

Violence Against Women in Politics

**A Study Conducted in India, Nepal and
Pakistan**

CSR



Centre for Social Research



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

Violence against Women in Politics

(A study conducted in India, Nepal and Pakistan)

Research Team

India: Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Dr. Mallika Mitra Biswas, Ms. Uditā Das, Ms. Sophie Hardefeldt

Pakistan: Ms. Valerie Khan

Nepal: Ms. Saloni Singh

Research Advisors

India: Professor Roop Rekha Verma, Ms. Bharati Silawal Giri

Pakistan: Dr. Farzana Bari

Nepal: Professor Meena Vaidya

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Abbreviations

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CA	Constituent Assembly
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPN (M)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPN (UML)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)
CSR	Centre for Social Research
ECI	Election Commission of India
ECP	Election Commission of Pakistan
FAFEN	Free and Fair Elections Network
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
ICT	Islamabad Capital Territory
IDI	In-Depth Interview
KP	Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa
LGO	Local Government Ordinance
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MNA	Member of the National Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
MPA	Member of Provincial Assembly
NA	National Assembly
NC	Nepali Congress
NCP	Nationalist Congress Party
NCSW	National Commission on the Status of Women
NCT	National Capital Territory
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PA	Provincial Assembly
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
RoPA	Representation of People Act 1976
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SP	Samajwadi Party
SAP-PK	South Asian Partnership –Pakistan
UC	Union Council
UDHR	Universal Declaration on Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UP	Uttar Pradesh
VAW	Violence against Women
VAWIP	Violence against Women in Politics
WSGP	Women Security Pressure Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Violence against Women (VAW) is prevalent in every country in the world and is one of the leading causes of morbidity for women. Among women aged between 15 and 44, acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined. Perhaps the most pervasive human rights violation that we know of today, VAW includes domestic violence in the home, sexual abuse of girls in schools, sexual harassment at work, and rape – whether by husbands or strangers, in refugee camps or as a tactic of war.¹ This violence, which is reinforced by discriminatory cultural, social and economic structures, devastates lives, fractures communities, and stalls development.

South Asia is home to one-fifth of the world's population and it is estimated that one third of South Asian women experience violence throughout their lives.² VAW is institutionalised through family structures, wider social and economic frameworks and cultural and religious traditions. It is a widely accepted method for controlling women. Moreover, it is largely overlooked by law enforcement agencies and is ignored by those in power.

Violence is a common feature of South Asian politics. Candidates and their families as well as voters have routinely faced violence during elections. The violent nature of politics within South Asia often deters women from participating within the political sphere. Politics has also traditionally been promoted as the territory of men and the perceived “masculization” of the political sphere has led to politics being seen as a “dirty” sector that must be “prohibited for women.”³

Violence against women in politics (VAWIP) is violence that occurs within the political sphere but that specifically targets women. VAWIP is used to reinforce traditional social and political structures by targeting women leaders who challenge patriarchy and the prevailing social expectations and norms. It restricts women's mobility and capacity to participate within the political sphere. VAWIP has been defined as:

¹ UN Women (2007) *Say NO – UNiTE to end violence against women*. Available from: saynotoviolence.org/issue/facts-and-figures.

² www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf.

³ SAP International (2007) *Unfolding the realities: Silenced Voices of Women in Politics* ed. Nepali, Rohit Kumar, Shrestha Prakash, Kathmandu: SAP International.

The connotation of any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women politicians, including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life.⁴

To be more comprehensive, this study extends the definition of VAWIP to include the inability of women to use their constitutional rights to participate in politics as a voter, an activist or an active and engaged citizen.

This study addresses the nature, extent and reasons for violence that inhibits women's political participation within India, Nepal and Pakistan. All three countries have recently elected or are in the process of electing their national law making bodies. Throughout these countries the percentage of women candidates fielded by political parties has increased as has the percentage of female voters, but the percentage of female representatives in the national bodies have decreased over the years. Except for a few chosen female politicians, most of the elected female representatives have a limited or marginal role in important discussions within their political party or within the national decision-making processes.

The constitutions of all the three countries give equal rights to women and do not restrict them from contesting elections. Therefore a legal procedure addressing VAWIP as a type of VAW is available.⁵ However, none of these countries have legislation that deals strictly with VAWIP.

The three objectives of the study are to:

1. Understand the context of violence against women in the three countries related to gender-based violence in elections.
2. Understand the nature and extent of VAWIP, the motive behind such violence, and the effect of this violence.
3. Increase awareness of VAWIP by identifying and disseminating best practices in combating VAWIP through the facilitation of a consultative workshop.

This study employed a mix method approach in order to examine, analyse and understand the

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