

**Impact Ideation Workshop: Global Sustainable Development  
Monday 28<sup>th</sup> November  
Hauser Forum, West Cambridge**

**Interview with Maryam Tanwir**

**Hi Maryam, thanks for talking to us today about your research and some of the ways you have put that research into action!**



Hi! My background is that I have a PhD in International Development and since then have been specializing in gender-related subjects around policy. I also work as a gender consultant for the World Bank and the United Nations. And for the last few years I have also worked on a fascinating project on Women Against Violence Centres in Pakistan, alongside a [big study](#) on the problem of intimate partner violence published three years ago.

**What is the big problem that your work addresses?**

At the time we were carrying out our last study, Pakistan was the 6<sup>th</sup> most dangerous country in the world for intimate partner violence. Now it is the second most dangerous. So within the span of a few years, women are in a more dangerous place than they were ever before in Pakistan. This is a huge crisis and a very important areas to focus. We can sum it up simply by asking where is the most dangerous place for women? – in fact, it is the home. Yes, if you pick up the newspaper in Pakistan, you will see domestic violence against rich or middle class women reported, and there is a public outcry against violence towards women. Despite this women are still murdered. For rural women they really have no voice, their deaths don't even go reported. It is these rural women who I want to focus on in my work.

**Tell us a bit about the project and the contribution by social science researchers like yourself?**

I was involved in a project initiated by the Government of Pakistan: the Women Against Violence Centres. The principle behind this was that because of the culture of misogyny faced by women in Pakistan, women who get abused or raped find that when they go to lodge a complaint, the police don't take them seriously. When they have to go to court they find the judge won't take them seriously either. They can wind up being put in jail or into safe houses – and those safe houses are very much not safe places for women.

In response to this the government set up the Centres where the police, the judiciary, the lawyers, everybody was there in one place where women could find refuge and could receive training and economic support for a transition towards a safer future.

But unfortunately the minute that there was a change in government, the new government cut off all funding and the project was in disarray. This was despite the fact that so much had been achieved and we had found that the intervention worked so well that lots of other countries asked Pakistan for help to replicate this.

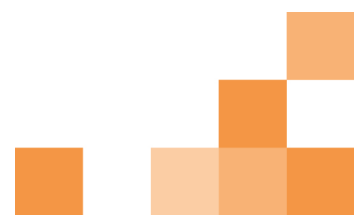
### **What do you see as a pathway to beginning to address this problem?**

I started to research about the kind of gadgets available for women with more means, who are able to be more cognisant about personal safety, whether it's a smartphone, whether it's battery-operated alarm system. In these cases, you press a button on the system and it sends an alert that the victim is being abused. These systems are in place now in Pakistan, but it is richer educated women who have access to smartphones, and what's more obviously these women, even with these measures in place, still get abused. Rural women find it very difficult to access a SIM card – basically impossible – or mobile data or even a smartphone. By the way, most murders are committed by repeat offenders, where women have already complained about abuse and not found an escape.

So, what can we do to improve on this? And can technology help us here? I'm focusing again on poor rural women. I started to think that it would be possible to develop something that the woman can have next to her body or attached to her body which is innocuous, which can emit an audible alarm or another signal of distress. This signal can be picked up in the community, especially by the other women of the community.

Typically, what happens is that the man feels that he has the right and has the power to abuse women if they don't comply. So, this is the misogynistic mindset, which actually may also be reflected in law or in religious cultural customs. And that is the backdrop against which he flies into a violent rage.

The idea with this technology is to interrupt the violence, to create a bit of time in which violence can be diffused or others can respond. It also makes the violence visible to the community. I would say it should be the women of the community who can act and respond to help other women.



**It's exciting to think that there are possibilities for the research to be translated into a technological solution. What are your next steps?**

There are still unanswered questions to tackle. I'm going to Pakistan in December to research with some of the women and ask them "what sort of a safety device would you like to have?"

When we worked with women who were getting abused in the Women Against Violence Centres in Multan, they would put a tracker on the male aggressor and the effect was that slowly we began see a change in the permissive culture around violence against their women.

The same sort of approach could be true in the communities I'm working with. And if we could simultaneously organize with the government to do a bit of training with the local mosques around the communities where we are installing these technologies, and if we could talk to the Imams there and get them to agree that the mosque will be involved in calling out domestic violence as something which is not acceptable, not sanctified... that could really start changing the social norms and start to save lives.

