



# Underprivileged Women Impacted by Ethnic Violence: Deconstructing Lives

Zehra Habib<sup>1</sup> · Kamal Ahmed Soomro<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

Though the city of Karachi in Pakistan is a nucleus of ethnic violence, only a limited number of studies have been conducted on the predicament of underprivileged women during ongoing conflicts. There has been negligible focus on how the women are coping in the post violence milieu. Voices of disadvantaged women remain unheard in patriarchal societies, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries. The objective of this qualitative study is to provide voice to underprivileged women impacted by ethnic violence and to comprehend post violence conditions under which they are surviving. This research accentuates the relevance of studying gender dimension of violence (GDV) from women's perspectives. Findings from five focus group interviews with 24 participants highlight the harrowing tales of poverty, despair, physical and psychological distress with which the women are coping. Individual, semi structured interviews were conducted with two female workers from local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to examine measures for rehabilitation of the women. Data from NGO workers underscores the inertia of government in this respect and recommendations include endeavors of governmental and non-governmental organizations to provide healthcare, education and vocational training to the impacted women.

**Keywords** Ethnic violence · Gender dimension of violence (GDV) · Underprivileged women · Post violence trauma · Post conflict rehabilitation

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✉ Zehra Habib  
zehra.habib@iobm.edu.pk  
Kamal Ahmed Soomro  
kasoomro@mix.wvu.edu

<sup>1</sup> Manager Research Planning and Development Office of Research Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC), Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> Department of Education, Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi, Pakistan

## Introduction

Ethnicity is deeply rooted in communal, historical, and political backgrounds and is visible where clusters of people are contiguous and interact regularly [23]. An individual's ethnic identity is defined by indicators of race, religion, and language [24] and ethnic conflict is characterized by political or communal clashes involving factions identified by different indicators of ethnicity [52]. Nonetheless, ethnic conflict is usually not so much about cultural variances as it is about dogmatic, fiscal, social, and territorial matters [38].

Underprivileged or disadvantaged persons denote individuals who are marginalized by society, live below the poverty line and are susceptible to injustice and violence [15]. Such segments of population include ethnic groups, refugees, and in some instances the disabled and the elderly. Women and girls belonging to these groups are often exposed to manifold discriminatory practices and gender-based violence [19]. Underprivileged Pakistani women often experience poverty, low literacy levels and low self-esteem [71] and the oppression is such that they are deprived even of their basic rights [34] and are considered to lack opinion and expression [44].

Due to high rates of sexual and domestic violence, Pakistan ranks as the sixth most hazardous country in the world for women [78], seventh in sexual violence and fifth in domestic abuse [86]. Women who experience violence in Pakistan are often too intimidated to seek and accept help, or are unaware of available support and resources [34, 64]. They live in slums, many of which are conflict ridden areas of Karachi, and struggle to support themselves and their families, obtaining little if any support from the government [71]. Their voices remain unheeded [2, 61], even though understanding women's standpoints and comprehending violence from the gender perspective is crucial for lasting peace [12, 18, 33, 80].

## Building the Context

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deliberate on the causes of ethnic violence in Karachi, yet every conflict should be studied in relation to its historical perspective [16]. Karachi, the largest city of Pakistan is home to around 16.93 million people [85] and is the country's financial and commercial hub [62, 84]. Once described as the city of lights in the 60s and 70s, it is now a metropolitan center of mayhem where peace pivots on the extensive deployment of security forces [20, 49]. Since the mid 80's, the predominant trend of violence in Karachi has been that of ethnic conflicts in disadvantaged neighborhoods, receding and rekindling without any substantial foundation [22, 39, 72, 82].

Ethnic tensions have prevailed in Karachi, Pakistan, due to the influx of over 600,000 Muslim migrants from India, at the time of partition of the subcontinent by the British in 1947. These Urdu speaking migrants are dubbed as *Mohajirs*, a native term used for describing immigrants from India to Pakistan [56, 70]. Additionally, the perpetual surge of Pashtuns in Karachi from the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has led to immense competition for ethnic and socio-political space in the city. The migration of Pashtuns has spawned continuous tensions between the

Pashtuns and Mohajir ethnic groups which have led to battles, bloodshed and heavy losses of lives [70, 82, 87]. The Karachi carnage is an armed battle between the two groups fighting turf wars for control of resources and land [26, 81]. It is *particularly* the *Mohajir women* who have suffered the consequences of tensions between Pashtuns and Mohajirs [1, 9, 21, 37, 39, 62, 82].

## Gender Dimension of Violence

Gender Dimension of Violence (GDV) applies a gendered perspective in understanding the causes, impacts, and dynamics of violence in certain settings and environments. It sifts experiences of men and women to examine how violence impacts the two genders differently [11, 68]. Dichotomies between men as perpetrators of violence and women as silent victims have been challenged because in some cases, both can be executors and victims of violence [14, 75, 77]. GDV from women's standpoint highlights how women in third world countries are often marginalized and their concerns regarding violence and inequality ignored by governments [17, 54]. Most studies of violent zones do not give precedence to women and are either 'male-centric,' or gender blind in their approach [6, 10, 54, 69]. A violent zone is a region discernable for excessive acts of aggression, including war, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, domestic belligerence and hate crime. Violence encompasses use of force or power against individuals or groups resulting in physical and mental grievances, death and deprivation [43, 83].

Among highly detrimental factors impacting women in violent zones are rape and other sexual crimes as major tactics and weapons to undermine the enemy and to destabilize opponents [3, 5, 7, 29, 41]. International media accentuate rape as a means for exploiting the enemy in (former) Yugoslavia, Philippines and Uganda [17]. In less developed countries, rape is considered taboo and victims consider themselves deprived of self-esteem and honor. As such women neither speak out, nor avail help because of loss of self-image and confidence [30, 48, 73]. In addition, post violence indicators for women include deprivation of physical, mental and social needs [12, 68]. The trauma experienced has a deep impact on their future psychological and reproductive health, depriving them of physical capabilities to cope with their many responsibilities [17, 32, 61]. Many women face immense risk of exploitation as a result of breakdown in family structures and dearth of funds for sustenance [80]. Loss of male family members often leads to a role reversal for women because they unexpectedly find themselves as household heads and bread winners [53].

International Alert [31] recommends a thorough analysis of GDV based on findings from empirical studies to provide a genuine gender-sensitive appraisal. Primary research indicates that post conflict trauma, including stress disorder symptoms are most common in Palestine, if women have lost a loved one in conflict [29, 47]. In Uganda, women have encountered forced pregnancies, abortions, and socio-economic violations which have hindered them from effectively fulfilling their responsibilities to their families [57]. Further pointers of stress include hallucinations, invasive memories, troubled sleep with nightmares, and general terror [29]. Some factors cited in the very limited literature regarding post ethnic trauma experienced by underprivileged women in Pakistan, include panic, frustration, psychological and physical distress [55].

## Current Study

The objective of this qualitative study is to afford a platform to the Mohajir women impacted by ethnic violence and to comprehend how they have managed their lives almost ten years beyond the conflict. The main research question pertains to examining women's post conflict lives and the second research question concerns measures that could be taken to alleviate their distress.

## Method

This research focused on Mohajir women impacted by the brutal outbreaks of violence between the Mohajirs and Pushtuns in late 2011. Focus group interviews were conducted in January 2020 almost a decade later because the main purpose of the research was to examine their post violence lives.

## Participant Recruitment

To be eligible for this research, participants must be Mohajir women living in an under-served community and report being impacted by violence. Oral informed consent was obtained because the women could neither read nor write. They were assured that pseudonyms would be assigned, and their identities or localities of residence will not be divulged. Women who consented to participate were not sure about their 'real' ages, but each one recounted approximately how old she was. The youngest participant was 29 years old, and the oldest one was 62 at the time when the research data were gathered. Two techniques were used to select the participants from two proximal localities of Karachi which had been severely impacted by ethnic strife (names of localities have not been divulged because of confidentiality procedures). The first technique was purposive because this selection provides information rich cases within restricted resources [59]. A social worker helped identify five Mohajir women who agreed to participate after comprehending the purpose of the research. Since ethnic violence is a sensitive issue and women afflicted by such happenings are a hard-to-reach population, the second technique for recruiting participants was that of snowball sampling because it was via the five Mohajir women that 20 more participants were identified and invited to participate. Snowball sampling is a strategy through which preliminary participants refer to others in a similar situation to add to the number of respondents [35]. For a primarily explorative, qualitative and sensitive study, snowball sampling provides an edge in locating cases for procuring information on difficult to observe phenomena [28]. Initially there were 25 willing participants, but one woman who was a rape victim, backed out prior to the interview. As such, 24 Mohajir women impacted by violence participated in the research. Figure 1 represents participant recruitment for focus group interviews.

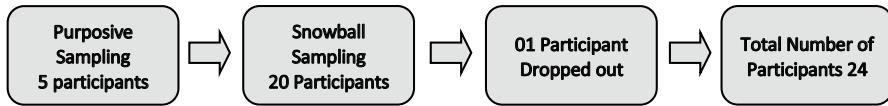


Fig. 1 Participant Recruitment for Focus Group Interviews

## Baseline Demographics

Seven participants had lost their husbands to targeted killings in ethnic violence, and one participant's husband had been shot at and maimed waist downwards. Yet another woman who was a widow had lost both her son and her son-in-law during brutal spates of violence and another participant had lost her brother. Four participants' sons had 'mysteriously disappeared' and another participant's brother was also amongst missing persons. Three women recounted harrowing tales of sexual violence, including rape of a sister, a niece, and a cousin. All participants had suffered severe economic constraints and continue to live in despair and poverty in the post violence situation. None of the participants had been to school and only two among the 24 women could read the Quran (The Holy Book of Muslims).

Table 1 highlights demographics of participants and the impact of ethnic violence on their lives.

Two local NGO workers from two small scale NGOs based in the afflicted areas were included in the research to examine their standpoints regarding key areas of assistance that could be offered to the women for post conflict rehabilitation. The two women whose ages were 37 and 46 years, read and signed the informed consent form after comprehending the research purpose. Table 2

## Qualitative Data Collection Procedures

Using a Qualitative Interpretivist Approach [25], data were obtained from five focus group interviews, four groups comprising 5 participants each and the fifth one comprising 4 participants. Women only focus group interviews are a critical way for hearing marginalized voices because they get space to open up and voice their grievances [53]. In addition, data were obtained via individual semi structured from two NGO workers.

## Focus Group Interviews

Each interview session was held in a classroom of a small scale, non-elite private school in one of the afflicted areas, where participants could reach without any logistic issues. The sessions were held with the consent of the principal of the school during

**Table 1** Demographics of Participants and Impact of Ethnic Violence

Pseudonyms of participants	Age	Marital Status	Impact of ethnic violence	
1	Basma	31	Widow	Husband shot and killed
2	Faiza	29	Widow	Husband stabbed and killed
3	Samina	35	Widow	Husband shot and Killed
4	Parveen	44	Widow	Husband shot and Killed
5	Lubna	39	widow	Husband shot and Killed
6	Naima	40	Widow	Husband stabbed and killed
7	Salma	38	Widow	Husband shot and killed
8	Urooj	41	Married	Husband shot at and maimed
9	Talat	51	Window	Son and son in law shot and killed
10	kaneez	50	Married	Brother shot and killed
11	Yasmin	62	Married	Son missing
12	Moona	47	Married	Son missing
13	Nirma	49	Married	Son missing
14	Hania	52	Married	Son missing
15	Silwat	29	Married	Brother missing
16	Rani	51	Married	Sister raped and killed
17	Preeha	47	Married	Niece raped
18	Nargis	51	Married	Cousin raped
19	Sara	37	Divorced	Overall fear and distress
20	Fehmida	47	Married	Overall fear and distress
21	Zarin	29	Divorced	Overall fear and distress
22	Tooba	38	Divorced	Overall fear and distress
24	Areeba	38	Married	Overall fear and distress
24	Nageen	33	Married	Overall fear and distress

**Table 2** Demographics of Local NGO Workers

Pseudonyms of NGO workers	Age	Marital status	NGO experience	
1	Munira	37	Married	10 Years
2	Saima	46	Married	13 Years

late afternoon, after school hours. On average, the duration of each focus group discussion was over an hour. The longest session continued for 95 min, while the shortest session lasted for 70 min. All focus group discussions were conducted in Urdu, because the women could not speak English. Urdu is the mother tongue of the Mohajir women and the national language of Pakistan. Data were recorded and later translated and transcribed in English for dissemination to a larger audience. In translating data, care has been taken to stay close to what the participants reported.

## Semi-Structured Interviews

Individual, semi structured interviews were conducted with two NGO workers, who were partially involved in relief work for women during spates of ethnic violence. The two workers were also interviewed in Urdu because of limited fluency in English. The first interview lasted for about 55 min, while the second one went on for 75 min. As was the case with the interview data from the focus group, the procedure of translation and transcription in English was applied.

## Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis strategies recommended by Saldana [67], and Corbin and Strauss [13] were followed. Accordingly, single words or phrases representing a core concept in the data were highlighted [67] and in-vivo coding was done wherein researchers borrow words of a participant to mark codes because this is a crucial step for coding and categorizing [13]. A constant comparative analysis was also conducted so as to decode similarities and differences [13] among the viewpoints of the five focus group participants and also from the individual semi structured interviews of the two NGO workers.

Both researchers adhered to credibility criteria [42] by compiling research questions, developing interview guides and conducting analysis together. Several days were spent on reading and re-reading transcripts and on data analyses and development of themes. Focus group interviews were conducted by the first author and interviews of the two NGO workers were conducted by the second author. The prime reason for the first author conducting focus group interviews is that underprivileged women might not have been comfortable by the presence of the second author who is male. All research participants were fully aware that two researchers were involved in the research process. It is also pertinent to elucidate that ethnic identity of both researchers is neither Mohajir nor Pashtun, as such the current research has been conducted very objectively, with no bias or partiality towards any ethnic group. Ethnic identities of the NGO workers are from neither of the two warring factions.

## Findings from Focus Group Interviews

Initially most of the participants were a bit hesitant and timid to speak out because they had never been interviewed before. The women gradually opened up after warm up questions, and most of them vented their feelings and were quite vocal as the discussions progressed. The participants first expanded on their sufferings during the conflicts and then accentuated on how past violence still continues to haunt their lives. They underscored the binding fear and the ominous threats to their lives and honor and the extreme poverty they had experienced and continue to do so in the shanty towns of Karachi. The participants emphasized

that violence had temporarily died down, but they continued to live amid extreme mental and physical tension because the future was “*so uncertain*.” Themes that had a strong presence in all five focus groups regarding suffering during and post violence are highlighted below.

### **Post Violence Lives of Rape Victims**

The perpetual fear for the future of women who had been raped stood out conspicuously in all five focus group interviews. Sara remarked that in the current post violence scenario, there is “*no life*” for girls or women who had been raped because “*they have lost their honor*.” Preeha expressed emphatically that “*women who had been raped ought to kill themselves because there is no life left for them afterwards*.” Likewise, Tooba insisted that “*such women should die because they will be living sinful lives*.” Zarin went on to add that women who had been raped should “*never go for medical assistance*.” An excerpt from Nargis’ standpoint sheds further light on lives of rape victims:

My cousin, who was also a neighbor was brutally raped by *many* persons. We helplessly heard screams from next door and I *still* tremble at the thought! She was around 45 then, a mother of three. Was it her fault? But her husband abandoned her and their three children. She works in people’s homes now, so does her daughter. Her two sons are useless; they just languish at home.

Rani, whose sister had been raped and killed and who appeared visibly distraught, remarked in an unusually low voice:

My 16-year-old sister was raped and killed. You know, they jumped into the house when only my mother was at home. They tied my mother up and raped and killed her before her [mother’s] eyes. My mother is surviving.....but she has *almost* lost her mind... she either cries or screams. She is a widow... I have a marriageable daughter but there are *no* proposals, perhaps because there has been rape in the family.

Yasmin, who was the oldest among all participants, elucidated how rape destroys not only women but also men:

If a woman is raped, the honor of our men is also destroyed forever. They actually do this [rape] to crush and humiliate our men. The men are utterly devastated for the rest of their lives; they even abandon their own women.

### **Psychological, Emotional and Physical Trauma**

Loss of male members is another major reason for psychological, emotional and physical agony during violence and in the post violence scenario. Talat, who had been widowed young, lost both her son and son in law in the ethnic violence. Following is an extract from what she said:



I think about my son...I can't sleep! I had no husband because he died young... but now they've killed my son and my only daughter's husband. Her in laws have turned her out...she is with us. Who will marry her now? She complains of severe headaches. I took her to a clinic but whatever medicines they gave did not help. Her son, who was only seven years old, saw his father being shot. He still has nightmares and my daughter...and I...we are both so worried for him.

Naima, Salma, Parveen and Lubna all stated emphatically that life for them has “*never been the same*” ever since the brutal killings of their husbands. Lubna and Parveen specifically mentioned that they live in “*a state of trance even after so many years*” and added that “*they live in fear of violence erupting again*” and are at times unable to sleep at night because of this fear. All four women affirmed that their health has deteriorated in the post conflict setting and that they are living under emotional stress and severe financial paucity.

### **Change of Role for Women after Loss of Bread Earners**

Urooj recounted how her life has changed since her husband, who was a taxi driver had been shot at during ethnic riots and was now maimed for life. She has no choice but to work as a house maid in affluent neighborhoods because she had 3 minor daughters at the time when the incident happened. She lamented that her daughters were of marriageable age now, yet they are “*sitting at home*” because she does not have money to marry them off. She further stated that some people “*from the government*” had visited her house and asked her to put her thumb impression on a card which they informed was from the Benazir Income Support Program (a government sponsored program for supporting the needy) through which she would get Rupees 6000 every month (approximately \$ 80), but to date she had not received a single rupee.

Samina, Faiza and Basma recounted that they were in a state of shock when they lost their husbands who were also the breadwinners of their families but accepted that they were now “*the men of the house.*” Samina expressed her viewpoint in the following words:

I was shattered and worried for my four children. I started dusting and sweeping in homes of the rich because there is *nothing else* I can do. The *begum* [mistress of the house] deducts my salary if I cannot get to work on any day... we poor women are *so helpless*...One of my sons works at a car garage, the other three are home... My daughter who is 17 now is not married because I don't have the savings.

Faiza, whose husband was stabbed, revealed how she still sees images of the “*blood soaked body*” but declared that she had to pick up courage because she “*had no choice.*” Her view of the situation was somewhat different from that of Samina's:

I had to pick up courage and started working as a housemaid in people's homes because *I don't know anything else*....but I've *seen* how the rich people live! I've *seen* how educated they are! I wanted my children to study and to be like *begum and sahib* (master and mistress of the house). But we are so poor that I was never able to give them good education....but I've *seen* the outside world!

### Missing Persons

Yasmin and Moona described their torment ever since their sons had been missing during the violence. They grieved that they could neither eat nor sleep because they did not know if their sons would ever return. Their mental and physical health had declined because of the continued anxiety. Both women continued to visit police stations even after ten years had lapsed, in case there was some news about their sons. The police had registered a First Information Report (FIR) for their missing sons, but *"nothing has been done to trace them."*

Among missing persons were also Hania's son and Silwat's brother; the two women had almost given up hope and had stopped going to the police station. Hania grieved that she had to convince herself that her son would never return. She went on to ask, *"can you imagine how painful that is? I did not even have a body to bury."* She further asserted that her life had *"changed completely"* and that she lives in misery ever since her son was *"lost."*

Though not a recurrent theme in the data, it is pertinent to include the perspective of Nirma whose son had been missing and who had been visiting the police station regularly to inquire about his whereabouts. Following is an excerpt highlighting her standpoint:

My son is still missing.... he was only 17 years old. I would kill the people who have driven him to hide... I would kill the enemy... I have always encouraged my son to kill them. I would still encourage him... I also encouraged my husband to kill the enemy. Why should *we* not kill *them*?

### Lack of Strategies for Coping with Trauma

Regarding community strategies of Mohajir women to cope with their post violence lives, *none* of the participants could offer any viable solutions. Fehmida expressed helplessness by saying, *"we are women, what can we do? We are not even educated."* Nageen looked surprised at the question and countered my question with one of her own: *"Why are you asking us this question? We are helpless; we do not know what to do."* Tooba went on to add that I should *"ask the government, why ask us?"*.

## Government Apathy

It was highly distressful when the women in all five groups questioned why there was no help forthcoming from the authorities. Areeba pleadingly asked, “*is it possible that you take our case up to the higher authorities?*” Parveen’s question related more to financial aid, “*can the government or anyone provide even a bit of financial assistance?*” All participants lacked confidence in the provincial government and pleaded that their case be taken up with the authorities.

## Findings from Individual Interviews of Two NGO Workers

Both Munira and Saima underlined that assistance from their NGOs was for *all women* regardless of ethnicity. Both also cited limitations of their NGOs, stating that their small-scale organizations had very limited funds to support the women. Munira mentioned that their NGO ran a small clinic with one lady doctor and that this was not adequate to cater to all the physical and mental ailments of afflicted women.

She also complained that there was dearth of medicines at their center. Saima informed that their NGO did not have a regular clinic but that a lady doctor only visited twice a week for three hours. Munira and Saima remonstrated against the apathy of the provincial government for their “*heedless*” and “*callous*” attitude and added that “*nothing was being done for the rehabilitation of the affected women and men.*”

The two workers confirmed that there were hardly any cases of rape reported because rape is taboo, particularly for underprivileged women and they are “*too ashamed to disclose their plight.*” Munira elaborated that if ever a rape victim came to their clinic, it was only because she felt “*unwell*” but if she found out that she was pregnant, she would plead for the fetus to be aborted which was not a possibility at their clinic. Munira went on to add that even if they delivered their babies, the infants were either abandoned or left at charitable centers.

Another standpoint of both women related to intense mental suffering and physical ailments of women whose male family members were killed, and Saima affirmed that “*depending on their capacity to cope, some try to be brave, others almost lose their minds...*” Both women emphasized that there was excessive post violence stress on women and that it was “*near impossible*” for them to handle the pressure because of their dismal physical, mental and economic conditions.

## Modes of Assistance for the Afflicted Women

The most significant findings from the NGO workers’ data pertained to measures of rehabilitation for the women. Saima and Munira underlined that help should correlate with the needs of the women impacted by violence. They lamented that no assistance was forthcoming from the government or from civil society. Following are some recommendations they made regarding rehabilitation of the women.

## Vocational Training

The standpoint of the NGO workers was that afflicted women should be given vocational training such as acquiring skills to sew and embroider. Training in culinary skills was another suggestion offered by both workers. They asserted that these and other related skills could go a long way in supporting their families. Saima added that training in soft skills such as education of human rights, adaptability, open mindedness and conflict resolution could also play a significant role in assisting the women to cope better with the post violence situation.

## Camps for Specific Therapies

In Munira's opinion, setting up of temporary camps/sessions by the provincial government for psychological and emotional therapy would be beneficial. She added that in order to encourage women to attend the camps, the authorities should provide monetary incentive. She further recommended that seminars on values of peace should be included in the therapeutic sessions.

## Setting up of Permanent Medical Centers

Both workers advocated setting up of permanent government run clinics and availability of ambulance services in the affected localities. Saima elaborated that the two major public sector hospitals in Karachi were at a vast distance from the localities under discussion. Availability of clinics and ambulances in the affected areas would make access to medical help easy for the victims.

## Literacy and Education: A Key Solution

Munira and Saima accentuated the need for literacy programs for the affected women. They expressed very strongly that if girls and women are educated, it would make an immense difference. Following is an extract from Saima's interview:

The key is to educate *women and men*. But mothers bring up children in the Pakistani society and it is the children of these mothers who indulge in violence. The government, the private sector and the NGOs should all work to establish proper schools in underprivileged areas. There should also be literacy camps for women. Pakistani society will be rid of a hundred evils if proper education is provided.

## Discussion

Too often women's suffering in conflict are sidelined, particularly in the developing world. Key outcomes of this research reinforce the significance of studying violence from the standpoint of gender and the significance of affording voice to

underprivileged women. The findings highlight the post violence stressors that women have to cope with. This research has made visible that even ten years beyond the violence, no steps have been taken by the provincial government or by civil society to rehabilitate affected women. The current study also corroborates some findings from existing studies related to post violence trauma for women. A crucial finding pivots around women's fear of rape and its subsequent outcomes. The threat of being raped extends even to the sanctuary of their abode because it is in homes that rape has occurred. In conflict and in post conflict situations, there is a persecution that disadvantaged women experience in losing the sanctuary that a home provides [39].

The viewpoint of participants regarding rape victims' suffering in silence has also been highlighted by literature [30, 74]. In fact, women who are raped suffer such excessive trauma that it ultimately leads to spiritual death [50]. This gradual death of the spirit is caused by extreme hopelessness and anguish [58]. The silent suffering leads to excessive mental and physical trepidation for the victims in months and even years to come [4]. Literature also corroborates the finding that the enemy deals a harsh blow not only to the women but also to the men because the men feel mortified and demoralized if their women are raped [7, 29]. Participants declared how women who had been raped were turned down by their spouses. This is consistent with studies of intercommunal violence and rape in conflict zones [17, 29, 53, 79]. Previous studies also underscore that rape can lead to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, adversely impacting women's health [46, 76]. As such it is imperative to deliver 'survivor centered responses' to the victims [66].

Studies of conflict zones have revealed that post violence physical and mental ailments that women incur as a consequence of loss of male members cause psychological and physical suffering [60]. Mohajir women embroiled in ethnic violence are severely challenged by intrusions into homes to loot and kill and their spiritual crumbling after death of a loved one, leads to physical and mental alarms [8].

Women who lose male breadwinners, precipitously face a change of role from passive and submissive stay-at-home wives, to active providers for their children. The crisis plunges them into new roles for which they are unprepared [10, 53]. Loss of male members might also indicate a positive stance for some women because they feel empowered and their agency increases in their new roles [51, 79]. Findings from the current research portray both the positive and the negative aspects, though there are more negative and less positive aspects denoted by the findings. One positive aspect is that a participant who lost her husband and is currently working as a maid, feels emancipated because she witnessed the affluent and educated society around her, and expressed the desire for educating her children so that they could raise their status in society. Other participants, however, resent working in affluent people's homes, particularly when the *begum* deducts salary, if work is missed for some reason. Ironically, this projects that women from the higher strata of society have no empathy for their counterparts who come from underprivileged segments of society.

One finding, which could be reported as a negative case, stands out uniquely in data [59], indicating indirect contribution of women to violence. A participant asserted that even if her son were guilty of violence and murder, she would continue

to encourage him to kill the enemy. This portrays that women at times are not only victims but can incite and support violence [29, 45, 75].

An aspect that stands out in this study is that the women had no direction on managing their post violence lives. The two NGO workers' presented key aspects for rehabilitation, such as vocational training, therapy sessions, literacy and education. Previous studies document that education and vocational training play a hugely constructive role for women in violent zones [27, 36, 40]. The Forum for African Educationalists (FAWE) and The Danish International Development Agency conducted a study from 2009 to 2014, reaching out to hundreds of girls and women in four African countries impacted by conflict. Results after technical and vocational education demonstrate that a number of women and girls experienced empowerment which consequently raised their self-esteem. The emphasis of NGO workers for establishing schools in afflicted areas to inculcate tenets of peace and to nurture respect for diverse ethnic cultures is fully justified by previous literature [27, 36, 63]. The suggestion for camps and clinics for the psychological and physical well-being of aggrieved women would go a long way to cater to the physical and mental concerns of women afflicted by violence [80].

## Limitations

This study touched only the tip of the iceberg and presented a preliminary exploration of the post violence lives of disadvantaged Mohajir women and their changing roles. However, women from only one ethnic group were interviewed from two of the several areas wedged by ethnic conflicts in Karachi and perspectives of only two local NGO workers were analyzed. Understanding standpoints of women from both groups embroiled in violence and bringing in women from several violence affected localities could have enhanced the depth of the study. Similarly examining perspectives of NGO workers from more than two NGO's could have shed further light on aspects of rehabilitation. Even though conclusions of the current study are supported by findings from previous research, these cannot be generalized to other contexts of ethnic violence. It is therefore pertinent that future research examines the perspectives of women from both ethnic groups and it is equally relevant to examine perspectives of men from both warring factions. Based on the results of this study, action research was to follow with the help of NGO's in summer 2020, via small scale vocational training camps to train impacted women in sewing and culinary skills. However, this venture had to be postponed because of COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the government.

## Conclusion

A substantial contribution of this study is to disseminate to a wider readership the hitherto unheeded concerns of Karachi's disadvantaged women impacted by ethnic violence. Another key aspect of the research is to emphasize the relevance of studying the gender dimension of violence from the perspective of women. Most

significantly, this research underscores that the suffering of women impacted by violence continues almost a decade beyond the violence and that no action has been taken by the government to rehabilitate the women and families. This study offers vital, preliminary acumens to Karachi's ethnic cauldron and participants provide a strong springboard for further research and action.

The way forward is for government and nongovernmental organizations to join hands to educate not only grassroots women, but also men, particularly from the perspectives of peace. Peace Education aspires to achieve harmony and minimize differences in compassionate and non-violent ways [65]. Instead of letting underprivileged women suffer in reticence, this research advocates that concrete steps should be taken to alleviate their distress.

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#### Declaration

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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