

# **Capacity Building of Pakistani NGOs on Gender Based Violence and Reproductive Health**

## **Findings of the Situation Analysis in Kashmore**

### **INTRODUCTION**

World Population Foundation (WPF), Pakistan has initiated Population and Reproductive Health Programme, with funding from World Bank to improve the current limited capacity of Pakistani NGOs to develop and implement projects on Gender Based Violence (and Reproductive Health). The project is designed to enhance the limited capacity of partner NGOs to develop and implement projects related to GBV and the Reproductive Health needs of selected communities in districts with a high incidence of GBV in Pakistan.

### **DISTRICT PROFILE**

The District of Kashmore was created in 2004. It was carved out of Jacobabad District. It has three sub-divisions; namely Kandhkot, Kashmore & Tangwani. Kashmore is located at a tri-junction point connecting three provinces and therefore acts as a gateway to the provinces of Punjab and Balochistan. The human rights situation in the district is getting worse as women are often subjected to brutal crimes like rape and murder. The literacy rate is below average in the district Kashmore, and the female literacy rate is 20%. As regards the basic health facilities, many rural and urban areas are deprived of such facilities. Due to lack of proper infrastructure and communication, the people in this area face series of problems.

### **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION – METHODOLOGY**

The focus group at Kashmore was held in April 2009, with the help of Kainat Development association (KDA), an NGO working in the area for the uplift of the citizens. Discussions were held with a combined group of men and women. There were 10 men and 3 women. The participants were a mix of Community Based Organization (CBO) representatives, district hospital doctor, health workers and a school teacher.

### **FINDINGS FROM THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

The discussion began with the moderator asking the participants about their understanding of GBV-RH and if they could give some examples. One of the first answers that came was that since women are perceived to be the weaker sex and are in

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need of protection, it's the men who have the responsibility to be the brave ones. However, this attitude backfires since it gives men the upper hand, placing them in a position where they exploit and abuse women.

*"Most men think that they have to safeguard the honour of their wives, sisters, and daughters and in some case their female relatives. Many a times, they just jump to conclusion and end up hurting women for no fault or reason"*

"The *Bradari*<sup>1</sup> system here is strong and any woman within the family is considered to be 'honour'. If a man spots his female relative in a compromising position, he will go ahead and do whatever it takes to preserve the 'honour' of the family. At times, this means killing the woman"

Talking about the causes of GBV in the society, the participants said that lack of education and gender sensitization was the major reason. The situation is further worsened by the deep rooted *Bradari*<sup>1</sup> system and customs like *Karo Kari*<sup>2</sup>.

*"Over the past 2 decades, it seems that illiteracy has taken over our area. There was a time when we had educated women coming out of area, one such example being Sara Siddqui, who was the first female doctor in Sindh. Now, though we have 7 women nazims<sup>3</sup> belonging to this area, things are going downhill"*

"We had a local tradition, in which a woman was considered equal to seven Quran Sharifs<sup>4</sup>. This was an act that showed a mark of respect for women but sadly these things have been forgotten. What now remains is the mentality of regarding women as dispensable commodities, using them in anyway possible and doing away with them if that gives us some benefit. Most of the *Karo Kari* cases have nothing to do with adultery. A man kills some rival of his and then goes home and kills his 70 year old mother, labeling her Kari. This is just to get away with a planned murder by making it seem like a crime of passion"

As the discussion progressed, an interesting situation arose when one participant referred to an Islamic perspective while another opposed him then and there.

*"If we follow Islam, a woman's kingdom is her home. She is supposed to stay in there and do whatever it takes to make it comfortable and pleasant and live like a queen"*

*"How can you say that when we all know that in reality, most of our women work? They may not be working in offices, but a large number of our women work in fields and*

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<sup>1</sup> Clan/ community

<sup>2</sup> Honour Killing

<sup>3</sup> Coordinator of cities and towns

<sup>4</sup> Holy book of the Muslims

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*contribute to the farming apart from doing the household chores. And then again, it's an open secret that men are wasting their time at chai hotels (tea houses) watching sleazy movies"*

Talking about GBV-RH, men in the discussion asserted that often, pregnant women are denied access to medical care as well as good food and adequate rest. Questions regarding puberty, marital life, sexual health and family planning were answered by male participants. The three female participants kept quite while the discussion kept on losing focus due to the comments of some males. One thing that did come to fore was the use of sex selective abortions even in remote areas of the district.

*"Using the ultrasound to find out the sex of the fetus is a norm here. People visit the hospital not due to health reasons but just to find out if the fetus is a boy or a girl. Again, if it happens to be a girl, no time is wasted in getting an abortion"*

*"The abortions are carried out in back alley clinics as well as by Traditional Birth Attendants. Depending on the socio-economic status of the women, they will approach a person who can do the deed"*

*"For people, even belonging to very backward areas, a visit to the hospital for an ultrasound that costs less than Rs200 is an easy way to get rid of the female child"*

Though most male participants said that Islamic beliefs are considered to be the main reason behind the low use of contraceptives or family planning services, they added that people did not consider it a sin to get an abortion.

"People give all sorts of excuses for not using family planning but when it comes to abortion, many women say that they asked for a fatwa from the local maulvi sahib (religious authority)".

It was not very surprising though that the area has its fair share of misconceptions. A doctor belonging to the public hospital said that if people did not have children for five years after the birth of a daughter, they will get a baby boy.

*"People who come to me, I tell them not to have kids for at least five years if they want a boy. This gap gives a woman more chance of having a male child"*

When asked if there was a scientific basis to his claim, the participant said no but stated that such a practice would decrease the birth rate. The participants said that women are not in a position to negotiate sexual relations with their husbands nor can they decide about the use of contraceptives. However, like all other districts, here too women use oral contraceptives as and when possible.

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"The decision making power lies with men in matters pertaining to finances. However, the mother in law often dictates regarding the size of the family and often it's her will to have more grandchildren"

"Women use oral contraceptives but prefer not to tell their husbands. Morning after pill is also common now since they can use it later rather than following a strict schedule that is needed with contraceptive pills"

*"The Ulema<sup>5</sup> are not flexible on the issue of family planning as they see it as a conspiracy by the USA and Israel. They think that family planning is just a method of reducing the number of Muslim population. It is very common during the Friday sermons for the religious authorities to urge the followers to have as many kids as possible while telling the men that women are like land that should be tilled and cultivated for the crop; the future generation of Muslims"*

*"When the UNFPA website mentioned the fatwa given by an Egyptian university regarding family planning, the Ulema here labeled them as kafirs (non-believers)".*

Talking about the birth of children and their care, the participants said that mothers did not differentiate on the basis of sex, at least in the case of infants. However, as the toddler ages, more attention and care would be given to a male child than a female.

"No matter what a woman's financial position is, if her son is ill, she will make it a point to take him to a doctor in a public or private health facility but if it's a daughter, she will not consider taking her"

*"As a girl grows up, her puberty is again an issue as people here believe that she should be married off as soon as possible"*

*"The more you delay a girl's marriage, the more chances she has of bringing shame to the family"*

*"A girl has no one to ask questions regarding the physical and sexual changes in her body. She will often be confused but has no one to talk to apart from her friends but then again, the girls have limited knowledge and often wrong information is spread"*

*"Boys have friends on whom they can rely for information sharing but in their case too, asking a parent means calling for trouble"*

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<sup>5</sup> Muslim Scholars

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*"For a lot of young boys, their first sexual experience is either with male friends or with some male elder. Child abuse is common in this area"*

*"A girl's virginity is an important issue and if she is found not to be one, she will be killed then and there"*

Tribal customs pertaining to marriages were discussed with *Watta Satta*<sup>6</sup> and *Pait Likhai*<sup>7</sup> being practiced around.

*"Age is never considered in watta satta matches. A girl of 10 would be given away to a man of 40 and vice versa in some cases"*

*"Suicide and depression is rampant in such marriages"*

### LESSONS LEARNT

Over all, the combined focus group discussion did not yield much in terms of information except for the fact that sex selective abortions were being carried out in the area frequently, regardless of the level of literacy and socio-economic status. The discussion was carried out completely by the males in the group as the female members remained quite. Even when attempts were made to elicit answers from them, they did not respond. Over all, the situation in Kashmore is as bad as in the other districts but somehow the male Focus Group Discussion participants did not let issues come to fore. With regards to the service delivery mechanisms for Gender Based Violence victims/survivors, not much was stated as participants got on the defensive and tried to change the course of the discussion.

Education is needed to improve the situation. Media needs to play an active role in sensitizing the masses. Noted members of the society as well religious leaders and clerics should be taken on board and sensitized about these issues. Since the knowledge of women is nil with regards to reproductive health and rights, they should be sensitized about it. Youth must be a part of this since they can bring about a change in their lives.

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<sup>6</sup> Tribal custom of exchanging brides between two families.

<sup>7</sup> Promise the hand in marriage of an unborn child