclosing abuse and seeking help. Twenty-one relevant studies were included and revealed barriers categorised into social context, family context, individual factors, and expectations of service providers. The findings highlighted the complex interplay of factors influencing Muslim women's ability to disclose abuse and access support services. These cultural norms further limit strategies to help prevent FV.

Social, Socio-demographic and Legal Factors

Socio-demographic and legal factors have also been found to contribute to FV in Pakistan communities. According to the World Bank (2011), 63 percent of Pakistan's population lives in rural regions, and rural women face a higher risk of FV than their urban counterparts ([Zakar et al., 2016](#)). Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social variables are likely to have a role in the aetiology of FV among married rural women. They have a lower social status, a lower literacy rate, and are less aware of their social and legal rights ([Zakar et al., 2016](#)). Rural women lack capacity-building opportunities and access to economic resources as a result

of structural obstacles, and are typically reliant on males for day-to-day subsistence ([Koenig et al., 2003](#)). They are also at times physically isolated and lack community assistance and legal resources if they become victims of domestic violence ([Krishnan et al., 2001](#)). Furthermore, cultural support of violence against women tends to be stronger in rural regions, especially in situations of disobedience, suspected infidelity, or demonstrating disrespect to her in-laws ([Bogal-Allbritten & Daughaday, 1990](#)).

[Zakar et al. \(2016\)](#) argued that Pakistan's current legislation for defining and combating VAW, especially domestic violence (DV), is comprehensive and includes several legal tools. The current legal protection of women from violence includes the Constitution, the Penal Code, and other legislation issued by the government. When it comes to domestic abuse against women, children, or other vulnerable individuals, the Domestic Violence (Prevention & Protection) Act 2012 has been a big step forward. The legislation can impose criminal penalties for acts of physical, sexual, psychological, and financial abuse ([Zakar et al., 2016](#)). While women in Pakistan now have legal protection against this type of abuse, the structural and administrative limitations of the law enforcement system prevent it from being fully applied ([Critelli, 2010](#)).

The legal system in Afghanistan has failed to effectively combat violence against women and children ([Qazi Zada, 2021](#)). The country's legal framework, including the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW), has not been able to address the mounting challenges on the ground ([Basu, 2023](#); [Hakimi, 2020](#)). The use of mediation in criminal cases and violations perpetrated by State agents have hindered Afghan women's quest for justice, making it increasingly problematic ([Hakimi, 2020](#)). The personalised and hierarchical politics surrounding law making and legal practices have also limited the transformative impact of efforts to combat violence against women ([Wimpelmann, 2015](#)). Moreover, existing sexual ideologies have rarely been challenged leading to the arrest and prosecution of women for actions such as "escaping" from home or "attempted" adultery ([Akbari et al., 2022](#)).

Familial Factors: The Role of In-laws

The role of familial factors in the incidence of FV has received relatively limited research attention. However, studies by [Hyder et al. \(2007\)](#) in Pakistan and [Gangoli and Rew \(2011\)](#) in India have investigated this issue. [Gangoli and Rew \(2011\)](#) found a notable disparity between the United Kingdom and India in terms of the gender breakdown of domestic violence perpetrators. Specifically, data from Indian research suggested that between 33% to 40% of

domestic violence incidents involved individuals beyond the couple, encompassing female relatives of the husband who assume the role of perpetrators or instigators of violence ([Gangoli & Rew, 2011](#)). This was in contrast to the UK, where a far higher proportion, 92% of domestic violence incidents involved male perpetrators ([Garbett et al., 2022](#)).

[Hyder et al. \(2007\)](#) further explored the role of in-laws in perpetuating FV. They interviewed 20 women and 20 health workers from an Afghan refugee camp. Most of the women interviewed had joint families with their husbands' families. Despite the potential benefits of living in a joint family, the negative aspects such as rivalry for resources and overcrowding in the house were frequently highlighted as sources of conflict. Specifically, it appeared that sisters-in-law played a major role in familial tensions and conflict. It was often preceded by disagreements about shared household tasks or allocation of resources among their children, as well as fights among their children. This conflict was primarily verbal, with rare outbreaks of physical violence ([Hyder et al., 2007](#)).

Researchers such as [Gangoli and Rew \(2011\)](#); [Hyder et al. \(2007\)](#); [Olutola \(2012\)](#) have explored the role of mothers-in-law in the perpetration of FV. [Hyder et al. \(2007\)](#) found that mother-in-law and daughter-in-law disagreements were reported to be quite common in their study. These disagreements frequently arose from concerns about the quantity or quality of the daughter-in-law's domestic duties and could end in physical violence. [Gangoli and Rew \(2011\)](#) also investigated the involvement of mothers-in-law in instances of domestic violence. They found that many young Indian women faced violence from their mothers-in-law with some incidents resulting in death. [Gangoli and Rew \(2011\)](#) further reported that although some researchers have argued that violence may be dowry related, the violence that mothers-in-law perpetrated towards their daughters-in-law may be a form of violence that serves patriarchal interests and gives older women control over younger women. The mothers-in-law themselves may have been subjected to violence when they were younger or were even still being subjected to violence. Indeed, [Niaz \(2003\)](#) found that while in some collectivist societies elderly women are revered in comparison to younger women, this does not rule out the possibility of elderly women being mistreated.

In conclusion, religion was found to be a factor both contributing to and preventing FV ([Alkhateeb et al., 2001](#); [Khatri, 2020](#); [Nason-Clark et al., 2018](#); [Ram, 2004](#)). Moreover, cultural norms in Pakistan place significant importance on family honor and conventional gender roles, which puts women's sexuality and independence at the centre of men's subjugation of women, as is common in patriarchal faith-based communities ([Ali, Krantz, et al., 2011](#)). Because of religious and cultural norms, traditional gender roles, and

financial and emotional reliance, women may be forced to accept and even rationalise domestic abuse ([Kanwal Aslam et al., 2015](#); [Koenig et al., 2006](#)). Researchers have also identified socio-demographic, legal and familial factors related to the incidence of FV. This highlights the complexity of the issues to be considered in trying to address FV.

FV in Pashtun Communities

Pashtun women are governed by patriarchal social standards which feature stringent regulations of conduct, strict gender segregation, family and kinship patterns, and a strong ideology that links a family's reputation to female purity. The preservation of Pashtun patriarchy centres around the household system. To avoid public scrutiny, Pashtun women are primarily found in the chardivari (the home), where they are protected from the outside world ([Afridi et al., 2023](#); [Rizwan, 2023](#)). When women find it difficult to leave the house, it severely restricts their access to education, jobs, and political involvement in the public sphere.

A review of literature indicates that there are relatively limited studies examining FV among the Pashtun community. One recent study by [Dadras et al. \(2021\)](#) focused on examining the relationship between IPV and the unmet demand for family planning among a specific group of individuals. The participants of the study were married Afghan women aged between 18 and 49 years. The authors found that over 55% of the participants experienced IPV in the last 12 months and that Pashtun, Tajik, and Pashai ethnic groups were more likely to experience any form of violence compared to Turkmen, the reference group.

Researchers ([Daraz et al. \(2023\)](#); [Gibbs et al. \(2018\)](#); [Qasim \(2023\)](#); [Sanauddin et al. \(2015\)](#); [Stokes et al. \(2016\)](#); [\(Wahyono, 2021\)](#)) have sought to further explore FV in Pashtun communities. They examined the incidence and types of abuse faced by women. [Gibbs et al. \(2018\)](#) conducted a cross-sectional study and found 11.8% of married Afghan women reported having experienced emotional IPV while 23.1% experienced both physical and emotional IPV. [Stokes et al. \(2016\)](#) investigated abuse and care seeking among Afghan women victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in Afghanistan. Thematic analysis revealed that the women had experienced diverse forms of abuse. While most sought medical treatment for abuse-related health issues, fewer than half disclosed abuse to healthcare providers or were asked about the context of their injuries. [Daraz et al. \(2023\)](#) conducted twenty-seven in-depth interviews in six months of ethnographic fieldwork in Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The research revealed that women in Malakand were subjected to psychological and emotional violence, often driven by unreasonable masculine behaviour. Those who were homemakers experienced anxiety, stress, and emotional disorders as a result of men's violent and unreasonable actions.

Other researchers have explored the specific role of patriarchal value systems in the incidence of FV. [Qasim \(2023\)](#) investigated non-compliance with domestic violence laws in the district of Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study found that the patriarchal way of life, culture, norms, traditions and even the translation of Islamic faith for personal benefit were the major reasons for the non-compliance with laws which sought to prevent domestic violence against women. [Sanauddin et al. \(2015\)](#) examined patriarchal systems within Pashtun patriarchy. The study highlighted how gender relations in the Pashtun ethnic group in northwest Pakistan were constrained by traditions and norms like seclusion, family dynamics, and cultural practices of the veil and confinement within the home which limited women's participation in broader society.

Another qualitative study examined patriarchal oppression, focusing on Pashtun women in Pakistan's Swat Valley ([Wahyono, 2021](#)). It identified cultural dominance, powerlessness, exploitation, violence, and marginalisation as forms of oppression. The regime of General Zia's government and Taliban rules were said to have contributed to this oppression, marginalising Pashtun women and enforcing strict gender roles. Cultural traditions, favouring sons over daughters, have exacerbated the issue.

[Afrouz et al. \(2021a, 2021b, 2023\)](#) examined the perceptions and personal experiences of domestic violence in a group of Pashtun women who relocated to Australia from the Khuber PukhtunKhwa, Pakistan. They explored Afghan women's encounters with domestic violence and their beliefs about the prevalence of domestic violence within the Afghan community in Australia. The research included semi-structured interviews with 21 Afghan women who had resided in Australia for between six months and a decade. The researchers found that participants who faced domestic violence were victims of abuse by their spouses. Moreover, as some participants stayed with relatives and in-laws in Australia, family members and in-laws also engaged in violence in certain situations. [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) investigated newly arrived Afghan women's perceptions of domestic violence and its acceptability. They reported that participants possessed a strong understanding of domestic violence and rejected its normalisation or acceptability. The analysis suggested a comprehensive awareness among informants regarding various forms of violence against women. Furthermore, [Afrouz et al. \(2023\)](#) investigated barriers to seeking help for domestic violence among newly arrived Afghan women in Australia. Thematic analysis of the data identified cultural norms encouraging women to stay in marriages, pressure to uphold family reputation, personal circumstances, and experiences with available services as key barriers. The findings underscored the need for

policies and practices that acknowledge and address these barriers in a culturally sensitive manner.

The above studies, however, do have some limitations. They did not investigate the potential shifts in the attitudes of the spouses of Afghan women after their resettlement in Australia, nor did they explore the impact of FV on children. Moreover, the studies did not examine the participants' perspectives on the community support that they believe should be extended to women who experience FV. Therefore, there is a need for further research in this area; in particular, to further understand the complex interplay of societal, community and individual factors contributing to FV and how to best address this issue in a culturally appropriate manner.

Socio-Ecological Models

Socio-ecological models are frameworks used to understand the complex interactions between social systems and ecological systems. These models vary in complexity and focus, but they all aim to analyse how human activities and behaviour influence, and are influenced by, the natural environment ([Binder et al., 2013](#); [Liu et al., 2023](#)). The following section presents a discussion of some of the main socio-ecological models.

[Heise's \(1998\)](#) work is pivotal in the development and application of the SEM) in the context of VAW. Heise emphasises the importance of understanding intimate partner violence within a multi-level framework, acknowledging that factors at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels all contribute to the perpetuation of violence. Her model specifically highlights the dynamic interaction between personal vulnerabilities, such as socioeconomic status and cultural norms, and external factors, including community resources and societal attitudes towards violence. This comprehensive approach makes Heise's framework particularly valuable for analysing and addressing VAW, as it considers the broader environmental and systemic factors that contribute to the phenomenon. Heise's work serves as the foundation for many studies that have utilised SEM to explore and intervene in issues of VAW, making it an essential reference for this research. Heise's work adapts Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to study VAW, extending the broader framework of nested influences to focus specifically on intimate partner violence.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: [Bronfenbrenner's \(1977\)](#) theory emphasises the interconnectedness between individuals and their social environment. It

identifies multiple nested layers of influence, including the microsystem (individual's immediate environment), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (external environments indirectly affecting the individual), macrosystem (cultural context), and chronosystem (changes over time). This model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multi-level influences on individuals and their development and emphasises the importance of considering various environmental factors.

Resilience theory explores the ability of socio-ecological systems to absorb disturbances and adapt while maintaining key functions and structures. It examines factors that contribute to resilience at individual, community, and ecosystem levels, and seeks to understand how resilience can be fostered to address environmental and social challenges (Folke, 2006). It provides a useful framework for understanding and fostering adaptive capacity in socio-ecological systems and it also emphasises the importance of learning from and adapting to change (Walker et al., 2004). However, it is challenging to operationalise and measure resilience, leading to ambiguity in its application (Davidson, 2010). It is also argued that resilience can sometimes be used to justify maintaining unsustainable practices rather than addressing root causes of vulnerability (Olsson et al., 2004).

In contrast, The Human-Ecological Systems framework emphasises the reciprocal relationships between humans and their environment, viewing humans as both the drivers and products of ecological change. It examines how human activities such as land use, resource extraction, and pollution impact ecosystems, and how changes in ecosystems in turn affect human well-being (Redman, 1999). This framework's strengths are that it emphasises the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment, acknowledging the importance of understanding socio-ecological feedback loops. It also integrates social and ecological perspectives (Liu et al., 2007; Turner et al., 2003). However, this framework struggles to address the complexity of interactions within and between social and ecological systems (Walker et al., 2004). It can be challenging to apply in practice due to its broad scope and interdisciplinary nature (Ostrom, 2009).

Based on the review of the above Socio-Ecological Models and their applicability to the study's research aims, the researcher will employ the socio-ecological framework introduced by Heise (1998). This model is depicted in Figure 1 below. Various factors can impact FV, making it a difficult phenomenon to study. Personal, economic, political, and cultural variables can all have a role. To fully understand the phenomenon of FV, a conceptual framework must be capable of addressing a wide range of factors at multiple levels and be able

to connect these levels when necessary. This expands the study's scope and allows it to go beyond the interpretations and exploration of previous theories of the phenomenon of FV.

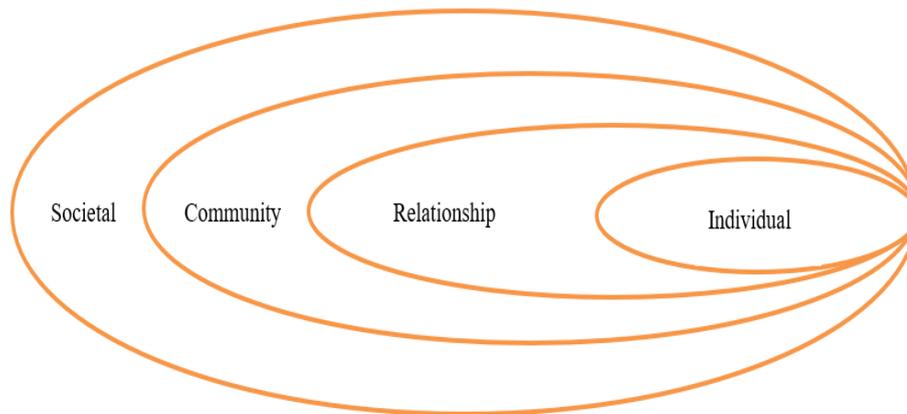


Figure 1: Socio-ecological Framework for Understanding FV

Source: [Heise \(1998\)](#)

Researchers ([Boodram \(2022\)](#); [Campbell et al. \(2009\)](#); [Hardesty and Ogolsky \(2020\)](#); [Khan et al. \(2009\)](#); [Ler et al. \(2020\)](#); [Tekkas Kerman and Betrus \(2020\)](#)) have used the socio-ecological framework to try to better understand FV. [Boodram's \(2022\)](#) study supports Heise's SEM in the context of VAW by emphasising the importance of addressing not just the victim, but the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts that contribute to FV. Boodram argues that traditional models, which focus solely on empowering victims, fail to address the systemic factors that perpetuate violence. Instead, the study advocates for an all-of-society approach, in which the SEM is applied to disrupt the individual, family, community, and societal systems that support violence. This aligns with Heise's theory, which emphasises multi-level interventions.

[Hardesty and Ogolsky \(2020\)](#) provide strong support for the SEM by demonstrating its applicability across multiple levels of IPV research. The study advances understanding of IPV at individual and relational levels but also emphasises the need for further exploration of community and sociocultural factors, highlighting gaps in the literature that Heise's model directly addresses. This supports the multi-level framework proposed by Heise and underscores the need for broader, multi-faceted interventions to tackle IPV. [Khan et al. \(2009\)](#) support the utility of the SEM by highlighting how factors at multiple levels—individual, family, community, and societal—contribute to the prevalence of intimate partner violence in Pakistan. The study links factors such as low education, cultural norms, and honor-related violence to IPV, demonstrating the relevance of Heise's model in addressing systemic, cultural, and

structural issues that sustain violence. Furthermore, the emphasis on interventions at all levels, including education, healthcare, and legal reforms, aligns with Heise's multi-level approach to addressing FV. The findings provide evidence of the model's applicability in the Pakistani context, particularly in addressing societal and cultural factors influencing IPV.

[Ler et al. \(2020\)](#) also strongly support the SEM by demonstrating how individual, relationship, community, and societal factors contribute to the prevalence of IPV among young women in India. The study highlights how socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and acceptance of IPV, as well as relationship dynamics (e.g., controlling behaviors and alcohol consumption), influence IPV outcomes. This provides clear evidence of the model's relevance in understanding the multi-dimensional causes of IPV. The study further supports Heise's framework by calling for multidisciplinary efforts to address IPV at all ecological levels, ensuring interventions are tailored to specific populations such as adolescents and young women.

[Tekkas Kerman and Betrus \(2020\)](#) also provide strong evidence for the applicability of the SEM in understanding VAW in Turkey. The study identifies a wide range of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors influencing VAW, providing a comprehensive overview of the structural, cultural, and personal determinants of violence. By synthesising existing literature and proposing multilevel prevention strategies, the study underscores the utility of Heise's framework in understanding and addressing VAW. The findings emphasise the need for integrated interventions at all ecological levels, from individual education and relationship support to societal reforms and legal changes. This further validates the applicability of the SEM in guiding effective prevention and intervention efforts. The goal of Socio-ecological theory is to have a better understanding of human behaviour and how it interacts with the environment. It also sees abuse/violence as a complex issue that has many facets ([Heise, 1998](#); [Khan et al., 2009](#)). Therefore, it is argued that it is a suitable framework for investigating FV in Pashtun communities.

Rationale

A review of the literature indicated that FV is a serious problem in Pakistan, and women of all socioeconomic backgrounds are at risk ([Amir-ud-Din et al., 2021](#)). Despite efforts to address FV through legislation such as the FV (Prevention and Protection) Act, cultural norms often prevent women from seeking help or disclosing abuse. Rural women face heightened vulnerability due to limited resources, social isolation, and lack of awareness about their legal rights [Zakar et al. \(2016\)](#), further exacerbating their susceptibility to domestic violence. Efforts

to combat FV in Pakistan require comprehensive strategies addressing cultural norms, legal enforcement, and support systems for victims.

Despite limited research on FV in the Pashtun community, studies reveal high rates of IPV, with psychological and emotional abuse being prevalent forms. Studies on Pashtun women's experiences of FV in Australia ([Afrouz et al., 2021a](#), [2021b](#); [Afrouz et al., 2023](#)) further highlight the need for culturally sensitive support services and policies to address the multifaceted barriers faced by victims. However, previous research has overlooked important aspects such as shifts in attitudes post-resettlement, impacts on children, and perspectives on necessary changes within the community. This study aimed to address these research gaps by employing a socio-ecological framework to explore Pashtun women's understandings and experiences of FV which occurred when they were living in Khuber PukhtunKhwa Pakistan. It sought to examine the systemic, structural and cultural factors that contributed to FV in Pashtun families. It also examined the support systems available to women.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the research approach adopted in this study. It outlines the rationale for selecting a qualitative methodology and discusses the sampling technique employed to recruit participants. It also presents the demographic profiles of the participants. This is followed by discussion of the procedures undertaken for data collection and analysis. Ensuring the rigor and trustworthiness of data in all qualitative research is important for maintaining the credibility and validity of the findings; therefore, this section discusses the rigor and trustworthiness of the data analysis and interpretation process. The final section focuses on ethical considerations, including measures adopted to safeguard the confidentiality of participants.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The present study utilised a qualitative research methodology, aligning with previous research investigating Pashtun women's experiences of FV conducted by [Afrouz \(2019\)](#); [Afrouz et al. \(2021a, 2021b\)](#); [Afrouz et al. \(2023\)](#). This study has also followed the guidelines provided in the World Health Organisation's ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women ([WHO, 2001](#)). Given that FV is a complex social phenomenon, qualitative methodology is well-suited to this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of women's lived experiences, their perceptions, and the meanings they attribute to their experiences of FV ([Grossoehme, 2014](#)).

This study is grounded in a constructivist epistemology, which posits that there is no single objective truth but rather multiple realities shaped by individual experiences. Consequently, the research embraces diverse perspectives by incorporating numerous participant quotes to represent these varied realities authentically ([Creswell & Poth, 2016](#)).

Although multiple qualitative methodologies are available, this study employed phenomenology due to its particular suitability for exploring lived experiences ([Moustakas, 1994](#)). Unlike grounded theory, which focuses on developing a theoretical model, this research sought to capture and interpret the essence of lived experiences rather than generate new theory ([Charmaz, 2006](#); [Glaser & Strauss, 2017](#)). Narrative inquiry centres on individual life stories and temporal sequences, whereas the present research aimed to identify commonalities and structures of meaning across multiple participants' experiences ([Riessman, 2008](#)). Phenomenology, therefore, was advantageous as it prioritises participants' subjective realities

and enables a deep exploration of shared meanings surrounding FV within the Pashtun community. This approach allowed the researcher to uncover how cultural and social contexts shape women's understanding and experiences of violence — a goal that was addressed through the adoption of a phenomenological methodology.

Edmund Husserl, often regarded as the founder of phenomenology, emphasised the study of structures of consciousness and the essences of lived experiences through a process of "bracketing" presuppositions to access phenomena as they appear in 1913 ([Husserl & Moran, 2012](#)). Martin Heidegger extended this framework by focusing on the ontological dimensions of human existence or "being-in-the-world," emphasising the contextual and interpretive nature of experience ([Heidegger, 1927](#)). More contemporary phenomenological scholars such as [Van Manen \(2016\)](#) and [Moustakas \(1994\)](#) emphasise the importance of grounding phenomenological enquiry in the lived experiences as narrated by individuals, aiming to capture the essence and meaning of these experiences.

This study employs a descriptive phenomenological approach, which seeks to describe and understand the essence of lived experiences as they are perceived by individuals. An essential component of this approach is bracketing, originally posited by Husserl in 1913 ([Husserl & Moran, 2012](#)), where the researcher sets aside personal preconceptions to approach the phenomenon with openness. This methodological step enables the capturing of phenomena as genuinely lived and experienced. It involves suspending judgment about external realities to focus on the subjective meanings presented by participants ([Moustakas, 1994](#)).

Phenomenology has been used in previous studies to explore participants' perspectives of FV. For instance, [Tedder and Smith \(2018\)](#) employed a phenomenological approach to investigate Black American clergy leaders' reactions to IPV against African American women, while [Sattar et al. \(2022\)](#) qualitative study gathered data through 46 in-depth interviews with married women who had experienced IPV in rural areas of South Punjab.

The theoretical framework that has guided this study is the socio-ecological framework developed by [Heise \(1998\)](#). As previously discussed, to fully understand the phenomenon of FV, a conceptual framework must be capable of addressing a wide range of factors at multiple levels and be able to connect these levels when necessary which was why [Heise \(1998\)](#) framework was utilised. Use of this framework is consistent with previous research that has explored the topic of FV ([Boodram, 2022](#); [Hardesty & Ogolsky, 2020](#); [Heise, 1998](#); [Ler et al., 2020](#); [Tekkas Kerman & Betrus, 2020](#)). It has also been used in studies that have specifically explored FV among Pakistani women ([Khan et al., 2009](#)).

Use of a phenomenological approach with the socio-ecological theoretical framework guided data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The socio-ecological framework developed by [Heise \(1998\)](#) was employed to explore the multi-level factors influencing FV in Pashtun communities. This framework allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how individual behaviour, cultural norms, and structural influences interact at various levels, from the immediate family to the broader societal context ([Boodram, 2022](#); [Khan et al., 2009](#)). The phenomenological approach was applied to capture the lived experience of participants. By focusing on participants' subjective experiences, this approach provided rich insights into how they perceived and interpreted FV within their families and the broader Pashtun community.

Participant Recruitment

Following University Ethics Approval (See Appendix A), the researcher recruited a total of eight participants. The participants shared the "Information to participants' letter" (see Appendix B for English and Appendix C for Urdu) with other potential participants.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The researcher employed a combination of snowball sampling and criterion sampling to recruit participants for this study. Snowball sampling, a non-probability technique, was used to identify and recruit participants through existing social networks ([Parker et al., 2019](#)). The researcher initially selected a small group of participants who met the inclusion criteria: women who had experienced instances of FV while living in Pakistan, had been living in Australia for five years or more, and were willing to participate in the research. Exclusion criteria included women who had not encountered FV in Pakistan, those who had been in Australia for less than five years, or those who declined to participate. After recruiting the initial group, the researcher used snowball sampling to inquire about other potential participants who satisfied the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate ([Browne, 2005](#)).

In addition to snowball sampling, criterion sampling was also employed, as it is essential for phenomenological research, ensuring that all participants had experienced the phenomenon under study ([Creswell & Poth, 2016](#)). In this study, the phenomenon under study was FV, and it was crucial that each participant had experienced this phenomenon as a criterion for inclusion.

Participant Demographics

Eight Pashtun women living in Melbourne, Australia who had past experiences of FV provided informed consent and volunteered to participate in the study. Table 1 presents the

demographic characteristics of the participants. All participants in the study were aged 30 years or older and had at least high school education, with two participants having completed Master level qualifications. The duration of marriage among the participants ranged from 11 to 25 years. All participants had resided in Australia for more than five years. Despite some participants having been employed in Pakistan, all the participants were currently housewives in Australia. However, some participants were also concurrently pursuing educational studies. The age of children of the participants ranged from infants to nine years old. It is worth noting that two individuals had experienced the tragic loss of their children due to FV. While living in Pakistan all participants had resided within extended families; however, they currently resided in their nuclear families.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

Participants' names*	Age	Education	Total Married Years	Total Years in Australia	Profession	Number of Children (1st marriage)	Family Structure
Fatima	35	M.Phil.	13	10	Housewife	2	Extended family system
Khyala	49	Matric	17	5	Housewife	9 (4 dead)	„
Mahnosh	38	Master's degree	12	9	Housewife	3	„
Nasreen	32	Intermediate	13	6	Housewife	2	„
Norana	45	8th	16	10	Housewife	7 (2 dead)	„
Saba	31	Intermediate	11	6	Housewife	0	„
Samina	43	Matric	25	8	Housewife	4	„
Shenaz	40	Bachelor's degree	20	9	Housewife	1	„

* Participant pseudonyms

Regarding their marital union, most women in the study had entered into arranged marriages. However, two participants, Shenaz and Nasreen, had choice in whom they married. They reported that their love marriages resulted in them facing disapproval from their respective in-laws.

Sample Size Considerations

The aim of qualitative research is not about statistical generalisability that is dependent on sample size and characteristics, rather generalisability in qualitative studies refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied or transferred to other contexts or settings beyond the immediate study [Tsang \(2014\)](#). According to [Hartley \(1994\)](#), generalisations pertain to

theoretical stances rather than populations. Determining the appropriate sample size in qualitative research, especially in studies employing a phenomenological approach, is more about the depth of exploration and richness of the data than adhering to a specific numerical target. [Dodgson \(2023\)](#) argues that in phenomenological research the emphasis is on exploring in-depth experiences and perspectives of a small number of participants rather than aiming for statistical representativeness or generalisability. Typically, phenomenological studies involve a small number of participants, often ranging from five to 25. [Pietkiewicz and Smith \(2014\)](#) recommended that phenomenological studies should have small samples ($n < 12$) to yield the level of depth and detail required to give voice to participants' lived experience.

Sample size considerations in qualitative research is also discussed in terms of saturation, where no new significant information or themes emerge from additional interviews ([Guest et al., 2020](#)). Saturation indicates that the researcher has thoroughly explored the phenomenon under investigation. The sample size of this study was eight and each interview was approximately one hour long. The eight interviews provided thick and rich descriptions of participants' experiences. The depth of information in the interviews also allowed the student researcher to capture the nuances and variations in participants' lived experience. At the end of the eight interviews the researcher felt that saturation to some extent had been achieved.

Method

In this study, semi-structured interviews were employed to gain an insight into participants' experiences and perspectives of FV. The semi-structured interview is a commonly employed method in the field of social sciences, primarily utilised to collect data for qualitative research ([Qu & Dumay, 2011](#)). Semi-structured interviews are designed in a structured manner to facilitate exploration of selected topics; however, they also provide a degree of flexibility that enables respondents to contribute novel insights and interpretations to the topics discussed ([Galletta, 2013](#); [Magaldi & Berler, 2020](#)).

The utilisation of an interview approach offers several benefits due to its ability to yield comprehensive and nuanced data ([Dolczewski, 2022](#)). Nevertheless, there are certain constraints associated with this approach. [Dolczewski \(2022\)](#) posits that the examination of data obtained through interviews necessitates a multifaceted approach, compared to data acquired through self-reported questionnaires. An interview is a form of engagement where the interviewer has the potential to influence the interviewee through various means, such as providing suggestions for replies or guiding the path of the story. To prevent the interviewer

influencing the process, this study framed questions in an open-ended manner to encourage participants to express their thoughts freely. During the interviews, the interviewer also maintained a neutral and non-judgmental demeanour. This helped create an environment where participants felt comfortable expressing their own opinions without feeling pressured to potentially conform to the interviewer's views.

Development of Interview Schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed and used in the current study. The development of this schedule was guided by the study's research questions; for example, the level of instances of FV and factors causing FV in the Pashtun community, and previous research examining women's experiences of FV ([Afrouz \(2019\)](#); [Afrouz et al. \(2021a, 2021b\)](#); [Afrouz et al. \(2023\)](#)). The schedule had 16 questions in total (see Appendices D and E). The first section of the interview guide included demographic questions to gather information about the participants' ages, educational background, number of children. It also included three open ended questions to gather information about the participants' husbands, their marriages, and extended family members.

The next three open-ended interview questions asked the participants about how they spent their daily lives, what they thought about their relationship with their husband, and what they thought about their relationships with extended family members. From the fourth question onwards, the interview included questions related to FV. For example, "Can you tell me about any problems you may have had with your family in the past?" "What is your understanding of FV?" "Would you describe your experiences as FV? Why or why not?" "What impact did your experience of FV have on your wellbeing?" There were also questions that asked the participants about the factors contributing to FV in Pashtun families, what role culture and religion played in relation to FV and what types of support were needed by women experiencing FV.

Procedure

Following ethics approval from Victoria University's Ethics Committee (See Appendix A: Application ID: HRE20-0679) the process of participant recruitment commenced. Potential participants were given the Information to Participants' letter (Appendices B and C) in their first/native language and a consent form (Appendix F and G). Participants were given time to consider whether they would like to volunteer to participate in the study. If the potential participant was interested in participating, they were invited to contact the researcher. Written

consent was sought from the participants prior to scheduling interviews. At the start of interviews, participants were also reminded that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences to them.

Due to the highly sensitive nature of the interview topics, strategies were employed to help mitigate risk to the participants. These included if any participant experienced distress or showed signs of discomfort during the interview, the researcher assisted the participant to the best of her ability and provided the participant with the contact details of appropriate counselling services. The participant was also reminded of their right to withdraw from the study or not to respond to any question that they felt was intrusive or that caused them distress. The interviews lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes and all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in the participant's local/native language (Urdu/Pashtu, see Appendix E), which was the first language of the student researcher.

Analysis Approach

The analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted using thematic analysis, following the methodology described by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). The process involved six distinct phases, which the researcher adhered to, and utilised NVivo software for coding and analysis. The coding approach adopted for this study was a combination of both inductive and deductive methods. The inductive aspect allowed themes to emerge directly from the participants' narratives, reflecting their lived experiences without being constrained by preconceived categories. At the same time, the deductive approach was guided by the research questions and the conceptual framework underpinning the study, ensuring that the analysis remained aligned with the theoretical focus on FV within the Pashtun community. This hybrid approach facilitated a balanced and comprehensive understanding of the data, allowing both data-driven insights and theory-informed interpretations to shape the thematic structure ([Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019](#)).

Familiarisation with the Data

The initial stage involved transcribing the interviews and repeatedly reading the transcripts to become thoroughly acquainted with the data. This step was critical for developing a deep understanding and familiarity with the content of the interviews. During this phase, the researcher took notes and highlighted initial impressions to assist in the subsequent coding process.

Generating Initial Codes

Using NVivo, the researcher systematically coded the entire dataset, identifying and labeling significant features of the data that were relevant to the research questions. For instance, responses to the question "Can you tell me about any problems you may have had with your family in the past?" were initially coded under categories such as "family conflict" and "causes of issues". Each segment of the text that appeared relevant was assigned a descriptive code to encapsulate its essence. This phase involved line-by-line analysis, ensuring that all pertinent data segments were coded, resulting in a comprehensive set of initial codes.

Searching for Themes

After generating initial codes, the researcher examined the codes to identify patterns and grouped them into potential themes. This phase involved organising codes into broader themes that accurately reflected significant aspects of the data. For example, codes related to various forms of family conflict were grouped under a theme labeled "Nature of FV in Pashtun Community". During this process, the researcher thoroughly reviewed and compared the codes to understand the relationships and overarching patterns, which helped in refining and consolidating the themes.

Reviewing Themes

The themes were reviewed to ensure they coherently represented the data and addressed the research questions. This involved refining the themes and checking them against the data to ensure consistency. At this stage, some themes were modified, combined, or discarded as necessary. This step included two levels of review: first, reviewing all the coded data extracts for each theme to check for coherence; second, considering the validity of individual themes in relation to the entire dataset.

Defining and Naming Themes

Once finalised, each theme was defined and named clearly to ensure they accurately represented the data. The themes and sub-themes identified in my analysis were as follows:

Awareness and Understanding of FV

- Ignorance and Misconceptions
- Awareness and Informed Understanding

Factors of FV in Pashtun Community

- Culture and Religion
- Familial Relationships

- Financial Dependency

Nature of FV in Pashtun Community

- Uncontrolled Dynamics of FV
- Cultural Norms and Patriarchal Structures

Impact of FV in the Pashtun Community

- Physical Abuse
- Emotional and Psychological Impact of Abuse
- Social and Work-Related Impact
- Impact on Children

Challenges in Seeking Support during Experiences of FV

- Lack of Familial Support and Silencing of Victims (Social Isolation)
- Societal Pressure and Fear of Shame

Strategies to Address FV in the Pashtun Community

- Education
- Government and NGO Interventions
- Religious Leaders' Roles
- Changing Patriarchal Mindset
- Financial Independence for Women

Transformation of Marital Lives: Pakistan vs. Australia

- Transformation in Spousal Attitudes
- Influence of Nuclear Family Structure

Each theme was supported by detailed definitions and illustrative quotes from the data. This ensured that the themes were not only descriptive but also grounded in the actual data. Definitions were carefully crafted to encapsulate the essence of each theme and to distinguish them from each other.

Producing the Report

The final step involved writing the next chapter of findings and discussion, where each theme was detailed with supporting quotes from the transcripts to provide a comprehensive narrative of the findings. This ensured that the analysis was transparent and grounded in the data. The chapter includes a discussion of each theme, illustrating how it answered the research questions and contributed to the overall understanding of the phenomena studied.

Throughout this process, NVivo facilitated the management and analysis of the data by providing tools to code, organise, and understand the relationships between codes and themes. This systematic approach, grounded in Braun and Clarke's methodology, ensured a thorough and rigorous analysis of the interview data. The use of NVivo allowed for efficient handling of the data, ensuring that all relevant data segments were coded and analysed systematically.

Rigor and Trustworthiness of Data Collection and Analysis

In qualitative research, particularly in the field of phenomenology, rigor and trustworthiness are crucial concepts that ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected. Rigor refers to the degree to which a study is systematic, thorough, and well-designed. It involves using appropriate methods, collecting sufficient data, and analysing it thoroughly to minimise bias and errors ([Gubrium & Holstein, 2009](#)). Trustworthiness refers to how reliable and credible the results of a study can be. It encompasses several components, including authenticity, dependability, confirmability, and transferability ([Nazar et al., 2022](#)).

Researcher Bias and Reflexivity

Several measures were employed to help ensure the credibility or trustworthiness of the data collected. Following [Finlay \(2002\)](#) and [Creswell and Poth \(2016\)](#), the researcher applied the concept of bracketing and reflexivity and tried to set aside her preconceived notions and biases to approach the phenomenon with fresh eyes. This practice aimed to reduce the potential influence of personal perspectives on the interviewees and their responses, thus enhancing the credibility of the data by trying to minimise any researcher bias ([Finlay, 2002](#)). Throughout the research process, the researcher remained reflexive by being continually aware of her own position as a Pakistani Pashtun woman who has migrated to Australia.

This awareness helped the researcher recognise how her cultural background and migration experience influenced her relationship with the participants. Her position as an insider and outsider simultaneously shaped the way she interacted with participants and interpreted their experiences, particularly in the context of FV. Reflexivity was crucial to ensuring that the data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes were rigorous and transparent, as it allowed the researcher to acknowledge and critically examine the potential biases and influences stemming from her identity.

Ethical Considerations and Management of Risks

There is a risk with FV research that perpetrators could become aware of the participants' involvement in the research and the participants or researcher could potentially be physically threatened. This was a major consideration in maintaining safety for women and the researcher during the project (see Appendices I and J) In addition to potential physical risks, various psychological risks were also identified. Involvement in the interview could potentially trigger memories of traumatic experiences that occurred when the participant was living in Pakistan, and this could cause the participant to feel distress or anxiety. There was also a low probability of social risk if the identity of participants was revealed; they could be ostracised in the Pashtun community for disclosing undesirable aspects of FV endemic to the community. Potential legal risks in conducting this research were also identified. The research intentionally did not ask participants to disclose information relating to their past, present, or possible future involvement in illegal activities. However, such information was likely to be disclosed by participants during the research. The student researcher made it clear to participants as part of the process of gaining informed consent that while not asking participants to provide information about their involvement in illegal activities, this might still result in them disclosing such information. Participants were advised to consider carefully any disclosures and were made aware of the potential limits of confidentiality with the disclosure of illegal activities.

To minimise these potential risks, only women who had experienced FV in the context of extended families while living in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Pakistan region in Pakistan were invited to volunteer to participate in the study. These women had subsequently migrated to Melbourne and were no longer living in situations of FV, with the violence occurring at least 12 months prior to this research. Women who identified as currently in a FV situation were excluded from participating in the study.

The reason for interviewing Pashtun participants with past experiences of FV perpetrated by extended families including their parents in laws was to help ensure physical, psychological and social safety. These participants were no longer experiencing FV. They had escaped from their in law extended families. Conducting the interviews in Melbourne instead of Pakistan helped create some level of physical, psychological and social safety for participants due to geographical distance. If a participant disclosed FV, there was a safety plan

and appropriate services in place, which included calling Police or Safe steps (for crisis response) or getting in touch with the Multicultural Centre Against FV.

To help prevent and mitigate potential psychological risks, the purpose and processes of the study were provided in advance to participants in their native language. Participants were given time to consider their participation in the study to help ensure that they felt comfortable and prepared to participate. During the interview participants were encouraged to only share information with which they felt comfortable. They were reminded that participation in the research was voluntary and that they were free not to answer any questions with which they felt uncomfortable, that they were able to request breaks at any stage during the interview or even terminate it at any time without any consequences to them.

Where any participants experienced distress or anxiety during the interview, the student researcher stopped the interview and asked the participant if she would prefer not to proceed with the interview. The researcher was also prepared, if required, to organise a referral to an appropriate support service. The contact details of registered and professional counsellors were made available to the participants. In addition, participants could contact a psychotherapist (AMAFHH Federation) which would be free of charge for an initial consultation, with referrals to other services if any follow up was required.

To mitigate social risks, participants were assured that their responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and would not be shared with anyone apart from the student researcher's supervisors. All participants were offered the opportunity to select a pseudonym to be used during the interview and subsequent transcriptions. During the interview and analysis process, all consent forms and interview data were kept on a password protected computer.

In addition to risks to the participants, potential risks to the researcher were also identified. The student researcher was a social worker in an NGO in the Pashtun Tribal areas of Pakistan (Community Motivation & Development Organisation) and had substantial experience handling cases including FV in the local context. She was also an active member of her community (Pashtun) and has completed a Certificate in Community Leadership Program (AMES Melbourne). Nevertheless, as a female Pakistani research student in Australia, the researcher could have been exposed to social and psychological risks while conducting the interviews. The interview might trigger memories of traumatic experiences for the participants,

and this may also cause distress or anxiety for the researcher. Social risks to which the researcher may have been exposed could include being ostracised for revealing undesirable aspects of FV endemic in the Pashtun community.

To help minimise risk, prior to conducting the interviews the student researcher prepared herself through reading and participating in interview trials and role playing with supervisors to ensure best research practice. A personal management strategy for the student researcher's mental health was in place, including formal debriefing processes to help ensure that she remained psychologically healthy. If required, the student researcher could seek counselling support from the University Counselling Services, and could also approach a psychiatrist if further support was needed. As well, she was in contact with a Batul Gulani Clinical Supervisor/ Psychotherapist (AMAFHH Federation).

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the rationale for choosing a phenomenological approach to understand women's experiences of FV from their perspective. It also outlined the processes undertaken to recruit participants and collect and analyse data. Due to the sensitive nature of the research topic, the ethical considerations and steps taken to mitigate risk to both the participants and researcher were comprehensively discussed.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the study's findings that sought to explore Pashtun women's awareness and understanding of FV, causes of FV within the Pashtun community, the impact of FV on the participants and their children, and support systems available to Pashtun women along with potential modifications to enhance their effectiveness. This study identified seven main themes that describe participants' understandings of and experiences with FV. Each main theme is further delineated by two to six sub-themes (please refer to Table 2).

Table 2: Thematic Table

Theme	Subtheme
Awareness and Understanding of FV	Ignorance and Misconceptions Awareness and Informed Understanding
Factors Contributing to FV in Pashtun Community	Culture and Religion Familial Relationships Financial Dependency
Nature of FV in Pashtun Community	Uncontrolled Dynamics of FV Cultural Norms and Patriarchal Structures
Impact of FV	Physical Impact Emotional and Psychological Impact of Abuse Social and Work-Related Impact Impact on Children
Challenges in Seeking Support during Experiences of FV	Lack of Familial Support and Silencing of Victims (Social Isolation) Societal Pressure and Fear of Shame
Strategies to Address FV in Pashtun Community	Education Government and NGO Interventions Religious Leaders' Roles Changing Patriarchal Mindset Financial Independence for Women
Transformation of Marital Lives: Pakistan versus Australia	Transformation in Spousal Attitudes Influence of Nuclear Family Structure

Awareness and Understanding of FV

The findings of this study indicate that most participants; that is six out of the eight Pashtun women, demonstrated limited awareness and understanding of FV. Many participants did not clearly identify the abusive behaviours they endured as FV, instead normalising these actions as typical within marriage.

Ignorance and Misconceptions I have added this subtheme

There is evidence that a number of participants lack a comprehensive understanding of FV among Pashtun married women highlights how a lack of understanding and misconceptions ignorance and misconceptions may contribute to the normalisation of abusive behaviours. Participants' ignorance of what constituted FV may have perpetuated misconceptions wherein they believed such behaviours were typical within marital relationships. Moreover, some participants even concealed instances of FV from their husbands, indicating a reluctance to acknowledge or confront the reality of abuse due to societal norms and misconceptions.

For example, three participants—Nasreen, Norana, and Samina Baji—commented that at the time of their experience, they were unaware that they were facing FV. Norana confessed to concealing the abuse from her husband, believing that violence was a normal and expected part of married life.

No, I did not understand these things at all. If they fought me, I would not tell even my husband that they had fought me (Norana, 45).

I did not understand at that time what FV is. I had just come out of sixth or seven grade. But I knew what rights were (Norana, 45)

These excerpts reflect a somewhat limited understanding and misconceptions that may prevent victims from acknowledging abuse and seeking help. Similarly, Samina endured abuse and was advised to “have patience” and “wait for good times,” further reinforcing misconceptions regarding the nature of FV and reinforcing a culture of silence and endurance.

Awareness and Informed Understanding

This subtheme sheds light on the disparity in understanding FV among Pashtun married women. Unlike the majority who lacked awareness, a minority of participants demonstrated early recognition of FV within their marital relationships. It is also noticed that while some women may possess informed perceptions of FV from the onset, others may require education and support to recognise and address abusive behaviours within their marriages.

For example, some participants such as Fatima and Mahnosh, exhibited a clearer and more informed understanding of FV. Fatima described FV as the violation of an individual's rights and intentional harm. Mahnosh provided a more detailed explanation, describing FV in Pashtun families as encompassing any harmful or aggressive behaviour towards a family member, often stemming from cultural traditions, beliefs, or familial discord:

FV in a Pashtun family refers to any kind of harmful or aggressive behaviour towards a family member. This type of violence can happen due to various reasons such as cultural practices, beliefs or family disputes (Mahnosh, 38).

The contrast in participants' awareness and understandings of FV highlights the complexity of FV within Pashtun society. While some women appeared to accept abusive behaviour as part of marital life, others recognised it as harmful and unacceptable. It is notable that six out of eight participants could not provide a clear definition of FV, whereas the two participants who articulated clearer understandings of FV held higher educational qualifications (MPhil and Master's degrees). These findings are consistent with past research. [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) reported similar findings, observing that women with lower education levels had less understanding of FV compared to their more educated counterparts. Limited awareness and misconceptions within the Pashtun community are likely to contribute to the 'acceptance', endurance, and concealment of FV, which in turn makes it difficult to implement strategies to help prevent FV or to intervene in helping to address FV.

Further, [Rodriguez Martinez and Khalil \(2017\)](#) highlighted that immigrant communities often hold perceptions and attitudes toward FV that differ significantly from those in their host countries, influenced by cultural norms from their countries of origin. Indeed, [Gennari et al. \(2017\)](#) found that some women maintain traditional views consistent with their native cultural gender roles, which can inhibit recognition and rejection of abusive behaviour. These findings

and those of the present study underscore an urgent need for targeted education and awareness initiatives aimed at dispelling misconceptions regarding FV.

The disparity in participants' understandings of FV in the current study also highlight the need for comprehensive awareness programs and safe spaces for open discussion. Moreover, the diverse viewpoints of participants demonstrate that awareness programs must be culturally sensitive, addressing the complex intersection of societal norms, gender expectations, and personal experiences. Through increasing knowledge and challenging cultural norms, such efforts can play a vital role in empowering Pashtun women to recognise and to seek support for FV. This may in turn reduce the prevalence and impact of FV within Pashtun communities.

Factors Contributing to FV in Pashtun Community

This study's findings highlight that FV results from multiple interconnected factors, including familial relationships, social norms, financial conditions, and cultural and religious influences, as shown in Figure 1. An analysis of participant responses reveals how factors at different levels of the socio-ecological framework contribute to the perpetuation of FV, reinforcing the structural and systemic nature of abuse within Pashtun families, as described by [Heise \(1998\)](#).

Culture and Religion

The findings of this study suggest that cultural and religious belief systems play a significant role in shaping FV within the Pashtun community. Specifically, cultural norms appear to be the primary influence driving the prevalence and acceptance of FV, often overshadowing religious teachings. Norana believed that FV is rooted mainly in cultural factors rather than religion. Samina Baji similarly highlighted that the oppressive behaviour by her in-laws reflected deep-seated cultural norms prevalent in Pashtun society. Consistent with these views, Nasreen attributed the passivity of spouses and their failure to intervene in cases of violence to entrenched cultural expectations:

In our culture when a husband takes [a] stand for his wife, he is considered as he is afraid of his wife. He is considered as subservient to his wife. Culture plays a lot and religion play no role in this regard. In our Pashtun society law is secondary to our culture. We follow the cultural traditions that have come down to us from our ancestors (Nasreen, 32).

Mahnosh added that Pashtun culture treats FV, especially from in-laws, as a private issue rarely discussed publicly:

Culturally, FV from in-laws is often viewed as a private matter and is generally not discussed in public (Mahnosh, 38).

This perception reinforces the silence and invisibility of FV, consistent with [Saeed \(2012\)](#)'s findings that aggression is socially learned and normalised within Pakhtun society. Such cultural norms thus contribute to the perpetuation of violence. The patriarchal social order within Pashtun culture, as described by Fatima, is another critical factor contributing to FV:

Pashtuns are more egoist and honour conscious... a man who beats his wife is counted as a man... A man who listens to his wife is considered as dis-honoured and submissive to his wife. They burn women alive or drop them from rooftops (Fatima, 35).

This stark illustration of honour-based violence confirms the deeply ingrained patriarchal values that prioritise family reputation over women's safety. These findings also demonstrate how cultural norms and expectations may promote behaviour that perpetuates FV. This is consistent with [Moreno \(2007\)](#) and [Vandello and Cohen \(2003\)](#) who found that collectivist cultural systems encourage submission to male authority and tolerance of violence, while [Koenig et al., 2006](#) emphasise that traditional gender roles and dependency may lead to the rationalisation of domestic abuse.

In contrast to findings regarding the influence of cultural norms on the prevalence of FV, participants had different perspectives regarding the role of religious beliefs. Both Fatima and Shehnaz emphasised that Islam itself does not promote violence, but that Pashtun cultural practices selectively interpret religious teachings to fit existing norms. Fatima explained:

Yes, Islam says that everyone has the right of decision. Everyone has the right to lead his/ her life according to his/ her own will... We adopt those religious injunctions which are in our benefit and don't adopt those which are not beneficial for us... Culturally, we only adopt this that Islam says to marry four wives and do not adopt that the one who has been married has what kind of rights. The problem is not in the religion; the problem is with the people (Fatima, 35).

Fatima's viewpoint highlights selective religious adherence and cultural misapplication of Islamic teachings, a finding supported by [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) who found that tribal culture rather than Islam is responsible for patriarchy and gender disparities in Afghanistan.

Hence, this study's findings demonstrate that Pashtun culture, rather than Islam, is the primary source of FV. Community members adopt traditional beliefs that they perceive as compatible with Islam, but which culturally legitimise violence. Understanding these cultural roots is essential for designing effective interventions.

Familial Relationships

All participants regarded their in-laws as the primary instigators of FV. In certain cases, participants attributed the primary responsibility for FV to either their mother-in-law or father-in-law, while others identified both in-laws as the perpetrators. In other cases, participants identified their brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law as the primary perpetrators of FV. Some described instances where all their in-laws exhibited violent behaviour and caused them distress.

This study found that fathers-in-law were significant perpetrators of FV towards their daughters-in-law in the Pashtun community. Four of the eight participants reported instances of violent behaviour exhibited by their fathers-in-law. This violence often manifested as severe physical abuse, even during vulnerable conditions such as pregnancy, demonstrating the critical role of extended family members in perpetuating FV.

Participants described how fathers-in-law inflicted violent acts that severely impacted the victims' physical and mental health. Norana's experience illustrated this vividly; despite being pregnant, her father-in-law physically assaulted her and pushed her down the stairs which led to her child being stillborn:

I have undergone too much violence; the second daughter was in my womb. My father-in-law beat me and made me fall down the stairs and within fifteen days I gave birth to a dead baby girl. She was fatty, having red lips, black hair, was very beautiful (Norana, 45).

Khyala's narrative further explains how trivial reasons often triggered severe beatings by her father-in-law who used sticks and targeted her hands, legs, and thighs with relentless physical abuse. She described how:

My father-in-law also beat me so severely that I could not be able to do my home chores. My father-in-law used to beat me without any reason. The plea was that I did not work properly, or I had not cooked the meal appropriately, or I was not walking decently on the way (Khyala, 49).

This narrative supports the view that such violence is arbitrary and pervasive and is used as a tool of control. The findings corroborate previous research by [Ali et al. \(2020\)](#) who reported that fathers-in-law are common perpetrators of FV in Pakistan's joint family systems, emphasising the systemic nature of this violence.

The mental health consequences of such abuse were powerfully demonstrated by Saba, whose father-in-law's frequent beatings caused her to develop psychosis. She reported that:

My father-in-law used to beat me very often. It made me physically and mentally ill...it was more than violence; my mind didn't even work sometimes.... He made me a psychotic patient (Saba, 31).

This excerpt highlights the profound psychological trauma that accompanies physical violence and broadens the understanding of the impact of FV, addressing the research question's focus on the effects of violence on victims.

Shahnaz also experienced physical abuse at the hands of her unemployed father-in-law, whose constant presence in the home contributed to the frequency of violence. She explained how:

My in-laws used abusive language. If something went wrong, you had to be hit. I have also been a victim of physical violence. My father-in-law was always at home because he had no job. My father-in-law beat me many times. It also happened that my husband could not interfere to take my side when I was being beaten by my father-in-law (Shehnaz, 40).

Shahnaz's report illustrates how socioeconomic factors like unemployment intersect with patriarchal norms to sustain violence, and how husbands often fail to protect their wives due to social pressures.

This study found that half of the participants experienced severe physical violence from their fathers-in-law, indicating their critical role as perpetrators of FV in Pashtun households. This is consistent with [Jewkes et al. \(2019\)](#)'s findings that identified fathers-in-law as perpetrators in 7% of cases in Afghanistan's Demographic and Health Survey (2017-18).

Mothers-in-law were also violent towards their son's wives. This study found that six of the eight participants reported instances of violent behaviour by their mothers-in-law. They either engaged in physical confrontation with them or incited other members of the family to engage in aggressive behaviour. The reasons for this violence varied. Mahnosh, frequently experienced verbal and emotional abuse from her mother-in-law who expected her to receive 50% of her salary and isolated her from her family and friends:

My mother-in-law has been verbally and emotionally abusive towards me on a regular basis. She has also been trying to isolate me socially by not allowing me to interact with my parents, friends and others and was creating a hostile environment in the house (Mahnosh, 38).

Similarly, Fatima reported being compelled to reside within a setting reminiscent of a prison as a result of her mother-in-law's overbearing disposition:

My father's family could not visit us, if they came, mother-in-law always became upset. Similarly, my meetings with my friends had become zero. Neither anyone could visit us, nor could I visit them. It was a prison like environment. My mother-in-law had a dominating behaviour from the very first day and she wanted that dominancy to continue till the end (Fatima, 35).

Nasreen also experienced physical and psychological abuse from her mother-in-law due to the latter's insistence on her bearing more children;

I have two kids and I have given them birth with a small interval between them. I have exhausted after raising them. I don't want a baby for the next one or two years. But my mother-in-law is enforcing my husband to have a baby. Now here I am not

mentally prepared and, you know, this is the reason to have a fight with my husband (Nasreen, 32).

The violence perpetrated by mothers-in-law also impacted on the participants' children's lives. Norana attributed the death of her two daughters to the malevolence exhibited by her mother-in-law who failed to provide her with the essential resources required for sustaining their livelihood.

My two daughters had died; their memory still haunts me. I gave birth to a daughter; she lived for five months and died due to helplessness and poverty. My mother-in-law did not give wood [for fuel] to make fire for her [to keep her warm in cold]. They died because of her cruelty (Norana, 45).

In addition to directly perpetrating violence, mothers-in-law incited other family members to engage in violent behaviour. Khyala's mother-in-law not only prohibited her from having a conversation with her husband or sitting next to him but also incited other members of the extended family to physically assault her. She described how:

My mother-in-law would act in frenzy and jabbering as if she was in hold of some spirit (genii) in case my husband talked to me. He could not talk to me or sit beside me in my room out of her fear. I could not talk to my husband at all. My mother-in-law also instigated other in-laws who beat me without understanding the real cause (Khyala, 49).

While the family did not understand the reason for her mistreatment, the mother-in-law's influence and control extended over everyone in the household. This behaviour highlights the pervasive nature of patriarchal authority within the family structure, where power dynamics are reinforced by the actions of extended family members, even when they lack comprehension of the underlying causes of the violence.

This narrative illustrates how such culturally rooted justifications perpetuate cycles of violence within Pashtun households, demonstrating how patriarchal norms continue to fuel abuse. Rather than being a form of male gender-based violence against women, mother-in-law perpetrating FV, [Gangoli and Rew \(2011\)](#) argue that it is as a form of intra-women relational conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law or dowry related. Intra-women relational conflict refers to the tension and violence between mothers-in-law and

daughters-in-law and is viewed as a struggle for power and control within the household rather than solely male-perpetrated gender-based violence. This perspective highlights generational and social dynamics where elder women enforce patriarchal norms by dominating younger women.

The researcher partially agrees with this view because it captures important relational and generational factors influencing mother-in-law violence, but the researcher also maintains that it should not be seen in isolation from the broader patriarchal system that enables and legitimises such violence. Focusing only on intra-women conflict risks overlooking structural gender inequalities and male dominance that underpin these dynamics. Therefore, understanding mother-in-law violence requires integrating both intra-women relational conflict and patriarchal power structures to provide a more comprehensive explanation.

This study found that sisters-in-law, including both the husband's sisters and wives of the husband's brothers, frequently engaged in oppressive and violent behaviour toward other daughters-in-law in Pashtun families. These findings highlight the critical role sisters-in-law play as perpetrators within the complex family dynamics. Participants described how sisters-in-law inflicted physical and psychological abuse, often instigated or supported by the mother-in-law. For example, Khyala recounted enduring physical violence at the hands of her sisters-in-law, who were incited by her mother-in-law to assault her during visits to their parents' home, a common Pashtun tradition. Khyala said:

My sisters in law were married, when they would come to visit us, [it is a tradition in Pashtun society that married women come their parents' home for some days once or twice a year] my mother-in-law instigated them against me. Then they fought me and pulled out my hair and beat me (Khyala, 49).

This excerpt demonstrates how sisters-in-law, under the influence of mothers-in-law, participate actively in violent acts, supporting the finding that violence is often a collective family phenomenon. Nasreen's experience further reveals the psychological violence perpetuated by sisters-in-law, particularly the wife of her elder brother-in-law, who not only abused her but also barred her from entering her room. She explained:

The sisters in law especially the elder one played a major role in doing psychological and abusive violence. Also, the wife of my elder brother-in-law suffered me a lot. She fought me and banned me to enter her room (Nasreen, 32).

This account highlights the complexity of power dynamics within patriarchal family structures where women, despite being victims of systemic violence, may become perpetrators to maintain their own authority. This complicity aligns with previous research on intra-gender violence within patriarchal systems and corresponds to the research question by illustrating nuanced family roles in perpetuating FV.

Mahnosh's sisters-in-law also exerted strict control over her daily life, enforcing rigid behavioural norms and physically punishing any deviations. She reported that:

My sisters-in-law was very abusive towards me. My sisters in law were also asking me what to do and what not. What to say and what not to say. I was not allowed to go to sleep early. I was not allowed to wake up late. I have to be at the main living room until everyone goes to sleep. I have to awake up early in the morning before the sunrise and will go to the main living room and will sit there. I was not allowed to have rest during the day. They used to be beat me if did not follow them (Mahnosh, 38).

This detailed testimony confirms the pervasive control and abuse sisters-in-law wield, enforcing patriarchal norms and perpetuating violence. It concurs with [Roomani et al. \(2016\)](#) findings that sisters-in-law serve as primary accomplices to mothers-in-law in exerting early and continuous violence.

Norana and Samina also endured severe physical abuse from sisters-in-law who used brooms, bricks, and rods as weapons, and employed acts of theft and oppression. Samina Baji recounted:

My sister-in-law beat me. She once sat on my abdomen and pulled my hair. I was not able to eat [a] meal or do anything (Samina, 43).

These vivid accounts illustrate the harsh realities of sister-in-law violence, corroborating the literature on familial violence where sisters-in-law act in collusion with mothers-in-law ([Roomani et al. \(2016\)](#), [Obaid-Chinoy \(2020\)](#)) similarly reported instances of woman-to-woman violence, including extreme acts of violence committed in concert by mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, emphasising the collective nature of abuse within extended families.

Hence, the findings of this research clearly demonstrate that sisters-in-law are significant perpetrators of FV in Pashtun communities, often acting as the principal allies of mothers-in-law in maintaining and enforcing violent patriarchal norms. These findings help to address the study's research questions by identifying key familial actors responsible for perpetuating violence, highlighting the need for interventions that consider the collective family dynamics sustaining FV.

This study found that brothers-in-law are also significant perpetrators of FV towards daughters-in-law in Pashtun families. Their violent behaviour often occurs at the instigation or encouragement of mothers-in-law, revealing a complex family power dynamic. Norana described how her brother-in-law treated her like property and physically assaulted her over trivial matters:

My brother-in-law had beaten me on the head. I don't know what it was, probably he was asking for something to be brought for, but that was kept above my reach and heavy for me. It was a heavy bag of mung beans or what it was, and I could not lift and bring it (Norana, 45).

This arbitrary and controlling violence supports the notion that brothers-in-law act as enforcers within the patriarchal family system and concurs with [Ali et al. \(2020\)](#)'s study which identified brothers-in-law as perpetrators of FV within joint family systems, often acting under the influence of mothers-in-law.

Khyala also experienced unjustified beatings by her brother-in-law on her mother-in-law's instigation:

My brother-in-law also beat me without any reason on the instigation of my mother-in-law. He had no sympathy with me (Khyala, 49).

This account highlights the use of extreme violence and intimidation tactics within families. [Ali et al. \(2012\)](#) similarly note that in cases where husbands are absent, brothers-in-law may act independently, sometimes asserting sexual entitlement, which underscores the vulnerability of women in such family structures. Her account reiterates the role of brothers-in-law as enforcers of familial control, often empowered by maternal figures, and aligns with

[Roomani et al. \(2016\)](#) who documented that brothers-in-law act as accomplices in violence initiated by mothers-in-law, emphasising the collective nature of such abuse.

The literature broadly confirms that in-laws, including brothers-in-law, are key perpetrators of FV in such contexts. For example, [Sattar et al. \(2022\)](#) categorised IPV causes within the socio-ecological framework, highlighting relationship-level factors such as in-law dynamics. [Habiba and Abbas \(2022\)](#) also identified patriarchy and in-law interference as major contributors to FV, reinforcing the current findings. [Raj et al. \(2006\)](#) further detailed emotional and physical abuse by in-laws, which corroborates this study's evidence of multifaceted mistreatment by brothers-in-law.

Conversely, some scholars ([Murshid & Critelli, 2020](#); [Saeed, 2012](#)) emphasise husbands as primary perpetrators of FV, rooted in societal gender norms. However, this study uniquely highlights the passive role of husbands during abuse from in-laws, illustrating a divergence that enriches understanding of the complexity of FV in Pashtun households.

Financial Dependency

The study found that economic dependence is a significant factor contributing to female victimisation within Pashtun households. Mahnosh emphasised that women's reliance on their husbands or in-laws for financial support restricts their ability to leave abusive situations, highlighting financial independence as a potential pathway to freedom from FV. She observed that:

One of the main factors is women in Pashtun families in Pakistan may be economically dependent on their husbands or in-laws. This can make it difficult for them to leave abusive situations, as they may not have the financial resources to support themselves (Mahnosh, 38).

This finding confirms the critical role of financial dependency in perpetuating violence and concurs with [Landvogt and Ramanathan \(2011\)](#)'s findings that increased economic stability and financial independence serve as protective factors against IPV.

Nasreen identified financial dependence as the second most important factor, after illiteracy, behind FV in the Pashtun community and commented that:

I think the second most important thing is financial independence. If a woman is financially independent, obviously, she does not need a male. When she can provide

herself all the provisions then why she should be afraid of male. If he is good that's ok, if not, I need not him (Nasreen, 32).

Her perspective highlights how financial autonomy empowers women and reduces their fear of male dominance, supporting [Campo and Tayton \(2015\)](#) findings that lack of financial autonomy limits women's access to housing, legal aid, transportation, and basic necessities. It also helps foster understanding of how economic factors influence women's ability to escape violence.

Shahnaz expressed regret that if she had had financial autonomy, she could have avoided prolonged exposure to FV. She explained:

If I had the opportunity to work, I would have been able to satisfy my child's financial demands while my husband was abroad. I could have then left my in-law's house. Financial freedom is critical for women (Shenaz, 40).

This excerpt underscores the transformative power of financial independence in enabling women to leave abusive environments. It concurs with [Nosheen, 2011](#) findings that economic empowerment shifts perspectives and motivates victims to actively seek change regarding FV.

In summary, the study's findings emphasise that financial dependence significantly contributes to women's susceptibility to FV within Pashtun communities. This aligns with existing research advocating for economic empowerment as a critical strategy for preventing and escaping violence, and answers the research question concerning the systemic contributors to FV.

Nature of FV in Pashtun Community

This theme delves into the underlying dynamics and characteristics of FV within Pashtun society. It aims to unravel the complexities of abusive behaviour, shedding light on the cultural, social, and individual factors contributing to its prevalence. Through qualitative exploration, this theme seeks to elucidate the distinct nature of FV within the Pashtun community, providing insights for intervention and support strategies.

Uncontrolled Dynamics of FV

The FV dynamics within the Pashtun community exhibit a pronounced level of uncontrolled characteristics. Mahnosh recounted instances in which she experienced physical abuse for

seemingly trivial reasons, such as briefly visiting her mother's residence or failing to complete a specific household task. She vividly describes an incident where her mother-in-law threatened her with a tong, illustrating the extent of aggression and violence present in familial relationships.

Yes, once my mum was very sick. And I went to see her when my MIL allowed me to go after asking for several days. My mum wanted me to stay with her for that night. Long drama short. I went back my husband's home and as soon as I entered the door my MIL started yelling, shouting, and swearing. One time she took a long FIRE Tong (metal Tong that used for grabbing the fired red coal or a wood on fire) and ran after me to bang it on my head and she was screaming at me and was saying now I will kill and take out your baby out of your tummy with this tong. The tong barely could touch me when her daughters stopped her and snatched the tong from her. (CRYING) And it impacted my physical health I was having headaches, body pains and fatigue for days (Mahnosh, 38).

Samina Baji's testimony further exemplifies the uncontrolled nature of FV, with threats escalating to the use of firearms. She describes being beaten with a heavy stick and threatened with a gun by her brother-in-law, highlighting the extreme measures taken to maintain power and control within the family unit.

My mother-in-law was beating me, beating me with a heavy stick or sometimes they took a gun. They beat me on elbows and wounded me. My brother-in-law beat me on the instigation of my mother-in-law. She told him that I was so and so and he accepted that. When he tired of beating then he would take a gun and I had to hid myself. He threatened that he would shoot me and would also send message of my death to my father's home. So, I was afraid of him.

Cultural Norms and Patriarchal Structures

This subtheme examines the influence of cultural norms and patriarchal structures in fostering FV within Pashtun communities. It reveals how deeply entrenched societal values prioritise male dominance and honor, often justifying violent behavior towards women.

Pashtuns are more egoist and honour conscious. Speaking of the backward areas not of the educated people, a man who beats his wife is counted as a man. A man who listens to his wife is considered as a dis-honoured and submissive to his wife. They burn women alive or drop them from roof tops (Fatima, 35).

Fatima's assertion underscores the influence of cultural norms and patriarchal structures in perpetuating FV within the Pashtun community. Pashtuns are depicted as prioritising honour and adhering to a patriarchal social order, where acts of violence against women are normalised and even valorised. Fatima's reference to burning women alive or throwing them off rooftops reflects the extreme consequences of challenging established gender roles and norms.

Khyala's narrative provides insight into the systemic nature of FV, particularly the role of mothers-in-law in subjecting daughters-in-law to agony. The prevalence of physical abuse is rationalised through perceived justifications rooted in cultural expectations and norms, illustrating how entrenched patriarchal structures perpetuate cycles of violence within Pashtun households.

The habits are that they say that you are getting up late or you are not doing the chores well. Take my example, I was getting up early and doing all the chores well. But as they did not like me, therefore, they sought problems with each and every thing. They may find a reason to fight. So, these are the habits and Pashtuns are compelled due to these habits (Khyala, 49).

According to the findings of [Saeed \(2012\)](#)'s PhD thesis, it was determined that within Pakhtun society, individuals acquire aggressive tendencies as a means to assert dominance and exercise control. Consequently, one manifestation of this aggressiveness is observed through acts of violence perpetrated against women. According to the research conducted by [Jewkes et al. \(2019\)](#)'s the occurrence of physical violence between mothers-in-law and sibling-in-laws/siblings represents a significant issue among the female population under study in Afghanistan. This phenomenon has been identified as being associated with poverty. The aforementioned factor significantly influences the well-being of women, exacerbating the health consequences associated with intimate partner violence (IPV).

Understanding the uncontrolled nature of FV and its cultural roots within Pashtun communities is essential for developing effective interventions. By exploring the interplay

between cultural norms and abusive behaviour, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of within this cultural context.

Impact of FV

FV within the Pashtun community inflicts profound and enduring impacts on individuals and families, transcending physical effects to encompass emotional, psychological, social, and intergenerational dimensions. This study explored the multifaceted repercussions of FV, shedding light on its pervasive influence within Pashtun households and the broader community.

Physical Impact

The participants reported that the physical abuse they endured had severe adverse effects on their physical health and wellbeing. They described being subjected to violence by relatives through marriage even over minor provocations, often being dehumanised by their in-laws. Khyala recounted that despite cultural norms prescribing rest after childbirth, she was forced to engage in continuous domestic labour without respite, which led to severe deterioration of her health:

Not at all, even when I gave birth to a baby, I cannot take rest although it is a tradition in Pashtun society that such a woman take rest in bed for ten days. But I did not take such rest. I was compelled to do domestic chores like cleaning, washing clothes, washing dishes, sweeping and doing everything. That is why my health deteriorated but they had no mercy on me. I did not take rest whether it was the occasion of the birth or death of my kids. They gave me no facility (Khyala, 49).

This excerpt highlights the harsh physical demands and lack of care imposed on women, intensifying the impact of violence on their bodies. These findings align with [García-Moreno et al. \(2013\)](#) research which estimated that approximately 35% of women worldwide experience physical or sexual abuse, underscoring the global scale of such harm. [WHO \(2024\)](#) reports that nearly 1 in 3, or 30%, of women globally have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner, emphasising the widespread nature of such abuse. Similarly, [Dillon et al. \(2013\)](#) found that approximately 40% of women in their study reported experiencing intimate partner violence, further emphasising the pervasiveness of IPV. Additionally, [Ellsberg et al. \(2008\)](#) highlighted that 37% of women in a multi-country

study had experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, which demonstrates the widespread prevalence of IPV across different cultural settings.

Norana described severe physical abuse, including an incident where her hand was beaten to the point of requiring crude medical intervention:

I had been beaten more. Whole of my body had been smashed but the hand had been beaten severely. Whether the hand was beaten with a piece of fuel wood or heavy stick or hit twice or thrice, did not know but it had been congealed on the back of the right arm. Then the physician like man was brought. He put the horn on it, then cut it through blade and excreted the blood. I took rest for some days but there were no medicines or anything. Then the hand became dried [stopped bleeding] but it was still wounded for three or four months (Norana, 45).

Her account illustrates the extreme brutality inflicted and the neglect of medical care, emphasising the prolonged physical suffering caused by FV. This evidence corresponds with [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) study which reported that many women identify physical abuse, including striking and assault, as common forms of violence.

Khyala explained that her father-in-law would beat her with a heavy stick during family disputes without investigating the cause, inflicting injuries that hindered her ability to perform household chores:

When I had a scuffle with my mother-in-law and sometimes when my father-in-law came at the occasion, he was not enquiring about who was wrong, rather would take [a] heavy stick, spare his wife and start beating me to the extent that I would fall to the ground, having no energy to stand. He beat me on my hands, legs and thighs. It was then quite difficult for me to do home chores. I took pain killers but still my body ached. On the one hand they beat me and on the other they commanded [me] to do home chores. Such injustice they were doing to me (Khyala, 49).

This testimony demonstrates the compounding effect of violence and forced labour on victims' health, highlighting the severe physical toll of FV. [García-Moreno et al. \(2005\)](#) found that attitudes towards violence vary across cultures, with higher acceptance of physical violence among women who have experienced abuse, illustrating the normalisation of such harm.

Hence, the study's findings corroborate global and regional evidence indicating that physical abuse in FV causes severe and lasting harm to women's physical health. These findings provide insight into the direct impact of violence on victims' wellbeing and underscores the urgent need for effective intervention and support.

Emotional and Psychological Impact

The participants experienced profound emotional and psychological effects because of the abuse they endured, with memories of the violence continuing to deeply affect their mental well-being. Fatima's experience was particularly severe, leading her to attempt suicide twice and seek psychiatric help. She reflected that:

Emotionally and psychologically, I suffered a lot. During my student life I was a kind and down-to-earth person but now I have become hard and harsh and most of the time I am angry. Psychologically depression was caused, and I started treatment for that through a psychiatrist, I also tried myself to get rid of that with the strong belief that a day will come that all this will come to an end. What will be the most appropriate example of it that I attempted suicide twice? If a person can go to such an extent, it means that he or she has no other way (Fatima, 35).

Fatima's narrative highlights the extreme psychological toll of FV, including depression and suicidal ideation. This finding aligns with [Kaur and Garg \(2008\)](#) study which reported that domestic violence adversely impacts women's psychological health beyond physical injuries and [Hussain et al. \(2020\)](#) who found abused women exhibit higher levels of psychological distress, anxiety, and diminished mental health.

Khyala described how the psychological abuse she experienced led to persistent sadness and rumination, which even affected her children:

I always am in pensive mood. Sometimes I tell those stories to my kids, and they become sad and feel sorry for me. My kids try to console me by saying that I should forget those times as there is no difficulty in [the] present. But I cannot forget that life which I have passed and that has effects on my mind, which haunts me (Khyala, 49).

Her account illustrates the lasting emotional scars left by abuse and the intergenerational impact of trauma. It reinforces [Hussain et al. \(2020\)](#)'s findings regarding the sustained negative

effects of violence on victims' psychological well-being and family dynamics, corresponds to the research question's exploration of the broader psychological impact of FV.

Nasreen's emotional suffering was manifested in episodes of intense weeping that distressed her family. She explained:

When I was driven out from home and was sitting in my parents' home, I had become mentally so disturbed that I was weeping till 3 o'clock in the night, and my pillow would become wet due to my shedding tears. In our culture we do not sleep alone in the room unless you have kids, so at that time my younger sister was sleeping with me in the room. She had observed me weeping for several nights due to which she was also hurt, my whole family had become hurt, but they did not show it in front of me that they were also feeling pain for me. One morning she reported [to] my mother that Nasreen was weeping at night till 3 o'clock (Nasreen, 32) .

Her experience reflects the deep psychological distress and isolation felt by victims, which resonates with the psychological symptoms described by [Hussain et al. \(2020\)](#) and further highlights the emotional suffering caused by FV. This evidence strengthens the study's contribution to understanding the emotional impact of FV.

Saba developed symptoms consistent with psychosis because of sustained abuse, while Shahnaz reported physical violence occurring in the presence of her children which added to her mental suffering under difficult living conditions in Pakistan. These experiences underscore the severe psychological consequences and trauma caused by FV, which extend beyond physical injuries to long-term mental health challenges.

In conclusion, the emotional and psychological impact of FV on Pashtun women is profound and enduring, affecting their mental health and family relationships. These findings correspond with established research and directly address the research question by illuminating the deep psychological harm caused by FV and emphasising the urgent need for psychological support and intervention.

Social and Work-Related Impact

This study found that participants' husbands generally assumed passive roles during episodes of physical, emotional, and psychological abuse inflicted by in-laws. The participants reported

being prohibited from visiting their parental homes after incidents of FV, as in-laws sought to prevent disclosure of abuse. This resulted in profound social isolation, with spouses' residences becoming confining spaces and significant challenges to continuing education or employment after marriage.

Khyala described how her social interactions were severely restricted by her in-laws, which isolated her from support systems, including her mother, who was herself a victim of violence:

What could I do? Where could I go? I had nobody. I had no shelter. My father had married a second wife, and he never asked about me or visited me. When my mother visited me, my in-laws accused that she was instigating me and had brought magic amulets for me. They would fight her in the home; therefore, she also could not visit me. My mother was also under violence in her own home. Then how could I go there (Khyala, 49)?

This quote highlights the compounded isolation caused by familial control and violence, as well as the lack of available support and is consistent with [Ali et al. \(2013\)](#) findings that FV restricts women's individual and social freedoms, underscoring how FV constrains access to support networks.

Norana also experienced severe social restrictions enforced by her in-laws. Her fear of escalating conflict by involving her brothers led her to endure abuse silently, further isolating her from her family:

No, I did not tell them as well fearing that my brothers might come and fight them, as a result their visits to my in-laws might be banned. I and my in-laws were inseparable, why dragging my brothers to become indignant towards the in-laws and could not visit us. For two or two and a half years, my father did not enter my room and was giving me baggage outside the main gate. He brought the baggage, gave me in the gate and went and never came in (Norana, 45).

Norana's experience reflects the pervasive fear and isolation imposed by in-laws, limiting women's social support. It concurs with [Jafari et al. \(2022\)](#) study which found that limited familial and social support impedes addressing the emotional and social needs of abused women.

Fatima's advanced education was met with devaluation and control by her in-laws who refused to allow her to work, intensifying her stress and isolation:

When I am in stress, I know myself, I know the symptoms, I have discussed them with a psychologist but when I continued, I took a new start I feel that my life changed. Despite my M.Phil., my in-laws never valued my education. They always made me feel like my education was worthless, which added to my stress and isolation. They did not allow me to seek employment, insisting that my place was at home (Fatima, 35).

This illustrates how educational achievements can become sources of tension within patriarchal family systems that enforce traditional gender roles. Mahnosh shared similar frustrations, revealing the conflict between her educational identity and the restrictive expectations of her in-laws:

Having a Master's degree didn't matter to my in-laws. They expected me to conform to the traditional roles of a housewife, which caused a lot of tension. They often belittled my educational background and made it difficult for me to maintain any form of intellectual engagement. They were adamant that I should not work, which was frustrating and disheartening (Mahnosh, 38).

These narratives corroborate [Ali et al. \(2020\)](#) research which noted that familial support for women is constrained due to fears of marital disruption, reflecting the systemic barriers women face in pursuing education and work, and highlights the social and economic restrictions reinforcing FV.

The study's findings reveal that FV severely restricts women's social interactions, emotional wellbeing, educational pursuits, and employment opportunities. Such restrictions compound their isolation and vulnerability, consistent with existing research on the multifaceted impacts of FV. Understanding these social and work-related effects is essential to comprehensively addressing the systemic challenges faced by victims.

Impact on Children

The participants reported several negative consequences of FV on their children, including impaired family life, illness from inadequate nutrition and healthcare, exposure to violence,

separation from mothers, depression, and, in some cases, death due to neglect. These impacts reflect the far-reaching effects of FV beyond the direct victims.

Shehnaz and Norana described how FV caused emotional distress and depression in their children. Shahnaz shared how repeated violence led her to frequently weep, which in turn affected her children's wellbeing:

This distressing situation occurred on multiple occasions within a monthly timeframe, leading to the children also experiencing distress (Shenaz, 40).

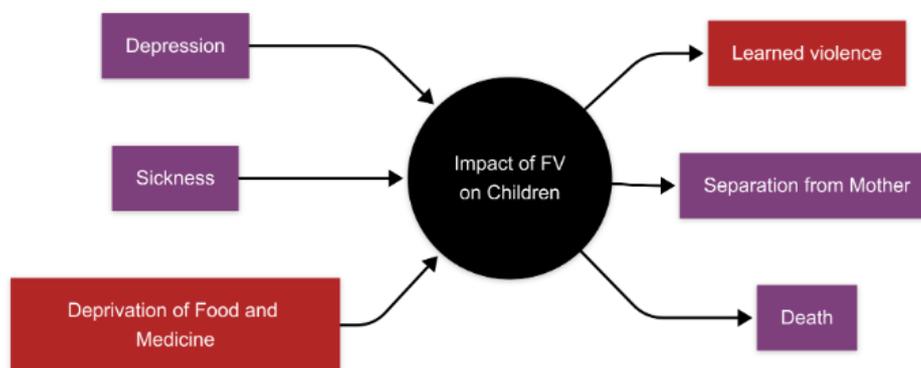


Figure 2 Impact of FV on Children

Norana similarly noted:

I had headache, pains in the body, dejected and weeping for myself all day that led me to depression. My children also became depressed and weak (Norana, 45).

These accounts align with [Sternberg et al. \(2006\)](#) who emphasise the importance of assessing the long-term behavioural impact of FV on children, noting that younger children may be particularly vulnerable. Several participants also expressed concern that their children might emulate the violent behaviour witnessed in the household. Mahnosh described the fear that her children's exposure to violence would lead to emotional and behavioural issues:

Witnessing FV caused my children to feel scared and insecure, which I am concerned can lead to behavioural and emotional issues (Mahnosh, 38).

Shehnaz also reported:

When I was beaten in front of my kid, I feel that he has also learnt violence (Shenaz, 40).

This reflects the findings by [Al Majali and Alsrehan \(2019\)](#) that childhood exposure to domestic violence negatively impacts social and psychological development, often resulting in long-lasting consequences. The physical health of children was also severely affected. Norana's five-month-old daughter fell seriously ill due to neglect by in-laws:

My five months daughter became sick due to careless behaviour of my in-laws.

Similarly, Khyala and Mahnosh noted:

My child became sick and my in-laws were not providing any help (Khyala, 49).

My six months old child hospitalised twice. He caught phenomena because I was not allowed to put heater on in my bedroom (Mahnosh, 38).

Such neglect further highlights the broader harm of FV, consistent with [Jaffe et al. \(1986\)](#) study that found children from violent homes exhibited both behavioural problems and lower social competence compared to those from nonviolent families. Participants also recounted forced separation from their children. Samina Baji was deceived into losing custody of her male children after her first marriage dissolved:

My father told me to hand over to them (in-laws) the kids and I would live there after divorce. I told him that I was deceived. I was told that my mother was hospitalised. They took all my children and only the girl was given to me (Samina, 43).

Khyala's children were similarly restricted from contact with her except during moments of crisis:

No, they were not oppressed or beaten but they were not allowed to be close to me. They had been made close to them by the father-in-law, mother-in-law and sisters in law. They told them that they should not be close to me in my company lest their behaviour might be spoiled. Being their mother, they would come closer to me

when I was beaten, otherwise most of the time they were in their company (Khyala, 49).

Saba detailed the deprivation of basic needs for her children, including food and medical care:

My children were too much oppressed. I have told you my story that they did not give milk for them; there was no injection and no hospital for them. There was only the help of God otherwise there was too much oppression to my kids (Saba, 31).

Samina echoed similar hardships related to food scarcity:

My children and I were hungry. I raised them, but they were feeble and slender, and their skin turned black. This was owing to a scarcity of food. I would sneak a little milk under the box when I milked the cow to feed them at night. They would inquire about the quantity of milk, so I would have to add some water to the milk (Samina, 43).

These experiences of neglect and deprivation illustrate the devastating consequences of FV on children's physical health and survival. Tragically, Norana lost her infant daughter due to neglect and lack of medical care:

She was only five months old, but she looked like she was three years. She died because we didn't do anything to help her. There was no fire for her. I was also younger and didn't know what was wrong with her. No medicine was there. They weren't paying attention. She had a fever one night, and the next morning she was dead (Norana, 45).

Khyala also suffered the loss of children under similar circumstances, with four of her nine children dying due to neglect by in-laws. Norana lost two of her seven children in Pakistan. These devastating outcomes demonstrate the fatal risks children face within violent family environments.

Hence, the impact of FV within Pashtun families extends beyond the direct victims to affect children emotionally, psychologically, socially, and physically. These findings are consistent with past research that highlights the long-term and intergenerational harm of domestic violence. The intergenerational effects of intimate partner violence (IPV) have been well-documented, with research by [Le and Giang \(2025\)](#) showing that IPV may lead to negative impacts on child development due to detrimental effects on mothers' health and an increased

likelihood of children having psychological and behavioral difficulties. [Hashemi et al. \(2022\)](#) further explains that parental exposure to violence during either childhood or adulthood is associated with elevated risks of emotional-behavioral problems and academic difficulties in their children. This intergenerational pattern means children in families affected by violence are more likely to experience adverse outcomes across several domains compared to those unexposed.

[Osborne et al. \(2025\)](#) provides evidence that children who experience emotional IPV are twice as likely to perpetrate similar violence in adulthood relative to unexposed peers, thus supporting the theory of intergenerational transmission. This finding is echoed in a meta-analysis, which establishes exposure to emotional IPV in childhood as one of the strongest predictors of later perpetration, irrespective of gender or socioeconomic status.

[Whitten et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasise that physical abuse is the most visible form of domestic and FV affecting children. Direct victims or witnesses both face significantly higher risks of serious physical illness, chronic disease, and even increased mortality. The authors note that exposure to such violence can impair neurological development, increase the likelihood of later criminal involvement, and lower educational attainment, making the physical toll on children both immediate and life-long. [MacMillan and Wathen \(2014\)](#) report that children exposed to intimate partner violence experience increased risk for both physical and psychological health issues—including more frequent injuries, headaches, and somatic complaints. The studies also reveal a clear association between physical harm and behavioral problems, such as aggression and anxiety, underlining that physical threats and injury are often intertwined with broader negative outcomes for children's wellbeing.

Exposure to FV has also been shown to severely impact children's cognitive development, emotional regulation, and social skills ([Cicchetti & Banny, 2014](#)). Longitudinal research reveals how early exposure increases risks of behavioral disorders and mental health problems throughout adolescence and adulthood ([Margolin & Gordis, 2000](#)). Neuroscientific studies underscore the biological effects of sustained stress due to FV, such as dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which affects children's stress response systems and vulnerability to psychopathology ([De Bellis & AB, 2014](#)).

Furthermore, research highlights the importance of protective factors like supportive caregiving, social networks, and community resources in moderating negative outcomes ([Evans et al., 2014](#)). Such findings reinforce the need for holistic intervention programs that address not only the trauma but also the broader ecological context surrounding affected children ([Kitzmann et al., 2003](#)). Thus, these studies emphasise the multifaceted, lifelong

consequences of FV exposure on children's well-being, calling for integrated approaches that combine mental health, social support, and culturally informed practices to foster resilience and recovery.

Challenges in Seeking Support during Experiences of FV

The current study's findings revealed that navigating familial and social networks for support during instances of FV posed significant challenges for individuals within marital relationships. The following section discusses the findings in relation to the complexities of seeking external and internal support systems amid experiences of familial violence.

Lack of Familial Support and Silencing of Victims (Social Isolation)

The findings in this study reveal a strong connection between lack of familial support and social isolation as key mechanisms that reinforce the persistence of FV. Participants consistently reported a lack of support from their immediate family members when disclosing experiences of abuse. For instance, Nasreen shared how her family members advised her to exercise patience, reflecting a common familial response designed to avoid conflict escalation rather than offering meaningful help. She described her experience, saying:

There were ups and downs in my relations with my husband, I had shared them with my friends. But in our society, when relations with your partner or in laws are not good, it may not be told to outside people because it is a matter of shame. Our society is [a] male dominant one. If one expresses one's emotions or sadness before others, they will tell you to have patience. One has to accept one's defeat because in our society a woman cannot fight for her rights. I have shared them with my friends and my family members, but I would say that invokes no action. No one is going to help you. You have to stand up for yourself (Nasreen, 32).

This testimony highlights how familial support is constrained by cultural norms, including concerns about marital stability and social reputation. These dynamics align with findings from [Ali et al. \(2020\)](#), who reported that family support is often withheld due to fear of disrupting the marriage and tarnishing the family's honor. Similarly, Norana refrained from seeking familial support, fearing that it would worsen tensions and jeopardise her relationships with relatives. This supports [Afrouz \(2019\)](#), who emphasised that family honor and shame mechanisms are often employed to silence women and maintain the status quo, further preventing women from accessing support.

The silencing of victims through social isolation was also a pervasive experience among participants, particularly through restrictions placed by their in-laws. Participants reported being cut off from their parental homes and support networks. Khyala described how her parents were mistreated and prevented from visiting, saying:

No, they were neither coming nor could come. They were weary of my mother-in-law. If my relatives visited us, my mother-in-law would mistreat them (Khyala, 49).

This tactic of isolating victims from their supportive family members is a clear reflection of social stigma and cultural control mechanisms. The deliberate severing of social ties ensures that victims remain isolated, dependent on the abuser, and unable to seek outside help. These practices align with [Afrouz \(2019\)](#), which highlighted the use of honor and shame to force women to stay in abusive relationships, prioritising social reputation over women's safety. Mahnosh's testimony further demonstrates how FV strains relationships, leading to self-imposed social isolation:

Yes, this experience strained my relationships with my friends and family relatives. I was socially isolated. I couldn't maintain close relationships (Mahnosh, 38).

This finding suggests that social isolation is a critical effect of FV, resulting not only from external restrictions but also from the psychological and emotional toll of abuse. These findings resonate with [Ali et al. \(2020\)](#) study which reported that women's familial support is often limited due to concerns that intervention might threaten marital stability. Such constraints significantly hinder victims' access to safe havens and supportive networks, a key factor explored in the research question related to victims' challenges in seeking support.

Samina's experience further illustrates this confinement, with her husband's home becoming a restrictive environment that severely limited her social interaction with extended family and friends, permitting contact only during special occasions such as marriages or funerals:

There were strict restrictions on me. I could hardly visit my father's home. I could not keep relations with anyone, relatives or friends except on the occasions of marriage or death (Samina, 43).

The findings of this study resonate with extant IPV stigma literature, which highlights social isolation and familial constraints as key mechanisms perpetuating intimate partner violence. Social isolation restricts victims' access to supportive networks outside the abusive relationship, thereby exacerbating vulnerability to ongoing violence and impeding help-seeking behaviors ([Mojahed et al., 2021](#)). Cultural and familial norms often prioritise family honor and reputation over individual safety, fostering environments where victim blaming and marginalisation prevail ([Overstreet & Quinn, 2016](#)). Such stigmatisation constructs victims as passive and responsible for their abuse, reinforcing silence and sustained victimisation ([Overstreet & Quinn, 2016](#)). Victim blaming is intensified when IPV survivors violate gender roles or cultural expectations, further isolating them within their communities ([Murvartian et al., 2023](#)). Additionally, social stigma embedded in patriarchal norms often leads to marginalised survivors facing discrimination from informal and formal support systems alike, undermining their mental health and recovery prospects ([Lortkipanidze et al., 2025](#); [Wessells & Kostelny, 2022](#)). Thus, IPV stigma, deeply intertwined with cultural and familial expectations, sustains violence through social isolation, victim blaming, and systemic marginalisation, limiting victims' agency and access to help.

Societal Pressure and Fear of Shame

Participants also expressed fears related to societal perceptions and reputation which discouraged them from disclosing familial violence. Saba described how surveillance and intimidation by in-laws forced her to discontinue conversations about her abuse:

Yes, I used to discuss with my mother and close cousins when I felt pain, but they followed us and made us scared that we talked about them outside (Saba, 31).

Participants expressed fears related to societal perceptions and family reputation that discouraged them from disclosing familial violence. Surveillance and intimidation by in-laws created an environment of fear, leading to discontinuation of conversations about abuse. Studies show that anticipated stigma and internalised shame act as powerful barriers to disclosure in IPV cases, as victims fear judgment, social rejection, and damage to family honor ([Overstreet & Quinn, 2016](#); [Taccini & Mannarini, 2023](#)). Such stigma limits social support and contributes to victims' isolation and silence.

Nasreen also elaborated on the societal expectations placed on women to endure abuse for the sake of family reputation and siblings' welfare:

Obviously, the family members say to have patience. As I have told you that in our society when parents have many daughters, they can do nothing in such cases. If they take stand for one daughter and have a divorce for her then it affects the other siblings. Such cases have been already occurred in our family, and we have already seen the result. So, you cannot take the stand because the outcomes are very negative (Nasreen, 32).

Nasreen's account illustrates the profound societal expectations that compel women to endure abuse to preserve family reputation and protect siblings' future welfare. Research on IPV stigma supports this, showing that collective family honor often overrides individual safety, leading to women's silence and continued victimisation ([Overstreet & Quinn, 2016](#)). Similarly, [McCleary-Sills et al. \(2016\)](#) emphasize that stigma and shame function as powerful mechanisms to coerce women into maintaining silence, reinforcing social norms that prioritize familial reputation over survivors' wellbeing.

In conclusion, these findings reinforce the understanding that IPV stigma, rooted in cultural and familial contexts, significantly obstructs access to support by fostering fear, shame, and anticipated social reprisals. The Intimate Partner Violence Stigmatisation Model highlights how cultural, internalised, and anticipated stigma interact to create formidable barriers to help-seeking, thereby perpetuating cycles of abuse ([Overstreet & Quinn, 2016](#)). Addressing IPV effectively demands comprehensive interventions that dismantle these stigmatising norms and establish supportive environments where survivors can safely seek help and reclaim agency.

Strategies to Address FV in the Pashtun Community

The study's findings illustrate that the strategies to address FV in the Pashtun Community entail multifaceted approaches aimed at transforming societal norms and structures to prevent and mitigate instances of FV ([Heise, 1998](#)). Findings from participant narratives underscore the critical role of education, government and NGO interventions, religious leaders' engagement, changing patriarchal mindsets, and promoting financial independence for women in combatting FV.

Education

Education emerged as a key strategy for preventing FV, with participants advocating the inclusion of moral principles and communication skills in formal education. Fatima

emphasised that teaching young boys from an early age about respect and appropriate treatment of others can effectively reduce FV in Pashtun communities:

I say is to educate your male child how to treat his wife, another point is to teach your child moral values that what is wrong and what is right. If you don't teach them in the early life, you cannot change them later (Fatima, 35).

This insight underscores the importance of early education in shaping attitudes and behaviour.

Mahnosh also highlighted the necessity for community-wide education about healthy relationships and effective communication to combat FV, asserting that:

Education about healthy relationships and communication needs to be emphasised in Pashtun communities to prevent FV (Mahnosh, 38).

This points to the broader role of education in fostering social change and improved interpersonal dynamics, which is supported by [Sundaram and Stenson \(2022\)](#) who argued that education plays a critical role in reducing violence against women and girls.

Similarly, Nasreen and Samina Baji stressed the value of education for empowerment. Nasreen advocated:

Giving your children education at large. As I have told you that if I had not been educated, I would not have been what I am now (Nasreen, 32).

While Samina Baji focused specifically on female education:

Education can uplift the female; therefore, female education is very necessary. She can then do something for herself. Education is very essential for a woman (Samina, 43).

These comments emphasise education's role in empowering women to challenge and overcome violence, reinforcing the study's findings and existing literature advocating for education as a pathway to reduce FV. Hence, participants emphasised formal education combined with moral and social values education as vital in preventing FV. Comprehensive

educational programs targeting both genders have shown promise in altering attitudes and behaviors related to FV. The evaluation of the Gender-based Violence Sensitisation Programme for school-going male adolescents in Pakistan found that the intervention significantly improved participants' understanding of gender equality and the harmful effects of violence against women. Post-program assessments revealed a marked reduction in acceptance of gender-based violence and increased willingness among boys to challenge abusive behaviors in their families and communities ([Khan, 2019](#)). According to [Flood and Pease \(2009\)](#), school-based programs that teach respect, gender equality, and healthy relationships contribute to reducing acceptance of violence among youth and subsequently lower FV rates. Similarly, [De Silva \(2017\)](#) found that integrating FV prevention in community education emphasises awareness and skill building, resulting in decreased tolerance of abusive behavior over time.

Government and Non-Government Organisations (NGO) Interventions

Participants emphasised the critical role of government and NGO interventions in addressing FV. Norana suggested establishing committees to conduct door-to-door campaigns aimed at reducing FV and promoting respectful treatment of daughters-in-law and proposed that:

An NGO should be founded to organise committees in order to launch a door-to-door campaign against FV and encourage people to treat their daughters in law as they would their own daughters. These organisations should work with the government to boost their efforts (Norana, 45).

This highlights the community-based approach to prevention and the importance of collaboration between NGOs and government bodies and aligns with [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) research which emphasised door-to-door campaigns and educational workshops as effective government and NGO initiatives in reducing domestic violence among Afghan women in Australia.

Shehnaz further recommended that NGOs organise educational workshops specifically targeting illiterate populations to raise awareness about women's rights. She said:

So far [as], the illiterate people are concerned, as I have told you before that there should be workshops through NGOs. There are some NGOs who undertake surveys

and provide financial support. They should arrange workshops for the illiterate people so that they may be made aware that the women have also rights (Shenaz, 40).

This recommendation underscores the need for tailored educational programs to reach vulnerable groups and empower them with knowledge and is consistent with [Khanam and Meem \(2018\)](#), who found that areas with active NGO interventions experienced increased legal assistance-seeking among victims of FV.

Saba advocated legislative measures, suggesting that the government should require a declaration in marriage registrations that there will be no FV to prevent violence against women:

In order to avoid such violence against women, the government should require that a statement to that effect be included on the bride's marriage registration (Saba, 31).

This innovative policy proposal reflects the participant's desire for systemic accountability and legal deterrents, aligning with broader calls for institutional reforms.

Khyala highlighted the potential of involving religious leaders in FV prevention efforts and suggested:

Government should take steps on its own behalf. It should urge the religious scholars to deliver speeches with regard to curbing the FV. Government and clergy should join hands in order to eradicate FV from Pashtun society (Khyala, 49).

This recommendation emphasises the cultural relevance of religious authority in influencing community norms, and supports a collaborative approach between state and religious institutions consistent with the findings of [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) about culturally sensitive interventions. Community mobilisation and door-to-door awareness campaigns have been effective in engaging local populations to challenge norms that tolerate violence. [Jewkes et al. \(2019\)](#) reported that participatory interventions in communities, including workshops and advocacy led by NGOs and government agencies, improved knowledge of rights and service availability and encouraged victims to seek help, thereby reducing FV prevalence. However, sustainability depends on continuous funding and culturally sensitive adaptation.

Hence, the study's findings highlight the effectiveness of coordinated government and NGO efforts, including awareness campaigns, educational workshops, legislative measures, and religious engagement in addressing FV. These strategies correspond with prior research and offer actionable solutions aligned with the research question on strategies to reduce FV in Pashtun communities.

Religious Leaders' Roles

Participants identified religious leaders as influential agents for change, emphasising their potential role in addressing FV during religious gatherings and promoting a culture that unequivocally rejects violence against women, rooted in Islamic teachings. Shehnaz advocated for religious leaders to use occasions like Muharram and Ramazan to educate the community, as follows:

We have religious gatherings in Muharram and Ramazan where speeches are delivered by religious scholars on specific topics. Most of the people participate in it and listen to it. The scholars can play their role and can deliver the message by saying that there should be no FV and no beatings of the wives. People should be made aware through this (Shenaz, 40).

This highlights the importance of utilising existing religious platforms to spread awareness. Mahnosh also underscored the responsibility of religious leaders to foster a cultural climate that unequivocally condemns FV, noting:

Religious scholars should speak out against domestic violence to encourage a culture of zero-tolerance towards it (Mahnosh, 38).

Her view emphasises the proactive role religious leaders must take, aligning with [Flood and Pease \(2009\)](#) who found that religious and spiritual beliefs significantly shape community perspectives on violence against women, and thus religious leaders are vital for education and awareness. This supports the research question by suggesting influential actors for community-level change.

Fatima called for Islamic religious leaders to fulfill their duties by preaching about the rights and responsibilities of daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law according to Islamic teachings, reflecting the need for religious messaging that accurately represents Islamic

principles promoting respect and non-violence. The study's findings correspond with [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) who noted that in some contexts, Islamic leaders promote control over women rather than kindness as prescribed by Islam, highlighting the importance of redirecting religious discourse towards supporting women's rights. This alignment emphasises the role of religious leaders as critical change agents in Pashtun communities.

Conversely, [Berkel et al. \(2004\)](#) found no significant correlation between religiosity and support for domestic abuse, suggesting variability in the influence of religious leaders across different contexts. This contrast points to the need for further research on how religious teachings and leadership impact FV in diverse cultural settings, highlighting complexities related to the research question. Engaging religious leaders as advocates against FV leverages their social influence. [Berhanu et al. \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that when religious leaders publicly denounce FV and promote non-violent teachings aligned with faith doctrines, community acceptance of violence decreases. Nevertheless, impact varies depending on the leader's willingness and the community's openness to change, underlining the importance of involving progressive and supportive clerics. The study reinforces the importance of involving religious leaders in coordinated efforts to address FV, promote awareness, and support victims.

Changing Patriarchal Mindset

Participants recognised that addressing the patriarchal mindset was pivotal to preventing FV, emphasising the need to transform attitudes that rationalise and perpetuate abuse. Mahnosh focused on the role of patriarchy in fostering such violence:

Efforts should be made to change the patriarchal mindset that justifies, normalises, or condones violence against women and children (Mahnosh, 38).

This highlights the necessity of challenging entrenched social norms that support violence. Nasreen similarly identified patriarchy as the fundamental underlying cause of FV in the Pashtun community, explaining that:

Pashtun culture is patriarchal, which means that men hold positions of power within the family and women are expected to be subservient to them. This can often be the root cause of FV and abuse (Nasreen, 32).

This insight reflects how the gendered power imbalance underlies violence and in turn highlights the systemic nature of FV. These findings are consistent with prior research. [Flood](#)

[and Pease \(2009\)](#) argued that men's adherence to social norms in patriarchal and violence-supportive environments contributes to the development of violent attitudes and behaviour. [Habiba and Abbas \(2022\)](#) also identified patriarchal norms as key contributors to FV, noting that patriarchy is perpetuated through various strategies reinforcing women's subordination. Furthermore, [Luccaro and Gaston \(2014\)](#) found that conservative and traditional standards in Afghanistan impose significant limitations on women's rights and freedoms, paralleling Pashtun cultural constraints, while [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) emphasised how patriarchy in this region is closely linked to tribal culture rather than solely religion, shaping rigid gender roles and disparities. Interventions addressing underlying patriarchal structures focus on empowering women and transforming male attitudes. Meta-analyses indicate that programs engaging men and boys to reflect on masculinity and violence decrease FV rates more effectively than those targeting women alone ([García-Moreno et al., 2015](#)). Together, these studies and the present findings underscore that transforming patriarchal mindsets, rooted in cultural and tribal traditions, is essential to reducing FV.

Financial Independence for Women

Fostering financial independence emerged as a critical factor in addressing the effects of FV, empowering women to escape abusive situations and reduce their vulnerability. Mahnosh emphasised the economic dependence of women on their husbands or in-laws as a major contributor to FV in Pashtun families. She explained that:

One of the main factors is Women in Pashtun families in Pakistan may be economically dependent on their husbands or in-laws. This can make it difficult for them to leave abusive situations, as they may not have the financial resources to support themselves (Mahnosh, 38).

This insight underscores the importance of economic empowerment in preventing violence and aligns with the research question's focus on systemic factors influencing FV. Shahnaz expressed regret that a lack of financial autonomy prolonged her exposure to FV, explaining:

If I had the opportunity to work, I would have been able to satisfy my child's financial demands while my husband was abroad. I could have then left my in-law's house. Financial freedom is critical for women (Shenaz, 40).

Her testimony reflects the transformative potential of economic independence in enabling women to leave abusive environments, reinforcing the importance of this factor in addressing FV. These findings are consistent with past research. [Landvogt and Ramanathan \(2011\)](#) found that increased economic stability and financial independence can serve as preventive measures against IPV. Conversely, [Campo and Tayton \(2015\)](#) argued that lack of financial autonomy limits women's ability to secure alternative housing, legal aid, transportation, and basic necessities, exacerbating vulnerability. [\(Nosheen, 2011\)](#) further demonstrated that achieving financial independence leads to empowerment and active advocacy against FV. Evidence shows that economic interventions such as microfinance programs combined with gender equity training reduce FV by enhancing women's autonomy and bargaining power within households [\(Williams et al., 2025\)](#). However, [Jewkes et al. \(2019\)](#) caution that economic empowerment alone is insufficient and must be integrated with psychosocial support and community engagement to avoid unintended backlash or increased violence.

Hence, addressing FV in Pashtun communities requires a comprehensive approach that includes promoting financial independence alongside education, government and NGO interventions, religious leadership, and challenging patriarchal norms. Collectively, these strategies have the potential to foster meaningful change and create a safer, more equitable environment, aligning with the research question's focus on effective interventions.

Transformation of Marital Lives: Pakistan vs. Australia

This study's findings indicate a significant transformation in marital relationships following migration to Australia, with many participants reporting improvement in their husbands' attitudes and behaviour. The removal of familial pressures, particularly from in-laws, appears to have contributed to healthier and more supportive relationships. Participants frequently reported that their husbands' attitudes changed significantly, and they became more caring and attentive once the influence of in-laws diminished.

Transformation in Spousal Attitudes

All participants have reported that their marital lives in their current country of residence (Australia) are significantly improved compared to their marital lives in Pakistan. As shown in Table 2, seven out of eight participants (= 87.5%) reported that their husbands' attitudes had significantly altered and that they had turned loving and caring in Australia who were acting

like devils in Pakistan under the influence of in-laws. According to Khyala, her spouse exhibits remorse for the aggressive conduct he displayed in Pakistan.

For example, Khayla reported that her husband, who had been abusive in Pakistan, showed remorse after their relocation. She attributed his previous behaviour to the influence of family members, particularly his sisters, father, and mother.

My husband is now repentant over what he had done to me in the past on the instigation of his sisters, father, mother, all of them. He is repentant on my beating in the past (Khyala, 49).

Shenaz reflects on her transformative journey, comparing her current life to her past struggles. She notes the positive shift since receiving support from her husband and accessing psychological help, alongside proper medication. She emphasises the contrast between her past and present, highlighting the availability of facilities, opportunities for education, and the respect women receive in her new environment. Overall, she describes her life as significantly better than in Pakistan:

I have told you about my previous life and currently I have the support of my husband. All the things have come to an end which were negatively affecting my life. I have a psychological support over here; I can avail it. My medication is properly done. My life has been put on a normal track. There is a lot of difference. There was nothing over there. Over here there are too many facilities, even if I want to continue my education there is no problem for me. Over here woman is listened to. It is too much better here as compared to Pakistan (Shenaz, 40).

These experiences highlight the significant role in-laws played in shaping marital dynamics in Pakistan, often creating conflict between spouses. Participants expressed relief after moving to Australia where such external pressures were minimised, leading to more positive relationships.

Table 3 illustrates the educational background, employment status, and the shift in husbands' attitudes towards their spouses both in Pakistan and Australia. It highlights the changes participants observed in their relationships, with most reporting that their husbands became more supportive in Australia compared to their hostile behaviour in Pakistan.

Table 3: Husband’s Educational and Employment Background and Attitude

Participants' names	Husband’s Education	Husband’s Profession in Pakistan	Husband’s Profession in Australia	Relationship with Husband in Pakistan	Relationship with Husband in Australia
Fatima	8th	Govt. Job	Taxi driver	Hostile	Caring
Khyala	5th	Labourer	Taxi driver	Hostile	Caring
Mahnosh	Bachelor's Degree	Real estate agent	Security officer	Caring	Caring
Nasreen	Intermediate	Student	Salesman	Hostile	Caring
Norana	5 th	Labourer	Taxi driver	Caring	Caring
Saba	Intermediate	Office work	Taxi driver	Hostile	Mixed
Samina	Intermediate	Para-military force	Taxi driver	Hostile	Caring
Shenaz	Not Educated	Labourer	Taxi driver	Caring	Caring

Influence of Nuclear Family Structure

The adoption of a nuclear family structure in Australia contributes to the improvement of marital lives, allowing couples to establish more loving and caring relationships. Participants highlight the importance of autonomy and freedom from familial influence, enabling them to lead contented lives free from the constraints of patriarchal norms prevalent in Pakistan. One noteworthy observation is that the individuals' in-laws residing in Pakistan continue to exert influence over their lives in Australia. However, one participant, Saba, noted that her husband remained under the influence of his family, even from afar, which continued to strain their relationship. She described how his behavior fluctuated depending on the contact he had with his family in Pakistan:

My husband is still in their control, whatever happens he always listens to them, and does not think at all because they made him like this, he becomes good just for [a] few days and when he contacts them, they say something about me then he changes again; they should not do that, why they ruin someone’s life (Saba, 31).

Saba’s experience illustrates how deeply ingrained familial influence can be, even across a long distance, and how it continues to affect marital relationships for some couples after relocation. In contrast, participants like Khayla and Samina Baji experienced significant positive changes in their husbands' attitudes, linking these improvements to the absence of in-laws and the greater independence afforded by life in Australia.

All the participants in this study were leading contented lives in Australia; however, their in-laws exerted some degree of control over their lives through regular phone communication. Various strategies were used to provoke or taunt individuals. The perpetration of verbal, emotional, and psychological violence was manifested in making phone calls or voice messages to women or their spouses. However, it can be concluded that their marital lives had significantly improved in Australia compared to Pakistan. Consistent with the current study's findings, [Afrouz \(2019\)](#) and [Afrouz et al. \(2021b\)](#) similarly documented how Afghan women experienced enhanced autonomy and access to various opportunities after resettlement in Australia. This study contributes to the existing body of literature by suggesting that the adoption of a nuclear family structure by married couples may foster a more loving and caring attitude in husbands towards their wives, potentially mitigating the influence of in-laws.

Mahnosh reported that access to tools and networks available in Australia enabled her to better deal with and escape from FV. These tools included legal resources, social services, and support groups that are specifically designed to protect women from abuse and provide them with the means to seek help. For instance, Australia has a range of services such as helplines, women's shelters, legal aid services, and support networks that help women identify and escape abusive relationships. In addition, legal safeguards, including protective orders and the right to child custody, further empower women in their decision to leave abusive marriages. With the legal protection and networks in place, Mahnosh felt more emboldened to speak out against FV and seek justice for instances of abuse.

In Melbourne, a Pashtun woman will have access to resources and support systems that can help her address and escape FV. She may also feel more empowered to speak out against and seek justice for instances of abuse, due to the legal protections afforded to women in Australia (Mahnosh, 38).

With her spouse and children, Norana claimed to be living a good and happy life in Australia, free from the influences that had previously impacted on her marriage in Pakistan. Shehnaz also echoed these sentiments, stating that everything that had been negatively influencing her marital life in Pakistan had ended. Norana now enjoyed a supportive and caring relationship with her husband in Australia.

Now I am leading a good and happy life with my husband. I am very happy with my kids. But I cannot forget those two kids of mine who died before coming to Australia.

Whole [of] my body aches, thoughts haunt me and I am ill. I am too much happy but cannot enjoy the happiness due to my illness. Although I am happy but take pills even for to sleep. Otherwise, my life is too much good (Norana, 45).

Khyala maintained that while she lived a very unhappy life in Pakistan, she now has a joyful life in Australia with her husband and children.

There is a lot of difference between the life in Australia and the life in Pakistan. I led a very miserable life in Pakistan. Here in Australia, I happily live with my husband and kids. While in Pakistan we could not come near each other, we could not talk openly with one another, we could not take opinions of one another, we could not consult each other. Now we, here, live as a normal family and I understood the meaning of a family and life (Khyala, 49).

However, several participants talked about their inability to overcome previous encounters with FV, resulting in severe physical ailments. Familial dynamics were also occasionally influenced by in-laws who continued to reside in Pakistan, even though the participants were now living in Australia. This ongoing connection with in-laws in Pakistan highlights how deeply ingrained family dynamics can be, with remote influences continuing to disrupt the autonomy and stability of marital relationships in Australia.

Conclusion

This study found that participants varied in their understanding and awareness of FV. The factors influencing FV within the Pashtun community include cultural and religious beliefs, familial factors and women's economic dependency. The participants experienced psychological and emotional abuse perpetrated by their in-laws, during which their husbands played largely passive roles as observers. All participants indicated that they were restricted from visiting their parents' homes following FV incidents because their in-laws wanted to prevent any disclosure of the incidents. Moreover, participants had distanced themselves from close friends to conceal their personal hardships. This led to social isolation as their spousal homes became confining spaces.

The participants' responses also revealed several negative consequences of FV on children. These varied from physical deprivation and illness and in some cases even death due to lack of access to adequate nutrition and medical resources. Participants also reported

emotional and social impacts on their children. To help prevent or mitigate FV in the Pashtun community, the study's participants suggested six factors that could help to achieve this objective: education, the role of government, NGOs and religious leaders in addressing FV, change in the patriarchal mindset, and financial independence for women. All participants reported that their marital lives in Australia substantially improved, compared to Pakistan. They reported that their husbands' attitudes had significantly altered; they had become loving and caring in Australia, this was in contrast to their behaviour whilst in Pakistan and under the influence of their families.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

A phenomenological qualitative study was undertaken to explore Pashtun women's understanding and experiences of FV while they were living in Pakistan. It investigated four research questions that sought to explore Pashtun women's level of awareness and understanding of FV, causes and impact of FV, and the support available to women. It also examined potential changes needed to enhance support systems.

The study revealed that many of the participants appeared to lack a comprehensive understanding of FV, potentially attributed to cultural and societal factors. Many Pashtun women have been raised in a deeply patriarchal society where cultural norms appear to normalise abusive behaviour within the family context ([Jan et al., 2021](#)). This normalisation may lead to women being forced to accept physical, emotional, and psychological abuse as part of their marital duties.

In applying a socio-ecological framework to explore the systemic, structural, and cultural factors that contribute to FV in Pashtun families, the study found that the primary factors influencing FV within the Pashtun community are cultural and religious belief systems, familial factors and financial conditions. Lack of financial independence meant that women were dependent on their in-laws and this made it difficult to leave abusive situations. Patriarchal cultural belief systems shape the nature of the community and are reflected in the family system. The family dynamics discussed in the study highlight how women are often subjugated within familial relationships due to the influence of patriarchal and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality. These dynamics are further compounded by misinterpretations of Islam, which rather than focusing on core teachings of respect, equality and compassion, are selectively applied to maintain male authority and control. This reflects a broader societal structure that uses cultural and religious justifications to uphold systems of violence and gendered subjugation.

Actions to control and subjugate women were manifested in the women's relationships with in-laws. Participants in the study reported physical, psychological, emotional and financial abuse being perpetrated by in-laws, particularly mothers-in-law. This woman-to-woman violence has been described as a means of older women exerting their power over younger women in a larger patriarchal world ([Gangoli & Rew, 2011](#)). Participants reported that acts of FV were often witnessed by husbands, but many appeared to play a complicit role by failing to intervene, which enabled the continuation of violence. Participants also reported negative consequences of FV on children, including illness and even death due to lack of

medical care, and deprivation of basic needs. The findings indicate that children are not only indirect victims of violence but also suffer from direct abuse, neglect, malnutrition, and emotional trauma.

This study also sheds light on the lack of formal support systems for Pashtun women, especially in rural areas. Targeted support programs and counseling services remain scarce due to patriarchal resistance and a lack of intervention from government and non-government bodies ([Jan et al., 2021](#)). To address these gaps, education programs to raise awareness of FV, prevention and support programs must be designed in a way that respects cultural sensitivities while promoting awareness about FV and women's rights. In terms of targeted programs aimed at raising awareness about FV, there are currently very few initiatives within the Pashtun community, particularly in more rural areas. This is largely due to cultural resistance and lack of government or non-government intervention focusing on gender-based violence. Without significant investment in both education and community outreach, many women remain unaware of their legal rights or available support systems. Prevention programs should aim to both empower women and engage men in discussion about gender equality and the harmful effects of violence. For example, educational programs that focus on women's rights, framed within the context of Islamic teachings on justice and respect, could empower women to recognise abusive behaviour and to seek whatever support is available to them. Increasing awareness and education about the negative impact of familial interference, particularly from in-laws, could potentially foster healthier and more supportive marital environments. Furthermore, promoting community-based support systems and counseling services tailored to the needs of Pashtun women may help couples navigate familial pressures and strengthen their relationships, thereby potentially reducing the influence of in-laws in a culturally acceptable manner.

In addition to culturally sensitive education and support programs, participants identified other changes at different levels of the socio-ecological system that were needed to help prevent FV in Pashtun communities. These included government involvement in the development of more robust laws that specifically protect women from the abusive control of in-laws and ensuring perpetrators are held accountable. They also identified the role of NGOs and religious leaders in helping prevent FV. They reported that NGOs could play a pivotal role in raising awareness and providing support services for victims of FV, particularly in areas where formal state interventions were lacking. Engaging religious leaders in promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal interpretations of religion could also lead to greater community support for women's rights.

In addition, participants reported that strategies to foster the financial independence of women may help reduce their vulnerability to violence and provide greater opportunities to leave abusive relationships. However, access to greater financial independence may be difficult, as some participants reported that their in-laws restricted their ability to seek employment. Although the participants outlined several strategies to help prevent FV, addressing the patriarchal cultural norms that perpetuate FV is essential for creating more equitable relationships. But such a cultural shift will require a concerted effort by government, religious leaders and the community before it begins to happen. The reported transformation in their husbands' behaviour after moving to Australia illustrates that men's attitudes to FV can change. The comparison between participants' lives in Pakistan and Australia illustrated how cultural environments and social systems can significantly influence family relationships and reduce instances of FV.

Limitations

While providing valuable insights into FV within the Pashtun community, this study has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The first limitation is the small sample size of eight women. Given the sensitivity of the topic, this study is necessarily small in scale. It is possible that some women chose not to participate due to concerns about confidentiality, fear of social repercussions, or feelings of shame associated with discussing such issues. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the breadth of experiences or perspectives within the wider Pashtun community. Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to offer a more comprehensive understanding of IPV in this context.

Contributions and Future Research Recommendations

This study fills an important research gap by examining a sample of Pashtun women from Pakistan who migrated to Australia. The findings of this study contribute to the FV literature by providing insights into the lived experience of Pashtun women who have experienced FV. It sheds light on how women from this cultural and religious background perceive and experience different forms of violence, including physical, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse. Such insights are particularly valuable given the paucity of existing literature on the specific experiences of Pashtun women, particularly regarding how FV manifests within their cultural and religious contexts.

This study also identified key cultural and religious factors that contribute to the perpetuation of FV in Pashtun families, such as the role of in-laws, patriarchal cultural norms, and financial conditions. By detailing the influence of these factors, the study expands on how patriarchal structures and traditional beliefs intersect to reinforce abusive behaviour within the family unit. Its focus on in-law dynamics, particularly the role of mothers-in-law in perpetuating abuse, adds a new dimension to the understanding of FV in Pashtun communities.

This study also reveals the significant gaps in awareness regarding what constitutes FV among Pashtun women and highlights how deeply ingrained cultural norms may lead to the normalisation of violence, especially for women with lower education levels. Moreover, it demonstrates that formal support systems, such as shelters, legal aid, and counseling, are largely inaccessible or nonexistent, particularly in rural areas of Pakistan. This insight into the lack of targeted interventions and educational programs underscores the need for both government and non-government organisations to address these issues.

This study suggests that interventions should be framed within the context of Islamic teachings on justice and respect for women, making them more acceptable to communities. It also recommends engaging community leaders and religious figures to foster support for gender equality and raise awareness about women's rights. These recommendations highlight the importance of culturally relevant approaches when addressing sensitive issues such as FV.

A critical recommendation from the study is to focus on raising awareness and education around the negative consequences of familial interference, particularly from in-laws. Educational campaigns that engage both men and women about the damaging effects of controlling behaviour within families and promote healthier relational dynamics could foster more supportive marital environments. Interventions should also involve religious leaders, as many participants suggested that shifting patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings could be instrumental in creating cultural change.

Further research is also needed to understand how socioeconomic status, education, and cultural exposure affect women's understanding of FV. Tailoring educational programs and interventions to different demographic groups will ensure that future efforts are targeted and effective in changing attitudes towards FV. In addition, this study highlights that while husbands in Pashtun families are often not direct perpetrators of FV, they are complicit by failing to intervene in instances of abuse. Future research could focus on strategies to empower men within these communities to take an active role in preventing FV, not just by intervening

but by fostering gender equality and understanding their role in the broader cultural dynamics of FV.

Finally, future studies should focus on the following six key areas that emerged as central to addressing FV in the Pashtun community: education, government involvement, NGO engagement, religious leadership, changing patriarchal norms and financial independence for women. Therefore, future studies should build on the findings of this study to design holistic, culturally sensitive interventions that engage not only the victims but also the perpetrators and the community at large. By focusing on education, religious leaders, government and community engagement, these interventions can work towards efforts to better help prevent FV in Pashtun communities.

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Appendices

Appendix A University Ethics Approval

To: Nargis Gulab
Fri 16/10/2020 9:37 AM



Ethics Application
PDF - 309 KB



Appendix F - Safety Plan_Final
DOCX - 19 KB

7 attachments (476 KB)

Dear Researcher,

Please find attached a copy of your application for ethical review of research involving human participants at Victoria University.

NOTE: This email contains a copy of the application only and is NOT confirmation of submission. Please check the 'Process Status' below to determine the current status of this application.

- » Application ID: HRE20-067
- » Chief Investigator: DR LISA HODGE
- » Other Investigators: DR ROMANA MORDA, MRS Nargis GULAB
- » Application Title: Melbourne based Pashtun women's experiences of family violence that occurred when living in Pakistan.
- » Process Status: Finalised - Approved
- » Form Version: 13-07

To access the application online, go to
<http://quest.vu.edu.au/>

For help and information regarding ethical conduct or applications for ethical review at Victoria University, refer to the Human Research Ethics website or contact the Secretary for the Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research.
Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461
Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au
Website: <http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php>

Appendix B Information to Participants Letter



INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "Melbourne based Pashtun women's past experiences of family violence that occurred when living in Pakistan".

This project is being conducted by a student researcher **Nargis Gulab** as part of a Masters by Research study at Victoria University under the supervision of Dr Lisa Hodge and Dr Romana Morda from the Institute for Health and Sport at Victoria University.

Project explanation

Despite the serious physical and psychological implications of family violence, family violence in Pashtun families remains a relatively under researched area. The aim of this project is to explore Pashtun women's understanding of past family violence experienced by extended families, including their parents in laws, when they were living in Khyber Pukhtun Khwa Pakistan. The women have escaped from their violent families and are now living in Melbourne. The specific objectives of the project are:

- (a) To examine women's views and experiences of family violence in Pashtun Families.
- (b) To explore the systemic, structural and cultural factors that contribute to family violence in Pashtun families.

What will I be asked to do?

Following your voluntary consent to be part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a private semi-structured interview with the student researcher which will be audio recorded with your permission. The interview will be approximately one hour face to face or on Zoom/ skype. The interview will explore a number of topics including what are your views about family violence, what are some of the challenges you have faced and how would you describe your experiences of family violence.

What will I gain from participating?

There is limited research exploring family violence in Pashtun Families from Newly Merged Tribal Districts of Khyber Pukhtun khwa in Pakistan, therefore your participation will assist in developing knowledge regarding women's past experiences of family violence perpetrated by extended family and the systemic and cultural factors that contribute to family violence. Findings from the proposed study will contribute new knowledge to the field of family violence in the Pashtun community.

How will the information I give be used?

The information from your interview will become part of a research thesis exploring women's views and past experiences of family violence. Quotes from the interview will be used in the final thesis but your identity will not be revealed. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym and any other identifying details will be omitted. Interview data may also be used in future presentations or publications based on the general findings of this study.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

Your participation in this study may involve the following psychological and social risks. Potential psychological risks include possible feelings of anxiety or emotional discomfort while participating in the interview. The interview may trigger

memories and traumatic experiences from your past. However, if during the interview you become uncomfortable you have the right to not answer a question and can withdraw from the study at any time. If you wish to discuss your concerns with a psychotherapist unrelated to the research process, you can contact Batul Gulani Clinical Supervisor/ Psychotherapist (AMAFFH Federation) directly on 0422 851 536. It would be free of charge for an initial consultation only, with referrals to other services if required.

Potential social risks centre on issues of anonymity and confidentiality. It is advised that your anonymity cannot be assured as you are participating in an interview with the student researcher. However, the information provided in these interviews will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will only be available to the project researchers. A pseudonym will be used in place of your real name, and any other identifying information will be removed from the thesis.

How will this project be conducted?

This study will involve interviews with only those Pashtun women who have experienced family violence perpetrated by extended family members at least 12 months previously while they were living in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Pakistan region and who have subsequently escaped and are now living in Melbourne, Australia. You will be asked questions which explore a number of topics including what are your views about family violence, what are some of the challenges you have faced and how would you describe your experiences of family violence. Interviews will be conducted at a time convenient to participants and at a suitably private and neutral location or via Zoom. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. The data collected will be collated and qualitatively analysed.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form, which indicates that you understand the nature and procedures involved in this study, and that you agree to participate. Please email your consent form to nargis.gulab@live.vu.edu.au. After receiving your signed consent form, you will be contacted in order to arrange a time and place for the interview.

Who is conducting the study?

<u>Principal Researcher</u>	<u>Principal Researcher</u>	<u>Student Researcher</u>
Dr. Lisa Hodge	Dr. Romana Morda	Mrs. Nargis gulab
Research Fellow Institute of Health and Sport	Institute of Health and Sport	Institute of Health and Sport
Victoria University	Victoria University	Victoria University
Ph: 9919 5751	Ph: 9919 5223	Ph: 0484 844 096
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Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix C Information to Participants Letter



TRANSLATION OF INFORMATION SHEET FROM ENGLISH TO URDU

تحقیق میں حصہ لینے والوں کے لیے معلومات

آپ کو ایک تحقیقی عمل جس کا عنوان ہے "میلبورن میں مقیم ہشون خواتین کے ماضی میں گھریلو تشدد کے تجربات" ہیں۔ جب وہ پاکستان میں رہتی تھیں۔
یہ تحقیق ایک ماہر علم جس کا نام زگس گلاب ہے کر رہی ہے جو کہ ونگورا یونیورسٹی میں تحقیقی ماسٹر کی سطح کی تعلیم حاصل کر رہی ہے جس کی نگرانی ڈاکٹر لیسبا بوج اور ڈاکٹر رومانہ مورڈا، جن کا تعلق ونگورا یونیورسٹی میں صحت اور کھیلوں کے مرکز سے ہے، کر رہی ہیں۔

منصوبے کی تفصیل:

گھریلو تشدد کے شدید تر جسمانی اور نفسیاتی اثرات کے باوجود پختون خاندانوں میں گھریلو تشدد پر خاطر خواہ تحقیق نہیں ہوئی ہے۔ اس منصوبے کا مقصد ہشون خواتین پر ماضی میں ان کے مشترکہ خاندانی نظام میں خاندان کے افراد بشمول ماں سے سسر کی جانب سے کیے گئے گھریلو تشدد کے بارے میں ان کی فہم و فراست کو جاننا ہے جب وہ غیر پختونخواہ، پاکستان میں رہ رہی تھیں۔ یہ خواتین اپنے پرتشدد خاندانوں سے بچ کر آئی ہیں اور اس وقت میلبورن میں مقیم ہیں۔

تحقیق کے خاص مقاصد یہ ہیں

(الف) ہشون خاندانوں میں گھریلو تشدد سے متعلق خواتین کے خیالات اور تجربات کو جاننا۔

(ب) ان مروجہ خود ساختہ قوانین، ثقافتی اور سیاسی حوالہ پر منہ معلومات اکٹھی کرنا جو ہشون خاندانوں میں گھریلو تشدد کا باعث بنتے ہیں۔

کیا بوجھا جائے گا؟

آپ کی رضامندی سے آپ کو اس تحقیق کے لئے ایک ایسے شروع میں شرکت کرنے کو کہا جاتا ہے جو کہ عام روایتی طریقے سے آپ اور تحقیق کے طالب علم کے درمیان ہوگا اور آپ کی رضامندی سے آپ کو ہونے والا ہے۔ شروع شروع میں آپ کو ایک گھنٹے پر محیط آنے سانسے یا سٹاکپ (ZOOM) کے ذریعے لیا جائے گا۔ شروع کے دوران کئی موضوعات پر بات ہوگی جیسا کہ آپ کا گھریلو تشدد سے متعلق کیا خیال ہے، آپ کو کئی مشکلات کا سامنا رہا ہے اور آپ کا اس سوال سے کیا تجربہ رہا ہے؟

اس تحقیق میں شامل ہونے سے مجھے کیا فائدہ ہوگا؟

غیر پختونخواہ، پاکستان میں حالیہ ہم شدہ ضمنی حیثیت رکھنے والے قبائل علاقوں میں گھریلو تشدد سے متعلق بہت محدود تحقیق ہوئی ہے، اس لئے اس تحقیق میں آپ کی شرکت سے زیادہ معلومات اکٹھی ہوں گی، خواتین پر ماضی میں ان کے مشترکہ خاندانی نظام میں خاندان کے افراد کی جانب سے کیے گئے گھریلو تشدد کے تجربات اور اس سے متعلق معاشرتی ساخت اور ثقافتی حوالہ کو سمیٹنے میں مدد ملے گی۔ اس مجوزہ تحقیق سے حاصل کردہ نتائج سے ہشون کمیونٹی میں خاندانی تشدد کے میدان میں نئے علم کو فروغ حاصل ہوگا۔

میری فراہم کردہ معلومات کس طرح سے استعمال کی جائیں گی؟

شروع سے آپ کی فراہم کردہ معلومات تحقیقی مقالے کا حصہ ہونگی جس میں گھریلو تشدد کا شکار خواتین کے خیالات اور ان کے ماضی کے تجربات کا تجربہ کیا جائے گا۔ آخری تحقیقی مضامین میں آپ کے شروع سے لے گئے اقتباسات کو شامل کیا جائے گا لیکن آپ کے نام اور شناخت کو ظاہر نہیں کیا جائے گا۔ آپ کے نام کی جگہ ایک فرضی نام استعمال ہوگا اور شروع سے آپ کے شناخت سے متعلق سارا مواد ہٹا دیا جائے گا۔ شروع سے اخذ شدہ معلومات کو اس مقالے کے عمومی نتائج کی بنیاد پر مستقبل کی اشاعتوں اور پروفیسر میں استعمال کیا جاسکتا ہے۔

اس منصوبے میں شمولیت کے ممکنہ خطرات کیا ہو سکتے ہیں؟

آپ کی اس تحقیق میں شرکت سے آپ کو یہ سیاسی اور نفسیاتی خطرات درپیش ہو سکتے ہیں۔ اس شروع سے آپ پر ممکنہ طور پر جذباتی سے سکونی اور ذہنی اضطراب طاری ہو سکتا ہے۔ شروع کے دوران آپ کے ماضی کی باتوں یا تکلیف دہ تجربات تازہ ہو سکتے ہیں۔ تاہم اگر آپ شروع کے دوران کسی سے سکونی کو محسوس کریں تو آپ سوال کا جواب دینے کی پابندی نہیں ہیں اور آپ کسی وقت بھی شروع سے چھوڑ سکتی ہیں۔

اگر آپ اس تحقیق کے عمل سے پریشانی محسوس کریں یا کسی ماہر نفسیات سے رابطہ کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو آپ ہول گزاتی جوائنٹل سپروائزر / سائیکو تھراپسٹ امیہ (AMAFHH Federation) فونیشن ہیں، سے 0422854536 پر براہ راست رابطہ کر سکتے ہیں جو کہ وقت ضرورت آپ کو ابتدائی مشورے کے ساتھ

ساتھ دوسرے سرورسز کے حوالے سے بھی مدد مشورہ دے سکتی ہیں۔ اس کے علاوہ وہ تعلق مشاورت بھی دے سکتی ہیں۔

تک کہ ماضی کے خطرات کا محور گنتامی و رازداری کے معاملات ہیں۔ آپ کو ہا د یا جانا ہے کہ آپ کی گنتامی اور رازداری کو اس لیے مکمل طور پر بخفی نہیں بنایا جا سکتا ہے کیونکہ آپ کا اشریو ایک طالب علم محقق ہے۔ تاہم آپ کی گنتامی اور رازداری کو ہر تکہ طور پر رازداری اور گنتامی میں رکھا جائے گا اور اس اشریو تک صرف متعلقہ محققین کی رسائی ہوگی جو کہ اس منصوبے پر تحقیق کرنے میں حصہ دار ہیں۔ آپ کے اصل نام کی جگہ ایک فرضی نام کو استعمال کیا جائے گا اور شناخت سے متعلق باقی سارے مواد کو بھی متعلقہ مضامین سے ہٹا دیا جائے گا۔

اس منصوبے اپراجیکٹ پر کیسے کام ہوگا؟

اس مطالعے میں صرف ان ہفتوں خواتین کے اشریوز شامل ہونگے جن کو ان کے وسیع خاندان کے افراد کی جانب سے کم از کم 22 ماہ پہلے تصدیق کا نشانہ بنایا گیا تھا جب وہ خیرین خصوصاً پاکستان بچوں میں رہ رہیں تھیں اور جو ہم میں وہاں سے بچ کر آچکی ہیں اور اب بیلیون آسٹریلیا میں رہائش پذیر ہیں۔ آپ سے گھریلو تصدیق سے متعلق آپ کے خیالات، ذاتی تجربات سمیت مختلف موضوعات اور حوالے پر سوالات کیے جائینگے۔ اشریو باہمی طور پر طے شدہ مناسب اور غیر جانبدار جگہ پر اسکاپ چھپٹہ / ZOOM کے ذریعے ہوگا۔ آپ کی رضامندی سے اشریو آڈیو ریکارڈ کیا جائے گا جس کا دورانیہ تقریباً ساٹھ منٹ ہوگا۔ اشریو سے حاصل ہونے والے مواد کا ترمیمی اور معیاری خیابوں پر تجربہ کیا جائے گا۔

اگر آپ اس اشریو میں شرکت کے لیے راضی ہے تو مندرجہ ذیل رضامندی کے فارم کو مکمل کریں جس کا مطالبہ ہے کہ آپ اس اشریو کی خاصیت اور طریقہ کار سے واقف ہیں اور اس میں شامل ہونے کے لیے راضی ہیں۔

ہر کم اس رضامندی کے فارم کو nayia.gulab@lvc.vu.edu.au پر بھیج دیجئے۔

آپ کا دستخط شدہ فارم موصول ہونے کے بعد آپ سے اشریو کے وقت اور جگہ کے متعلق بات کرنے کے لیے رابطہ کیا جائے گا۔

مطالعے میں کون کون شامل ہیں؟

پرنسپل محقق: ڈاکٹر لیزا ہوج

ہسرچ فیلو انسٹیٹیوٹ آف ہیلتھ اینڈ سپورٹس، ونگورہ یونیورسٹی۔

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موبائل: 0434844096

ای میل: nayia.gulab@lvc.vu.edu.au

اس منصوبے میں اپنی شرکت سے متعلق ہر طرح کے سوالات مندرجہ بالا فہرست میں شامل چیف انسٹیٹیوٹ سے کیے جاسکتے ہیں۔

آپ کو اس اشریو کے بارے میں کسی بھی طرح کے غیر مناسب سلوک پر اعتراض ہو تو آپ ایچکس سیکرٹری، ونگورہ یونیورسٹی ہیومن ریسرچ

ایچکس کمیٹی، دفتر برائے ہسرچ، ونگورہ یونیورسٹی سے

ای میل: researchethics@lvc.vu.edu.au یا PO Box 24428, Melbourne, Vic 3004

99494782 or 4461 پر رابطہ کر سکتے ہیں۔

Appendix D Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Part 1: Demographic Questions

1. Can you please tell me about yourself?
 - a. educational background?
 - b. Family background?
 - c. Do you have children?
 - d. Tell me about your husband. How did you first meet?
 - e. When did you get married? What does he do?
 - f. Who else is in your family? Any extended family members living with you?
2. How do you normally spend your days? What things do you like to do?

Part 2: Interview Prompts

3. How would you describe your relationship with your husband?
4. How would you describe your relationship with your extended family?
5. Can you tell me about any problems you may have had with your family in the past?
 - a. When did these issues start?
 - b. What do you think caused these issues?
6. What is your understanding of FV?
7. Would you describe your experiences as FV? Why or why not?
8. What impact did your experience of FV have on your wellbeing?
 - a. Physical?
 - b. Psychological/ Emotionally?
 - c. Socially? Relationships with friends and family members?
 - d. Work outside of the home?
9. How did your experiences impact on your children (if they have any)?
10. Did you ever discuss your family problems with others?
 - a. How did they respond?
 - b. Was there more that you would have liked them to do?
11. What other support do you think should be offered to women from your community who experience FV?
12. In your opinion is FV a particular problem for Pashtun families? Why or why not?
13. What factors contribute to FV in Pashtun families?

14. What role does culture and religion play in regards to FV?
 - a. How is it viewed culturally / wider society?
 - b. Religion
15. Looking back at your situation, what advice would you give another woman who has just started to have these sorts of problems with her family?
16. What do you think needs to change to help prevent incidences of FV in the Pashtun community?

Appendix E Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

ترقی کتاب

انٹرویو کے سوالات

تحقیق سے متعلقہ سوالات

- 1) خیبرپختونخواہ پاکستان سے آئی ہوئیں میلبورن، آسٹریلیا میں مقیم پشتون خواتین کے گھریلو تشدد کے بارے میں کیا خیالات اور تجربات ہیں؟
- 2) وہ کونسے مروجہ خود ساختہ قوانین، ثقافتی اور سماجی عوامل ہیں جو پشتون خاندانوں میں گھریلو تشدد کا باعث بنتے ہیں؟

انٹرویو کے سوالات

1. کیا آپ مہربانی کر کے مجھے اپنے بارے میں بتا سکتی ہیں؟
 - الف. تعلیمی پس منظر؟
 - ب. خاندانی پس منظر؟
 - پ. کیا آپ کے بچے ہیں؟
 - ت. مجھے اپنے شوہر کے بارے میں بتائیے۔ آپ کی پہلی بار کیسے ملاقات ہوئی تھی؟
 - ث. آپ کی شادی کب ہوئی تھی؟ وہ کیا کام کرتے ہیں؟
 - ج. آپ کے خاندان میں اور کون لوگ ہیں؟ دیگر خاندانی رشتے دار جیسا کہ باپ دادا وغیرہ جو آپ کے ساتھ رہ رہے ہوں؟
2. آپ عام طور پر اپنے دن کیسے گزارتی ہیں؟ آپ کونسے کام کرنا پسند کرتی ہیں؟
 3. آپ اپنے شوہر کیساتھ تعلقات کو کس طرح سے بیان کریں گی؟
 4. آپ اپنے دیگر خاندانی رشتے داروں جیسا کہ باپ دادا وغیرہ کیساتھ تعلقات کو کس طرح سے بیان کریں گی؟

5. کیا آپ مجھے چند ایسے مسئلوں کے بارے میں بتا سکتی ہیں جو ماضی میں آپ کے اپنے خاندان کیساتھ رہے ہوں؟

الف۔ یہ جھگڑے کب شروع ہوئے تھے؟

ب۔ آپ کے خیال میں کس وجہ سے یہ جھگڑے شروع ہوئے تھے؟

6. گھریلو تشدد کے بارے میں آپ کی سمجھ بوجھ کیا ہے؟

7. گھریلو تشدد کے بارے میں کیا آپ اپنے تجربات کو بیان کریں گیں؟ کیوں یا کیوں نہیں؟

8. آپ کی فلاح و بہبود پر گھریلو تشدد کے تجربے کے کیا اثرات پڑے تھے؟

الف۔ جسمانی؟

ب۔ نفسیاتی / جذباتی؟

ب۔ سماجی؟ دوستوں اور خاندان کے افراد کیساتھ تعلقات پر؟

تہ گھر سے باہر کام پر؟

9. آپ کے تجربات کے آپ کے بچوں پر کیا اثرات پڑے تھے (اگر کوئی تھے تو)؟

10. کیا آپ نے اپنے خاندانی مسائل کے بارے میں نوسروں کیساتھ کبھی بات چیت کی تھی؟

الف۔ ان کا کیا ردعمل تھا؟

ب۔ کیا مزید کچھ ایسا تھا جو آپ چاہتی تھیں کہ وہ اس بارے میں کریں؟

11. آپ کے خیال آپ کی کمیونٹی سے تعلق رکھنے والی ایسی خواتین کی اور کس طرح سے مدد

کی جاسکتی ہے جو گھریلو تشدد کا شکار ہوتی ہیں؟

12. آپ کی رائے میں کیا گھریلو تشدد پشتون خاندانوں کا ہی ایک مخصوص مسئلہ ہے؟ کیوں یا

کیوں نہیں؟

13. وہ کونسے عوامل ہیں جو پشتون خاندانوں میں گھریلو تشدد کا باعث بنتے ہیں؟

14. گھریلو تشدد میں ثقافت اور مذہب کا کیا کردار ہوتا ہے؟

الف۔ اسے ثقافتی طور پر / معاشرے بھر میں کس نظر سے دیکھا جاتا ہے؟

ب۔ مذہب

15. آپ اپنی صورتحال کو مدنظر رکھتے ہوئے، کسی دوسری عورت کو جسے اپنے خاندان

کیساتھ اس طرح کے مسائل کا ابھی سامنا شروع کرنا پڑ رہا ہو کیا مشورہ دیں گیں؟

16. آپ کے خیال میں کیا تبدیلی لائی جائے جس سے پشتون خاندانوں میں گھریلو تشدد کے واقعات

کی روک تھام میں مدد مل سکے؟

I certify that this is a true translation of the attached document in English.

(Muhammad Abdullah Khan)

Professional Translator Urdu<-> English
NAATI Practitioner ID:CPN6MR60P

Dated: 21-10-2020

DocuSigned by:



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CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study entitled “Melbourne based Pashtun women’s past experiences of family violence that occurred when living in Pakistan” and the study will explore women’s views and experiences about family violence in Pashtun Families. This research is being conducted by a student researcher **Nargis Gulab** as part of a Masters by Research study at Victoria University.

For the purpose of this research I will conduct interviews with Pashtun women who have experienced family violence perpetrated by extended family members in their joint family system, at least 12 months previously while they were living in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Pakistan region and who have subsequently escaped and are now living in Melbourne, Australia. The interview will be audio taped with your permission and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions which explore a number of topics including what are your views about family violence, what are some of the challenges you have faced and how would you describe your experiences of family violence. If during the interview you become in any way distressed by the questions, you have the right to choose not to answer or withdraw from the study at anytime. Your response will be confidential and any personal details that may identify you will be removed from the interview transcripts and the final thesis. If you wish to discuss your concerns with a psychotherapist unrelated to the research process, you can contact Batul Gulani Clinical Supervisor/ Psychotherapist (AMAFHH Federation) directly on 0422 851 536. It would be free of charge for an initial consultation only, with referrals to other services if required.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I,of, (suburb).....

Certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: “Melbourne based Pashtun women’s past experiences of family violence that occurred when living in Pakistan.” being conducted at Victoria University by: Nargis Gulab under the supervision of Dr Lisa Hodge and Dr Romana Morda.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed here under to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by: NARGIS GULAB and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Participation in an interview, including explicit consent to be audio taped for transcription and data analysis process.

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed: Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the investigators:

Dr Lisa Hodge (9919 5751) Lisa.Hodge@vu.edu.au

Dr Romana Morda (9919 5223) Romana.Morda@vu.edu.au

Mrs.Nargis Gulab (0484 844096) nargis.gulab@live.vu.edu.au

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

TRANSLATION OF CONSENT FORM FROM ENGLISH TO URDU

تحقیق میں شرکت کنندگان کے لیے باہمی رضامندی کا فارم
شرکت کرنے والے کے لیے معلومات:

ہم آپ کو اس تحقیق میں حصہ لینے کی دعوت دیتے ہیں جس کا عنوان "میلبرن میں مقیم بھون خواتین کے ماضی میں گھریلو تشدد کے تجربات ہیں، جب وہ پاکستان میں رہتی تھیں" اور مطالعے کا مقصد ان بھون خواتین کے گھریلو تشدد کے حوالے سے ان کے خیالات اور تجربات کے بارے میں مزید معلومات اکٹھی کرنا ہے۔

یہ تحقیق ایک طالب علم تحقیق ترگس گلاب کر رہی ہے جو ونکوہ یونیورسٹی سے تحقیق کے ذریعے ماسٹر کر رہی ہے۔ اس مقصد کے لیے میں ان بھون خواتین کے انٹرویوز کرونگی جن کو ان کے مشترکہ خاندانی نظام میں ان کے خاندان کے افراد کی جانب سے کم از کم 12 ماہ پہلے تشدد کا نشانہ بنایا گیا تھا جب وہ خیریت خواہ پاکستان کے علاقے میں رہ رہی تھیں اور جو بعد میں وہاں سے بچ کر آچکی ہیں اور اب میلبرن آسٹریلیا میں رہائش پذیر ہیں۔ انٹرویو آپ کی اجازت اور رضامندی سے ہی انڈیو ریکارڈ کیا جائے گا اور اس کا دورانیہ تقریباً ایک گھنٹہ ہوگا۔ انٹرویو کے دوران آپ سے مختلف موضوعات پر بات ہوگی جس میں آپ کے گھریلو تشدد کے بارے میں کیا خیالات ہیں، آپ کو ممکنہ طور پر مشکلات درپیش ہونے اور اس حوالے سے آپ کے اپنے کیا تجربات ہیں، شامل ہونگے۔ انٹرویو کے دوران اگر آپ کو کسی بھی سوال پر کسی بھی قسم کی پریشانی یا نفسیاتی دباؤ محسوس ہو تو آپ کسی بھی ایسے سوال کا جواب دینے کی پابندی نہیں ہے اور اگر آپ چاہیں تو آپ کا حق ہوتا ہے کہ آپ اس تحقیقی منصوبے / پراجیکٹ سے علیحدہ ہوسکتی ہیں۔ آپ کا نام، شناخت سے متعلق ساری معلومات اور آپ کے جوابات راز میں رہیں گے۔ اور آپ کے ساری معلومات جو آپ کے شناخت سے متعلق ہوں، ایسے علم مواد کو انٹرویو کے ٹرانسکرپٹ اور آخری تجربہ میں سے نکالنا چاہئے گا۔ اگر آپ اس تحقیق کے عمل سے ہٹ کر کسی ماہر نفسیات سے رابطہ کرنا چاہتے ہیں تو آپ ہول گلابی سول کلبنگل سپروائزر / اسٹیکو ٹیراٹسٹ (AMAFHH Federation) امانہ فیشن ہیں، سے 0422854536 پر براہ راست رابطہ کر سکتے ہیں جو کہ وقت ضرورت آپ کو ابتدائی مشورے کے ساتھ ساتھ دوسرے سروسز کے حوالے سے بھی مفت مشورہ دے سکتی ہیں۔

شرکت کنندہ کا سرٹیفکیٹ

میں.....(مضامنی علاقہ)..... کی رضی والی تصدیق کرتی ہوں کہ میری عمر چارہ سال سے زائد ہے اور میں رضاکارانہ طور پر اس مطالعے میں شرکت کرنے پر رضی ہوں: "میلبرن میں رہائش پذیر بھون خواتین کے ماضی کے خاندانی تشدد کے تجربات ہیں، جب وہ پاکستان میں رہتی تھیں" جو ونکوہ یونیورسٹی کی طالبہ ترگس گلاب ڈاکٹر ایسا بوج اور ڈاکٹر رومانہ مورٹا کی نگرانی میں کر رہی ہے۔

میں تصدیق کرتی ہوں کہ اس انٹرویو اور مطالعے کے مقاصد سمیت اس میں ممکنہ طور پر موجود تمام تر خطرات، نقصانات اور اس میں تجربہ شدہ طریقہ کار کے بارے میں مجھے ساری تفصیل ترگس گلاب نے بتائی ہے اور میں رضاکارانہ طور پر اس میں شریک ہو رہی ہوں۔

• اس انٹرویو میں شمولیت، مع واضح رضامندی سلسلہ فرانسسکین اور ڈیٹا پر تجزیاتی عمل کے لیے انڈیو ریکارڈ کیے جانے کے لیے

میں تصدیق کرتی ہوں کہ مجھے سوائٹ بوجنے اور جواب کا موقع دیا گیا ہے اور میں یہ سمجھتی ہوں کہ میں کسی بھی وقت اس انٹرویو کے عمل سے علیحدہ ہوسکتی ہوں اور ہونے سے مجھے کسی قسم کا خطرہ لاحق نہیں ہوگا۔ مجھے بتایا گیا ہے کہ میں سو معلومات فراہم کرونگی انہیں صیغہ راز میں رکھا جائے گا۔

..... نام

آپ کا اس منصوبے میں اپنی شرکت کے حوالے سے کوئی بھی سوال ہو تو آپ مندرجہ ذیل متعلقہ محققین سے رابطہ کر سکتی ہیں۔

ڈاکٹر ایسا بوج Lisa.Hodge@vu.edu.au (99495751)

ڈاکٹر رومانہ مورٹا Rotasana.Mordas@vu.edu.au (99495223)

ترگس گلاب nazgul.gulab@live.vu.edu.au (0434 844096)



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

- اگر اس دوران آپ کو کسی بھی مسئلہ کے بارے میں کوئی سوال یا اعتراض ہو تو آپ ایمپلوائمنٹ سیکرٹری، وکٹوریہ یونیورسٹی، میلبورن، وکٹوریہ یونیورسٹی، کینیڈا، ڈیلا، وکٹوریہ یونیورسٹی، پتہ PO Box 14428 میلبورن، وکٹوریہ 3001، یا ای میل researchethics@vu.edu.au یا 99194781 (03) یا رابطہ کر سکتے ہیں۔

Appendix H Approved Safety Plan

SAFETY PLAN for conducting the interviews

Melbourne based Pashtun women's experiences of family violence that occurred when living in Pakistan.

The student researcher will be interviewing 6 to 8 Pashtun participants (women) living in Melbourne, Australia. Only women who have experienced family violence at least 12 months prior to this study when they were living in Pakistan, will be recruited. Potential participants will be invited to have a support person with them during the interview.

1. Prior to beginning the interview, the student researcher will go through the consent process with the participant.
 - a. This will include a duty of care statement and discussing the limits of confidentiality to ensure that the participant is fully aware of when confidentiality cannot (lawfully) be maintained (such as risk to oneself or risk to others and disclosure of child abuse).
 - b. The participant will be reminded that the interview will be conducted with high confidentiality to ensure the participant's identity will be protected, for example, any identifiable information will be coded and de-identified.
 - c. The participant will be invited to self-select a pseudonym.
 - d. The participant will be reminded that they can request small breaks, or even withdraw from the interview by requesting to terminate the interview at any time, without consequence to them.
 - e. The participant will be encouraged to only share information that they feel comfortable with.
 - f. In addition to participants giving written consent, verbal consent will be sought from the participant prior to the interview commencing.
 - g. Finally, if the interviews are conducted face-to-face, (depending on COVID-19 restrictions) the researcher will bring simple cultural snacks, water and tissues to the interview to create psychological comfort for the participants.
2. To mitigate the risk to safety and of psychological distress, women who are currently in a family violence situation will be excluded from participating in the study.
3. The interview will be face-to-face or via Zoom (due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions) and conducted in a safe and quiet location and a time convenient to the participant.
4. The interview will be conducted in local/native language (Urdu/Pashto), which is also the first language of the student researcher.
5. Conducting the interviews in Melbourne instead of Pakistan will help create some level of psychological and social safety, due to geographical distance from their country of origin where the participant experienced the family violence.
6. In case of any unforeseen issue, such as the participant becoming distressed while participating in the interview, the student researcher will refer the participant to relevant registered and professional support in Melbourne.
7. If the interview triggers memories and traumatic experiences for the participant and the participant becomes distressed, the student researcher will manage these events:

- a. Firstly, by offering to terminate the interview, or to reschedule it at another time, or to suggest that they may request to have small breaks and reminding the participant that participation is entirely voluntary and they may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequence to them.
 - b. Secondly, by referring the participant to relevant services, including the psychologist who is supporting the research.
 - c. Cultural counseling will be offered as an option for the participants (Cultural counseling is practiced by local elders and trusted community member).
8. Despite purposively selecting women who are not currently experiencing family violence, if a participant discloses family violence, the appropriate support will be put in place:
- a. This will include calling the Police or Safe steps (for crisis response) or Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence.
 - b. The student researcher will provide contact details for counseling services.
 - c. The student researcher will immediately contact her supervisors to inform them of the situation.

Appendix I Approved Medical Support

From: nargis Zulfiqar
To: [Lisa Hodges](#)
Subject: Fw: As Requested.
Date: Wednesday, 29 April 2020 4:05:31 PM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

----- Forwarded message -----

From: "batul@amafhh.org.au" <batul@amafhh.org.au>
To: "nargis Zulfiqar" <nargishh@yahoo.com>
Cc: "David Webb" <secretary@amafhh.org.au>
Sent: Wed, 29 Apr. 2020 at 3:45 pm
Subject: As Requested.

Dear Nargis Gulab,

It is great to know about your research. I hope this will make a difference for those in need in the Pashtun Society and community as a whole.

I, Batul Gulani, Clinical Supervisor/ Psychotherapist, and a community leader, happily support you and your interview participants during this process when needed. You or/and your clients can directly contact (AMAFHH Federation) on 0422 851 536 free of charge. Furthermore, cultural counselling will also be offered to you and the clients.

I wish you best of luck.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require more information.

Thanks & Regards,

Batul Gulani

AMAFHH Federation Chairperson / Clinical Supervisor & Counsellor / Community Worker.

South Asian Communities Ministerial Advisory Council Member.

Victorian Multicultural Commission Regional Advisory Council Member.

Victorian Multicultural Commission Multi-faith Advisory Group Member.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/batul-gulani-07152351/>

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