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SOCIAL PROBLEMS FACED BY THE MARGINALIZED WOMEN: A QUALITATIVE SURVEY FROM THE NON-MUSLIM AREAS OF KARACHI

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Social Problems Faced by the Marginalized Women: A Qualitative Survey from the Non-Muslim Areas of Karachi

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Abstract

Generally, women are weaker than men in Pakistani Society while the women belonged to non-Muslim communities have to face double problems. In this study, the social problems of non-Muslim women in

Karachi are analyzed. For this purpose, 300 non-Muslim citizens were interviewed while Karachi division was universe and eleven (11) clusters of non-Muslim populated areas were selected for sampling. It has come into light through findings that non-Muslim women of Karachi have to face various social problems due to poverty and un-employment. The women, who do jobs can only get the cleaning work and are paid less wages. The women use their income to run the household budget. The non-Muslim women of Karachi don't have suitable facilities of health and education. Due to unavailability of medical facilities and shortage of food, the women suffer from feminine diseases. Most of women in non-Muslim populated areas of Karachi were not only tortured by males but also given divorce due to ignorance and economic problems. In this situation, the government has a responsibility to take initiatives to solve the problems of women who are belonged to non-Muslim community.

Introduction

The non-Muslim citizens play an important role in the development of any country. In Pakistani society, the non-Muslim citizens have been labeled as religious minorities due to their shortage of number as compared to the majority group. Religious minorities can be found all over the world. The minority group of a particular area may be the majority group in other parts of the world. They may have a higher status in some areas and in some parts they may be neglected. Minorities may be a dominant or suppressed class, having the strong economic and social background or underprivileged in different parts. The social problems of marginalized minority women of Karachi would be discussed in this research. In the light of Pakistan's social perspective lower class non-muslim citizens are considered as marginalized religious minorities whose educational, economic, political and social status is low and they face more socio-political problems than the majority group.



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Marginalized Religious Minorities in Karachi:

According to population, Karachi is the biggest city of Pakistan ¹ where multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups are settled, it includes a large number of marginalized religious minorities. Qadianies have also been living in a large number in Karachi; they were declared non-Muslims in the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan through the second constitutional amendment in September 1974.² The other groups of non-Muslim citizens including Parsis, Behaies, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs are well known minority groups in Karachi.³ Parsis, Behaies and Qadianies enjoy the best educational, economic, political and social status. A large number of people among these groups are connected to white collar jobs or business. That is why, they don't have to face considerable problems.⁴ On the other hand, the scheduled caste Hindus, Christians and Sikhs are included in marginalized religious minorities because the people of these classes are bound to face the problems like unemployment, ignorance, unavailability of health facilities and social differential attitudes.⁵

Situation of non-Muslim Women in Pakistan:

The women who are belonged to non-Muslim community have to face double problems due to un-satisfactory socio-political conditions in Pakistani society. In our society, Muslim women have lower status than men and they are tortured, particularly physically. As the religious minorities are oppressed in the country; therefore, the non-Muslim women have been facing double social problems. The first reason of their low status is their gender and the other is their minority status. They have to face even worse attitudes as compared to the Muslim women of the society. The minority women look like ordinary women of the society, although non-Muslims are disturbed by everyone without any fear. Everyone knows that the non-Muslim women can not hurt anyone. On 12th July 2010, in the premises of the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre of Karachi, a nursing student experienced the sexual harassment within the boundaries of the hospital by some working doctors which indicates the weak situation of non-Muslim women in Pakistani society. In rural as well as urban areas of Sindh, school and college going Hindu girls and women are frequently kidnapped. These girls and women would later declare in court that they willingly converted to Islam and married to Muslim men.8 The Hindus of Karachi are afraid of the situation and they avoid sending their girls to schools.9

Theoretical Framework:

The conflict on the basis of gender can be observed all over the world. Commonly it is seen that the women are victimized by the men. The women are discriminated and exploited in various situations. For example, women



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have less health facilities than men, they are not given equal importance in homes; they have to face rapes, harassment and economic exploitation in jobs particularly in industries. The women also remain under privileged during emergency relief. ¹⁰

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status." ¹¹

According to The Universal Declaration of Human Rights every one has the equal fundamental human rights without the discrimination of gender or religion but in Pakistan the situation of women is no more different than the situation discussed by Arora. The minority women have to face double problems, first of all due to being a female and secondly being a non-muslim.

Research Method

The problems of marginalized non-Muslim women of Karachi have been discussed in this study. The research was completed with the help of a survey. Eleven different areas were selected as clusters for the field research including Taisar Town, Narain Pura, Mari Pur, Christian Town, Jogi Moar, Eisa Nagri, D. Silva Town, Eido Goath, Chanesar Goath, Shah Rasool Colony and Pehlwan Goath. Multi-stage Cluster Sampling was used by the researcher to make the research valid and according to the scientific methods. Explanatory and exploratory methods were adopted in this research. This research is based on primary data collected by the researcher from selected clusters. 300 minority respondents were interviewed including 228 male and 72 female respondents. It includes Hindu, Christian and Sikh citizens of Karachi. The main object of these interviews was to analyze the social problems faced by the non-Muslims women in Karachi. The respondents discussed their issues during their interviews which have been discussed in the following lines under different categories.

Discussions

Job Resources of non-Muslim Women

The non-Muslim women of Karachi have to face various social problems in terms of employment. The data in the table No. 1 indicates that the largest percentage of working women (42.33 percent) is associated with cleaning work. In this context, the sample included the respondents said that the women of their community work in government bodies while the majority of women is involved in cleaning of houses, bungalows, hospitals and factories. 39.67 percent of respondents said that most women wash



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dishes, laundry, cleaning and cooking in homes. 7 percent of respondents mentioned other tasks. Sale of boiled potatoes, teaching embroidery, sale of new and old clothes at homes and selling a variety of goods and fruits in weekly markets are included. Women of Mari Pur visit in warehouses to clean rice and other food items. The women of Eido Goath cut woods, raise goats and sell them in the market. Some respondents from Jogi Moar, Eisa Nagri, Chanesar Goath and Pehlwan Goath disclosed that the women in their community are forced to prostitution.

Wages paid to non-Muslim women

The minority women are paid less wages for their jobs. Data given in Table No. 2 indicates that 35.67 percent women get less payment and 16.67 percent get very less.

The women of Hindu community from Taisar town get only 15 Rupees as labour for making a cage while each woman in Taisar town and Chanesar Goath makes average 100 ropes in a day and get one rupee for each rope. 13 percent respondents told that the working ladies earn reasonable wages Depending on the nature of their work. 4 percent of respondents said that both the situations of earning are present for working women.

Women's Income Spending Categories

The table No. 3 shows that 44.67 percent respondents revealed that women spend their income toward household budget. 21 percent women spend their earning on children's food and their education while 8.67 percent on household food. 16 percent respondents mentioned other categories. Shopping on the occasion of religious festivals, payments of debits, purchasing of medicines, House rent, Children's pocket money, fair of buses and buying the drugs for men are included in other categories.

Educational Issues of Girls in non-Muslim Households

Table No. 4 indicates that 47.33 percent of respondents among the sample are deprived to educate their daughters while 20.67 percent due to the absence of educational institutions. Some respondents from Jogi Moar and Eisa Nagri explained that girls and boys do not have any public school in such a large and ancient populated area. 9 percent of respondents don't send their daughters to school due to higher cost of education and 8.33 percent because of bad environments.

General Issues of Women's Health in non-Muslims' Households

The minority women of Karachi have to face various health problems. According to Table No. 5 a large number of respondents (16.67 percent) told that the greatest problem of their women regarding health services is lack of medical facilities. 15 percent said that minority women get trouble during maternity because there are no government hospitals and maternity



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homes in their localities. Usually the process of delivery is undertaken by a midwife, but if the case deteriorates then the women are tormented at home.

The proportion of respondents was 19 percent who stated other issues regarding women's health. To hide disease, general health deterioration, hepatic failure, insomnia at night, Ear pain, vomiting and laxative, Diarrhea, frequent urination, lower age of marriage and the menstrual Sufferings are included in other diseases.

Causes of Feminine Health Issues

Table No. 6 indicates that 28.67 percent respondents revealed that minority women face such problems as tension and anxiety due to poverty. Poor economic conditions and poverty, as well as inflation have a negative impact on human health. Family obligations and financial problems have made the woman's life miserable. The minority population of Taisar Town, Chanesar Goath and Eido Goath is in the state of poverty that they often have to live on water. In this context, women's health can not remain well. 11.33 percent of respondents said lack of medical facilities while 10.67 percent declared government indifference and negligence as the cause of health problems. 9.67 percent of respondents considered other reasons for women's health problems. Expensive delivery and debt burden, their own negligence, to hide illness, working in severe weather, the use of poor-quality items, anemia, densely populated and congested housing are other important issues.

Trend to Keep More or Less Children in non-Muslim Families

Table No. 7 indicates that a large number of respondents (41.67 percent) are of the opinion to keep the number of children less. Some women respondents in the sample said that women want to deliver fewer children but there is no work for their husbands except exercising sex so they want more kids. One respondent from Shah Rasool Colony had the opinion that less number of children should be nice but we can find 10 to 15 children in most homes. 10.67 percent respondents were in favour of keeping the number of children up to 2 or less while 10.33 percent told that number of children should be up to 3.

Best Age for Girls' Marriage in non-Muslim Families

Table No. 8 shows the best age for girls' marriage in non-Muslim families of Karachi. Seven (7) percent respondents think that the best age of marriage for girls is 10 to 14 years. In this regards 9 respondents out of 30 from Jogi Moar told that they marry their girls off between the ages of 12 to 14 while 2 respondents from Chanesar Goath revealed that the girls at the age of 10 are married off in their community. According to 18 percent, the ideal age of marriage for girls is 15 to 17 years.



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The Reasons for Divorce in non-Muslim Families

Table No. 9 shows the reasons for divorce in non-Muslim families of Karachi. A large number of respondents (8.33 percent) described the Economic issues as the major cause of divorce. In this regard some of respondents revealed that lack of business, shortage of money, discomfort due to poverty, tension, worry, starving, fighting due to less food, greater expenditure than income and men's violence against women due to lowincome are the main reasons of Separation. A respondent from Christian Town said that according to his information, around 100 families were devastated by the divorce. One respondent from Chanesar Goath explained that two married girls left the house and went away in his neighborhood because they had no food to eat. Another person from the same cluster told that he knows seven to eight families where divorce has been given. He further informed that in his neighborhood, a woman was burned alive by herself due to poverty. Another man from Eido Goath said that a man's wife was sick and he had no money for her treatment, he did not see any way he divorced his wife. 4 percent of respondents expressed their thoughts saving that the divorce is exercised due to the men's attitude. 3.67 percent respondents described that divorce is due to mutual un- understanding while 2.67 percent think that it is due to women's mistakes. 3.67 percent described other reasons like love marriages, disobedience of parents and under-age marriages.

Trends of Violence on Women in non-Muslim Households

Table No.10 shows that according to 19.67 percent respondents, domestic violence against women is less and according to 18 percent the violence against women is often. 13.33 percent respondents said that violence against women is practiced in every house in their neighborhood. According to 25.33 percent respondents there is no violence against women in minority families.

Reasons of Violence on non-Muslim Women

Table No. 11 reveals the reasons of violence on non-Muslim women. It shows that 30.33 percent male do violence on their wives and women due to poverty, unemployment and economic problems. 9.33 percent have tortured them due to domestic problems and 6.67 percent because of women's mistakes. Five (5) percent respondents described the other reasons including lack of respect for women, non availability of food on time, misunderstanding, demanding money from wife when drunk and women's



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infertility. According to 26.33 percent respondents there is no violence against women while 16.67 percent told that they don't know about the violence and its reasons.

Issues Faced by non-Muslim Women Outside the Home

Table No. 12 reveals the important issues faced by non-Muslim women of Karachi outside their homes. According to the said table 19.33 percent women have to face sexual harassment and insolence. In this context, some respondents told that minority women are being sexually harassed by the people on their way. They remain silent because of their decency and do not mention at home because of fear. One respondent said from the Hindu community of Jogi Moar that feudal of Sindh abduct Hindu women from Karachi to Sindh and then do not return. A responder from Eisa Nagri told that when the police are in the vehicle they tease the walking girls in the way. Due to poverty minority girls are forced to face greater worry than Muslim girls. According to 6 percent of respondents in the sample minority women have to face fear and panic outside the homes while 3 percent women face sexual harassment at the hands of the males. Only one percent respondents were of the view that minority women are treated like other women in the society.

The Causes to Consider Women Unsafe at Home

Many non-Muslim citizens of Karachi think their women unsafe inside the homes. Table No. 13 contains 4 percent of respondents in the sample who consider their women are unsafe in their homes due to poor situation of law and order. In this regard the respondents of Narain Pura, Christian Town, Mari Pur and Chanesar Goath told that whenever there is a problem with Muslims in India, here in Karachi, the situation is deteriorated. The Muslims enter in Hindu homes, abuse and rape Hindu girls. A Hindu citizen from Jogi Moar said that their girls are abducted by the Muslims from their houses and they return their girls next day after raping them. The proportion of respondents who had other reasons was calculated 3.33 percent.

Summary

According to the results obtained from survey 42.33 % non-Muslim women are related with cleaning jobs while 39.67% make a living by working at homes. According to 35.67% respondents working women get less wages. 44.67% women spend their income in household expenditures while 21% women are spending on their children's food and education. 47.33 % respondents told that their girls can not get education due to economic problems and 20.67% due to unavailability of educational institutions. If we look at health facilities, 17.67% women have to face the unavailability of



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health facilities, 15 % child birth problems, 11.33% fever, cough and flu etc. and 10.33% don't have proper food. 28.67% respondents told that minority women in Karachi suffer from feminine diseases due to poverty and unemployment. 41.67% people are in favour of having 2 children. 56.67% respondents have the opinion that the girls should be married off at the age of 18 to 20. According to 8.33% respondents, women are divorced due to poverty and economic problems. 19.67% respondents told that the women are physically tortured in their locality in some houses while 18 % said that this practice can be observed in many homes. 30.33% respondents said that the women have to face torture due to unemployment and economic problems. 19.33% have the opinion that minority women have to face the problems like sexual harassment and misbehavior outside the homes. 4 % respondents understand that their women are insecure inside the homes due to poor situation of law and order and 2 % due to being a minority group.

Analysis

Due to poverty, inflation, lack of education and other reasons the poor non-Muslim women face several problems. Due to rising inflation and unemployment, now the poor minority families don't like the more number of children. Therefore, the people's response is that the number of children should be minimum so their offspring may get education. The parents are sick of poverty and unemployment so they have the trend to marry their daughters off in young age. The very young girls are married off in Hindu households of Narain Pura, Jogi Moar and Chanesar Goath and in the Christian families of Eisa Nagri. Due to inflation and unemployment minority women go out of homes for working. The wages are not suitable for work but due to domestic economic issues they are forced to work on low wages. Women who do their own jobs, their condition is also pathetic. Most women of Jogi Moar and Chanesar Goath cook and sell the cooked curry of vegetables, animal stomach, fish, head and hoof and poultry claws. Many women also rear the chicks and hens. All the women who make cages for birds belong to Hindu community of Taisar Town and Hindu women of Taisar town and Chanesar Goath make the ropes and sell them. Women who don't get jobs, start begging. Jogi Moar is the ancient slum area of Hindus in Karachi. Many Hindu women work here as sweepers in the factories but most of the factories are closed now and the result is that these women have lost their jobs. The women from Hindu community of Chanesar Goath also beg to feed themselves and their children but these women are harassed by police. The police tease them without any reason, when the cops get a chance carry them in the van and rape them. Despite these



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conditions women are forced to beg and suffer injustice. Due to lack of medical facilities, the minority women have many problems regarding health. Due to lack of food during pregnancy and unavailability of proper food after delivery women face many worries. In addition, minority women were suffering from T.B., respiratory diseases, Anemia, physical weakness, cough, stomach disorders, obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Using contaminated water, getting sick due to pollution, vision impairment, skin diseases and disorder of kidneys were also described. It happens in the Hindu families of Taisar Town, Mari Pur and Chanesar Goath that family members have had only water to drink. Due to poverty, unemployment and drug men often do violence on their wives in Karachi's poor minority families and finally many women are divorced. When girls of minority families go out of their homes for studying they face many problems on the way. In educational institutions, Hindu children are forced to be a Muslim. In such a situation, Hindu citizens cannot do anything. Sometimes a minority girl associates herself with a Muslim citizen and accepts Islam. Because of this fear, parents do not send their girls to school. Many non-Muslim citizens can not keep the virgin girls in their homes and so the girls are married off soon. Due to this reason these girls are deprived of education. Even the minority women face multiple problems if they go outside for employment.

Recommendations

- 1. Appropriate measures should be taken to teach crafts at community level to the non-Muslim women of Karachi, for this purpose, the local minority leaders can be supported.
- 2. Minority women who work at homes, have to perform too much work of cleaning and washing utensils are paid very less compensation. Not only that, but often young girls are subject to sexual violence, and there is no one who listen to them. So if a non-Muslim servant demands to increase her wages, she may put into more complicated problems like accusing of theft.
- 3. Permanent monthly allowance should be provided to the widows by the government to live off, they should be registered. For the purpose first and then will be paid through post offices and banks on the pattern of pension. This amount could be increased annually by the rate of inflation.
- 4. Dowry fund for marriages of poor minority girls should be given by the Government. This assistance can be given directly to the individual; this help may be given indirectly by arranging collective marriages with the help of local minority leaders.



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- 5. Government should provide basic health services to minority women and organize training programs to inform common health issues to the uneducated women. The areas where there is a majority of non-muslim citizens, minority women health workers can be deployed.
- 6. Officially Maternity Homes should be established in Non-Muslim citizen's settlements to prevent loss of precious human lives during maternity.
- 7. The incidence of domestic violence on minority women, are often brought to light. There should be proper legislation for the prevention of such incidents and the government should ensure the implementation of these laws.
- 8. Family laws for non-muslim citizens should be updated. Many Hindu citizens do not have the marriage certificates. In this context, proper steps are required. This can be done by taking the help of minorities' representatives.
- 9. In the country the events of kidnapping and then arranging their marriages with muslim males after converting religion of non-Muslim women, especially Hindu women are coming into light for a long time. Such incidents should be immediately discouraged otherwise such cases may increase.

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Interview *Mr. Arif Naqeeb* (Social worker and religious leader of Christians), Taisar Town, Karachi. And Interview *Mr. Master Shinkar Laal*, (Social leader of Hindu Community and Minority Councilor), Narain Pura, Sadder Town, Karachi. And *Mr. Bhola Singh*, (Social worker of Sikhs), Narain Pura, Sadder Town, Karachi.

Interview *Mr. Sadiq Masih*, (Social worker of Christians), Bin Qasim Town, opposite Jinnah Park, Eido Goath, Karachi.

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The benefit of Multi-stage Cluster sampling is that a few clusters are selected from scattered population and there is no need to make a list of the whole population. Thus it saves time.

The religious, social and political leaders of non-muslim citizens were interviewed. The purpose of their interviews was to analyze which minorities of Karachi were marginalized. In the light of these interviews it was concluded that Hindus, Christians and Sikhs are marginalized religious minorities of Karachi.

Appendix No 1. Tables

Table No. 1

Job Resources of working women	Frequency	Percentage
Cleaning work	127	42.33
washing dishes, laundry at homes	119	39.67
Nursing	26	8.67
Embroidery	25	8.33
Begging	23	7.67
Teaching	21	7
Factory worker	15	5
Beauty parlour	14	4.67
Maid	11	3.67
Selling cooked food	9	3
Office work /computer	9	3
To sell chicken and birds	7	2.33
Making cages	7	2.33
Making rope	6	2
Charge of the Shop	5	1.67
Other	21	7



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Not working	26	8.67	
Don't know	19	6.33	
Total	300	100	

Table No. 2

Wages paid to	women		Frequency	Percentage
Less			107	35.67
Very less			50	16.67
Reasonable			39	13
Somewhere	less,	somewhere	12	4
reasonable				
Other			19	6.33
Don't know			73	24.33
Total			300	100

Table No. 3 (N=300)

Spending categories	Frequency	Percentage
Household expenditure	134	44.67
Children's food and education	63	21
Groceries or food	26	8.67
Saving	6	2
Other	48	16
Don't know	65	21.67

Table No 4 (N=300)

Girls' educational issues	Frequency	Percentage
Economic problems	142	47.33
Unavailability of schools	62	20.67
Costly education	27	9
Bad environments	25	8.33
Uneducated family	17	5.67
Due to minority	13	4.33
Early marriages	3	1
Other	19	6.33
No problem	14	4.67
Don't know	5	1.67



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Table No. 5 (N=300)

Problems/ Diseases	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of medical facilities	53	17.67
Maternity problems	45	15
Fever, cold, flu	34	11.33
Shortage of food	31	10.33
Blood pressure	26	8.67
Body pain	24	8
T.B. / Bronchial	17	5.67
Anemia	11	3.67
Physical weakness	10	3.33
Cough	8	2.67
Abdominal deceases	8	2.67
Obesity	7	2.33
Diabetes	6	2
Heart Diseases	6	2
Use of contaminated water	5	1.67
Filth	5	1.67
Vision impairment	5	1.67
Skin problems	4	1.33
Kidney problems	4	1.33
Other	57	19
No problem	35	11.67
Don't know	13	4.33

Table No. 6 (N=300)

Causes of feminine health issues	Frequency	Percentage
Poverty and unemployment	86	28.67
Absence of medical facilities	34	11.33
Government indifference	32	10.67
Insufficient food	29	9.67
Uncomforting life	21	7
Reduction of clean	16	5.33
Religious discrimination	5	1.67
Lack of education	5	1.67
Early marriages	3	1
Other	29	9.67



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Don't know	24	8	
No problem	39	13	

Table No. 7

Desired No. of children	Frequency	Percentage
Minimum	125	41.67
2 or less than 2	32	10.67
Up to 3	31	10.33
Up to 4	30	10
The will of God	23	7.67
More than 4	4	1.33
Other	48	16
Don't know	7	2.33
Total	300	100

Table No. 8

Age for marriage (in years)	Frequency	Percentage
10 to 14 years	21	7
15 to 17 years	54	18
18 to 20 years	170	56.67
21 to 23 years	25	8.33
24 to 26 years	21	7
27 to 29 years	1	0.33
30 years and above	6	2
Other	2	0.67
_Total	300	100

Table No. 9 (N=300)

Reasons for divorce	Frequency	Percentage
Economic problems	25	8.33
Man's behaviour	12	4
Mutual hypocrisy	11	3.67
Woman's behaviour	8	2.67
Domestic disputes	7	2.33
Infertility	5	1.67
Doubt and suspicion	3	1
Joint family	2	0.67



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Other	11	3.67	
No divorce	109	36.33	
Don't know	119	39.67	

Table No 10

Violence in households	Frequency	Percentage
In few homes	59	19.67
In more homes	54	18
In each house	40	13.33
Other	20	6.67
No violence	76	25.33
Don't know	51	17
_Total	300	100

Table No. 11 (N=300)

Reasons of Violence		Frequency	Percentage	
Poverty/	Unemployment/	Economic	91	30.33
Problems				
Domestic is	ssues		28	9.33
Woman's b	ehaviour		20	6.67
Men's addi	ction		13	4.33
Children Is	sues		7	2.33
Doubt on w	omen		6	2
Lack of edu	ıcation		5	1.67
Other			15	5
No violence	2		79	26.33
Don't know	7		50	16.67

Table No 12

The nature of problems	Frequency	Percentage
Compromised / insolence	58	19.33
Fear and Panic	18	6
Stare / sexual harassment	9	3
Transportation / transport rent	9	3
Robbery / snatching	8	2.67
Stay at home	8	2.67
Normal social behavior	3	1



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Other	18	6
No problem	135	45
Don't know	34	11.34
Total	300	100

Table No 13 (N=300)

Causes	Total	Percentage
Law and order	12	4
Being minority	6	2
Men's absence	4	1.33
Other	10	3.33