



Women Welfare Services in Shelters: A Study of the Punjab's Dar-ul-Aman

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Abstract

Shelter homes have been established in almost all over the world to address the issues of violence against women. The government of Pakistan also followed this practice and these institutions are providing relief to distressed and deprived women in terms of psycho-social counseling, medical, lodging and boarding facilities with marketable skill training. These shelter homes are called Dar-ul-Aman. This study has examined the life experiences of 500 women living in 34 Dar-ul-Aman, working under the Department of Social Welfare and Bait-ul-Mal, Government of the Punjab, Pakistan. Primary data was taken from two involved parties; service-providers and women residing in Dar-ul-Aman. For this purpose, interviews were conducted to collect the information, which was quantitative and qualitative in its nature. The study was to check the role of Dar-ul-Aman as a safe haven for victims of violence, exploring intervention and rehabilitation services. The study also looked in need of a structural overhauling to improve the staff-resident relationship, curbing exploitative practices on shelter premises.

Keywords: Intervention, Rehabilitation, Violence Against Women, Shelters, Social Work.

I. Introduction

Shelter homes are considered a bulwark, providing treatment and protection for women because the creation of specially designed shelters for victims of violence is the only direct, satisfactory and immediate solution. Generally, the shelter homes are working to provide a pragmatic and immediate response to the problem of violence against women in different parts of the world (Ballard, 2012; Stop Abusive and Violent Environments, 2010; Martin, 1976; Dubois & Miley, 1996; Dobash & Dobash, 1992).

The government of Pakistan also showed concern towards the violence against women, which is due to pervasive culture and traditional attitudes. Above it, legal protection is inadequate and access to shelter is also difficult. In such circumstances, women are unable to escape from violence. These victims tried to get access to shelter homes for relief and justice. In Pakistan, the government has established shelter homes (Dar-ul-Aman) in all provinces of Pakistan. Dar-ul-Aman means "house of peace" (Eshraghi, 2006). Ministry of Social Welfare and Bait-ul-Mall (2005) has defined shelter home as, "a place where we provide temporary shelter, free legal aid, medical relief and psycho-social counseling services to women in distress" (p. 1). In Pakistani culture, a woman leaves her home as an act of last resort, in search of a friendly and favorable atmosphere. She would be suffered from unbearable and hostile behaviors (Hashmi, 2009). Some families refuse to house their female relatives when they turned out of their marital home, ignoring the abused behaviour, which is perpetrated by their husband or in-

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laws. In such situations, when their families turn their backs on them, shelter homes provide refuge to these victims of violence (Patel, 2010).

In Dar-ul-Aman, women are either referred by courts, NGOs or may approach on their own. Each Dar-ul-Aman has the responsibility to safeguard its residents from outside and inside threats (Government of Pakistan, 2011). Until 2006, there were fifteen Dar-ul-Aman in four provinces of Pakistan and eight of them were in the Punjab (Eshraghi, 2006). Khybar Pakhtonkha has four Dar-ul-Aman in D.I.Khan, Mardan, Abbottabad and Sawat to provide a secure atmosphere as well as human and legal services. Each Dar-ul-Aman was established to provide institutional-cum-residential care to destitute and run away women along with legal assistance, ethical and religious education, arrangement for effective reconciliation and compromise with the families along with vocational and skill training to enable them to generate income for their livelihood and their subsequent reintegration into the society (Government of Pakistan, 2012). According to the United States Trafficking in Persons Report (2009), internally trafficked women in Pakistan can get admission in “*Dar-ul Aman*” centers established by the provincial government for abused women and children to offer legal assistance, vocational training and medical treatment, however, there is limited protection for women victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

Dar-ul-Amans are usually located in public areas with heavy metal fenced building and security guards posted at the main entrance/gate. The residents are restricted and expected to remain within the boundaries of the shelter unless they have a court appearance or medical issue. Accommodation, food, clothing, basic vocational training (sewing and embroidery), counseling and legal aid are free however the residents may have to contribute for the documentation cost (Siddiqui, Ismail & Allen, 2008).

In the Punjab province, first Dar-ul-Aman was established in 1963 and seven more shelter homes were opened subsequently in the 1970s and 1980s. Before 2005, all those homes were serving at division level. In 2005, the department of Social Welfare and Bait-ul-Mal began to expand women's welfare services of shelters by establishing homes in each district of the Punjab (Government of Pakistan, 2010). Till date, 36 shelter homes are working in the Punjab, for distressed and socially disadvantaged women (Government of Punjab, 2014). Although the government has established Dar-ul-Aman in each district of the Punjab, yet there is continuous criticism about their performance as these are neither providing shelter nor working as homes for disadvantaged women (Hashmi, 2009).

Total duration of stay varies between three weeks up to six months or even up to one year for some of the women. In exceptional cases, Dar-ul-Amans provided a long term stay to the residents who were not having a family or relatives and the shelter administration also arranged their marriages (Directorate of Social Welfare, 2011; Government of Punjab; 2005; Médecins du Monde, 2007).

II. Literature Review

Domestic violence shelters aim to provide housing assistance, legal aid and individual and group therapy and to enhance the external and internal resources of women victims of violence and their children (Macy, Giattina, Sangster, Crosby, & Montijo, 2009). Different studies have concluded that a shelter stay can reduce the intensity and frequency of violence

against women and women victims of violence become more hopeful and less depressed after two weeks of shelter living (Berk, Newton, & Berk, 1986; Sedlak, 1988).

According to the Directorate of Social Welfare & Bait-ul-Mal (2011), in each Dar-ul-Aman, there are supposed to be ten staff members, comprising of a superintendent (in charge), computer operator, assistant accountant, junior clerk, two teachers, guard, peon, driver and cleaner. In a few Dar-ul-Aman, full staff is available. It has also been mentioned that the shelters established in big cities i.e. Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Rawalpindi, Sargodha, Bahawalpur and Multan, have a capacity of fifty residents while other Dar-ul-Aman can provide shelter to around twenty residents. According to official statistic (Government of Pakistan, 2011), in 2010 more than 8000 women and their children were admitted to Dar-ul-Amans. In 2010, among 26 shelters, 11 accommodated more than their sanctioned capacity (Approximately 22-34 residents, medium), 4 accommodated around 15-20 residents and the remaining 11 shelters accommodated only five women every month.

Eshraghi (2006) highlighted that around 80 percent of Pakistani women suffer from psychological, sexual and physical violence during their married and family life and those who tried to flee from domestic violence had to face honor killings, perpetrated by male family members to restore family honor. To escape from daily violence of family and husband, Pakistani women can get refuge in Dar-ul-Aman as the last resort, where they can wait for being able to reintegrate into society. Khalid (2006) said that,

It serves as a rehabilitation center for those women who are deprived of the protection of their families owing to marital discords or desertion etc. In these homes, women are taught skills in handicrafts, cooking, home managements etc. and prepared to support them. They are helped to reconcile with their parents and relatives. The 'Home' also helps them by arranging their marriages or employment.”

Patel (2010) reported that Pakistan has a few shelters with the capacity to protect women victims of violence by providing a secure place and facilitation in crisis situations. Mostly, shelters are located in large cities like Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar and the courts send vulnerable women to such shelters where they are kept in protective custody. The government of Pakistan is unable to run these shelters efficiently and these shelters are failing to provide the required facilities for women victims of violence.

Hashmi (2009) reported that a few years back some shelters were having men in charge and many shelters resembled hell, but in 2008 the Punjab government recruited women in charge, which improved the situation in Dar-ul-Amans. Human Right Watch commented that shelter should not work as a jail or remand homes and they should be provided with funds and psycho-social counseling services (Burney, 1999).

The Department of Social Welfare and Bait-ul-Mal reported (Government of Pakistan, 2011), a few years back, there were approximately 5-7 Dar-ul-Aman (women shelters) in three provinces of Pakistan (Sindh, Baloochistan, Kheyber Pakhtonkha) and all were in pathetic condition. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has also reported in 2007 that existing shelter homes are ill-equipped, understaffed and unable to provide serious interventions. Psychological counseling as well as the free legal and medical aid is not available due to non availability of trained staff and funds.

According to the guidelines (2005) for the staff, the objectives of Dar-ul-Aman (Shelter homes) are;

- i. To provide immediate refuge, boarding, lodging facility for women /girls in distress.
- ii. To facilitate needy women to access to justice.
- iii. To make available rehabilitation program for psychological, social and economic empowerment.
- iv. To support women in distress through a process of reconciliation and negotiation for rehabilitation with their family.
- v. To protect deserving women against exploitation resulting from compromises imposed on them by advantage of their desperation and feeling that no alternatives are available.
- vi. To make matrimonial arrangement for destitute women/girls staying in Dar-ul-Aman with their free consent.
- vii. To provide an environment for women in which they can make decisions about their future and determine proper course of action to secure their interests.

Women can be referred by courts/ judges, authorities, social welfare agencies (NGOs/CBOs), government and semi government projects or institutions as well as can approach themselves (Directorate of Social Welfare, 2011; Government of Pakistan, 2010).

According to a survey conducted by Médecins du Monde (2007), 65% of the women in Faisalabad Dar-ul-Aman, 83 percent in Gujranwala and 63 percent in Lahore were not aware about their expected duration of Dar-ul-Aman stay which made them stressful. Moreover, 86 percent of the residents were the victims of physical violence. Some were burnt, had knife injuries and received electric shocks, but most of them were beaten with hands, feet and sticks. Residents were also threatened with guns and the majority of the victims experienced physical violence several times a week.

According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2007), existing shelter homes are ill-equipped, understaffed and unable to provide serious interventions. Psychological counseling as well as the free legal and medical aid is not available due to non availability of trained staff and funds. Médecins du Monde (2007) reported that the control over their lives was transferred to shelter management for families as the governmental staff of Dar-ul-Amans often pressurized the residents to go back to their families, to work, to meet the visitors and to give money. The staff also stigmatized them as bad women who left their families and homes.

III. Methodology

The research study was framed by using a mixed method approach to get best results from both qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary data was collected from the superintendents and women residing in Dar-ul-Aman through interview schedules. To collect data from the residents of Dar-ul-Aman, the proportionate stratified sampling technique was adopted in this study to have a more representative sample. The information about the population of all Darul Aman was obtained from the Directorate of Social Welfare & Bait-ul-Mal, Punjab and a formula were applied to draw the sample.

The Formula to draw a proportionate sample was;

$$(nh = \frac{Nh}{N} \times n)$$

$$N$$
 nh = Proportion of sample from each Darul Aman (shelter home) Nh = Population of each Darul Aman (shelter home) n = Sample size N = Population of the universe (Rafiq, 2006).

The sample size was 500 and the universe was divided into nine zones for researcher's convenience. The respondents (residents) were selected by using a simple random sampling techniques and the superintendents of thirty shelters were also interviewed. The number of qualitative interviews was based on data saturation. After collecting the data from the residents through interview schedule, it was scrutinized, verified and analyzed through computer. To provide a comprehensive analysis, the researchers provided a mix analysis of the data gathered from two research tools (Interview schedules for the residents & the superintendents) and found mixed-method approach really helpful to generalize social explanations.

IV. Results & Discussion

The findings explored that all of the shelter homes established by the Department of Social Welfare Women Development and Bait-ul-Mal were providing boarding services to all residents and according to the PC-1 and Guidelines for Superintendents (2005) a resident can stay for up to three months (90 days), but the superintendents said that a resident can stay in a shelter for more than three months if her case is proceeding in court or if she needs shelter.

More than three fourth (89%) of the respondents were referred by court order and 8.8% approached shelter homes by themselves. The rest of them was referred by a rescue service and the police department. The service providers also stated that the court referred most of the residents and they prefer to admit the women with court orders to minimize complications.

Service providers shared that Dar-ul-Aman is a place for Pakistani women to escape from honor killing, forced marriages and domestic violence. The majority of the respondents (99%) found shelter as a place to flee from abusive situations. The service providers explained that within the patriarchal structure, it is difficult for women to resist violence and to access their legal rights, and violence against women increases with women's demand for legal and religious rights so in such situations Dar-ul-Aman serves as a safe haven.

More than half (51%) of the respondents were not fearful after getting shelter, but less than half (49%) were fearful. More than one fourth (31.2%) of the respondents were fearful of their future because they were uncertain about that and 6.6% were fearful of honor killing after leaving a shelter. Some respondents were fearful of police cases against their boyfriends and husbands filed by their families as reactions to their love marriage or efforts to enter into a love marriage. A few residents (0.2%) were fearful of the head resident of the shelter due to internal grouping and politics. Service providers stated that residents' fears after getting shelter were increased by slow legal proceedings and uncertainty about the future.

Psycho-social counseling was available to 65.8% of the respondents and was not available to 21.0% of the respondents. Psycho-social counseling was to some extent available to 13.2% of the respondents. The superintendents provided information that in past, psychological

sessions were conducted by the volunteers appointed by Médecins du Monde. They also shared that with all of their other responsibilities, the superintendents also had to provide psycho-social counseling services. Some superintendents had the additional charge of shelters along with their regular duty on another social welfare project so they were not able to give full attention and services to the residents of the shelter, and clerical staff was unable to organize psycho-social counseling sessions. After attending psycho-social counseling sessions, only 42.8% of the respondents felt relaxed for a limited time while one fourth (29%) of the respondents gained no benefit from available psycho-social counseling sessions. Only 1.4% of the respondents received guidance from the sessions and 5.6% considered them just an activity to keep them busy. The respondents who attended the sessions with psychologists also pointed out that the root cause of their problems was social, but psychologists just addressed the psychological factors. The respondents also reported that there was no scheduled session with the superintendent, but the superintendents who were residing within the shelter were more active in psycho-social counseling and gave it regular time in the evenings. There was no fixed duration; it all depended upon the availability and mood of the service provider and the situation and mood of the service receiver. The respondents were also asked about total attended sessions and they were not able to count precisely. Moreover, many of the residents had the early or forced marriages, but a few superintendents were not sensitized and trained to provide services to women victims of violence. However, some superintendents and the residents recommended that intensive and individual sessions should be conducted to address the resident's psycho-social issues for better results.

Medical services were available to more than half (59.8%) of the respondents and to some extent available for more than one fourth (36.2%) of the respondents. Only 4% residents were not getting medical services. For regular medical services, the superintendents arranged the residents' visits to nearest district hospital. In some Dar-ul-Aman there were victims of violence with serious injuries and the superintendents provided medical assistance to them with the help of an advisory committee and local volunteer network but due to financial limitations the victims had to bear the expenses.

More than three fourth (87%) of the respondents admitted that their physical health improved after getting shelter. The superintendents of all shelters reported that residents' physical health improves after getting shelter and explained that most of the residents start to apply a mixture of different facial whitening creams to look beautiful so their look changes in a few days. The superintendents also mentioned that the majority of the residents belongs to the lower class, and would have not experienced the relative luxury and facilities of shelters when they were at home, so their physical health improves after getting refuge.

Legal assistance was available to more than half (63 %) of the respondents, while more than one fourth (28.8%) were provided with legal assistance to some extent. Legal services were not available to 7.4 % of the respondents and that includes the respondents from some shelters where there was a budget issue which prevented superintendents from providing legal assistance to the residents. The superintendents had an approved group of local lawyers who provided free legal assistance, but the shelter administration had to pay for the forms and the case fee. The majority of the residents was referred by court orders and they were already getting legal services.

Skills training was to some extent available to more than half (67.8%) of the respondents and was not available to 16.8% of the respondents. Only 15.4% of the respondents received skills training provided by Dar-ul-Aman administration. The service providers explained that in each Dar-ul-Aman they had vocational teachers to conduct skills training, but in some shelters the posts were vacant. More than half (54.4%) of the respondents had no technical/vocational skills before joining a Dar-ul-Aman and 45.6% had vocational skills. Shelter homes provided vocational sessions for sewing, embroidery and handicrafts and a large number of residents was already trained in those skills.

The majority (70.4%) of the respondents felt safe in a Dar-ul-Aman, 7.2% were relaxed, 6.4% were depressed and 5.2% felt regret after joining shelter. The service providers shared that some residents tried to commit suicide after joining a Dar-ul-Aman.

All Dar-ul-Aman had an activity timetable for residents that started with breakfast, followed by a religious class and a vocational class. More than three fourth (89%) of the residents were attending the religious session and only 11% were not attending due to their mental state and non-availability of sessions. Dar-ul-Amans were conducting religious sessions without any outline of content to be covered, but 5% of the respondents reported that they learnt about Islam in the sessions and the rest of them (95%) felt relaxed and busy after attending the sessions. The service providers shared that religious sessions were helpful for keeping the residents busy.

Only 3.6% of the respondents were helped by the superintendents to arrange their marriage. The superintendents found it really difficult to search for a proposal and to arrange marriage because of the negative image of shelters and residents. Some superintendents arranged residents' marriages with the active participation of an advisory committee and judges. Only 36% of the respondents were helped by Dar-ul-Aman administration to reconcile with their families and 63.2% were not helped. The service providers highlighted that it was not possible for them to help residents to reconcile in all cases because they cannot start the reconciliation process without the residents' consent and in most of the cases residents were not willing to reconcile. The superintendents also shared that the families usually visit to meet the superintendent and request to start the reconciliation process. A few (3%) respondents had successful reconciliation and were going to join their families and 0.4% of the respondents' reconciliations were in process. About one fourth (21%) of the respondents refused to go back and 5.8% were fearful of their honor killing after leaving a Dar-ul-Aman, 0.6% were disowned by their families, 0.6% were fearful of being sold by their husbands as punishment for joining a shelter home and 0.4% had the same fear from their families. The service providers shared their experiences of reconciliation, stating that in many cases, families accepted the residents' demands and reconciled, but killed her after she left Dar-ul-Aman. The superintendents emphasized the importance of providing the resident with legal protection after leaving a Dar-ul-Aman to prevent honor killing.

About one fourth (21.6%) of the respondents had the opinion that Dar-ul-Aman was going to improve their life after leaving it by providing safe access to legal rights but the three fourth (78.4%) of the respondents did not think so. The superintendents explained that the Dar-ul-Aman provided immediate and short-term security, but after leaving women would have to face honor killing and other consequences.

V. Conclusion

Dar-ul-Amans do have positive outcomes for those who seek help, but most of them were overcrowded and under resourced. Most of the survivors of domestic/family violence came to the shelters at the most vulnerable time of their lives with the hope that the shelter experience would play a critical role in helping them to heal from abuse and establish a new way of thinking about themselves and their options for the future. Unfortunately, the residents were not strengthened or empowered by their Dar-ul-Aman stay. No doubt, immediate and short-term security was provided to them but, after leaving the shelter, women are more vulnerable to becoming victims of honor killing or facing the wrath of perpetrators. They are left completely at the mercy of the patriarchal structure and the gender-based inequalities embedded in social norms. It is also concluded that Dar-ul-Amans operate a philanthropic philosophy, which usually provides only the basic necessities of life, i.e. clothing, shelter and food. However, a therapeutic and activist approach can be more helpful in offering intervention and rehabilitation services in shelters. The therapeutic approach can provide counseling, therapy and mental-health services. Most of the Dar-ul-Amans in Punjab Province have social workers and sociologists as superintendents and they are trying to provide services such as psycho-social counseling, legal advice, reconciliations, remarriages and rehabilitation but, due to poor working conditions, lack of appropriate training, resources and worker's accountability, they were unable to offer serious interventions or rehabilitation.

VI. Recommendations

- i. Women victims of violence face serious psycho-social problems and require the help of trained professionals. Shelter staff can improve residents' experiences in shelters by responding with greater sensitivity to their shared and individual needs. There is a great need for more well-trained staff, especially in crisis counseling.
- ii. Social workers working in shelters should conduct intensive and individual psycho-social counseling sessions in order to achieve better results. It is also suggested that a full-time psychiatrist or mental health professional be appointed in each Dar-ul-Aman.
- iii. Strength-based generalist social work practice in shelters can also help women victims of violence and their families by focusing on their inherent strengths, resources and coping abilities.
- iv. The shelters should ensure pertinent arrangements for vocational training as well as physical and mental rehabilitation by introducing marketable skills to empower the residents in a real sense.
- v. It is also recommended to provide totally free medical services along with the healthy nutrition needed to recover. The Directorate of Social Welfare and Bait-ul-Mal should work to establish professional and good-practice standards in Dar-ul-Aman.
- vi. It is imperative for researchers, academics and concerned departments to continue to explore this area of research, specifically around the staff-resident relationship, abuse cycle, support networks and good practice models.

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