Against All Odds:
Post shelter lives of women survivors of violence

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A Research Study

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List of Abbreviations

APWA	All Pakistan Women Association
DFID	Department for International Development
KPK	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
MoWD	Ministry of Women Development
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nation Children Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WDD	Women Development Department
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
DuA	Dar ul Aman
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women

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About Rozan

Rozan is an Islamabad based non-governmental and not for profit organization, working since 1998 on emotional health, gender, violence against women and children and sexual and reproductive health and rights of youth. Rozan uses capacity building, awareness raising, research, counseling and advocacy as its core intervention strategies. Rozan's vision is to create "a self-aware, gender just society that celebrates diversity and is free of violence".

Rozan focuses on its core area of work with the help of its following programs and units.

- Aangan works on the emotional health of children and youth with a particular focus on child sexual abuse (CSA).

- Humqadam aims at creating spaces for men to engage on the issue of violence against women. It explores alternative and healthier models of masculinities with a special emphasis on involving men and boys in stopping violence against women.

- Rabta builds capacity and enhances the sensitivity of police personnel to respond effectively towards women and child survivors of violence.

- Rozan Helpline offers counseling services telephonically, in-person, via email and at free counseling camps to children, youth, and women.

- Zeest is Rozan's program working on emotional and mental health of women with special focus on Violence Against Women.

Rozan's work with the survivors of violence is at three levels:

- awareness raising in communities

- working directly with survivors to provide counseling and psychosocial support

- training of service providers including psychologists, doctors, lawyers, police, and institutions such as shelter homes to adopt sensitive and ethical approaches while dealing with survivors.

Rozan has been working with women shelters since 2000. It has been involved in strengthening shelter services for survivors including building capacity of shelter staff to provide quality care to women survivors, developing standard operating procedures for Dar ul Amans (DuA) and crisis centers in the partnership with federal and provincial governments and providing direct counseling to women survivors in few state-run shelters. Rozan has also been involved in initiatives aimed at improving infrastructure in DuAs as well as developing economic reintegration programmes for survivors

Foreword

Against all odds: Post shelter lives of women survivors of violence, is a pioneering and nuanced study that through interviews of women between ages 15 to 64 years has documented their experiences and perspectives of staying in a shelter. The range of issues covered is wide: compulsions of women seeking a shelter – usually a last resort choice; the helplessness that accompanies the decision as also the decision to go back; public apathy to violence against women; the harsh attitude of brothers; the sense of freedom from violence in the shelter; and above all their positive experience of them. There are many lessons that can be extracted from women's stories that are built around the milestones in their lives, marriage being an important one. Similarity in experiences across ages and locations, as well as the diversities defined by region specific norms highlights the complexities that point to the need for factoring in local contexts. The study compels us to reflect upon the fact that women may come out of shelters more prepared to face difficulties but with continuity of vulnerabilities, that violence and oppression of women looking for refuge is mostly from near ones at home, in the family and the community, that perceptions about shelters are not positive, and that generally women are unaware of shelters, their locations and access. The study includes a set of actionable recommendations for policy makers.

National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) is a statutory body established with the objective of promoting social, economic, political and legal rights of women as provided in the Constitution and in accordance with Pakistan's international commitments. Its functions include advice on measures for addressing and promoting women's rights as well as of monitoring the implementation of laws and policies that affect the status and rights of women. Violence against women is one of NCSW's priority areas as a major barrier to attaining women's rights, aspirations and the realization of their potential. Support services for women survivors of violence are therefore high on the Commission's agenda. A major concern of the Commission has been the state of shelters for women seeking refuge and relief from violence. While there are different kinds of public and private run shelters in the country where women can go or are sent through court orders information about what happens to women when they leave these shelters is not documented.

NCSW's mandate includes networking and collaboration with civil society organisations and it eagerly looks forward to meaningful research in its areas of concern. Rozan's initiative to fill the knowledge gap about women's experience of life after leaving shelters that provided temporary succour in times of distress is therefore welcomed by the Commission. This is perhaps the first study of its kind by a team of researchers who have dealt with women survivors seeking advice and psychological support. The study, though not representative and limited to two provinces (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh), provides valuable insights and in-depth analysis of women who have taken refuge in privately run shelters. A few from among them had also experience of Government run Darul Amaan which makes a comparison of sorts possible between the two kinds of shelters available.

NCSW endorses this effort and would like to take it forward to enhance policies and encourage similar research of women who have sought relief in public sector shelters. Currently there is no system of documentation, follow up or feed-back loop of women who have availed of either kind of shelters, nor a mechanism to assess the needs of women who go back to their families or start a new life. While there are

Standard Operating Procedures for running the shelters, some system is sorely needed to ensure follow up and contact with those leaving the shelters.

I would like to congratulate Rozan and its team for undertaking this much needed exercise that will hopefully open the door for a scaled up study of women beyond the shelters. This is indeed a peep into the lives of women who try to get out of oppression and violence against all odds.

Khawar Mumtaz

Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women

Executive Summary

Violence against women is a global human rights violation and is rooted in a culture of patriarchal-based discrimination. Structural discrimination against women and girls in Pakistan is evident in their lower social and economic status, as well as high rates of violence against them. Women who face violence have multiple and diverse, immediate and long-term needs, to establish their lives away from violent relationships. Comprehensive shelter services are a critical feature of any violence response programme. This requires extensive and extended services from state institutions and social welfare, making state support and funding crucial to women's lives.

The Study

A review of literature on assessments of the crisis centers and Dar ul Aman service delivery in Pakistan reveal a number of limitations, within the current shelter services available to survivors of violence. Moreover, Rozan's experience of working with women survivors of violence directly, in shelter homes and in communities, shows that reintegration programmes for survivors, as they exit shelters, are often inadequate and poorly conceptualized to meet the enormous challenges faced by women as they return to their communities. Little is known about the long-term impact of shelter programmes on the lives of women served or the subsequent experiences of women once they leave shelters. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge, by investigating post-shelter trajectories of women survivors of violence.

The primary purpose of the research study was:

To qualitatively study the experiences of women survivors of gender-based violence who reached out to the (private) shelter homes, and were in the process of community reintegration in the context of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces. Specific research questions that this study tried to explore are related to factors that enable or hinder women to successfully reintegrate into the community when they exit from a shelter.

The study findings and recommendations aim to assist policy and programming around survivor support by:

- Strengthening services and programmes for survivors while they reside within shelter homes.
- Development of strategic community-based interventions to provide survivors of violence with the support they need to live their post shelter lives with dignity.
- Enhancing advocacy efforts for inclusion of post shelter interventions, within survivor reintegration programmes, offered by the state and private shelter homes.

The study designed was based on a firm commitment that those affected most (by violence) must be in charge of telling these stories and shaping of agendas and policies that are framed for them. For these reasons, an interpretative qualitative approach was selected. Methods included in-depth semi structured interviews, supplemented by a robust desk review of existing literature around assessment studies of shelter services in Pakistan, including interviews with shelter management and staff in both the shelters engaged. Survivors were accessed through shelter home administration. In total, 12 survivors, 7 in Sindh and 5 in KPK, were selected according to a pre-defined criteria.

Findings and Recommendations

The study details the breadth of these women's lives, starting from childhood and running through major milestones, such as relationships and conditions at home, educational experiences, marriages and relationships after, histories of violence, decision to leave home, their shelter experiences and post shelter lives.

It is clear from the study that women's lives post shelter are far from perfect. Depending upon the trajectory of their post shelter lives, many still face violence or the threat of violence, severe stigma for living without male members or as a divorced woman as well as considerable distress as consequence of years of abuse and loss of support from family members. Many also face financial constraints and practical challenges of living such as safe housing. Despite these overwhelming odds women persevere. Enabling factors, both external and internal help women cope better as they go back to the community, be it alone or within a family setting. The rejection of gender inequitable norms, a heightened sense of control, the presence of children in their lives, skills and dignity of work and continued support from the shelter are factors that buffer women against challenges. Based on their experiences, the recommendations seek to minimize the obstacles identified by these women and strengthen factors that they have recognized as aids in their ongoing struggle against odds.

The study findings suggest a broad framework and an approach to policy and programming which can be applied nationally. This framework outlines the kind of policy and services for women survivors of violence in Pakistan, that can further be complemented and contextualized, to make it province specific. Public policy and programming that provides relief and support to survivors of violence must recognize the systemic discriminations that increase women's vulnerability to violence, and limit their capacities to not only respond but also live with dignity in a post shelter world. The study advocates a more long-term approach, where interventions strengthen women's ability to survive after violence. Post shelter integration will depend, in addition to interventions for the post shelter phase, to more robust shelter interventions that can prepare women better and on easier and less stigmatised access to safe spaces. The following three-fold focus is recommended by the study:

- Enablement of women facing violence through increased provision and access to safe spaces, such as shelter homes.

- Mitigation of systemic deprivations faced by these women through high quality shelter services

- Inclusion of post shelter support services for women survivors of violence in survivor integration programmes.

This research study is an attempt to expand knowledge and understanding on the enabling mechanisms and challenges faced by women survivors of violence in the process of their social, psychological and economic reintegration in the community. In doing so, the study hopes to put these women center stage, not only within how the stories of their lives are told and understood, but also within the polices and interventions that seek to provide relief to survivors of violence.

Study Background

1. Study Background

1.1 Violence against women: Prevalence and Dynamics

Violence against women, a global human rights violation, is widespread in all countries, irrespective of social, economic, religious, or cultural group.[1] The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993)[2] defines violence against women as:

> 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.

According to lifetime prevalence rates reported worldwide, almost one in four women experienced domestic abuse in their lifetime [3][4][5] and almost one in seven women will be raped or sexually assaulted (UNICEF 1997)[6]. Domestic violence is considered to be the most common form of violence against women globally with nearly 30% of women experiencing physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner, at least once in their lifetime (World Health Organization 2013).[7]

Violence against women and girls is rooted in a global culture of patriarchal-based discrimination, ordaining women a lower status in all spheres of life.[8] According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), 'violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women'. It further states that 'violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.[9] Violence, thus becomes endemic in contexts where women have limited opportunities, resources and exposure and where women are placed in subservient and dependent positions, both socially and economically.

Patriarchy is deeply rooted in Pakistan and manifests itself in structural discrimination against women and girls. This is evident in the lower social and economic status of women and girls, as well as high rates of violence against them.

- Pakistan continues to rank low at 143rd out of 144 countries on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, 2016.[10]

- Female literacy stands at 51% for women and 72% for men, with stark rural and urban differences according to the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (2014-15).[11]

- The Labour Force Survey (2014-15) suggests that the labour force participation remains a low 26% for women.[12]

- The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey of 2012-2013, revealed that 39 per cent of ever-married women from the ages of 15-49 reported having experienced intimate partner violence.[13]

- Other studies estimate this figure to be much higher; for example the Human Rights Watch estimates that 70 to 90% of women in Pakistan are subjected to domestic violence alone.[14]

Culturally specific forms of violence in Pakistan and parts of South Asia such as forced, exchange or child marriages, in the name of honor killings, stove burnings acid attacks and trafficking of women further compound the situation.[15][16][17][18] Child marriage continues to be a serious concern in Pakistan with 21 per cent of girls marrying before the age of 18 years.[19] Existing research on violence against women indicates that it is not an issue limited to the private, domestic sphere but also a grave social and public health concern due to long-term physical, psychological and social consequences. [20][21][22]

Attitudes and practices that treat women as property and as repositories of family honour,[23] poor access to sources of information and decision-making powers, limited mobility and economic dependency, impunity given to perpetrators due to cultural norms or the law[24] and a dysfunctional criminal justice system[25] create special vulnerabilities for women in Pakistan. The presence of informal and illegal courts of called 'Jirgas' or 'panchayats' further violates women rights through their discriminatory attitude towards settlement of women's cases.[26]

Domestic violence is considered a private matter, as it occurs in the family, and therefore is not considered an appropriate focus for assessment or intervention, or discussed in public. Spousal abuse is normalized within the culture, and is rarely considered a crime socially unless it takes an extreme form. The vast majority of such cases, especially those of domestic violence, are not reported to any official body [27] or misreported as accidents or suicides. In another research study,[28] nearly one third of the 23,430 women interviewed shared experiencing physical violence. Of these, 35% disclosed their experiences of physical violence to a family member, with only 14% reporting it to the police. The research suggests that women's economic dependence is the main reason behind not seeking any formal help. Other suggested reasons of this major under reporting are fear of stigmatization, threat of further abuse, the perception of bringing shame to family honour and the biased response from service institutions, such as police and courts.

However, an undefined percentage of women can and do leave situations of prolonged domestic violence despite these barriers and fears.[29] Refuge is sought in shelters often because of extreme violence and a complete breakdown of traditional social support. Women are often accompanied by children and are largely dependent on their immediate or husband's family for basic needs and economic resources.[28][30] Once women choose to leave marriage, even for legitimate reasons, they are considered to be 'immoral' and ostracized by society[20]. This perception is extended to NGOs, shelters and its members who challenge conventional, patriarchal beliefs and practices and is often concomitant with increased risk of violence, threats, hostility and false accusations.[31] As a result societal acceptability of women who sought shelter residency and services is even lower upon leaving the shelter.

1.2   Policy and Institutional Response to Violence Against Women

Women survivors of violence who try to leave abusive relationships face a distinct challenge because perpetrators are intimate relations. As such, these women often are unable to rely on support from traditional support mechanisms such as extended family. Furthermore, keeping in mind the distinct deprivations and discriminations that they face in their lives, women have multiple and diverse, immediate and long terms needs to establish their lives away from violent relationships. This requires extensive and

extended services from state institutions and social welfare, making state support and funding crucial to their lives.

Public policy to address the needs of women has emerged as a result of different social movements and their advocacy for reform of state institutions. Western feminist movements in this regard have highlighted how gendered roles in the family heighten women's oppression. The physical abuse of women and children, as a social problem, has been a key area of attention within these movements. Sustained advocacy by these groups brought up the importance of shelters as 'transitional' institutions that could act as the bridge between home and community.[32] The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) recommended that States 'provide well-funded shelters and relief support for girls and women subjected to violence, as well as medical, psychological and other counseling services and free or low-cost legal aid, where it is needed, as well as appropriate assistance to enable them to find a means of subsistence'.[33] In 2017 The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its calls upon states to recognize the importance of shelters to ensure the security and safety of survivors of family violence.[34] It would be fair to suggest that the need for provision of shelter facilities is considered a standard response to women facing violence in their lives in intimate relations. It provides women with an escape from the violence and access to the resources that can help women reconstruct their lives.

Public policy in Pakistan, around issues facing women in general and violence against women in particular, has been influenced by a number of factors including pressures of international commitments, the momentum generated by women's activism and movements within the country and the impact of retrogressive agenda of religious extremists. The Constitution of Pakistan affirms gender equality and women's participation in all spheres of public life. Articles in the Constitution reiterate principles of non-discrimination on the basis of sex, full access to public places and participation in national life[i]. Acknowledging Pakistan's constitutional aspirations, its international commitments such as the Convention against the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), successive governments in Pakistan, both military and civilian, have undertaken a number of initiatives to safeguard the interests of women. In early decades, after independence, women rights and development was limited to income generation or needs of destitute women, widows, etc.[35] The government of Pakistan establishment a Women's Division in 1979. This was later upgraded to Ministry of Women Development (MoWD) and followed by the inclusion of a separate chapter on women development in Pakistan's sixth 5-year plan that advocated for equal opportunity in education and employment. MoWD was expected to take new initiatives, as pilot projects, that would ensure women interests and needs but most of its projects were, traditional, temporary and small scaled, implemented through the Departments of Social Welfare, Health and Education and merely financed by MoWD. [36]

More recent steps taken to improve women's status is the reservation of 17% seats for women in the national and provincial assemblies and the Senate. Other initiatives include the setting up of special monitoring institutions like the National and Provincial Commissions on the Status of Women and the appointment of Ombudspersons for the protection of women against harassment in the workplace. The increase in

pro-women legislation in Pakistan since 2008 has been a promising development, for it highlights the willingness of the state to criminalize discriminatory and harmful practices. Legislation to protect women from various forms of violence, such as acid throwing, marriage to the Quran, child marriages, marriage of women to settle disputes, rape and domestic violence has been introduced or improved. Despite the extensive attention paid to progressive legislation, access to justice for women has not improved drastically. Challenges are aplenty in the form of poor implementation, procedural lacunas in evidence gathering, insensitivity of criminal justice actors and limited knowledge of laws within society and those who are meant to implement them.[25]

Women Shelters in Pakistan

Women shelters in Pakistan emerged in the 1970s, in response to the need for providing space to women whose cases were under trial, but had no secure place to live other than police custody. Initial mandate of shelter houses, therefore, was to provide security until their cases were resolved in the court.[ii] With the signing of CEDAW in 1996, Pakistan recognized itself as a State bound to ensure the provision of shelters for security and safety of survivors of violence.

Currently there are 4 types of women shelters in Pakistan.

1. **Crises Centers:** These centers operate as short-term shelters for women. Women needing longer stay are then transferred to Dar ul Amans. They offer services such as food, shelter and immediate medical and legal services. Women can access these spaces through the court, police or civil society. Initially set up by the MoWD, these centers are provincially managed by Provincial Women Development Departments, since the implementation of the18[th] Amendment. There are 17 Crises centers in the country, 12 of which are in Punjab, 3 in Baluchistan, one in Azad Jammu Kashmir and one in Islamabad.

2. **Dar ul Amans (DuAs):** DuAs provide relatively longer stay and are shelters run under the Provincial Social Welfare Departments. Women survivors are referred here mostly by the court, and stay here until their cases are resolved or they have some alternate arrangement that is approved by the court. The main function of Darul Aman is to provide secure shelter with free medical, legal and psychological services. Some DuAs also provide basic vocational skills training. The criteria for entry to DuAs through court orders has been lifted in some provinces but implementation still remains sketchy. There are almost 50 Darul Amans in the country, with Punjab having the highest number i.e., 36. There are 3 in Sindh, one in Baluchistan, 8 in KPK, and 2 in AJK[iii].

3. **Private shelters:** Prominent private shelter houses in the country include Mera Ghar in Peshawar established by Noor Education Trust, Abad in Hyderabad and Dastak in Lahore. These shelters provide security, shelter, food, medical and legal services and vocational skills training to women survivors. These places get regular referrals from police, court and other departments. Admission to private shelter houses does not require a court order.

4. **Public Private Partnership model:** Pannah, a women shelter home in Karachi was initially set up as a Darul Aman in 1970s, and was partially privatized in early 2000. It is now functional under a Board of

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Governors with finances being managed by local philanthropists. Women survivors can access and exit Pannah without having a court order but it is mandatory for the Pannah administration to inform the court. In addition to providing services mentioned above, such as shelter food, legal, medical services, Pannah also offers certified vocational skills trainings and runs a half-way house.

A review of literature on assessments of the crisis centers and DuA service delivery model by Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Commissions on the Status of Women, as well as international agencies reveals a number of challenges.[37][38][39][40] Limitations (depending on province and center, with DuAs in Punjab being much more established and effective) include conservative approach to violence against women, inadequate budgetary allocation, constraints of referral through court, custodial restraint, limited range of psychological support and economic enablement offered, lack of free and adequate legal aid, and inadequate infrastructure. In addition, studies cite lack of effective systems of follow up after women leave the shelter and poor mechanisms of risk assessment in cases where women go back to the same abusive environment after reconciliation. Furthermore, there is no comprehensive plan for social and economic reintegration to reduce women's economic dependency. Studies on DuAs mention the provision of vocational skills training, such as sewing, embroidery etc. but with limited or no opportunity to market these skills. Prejudicial attitude of staff members has also been recorded in nearly all these studies. Another research on Punjab DuA also mentions physical abuse, and pressure to meet abusive family members for reconciliation. [41]

Studies on the efficacy of private shelter homes, although few in number, suggest that the shelter space can be a positive experience, where women feel validated and find that their strengths and capacities for independent living are enhanced.[29] Furthermore, after receiving support and increased awareness regarding the shelter and its services, including lawyers and doctors, women are in a position to reassess their current situation and often leave their abusive homes. [20]

It would be important to reiterate here that shelters aim to serve as a temporary residence in which survivors can receive indispensable services and interventions to ensure their safety, healing and ultimately, reintegration. Ideally, reintegration requires overcoming life constraints to leaving an abusive husband and/or household and situation. However, in Pakistan a low socioeconomic status is attributed to the majority of shelter residents and presents overwhelming barriers to independent reintegration.[20] Furthermore, patriarchal family structures, collectivist societal norms fail to provide a conducive environment for single, independent women. Many barriers to living independently result in a high rate of return to abusive partners and/or households. This is evident in both developed and developing countries. A study conducted in California explored women's post-shelter experiences and found the rate of return to be 50%. [42]

It would be fair to suggest that the overall intervention model of services for survivors of violence in Pakistan whether public or private (with some exceptions in the case of a few private shelter homes) is need based, providing services that meet immediate concerns like shelter, medical and legal aid, with the intention of giving women temporary relief from violence. Most public shelters have limited or no follow up systems for

high-risk cases because the staff and responsible department feel it exceeds their mandate which is to provide immediate relief to women. Women are inevitably pushed back into the community either 'resettled' within their abusive homes or left to survive independently in a hostile socio-economic environment.

1.3 The Study

Shelter houses are regarded as the last resort for women because those accessing these spaces have nowhere left to turn for help. Shelters are also considered the final step in survivor support programmes, and represent the point after which there is limited follow up. The range of support provided to survivors is considered complete. The blind spot within services for survivors of violence, namely lack of recognition of the post shelter phase in women's lives is also reflected within research on violence conducted in Pakistan. Existing data provides information on structural determinants and dynamics of violence, reviews of policies and programmes for survivors, including shelters and research on their efficacy. Little is known about the long-term impact of shelter programmes on the lives of women served or the subsequent experiences of women once they leave the shelter. It would be fair to suggest that the survivors of violence foregrounded by policy, programming, as well as research are women and girls vulnerable to violence or those who have become victims of violence and need support in its immediate aftermath. The longer journey of these women's lives, or more specifically, the post shelter subject has received much less attention. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by investigating the post-shelter trajectories of women survivors of violence.

The study proposes that the post shelter survivor of violence is an important social category that deserves attention for two reasons. First, survivors of violence who exit shelter homes are on the rise as public consciousness and state acknowledgement around violence increases. The post shelter lives of these women represent an important window to understand the cost of breaking the silence and resisting violence, a long-standing goal of women's movements. It is only fair that these journeys receive attention and are documented. Second, a responsible social change programme that aims for gender equity must be responsive to the social and economic challenges faced by women seeking to re-establish themselves outside patriarchal contexts. Understanding the cost of taking action can have implications for both the substance and scope of policy and programming on violence against women, and enable interventions that can mitigate these challenges. Shelter homes are a support mechanism where survivors often stay for a defined period of time (as opposed to the police, legal or psychological support services where survivors access specific support only). Services and support provided here can encapsulate the above and more, and represent an opportunity for intervention which can have far reaching consequences for the survivor's ability to settle back into the community post shelter. In other words, post shelter survivors of violence represent an important social category that needs more scrutiny to understand the consequences of resistance to patriarchy in the lives of women, as well as to strengthen redressal mechanisms offered to them.

The primary purpose of the research study is:

To qualitatively study the lived experiences of women survivors of gender-based violence who have reached out to the (private) shelter homes and are in the process of community reintegration in the context of Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Specific research questions that have emerged from Rozan's own extensive work with women shelters in Sindh and KPK, and a literature review of survivor support systems and the experiences of women accessing them are as under:

1. What are the trajectories of reintegration for women? This involves a mapping of the routes that women's lives take after they leave shelter homes.

2. What enables women to reintegrate into communities?

3. What inhibits women from reintegration within the community?

It is important to state here that mapping processes of how women get to the shelter or a focus on their pre-shelter lives was considered an important context to understanding these research questions.

In short, this research study is an attempt to expand knowledge and understanding on the enabling mechanisms and challenges faced by women survivors of violence in the process of their social, psychological and economic reintegration in the community. We hope that the study findings and recommendations assist policy and programming around survivor support in three ways:

- Strengthening services and programs for survivors while they reside within shelter homes.

- Development of strategic community-based interventions to provide survivors of violence with the support they need to live their post shelter lives with dignity.

- Enhancing advocacy efforts for inclusion of post shelter interventions within survivor reintegration programmes offered by the state and private shelter homes.

The next section describes the rationale and process for the research methodology used in the study. The section that follows documents the experiences of women survivors from their preshelter phase to their post shelter lives. Section 4 presents the many challenges faced by these women, as well as the support mechanisms that enable women to survive in a post shelter world. The last section offers a framework for survivor integration programmes which recognizes women's post shelter lives and sets out a series of recommendations as a way forward.

Research Design

2. Research Design

2.1 Approach and Methods

The research study is primarily an investigation into a sensitive social phenomenon, namely an indepth analysis of the lives of women who faced violence, sought shelter support and then returned back to the community. To place narratives of survivors of violence at the center of this exploration was a deliberate choice. Research questions as such were open and exploratory, yielding unlimited emergent descriptive options as opposed to predetermined choices.[43] The intent was not to test variables preselected from an outside perspective but to explore the meaning of a phenomena for the people affected directly by it.[44] It was based on a firm commitment that those affected most (by violence) must be in charge of telling these stories and shaping of agendas and policies that are framed for them. For these reasons an interpretative qualitative approach was selected.

> Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and inter subjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers, thus, attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them.[45]

The method selected for the research study was based on two considerations. In-depth semi structured interviews were considered suitable to the research approach outlined above, as they allowed participants to provide open ended descriptive accounts about their experiences. Leaving them semi- structured also enabled an environment of 'empathic exploration' as opposed to a rigidly focused structure that we felt was unsuited to the emotive phenomena under study.[46] The initial intent to do a life history inquiry and to include an observational aspect to the study, involving a series of engagements with the survivors and their everyday lives or to leave the interview totally unstructured to encourage depth, flow and emergence was juxtaposed with the limitations of our access to survivors.[47] At the outset, it became clear that we would not be able to engage with these women more than once or twice. Following them into their daily life contexts was also difficult and shelter home management discouraged us from visiting their homes as many survivors wished to remain anonymous and not draw attention to their participation in the research. Our interaction with them was as such limited to the institutional setting of the shelter space, since we wished these women to have the privacy and safety to talk about their experiences. Keeping these constraints in mind, we felt that among the many types of life histories methods used, the best suited for this research is that which is described as concentrated , 'topical life documents' usually generated with a social goal in mind, and, therefore, do not emerge naturalistically but are drawn from the specific subjects.[48] The in-depth interview focused on the breadth of their lives, starting from childhood and running through major milestones, such as relationships and conditions at home, educational experiences, marriages and the relationships after, histories of violence, decision to leave home, their shelter experiences and post shelter lives. The concluding section of the interview also consisted of reflections on their life experiences, recommendations for the government and shelter management and finally aspirations and desires for the future. Questions were open-ended questions but also included probes to guide the interview in case information was not forthcoming.Interviews were supplemented by a robust desk review of existing

literature around assessment studies of shelter services in Pakistan, including review of documents and polices in use by the shelters wherever possible. Interviews with shelter management and staff, in both shelters engaged with the study, were also conducted. The main criteria for using different resources, including policy documents and broad literature were relevance and authenticity.

2.2 Selection of Participants

The research sample consisted of 12 women selected according to pre-determined criteria.

- Women survivors who faced domestic violence including forced marriages.
- Women who had resided in the shelter homes for a minimum period of 2 consecutive months.
- Women who had settled back in the community (post shelter) for a minimum of 3 months.
- Women who currently resided in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).
- Women or girls aged between 15-65.

Survivors were accessed through shelter home administration. Private and public women shelters were contacted through letters and emails with the brief introduction of research, its scope and objectives, support required from shelters in accessing participants, selection criteria and the process of contacting participants.

Both the private shelters approached, one in each province consented to be part of the study (Abad Shelter home in Hyderabad, and Mera Ghar in Peshawar). A detailed interview was conducted with the administration of each shelter home to understand its services, functioning, procedures, the process of reconciliation, staff understanding of shelter intervention model and reintegration process. There was a detailed discussion on women survivors who access the services of private shelters, types of violence and difficulties they face in the community upon leaving the shelter.

KPK Social welfare Department refused to participate in the study. An initial inception meeting was conducted with the DuA Hyderabad but they also discouraged the idea of any research on post shelter experience of women survivors due to lack of feasibility. They claimed they had no mechanism of active follow up of women once they leave the shelter space.

Shelter administration was given a short briefing on Rozan's concerns about survivors' confidentiality and safety. Administration was requested to ensure that women identified should be ones who could not be endangered by the research process. The administration was requested to make the initial phone contact with survivors, with the aim of introducing these women to the research. This would then be followed up by the Rozan team obtaining consent directly. The research team developed a comprehensive initial contact and consent tool for this purpose. However, this was not used as the shelter administration was reluctant to share contact information with Rozan. As such, shelter administration obtained the initial consent after which the woman was invited to the shelter home for the interview.

This criterion for minimum stay in the shelter was relaxed for one research participant who had spent only 7

days within the shelter house. She was invited by the shelter administration despite criteria having been shared. The interviewer felt that as there was a limited number of participants accessed within KPK, her story could contribute to findings with respect to her preshelter experience.

In total, 13 participants in the two provinces were approached for data collection. One interview in KPK, conducted at the survivor's house, had to be stopped as it was felt that the location did not allow for privacy. The final number of research participants stands at 12, with 5 from KPK and 7 from Sindh.

2.3. Ethical Considerations:

Research ethics were taken into consideration at each step, considering the sensitive nature of the research topic. A technical review committee consisting of gender practitioners and senior researchers, including faculty members from Quaid-i- Azam University and Habib University was formed to review the research design, tools and ethics.

In each interview, the consent form was read before the interview started. Consent form contained information regarding the objectives of the research, as well as how the interview would be taped, and data transcribed and saved. It also gave information on how the research would be reported and the importance of the contribution of the research participants. Participants were informed that they might feel upset during the interview as it may bring up painful memories. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview at any point for any reason. They were also told that tape recording could be refused and notes could be taken instead, if they preferred. They were told that tape recordings would be destroyed after the research was completed and all data conserved would not have any identifying information. Participants were informed that they would not be remunerated financially for their time: initially by the shelter organizations who were the first point of contact with them; and then by the interviewer at the beginning of the interview. Participants were also given Rozan's helpline number if they wished to reach out for psychological help or counseling after the interview. At the end of the interview, they were asked if they wished to be informed about the results of the research.

2.4 From Data to Analysis

Data Collection

There were two all-female teams for data collection, one for each province. Each team consisted of one interviewer and one note taker. Efforts were made not to take more than two interviews in a day to limit the risk of exhaustion and boredom. Both interviewers, senior Rozan staff members had been involved in various initiatives with shelter homes and survivors. They had also been involved in the process of research design, including tool development and were further given a basic orientation before conducting interviews. The interview guide was pre-tested before finalization and initiation of data collection. Pilot interviews with two women survivors who had stayed in shelter homes in Islamabad were conducted. Learnings from both pilot interviews were incorporated in the final research tools.

All interviews, except one, were recorded after permission. One woman from KPK refused to be tape recorded and her responses were documented by the note taker. Interviews extended between 1-2.5 hours,

giving enough time to the researcher and the respondent to build some degree of rapport, and be able to talk about sensitive issues more comfortably. Four of the interviews in KPK were conducted in Pushto (regional language spoken in KPK) with the help of the note taker in the team who was fluent in the language. All but one (in Sindh) of the twelve interviews were conducted within shelter premises as shelter management and survivors preferred it that way. Knowledge and information gained through in-depth interviews were reinforced through behavioural observation. Notes were taken on participants tone, body language, use of specific languages, mood etc.

In response to the question regarding whether they wished to learn about research findings, many expressed an interest. However, no one wished to be contacted directly and preferred that the information reached them via the shelter home.

Data Management

Recordings of 11 interviews were kept in a place accessible only to the research team. All interviews were transcribed in Urdu language by the note takers in the team. Four interviews recorded in Pushto language were translated and transcribed in Urdu by an additional transcriber to increase reliability of translation. Names of research participants were changed during this process so that the transcribed interviews did not mention real names. Original names along with basic information of all the participants including their names, age, marital status, number of children, types of violence etc. were recorded on a data sheet accessible only to the core research team for reference of information.

Data Analysis

Three members of the research team took part in the detailed analysis of the data. This included the main interviewers and one senior researcher, who was also part of the design and process. The analytical framework was guided by our research questions and the process of analysis was an intense exercise involving two stages. The first was a collective listening and re-listening to the tape recordings or as in the case of interviews in Pushto, reading and referring to two sets of transcripts. Stage one analysis of the first interview was conducted in the presence of the Technical Committee members from Habib and Quaid-i-Azam Universities. At least two members of the research team were present for every subsequent session. During these sessions, recordings or readings were stopped after every 15-20 minutes of the interview to discuss prominent themes, significant life events or epiphanies emerging. At the end of each interview, a detailed case study sheet was developed. This captured the following: 1) A brief case description, 2) Important themes emerging from the descriptions these women offered about their lives. These were recorded within temporal phases as outlined by the interview guide e.g. childhood, marriage, in shelter experience etc. 3) The trajectory that led them to leave their house and the route taken to the shelter home. This emerged as a category of information based on the survivors' own emphasis of this aspect in their stories.

In the second stage of analysis, there were deeper discussions on the contextual themes that were emerging across data sets. These included the similar vulnerabilities that they faced in their marital lives pre shelter,
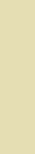
the affective commonalities expressed as they described their martial life, the difficult trajectories they followed on their path to the shelter homes and the role of institutions, such as shelter home, police, judiciary, in different stages of their life history. Though the emphasis of our analyses was on post shelter lives but these themes act as a context against which the post shelter journey experience could be analyzed more deeply. For instance, experiences of women inside the shelter helped them to better adjust in post shelter situation, such as skills learned in the shelter, their control over the reconciliation process, the active or inactive role of shelter and other institutions in the post shelter phase.

2.5 Reflections and Reflexivity

In this research, reflexivity was an attitude of being conscious and aware of the effect of the researcher on every step of the research process. It was through this attention that we sought to acknowledge the context of knowledge construction. Continuous reflection on one's own position, feelings, power dynamics inherent with the research process, and one's role as a researcher and a woman was encouraged. Interviewers were also encouraged to write down reflexive notes at the end of each day of the date collection and a detailed debriefing conducted after they returned. The following provides a glimpse into some of these discussions:

- Both interviewers were psychologists and have been counselling, as well as helping survivors of violence in accessing response services for many years. Where at times this experience helped, namely in being able to process their own feelings and also not be too overwhelmed by the affective tone of the interview, it also became difficult to separate the role of the psychologist from the researcher. This was especially so when the survivor was sharing the more emotionally disturbing aspects of her life. At times interviews were halted for brief periods to allow women to recover and permission sought before commencing. However, the challenge arose because the need to validate the woman's experiences and appreciate her courage and resilience broke the flow of the interview at times and the researcher-psychologist interviewer had to consciously not interrupt.

- There were four interviews conducted in Pushto, a language unknown to the main interviewer. This in some ways limited the ability of the main interviewer to intervene and probe.

- In some cases, rapport building was challenging for lack of time. All interviews were completed in 1-2.5 hours as often research participants could not give extended time. This was at times frustrating for the interviewers as they felt pressured to start interviewing almost immediately.

- There was a tendency on the part of research participants to talk extensively about the violence they had faced. There was a need to balance the desire to go with the flow of the participant's narration of her life history and the anxiety of completing the interview in a way that would include all information, especially regarding her post shelter experiences.

- The affective tone of the interview, and in many cases the emotional distress of the research participants also impacted the researchers and note takers and they often felt quite drained after each interview.

- During the analysis, staying with the descriptions offered by the women and not imposing themes

based on researcher's own experiences or politics was challenging. Researchers challenged each other on this during discussions and the analysis presented in this report reflects survivors' perspectives as much as possible.

- The last section of the questionnaire was more reflective and helped participants to think back on their lives. As a result of this, we found that despite the heavy tone during much of the interview, most participants left the interview with positive feelings.

The Lives of Women

3. The Lives of Women

This section of the report presents the experiences of the twelve women interviewed in the study. Our conversations with these women were intense and the lived experience that emerges is best captured through a representation that lends itself to a progressive telling of their lives as it unfolds over time, hence the sub sections below reflect that sequence.

The threads of these women's lives are markedly similar in some respects, and an analysis of their lives yields patterns and consistencies that notably stand out. Yet, in pulling together these commonalities, we are conscious of the variances within these stories. Distinctions within narratives appear because of the specific locales these stories are embedded in, signifying the precincts that influence the dynamics of violence, the options for support and agency, and the particular nature of circumstances under which they decided to step outside the home. Of the twelve women interviewed, five belong to KPK and seven reside in Sindh.

Of the twelve women interviewed nine were married, marriages that were stated to be marked by control and violence. These women belonged to the cohort aged 19- 38 years, of which nine were in their twenties. Amongst the other three, unmarried women [iv] two had run away to escape violence at homes where they were going to be forcibly married and one ran away from a house where she had been held after being kidnapped. Four of these women don't have children.

Table 1.Profile of women survivors interviewed:

Case Sr.	Interviewee	Age	Education	Marital Status	No. of children	Time inside shelter	Time post shelter	Area/ district	Violence Type
1	Rabia	20	5th Standard	Unmarried	None	1 year	2years	Jamshoro	Forced marriage
2	Soniya	20	7th Standard	Married	1	6 months	1 year	Hyderabad	Domestic Violence
3	Rohina	28	5th Standard	Divorced	2	2.5 months	2 years	Hyderabad	Domestic Violence
4	Shenaz	27	8th Standard	Married	4	1 year	2 years	Hyderabad	Domestic Violence
5	Tehmina	38	None	Divorced	3	2.5 months	7 months	Mitiari	Domestic Violence

[iv] One of these women had been forced to sign marriage papers but had managed to run away before her actual departure from her familial home to the husband's house. Although divorced now, in the study she is considered single as the nature of violence and threat she faces stem from her familial home and not her husband.

Case Sr.	Interviewee	Age	Education	Marital Status	No. of children	Time inside shelter	Time post shelter	Area/ district	Violence Type
6	Zahida	27	5th Standard	Married	4	2 months	4 months	Mitiari	Domestic Violence
7	Salma	22	8th Standard	Married	3	3 months	3 months	Peshawar	Domestic Violence
8	Sara	22		Unmarried	None	7 months	5 months	Charsadda	Kidnapping and Physical violence
9	Noor	32	3rd Standard	Divorced	5	2 months	8 months	Peshawar	Domestic Violence
10	Aisha	38	5th standard, LHV & Nursing course	Unmarried	None	4 months	7 months	Qandhaar (Swabi)	Forced marriage
11	Faiza	19	None	Married	None	7 days	5 months	Khyber Agency	Domestic Violence
12	Kiran	29	5th Standard	Divorced	1	4 months	4 months	Jamshoro	Domestic Violence

The story telling is textured, rich in descriptions of vulnerability and violence. It is marked by the survivors' desire to go back in time and retell, and in doing so, relive the set of circumstances that led them to leave their homes. The pain and trauma they experienced was apparent and there was often a ready flow of tears, even as the need to communicate and speak out remained strong. It is clear from these narratives, that despite the overwhelming odds, these women continue to strive against the adversities that challenge their lives, and perhaps their very ability to live and tell these stories are a testament to their resilience.

Sadly, what is also immediately apparent from their conversations is that the circumstances of their lives continue to be adverse. There appears to be no neat ending to these stories and we were left with a feeling that our study is limited by its temporality. It is a representation of their lives and struggle so far, with the challenges and possibilities that they will continue to face, yet to unfold.

3.1. Histories, Collective and Personal

This sub section outlines the lives of women before they entered the shelter home, their early life events, relationships, educational opportunities, as well as their marriages which for many took place when they were still children. It presents profiles of women who went to shelter homes, and the vulnerabilities that they carried long before the actual triggering incidents that led them to leave their homes. Interesting to note that despite the dissimilar demographics and the socio-cultural dynamics between the two provinces –KPK and Sindh – from where these women hailed, the commonalities of experiences present a remarkable coherent picture.

Each of the women told stories of deprivation and poverty that they faced since birth. Eight of the twelve women interviewed had spent much or part of their early childhood in a village, either in KPK or Sindh. They belonged to families where fathers or brothers were employed as daily wage labourers, farm hands, drivers, with some employed in factories and one in government service. Two of the women had mothers who worked to earn a wage and support household expenses. Some mentioned their families having moved to a city near their village in search of employment. Most of them belonged to large families and many felt the pinch of food scarcity during childhood. Decision making in their households was almost always in the hands of men, especially when it came to the decision around girls schooling, Violence experienced as a child was reported in some instances, often linked to control over their movement outside the house. The perpetrator in such instances was often the brother. Of the twelve women included in the study, the mobility of ten was repressively restricted, confined to family setting with very limited exposure outside the house, including the immediate neighborhood. The other two women, comparatively, had some exposure to the outside world: one who had worked and lived in people's homes prior to marriage; and the other had received training by non-governmental groups in Swabi with Afghan refugees.

Three of the twelve women interviewed never received any formal education. All three resided in their respective villages: one in Khyber Agency where she was sent to a madrassah instead. The other two could not go to school because their families did not encourage girls education. Thus, nine out of twelve experienced formal education, with five having left after primary school, one after class 7 and only 2 made it to middle school (Class 8). Their brothers, on the other hand, were allowed to continue schooling till at least Matriculation.

Those who were fortunate enough to get to school but then had to stop all pinpointed at the pressures exerted by the prevailing cultural norms which discouraged girls education and the associated mobility. In many of such cases, these norms were enforced by the brothers rather than the fathers. Some of these women recalled how their brothers would threaten them and sometimes act violently when they tried to defy. Rabia,[v] from a village in Jamshoro, reflected on how her brother beat her after school when she was twelve or thirteen years of age:

> He brought me home from school and beat me up and kicked me, he tore up my books and bags. He told my sister in-law not to let me leave the house and that he will get me married. [He said] my friends tease me that your sister is jawan (adult) and leaves the house. He used to resent that.

[v] All names have been changed

Findings reveal that brothers, along with husbands, are perpetrators of violence and gatekeepers of patriarchal norms within the house. For many of these women, it was the brother figure that restricted and controlled their activities, including access to education and decision making with regards to the age at marriage and choice of partner, and eventually support (or lack of) in case of an abusive marriage. It seems that progressive generations of males even though more educated (secondary to high school) continue to uphold gender inequitable norms and values, a finding in line with the result of the PAK-IMAGES survey on gender attitudes.

Instances where there was no opposition within the immediate family, women were stopped because it was not considered culturally appropriate for girls to study beyond a particular time, especially if the school was outside the village. There was one exception to this pattern; Noor, who was taken out of school after class 3 and made to work as the family was extremely poor.

Gender stereotypes and expectations that are deeply internalized were apparent in how these women understood and spoke about their early life experiences. Not resisting family pressures and accepting decisions made for them by men in the family was a code that was internalized by many. Speaking about this, Rabia said *'In our home we did not have the right to speak, we could not even raise our voices. We are Balouch, they [the men in our family] used to say our women do not have the right to speak loudly or leave the house.'* What went side by side with this attitude was a sense of self that was *'muhjboor'* (helpless)'. A sense of helplessness keenly felt and reinforced when they accepted or tolerated violence or abusive behaviour. Rohina's husband used to disappear for periods of time leaving her without finances and unsure about his return. Recalling this, she said *'How long will I cry after this person like a weakling, who betrays and leaves me again and again and returns when he feels like it and says I was helpless. He can't be as helpless as me. He is a man, he can't be helpless, not as helpless as a woman'.*

Many felt they were a burden or a possession with little agency. Zahida at the age of 16 felt she owed it to her father to agree to a marriage even though she was not willing. She recalled how he said to her *'I am sick, my life is uncertain, I could die anytime, you will be left behind. I am trying to lessen my load. My father told me to get married, I had to listen to him, I was young, he had brought me up. Refusing him would not have been fair'.* In an interesting play of words Rohina continuously referred to her stay at the shelter and later at her brother's house in a passive way, *'inho ne mujhe rukh liya* (they kept me)',* almost as if she was an inanimate object that needed to be placed in a safe place. Other women used similar language where other people or the shelter 'kept' them rather than them staying at the shelter or other people's homes.

All the married women in our study were married off before the age of 18, with five married between the ages of 12-14 years. Two were pregnant by the age of 14 years. Noor shared her experience as a child bride, recalling her inability to respond to her husband sexually and blaming herself for the initiation of violence in her marriage:

> [The problems in my marriage] were there from the beginning, from the first night onwards.

> Because I was 12 or 13 years old only, I could not bear my husband's [sexual] actions. He started beating me from the first night because I was young and did not have any knowledge [of sex]. I did not know how to manage a husband (…) that is why this violence started.

For most of the women in this study, violence started soon after marriage, with the exception of a couple for whom violence within marriage evolved over time. The majority of the marriages were arranged, both within and outside the family (although there was a tendency for the former). In most of the cases, willingness or consent was not sought and women did not overtly resist as they felt compelled to agree with parents. In a few cases, the parents themselves were reluctant but agreed because of watta satta (exchange marriage) arrangements. In one case, the woman was sold in marriage against money to a man thirty years her senior. Another was married at 17 to a fifty-year-old man who was already married. Of the three who married by choice, two had to run away from home to exercise that choice. In both these cases, the men were from outside the family and were already married, so they went as 2nd wives. Both marriages were abusive and have ended. All three women regret marrying by choice and carry considerable guilt for what they call 'shame' they brought to their families. A more pragmatic regret was the loss of family support, owing to their individual decision, a support without which they find their survival to be difficult. These incidents of marriage by choice are only present in the sample from Sindh.

Two of the women ran away from home to avoid marriage arranged by the family. One was a woman from a village in Jamshoro, who was being forced into a marriage through the watta satta arrangement into a family which she believed was involved in criminal activities, possibly prostitution. The other was an Afghan woman, settled in Swabi, who was being forced to marry a *'Talib* (member of the Sunni Islamic fundamentalist movement waging war within Afghanistan). In both cases, against life threatening odds, the women decided to run away and found their way to shelters in Hyderabad and Peshawar, respectively. In both the cases, because the fathers had passed away, the brothers were violent and were forcing them into a marriage that they did not want. They recalled having a congenial relationship with their father who was supportive and a source of strength to them. In both cases, the women admitted that it was because of their father that they were able to go to school and resist interference in their lives by others.

In all the above mentioned cases, marriage created upheavals and daunting intimidations in the lives of these women. Salma who was married to a drug addict at the age of 13, and became pregnant after five months stated *'My life's problems started after my marriage'*. Whether it was the experience of child marriage or being married against their will or a marriage by choice that did not go well or the violence that nearly all faced within their marriage, these women see marriage as the point in their lives which changed its course for the worst.

Initially it was difficult for these women to talk about their childhood even though many were relatively young. It seemed almost forgotten, lying redundant in their memories of the past, when instead there were more urgent and pressing issues to share. However, talking about childhood evoked a sense of wistfulness for some, a time where things were bearable, even happy and carefree. This sense is sharp within those who experienced adversity after marriage and sharper still for those who are living independently, because

families have severed all ties with them.

3.2 Leaving home

This sub section documents the trajectory of women's lives, from the circumstances that compel them to leave home, as well as the complicated and often risky path they traverse in reaching the shelter.

At the outset, it would be important to state that for none of these women seeking redressal outside the family or traditional sources was a first or preferred choice. Nearly all initially and repeatedly attempted to seek support for intervention from family members and their extended family. The decision to leave home followed a set of extreme circumstances, almost always involving violence, and sometimes threat or danger that extended to their children. In some cases, they simply had nowhere to go because of being turned out of the marital home and the absence of support from their own families. In a rare case, where the family or extended family may have been supportive, some women were advised to go to the shelter because it afforded them legal options and a more long-term solution, such as *khula* (dissolution of marriage), custody and possibly maintenance. For each of these women, the decision to step out was an act of desperation, an act they took with a heavy and a fearful heart, sharply conscious of the price they would have to pay for doing so. Kiran knew the consequences of stepping out:

> I was terrified (…) when I left the house. [But] I thought if I don't leave I will kill myself. In Sindhi families, if a girl leaves the house in the morning and returns in the evening it is acceptable, but if a day or two passes, then questions begin to be asked. They [family] declare her as a *kari* (a name given to women who are believed to have dishonoured the family) and kill her.

Fears about the shelter space were also strong, as many thought of shelters negatively. Tehmina arrived at the shelter and panicked. When *I got there, I felt intense fear, my nephew called me and told me that there is immoral activity in these institutions and that I should leave.*

These women take considerable risks and also experience intense fear in traversing the very challenging route to an unknown shelter, away from the known both in psychological and physical terms. The experiences of these women are at odds with the common prejudice that suggests that women who go to shelter homes do so because they exaggerate and lie about the direness of their circumstance or because they are 'immoral'. The latter perception about shelter homes persists, not just in the general public but is reported within studies that examine attitudes of shelter home staff.

Physical violence accompanied by severe bruising and injury, including sometimes torture, for example, having one's head dunked in the water, often in front of other family members, including children was a repeated feature of most marriages. This was often directed against the children as well, especially in cases where the husband was a drug addict or alcoholic. The latter was more common in Sindh. It was accompanied by psychological violence, involving controlling behaviour, such as not being allowed to visit family or leaving the house unattended. Economic control, including not being allowed to earn, even if it involved working from home, was also a feature of some marriages. The threat of being abandoned or of a second marriage was common, and some had been evicted from the house on many occasions. Sexual violence was also reported by the 19 year old Faiza who was repeatedly raped by her husband in the

presence of his first wife.

Patterns of violence were repeated in their lives and many women endured these or took respite from them from time to time in their parent's or sibling's houses, sometimes for months and years. Talking of her two marriages, the first arranged the second of her own choice, Rohina said *'It was my fault, I am a woman so I kept quiet, I kept getting beaten and I kept tolerating it, two years with him [2nd marriage] and ten years there [1st marriage] (…) if I told my father that he beat me, he would ask me to tolerate it and have patience and all will be well, what can I [father] do. He beat me up in front of my father also.* Messages given to the women by the parents often were that they should accept the violence and reconcile. Sometimes they also faced violence at the hands of their own family for daring to come back home. Kiran now 29, shared how after a particularly violent episode she left her house:

> *I left the house with just my dupatta (scarf), took the local transport and went to my brother. I remember he slapped me for travelling on local transport and said why have you come, whatever the problem you should have handled it there. You have come today, but in future if there is any problem with your husband don't come to us, die in your house but don't come here.*

The duration of stay at their parental home, when accepted back, was like being in a limbo, rarely involving legal or court procedures, mostly waiting during which the families either mediated or the husband used the children as a bargaining tool to get the woman to return. In two cases, where the women were urged by the family to seek legal counsel, the women faltered because they did not think legal recourse would yield favourable results as they feared that their children would be taken away.

These women endured long spells of violent and controlling behaviour. The decision to seek external help, such as the police or shelter space was taken after repeated attempts of reaching out to non- responsive families, and most commonly after a particularly violent incident. These women were able to distinctly recall such incidents and some mentioned it as a turning point in their lives where they decided to take charge. Even in the case of women (three of the nine married women) who were evicted out of their home by either the husband or father in-law, reaching out to the police or shelter represented a decision for they chose not to return to their parental homes again, but to seek support elsewhere. Noor shared how she made up her mind to leave:

> *My husband was a loafer. I used to stay at my mother's house for months at a stretch. We were very poor, I still stayed with him, but when my husband sold my daughter by force to pay off a loan, then I decided to rebel. What could I do, when my kids were not in my control anymore and our loans were increasing. It was better if I did not stay with him in this situation. My brother tried to force me, my mother tried to force me, my entire family tried to force me, [to stay but] despite this pressure I said to myself I will not spend my life with this man. He has ruined my life, he doesn't have the right to ruin my children's.*

Soniya, from Hyderabad described how her second husband, in addition to physical violence, obsessively watched her every move and discouraged her from going out. When she did go out to her neighbours he would go to their houses and inquire why she had visited them and told them not to welcome her the next time. It came to a point where he would get a young boy in the family to sit outside her door and do *chowkidari* (keep an eye on her). 'I said to myself, *I will no longer tolerate this, this is wrong, I am a human*

being, not a 'janwar' (animal) that you can tie and feed, even a tethered animal needs a rope that allows it to roam'.

The route taken by women to the shelter house was often convoluted, and made more treacherous either because of lack of knowledge about the shelter's existence or the prevalent negative stereotypes about these places, especially DuAs. Except for Zahida, who knew of the shelter's existence because of an orientation by the said shelter in her village near Mitiari, none of the other women approached the shelter home directly. These women were referred there by neighbours, lawyers, the court, women friends, such as a stitching teacher or a landlady, and, by far, the most common source of referral, the police. The last mentioned source was sometimes a passive referral through a poster with shelter information displayed in the police stations. Police behaviour varied from case to case. In some cases, they were supportive and suggested DuA's and private shelters near the area. In other instances, they refused to register a case, for example, when Noor went to the local station to report that her underage daughter had been married off forcibly by her husband or when Rohina went to them to report that her husband had deserted her. In both cases help was refused with the excuse that it was a private matter and outside their jurisdiction, advising them to go back home. In Rohina's case, however, they did phone her husband, who did not bother to go to the station and the police did not follow up further.

The journey to the shelter house from their home was long, sometimes from the village to the city where the shelter was located. It was often accompanied by a well-wisher, like the neighbor's son, a female teacher or in one case, a ten-year old boy of a landlady. For some, the journey was solitary, prone to further exposure to dangers. In such cases, the women were solicited for sexual favours by those they sought help from, and underwent intense fear of the unknown as they had never ventured, thus far alone. In addition to the fear experienced, many women also shared a sense of desperation that gave them strength, where they felt that they had had enough and needed to take charge of their lives, sometimes for their own sake and in other cases for the sake of their children.

Noor from Peshawar recollected the condition in which she went to the police station for the first time in her life. Her husband had been particularly violent with her as she was threatening to go to the police to report the forcible marriage of her underage daughter. He followed her out of the house and beat her up on a public road in the city of Peshawar. The most salient memory of that event was how not a single person, of the many who witnessed her being brutally thrashed stepped forward to help:
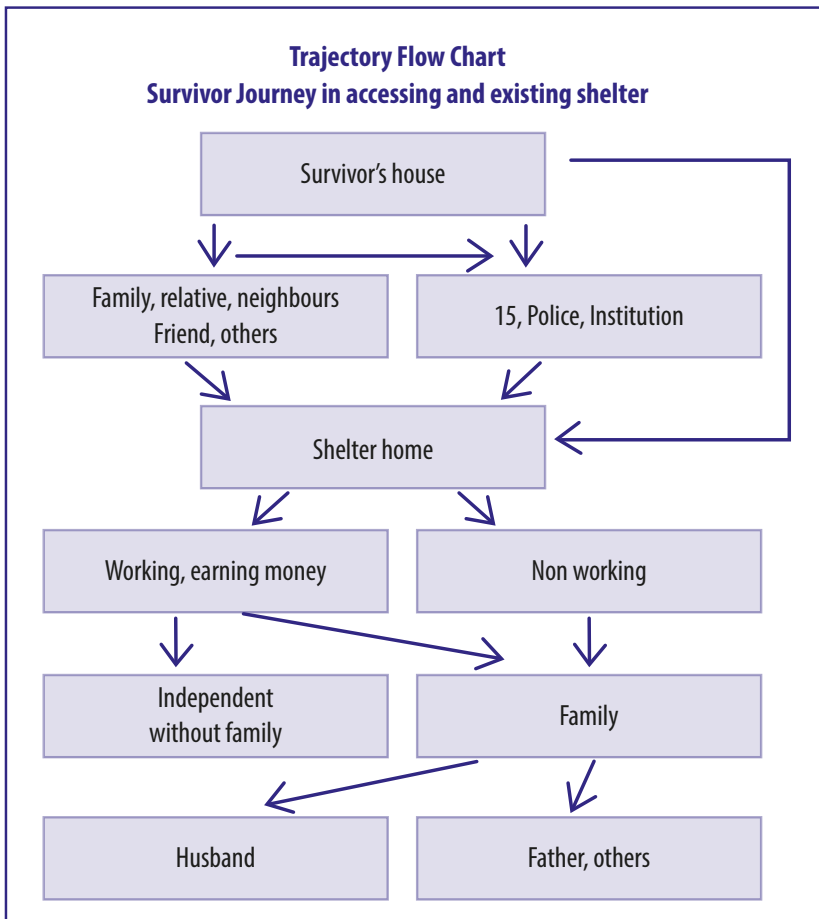
> *That day any fear in my heart died (. . .) At that point I went to the police chowki but no one lent an ear to my appeal, shopkeepers watched the tamasha (spectacle) [they wondered] why was this woman being beaten up here on the road and not at home. The traffic on the road stopped, and everyone kept watching and no one helped me, no one listened to me.*

To add to her misery, when she got to the police station they said to her that it was Friday prayer time and no one could assist her. Her family initially suggested that she go back to her husband but she remained adamant. She went to the police again after some months when her husband forcibly took her children while she was living with her mother, and they (the police) again refused to help. She recalled that moment of desperation as she stood in the middle of the road. *'I stood on the road and said either I will give my life*

today or I will raise my voice for my children and will fight till I have life in me. I stood in front of the Khyber news agency car and said either kill me or write my report'. It was with their support that she managed to file a case and later hire a lawyer to fight her case. It was this lawyer who referred her to the shelter home, later she was shot during a court hearing by her husband.

It is important to note here that some of the women were initially referred to the Dar ul Aman in the area but refused to go there because of the negative perceptions around it. These negative perceptions about shelter homes are intricately linked to how they represent, at least in principle, a threat to the patriarchal structures of control over women, who are expected not to seek external redressal for any problems that arise within the family. Some were already aware of the DUAs close to their area but had heard rumours that these places were not for 'good' women. Two of the women initially went to the DUAs (Hyderabad and Mardan). Although they found the security and refuge they needed, they chose to go to a private shelter home, when they sought assistance the second time.

Figure: Women's Trajectory Post-Shelter

Trajectory Flow Chart
Survivor Journey in accessing and existing shelter

Survivor's house

Family, relative, neighbours Friend, others

15, Police, Institution

Shelter home

Working, earning money

Non working

Independent without family

Family

Husband

Father, others

3.3 Lives within the shelter

This sub section presents women's experiences of these shelter homes against an overview of the kind of services and facilities provided there. In essence, it juxtaposes the objectives or intent of the services and how they are received by residents. The staff of both private shelters included in the study were interviewed and information on their facilities and services was obtained.

Women are generally allowed to remain in the shelter for a period of three to six months. However, exceptions are made in both the shelters for a longer stay, in case the women cannot return to families and need more time to settle back into the community. In our study sample, we had one woman who stayed in the shelter home for over a year. Most women averaged about 2 to 4 months, with five returning more than once, and staying in the shelter for varying lengths of time.

The experience of the shelter home detailed in this sub section is an overwhelmingly positive one. These experiences are in line with the study conducted with women residents in Dastak, another private shelter home in the Punjab, suggesting that the experience of the shelter 'opens up new options to counter their experiences of isolation and denial of information'.[20]

For almost all women in this study, it was an experience that served to support and strengthen them. A number of aspects of the shelter homes were highlighted by these women as being helpful. It would be fair to suggest that the shelter experience enabled some of these women to literally escape death, and for others to be in a stronger position to negotiate the terms of their lives.

Foremost, it provided immediate security and refuge. The threat to life, which for some was the reason why they ran away and for most others a consequence of running away, was real. As such, the appreciation of being in a guarded space that allowed them physical safety was expressed by most women. The shelter operates as an institution with strict enforcement of rules and regulations, such as daily time tables including division of the day in chores, classes, recreation and rest time, prohibition of males within the shelter premises, control over privacy, phone access, mobility and visitation with family. Calls are restricted to once a week and visits from family are supervised and conducted only after permission from residents. The women's immediate experience, once the fear wore off, was that of relief. In lieu of this and the earlier mentioned internalized gender norms, they found the *'pabandi'* (restrictions) of the shelter space, for most part as welcoming and understandable. Some of the women also welcomed restrictions for they felt it dispelled the negative perceptions around women shelters, and served as evidence that they were still good women. The need to hold on to their *izzat* (honour or reputation) which in their eyes remained closely linked to control, segregation and purdah of women was strong. Many feared they had irreparably tarnished their reputation by stepping out of the house. References were made to women who found these regulations challenging. They attributed this discomfort with regulations to these women's higher class or educational backgrounds or their disturbed emotional state.

For most women who came from abusive homes, where they had also experienced food scarcity, as well as the threat of conflict and violence on a daily basis, the *'sahooliat'* (amenities) of living in the shelter, the

predictable routine, reasonably comfortable living and sleeping quarters and open access to food was a welcome and even an enjoyable experience. Rabia, a 20 year old woman who arrived at the shelter when she was 15 shared:

> They kept us very happy, we used to watch TV, we had no time (to get bored), in the morning we did sewing cutting, a beautician course and computer classes, then we used to eat, and sometimes we had small parties (…). All things were in our control, it's not like this at home.

There was a compelling and a strongly voiced sense of solidarity in living with other women with similar circumstances. Many spoke about their friendships with other residents with similar problems who could understand their *'dil ki baat'* (intimate secrets) and how that gave them a sense of support and helped them overcome fear.

A limited range of vocational training opportunities, as well as literacy classes were also held in these shelters. Sewing, stitching cooking, handicrafts and parlour courses were offered. These classes allow the residents to either professionalize or hone a skill they already know e.g. stitching or learn a totally new set of skills, such as parlour work or computer proficiency. Classes seem skill focused where residents are encouraged to learn as much as they can, depending upon the length of stay in the shelter. Shelter homes sometimes offer a course completion certificate to residents who complete a 3-month programme. The objective of these trainings seemed threefold: First to help women do something useful with the time on their hands, as they await court decisions or wait out negotiations with their family; second to give them a sense of confidence in their abilities and; third to increase their ability to earn and be less economically dependent. The first objective is met to a large extent and women talk about attending these classes as an enjoyable bonding and learning experience which helped them pass time and ease worry about the future. The second objective was also fulfilled to some extent with many women exhibiting increased level of confidence in their ability. The third, in absolute terms, reflects a positive shift as 9 out of 12 women had gone on to practice skills learnt, and increased their earning irrespective of whether they lived independently or decided to reconcile.

Residents can also be eligible for grants provided the shelter has funds. Equipment like sewing machines and one off grants for capital, such as material for embroidery, parlour equipment is also given, especially to those women who complete the course and are starting out on their own without family support. One of the shelters displays handiwork of residents at the shelter and any proceeds from sale are given to the women. However, increase in earning capacity remained limited, partly because the type of trainings offered are narrow and job placement is not always possible, as these women come from far flung areas. As such many have to rely on doing small scale home-based work. One of the shelters also provides rudimentary orientation on accounts to women who wish to set up businesses. This shelter also tries to link up survivors with banks in their area for credit schemes, where possible, through their CBOs and volunteer network.

There is, however, no sustained effort made to link women to a formal or more secure job market or develop their entrepreneurial skills, including business plan development. In practice, women rely on community networks to get work and sustain their earnings. It was telling how only two women referred to skills they

had acquired as professions, e.g. beautician or tailor as opposed to most who referred to them as skill sets, *'parlour ka kaam', 'karahi karna' khana pakana* (parlour work, embroidery, cooking) they could employ informally within home settings.

Legal counselling and aid is an important feature of these shelter homes for women seeking *khula* or custody of children. Both shelters employ lawyers and also have lawyers on their referral that provide free legal services. Sessions on rights were also held from time to time. Separate psychological counselling sessions were held with more emotionally distressed women. The reference to counselling of women by the staff of these shelters was more in a general sense. It, more often than not, referred to motivational sessions informal and formal where women were given information on their rights, encouraged to be more confident or where the plan for their reintegration with family or independent living was discussed.

Recreational activities, such as celebration of national days, singing competitions, showing of films and indoor games are also held from time to time and are fondly mentioned by residents. Shelters also have a special teacher for children's education and this service was appreciated by women.

Being in guarded space, away from the abusive home was novel for these women. Their ability to literally survive away from family and often in defiance of them was a powerful experience for many. As Rabia explained:

> We learnt that our [legal] cases can get solved, we can leave home and we will not be hurt and can survive. We can get a *talaq* [divorce], we can live without family on our own terms. This is what we learnt, earlier we used to think that we had to live where we were married and spend our whole lives in it [marriage].

For others, especially those who had left children behind or those whose sons were too old to be kept inside the shelter as per policy, it was harder to settle down and it took them longer. The inability of shelter homes to absorb male children beyond ages 8 or 10 years was an issue for some of these women. Many of these children, as a result, were either in the parental home with parents who were reluctant to shoulder that responsibility, or with abusive partners or in state orphanages. The guilt of leaving children behind weighed heavily on these women and was often used by husbands and families to convince them to return. In some cases, husbands also left the children at the shelter's doorstep as they did not want to look after them. In other words, many of these children, also victims of violence were used as pawns, either to get the woman to return by not allowing her access, or by burdening her with them, making her survival outside the home, financially or emotionally unviable. In doing so, the intent was to leave her with no other option but to return. Often both strategies worked.

Women from the two private shelter homes studied alluded to specific shelter staff when referring to the shelter. So often the reference was to how 'madam' from the shelter had helped in negotiations with her husband or given a grant to start up her business and how Baji (counsellor at the shelter home) had helped her cope with the situation. Where residents had associated the shelter with support and safety, there was a clear dependency on one or two persons. Many experienced and referred to the shelter home as another

family, perhaps reflective of the limited experience of close relationships outside family settings, or possibly a longing for family ties that were now hostile or even severed because of their decision to move away. It also helped ease tensions and conflict that naturally arose within the enclosed space of the shelter homes, be it with other residents or with shelter's staff. Rabia said. . . *'They treat us well, a sister at home can also scold you, so it's like family here.'* Most of all, the need to stick to the family analogy seemed to arise from the desire to not upset or in any way unsettle the relationship of support that they had established with the shelter. As such, many were reluctant to criticize the shelter and the only two strong recommendations were that the shelter should extend its services to women who decide to live alone, away from family on a long term basis, and that it should accommodate male children irrespective of age.

Those who had stayed in both DuAs and in private shelters were able to reflect on the differences they experienced in the two. They shared that there was more *sakhti* (strictness) in DuA, meaning there were comparatively more rules and regulations in DuA and that they were more strictly enforced, especially regarding mobility. There was also a sense of being monitored 24/7. As compared to private shelter homes, accommodation in DuAs was more cramped and living facilities were generally more frugal. As Soniya described . . . *'Unlike the DuA, in the private shelter home there was no strictness, everything was open, fridge, oven everything was there, no tension.'* Whereas the private shelter space was almost always associated with the name of the counsellor or manager, the DuA was always referred to as the institution or in some cases the designation of the person in the institution, such as the warden or medical officer. None of the women returned to the DuA, and in both cases, the next time they needed to return for assistance, they contacted the private shelter space. This could be partly due to the fact that entrance to the DuA often requires a court order. However, what is important to note here is that none of the women tried to visit or contact the DuA, not even by phone for advice or support after leaving.

All in all, most looked back to their shelter experience and were able to verbalize how living in the shelter had made them stronger and more resilient. For many, there was a realization and an ability to verbalize how traditional gender norms and values were discriminatory towards women, and that they could and must speak up and resist. Tehmina, a 38-year old survivor, evidenced this awareness when she spoke about the duplicity in the concept of *ghairat* (honour) often used to restrain woman. Referring to how the men in her family did not help her when she was being brutally beaten up by her husband, and how they pressured her to return from the shelter because of family pride and honour she stated *'They [men] don't have ghiarat first, then when women step out of the house, then suddenly their ghairat becomes alive'*.

3.4 Leaving the Shelter home

This sub section maps the various trajectories of moving back into the community, in other words, the processes within and outside the shelter that have to do with the survivors' journey beyond the shelter space.

Interviews with women revealed that for most married women, entry into the shelter was followed by pressure from the family to make their return. It could be the husband or the woman's own family or both, pressurizing the woman to return to her husband's home. In either case, the reason was to save the family's

perceived 'izzat' (honour) or for the sake of the children, especially if they were outside the shelter home. For unmarried women, the pressure was even more intense, coupled often with threat to life. In such cases, the decision to contact families is taken with care and sometimes not at all. The shelters claim that after seeking the woman's permission, they contact the family and let them know of her whereabouts. Subsequent meetings are strictly with the survivor's consent. There can be a series of meetings where the shelter's lawyer is present and are aimed at convincing the survivor's family to resolve the matter in a way that allows her to go back safely with dignity. The survivor's family is asked to resolve the matter amicably, and are informed that the survivor has legal counsel and can approach the court for khula, or maintenance. There is a waiting out strategy employed by the shelter, which involves delaying decision making. This gives the woman some time to assess what she wants to do, and the family to realize the seriousness of the situation. Tehmina shared:

> Madam said to me we will fight the case. For the case madam gives some time. [She says] you have this much time, so think. But I told her that I can't stay with him [husband] (. . .) [when I came here] madam told him, she said [to me] we will tell him otherwise they [husband and family] will make a bigger issue that we have kept you here and will accuse us [shelter home](...)my husband came here, I refused to meet him. Madam said if you will give permission he will talk to you and if you don't, we will not force you.

Tehmina eventually chose to seek khula and lives independently with her children.

In cases where the parties opt for reconciliation, an affidavit called *sula-nama* (reconciliation agreement) is signed which seals the conditions for her return. Conditions can include clauses, such as cessation of violence, transfer of the house in the name of the woman, regular payment of household expenses, permission to work etc. This is signed in the presence of a lawyer employed by the shelter and sometimes the police. The latter is done especially in cases where the survivor has come through police referral. For those cases where the survivor is adamant that she does not wish to return, a case for *khula* and/ or financial maintenance case is filed and often resolved within 3 to 4 months respectively.

The challenges for women to survive, without familial support, in a highly patriarchal society are intense. Many of the women who enter the shelter, and demanding a release from marriage end up reconciling, often through 'counselling' by the shelter staff. Soniya reported how the staff counselled her by suggesting that *'staying here in not a good solution, it is wrong, you shouldn't do this, after all one's own house is one's own house. Go to your house and stay happy. It won't (violence) happen again, he will be more careful'.* Reconciliation, in case of severely violent marriages, may seem like a traditional or a conservative outcome, hardly any different from the stance of families of survivors that urge women to return. Refuge from abusive marriage, sought in parental home, is often marred by conditionalities, such as an eventual return to the marital home. Shelters too do not allow women to stay indefinitely within these spaces. Ironically these shelters considered a new family by the survivor also operate, to some extent, as an extension of the patriarchal family that encourages the survivor to reconcile. However, women seem to experience 'counselling' by the shelter staff differently, or at best less coercive compared to the pressures exerted by the

parental family to return. For them the decision to return in this case is more negotiated and owned by them.

This could be attributed to the overall environment and orientation of the shelter space as well as the concerted focus on reducing economic dependency. At the shelter homes, violence is denounced and considered unacceptable. During the counselling sessions or during meetings, with the shelter staff and other residents, women are told that their suffering is unjustifiable, violence is unacceptable and is a violation of their rights. Most importantly, if negotiation fails, they can access legal services and demand justice e.g. seek khula, demand maintenance or even file a case against an attempt against their life. This allows the women to enter into a formal negotiation with their abusive husband on terms that are more in their favour. They have the backing of the shelter home manager or the threat of legal action, a threat that they have means to put into action. Whether that threat is put into action or not, and in many cases, it is not, the very option and ability of recourse to legal action, enables the woman to bargain more effectively with the husband.

It would be important to mention here that women from Sindh reported higher rates of satisfaction with how their cases were handled, and felt that the process of reconciliation including the *sula nama* was an effective strategy. This is partly a reflection of stricter cultural and traditional norms in KPK, allowing less space and options to exercise, especially for those women who chose not to reconcile. It translates into exerting greater pressure on these women, by the shelter management, convincing them to reconcile. A reference to reconciliation processes in DuA would not be amiss here. Studies of these practices suggest that often what is termed as reconciliation is a coercive process whereby the woman is forced to return back to the abusive family with few opportunities and options for seeking an alternative solution such as legal action. More importantly, there is very little encouragement offered, by these shelters, for returning back to the shelter, in case things go wrong. The reconciliation agreement and process detailed above (from the shelter in Sindh) stands separate from this.

Follow up with women, once they leave shelter homes, is easier in case of women who opt to live independently or decide to go for *khula* as they stay in contact with the shelter themselves and seek support from time to time. Follow up with women who return to families is harder because many of these women are from distant areas, and sometimes because these women don't give consent. This is not to suggest that women do not return if reconciliation agreements fail. For five of the women, the shelter operated as a revolving door where recourse to shelter was sought more than once in their lives. There were two categories here, some women returned as they found that the abuse that they faced earlier had not abated after their return. Devastated, they returned and yet because they could return, knew where to go and what options it would yield for them if they did, they returned with less fear and more confidence. They used their ability to go to the shelter home again as a way to negotiate better the next time round in their relationship. The other category of women who returned were women in KPK who were at risk of being killed because they had not reconciled with families. They went back to the shelter after leaving work placements to await further job opportunities as domestic workers. This was the only kind of job available to these women as it provided a protected living environment.

Interviews with the 12 women reveal three types of outcomes after the shelter home. Reconciling with husband, moving back with the parental family and opting to live independently. The table below depicts this and further analysis that follows reveals some interesting trends.

Table 2: Post-shelter Outcomes for women Survivors

	Outcomes	No.	Economic activity
1	Reconcile with abusive husband- with increased earning /property ownership	5 (3)	i-Parlour in the house, tailoring and also has section of house in her name ii-hospital maid iii-has house in her name
2	Move into parental home	1	Parlour in the house
3	Live independently	6	All women are now earning.
	-with older children	(2)	i-Food catering for shopkeepers. Son works in a local public call office ii-Tailoring. Daughters work in a local bakery
	-with other shelter residents	(2)	i- Factory worker and also embroiders clothes ii-Runs parlour in the house
	-with a family as domestic help	(2)	- Domestic worker

Women who reconciled

Five of the nine married woman, nearly all with young children, went back to their husbands.

- Most married women reconciled, provided the husband was willing. The chances of reconciliation were higher if the woman was younger with smaller children.

Of the five that returned, the ones who were earning or those who had property transferred in their name, as part of the affidavit agreement, report less violence and more confidence and satisfaction with their current situation.

- Even though the shelter service has not been able to fully resolve the problems in their lives, the experience of living away from family, having access to legal recourse and increased earning

capacity better equipped them to deal with their situation.

Shenaz, now 27, who chose to go back to her husband, has set up a small parlour in her house in Hyderabad and manages household expenses. She said her husband has noticed a change in her and shared what he said to her. 'You have become a 'minister' now. You have started to speak back. Since you have come from there (shelter) you have started speaking differently using new words (..)'. She further added:

> They (shelter) gave us [women] a lot of support. Told us this (abusive situation) life is no life, you can't live in fear (. . .) Earlier I had no himmat (courage) I could not speak in front of other people (. . .) When he screams at me now, I say yes, go ahead and scream, you don't earn or feed us. Just try and hit me, I will break your arm. Earlier I used to be very fearful, and after he beat me I would go to the bathroom and lock myself in but not now. Now if he says one thing to me, I say 10 in return. You don't provide for us, or look after the children, I do everything, I even bring the food, so why do you try and rule over us.

Women who took khula

Four women took khula. Three live independently now. Two of the four had husbands who did not pursue them. The other two that opted for khula despite the option of reconciliation were older women in their 30's, and have children who are older and can earn.

-   The chances of a woman opting for dissolution of marriage were higher in the case of women who were older with children, who were in a position to supplement income.

One woman who moved back in with her parents after taking khula, contributes financially by running a parlour within the house. She feels stigmatized and unhappy as a twice divorced woman with two small children. Three out of four parental families of women who took khula also severed contact with them. In some cases, they changed their phone number so that women could not contact them.

-   Often parental families withdrew support and contact with women after they took khula.

Unmarried women

Of the three single women who had sought refuge in the shelter (two left home to avoid forced marriages and the third to escape from an abductor who had kidnapped her to avenge a family feud), going back to families was not an option. Two of them feared for their life (both from KPK) and one's family offered to take her back provided she marries someone of their choice. Once she refused, they broke off all contact. All three earn and live away from their families.

-   The threat to life for seeking support outside the family was higher for single women and the chances of reconciliation poorer, especially for those from KPK.

Women living without family post shelter

Of the 6 women (three single and three married who sought *khula*) living independently, all are now earning. Two of the women are living with another woman from the shelter house and support each other,

including practical help with child care. They face considerable stigma for living without a male member and are conscious of how they are viewed because of this. This is not just a sensitivity to societal disapproval but has practical consequences on their lives such as not being able to get rented accommodation. They are both in their early twenties and contemplate marriage as they see it as being important to survive in society but are fearful of what that arrangement will entail. Both these women reside in Sindh.

Two of the older women in the sample (in their thirties) who have taken *khula*, have older children who supplement household income. They are more settled and report less stigmatization when it comes to living alone. Tehmina's parental family severed contact with her when she took khula from her husband. She misses the lack of family support dearly, and often mentions that she has lost all her relations yet she said that:

> Things are not the way they used to be. That fighting and arguing, that is gone, now I live on my own terms, in *sakoon* (peace) and with *izzat* (dignity) in this place. We earn and we eat as we please and live as we want.

Those earning as domestic helpers, are both unable to live alone because of the threat to their life. Employers often withhold pay without fear of repercussion as they know that these women cannot leave that easily for they need refuge. Each time they have had to change employment they sought the support of the shelter for job placement. Both women reside in KPK.

- None of the women living independently of their families are living alone, some live with other shelter residents, others live with older children, and some as domestic helpers with families.

- All women living independently are now earning and supporting themselves, mostly through skills acquired at the shelter.

- Women in KPK, who were single and younger, had more difficulties in surviving on their own, with fewer options, when considering going back to the community after leaving the shelter space.

Post Shelter Lives:
An Assessment of Challenges and Enablers

4. Post Shelter Lives: An Assessment of Challenges and Enablers

It would be fair to suggest that the shelter experience enabled some of these women to literally escape death, and others to be in a stronger position to negotiate the terms of their lives. The attempt below is to capture the obstacles faced by women, as well as enabling factors that sustain them as they integrate into the community.

4.1 Challenges

Societal stigma and Harassment

An overarching challenge faced by these women is the stigma attached to women who have stayed away from homes in a shelter facility. Shenaz shared how she went to a wedding in the neighbourhood sometime after her return from the shelter:

> Women were all collecting around, calling each other to come and look at me, they were saying she has come from there [shelter home]. My complexion had improved in the shelter, here [husband's home] I was like a prisoner, there [shelter] there was no work, I was well looked after and ate well. They were commenting on me, yes look at her, she has been around *(ghoom ke aye hai)*, that's why she is like this.

The reference to having 'been around' is pejorative and the suggestion is that Shanaz has been moving about without family/male protection and possibly been involved in 'immoral' behaviour. Reported by women who reconciled with their husbands, this becomes especially severe for those women who were living independently. Rabia, now 20 living with another single woman in Hyderabad stated:

> I have been disgraced in my village, they say that she has run away with her *yaar* (paramour). I suffered that and now that I live here there is no male in our house, only us two (women). The world is a very bad place, here too they say *ghalat* (slanderous) things about us, but what can we do, we have to bear it for we don't have our own [family].

This category of women reported an additional stigma, specifically because of living without a family, and more so without male members. Many try to dissociate, at least visibly, with the shelter and lie to neighbours and landlords that they have brothers or fathers earning abroad. Single and younger women reported this more, and often shared a heightened sense of insecurity and vulnerability as a lone woman, without male members in their life.

Lack of family support

Women whose familial homes have been violent, express considerable bitterness, alongside an intense longing for the family. Tehmina stayed with her violent husband for 22 years but was shunned by her family when she decided to leave him. She acutely feels the lack of family for herself and for her children who too have no contact with the father or her side of the family. She shared how in moments of despondency she tells her children to go live with their father, as she well recognizes the challenge of living without social support. This need is intense not just for women who are facing financial difficulties but also for women who are able to earn and are financially independent. Collectivist societal norms where all men and especially women are seen as anchored within family make it very hard for women living independently to adjust in an

individualistic setting where the self stands without reference to relations. Many find this experience demoralizing and deeply distressing.

Presence of children

Having children has several implications for these women. First, for women with very young children the pressure to return for the sake of the children is high. This is evident even in cases where the father was violent towards the children. Moreover, parental families are reluctant to support these children. Sometimes families leave children at the shelter in a bid to pressure the woman to return. Women often mention how they cannot burden their parental families with more mouths to feed. Husbands also threaten wives that they would take the children away if they did not return.

The second implication is the financial burden of looking after these children, if the woman decides to take *khula*. Despite husbands' threats of taking children away, in our sample we found that it was the woman who was saddled with the financial responsibility of the children in case of *khula*. In our sample, none of the women were receiving maintenance, although a few had cases pending in the court. As a result, those who live alone have to provide and earn for themselves and their children. For these women, sending their children to the father is unacceptable. This is a feature of strong societal expectations and internalization of gender norms that associate responsibility of upbringing of children with the woman. It also reflects the father's disinterest in the children once the marriage has ended. Many husbands remarry fairly quickly.

Third, for women who seek *khula*, further plans to marry are also affected by the presence of children. Rohinya, now 28, who returned to the parental family with her two daughters after her second divorce, is often advised to return the children to the respective father so that she can start her life again by getting married. This, in addition to implying that a woman cannot survive alone and should exist within the institution of marriage, also suggests that the chances of a woman marrying again are bleak if she has children with her.

Emotional distress

Women expressed emotional distress as a consequence of long-term abuse and violence that occurred in the past, either at the hands of the husband or brother(s). Continued anxiety and fear was reported, especially in cases where abuse was very violent. This violence may have abated in their present circumstances, but these women continue to live with a sense of hyper vigilance and an inability to relax. Others report a loss of memory and school learning acquired in the past, as if it had been literally beaten out of them by their husband or their circumstances. Sadness and despair, because of the abandonment by the family and a sense of being anchorless was expressed by women living independently. Many spoke of suicidal ideation during the period where they were going through violence, and this was especially high towards the end when they were contemplating setting out of the house. Nearly all voiced a strong sense of loss and an intensely felt sense of sadness about the trajectory their lives have taken. Some talked of the future, only with reference to their children. Aspirations for themselves were rarely expressed as they felt that their lives have ended in many ways. The sadness was sometimes overwhelming when they spoke during the interview, and many wept as they talked about their lives and what they had suffered. Sometimes it became difficult for the interviewer to move beyond the circumstances that brought them to the shelter and steer

the conversation into their post shelters lives.

Financial uncertainty and Housing challenges

Women living independently are earning but continue to face financial uncertainty and many live in difficult circumstances. They live in rented accommodation and meeting rent, including questions from landlords and neighborhood about their family is a challenge. Some sold the little assets they had, others relied on extended family help or non-familial sources of support such as friends to survive initially. For many, this support although critical during their start-up phase, was time limited. Many are not skilled or experienced enough to align with a secure job market that is already hostile to women. They often rely on home-based work which can be ad hoc, accompanied by income uncertainty.

Threat to life

Continued threat to life, for some of these women, considerably reduces their chances of living with dignity and autonomy. For these women, the only occupation available is to be placed in a home as a domestic worker . As reported above these women are often exploited within these homes, as employers know of their dire circumstances.

4.2 Enabling factors

The following enabling factors in women's lives do not function in isolation and are connected to each other. In other words, the efficacy of an enabling factor depends upon the presence of others that strengthen it e.g. the ability of a woman to control her life is tied closely to her ability to earn.

Experience of shelter

The experience of the shelter home was an empowering one for these women, and acted as an enabler in their lives post shelter. Most women, married, single and those who took *khula* reported a reduction in fear and emotional distress as compared to their life before, an enhanced ability to handle their situation, whether it was their response to violence, or living independently, and attributed this to the shelter. Shelters in these women's lives represent a space, where the women attained recourse to not only a safe refuge but also access to skills training, legal intervention and mediation with the family. Moreover, these spaces validated women's experiences and encouraged them to take decisions.

Soniya, a 20-year old woman shared how the shelter taught her to speak up for herself:

> The most important thing I learnt from here is *himmat* (courage) which they [shelter house] gave to us. Taught us about what to expect, these problems can happen, you should say this, do this. This is what I have gained most, strength within (…) before this we could never speak up.

Presence of children

Earlier presented as a challenge that inhibited women's ability to leave marriage or live independently, the presence of children in these women's lives also served to give them the strength and motivation to continue to struggle. For some, the move out of the house was propelled partly by the violence their children suffered. Women are driven by a need to improve the lives of their children and nearly all are educating their children, daughters included. Their own lack of education and how that obstacle hindered their ability to cope in

adverse circumstances was keenly felt by these women. Many articulated that they want their children to study so that they can better cope with what life throws at them.

For some, the financial support provided by older children, in terms of supplemental income, was an enabler in their integration process. It helped to bring them together during difficult financial times. Women were not averse to both sons and daughters working.

Skills and Dignity of work

Nine of the twelve women interviewed had improved their ability to earn after the shelter experience. They participate in a number of economic activities, such as running parlour services within the home, food catering for local shopkeepers, tailoring and embroidering, as well as employment as domestic help, factory worker and hospital maid. The ability to earn signified the ability to survive for women living independently, with no other source of income. For these women their ability to earn is a source of pride. Noor explained:

> I have been able to do this [get *khula* and survive economically] because of my own *mehnat* [hard work] (…). [I] did not want to be a burden. I told my brothers and my mother, who were discouraging me from going to court, I will not be a burden on people, I will do this on my own, God will reward me, I will not ask from anyone and I will not stay quiet either. My sister said come to us, we will take your responsibility, but I have done this on my own.

For others, who continue to live with their husbands, it has meant more confidence and allows them to wield more power at home, and be treated with more respect and dignity. Economic independence has brought about a change in how they view themselves and they feel less *mohtahj* (dependent) on others, more in charge of their lives and the lives of their children.

Ownership of property

For two of the women from Sindh, property given to them as per the terms of the *sula-nama* helped strengthen their position at home. Shelter management reported that this was a good strategy and provided security to the women. Such an arrangement is agreed upon by the family in a bid to save the marriage and coax the woman to return. Both women reported reduction in violence and attributed this directly to the fact that the husband could not throw them out, as the house was now in their name and that they know their legal rights. The reliance, however, is largely on the shelter home, to assert this right, in case it is challenged.

Connections with the shelter home

Women who stay connected with the shelter, benefit from this association. This benefit is three-fold: First, it enables them to access material benefits, such as assistance in seeking a place to rent; job placement; and grants or even credit. Shelter home management often supports survivors in obtaining rental accommodation and this help can generally be sought time and again, especially in case of single women, who need references to avail tenancy. Second, it also serves as a backup measure in these women's lives. These women feel they can return to the shelter for support, in case circumstances become difficult and the terms of the *sula nama* are breached. Third, the continued contact with the shelter also has an inhibitory effect on abuse by the husband and his family, for they too are aware that the woman can reach the shelter

house or 'madam' in case they are in trouble. Zahida, now living with her husband, reported an interesting anecdote where her husband expressed concern when the shelter home called her for the research interview. She shared his reaction:

> I slapped you yesterday, you must have called them, that is why the phone came today. He [my husband] was afraid, I told him there is nothing like this, I am not taking a divorce (. . .) I will forgive you, I won't even tell them you hit me. He said forgive me I lost my temper when I hit you. I told him it's just an interview (. . .) He is afraid, he says if you take a divorce, I will be left in a fix, you will get the children [this is] because a portion of the house is in my name.

It may be pertinent to recall here that the women in our sample had all agreed to be contacted again, and thus, were accessible for the study. The shelter staff revealed that some married women do not give consent for the shelter to follow up or sometimes change phone numbers. It can only be assumed that those who do not stay in touch, are challenged by their lack of contact with the shelter homes.

Presence of Support Systems

It is important to highlight that many of these women received support from a number of sources that helped ease their journey back into the community. For some, the journey so far would not have been possible without these support systems. These included help from women allies and friends, such as a female stitching teacher or an older woman in the community who the survivor had done tailoring for in the past, and other women in the shelter with whom they could live as they moved out. In rare cases support also came from sympathetic extended family. They assisted in finding a place to rent, or provided in kind donations like basic furniture. These support systems were all the more significant not just for practical help they provided but also because these women often feel extremely isolated because of lack of family support.

Enhanced control over life

The notion of control versus helplessness surfaced in many interviews. These conversations suggest that the ability to take decisions for oneself, one's children and be in control of one's life is an important enabler that aids these women in their post shelter lives.

Four of the twelve women continue to face considerable distress in their current life arrangement, and a sense of helplessness in the course their lives are taking. Two of these women work as live-in domestic help and continue to face threats with regards to their life and have reduced options of living independently in KPK. The remaining two continue to be distressed, one, a divorced woman now living with her parents after her husband's desertion, and the other, a young woman who returned to her husband, who continues to be violent. What is common in the last four cases is a sense of helplessness and lack of control over their current lives and what the future holds.

Eight of the twelve women in our sample reported an improvement in their lives because of coming to the shelter home, and denote more satisfaction with their current life circumstances. Moving out of the shelter home was, to a large extent, their own decision, where they felt that they were relatively better equipped to deal with their life circumstances as compared to pre-shelter times. They now feel that they either have enhanced capacities to earn or own property or have more knowledge of their rights, including recourse to legal means if they so choose. A common factor in women who exhibited stronger adjustment in their

current life circumstances was a sense of control and enhanced confidence in their ability. While the struggles and constraints of their circumstances remain real, they articulated a sense of *sakoon* (calm).

Rejection of gender inequitable norms

Interviews show that most of these women saw themselves as resilient and capable of surviving through their own resources. They see their lives and actions as standing outside traditional gender roles and norms, and are able to articulate this as a shift that they have noticed in themselves. In the earlier section on histories (3.1), it has been pointed out that their earlier beliefs had been more traditional and accepting of gender norms. Shenaz living with her husband reflected *'I used to think, what can a woman do, if she steps out, for there are men out there, this will happen to her, that will happen to her. But none of this happened. If we become strong, everything is possible.'* Later in the interview she said:

> You should live life on your own terms and not of others. That person has his own life and my life is my own(…) He [husband] will not be violent with me now, I am now a little *pagal* (mad) ,if someone says something to me I am not like the old Shenaz, I have tolerated enough. Now he will still say things to me, criticize me, but he does not hit me (…) this is because at first I was afraid, I am not afraid anymore.

Interestingly, Shenaz finds the shift so radical that she calls herself 'mad' much like the way society labels women who stand up for themselves and resist. She says this ironically, taking pride in how she has changed.

Tahmina's response to a question about how a woman should respond to violence is a far cry from societal messages to women about violent marriages, including the messages she received from her family when she told them about the violence she faced:

> [Women] should speak, of course, the more she keeps quiet, hides these things, the more her family isolates her, [family says] keep silent, you are at fault, and the more you keep quiet the more no one listens, everyone takes advantage. This is the truth, I had so many problems and I kept suffering. I should have spoken up sooner, I didn't know we could be *azad* (live independently). We live in this city and we didn't know of this place.

Shenaz, in the same vein, highlighted how women do not know of these spaces and should be encouraged to seek support when things are rough:

> Women should be directed to these shelters, [people should say] that you should go (…). This violence that is happening is not a good thing, it is wrong, God has created all of us equal, like He has given men rights, He has given women rights. It's not like a man has everything and a woman has nothing. It is wrong for a woman to become voiceless and accept that this is my fate, my mother has given me or my father has given me, this is wrong. Because she doesn't raise her voice is the reason she is cut down again and again. It is wrong.

What is perhaps most telling in the excerpt above is how she said 'it is wrong' not once but thrice, a clear unequivocal denouncement of the violence in women's lives that is invisible because of societal attitudes that normalize it.

Many women refer to how they had thought that DuAs (often used for both public and private shelters) were

places where 'bad' women involved in 'immoral' activities went. Their perception shifted after their stay and they have now become active advocates of shelters and defend these spaces. Zahida vehemently stated: *Women should go to the center [shelter], their problems will be solved so they can live in their homes in peace, hitting and beating will stop. If he doesn't fix himself, they should take khula.*

Women had a lot more to say about how the state and society should deal with violence against women. They advocated for more shelters, improving access, especially for women from far flung areas who do not have resources to reach cities. Some spoke about the need for the police to be more sensitive. Others felt transitional half-way houses should be available, after shelters, and that providing housing to women struggling to survive on their own should be a priority of the government. They suggested these spaces should have facilities for male children who must not be separated from their mothers. Legislation and punishment for men who deserted women without maintenance should also be enforced, argued one survivor. Another felt that the kinds of facilities and services they had in the private shelter home were not provided in state shelters, and these centers should be modelled along the lines of the private shelter homes, with a special focus on skills training.

All in all, these women demanded more safe spaces for women and more extensive support with these spaces. They also advocated for support that went beyond shelter to services and facilities that would allow them to transition from victims of violence to survivors that could exist with dignity on their own terms.

5. Living with Dignity:
Recommendations for Post Shelter Support

5. Living with Dignity: Recommendations for Post Shelter Support

The research study set out to expand knowledge and understanding about the social, psychological and economic challenges faced by women survivors of gender-based violence as they settle back into the community. In doing so, it charted the survivors' journey to the shelter home as an important context to what enables and restricts their ability to live a life with dignity in the post shelter phase. Hence, Sections 3.1-3.2 of the study included a mapping of the women's vulnerabilities that begin in childhood and the precarious risk intensive route to the shelter facility. Sections 3.3-3.4 lays out the survivors' preparation and experiences of post shelter life. Section 4 analyses the obstacles that survivors continue to face, as well as the factors that enable them to function in these circumstances. This section carries forward these findings to secure recommendations that can strengthen her chances of living with dignity after violence.

Three aspects of the survivor's integration or journey back into the community are important to emphasis here.

First, the study argues that the term integration may be more suited in this context than the more commonly used word: reintegration. The term reintegration implies that the survivors of violence were integrated with society prior to the circumstances that led them to leave home. In our interviews with these women, we found that these women face a range of strategic deprivations and discriminations starting from early childhood that made them second class citizens, including limited mobility, education and livelihood opportunities,[12] as well as negligible access to legal resources and financial assets.[13] Furthermore, because of the breakdown of traditional forms of support that these women have been conditioned to depend upon, these women can no longer go back on the same terms. Integration of survivors within the community, therefore, requires the development of a new set of support systems and capacities e.g. a woman who has no education may need to earn and live as single parent or she may need to negotiate the process of litigation for maintenance or custody of her children independently.

Second, post shelter life may signify a return to a violent home and husband or survive in a society that is hostile to single women living alone. As such, the study nuances this process of integration and does not assess it from an arbitrary notion of success or failure. Instead, it regards gains or improvements in their life circumstances post shelter as relative to their life circumstances before they reached the shelter home, as well as societal norms prevalent in the area.

Third, the study looked at shelter services in two provinces of Pakistan, Sindh and KPK and regional variations have been documented in the sections above. In our sample, women from KPK faced more severe forms of violence and we found higher levels of emotional distress in this group. Moreover, shelter services although successful in providing them with safety and refuge, faced stronger challenges in integration, a feature of stricter cultural norms that allow women little autonomy outside marriage or family. These women faced greater continued risk to life, fewer opportunities for income generation and limited options for integration outside family. This suggests that socio-cultural dynamics need recognition and that services provided must be sensitive to and attempt to mitigate these challenges as much as possible.

5.1 Scope of Recommendations

Drawing upon the experiences of these women, findings from the study reflect general parameters that

should undergird survivor integration policy and programmes across Pakistan. This is not to suggest that provincial specificities, such as socio-cultural dynamics alluded to above, as well as variances in relevant institutional mechanisms, legal and procedural protocols can be ignored. However, study findings can be used to suggest a broad framework and approach which can be applied nationally. This framework outlines the kind of policy and services for women survivors of violence in Pakistan that can then be further complemented by province specific context.

The shelter home experience in this study refers largely to private shelter institutions. The experience of a few women in the study who went to state shelters, namely Darul Amans (DuAs) was not as positive. Based on the experiences of the women interviewed that reveal that quality shelter services can have far reaching consequences for the survivor's ability to settle back into the community post shelter. The study presents the possibilities for women if shelter homes (both public and private) strengthened their programmes.

It would be pertinent to remind here that the study looked at dynamics of survivor support for women facing domestic violence and those seeking refuge from forced marriages. As such, recommendations below do not address additional aspects of support and services needed by women facing other kinds of violence e.g. rape.

As stated in the section on methods, our sample is limited to women who have stayed alive and stayed in contact with private shelter homes after leaving. One way to assess this limitation is to disregard what the findings tell us, as representatives of women, who have had favourable experiences, and hence, stayed in contact as opposed to women who faced inadequate or poor quality of services, and with whom there is little or no follow up. We argue however, that it is these precise examples, namely the stories of women, who have had some measure of relief that in fact enable us to understand what works, what could be made better and what is possible.

5.2 Recommendations for survivor integration policy and programmes

Profile of women survivors of violence

- Poverty
- Little or no education
- Strong internalization of gender inequitable norms
- No control over decision-making
- Child marriage and pregnancies
- Limited mobility and exposure outside home
- Limited or no earning capacity
- Lack of family support when wanting to leave husband, especially pronounced in the case of contracting marriage by choice.
- Lack of awareness of resources that can help break the cycle of violence e.g. legal rights and access to legal services and shelter homes.

Findings from the research reiterate understanding of the dynamics of violence[49][50] in Pakistan, namely the many factors that heighten women's vulnerability to violence. This suggests that violence against women far from being an aberration or crisis of intimate relationships is instead a phenomenon that has structural determinants. Public policy and programming that provides relief and support to survivors of violence must therefore recognize the systemic discriminations that increase women's vulnerability to violence, and limit her capacity to not only respond but also live with dignity in a post shelter world. In simple words, women faced with violence need to be supported to not just put an end to violence in their lives but to overcome the set of vulnerabilities that made them victims in the first place. The study advocates a more long-term approach where interventions strengthen women's ability to survive after violence. Post shelter integration will depend, in addition to interventions for the post shelter phase, to more robust shelter interventions that can prepare women better and on easier and less stigmatized access to safe spaces. The following three-fold focus is recommended:

- Enablement of women facing violence through increased provision and access to safe spaces such as shelter homes.

- Mitigation of systemic deprivations faced by these women through high quality shelter services.

- Inclusion of post shelter support services for women survivors of violence in survivor integration programmes.

The following set of recommendations apply to both public and private shelter homes with recommendations 1.1, 1.2 , 2.1 and 2.2 specific to DuAs.

1. Provision and Access to Safety and Protection

A number of factors hinder women in reaching out for support when they are faced with violence in their lives. These include social isolation, lack of assistance from or further victimization by traditional social networks, including family and Jirgas/Faislos (non-formal bodies for dispute resolution), as well as lack of familiarity and negative perceptions regarding resources that could facilitate them such as helplines, police, courts, and shelter homes. The insensitive attitude of criminal justice actors, especially the police is another barrier. As a result, most survivors of violence find it immensely overwhelming to break the cycle of violence in their lives and suffer continued abuse, sometimes at the cost of their lives. Those who dare to seek non-traditional forms of support, such as going to the police, or a shelter in their area traverse a complicated and uncertain path to reach help. Women who come out of shelter homes are also stigmatized and their chances of integration negatively affected by these perceptions. The study calls for the following set of actions to mitigate these challenges:

1.1   Increase in the number of shelters across the country. Provincial governments must allocate adequate budget and provide a comprehensive coverage for shelter homes across all districts of a province. More specifically, there needs to be an increase in the number of DuAs in Sindh, KPK, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan (GB) and AJK.

1.2   Ensure entry to women reaching shelter with or without court orders. The criteria for entry to DuAs, through court orders, has been lifted in some provinces but implementation still remains sketchy.

1.3   Province specific communication strategy that raises awareness around child marriage and domestic violence legislation, including information on rights within the law.

1.4   Province specific communication strategy (possibly in combination with 1.3) to A) improve knowledge of specific procedural mechanisms as per law and B) promote a positive image of support services available to women such as helplines, police, courts and shelter homes for women. This can include campaigns to raise awareness in communities about the purpose of the creation of such facilities, and to sensitize the general public towards the circumstances that drive women to seek refuge in shelters. Shelter homes must be projected positively with a focus on provision of safety in a culturally appropriate, segregated environment for women.

1.5   Strengthen police response to women including emergency helpline services such as 15.

  •   Development and maintenance of referral directory by the police of relevant support services in the area.

  •   Facilitation of survivors must include information on shelter services and safe escort to the nearest shelter facility, if needed.

  •   Posters with information on public and private shelter facilities in the area and helplines for women (if available) displayed in all police stations.

1.6   Active outreach by shelters to publicize services to villages and cities within their catchment area. This can include orientations and the development of relevant IEC material which gives referral information for support facilities, including information on ways to get to the shelter physically.

2   Nature and Quality of services within shelter homes

The experience of reaching out to private shelter homes, as detailed in the sections above, is an overwhelmingly positive one that serves to support and strengthen women during this time of crisis. Shelter homes can, therefore, be a critical intervention offered to survivors that not only provide much needed refuge and redressal but the services and support provided have implications for post shelter life. Hence, interventions during this phase have a direct impact on how women cope with obstacles that they face after leaving shelters. The following set of recommendations builds upon aspects of the private shelter homes that were highlighted by the women in our study as being helpful, and those that they felt were inadequate.

2.1   Policy, guidelines and regulations of shelter homes must respect survivors' safety and autonomy as a core principle.

  •   Review of objectives and scope of work of DuA's from a gender and human rights perspective is recommended. The current social welfare model advocates for integrity of the family despite severe threat to the survivors' fundamental freedom, including sometimes the right to life. Robust models of standard operating procedures for DuAs have been developed in partnership with civil society organizations, such as GIZ, Rozan, Shirkat Gah and Dastak. These have been notified in some provinces but implementation is far from satisfactory because of inadequate budgetary allocations and lack of sustained commitment on part of provincial women development department and/or social welfare departments.

2.2 Involvement of supportive community members in management and oversight of activities of DuA can expand the network of support available to survivors after they leave and also improve standards of quality. This has been a strategy recommended within SoPs developed for DuA and implemented in some centers.

- Promoting public private partnerships and involvement of community in monitoring the services of DuAs.

2.3 Strong emotional distress, be it the impact of violence suffered or the isolation and challenges of surviving without family support, is a major obstacle that faces residents. It is important that the shelter space mitigate these factors and foster emotional growth and coping skills of residents.

- Psychological support services that foster a sense of control and social support. This can include psychological counselling and psycho-social group activities that build confidence and solidarity between residents.

  - Awareness raising on women's rights, including opportunities to learn and where possible participate in local activism around women's rights.

  - Recreational events which involve survivors in planning and execution.

  - Basic infrastructure such as adequate housing, as well as open spaces within the shelter enclosure.

2.4 Access to free legal services in shelter space made a significant difference in the lives of the women by enhancing their ability to negotiate the terms of their decision to either stay or leave their abusive situation.

  - Provision of strong legal aid services for khula, divorce, custody and maintenance cases. This needs to be strengthened, especially in case of maintenance after khula and should extend beyond case facilitation to mechanisms that ensure payments are made.

  - Safe facilitation to and from the shelter facility for attending court hearings.

2.5 Skills and dignity of work is an important enabler in lives of women who leave the shelter regardless of whether they chose to go back to potentially abusive homes or live independently.

  Vocational training programmes should be upgraded, offered with a clear focus on increasing women's earning capacity as opposed to just provision of skills training.

  - Expanded scope of vocational training programme beyond traditional skills. Market surveys to assess marketability of products or skills is recommended where possible.

  - Courses offered should be certified. This can include linkage development with province specific Technical and Vocational Training -Authorities (TEVTA) and institutes.

  - Courses and training supplemented by identification of clear job pathways and linkages to the market.

  - Enhancement of skills further supplemented by context specific training on entrepreneur skills

including small business plan development, financial management, sales and marketing and accessing loans and credit.

2.6 The presence of children in women's lives can sometimes force women to return to the abusive situation from a shelter as often there is limited or no provision of housing male children. Families actively use these children to black mail women into returning either by refusing to look after the children or by leaving them at the shelter home. In case of male children, the shelter facility refers to a state orphanage which can be very distressing for the child and the woman.

- Child friendly shelters that provide housing facilities for children, including male children, up till the age of 16.

- Services for children should include education, recreation and psychological support.

2.7 Women who stayed for a period of 2-4 months were able to benefit from vocational skills training programmes and the supportive shelter environment. Not rushing decision making allows time for the women to think through their options and also increases chances that her demands are taken more seriously by the husband and his family. Moreover, women's meaningful consent and participation in decision making also enables them in the post shelter phase.

- Women should be encouraged to take their time to decide. A minimum stay of 3 months is suggested.

- Families to be contacted only after survivor's consent and all visits assessed for risk to ensure safety of the woman.

- Case mediation based on the principle of consent of survivor and not aimed at family welfare or integrity. The goal is in the best interest of the survivor as an individual who has the right to live a life of dignity that is free from violence.

- Reconciliation agreement on a legal stamp paper witnessed by a lawyer and where possible in presence of police officials.

- Property rights or transfer of assets can be explored as a strategy to strengthen women's position.

- Reconciliation agreement can have clauses on cessation of violence, and no interference in women's economic activity so that the woman is able to earn once she goes back.

- Follow up phone calls and/or visits by the shelter management for up to one year at least, should be built into the agreement to reduce resistance to future intervention.

- Copy of the agreement to be kept within shelter records for follow up in case of breach and used as evidence in further court proceedings.

2.8 The importance of follow up protocol for the women's own safety must be emphasized and consent obtained where possible. Review of current systems for follow up shows that they are reliant on survivors' consent in private shelter homes and altogether missing in DuAs. The latter is despite notification of SoPs that incorporate them. Major obstacles cited are limitations of budget, lack of prioritization on part of shelter management and reluctance on part of the women and her family to

remain in contact.

- Development of follow up policy with clear time periods and plan of action including physical visits, if required. This will require budget allocation.

2.9   The need for staff capacity and sensitivity in handling women residents has been highlighted in a number of reports on state shelters. Reports suggest that often staff attitudes can be insensitive, and reflective of biases and judgements that abound in society regarding violence against women and its dynamics, as well as women who seek refuge in shelters. Trainings and curricula have been developed and conducted by a number of non-governmental organizations.

- Screening for sensitivity of staff to gender and violence made part of recruitment process.

- On the job training of staff on attitudes, case handling and management, as well as specific specialized skills, such as counselling, mediation made a regular feature in shelter homes.

3.   Continuity of Care Service Model

Challenges faced by women survivors of violence that seek to integrate into the community post shelter be it as single women, single parents or with the husbands who have been violent in the past are brought about partly by deprivations, such as limited education or economic capability and by societal norms that discourage and stigmatize these women. In some cases, it means a return to a potentially violent home and a continued need to negotiate freedom and safety. Continued association with the shelter home is of benefit to women and acts as an enabling factor in their post shelter integration. Follow up programmes of shelter need to be expanded to a continuity of care service model specific to the needs of women living independently and those living with families.

3.1   Provisions for living in an institutional setting for women facing threat to life. Care should be taken to ensure that women are not further exploited within these spaces and given regular and suitable remuneration.

3.2   Systematic job placement programme that has linkages with various public and private organizations. This programme should match survivors' skill sets with appropriate jobs in the area.

3.3   Assistance in local school placement for children of survivors that are living on their own.

3.4   Housing challenges both in terms of cost, safety issues and stigma attached to women living alone represents a major impediment to women who decide to live on their own, even those who have increased economic capability.

- Half-way houses/ transitional homes which provide housing and vocational skills training and are connected to but independent of the shelter homes. A small model is being operated by the PANAH shelter home, a public private partnership in Karachi. These houses should offer literacy, as well as opportunities for more advanced vocational trainings within or outside the half-way house. These houses can provide women with the much-needed time to transition from the guarded and segregated shelter facility to the challenges of living alone in the community. They can further provide women with the social support that they lack.

- Strong linkages with working women's hostels in the area which can be mandated to provide space for women survivors.

- Co-habitation schemes which encourage residents living in groups of twos or threes. These have been implemented with success by private shelter homes such as Abad in Sindh and Dastak in Lahore.

3.5 Provision of small grants and in-kind assistance, such as sewing machines or other capital/material needed to start up small businesses.

3.6 Facilitation of micro credit for women wanting to set up businesses. Shelters need to develop linkages with the eight national and two microfinance banks and numerous NGO's that provide micro credit to the poor in Pakistan. An example is the Khawateen Rozgar scheme by the Zarai Tarqiati Bank Limited (ZTBL). This is an affirmative action by the state for women's empowerment that can be further mandated to support women that come through these shelters.

3.7 Mechanisms for continued contact, such as an annual roster of events at the shelter where ex-residents are invited. This can encourage a sense of community and belonging, a need expressed by many of the women.

4. Opportunity for collaborative work and learning

The study provides evidence that private shelter homes in Pakistan represent good practice examples that provide insights for public shelters and their survivor integration programmes. Private shelter homes such as Dastak in Punjab, Abad in Hyderabad, Mera Ghar in Peshawar and the public private partnership model, Panah in Karachi have amassed a wealth of experience and learning in this area. The study recommends increasing opportunities for sharing of experiences and strategies between these groups.

- Establishment of fora to encourage learning and exchange of experiences. These can be conferences and formation of a network of groups (private and public) working on survivor integration, specifically shelter support.

It is clear from the study that women's lives post shelter are far from perfect. Depending upon the trajectory of their post shelter lives, many still face violence or the threat of violence, severe stigma for living without male members or as a divorced woman, as well as considerable distress as consequence of years of abuse and loss of support from family members. Many also face financial constraints and practical challenges of living such as safe housing. Yet, we also know that women despite these overwhelming odds persevere. Enabling factors, both external and internal help women cope better as they go back to the community, be it alone or within a family setting. The rejection of gender inequitable norms, a heightened sense of control, the presence of children in their lives, skills and dignity of work, and continued support from the shelter are factors that buffer women against challenges. The intent of the study was to record experiences of women like Rohina, Zahida, Faiza, Kirin, Shenaz, Rabia, Tehmina, Sara, Noor, Salma, Aisha and Soniya, and to better understand their lives; what makes them difficult and what makes them bearable. Based on their experiences, the recommendations above seek to minimize the obstacles identified by these women, and strengthen factors that they have recognized as aids in their ongoing struggle against odds. The study attempted to put these women center stage in the stories of their lives and by doing so, in the attempts and

interventions that seek to provide relief to survivors of violence. Taking a cue from the possibilities of what Shenaz imagines below, it is time that public policy and programmes recognize that post shelter women exist and their lives need attention.

The world should understand that women exist too. We can live independently, we can do something for our lives, for our children, for our families. Women should know this. It is wrong that she stay in her house, thinking that life has passed and what can she do. This is wrong, this should not happen. Women should fix [these] men who think they are the rulers of women.

End Notes

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