

# Masculinity and Online Abuse

Digital discourse targeting women in Pakistan





Lead Researcher - Nazish Brohi  
Co Researcher - Sadaf Khan



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## Authors' Note

We write this note at a time when many women in Pakistan are grappling with two dominant emotions - fear and anger. The fear has been triggered by a gang rape of a woman in front of her young children, on a highway where her car ran out of petrol. The anger has to do with the response. The police chief berated her for travelling late night on a deserted road without a male guardian. The identified perpetrators had prior criminal cases against them including one who was allowed an out of court settlement after a prior rape charge. It's yet another example of the system failing women.

Hyper-masculinity has surged across media outlets in Pakistan and voices from women's movements continue to be ignored while they demand fixing crisis response institutions and identify impunity and not severity of punishment as the biggest issue in the criminal justice system, where less than 5% of rape cases result in convictions; you cannot sentence who you cannot convict.

While the gang rape has been vehemently condemned by all, many men have raised mishandling of the case by officials, many have distanced themselves from perpetrators by deigning them animals and ravening beasts, some have been apologetic about dominant masculine codes, while others have blamed women for not being more cautious. Still others have blamed vulgarity in movies, not following Islam, feminism, increasing divorce rates and co-education.

We understand dominant, idealized masculinity as a critical maintenance engineer for patriarchy. In its role of rewarding compliance with it and penalizing transgression against it, it subjugates women but also men and boys in varying intensities.

We also see that things are shifting. Unprecedented discussions on victim-blaming and rape trial procedures are taking place on mainstream television talkshows. The controversial placard from the Women's March 'mera jism, meri marzi' (my body, my choice) which we had been tracking through hashtags is back in the limelight, but this time with a higher degree of acceptance as a valid slogan. New cases of extreme violence encounter public castigation, such as TV artist Shaheena murdered by her husband in Turbat, Balochistan; an art exhibition was held as a memorial for her. A film maker, Jami Mahmood, has publicly accused a media tycoon of raping him years ago, triggering online discussions about male rape and on how men are impacted by sexual aggression. A Pakistani online serial Churrails is creating ripples for subversive content and stirring conversations on feminism.

We don't of course know whether this public attention will have staying power and translate into a push for systemic change, or whether it is simply an ephemeral moment in fickle and churning news cycles. The uncertainty underscores the need for sustained critical engagement on how masculinities are shaped, perpetuated and contested, to build a more nuanced understanding of the mechanics of incremental change. We hope this study contributes to the process.

Nazish Brohi

Sadaf Khan

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## Research Layout

This research is drafted in five specific sections.

**Section one, Introduction and Framework** lays down the theoretical grounding of the research and outlines the analytical framework and methodology. It is through this section that the essential approaches, assumptions and techniques of data collection and analysis are explained.

**Section two, Assessment of Digital Narratives** presents three case studies. Two of the case studies are based on quantitative data gathered from Twitter and Facebook and one presenting the case of online violence against women journalists. The first case study is focused on Qandeel Baloch, a social media celebrity who was murdered by her brother for honor. The second case study focuses on the Aurat March (Women's March), an annual event that takes place of women's day and has triggered increasingly violent response online and the third case study looks at online violence against women journalists. This section presents the main data on which the study stands.

**Section three, Understanding Adaptive Masculinities** is an analytical chapter in which the data is analysed to provide a deeper dive into notions of masculinities. In the light of the literature review, and data gathered from the digital analysis, this section contextualises how violence against women is understood as a discourse and how intersecting forces and responses create ideas about dynamic masculinities. This section also includes a case study about all male digital spaces and the discourse on masculinity within such spaces. This section presents the meat of the research and creates the basis for the main findings

**Section four, Stakeholder Responses** consists of five chapters looking at the how policy makers, civil society, youth groups and media have engaged with and responded to hegemonic narratives around masculinity. This chapter identifies stakeholder approaches towards masculinities and identifies gaps in responses.

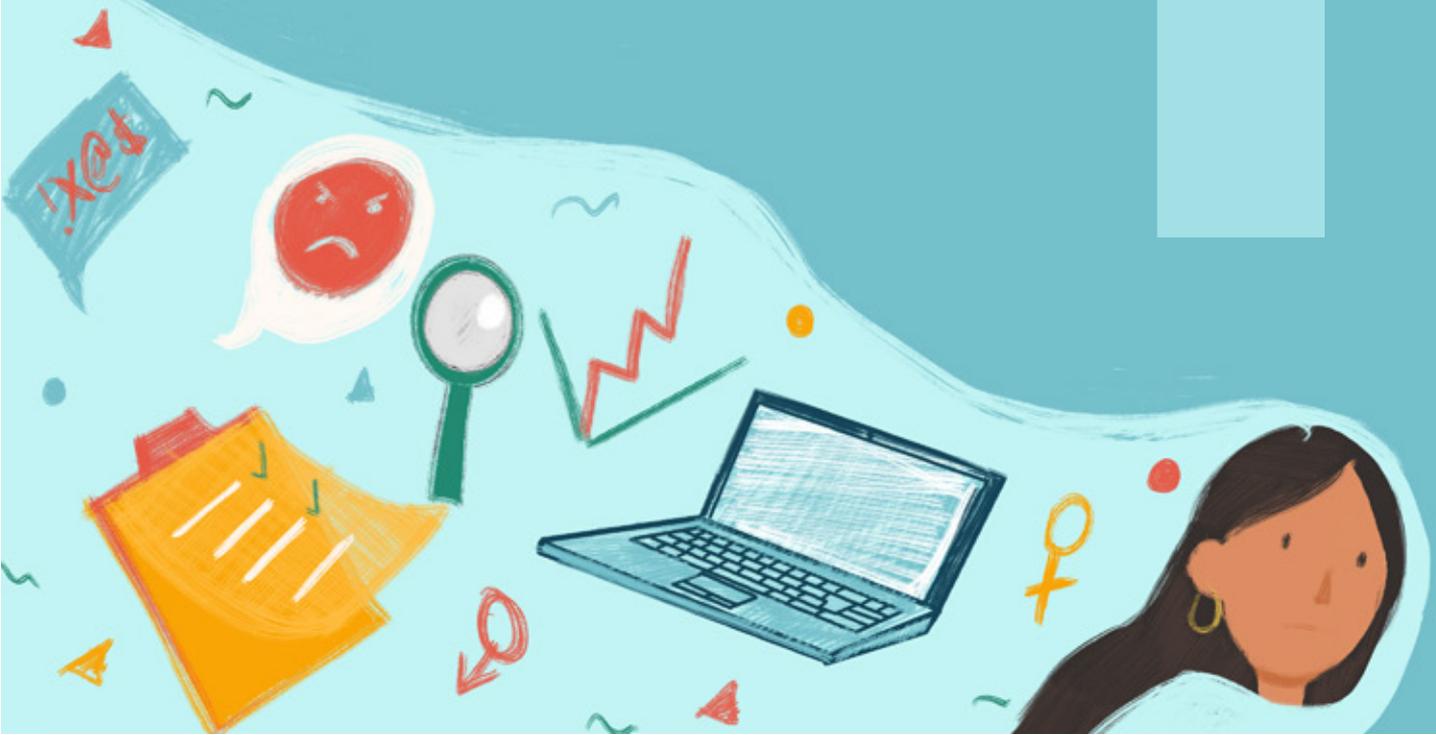
**Section five, Way Forward** presents the key findings and recommendations, bringing together the main learnings from the research.

# Introduction and Framework

## Section 1

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## 1.1 – Background and Context

Under its Kamyab Jawan: Youth Empowerment Programme, UNDP is seeking to employ innovative research methods to understand existing and emerging development issues in Pakistan. While the existence and perpetuation of hyper-masculine views in public discourse and policy measures is a matter of common knowledge, their percolation in the digital realm poses unprecedented development challenges to researchers and policy makers working on women's empowerment. This research aims to understand the preponderance and resilience of hyper-masculine narratives on social and digital media in Pakistan with the objective of analyzing their social impacts and informing possible policy and programming actions for women, girls and gender minorities safety, inclusion, equality and empowerment in national development processes, in line with Goal 5 of the SDGs.

This study explores how masculinity and its harmful manifestations legitimize and perpetuate gendered power structures in Pakistan. As online platforms gain prominence as venues for shaping socio-political commentaries, they also become sites for transference of socio-political and cultural realities; a portal for channelling inequalities, discriminations and marginalization into the virtual world.

Focusing on online threats, intimidation and harassment faced by women, the study examines the connection between violence against women and hegemonic masculinities. It

grew out of the need to understand how efforts for change are thwarted and their liberating potential for women and young people ends up getting subsumed under and reproducing mainstream dynamics.

Laws in Pakistan used to be commonly identified as the bedrock of institutionalized discrimination and structural violence against women. The earlier focus of efforts to challenge gender asymmetries was necessarily legalistic. Over the past decade and a half, most of the anomalies in the legal system have been addressed and fixed. However, almost none of these are evenly implemented<sup>1</sup>. A plethora of researches, reports, conference proceedings and gap analyses trace back this inertia to 'lack of political will', 'patriarchy' and 'preservation of status quo' by men in positions of authority<sup>2</sup>. What forces enable convergence and funnelling of disparate men's interest and coalesce different institutions' efforts into stalling reform? Deeper excavation is required for understanding how systems operate and perpetuate violence against women.

Another impetus of the study is to work towards freeing young people from those norms which now work more as constraints rather than enablers of social cohesion. Young people are continually held back by gender roles and societal expectations which are out of sync with their lived realities<sup>3</sup>. They are heirs to gender stereotypes that no longer respond to their

1 Muneer, S. (2018) 'Pro-Women Laws in Pakistan: Challenges Towards Implementation', (source: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324039364\\_Pro-women\\_Laws\\_in\\_Pakistan\\_Challenges\\_towards\\_Implementation/link/5aba5990458515fcc95e0046/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324039364_Pro-women_Laws_in_Pakistan_Challenges_towards_Implementation/link/5aba5990458515fcc95e0046/download)).

2 Zubair, M., Haider, S.I., and Khattak, F., (2018) 'The Implementation Challenges to Women Protection Laws in Pakistan' published in Global Regional Review (GRR), Vol.III, No. 1, pp. 253-264.

3 Mayer, D. (2018) 'How Men Get Penalized for Straying from Masculine Norms' published in the Harvard Business Review (Source: <https://hbr.org/2018/10/how-men-get-penalized-for-straying-from-masculine-norms>).

socio-economic realities and political conditions and hold them back in various ways, which they either prescribe to and practice, or contest and challenge.

Even as the youth faces entrenched structural barriers, new challenges simultaneously emerge. For instance, as violence against women persists, it also mutates into new forms such as online harassment, revenge porn and revenge rapes. Online spaces are a nascent site for revitalizing acceptability for gender tropes, policing transgressions and subverting the gains that access to democratized media platforms potentially promised women<sup>4</sup>. These require attention, given their exponential growth and the impact on young people.

This study interrogates the idea of mainstream monolithic masculinity. The construct has multiple manifestations, and dominant, idealized masculinity which obstructs change, is itself in flux. The porosity of systems, including harmful masculinities offers possibilities of meaningful change.

The study also looks at how these emergent issues are processed and understood by stakeholders, including students, activists, journalists and politicians. It considers how they evaluate the range of available policy options and civil society responses, and how those may steer future directions.

### Why study online spaces?

The universe of the study is online social media platforms, specifically Twitter and Facebook.

While Internet access in Pakistan is still limited, the number of people interacting online is significant and growing rapidly. Facebook alone has 36 million accounts operating from Pakistan, of which 21% are women<sup>5</sup>. Twitter with 1.26 million users including 18% women, has emerged as a major platform for political conversation and propaganda - both of which often inform the news and current affairs discourse on mainstream media<sup>6</sup>. Tweets by policymakers often make headline news and provide a response metric and feedback loop. Both Twitter and Facebook have emerged as powerful platforms which play a significant role in the determination of public narratives.

The popularity of printed newspapers and television channels, the previously popular modes for news consumption in Pakistan, have declined over the past few years and continue to cede audiences to digital media. They are no longer the main medium for setting the parameters of public discourse on issues important to the country.

A survey by Gallup<sup>7</sup> from April 2018, shows that over a period of 9 years, daily television viewership has declined. It finds only 19 percent of viewers watched news on television. Similarly, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics shows a significant decrease in print publications of all types across the country. In 2009, there were 1,039 publications registered in the country. By 2018 there were only 695 left. The move by major publications, especially mainstream English papers, to focus more on their digital brands in the past few years also signals a wider

4 Marjan, N. and Flamoe, A. (2019) 'Silencing Women: Gender and Online Harassment' published in *Social Science Computer Review*, pp. 1-14, (source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0894439319865518>)

5 Digital Reportal 2019: Pakistan (source: <https://www.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2019-pakistan-january-2019-v02>)

6 Ibid.

7 (<https://gallup.com.pk/>)

shift to digital. Previously, English newspapers in the country were thought to have more impact on policy discourse than Urdu papers. This changed with the rise of broadcast news and the shift towards discourse on the internet becoming more prominent.

As online spaces providing platforms for socio-political commentary become increasingly influential, they take on the attributes of public spaces in Pakistan - majoritarian, threatening for women and frequently veer into hostility for particular class and ethnic identities.

Violence, abuse, degradation, surveillance and control experienced by women elsewhere manifests in online bullying, slander, sexual objectification, sexually graphic threats and intimidation. Its online prevalence is aided by two factors:

- Dearth of adequate digital jurisprudence to moderate online behaviour. Impunity stems from lack of understanding and mechanisms of response, given the relative newness of the issue. While traditional media over time developed ways of balancing free speech and freedom of expression with slander and abuse, online spaces have started grappling with these concerns more recently. The democratization of media via online spaces present a challenge where traditional arbiters and filters of editorial control cannot be enforced.
- The anonymity factor weighs in. Cultural and interpersonal inhibitors which regulate in-person interactions and tone down direct, face to face hostility do not exist online.

Distance, anonymity, culturally ingrained mannerisms and lack of repercussions for actions define the online ecosystem, reducing legal and moral culpability<sup>8</sup>. While this has been a liberating tool for many, it also allows for collective action largely without collective or even individual consequences.

### What does online violence against women look like?

Attacks against women on online platforms has become a growing concern in Pakistan. As the initially niche online community has grown exponentially, the nature of challenges have morphed and multiplied, and online violence against women has become a nascent public concern, although it still remains peripheral to political and policy discourses.

In May 2019, in Badin, Sindh, a teenage girl committed suicide after being blackmailed online by three men who doctored her photographs. The gang managed to extort money and when she couldn't pay more, the images were sent to her fiancé, who broke off their engagement because of it<sup>9</sup>.

In 2015, in one of the earlier cases that caught media and public attention, a hacker calling himself Gandageer Khan was hacking into women's accounts and superimposing their photos onto explicit naked photographs of other women and demanding money to not publish them online. When a student from Peshawar refused, the doctored images were uploaded along with her name, phone number and messages of being open to solicitation for sex. Fifty young women were blackmailed over

8 Zimmerman, A. (2012) 'Online Aggression: The Influences of Anonymity and Social Modelling', University of North Florida Graduate Thesis (source:<https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1472&context=etd>).

9 Samoon, H. (2019, May 21). *Badin police arrest man accused of blackmailing girl who died by suicide*. Retrieved from Dawn.com: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1483652/badin-police-arrest-man-accused-of-blackmailing-girl-who-died-by-suicide>

two years by two men, Muhammad Ali Shah and Suhail who were eventually arrested.<sup>10</sup>

Since then, there have been thousands of complaints registered with FIA (Federal Investigation Agency), out of which FIA has been able to make arrests in several cases<sup>11</sup>. There are other cases in orders of magnitude that do not get reported to FIA for the same reasons women often do not register formal cases against different kinds of abuse and exploitation.

Between 2018 and 2020, the FIA dealt with over 400 cases of women being blackmailed online through threats of circulating their inappropriate videos and photographs<sup>12</sup>. In February 2020, the FIA set up a 24/7 cybercrime helpline. Within a month, over 100 women filed complaints of online harassment, blackmail and defamation.<sup>13</sup> Other complaints among the nearly 800 total filed included pornography, fake Facebook profiles and unauthorized access, in addition to financial fraud, hacking and online shopping frauds.

A study by Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD) focusing on [online violence faced by women journalists in Pakistan](#) showed that 9 out of 10 women journalists face mental health issues due to continued online violence<sup>14</sup>.

Journalists quoted in the study hold that “The trend of trolling, abuse, violence has increased after 2014”. Threats to media and journalists are common in Pakistan, and 9 out of 10 respondents of the survey agreed that “Women who are vocal online are more vulnerable to online violence”.

The DRF (Digital Rights Foundation) set up a cyber harassment helpline at the end of 2016, and published records for the first two years<sup>15</sup>. In this duration, DRF received 2,781 calls, averaging out to over 90 calls a month. The largest number of complaints received were about harassment via Facebook (29% of total complaints). In more than 50% of cases, the victim was between 21 and 30 years of age. The highest number of complaints were regarding non-consensual use of data and blackmail, followed by hacking of accounts and unwanted contact.

DRF also carried out a broad-ranging online harassment survey with women and girls in Pakistan in 2016<sup>16</sup>. The study was based on 1400 responses of women and girls in 17 universities and colleges across Pakistan<sup>17</sup>. 34% had experienced forms of online harassment directly, and another 55% witnessed other women suffer through it. 90% of them were between 18 and 25 years of age. 40% of them had been stalked or harassed through the messaging app, 29%

10 Parkin, S. (2016, June 28). *Pakistan's Troll Problem*. Retrieved from The New Yorker: <https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/pakistans-troll-problem>

11 Shahzad, M. (2019, March 3). *Cybercriminal arrested for blackmailing woman*. Retrieved from The Express Tribune: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1921964/1-cybercriminal-arrested-blackmailing-woman>

12 Khan, Z. A. (2020, March 11). *409 Pakistani women blackmailed online in last two years: report*. Retrieved from Samaa: <https://www.samaa.tv/news/pakistan/2020/03/409-pakistani-women-blackmailed-online-in-last-two-years-report/>

13 Wahab, N. (2020, March 10). *Cyber crime helpline: Over 100 women complain against online harassment in a month*. Retrieved from The News International: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/626813-cyber-crime-helpline-over-100-women-complain-against-online-harassment-in-a-month>

14 Kamran, H. (2019). *Hostile Bytes: A study of online violence against women journalists*. Islamabad: Media Matters for Democracy.

15 Digital Rights Foundation. (2019). *Cyber Harassment Helpline*. Lahore: Digital Rights Foundation.

16 Digital Rights Foundation. (2017). *Measuring Pakistani women's experience of online violence*. Lahore: Digital Rights Foundation.

17 In higher educational institutes in Charsadda, Peshawar, Jam Shoro, Tando Jam, Karachi, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Sialkot, Lahore, Multan, Quetta and Gilgit

had been sent inappropriate sexualized photos and 69% received unwanted messages. 16% had been threatened with physical violence, another 39% knew of other women who received such threats. 23% had been victims of leaked information/ doxxing. And these were just students.

When asked why more than 70% did not report nor knew of others who reported such crimes, women said it was embarrassing to do so and they thought their complaints would not be taken seriously and given attention. DRF highlights the larger context of victim-blaming, fear, honour-shaming and lack of family support as barriers to reporting. In Pakistan, the trepidations, stigma and shame around reporting sexual offences both online and offline are widely recognized concerns.

Blackmail, abuse, stalking, doxxing, sending lewd photographs and other forms of online harassment cannot be addressed simply through law and order controls. Curbing such practices and behaviours require centralizing impunity, patriarchy and codes of masculinity that validate, enable, and proliferate evolving forms of violence against women.

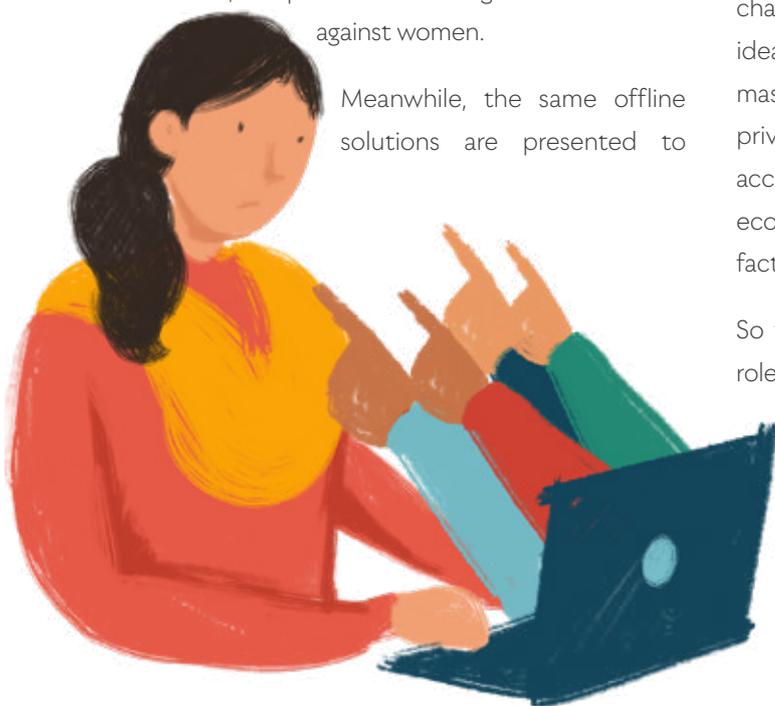
Meanwhile, the same offline solutions are presented to

women for online harassment: to remove themselves from the situation. Women rights activists point out that women experiencing harassment at workplaces are advised by their circles of support to change their job; women who get harassed in public places are advised by families and communities to either withdraw from the public domain or to regulate themselves, such as by going with an escort, covering themselves, etc. This behavioural pattern is repeated in the digital space, with women often advised to withdraw from the social media platform where they experienced abuse or harassment.

### Why are masculinities part of the problem?

Gender roles and behaviours are not biological phenomena. While the sex attributed to a person may be determined mostly by physiology (and that too is contested), gender refers to the socially constructed nature of identities, roles, expectations and ideals<sup>18</sup>. These result in caricature-like ideals and gender power structures enforce compliance and punish transgressions. The notion of masculinities challenges the assumed naturalness of the ideal male, positing that there is a spectrum of masculinities, and societies and communities privilege one form over another, shaping them according to class, race, ethnicity, religion, economy and mode of production among other factors<sup>19</sup>.

So while patriarchal expectations place men in roles of dominance and aggression, this is not true



18 World Health Organization, 'Gender and Genetics' (source: <https://www.who.int/genomics/gender/en/index1.html>)

19 Messerschmidt J.W. (2018) Multiple Masculinities. In: Risman B., Froyum C., Scarborough W. (eds) Handbook of the Sociology of Gender. Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research. Springer, Cham. (Source: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76333-0\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76333-0_11))

of all men – even as men overall tend to benefit from dividends of patriarchy<sup>20</sup>. While most perpetrators of violent crimes are men, most men are not violent or abusive. In an effort to understand the variations in men's behaviour and manifested gender identities and to de-naturalize male aggression, scholars, feminist thinkers and practitioners examine the range of masculinities, and observe they are actively produced, culturally contingent, and historically variable.

The dominant, or hegemonic masculinity in Pakistan props up a hyper-masculine ideal, of the true man as brave, strong, in control, well-built, virile, hardworking, unflinching, the bread-winner, responsible for family decisions, welfare, prestige and honour. Such hegemonic masculinity compels dominance over women because the ability to control is definitive for such masculinity, and because male honour is vested in exercising this control over women, especially in maintaining control of their bodies and sexuality. Violence and the threat of violence is one of the prominent ways of asserting dominance and for punishing women's transgressions into bodily autonomy<sup>21</sup>. Women's exercise of agency directly interpellates dishonourable male relatives.

## 1.2 - Analytical Framework

Understanding masculinities to be a spectrum, the research framework focuses on particular expressions of masculinity which militate against gender equality and create consent for power asymmetries. It addresses the constellation of dominance and power which configures manliness.

The concept of patriarchy highlights the congruence and protection of male interests and explains anomalies such as why women are often themselves embedded in and uphold such systems, and why dominant masculinities subjugate even men. It explains how violence against women which may at one level be an individual act, but is also a cumulative result of privilege, impunity, social endorsement and entitlement. Violence against women, marginalization of disparate gender identities and idealization of harmful masculinities are inextricably linked<sup>22</sup>.

Analysts have pointed to the collective nature of dominant masculinities, sustained and enacted not only by individuals but also by groups, institutions and mass media. Online platforms are one such site for exerting dominance and enforcing compliance with norms. Abuse, threats, slander and sexual objectification of women become resources for maintaining social order. This study attempts to instrumentally examine hegemonic masculinity in Pakistan as the value system that maintains and reproduces patriarchy, creating acceptability and circulation of gendered forms of power.

Hyper-masculinity creates idealized images of men who are physically strong, tough, sexually aggressive and willing to inflict violence to keep women in line. One of the first studies of hyper-masculinity explained hyper-masculinity or the 'macho personality' as consisting of three variables: callous sexual attitudes toward

20 Ibid

21 Aurat Foundation (2016) 'Comparative Analysis of Masculinity and Femininity in Pakistan: A Qualitative Analysis' (source: <http://af.org.pk/gep/images/GEP%20Gender%20Studies/Comparative%20Analysis%20of%20Masculinity%20and%20Femininity%20in%20Pakistan.pdf>)

22 Connell RW, Messerschmidt JW. Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*. 2005;19(6):829-859. doi:[10.1177/0891243205278639](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639)

women; the belief that violence is manly; the experience of danger as exciting, and found it most prevalent during adolescence and young adulthood, from then on solidifying into normativity<sup>23</sup>.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity is more nuanced. R.W Connell defines it as, "The currently most honoured way of being a man", bringing in its mutability and adaptive capacity to serve class, locational, regional, ethnic and other variations<sup>24</sup>. Connecting hegemony with masculinity, Kimmel and Davis explain, "The process of influence where we learn to earnestly embrace a system of beliefs and practices that essentially harm us, while working to uphold the interests of others who have power over us"<sup>25</sup>. The notion of hegemony is borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, essentially signalling a position of dominance attained through relative consensus rather than regular use of force, even if underpinned by use of force.

Masculinity, and men, in simple terms are a social category of gender. Patriarchy as a system links gender to a structure of power. Qualifying oppressive masculinity as hegemonic allows for understanding that there are multiple masculinities; that it evolves and adapts, making static depictions inadequate; that its dominance is maintained through consensus and explains how and why it is upheld even by those who are oppressed by it.

Ben Light draws attention to the production, circulation, validation and amplification online by

using the concept of networked masculinities<sup>26</sup>. Co-production and reproduction that happens online, whether through retweets, status sharing, engaging and commenting, becomes as generative as the original production. Light explains that while the original content may be an opinion, reflection, rant or accusation, its circulation through networked masculinities makes it the benchmark of what is considered normal. One individual's expression gathers velocity as it gathers validation, and such echoes solidify into the norm. In this sense, while a person may create a social media post, its circulation creates a separate thing, consensus. This research framework focuses on the aspect of legitimation raised by Light's study.

This study recognizes its limited, instrumentalist approach to hegemonic masculinity in using it as a conduit to addressing violence against women. Hegemonic masculinity is oppressive for men and boys across Pakistan who find themselves held back by the weight of expectations and pressures of conformity. They are heirs to norms and beliefs that no longer respond to their socio-economic realities and political conditions, which confine and harm many of them in various ways even while many others benefit from it. Men have responded variously, by prescribing to, practicing, or contesting and challenging these notions of masculinity. There is much justification for further nuanced research on masculinity that is not as instrumentalist and assesses it on its own terms.

23 Mosher, D.L. and Sirkin, M. (1984) 'Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation' published in *Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol 18, Issue 2, pp. 150-163 (source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0092656684900266>).

24 Connell RW, Messerschmidt JW. (2005) Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, Vol.19, Issue 6:829-859. (source:[10.1177/0891243205278639](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639))

25 Kimmel, M. S., & Davis, T. (2011). Mapping guyland in college. In J. A. Laker & T. Davis (Eds.), *Masculinities in higher education: Theoretical and practical considerations* (pp. 3-15). New York, NY: Routledge

26 Light, B.(2013). Networked Masculinities and Social Networking Sites: A Call for the Analysis of Men and Contemporary Digital Masculinities and Social Change, 2 (3), 245-265. doi: 10.4471/MCS.2013.34

Hegemonic masculinity is not a Pakistan-specific crisis and is reflective of global phenomenon. Pankaj Mishra, writing on *The Crisis in Modern Masculinity*<sup>27</sup> explicates the global need of a 'redeeming machismo' in face of seismic sociological shifts. He explains, "The quest for virility distilled a widespread response among men psychically battered by such uncontrollable and emasculating phenomena as industrialisation, urbanisation and mechanisation. The ideal of a strong, fearless manhood came to be embodied in muscular selves, nations, empires and races..... Rapid economic, social and technological change in our own time has plunged an exponentially larger number of uprooted and bewildered men into a doomed quest for masculine certainties."

Mishra's framing posits modern masculinity anxieties not as continuity of traditional patriarchy but a phenomenon birthed by change. It is particularly relevant for this study, which from its outset is anchored in exploring porosity of systems, tracing change that has already occurred and that which is further possible. Whereas Mishra delves into modernity as the rite of passage for resurgent machismo, this study looks towards gains in women's rights and empowerment as the seismic shift which has led to a crisis or blowback.

### 1.3 - Methodology

This study proceeds in two tiers:

- Establishing problems resulting from online articulations of hegemonic masculinity by attempting a deeper analysis through four case studies, and
- Mapping stakeholder responses to online abuse of women and harmful, hegemonic masculinities.

The virulence against women in online spaces is different from traditional conservatism that developed over generations in response to specific economic, political, sociological and technological conditions of prior times. The internet provided a democratized, free, and potentially neutral space which initially promised women new freedoms. The terms of engagement could potentially have been different without the weight of traditional institutions, community identities and expectations. Instead, discrimination, repression and violence against women was carried over into online spaces – but unmoored from the traditional structures responsible for their evolution and perpetuation.

By establishing a continuity with traditional forms of masculinity and by wielding disciplining narratives of culture, religion and modesty, offline and online worlds connect and converge into overarching, socially legitimated hegemonic masculinity.

This study aims to examine dominant masculinity as the construct that delineates, produces, generates and licences gender ideologies, creating both, victims and aggressors.

<sup>27</sup> Mishra, P. (2018, March 17). *The crisis in modern masculinity*. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/17/the-crisis-in-modern-masculinity>

## Tier 1

The first part of the study is based on collating and analysing online commentary through four case studies:

Case study	Explanation	Importance	Site	Method
1 <b>Qandeel Baloch</b>	Social media celebrity murdered by brother over outraged honour in 2016	Captures debates on gendered morality, victimhood and public judgments. Added to momentum for legal change	Twitter and Facebook	Secondary data. Quantitative data extraction with analysis  Review of published literature
2 <b>Aurat March</b>	Annual demonstrations for women's rights, held for 3 consecutive years in multiple cities. Organized by feminist associations.	Bring together a broad range of women. Has resulted in blowback and blamed for being divisive. Marchers face threats, bullying, lawsuits and physical attacks	Twitter and Facebook	Secondary data. Quantitative data extraction with analysis  Review of published literature
3 <b>Women journalists</b>	Open group letter disclosing threats, graphic sexual abuse and intimidation targeting women journalists.	Initiated by 15 women, now has over 150 signatories. First collective, organized pushback by women against online abuse. Taken up by a parliamentary committee.	Twitter and mainstream media	Primary data. Co-researcher's personal account of involvement  Online and political reactions
4 <b>Discussion on Soul Brothers</b>	FB male-only group dealing with masculinities and gender politics	Largest Pakistani all-male online group subject of critique and discussion in a conversation between men	Online pod-cast, The Pakistan Experience	Content analysis and discourse observation  Review of relevant literature

## Data Mining

Facebook and Twitter, the two social media platforms widely used in Pakistan were utilized for this study.

For Twitter, an online microblogging platform, the data was retrieved using the Twitter API. Pre-processing included conversion of formats, trimming of data columns and data scrubbing.

Due to the usage of roman English (Urdu words spelt out in English), inversions in intent statements, and interpretive implications, the sentiment analysis for classification was conducted manually with each tweet evaluated by human review.

The outputs were categorised as either "positive", "negative", "neutral" or "ignored".

"Ignored" tweets were used for overall assessments and discarded for granular visualisations.

Total tweets refer to the total number of relevant tweets retrieved from the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) for the analysis time period, which included the marked hashtags and were categorised with English or Urdu as the listed language.

Net Tweets refers to the net number of tweets retrieved from the Twitter Application

Programming Interface (API) for the analysis time period, used for the statistical analysis. These differ from the Total Tweets in the following ways:

- Exclude retweets
- Exclude conversational replies
- Exclude tweets which only contain media and no text
- Exclude posts which have the same content posted multiple times
- Ignore thematically irrelevant posts trying to piggyback off the popularity of the hashtag trend
- Ignore thematically irrelevant tweets attached to trending hashtag
- Include slang conversion for artificial intelligence definitions e.g. "coz" => "because" | "enuff" => "enough" | "smh" => "shake my head" => "to disapprove" or "to be in disbelief"
- Include language conversion from Urdu to English, and use translation for Urdu posts

### Case Study 1

The hashtags used for Case Study on Qandeel Baloch tracked the hashtags #QandeelBaloch, #Qandeel, #Qandeel\_Baloch.

The retrieval date range was from 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 to 1<sup>st</sup> August 2016.

98,083 total tweets were retrieved, which filtered down to 23,292 net tweets. Of these, 11,411 tweets were analysed.

### Case Study 2

The hashtags used for Case Study on Aurat March were far more numerous, with events in multiple cities and over three years. The hashtags tracked were:

#AuratMarch  
 #AuratAzadiMarch  
 #AuratMarch2018  
 #AuratMarch2019  
 #AuratMarchSindh  
 #AuratMarchLahore  
 #AuratAzadiMarchSukkur  
 #AuratMarchMultan  
 #AuratMarchIslamabad  
 #AuratAzadiMarch2020  
 #MeraJismMeriMarzi  
 #WeRejectMeraJismMeriMarzi

Aurat March year	Date band for tweets	Total tweets retrieved	Net tweets analysed
2020	8 <sup>th</sup> Feb – 8 <sup>th</sup> April 2020	80,497	15,008
2019	8 <sup>th</sup> Feb – 8 <sup>th</sup> April 2019	21,747	3897
2018	8 <sup>th</sup> Feb – 8 <sup>th</sup> April 2018	1841	474

### Facebook

After Facebook changed their Application Programming Interface (API) following the Cambridge Analytica incident, it is no longer possible to programmatically retrieve posts or comments made by users. This substantially limits the data available and limits the possibilities of using the platform for deriving quantitative data.

To track sentiment, public photos, derived posts and comments on those were used.

Derived posts refers to the total number of relevant posts available on Facebook which are marked 'public' for the analysis time period. Only posts explicitly marked 'public' were used.

Owing to restricted available data, Facebook was used for supplementary data to see whether responses were consistent or contradictory to Twitter quantitative data analysis, and whether there was cross platform variation. This refers specifically to data mining in the Qandeel Baloch and Aurat March case studies.

The comments by Facebook users on public posts and photos in the time period:

Exclude conversational replies to previous comments since they devolve to personal insults or deviate from topic of original post

Exclude comments relying on memes

Exclude comments where responses are only to link to URLs and other posts

The detailed methodology used for this section is annexed at **Annex 2**.

### Case Study 3

The case study follows the first collective, organized response by women in Pakistan subjected to graphic, sexual and violent online abuse. It follows the experience of women journalists who wrote an open letter calling out the abuse and identifying traits of its propagators and demanded governmental action. It looks at the response to their statement. The case study is written from the perspective of the researcher who was engaged in the process as a part of the women journalists community and observed the response in the public, political and policy circles first hand.

### Case Study 4

This case study consisted of content analysis of an online podcast episode, 'The Pakistan Experience' hosted by Shehzad Ghias.

The podcast was itself a discussion on and discourse observation of an all-male, members-only Facebook group. The tools in this case were a literature review on male critiques of masculinity, and content analysis of the podcast commentary. The commentators included administrators of the Facebook group Soul Brothers, and subject expert and gender analyst Muhammad Moiz.

## Tier 2

### Mapping of stakeholder responses

This section is based on desk research and key informant interviews from different stakeholder groups. Data collected through an analysis of online discourses in public digital spaces, news items and policy texts was used in conjunction with the opinions of key informants. The selection of interviewees in each stakeholder group has been done through purposive expert sampling, seeking out participants with particular characteristics according to the needs of the developing analysis<sup>28</sup>. To ensure diversity, experts from the following stakeholder groups were selected for interviews;

- Youth Groups - Included students engaged in leadership roles and activism on and off campus and those in feminist movements and human rights activism
- Media and Digital Content Producers - Included reporters, editors, and independent digital content producers within the mainstream media industry, digital media and social media
- Parliamentarians - Included Members of National Assembly, Members of Provincial Assemblies from all major political parties, both male and female parliamentarians. Due to challenges posed by COVID19,

<sup>28</sup> Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A., & Futing Liao, T. (2004). *The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods* (Vols. 1-0). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412950589

some of the identified informants could not be reached, and there is some measure of conscious sampling that had to be added as a result.

- Civil Society - Included feminist activists and professional women's rights advocates, and those in movements, alliances and networks.

The interviews were based on semi-structured questions. These were intended as an interview guide and no formal questionnaire was used. Interview questions were adapted according to the respondent's expertise and level of understanding of theoretical terminologies. They intended to explore:

- Respondent's view of general level of awareness and understanding of hegemonic and hyper-masculinity within their own community and their views on community responses

- Respondent's view of movements/measures that have contributed significantly to challenge hegemonic narratives of masculinity
- Identification of gaps in responses and challenges faced

Interviews with the parliamentarians explored the spillover of hyper-masculinity within the legislative process and its overall impact on laws and policies. These focused on:

- Opinions and attitudes affect the legislative process and reflected in policy making
- Opinions on what parliamentarians can do to challenge hegemonic masculinity.

The list of interviewees is attached as **Annex 3**.



# Assessment of Digital Narratives

## Section 2

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This section focuses on three particular case studies. These aim to provide quantitative data to substantiate the kinds of online discourses that articulate hegemonic masculinities and result in threats and online bullying against those who transgress gendered social norms.

The first case study is built around one individual, Qandeel Baloch, one of Pakistan's first and most prominent social media celebrities, murdered by her brother for violating his honor through her online persona and behavior. While alive, Qandeel Baloch was mostly ignored but also ridiculed and castigated by some people online for vulgarity. Her murder however was broadly condemned, made people sympathetic towards her, and for some she posthumously became an icon of resistance.

The second case study pans out to an annual event held in collaboration by various women's

collectives, the Aurat March (Women's March), which has been organized for three consecutive years. In this case, online discourses can be tracked over time to show how people's responses have changed in response to challenges to hegemonic masculinity – this is an overtly declared feminist event and has been met with the usual tirades which feminist discourses trigger in Pakistan.

The third case study looks at online violence against women journalists. In August - September 2020, over 150 women journalists in Pakistan came together to release a series of statements against continuous and violent hate speech that they have faced online. The case study presents an overview of the nature of abuse that is used to target women journalists and identifies how hypermasculinity manifests against women journalists who are vocal online.

## 2.1 Case Study - Qandeel Baloch

In July 2016, Qandeel Baloch, among Pakistan's first social media celebrities, was strangled to death by her brother at the age of 26 years. Her brother admitted to have done so because she violated family honor and he was taunted by other villagers. He has been sentenced to 25 years' imprisonment.

As Bandial and Dad note, "In the aftermath of her death, Qandeel has been reimagined as a symbol of defiance, independence and women's empowerment, but her death is also a reminder of the fate of bold and vocal women in Pakistan."<sup>29</sup>

Qandeel Baloch was generally unknown by mainstream media consumers but notorious

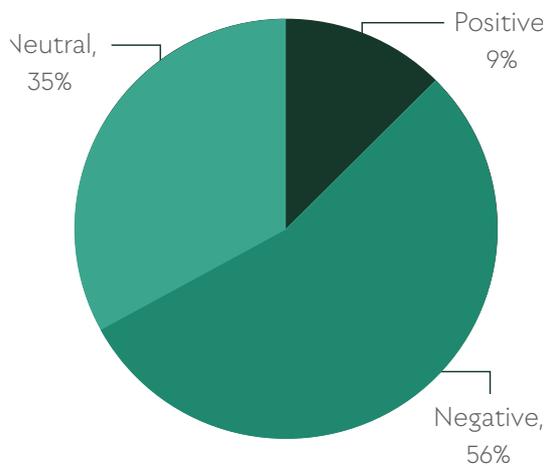
among social media users for her risqué music videos and publicity stunts like offering to strip naked if the Pakistan team won a cricket tournament. She first came in the mainstream limelight when she claimed that one of the popular religious clerics, Mufti Qavi visited her hotel room and behaved inappropriately with her, and shared photographs to substantiate it.

It led to a surge of curiosity about her. Mainstream media journalists wrote exposes about her origins, revealed that she was previously married with a child, what her real name was and such details. She held a press conference pleading to the government for protection in face of accelerating threats. Social media attacks including threats and abuse grew

<sup>29</sup> Dad, S. (2020). The 'honour' in murder. DAWN.COM. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1579389>

in tandem with her fame. The following data offers some glimpses into the responses to the online stardom of Qandeel Baloch.

The sentiment analysis on Twitter commentary shows immense variation before and after Qandeel Baloch’s murder. The analysis has been divided into two sections; the first prior to her death on July 15th, 2016 and the second immediately following her death.



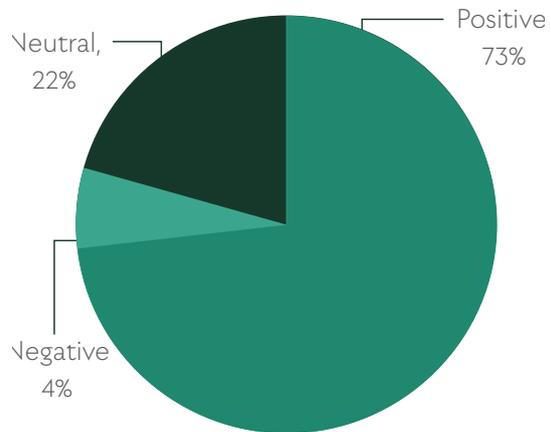
### Pre-death Results | All Tweets June 1 - July 15, 2016

Prior to Baloch’s murder, the engagements were **mostly negative (56%)** with only 9% of the chatter being supportive of her. Thematically, most of the negativity was either ridicule about her presence in the media, or comments slandering her character.

The 1207 tweets analysed included 325 tweets that were spam or irrelevant and thus ignored in the analysis. Among the remaining 882 tweets, the sentiment was distributed as follows



This is a significant change - up from 9% prior to her death - considering there was a sharp increase in the volume of tweets following her death.



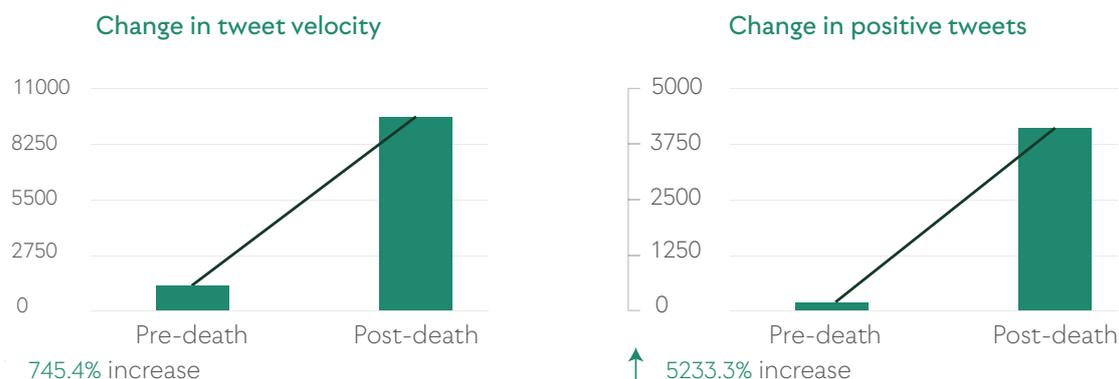
### Post-death Results | 10,204 tweet sample July 15 - August 1, 2016

After Baloch’s murder, there was a marked shift in the sentiment, with the majority being positive (73%) This is a significant change, up from 9% prior to her murder - considering there was a sharp increase in the volume of tweets following her death. Among the total 1-,204 tweets, 1319 were ignored for being spam or irrelevant. Among the remaining 5893 tweets, the sentiment was distributed as follows



### Change in velocity and sentiment

Positive sentiment increased by over 5000% post-death, while the volume of analysed tweets increased by 745%. Negative sentiment declined by 49%. Neutral tweets constituted 25.4% of analysed tweets. for the 45 day pre-death period and the number increased 1226.5% to 4311 in the 10,204 analysed tweets during the 15 day period following her death.



Prior to her death the negative comments were about her lifestyle choices including provocative behaviour, clothing and online postings. Most were condemnations for vulgarity, attention seeking, and accusing her of corrupting culture and minds of younger people. The slurs centred around her assertions of sexuality, and name calling variations of slut, whore and the like. Most negative comments used 'bitch' as the primary expletive. Men wrote in to her or commented on her posts that she reserved to be raped and/ or killed, that they were eager to do both those things if given the opportunity, openly offered her money for sex and sent her unsolicited photos of their genitalia. Women also condemned her, though in fewer numbers, stating she was a blight, a shame, some even claiming she deserved death.

56% of all commentary was negative, and only 9% could be qualified as positive.

The neutral posts mostly carried news about her, and comments were essentially suggesting people ignore her and not take her too seriously or to not judge her.

After her death, the volume of negative comments halved but the virulence of the negative comments continued unabated. Those continued to be abusive, calling her a cancer for society and castigating people for making a heroin out of her. Many said she deserved death

and her brother was compelled to do what he did. Many others said she was exploited by the media, that they were not her fan or supporter but judgment should be left to God alone.

The positive posts increased dramatically after her murder, over five thousand per cent. The positive sentiments expressed lamented the loss of a bright young life, her being a brave beauty who challenged social norms, emphasized her humble origins and fight to reach fame through much adversity. Others condemned her murder and notions of masculine honour for being vested in and restored through murder of women, demanding strict punishment for her brother and emphasised that women always pay the price for bringing about change.

The swing in sentiment could be speculatively explained through various ways:

- The cultural imperative of not speaking ill about the dead and praying for God's forgiveness for the person in question.
- More people finding out about her and intervening in discussions (increase in volume of tweets by 745%). Many people were not aware of her existence till she called out a religious cleric for hypocrisy. Many who learnt about her after her death did not have pre-determined opinions.
- Possibly due to her getting valorized after death, as many translated her lifestyle

choices as being acts of resistance against patriarchal norms. Many social media commentators retrospectively upheld her freedom of choice and expression as a heroic opposition to double standards of society and challenging mainstream ideas of piety and respectability.

- News reports revealed Qandeel belonged to a village in a backward, deprived district, that her family was very poor and she was their sole financial support. It also became known that her ex-husband was abusive and would not let her meet her son. This all may have made people more sympathetic towards her, more so when contrasted with how far she had moved from her point of origin and the media highlighted her struggles.

## Discussion

In understanding responses to different kinds of violence against women, feminist and rights groups point out that women-as-victims are usually able to find some pockets of support within their families and communities, except in instances where there is overt expression of or doubts about involvement of women's sexual agency. For instance, there is a higher probability of survivors of severe domestic violence or rape by strangers finding support, than for victims of honor crimes or date rape since the latter involve questions about degrees of women's consent to the relationship or to the date which led to the crime. This is an outgrowth of the social premium placed on women's sexual purity.

Public morality necessitates that a woman's character be beyond reproach before she is eligible for victimhood status. Assertion of sexual agency renders women complicit in any crimes against them through a cause-and-effect chain, summarized in judgments such as 'she had it coming'.

Other women celebrities in Pakistan who have expressed such sexual agency or engaged in sexually provocative behavior and faced a public backlash have mostly turned to public expressions of piety as a form of atonement<sup>30</sup>. Qandeel's blatant sexuality violated moral codes and impeded public sympathy but her murder worked as an equalizer and atoned for her actions, justifying consequent sympathy and support.

To understand how anxieties about masculinity shaped the case, it is instructive to analyze two particular discourses: one by another social media phenomenon, a man named Farhan Virk who led the campaign to have Qandeel's FaceBook page banned, and second, Waseem - her brother who murdered her.

Farhan Virk is among Pakistan's most well known online personalities, a self avowed troll<sup>31</sup> who rallied supporters for a political party and led one of its social media teams. Virk ran a campaign to get Qandeel's social media account banned for bringing disrepute to the country. As per compilations collected by journalist Sanam Maher who authored a book on Qandeel's life<sup>32</sup>, Virk urged people to condemn her and lodge protests with online authorities. "If you tolerate Qandeel today, then ten years from now every

30 'Rabi Peerzada says she'll focus on fulfilling her religious obligations' published in The News International on November 15, 2019 (source: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/569211-rabi-pirzada-says-she-ll-focus-on-fulfilling-her-religious-obligations>).

31 Waraich, O. (2020). *Hero and Villian: The Man Who Wanted to Be Both*. DAWN.COM. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1570912/hero-and-villain-the-man-who-wanted-to-be-both>

32 Maher, S. (2018) 'The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch' published by the Aleph Book Company on May 18, 2020.

actress will be doing what she is. And then we will hang our heads in shame and the people of India will mock us.”

He went on to goad people into action. “We need to stop her from spreading vulgarity in our Islamic state. Those who do not want to join the campaign and report to Facebook probably don’t have mothers and sisters in their homes, they have other Qandeels in their homes.”

His campaign was successful and her Facebook page, with its 800,000 followers, was banned.

Virk drew on hyper-masculine tropes of honor and dishonor at the personal level, extrapolating it onto hyper-nationalism and outraged notions of national dishonor before archrival India. Those who did not support banning her in this preemptive strike of sorts, would be responsible for all actresses misbehaving and causing national shame. Every self-respecting man should therefore join in, unless the women of their families were also like Qandeel – of bad character, non-existent morals and vulgar.

Similar arguments were echoed by Waseem, Qandeel’s brother, as his justification for murdering her, and by those who supported her killing. Maher documents the local jeering questioning his worth, taunting him for living luxuriously off what she earned from titillation. She notes that villagers said Qandeel’s and Waseem’s uncles, cousins and friends congratulated him for doing the right thing in killing her, saying “Even a man with no honour can discover honour at any moment.”<sup>33</sup>

Waseem confessed to her murder and was brought before journalists in a press conference

arranged by the police. He said he had no remorse because she had brought dishonor to the family and village. Journalists asked him that if outraged honor was the motivation, why he reacted after six years of her videos and social media postings. The issue, according to him, was the media started showing up at their house and village, which hadn’t happened before. It became a problem for Waseem once her real name and origins were discovered and the community found out what she had been doing. Their taunts about his honor, shame and manhood made it unbearable for him.

For Waseem, it was not what Qandeel was doing per se, which she had been doing for six years before he murdered her. It was the local community becoming aware of it and condemning her, and via her, condemning him. For Virk, Qandeel’s behavior would enable other women to act in ways which would shame Pakistani men before their rivals. The judgment of others remains a general social anxiety. In hegemonic masculinity, it sharpens into a defining force – a man’s worth and honor is reflected in how far he can control the women around him. The honor/ shame complex is intricately tied to notions of masculinity in Pakistan.

### Changing notions of honour

The law on honor killings has been changed in Pakistan in 2016, almost immediately after Qandeel Baloch was murdered. The formal legal system’s consensus against honour killings was achieved in less than two decades – within 17 years to be precise.

In 1999, Samia Sarwar was shot dead in her lawyer Hina Jilani’s office in Lahore<sup>34</sup>. The parliament

33 Ibid

34 ‘Relatives with blood on their hands’ published in Dawn on September 10, 2010 (source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/561976/relatives-with-blood-on-their-hands-2>)

of the time refused to pass any legislation condemning the murder, including disallowing a resolution, despite a few senior politicians advocating for it. The general argument against legal reform posed by some parliamentarians was that it went against 'our culture' and the formal system had no business impinging on cultural rights<sup>35</sup>.

After sustained efforts by women, a law was passed in 2004 prohibiting honour killing, but it left a loophole that allowed virtually all murderers to go free. It allowed heirs and survivors of women's family to forgive her murder. Given that almost all murders of women under the name of honour are carried out by family members, it meant family members were legally allowed to forgive other members of their own family. The courts routinely accepted the compromises and allowed forgiveness in court cases.

Women parliamentarians, rights activists, journalists and lawyers worked in sync to address this issue. In 2016, a law was finally passed making imprisonment mandatory in all honour killings. Under the new law, any declaration by a man that he murdered a woman for honour would make the law on forgiveness of murder (Qisas and Diyat) inapplicable. A regular murder can still be forgiven by a woman's heirs or compensated by blood money, but it is no longer possible in honour killing cases<sup>36</sup>.

Men can still kill women and not declare it an honour killing. There has been no published research in follow up to the law, but anecdotal evidence suggests that while honour killings

continue, fewer men are declaring honour-restoring murders and instead are trying to pass the killings off as suicides or random murders by unknown assailants. But if honour is performative and its restitution lies in proclaiming murder, does not declaring the honour-restoring murder change the dynamics of the honour code?

Honour crimes are commonly perceived not as aggression but as reaction. In Sindh for instance, a woman having or suspected of having sexual congress with a man on her volition without being married to him, is considered a crime against the men of her family. Her brother, father, uncles, cousins, and husband if married, all become collective victims of her crime; her crime was attacking and destroying their honour. The perpetrator is recast as the victim of a moral crime and the killing is an act of the restitution of honour<sup>37</sup>. It is enacted in the public sphere, and once it is deemed compromised, its restoration, in this and many other cases through a woman's death, must also be public. Scholars have long pointed out that honor, at the apex of hegemonic masculinity, is performative.

The notions of honour are possibly in flux. Already, the parliament previously unwilling to address cultural crimes, now passed important legislation on it and publicly affirms 'there is no honour in killing'. Community based informal judicial systems such as the *Jirga*, *panchayat* and *faislo* on honor killings have been banned, though the effectiveness of the ban is sketchy. The change in law may trigger further shifts in the social construction of honour, and thereby in codes of masculinity.

35 'Focus on honor killings' published in The New Humanitarian on January 9, 2003 (source: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2003/01/09/focus-honour-killings>)

36 Selby, D. and Rodriguez, L. (2019) 'How Activists Helped Change Pakistan's Honor Killing Law?' published in Global Citizen on April 9, 2019' (source: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/honor-killings-case-study/>)

37 Brohi, N. (2016). *Honour & deviance*. DAWN.COM. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1273561/honour-deviance>.

## 2.2 Case Study - Aurat March (Women's March)

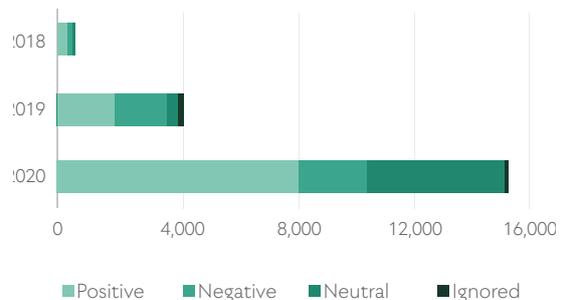
The Women March was an event held in Karachi in 2018, and since has grown into an annual political demonstration by women in Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Mardan, Quetta and Faisalabad. It is organized by feminist collectives in which feminist local organizations, feminist activists and women across a broad range of associations come together.

By the Aurat March of 2020, its size, scope and demands were threatening enough for there to be an on-ground mobilization against it. Organizers received death threats and rape threats. The BBC documented the fear of acid attacks and bomb threats<sup>38</sup>. In Islamabad, the marchers were attacked with bricks, sticks and stoned by a gathering of JUI-F, a conservative religio-political party. In Karachi, a corresponding 'Haya March' (Modesty March) was held by JI, another conservative religio-political party. In Sukkur, women organizers faced direct threats and intimidation by religio-political groups and had to appeal to the police for protection. Online, the velocity of threats grew, and hashtags substituted 'Aurat Azadi March' (March of women's freedom) with 'Aurat Barbadi March' (March for women's destruction). The castigation and threats grew in tandem with the event's popularity.

The Aurat March has its own published manifesto with a charter of demands which include better economic policies, bodily autonomy, safe and equal workplaces, criminalisation of discrimination, decriminalisation of defamation, criminalisation of domestic violence in all territories, amendments in anti-harassment

laws and sexual assault laws to include all genders as complainants, concrete actions to curb child sexual abuse and exploitation among other demands<sup>39</sup>. The organizers create their own posters and share images beforehand for others to make for themselves. They also welcome all women participants to bring in any poster with any message they want to send out as women. Most of the controversy so far surrounds the posters brought in by women participants. While the Aurat March stands by and owns all these messages, even claiming them as central themes for following years, the public focus on these often eclipses organizational demands in the manifesto.

As the Aurat March grew in size and spread, the attention it has drawn has increased exponentially. For instance, Twitter analysis on Aurat March shows a 285% increase in volume of net tweets from 2019 to 2020.



Data tracking 60 days of Twitter chatter in 2020 shows a 4% increase in year-over-year positive sentiment since 2019 and a 22% negative sentiment. There was a 22% increase in neutral Tweets.

38 Asher, S. (2020). *Pakistan on knife edge over women's march*. BBC News. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51748152>

39 *Aurat March core body defends bodily rights, presents manifesto*. DAWN.COM. (2020). Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1538745>

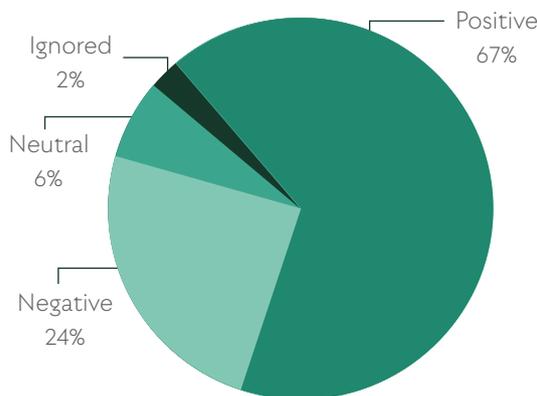
Year	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Ignored	Total
2018	263	125	86	26	500
2019	1976	1499	422	111	4008
2020	7939	2283	4786	42	15050

The volume of net tweets increased by 285% from 2019 to 2020. Negative sentiment declined by 22% year-over-year from 2019.

### Facebook

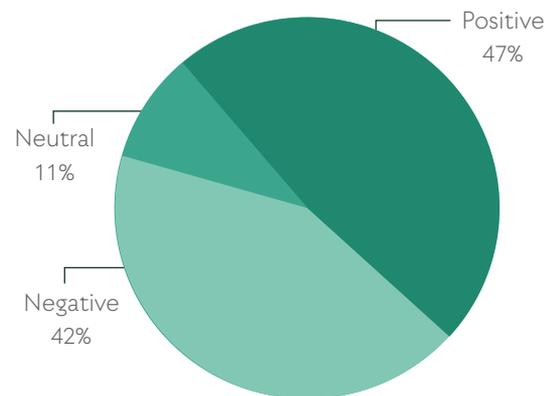
A small sample of under 200 FaceBook posts were individually reviewed for AM2020, despite

the methodological restrictions. It interestingly shows that people who hold negative views or sentiments about Aurat March are less likely to put up condemnatory posts and more likely to write condemnatory comments under posts by others.



### Sentiment in derived Posts

This includes posts by users, groups, businesses, organisational pages, and public photos and videos watched. More than 150 derived posts were individually reviewed. This does not include posts made by users who have not changed the settings of their posts to “Public”



### Sentiment in Public Comments

Multiple data sets of comments were collated across multiple post types and a broad mix of positive and negative posts. The polarity was pronounced unequivocally with strong opinions being stated without reservation.

While the overall sentiment seems to have shifted towards positivity, the virulence of the negativity has increased. Qualitative Tweet assessments conducted for this study show that in 2018, the negative comments were flippant and dismissive towards protestors as being westernized, irrelevant, elite, self-indulgent, immoral and promiscuous. But by 2020, the negative comments had swerved into rape and

death threats, calling on men to lay claim to protesting women as spoils of war, graphic sexual abuse and accusations of destroying culture, family system and values, cultural treason and betrayal of Islamic tenets.

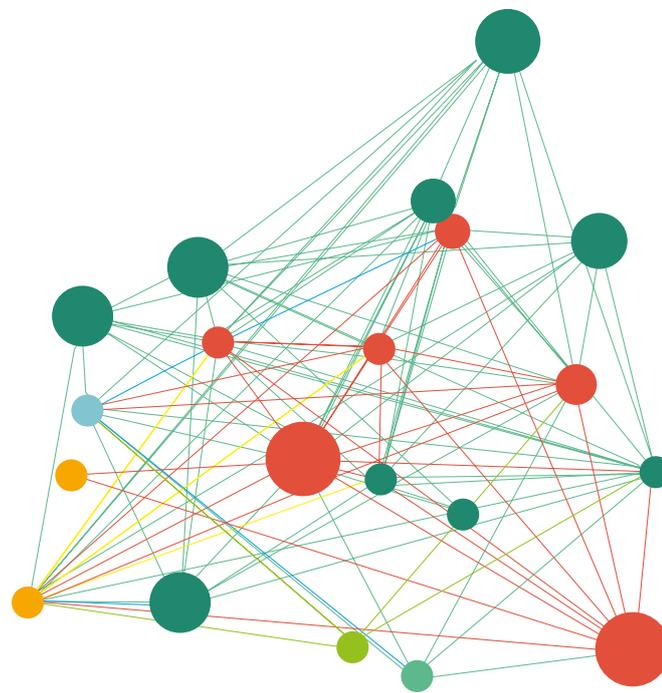
Social scientist Rizvan Saeed and journalist Usman Zafar analyzed key trends of Aurat March hashtags on Twitter to see whether opposition to it was organic or manufactured. For instance,

by using the Urdu hashtag of 'Fahashi march namanzoor' (roughly translating to Vulgar march unacceptable), they found it an "Inorganic trending by a dedicated group of users.... Of two groups affiliated with Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) that were working with each other on propagating this content."<sup>40</sup> Tehreek-e-Labaik is another, relatively newer religio-political party.

Studying 6,300 users and over 18,000 tweets,

Saeed and Zafar found majority of traffic was retweets with little original content, indicating trending by dedicated user groups.

Based on statistical modelling, they visually represented top users by showing impact of individual users through size of circles; diversity of user pattern and content coordination between them through colors; and connections between users through connecting lines.



Reproduced with permission, taken from Saeed and Zafar<sup>41</sup>

Using a similar methodology for a range of hashtags, Saeed and Zafar found that while some Twitter trending was 'inorganic', there was

still much conversation against the Aurat March and its slogans which was in fact organic, as seen in the table below:

40 Saeed, R., & Zafar, U. (2020). *Was opposition to Aurat March real or manufactured?* | SAMAA. Samaa TV. Retrieved 18 September 2020, from <https://www.samaa.tv/opinion/2020/03/was-opposition-to-aurat-march-real-or-manufactured/>

41 Saeed, R., & Zafar, U. (2020). *Was opposition to Aurat March real or manufactured?* | SAMAA. Samaa TV. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.samaa.tv/opinion/2020/03/was-opposition-to-aurat-march-real-or-manufactured/>

### Whether a hashtag was organic or inorganic: Get the Answer

Hashtag	Retweet	Organised group involved	Strong online connections amongst most active users	Main proponents	Analysis	
1	#ایکساڑھسے	88%	Yes	Yes	#IK_Force & Other PTI SM	Inorganic
2	#HayaMarch	69%	No	No		Organic but with a crowd effort
3	#WeRejectMeraJismMeriMarzi	78%	No	No		Organic
4	#MeraJismMeriMarzi	64%	No	No		Organic
5	#AmirLiaqat_Laanti	37%	No	No	@anah)ash @a6ubakr	Inorganic
6	#فحاشی_مارچ_نامنظور	89%	Yes	Yes	#TLP	Inorganic
7	#نکریم_نساء_ہمارا_شعار	84%	Yes	Yes	#JI	Inorganic
8	#OurWomenOurPride	90%	Yes	Yes	#ناپا_مجت	Inorganic

\* Reproduced with authors' permission

The table illustrates what was observable across social and broadcast media, that the slogan 'Mera Jism, Meri Marzi' (My Body, My Choice) caused immense disquiet and discomfort, and many were genuinely outraged. Women's rights activists have clarified on media that whereas rightwing groups were distorting and projecting this as a demand for the right to public promiscuity, it could also be seen as a rallying cry against forced marriages or against forced early pregnancies, and people read whatever they wanted into it through their confirmation biases. By standing by the slogan, women participants and organizers opened up an unprecedented public discourse on women's bodily autonomy.

### Discussion

Women's rights activist and one of the Aurat March organizers, Nighat Daad explains the virulence of online attacks on Aurat March. "The anger is so much more now. Earlier when women's movements were contesting the state and its injustices, male anger rose in response to what they saw as attacks on the system which worked for them. But now it's personal. The Aurat March is bringing into public focus the daily oppressions; the everyday indignities women face. And the culprit is not some vague state authority, it's every man. So they are lashing out viciously."

The opposition to women's publicly articulated demands is not new and has always met with

resistance and condemnation. However, women's activism on the streets, in parliament and in the media have shifted the scale of acceptable public discourse, rendering acceptable what was earlier objectionable, even as women's newer demands create newer objections.

So while earlier protests on honour killings and domestic violence were considered disruptive, a betrayal of cultural values and airing of dirty linen or better left unspoken, these arguments have petered out. Physical violence against women is increasingly condemned on public platforms, specifically domestic violence, battery, murder, torture, and forms of violence such as acid attacks. The more grotesque the attack, the louder and wider its condemnation. Since there is corporeal evidence in such cases, it makes it harder to deny. And women survivors increasingly speak of the trauma of their experiences, creating degrees of compassion. The earlier across board hostility to women's rights has diluted and become notionally accepted.

The countering narrative is now about creating hierarchies of rights to propose that different rights must be prioritized in different contexts. The moral ambiguity in taking sides emerges in public perception when there is a possibility that women exercised sexual agency. Any violence that raises questions about possible partial consent or does not fulfil the 'perfect victim' ideal still leads to condemnation of women, victim-blaming, doubt and disbelief.

Some of the online targeting of those who organized or participated in the demonstrations were upfront bullying tactics like ad hominem attacks which build on prejudices or single out their character rather than their contention, such as calling them sluts, fat, ugly, undesirable,

prostitutes and so on. Some others engaged with their contentions by deliberate distortion of demands and messages, for instance by extrapolating the slogan 'my body, my decision' to say they want the right to roam around naked on the road and give birth to children outside wedlock and have sex in public and so on. But there were many who opposed the Aurat March by using lines of reasoning which work as disciplining narratives to discredit women's demands and to propose socially conformist alternatives.

Narratives used to discipline women and their demands:

- Theirs are not 'Real' issues: As women speak out on violence and discriminations in the private space, it hits home both literally and figuratively. The collective reaction is to fling issues back out in the public space, to instead speak of generic issues directly affecting other women who suffer under someone else. Maternal mortality, adult illiteracy, minimum wage denied to field workers by feudal landlords are held up as acceptable demands, also because they externalize the problem and steer it away from everyday patriarchies of the home.
- Religion and hierarchies of rights: Arguments of cultural relativism gain ground with the insistence that women must fight only for those rights given by Islam and all other rights are irrelevant to their context. Going beyond those is posited as a form of cultural treason and challenges the limits set by religion.
- Elite class women exclude poor women: Perceived class privilege is held up to delegitimize demands of marchers. This line of criticism ignores the efforts organizers have made to connect with women at the

margins, including working class women, rural women and those from religious minorities, and that organizers themselves publicly acknowledge the need to do more to breach class barriers. Importantly, it also delegitimizes middle class and upper class women as stakeholders with the right to challenge patriarchies in their own lives. Their experiences are trivialized as they do not qualify as the 'perfect victim'.

- 'These' women are not representative: Here the reasoning is that poor or working class or rural women are the only legitimate claimant of rights whereas educated urban middle and upper class women are puppets animated by western concepts and mimic westernized concepts such as Me Too which have no local resonance. They work on the behest of others, so their agendas, motivation, fund-raising, all is suspect.
- Alienating people: Accusing women of extreme positions, this tone policing puts the onus on them for creating amenability towards their demands by being polite, non-confrontational, inclusive, cooperative and culturally sensitive. Women are cautioned against sweeping generalizations against men, society and system, and their cumulative anger is held up as counter-productive.

The biggest Aurat March gatherings in 2019 were in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. The following year, legal petitions were filed in all 3 cities against the Aurat March.

A petition was placed before the Lahore High Court to ban the Aurat March filed by a serial

petitioner, the chairman of an NGO, the Judicial Activism Panel. According to the petition, the Aurat March's "The sole purpose was spreading anarchy amongst the masses", it was "Against the very norms of Islam" and that, "Its hidden agenda is to spread anarchy, vulgarity and hatred." The petitioner also attempted to file a police report on AM but was ignored by the police.<sup>42</sup> The Lahore High Court allowed the Aurat March in Lahore to proceed provided it sought permission from relevant authorities given for all public demonstrations via the NOC (No Objection Certificate).

Separately, in Sindh High Court, a petition to stop the Aurat March in Sindh was filed by an unnamed woman. After hearing the arguments, the Sindh High Court observed she had no solid reason to file the petition, nor did she have any documents to back her claim<sup>43</sup>. The March was allowed.

Yet another petition filed in the Islamabad High Court, seeking to regulate the March by preventing certain slogans which included 'Mera Jism Meri Marzi' as being un-Islamic. It was dismissed as non-maintainable by the Chief Justice of the Islamabad High Court, stating freedom of assembly was a fundamental right. Chief Justice Athar Minallah used Islamic injunctions and references to justify and allow the Aurat March, lamenting in the judgment that violations and violence against women that were against Islam were not given due attention. He wrote that if women protestors had explained the slogans, no one else needed to interpret and read contradictory things into their slogans.<sup>44</sup>

42 Bilal, R. (2020). *LHC to hear arguments on petition against holding of Aurat March*. DAWN.COM. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1536401>

43 *Petition against the upcoming Aurat March filed by a woman*. Daily Times. (2020). Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://dailytimes.com.pk/567395/petition-against-the-upcoming-aurat-march-filed-by-a-woman/>

44 Asad, T., & Asad, M. (2020). *IHC throws out petition seeking to stop Aurat March*. DAWN.COM. Retrieved 17 September 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1538855>

AM's annual recurrence provides a novel way of assessing change over time. Ideas which seem radical at one point, after repeated public articulations become normalized, even when deemed not acceptable. Women's right to vote and choose their own marriage partners

are hard-won freedoms which were at various points in history considered radical demands. While sexual autonomy will conceivably remain intensely contested for women, the Aurat March has made headway in expanding the window of possible debates.

## 2.3 Case Study - Vocal Women Have it Coming<sup>45</sup>

### The nature of online violence against women

Pakistan has been rated as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists for years, with threats and physical attacks on journalists carried out with impunity. However, what makes the attacks on women journalists different from general attacks on the media and their male counterparts is the sexualised nature of the abuse. Women journalists are facing an environment where their bodies are up for expletive-filled discussion and degrading commentary by hordes of real and anonymous digital profiles. The online targeting and abuse can be broadly categorized as:

- **Casual Sexism and Discrediting of Women's Professional Work** - This kind of comparatively mild abuse may be in the form of casual sexism. Jokes about the lack of competence and intelligence are common. Women are told to go back to the kitchen. Their worth as mothers and wives is questioned and ridiculed.
- **Sexualised Abuse** - This severe form of abuse is directed at women who write and talk about politics and political ideologies. Writing critically about the present government can trigger an organized campaign, including dozens of accounts accusing the women of giving sexual favors

to men from the opposition parties. These targeted campaigns often have visual elements; morphed pictures and crude illustrations with sexual connotations. Women's faces are morphed over pornographic images with text insinuating sexual submission. The comments on bodies range from body shaming to discussions on the shape, size and desirability of their body parts.

- **Threats of sexual violence** - The most extreme kind of abuse comes in forms of threats of sexual violence. Some of these threats are straightforward - "I'll rape you and leave you in a state that you are never able to face anyone again" - but other threats are contain more graphic and excruciating detail of exactly how that rape would be executed. In more structured campaigns, these threats are combined with doxxing i.e. the release of personal identity details of the women, including their addresses. There have been instances of identity and details of family members being leaked as well. Men related to these women are also shamed for not keeping their women in control and this sexual domination (through rape) is presented as a way of showing the women their place.

<sup>45</sup> The section does not include references to specific tweets for two reasons - first, most of them are graphic and include hate and incitement which should not be amplified and second, various members of political class who have engaged in this abuse have threatened legal action for 'defamation', thus no specific identities and texts are being included.

Structured hate campaigns against women journalists often include abuse across these categories. The joint statement by women journalists notes, "Online attacks are instigated by government officials and then amplified by a large number of Twitter accounts". Another statement that followed also notes, "Pictures and videos are also used and our social media timelines are then barraged with gender-based slurs, threats of sexual and physical violence. So vicious is the campaign against women that even the women/female members of our male colleagues' families are not spared. Their photographs and videos are doctored, distorted and leaked on social media."<sup>46</sup>

The patterns are obvious.

- The abuse intensifies if the women are vocal
- Women are targeted mainly through their 'character' and accusations of sexual deviance are at the centre of the campaigns
- Men often feel emboldened enough to threaten women journalists with sexual violence without covering up their identity and seeking anonymity, demonstrating that they do not fear social or legal repercussions.

As I worked with a large group of women journalists to frame one of the statements, the discussions on the WhatsApp group became increasingly triggering. We women shared the worst of the abuse - countless pictures of male genitalia for example, sent on our WhatsApp from mobile numbers across the world. These

explicit images arrive without commentary and are followed by video calls. Some pictures sent show acts of horrific sexual violence. Even without text, the message is clear.

Some members of the group are now 'former journalists', forced to leave the profession owing to the public nature of sexual abuse that had a direct impact on their family and relationships.

The sheer number of men using threats of sexual violence as a way to demonstrate their disagreement with our views demonstrates their sense of entitlement as men - I am a man, these images seem to be saying, if you don't shut up, I'll prove it to you in the most manly way possible, through rape.

### Discussion

The release of joint statements by women journalists was met with a variety of responses.

First, there was an immediate increase in abuse from anonymous and troll accounts. Testimonies of women journalists, where the nature of abuse was mentioned were used as fodder to unleash further abusive comments. Accounts of rape threats shared by



46 Together Against Abuse. Joint Statement by Women Journalists - 12 August 2020 <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tqbUBcoCM27p9bmbJ5y9rplamjfqMW7EvHhUpLFqM-Q/>

women were dismissed with statements that these women were too ugly to be touched even for rape.

However, accounts with real names that had previously engaged in abusive commentary on women were defensive and held that any criticism from their accounts had been a professional critique, directed at the women's work not their personality and hence justified. Some of the past offenders were quick to talk about the respect they have for women.

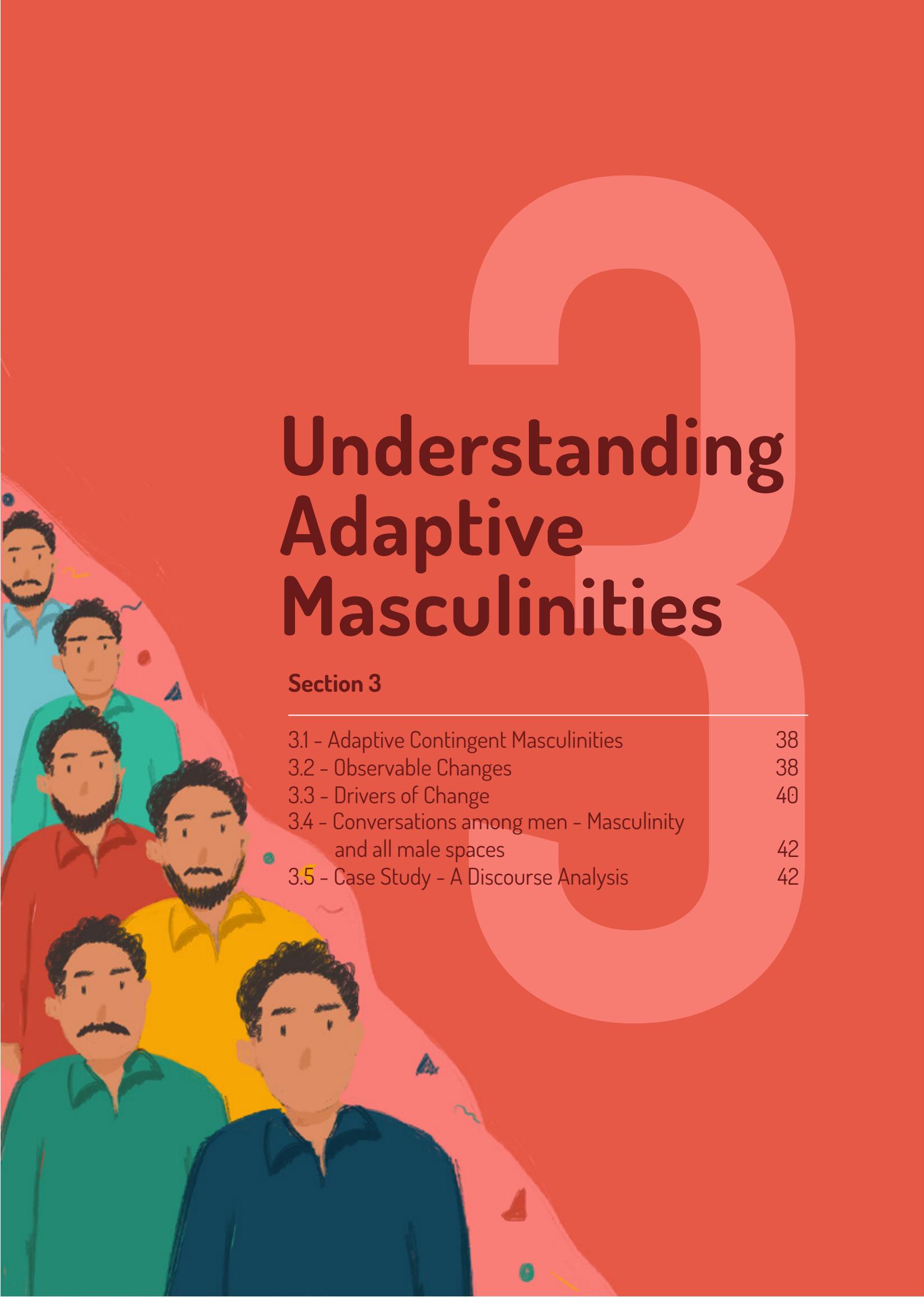
There were accusations that the call for action against online abuse was 'politically motivated' and thus the actual experience of abuse and violation was invalidated. The 'politically motivated' angle was also used to further subject women to accusations of being sexually involved with men from opposition parties.

Digital footprints of women journalists were brought up to undermine their claims, showing their use of expletives but none of them

contained hate speech and incitement to violence. These tweets were used to question their integrity and character, iterating that women's grievances are only considered valid if they present the image of being the 'perfect victim'- a flawless someone who has never said or done anything less than ideal.

In the parliamentary committee, where women journalists submitted evidence and shared testimonials about the impact of this abuse on their mental health, their profession and their family lives, the parliamentarians acknowledged the abuse and need for intervention. However the framework of support relied heavily on "the honored place of women in our society". Multiple male parliamentarians also talked of their responsibility to 'protect the izzat (honor) of women'.

On the positive side, victim blaming was minimal, which is progress within our context. The follow up hearings are still underway at the time of writing of this report.



# Understanding Adaptive Masculinities

## Section 3

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### 3.1 Adaptive, Contingent Masculinities

This section attempts to provide a deeper dive into notions of masculinities. It challenges the idea of monolithic, impermeable and static masculinity to highlight the possibility of bringing about change. By establishing that change is inevitable and always under way, it intends to de-naturalize the current hegemonic masculinity in Pakistan. It aims to:

- Contextualize how violence against women is understood, processed and contested as a discourse between men, and
- Show how these evolving ideas iterate that masculinity is dynamic and constantly shaped by intersecting forces and responses.

The construct of masculinity is unstable as it adapts and reinvents its forms and manifestations. It is shaped by changing gendered power relations and challenges by men themselves and evolves in response to

economic systems, and political and policy changes.

In reviewing and comparing studies on masculinity and femininity in Pakistan, Rashid and Khan note, "The concept of masculinity is fluid and malleable and subject to constant re-articulation and reconfiguration, especially as it comes to be deployed for specific purposes of the state, nation, ethnic or religious group"<sup>47</sup>. They find that research on masculinity in Pakistan precludes any analysis of economic drivers and the material political economy of masculinity remains a broad gap. This is all the more startling since R.W Connell, in his seminal study of masculinity suggests that masculinity is coherent only if studied in the context of race, class, culture, sexuality and other intersections that create its articulation. Masculinity is therefore 'inherently relational' rather than a fixed set of identities and attributes.

### 3.2 Observable changes

Online articulations of hegemonic masculinity are in flux.

The Qandeel Baloch case study shows reactions to notions of honour are gradually shifting. This bears out on social media as well. The Urdu words for honour (ghairat) and dishonourable (beyghairat) are now likelier to be used as a political taunt rather than a gendered one. On Twitter searches, top results and frequencies indicate its usage is increasingly directed towards politicians and those with political associations for lying or not delivering on their promises and volte-face behaviour, and lessening in frequency as a taunt to men for not controlling women.

Dominant forms of masculinity, alternative manifestations and treatment of outliers continues to change. In one small, micro illustration from Pakistan's online world, a social media celebrity Nasir Khan Jan, who presents an alternate masculinity otherwise disdained as 'effeminate', was invited by a television show host and then mocked and ridiculed in the show. On Twitter and Facebook, the TV channel and show host were condemned and shamed by men (and women), and eventually the show host publicly apologized on television and Jan accepted the apology<sup>48</sup>. It was a minor episode

47 Comparative Analysis of Masculinity & Femininity in Pakistan (Rukhsana Rashid & Fouqia Khan)

48 'SAMAA TV Host Apologizes to Nasir Khan Jan' published on Samaa Digital on May 8, 2019 (source: <https://www.samaa.tv/corrections/2019/05/samaa-tv-host-apologises-to-nasir-khan-jan/>)

and not a national controversy, but it broke with the norm – a norm in which ‘manliness’ is typecast and valued and those outside it become recipients of ridicule and scorn.

Publicly, there is a small but growing derision of hyper-masculinity. Its mascots still have immense public following. A famous television analyst, known for his disdain towards women<sup>49</sup> stated after Aurat March 2019 that women discussing sexual topics threaten the moral fabric of the society<sup>50</sup>. The analyst has also declared women as being unequal to men<sup>51</sup>; provoking rape<sup>52</sup>; enjoying domestic violence<sup>53</sup>. Despite this, the analyst remains popular. The popularity of such icons is not new. There are many other such public icons, men as well as women, who uphold the traditional gender divisions and insist all efforts to dislodge confining roles are part of a conspiracy to destroy Pakistan and Muslims. What is however new is them being publicly mocked online by men and women.

In the public sphere of social media, many men are increasingly distancing themselves from traditional notions of hyper-masculinity. To illustrate, consider the Twitter reactions to the case of two girls murdered for honour in May 2020 in North Waziristan. While such murders are again not new, the reaction to them is. A large number of Pashtun men on Twitter condemned

the killings and demanded justice for the girls. The few who invoked the usual arguments of it being part of culture, such as that promiscuous women would destroy Pashtun culture and identity and system, were either ignored or challenged. The leaders who were silent were called out for their silence. Others lamented the hypocrisy of expressing sympathy for the women in question but men continuing to subject their wives and sisters to the same honour code.

Honor killings are not an issue specific to Pushtuns and are common across Pakistan. The example from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province is raised here not to single it out for honour crimes but because some of the most vibrant discourses on masculinities, including challenges to it, are occurring online within this demographic. To contextualize, the conversation on harmful masculinities was initiated a few years ago by Pashtun women bloggers who called out the Pashtun patriarchy, drawing attention to male double standards. They were met with a barrage of insults and name calling. Many of those blogs have now been discontinued, though many more Pashtun feminists now actively engage on Twitter. More recently, an anonymous Pashtun woman created a character ‘Ror to muhtaja’ (the one who is dependent on her brother) who satirized masculinity in her video logs and used humor to speak about emotional abuse meted out to women. Despite the reactions

49 Mustafa, A. (2017). *Our nation has been plagued by one poisonous scholar after the other*. Dunya Blog. Retrieved 20 September 2020, from <http://blogs.dunyanews.tv/17148/>.

50 Javid, H. (2019). *A culture of misogyny*. The Nation. Retrieved 19 September 2020, from <https://nation.com.pk/19-May-2019/a-culture-of-misogyny>.

51 *Orya Maqbool Jan's Harf-i-Raaz banned for 30 days - Global Village Space*. Global Village Space. (2019). Retrieved 20 September 2020, from <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/orya-maqbool-jans-harf-i-raaz-banned-for-30-days/>

52 *What Is Woman Status In Society? Listen Orya Maqbool Jan Analysis On Aurat March*. UNewsTv. (2019). Retrieved 20 September 2020, from <https://www.unewstv.com/170278/what-is-woman-status-in-society-listen-orya-maqbool-jan-analysis-on-aurat-march>

53 T. Hashmi, Z. (2016). *Harassment by Orya Maqbool Jan*. Center for Peace and Secular Studies. Retrieved 20 September 2020, from <https://peaceandsecularstudies.org/harassment-by-orya-maqbool-jan/>

hurled their way, their narrative had staying power. Increasingly men are now speaking about evolving culture and changing traditional

notions of identity. These do not represent the views of the majority. They represent an internal challenge to hegemonic masculinity.

### 3.3 Drivers of Change

Social media commentators and social sector analysts attribute the change to various factors: changing codes of masculinity with some manifestations of it becoming progressively accepting of women's equality; or taming of its expressions to varying degrees of political correctness; or as some experts refer to it, 'woke performativity'.

Men are increasingly challenging other men who prop up idealized notions of harmful masculinity. One consistent reference point for men challenging other men is the increase in reported incidents of child sexual abuse and rape of children. Men increasingly point towards hypocrisy of selective male anger. They question why sensibilities around sanctity of religion that are outraged when women assert bodily autonomy remain unarticulated when religious clerics are perpetrators in child rape. Invoking children's rape presents a stark picture un-muddled by questions about women's sexual agency and judgment about their actions, behaviour, attire and their past. The perceived moral ambiguity and tendency to disbelieve women is erased in the case of children, and allows depiction of sexual assault as violent aggression in clear terms.

As more women assert themselves online, they pose a significant challenge to hegemonic masculinity through their online interactions. Observations of Twitter engagements

conducted for this study show women, counter abusive gendered tweets in three ways:

- By sharing their own stories of abuse and hurt, they bring forward a humanizing impulse by personalizing generic suffering and victimhood. They express the effect of physical violence and online abuse in their lives, creating sympathy and compassion. Such posts usually lead to men commenting on women's bravery, expressions of horror at their trauma and even expressing shame at being men.
- They rally in support of other women sharing their stories, expressing solidarity and adding momentum, creating and communicating about networks of support.
- They challenge hegemonic masculinity by drawing attention towards toxic content and goad men into breaking out of impassive neutrality and taking a stand<sup>54</sup>

Incidents of extreme violence present a shock that jolts people away from impersonal statistics of violence and make the violence personal and real. A frequent response of hegemonic masculinity is to remove and exclude such perpetrators from the category of men altogether. They are dehumanized, or demasculinized with the exclamation that they are not men but animals, beasts and such. Another related response is to distance themselves from perpetrators and accuse women of stereotyping them, vehemently insisting 'not all men'.

<sup>54</sup> There is an ongoing debate in feminist networks on callouts as strategy, on cancel culture and on why online solidarities do not translate into on ground support where women in distress are left facing systemic obstructions on their own. Those discussions are beyond the ambit of this study.

These emerging patterns are outliers. The majority still prescribes to dominant cultural and moral codes. These are minority responses in online spaces, even as online spaces themselves are populated by a minority – those who are literate, can afford communication devices and have internet access and time and interest to engage online.

However, there are indications that these may be in sync with other on ground developments. Across Pakistan, women's and girls' presence in the public space is increasing. The field of education illustrates this in stark terms. Zaidi and Haroon find that girls' participation in secondary education increased at the same rate as for boys, by 53%. In arts and science colleges, between 2002 and 2012, enrolment doubled for boys but went up by 82% for girls. At universities and professional colleges, between 2004 and 2014, girls' enrolment increased in a decade by 432%. By 2012, Zaidi and Haroon note, there were more girls than boys enrolled in universities<sup>55</sup>.

Women's labour force participation is also rising. Though it is still among the lowest in the region, it has gradually risen and women now constitute a quarter of the country's workforce. World Bank data finds women who can visit markets alone has risen by 12% in 5 years, now at 37%. Earlier, it was widely accepted that women must stay within the house, metaphorically its four walls 'chaar diwari'. Women are increasingly joining paid work across all classes, whether because of

economic compulsions of poverty or aspirations for higher standards of family living; the idea of keeping them homebound is losing both viability and traction.

These examples draw attention towards the current malleability of hegemonic masculinity and to show changes underway. For a more nuanced understanding, further study is required into the contingent nature of masculinities, changing with class and location and so on. This would help answer questions on the nature of such changes: Is the hegemonic nature of harmful hyper-masculinity cracking? Conceivably hyper-masculinities will continue to play out in the future, but is the dominant status based on consent of those governed by it giving way to multiple masculinities where harmful forms exist but are not privileged and idealized?

Or is masculinist control accommodating this change by shifting the protectionism from one based on confinement of women to one based on surveillance? Not allowing women to leave homes has given way to monitoring workplace interactions, monitoring online interactions, not allowing or monitoring mobile phones, ensuring they dress a particular way, issuing deadlines to return home, attempting to control or apportion earnings and so on. As women's employment accelerates contributions to economic well-being of families, is surveillance in public space substituting internment in the private sphere?

55 S. Akbar Zaidi and Haroon Jamal, An Overview of Inequality in Pakistan, Development Advocate Pakistan Volume 3, Issue 2, UNDP 2016

### 3.4 Conversations among Men: Masculinity and All Male Spaces

Change is always contradictory and contested. So while there is emerging evidence of some progressive trends, simultaneously, the opposite trend seems to be deepening in private spaces of social media. Members-only all-male closed groups such as those on Facebook, sealed off from public scrutiny continue to either accept, endorse and encourage misogynist content that sexualizes, degrades and attacks women. People have started to 'out' such groups by leaking information and screenshots. In recent examples 'dank' groups and meme groups, otherwise referring to dark or gallows humour, provide the gateway to toxic, sexualized, degrading content, often targeting particular women. The retreat of such content into closed off spaces shows that the impunity is not absolute and such content cannot be shared publicly without consequences. However, these online spaces are defined by exclusion of women and provide

a 'safe space' to abuse and sexualize them without censure.

All male-spaces were traditionally the default setting for much of public space in Pakistan. Women were allowed access to those on specific terms such as travelling with men of their families, or covering themselves up as a marker of respectability, or being allowed to come before a gathering to present their side of a story and so on. Over the years, women have pushed back against these boundaries, causing them to shift, adjust, and even accommodate.

Online men's groups are however, not a contiguous extension of these offline/ real life all-male spaces. The online public space was not by default an all-male space. All-male groups are therefore demarcated by and entirely defined by excluding women. An analyst and field expert observed, "Women's groups exist driven by the



need for safe spaces, free of the abuse, attacks and trolling from men. Men's groups exist for this rubbish. If they are discussing jobs, cars and financial issues, they don't need segregated groups for that. They want a safe space – safe from being put on the spot, where boys can continue to be boys. It's not like they're sheltering

men who cannot conform to the idealized male – those ones they hound out.”

This section uses a case study to examine a discourse in an all-male Facebook group as discussed in an online podcast.

### 3.5 Case Study – A Discourse Analysis

Soul Brothers Pakistan is a crowd sourced Facebook forum for Pakistani men with 35,000 members and gets between 700 to 900 posts every day. According to its administrators, they get over 500 daily requests for membership, where each is screened and has to agree to abide by rules before admission.

Without accessing the Soul Brothers forum itself, this case study attempts to showcase conversations in all male spaces through a two-hour-long discussion about Soul Brothers through an online podcast 'The Pakistan Experience', in specific its episode titled 'Toxic Masculinity, Feminism and Online Male Spaces'<sup>56</sup>.

This podcast warrants attention for a few reasons.

- It is a vantage point into the largest all-male online platform in Pakistan which is otherwise accessible to members only and where public sharing of postings is considered a breach of privacy;
- The interview podcast featured the founders and administrators of the forum;
- The interviewer, Shehzad Ghias, regularly challenges hegemonic masculinity in his shows, and the episode included an influential commentator on gender politics

known for promoting alternate masculinities, Muhammad Moiz;

- The conversation was a discussion between men talking about toxic masculinities and difficulties in moderating online spaces, and brought forward how personal perspectives and biases determine content curation despite claims of neutrality and objectivity.

#### Recap of the show:

It started with introducing Soul Brothers. Men often post about needing jobs and financial opportunities, and Soul Brothers have been able to provide a platform for connecting this form of demand and supply, and state they have been able to help men materially and emotionally through this space. The administrators of the FB group said initially they allowed discussions on religion and politics but later stopped it because it became 'ugly'; vitriolic and emotional and members could not find the ability to 'agree to disagree'. Their rules disallow pornography or any attacks on people, including women. They do not censor abusive language as long as those abusing and being abused know each other. They do not cull out swear words entirely since, they explain, boys will be boys and that's how men talk, but as long as it is not directed at someone who objects, they allow it.

<sup>56</sup> The podcast was moderated by the podcast anchor, Shehzad Ghias, with analysis and discussion by Muhammad Moiz – a public health specialist, comedian, and drag artist. Both of them are on the forefront of interrogating the masculinities' discourse in Pakistan.

The interviewer and analyst pointed out the thriving lynch mob mentality, homophobia, abuse and aggression directed at feminists in particular and women in general. The administrators dealt with the accusations point by point. They said they disallowed rape jokes and do not allow rape to be used as a metaphor. They held an online discussion on toxic masculinity to address such concerns. In one particular high profile celebrity case of sexual harassment, they allowed the posting of the news item but filtered out all commentary on it that attacked the woman in question.

The interviewer and analyst highlighted various instances when women were severely abused and attacked online, and that members of Soul Brothers posted such things because they anticipated such misogynist content would meet with group approval. After denials, the interviewer then played a voice post which had been approved and posted onto the platform.

The audio clip was an extremely abusive rant about a woman who parked her car wrong, and went onto attack feminism; issue rape threats against feminists; insist that all women should be publicly gang raped for being on the roads; undertaking to sexually assault women himself; castigation of all men who allow liberties to women they are related to; all couched in slurs and sexualized language.

The administrators of Soul Brothers were visibly shocked, condemned the rant and undertook to look into how the post was approved. The administrators of Soul Brothers discussed the ethics of moderation and learning how to walk the balance between freedom of speech including offensive speech on one hand, and marking it off from hate speech and provocation to harm. They shared that they muted or banned 200 to 300 men every month for offensive

behaviour. The discussion went on to how an all-male space invariably comes down to sexualized talk about women. They spoke of mental health conditions and deflected aggressions and the possibility of women coming to harm – either self-harm or attack by others as a result, and the need for responsibility. They spoke of the way online platforms allow men to create different personas and enables them to do online things they could not consider doing in real life.

The discussion followed a progressive conflict resolution format. It started off with denial or minimizing of the problem, then when challenged with evidence, acceptance followed by an undertaking to investigate and address it. There was recognition that there is accountability and space to learn and was followed by a discussion of how it links to broader issues and what can be done about those.

### Discussion

This all-male discussion was interesting because the call for accountability and demand for change came from men. The discussants acknowledged that men need to take on this responsibility. However, this resolution and decision-making may mirror much of gender politics in the rest of the country.

Possibly because of a shifting ethical compass or political correctness, there is an observable decline in the number of men publicly defending misogyny or opposing women's rights (there may be varying positions about what women's rights are). Rarely is there a public demand for accountability. When confronted with evidence, authorities are quick to promise redress. In prominent cases, authorities undertake immediate action even if it provides only temporary relief. Underlying issues remain in place, resulting in periodic outcropping of similar problems. It seems the FB group follows

a similar trajectory, since the same issues have repeatedly been flagged.

The expletive filled rant played in the podcast was pegged to the hardship inflicted on the abuser by a wrongly parked car. Similar to patriarchy's responses to honour killings, this repositioning of men as victims creates the moral justification for their actions. It dislodges the primary aggression and recasts it instead as a reaction to an action. It echoes recent writings on masculinity from across the world observing the phenomenon of aggrieved manhood. Writing on incel culture (involuntary celibacy), Debbie Ging notes of what she refers to as 'the manosphere'<sup>57</sup>, "While there are some continuities with older variants of anti feminism, many of these new toxic assemblages appear to complicate the orthodox alignment of power and dominance with hegemonic masculinity by operationalizing tropes of victimhood and beta masculinity."

Another similarity seems to be the disconnect between what ought to be, and what in effect, is. So the Soul Brothers rule book says one thing but in effect, it is run under a different set of unspoken rules. Norms outweigh rules. This mirrors the national level disconnect between legality and legitimacy. The administrators have made group rules, but the group culture decides which rules to uphold and which to set aside, legitimating infractions of rules.

The discussion, specifically through comments of the analyst Muhammad Moiz and interviewer Shehzad Ghias, illustrates how masculinity is not a thing that exists in stasis – it must be

performed. The audio clip that was played in the podcast had torrential expletives against women set to electronic music. It was meant to amuse and titillate. Moiz and Ghias make the point that the audio note is predicated on and anticipates endorsement from others in the group. Cultural content is often shaped by anticipated response, even if it is assumed to be oppositional.

Soul Brothers is, by various accounts, one of the least problematic men-only online groups. The others, closed off from public scrutiny, as per anecdotal accounts, are worse in that they resort exclusively to talk that sexualizes and demeans women, without the redeeming, helpful initiatives Soul Brothers include which assist men in their daily lives.

### Different conditions, different answers

The above podcast conversation can be contrasted by an online documentary on men and masculinities in Pakistan called 'Mard Bun' (Be A Man) produced by Shift Balance<sup>58</sup>. The interviews were conducted by Aurelie Salvaires, a French author and social entrepreneur. The interviewees knew their speech was to be used in a documentary on Pakistani masculinities. The men recorded one-on-one interviews or in small groups, without any factor of anonymity. Most of the men spoken to in the documentary were young, educated and before a western woman, a conduit to an international audience. The results were very different.

All of the men interviewed said they found hegemonic masculinity confining, with its insistence that men be dominating, strong, smiling in the face of danger, authoritative, the

57 Ging, D. (2017). Alphas, Betas, and Incels: Theorizing the Masculinities of the Manosphere. *Men and Masculinities*, 1-20.

58 Shift balance (2017, February 20). *A conversation about masculinity in Pakistan*. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Fj2hozAmRY&feature=youtu.be> and Shift balance (2017, May 7). *Maard Ban. Be a Man*. Retrieved From, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0H-3UXUzQVM>

fundamental family protector. They said men were not born violent but became violent; it was a result of social conditioning and not a natural state. They said they felt burdened by the need to always be the leader and exhibit no vulnerability and that they could not share their problems and emotions with others. They said for them an ideal masculinity would embrace male compassion, empathy, kindness, softness. Two respondents spoke about wearing figurative masks in public, donning a kind of masculinity as a disguise for public approval, and could not afford to show themselves to be what they are. They suggested solutions: build your own identity instead of receiving it as pre-formed; call men out for being sexist; change your behaviour in home and family to make both a better place to be.

On the other hand, when local male researchers from the NGO Rozan went to a peri-urban area in Rawalpindi and asked men in their own localities about masculinity, the responses were again qualitatively different<sup>59</sup>. Boys often expressed sexual helplessness when confronted with girls and women on the street, deemed it a woman's responsibility to control male reactions by not provoking attention, just like they said it was women's responsibility to prevent violence and conflict in the home by not doing things that would provoke men. Some believed rape cannot happen without the consent of women. Most men mentioned controlling women's sexual activity and a deep distrust of women. Interestingly, men said that part of the requirement of masculinity was to protect and 'clean up' society. So the moral order they must maintain in the home gets projected to wider

society and gives them an unstated role of being the moral protector of their community. Through acts like telling or taunting parents about daughters' behaviour outside the home and interaction with men, cracking down on gay inclinations, disrupting dates, all were part of their responsibility of morally cleansing society as protectors and guardians.

The Rozan study noted in its analysis, "Much of the discussion was on expectations to prove masculinity. There was relatively little emphasis on physical attributes, and men seemed to be driven more by the need to prove their sexual potency and ability to provide and earn for their family. Other proofs of masculinity were domination and control over their wife, not being feminine, responding without fear to threats and insults, and taking revenge. Being a man was not an entitlement by birth, but had to be proved repeatedly through the fulfilment of sexual, familial, and financial roles."

An Aurat Foundation report by Rashid and Khan found while hegemonic masculinities world over focused on three main functions of being 'the provider, the protector and the procreator', in the case of Pakistan and India, there was another additional role, that of the regulator<sup>60</sup>. Controlling others' actions, including men and women, and maintaining order in the community were seen as integral to the protector role. The research found that in acknowledging privileges, men in Pakistan valued freedoms and liberties accorded to them the most, followed next by the respect accorded to them by society. What they appreciated the least was financial responsibility of households and the need to control and not express emotions.

59 Rashid, M., Bashir, B., & Ullah, S. (2010). *Understanding Masculinities : A formative Research in Peri Urban Location of Rawalpindi Pakistan*. Islamabad: Rozan.

60 Aurat Foundation. (2016). *Comparative Analysis of Masculinity & Femininity in Pakistan*. Aurat Foundation

The above cited responses are clearly from different groups of men, differentiated by class, income, location, education, age and exposure. The point is not simply that responses vary by demographics but that responses are shaped by a host of factors including the intended audience, pointing to the social and conditional construction of masculinity.

It may be useful to look at the recent research from India, given the traditional similarities with Pakistan, specifically the manner in which localized patriarchies are manifested. In a particularly nuanced research of masculinities and domestic violence in India by the International Centre for Research on Women, separate studies were conducted in four states (Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Delhi) and brought together for a comparative analysis<sup>61</sup>. Where courage was the most cited characteristic in Rajasthan, boldness was the most important for Dalit men in Tamil Nadu. In the latter, the study traced how changes in masculinity occurred when the traditional land tenure system crumbled and transition to industrialization occurred. Dalit men gained power in an industrialized environment, which Dalit youth communicated by sexually harassing women from the upper castes while controlling their own sisters and their income from factory work. As increased labour force participation of women undermines men's role as primary providers, "Some men appear to have redefined their role of providers as that of providing protection for the community and for women."

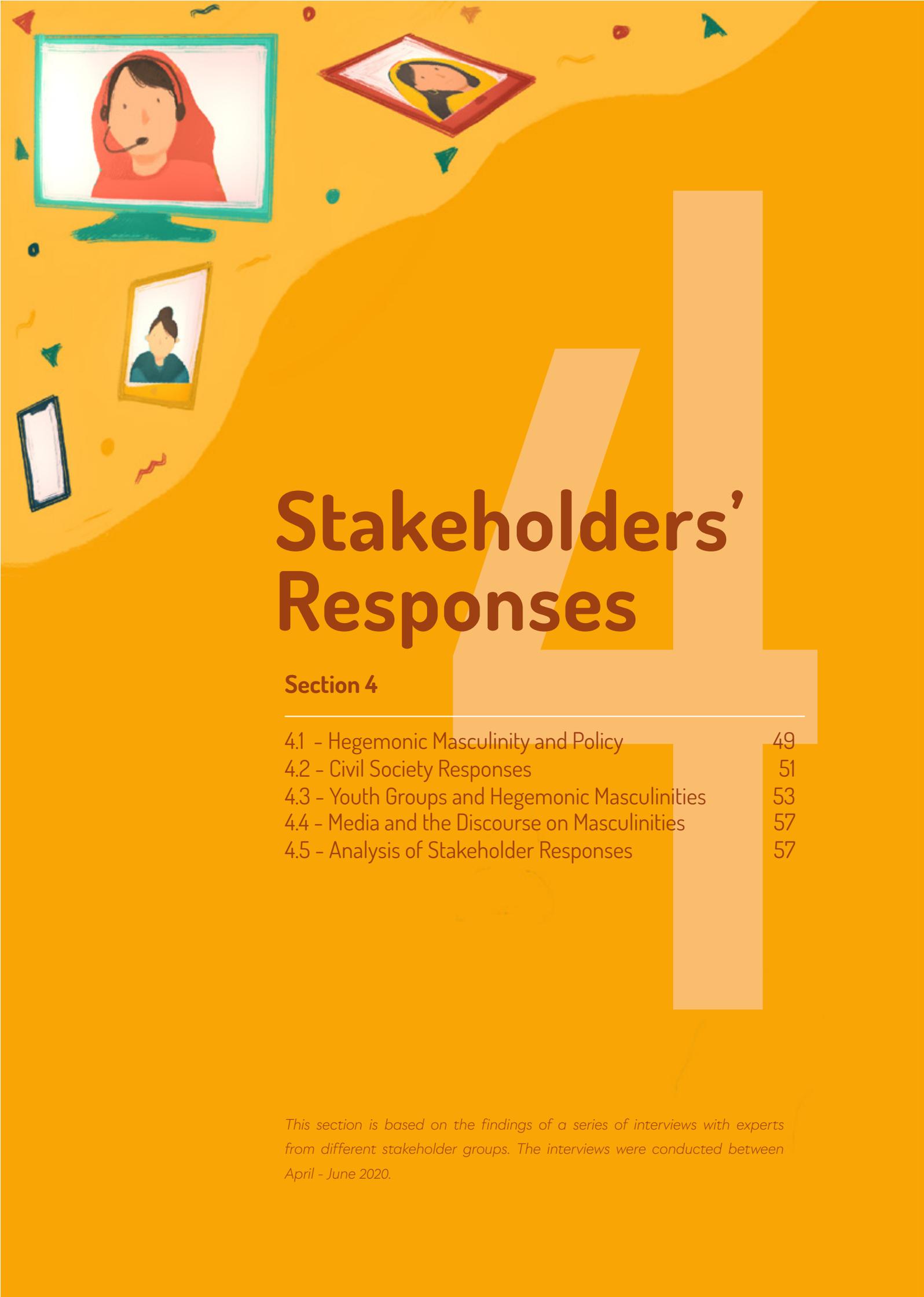
In Punjab and Rajasthan, the study found that while control and power were the most highly rated masculinity markers, which sphere in

which they chose to exercise it varied. Men with higher education and social status valued power and control in the public domain (such as community decisions, public policies, business decisions etc.), whereas those with lower status, education and opportunities for public power, exercised more power and control within the family, including over women. The study concluded, "While some markers of masculinity are universally endorsed, masculinity is clearly shaped by the location of the individual within social hierarchies of age, caste, and socio-economic class."

No such detailed, comparative work has been done on masculinities in Pakistan, whereas such analysis would significantly deepen the understanding and help identify locally responsive opportunities for change. A case could be argued that hyper-masculinity has specific socio-political and economic utility in agricultural, feudal and tribal societies. As modes of production change, the narratives that legitimate it become less functional, more obsolete and more oppressive. The understanding in Pakistan-related scholarship on masculinities is still rudimentary and requires closer attention.

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61 Men, Masculinity and Domestic Violence in India Summary Report of Four Studies, International Center for Research on Women



# Stakeholders' Responses

## Section 4

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*This section is based on the findings of a series of interviews with experts from different stakeholder groups. The interviews were conducted between April - June 2020.*

## 4.1 Hegemonic Masculinity & Policy

This part explores how notions of masculinity inform the culture and debates in parliamentary circles and highlights instances in which policymakers have furthered or challenged hegemonic masculinity. The section is based on interviews with six parliamentarians from different political parties.

The interviews show that narratives surrounding policy formulation often tie back to ideals introduced by culture, societal values and religion. These are operationalised both through policies of the state in the public sphere and the legal construction of family as a unit led by a male in the private sphere.

Women parliamentarians spoke of not being taken seriously, and attempts at limiting their participation to 'women's subjects', away from 'hard' matters related to national security and economy. The majority of men policymakers see the institutionalised power of the legislature as their inherent right and women are often treated as interlopers.

Both men and women agreed there is a lack of understanding and will to engage with issues of masculinities and gender sensitivities. Women parliamentarians held that they are rarely regarded as equal by their male counterparts and even if they do understand these issues, 'Gender issues don't go with political agendas'. Even male interviewees agreed that there is a rampant insensitivity towards gender within parliament. Women used the term 'patriarchy'

to explain the lack of will, while the men used 'culture' and 'social values'.

The Aurat March, one of the most visible annual events questioning traditional gender roles has been termed as a 'cultural clash' by one of the most powerful politicians in the country who thought that an integrated schooling system would help deal with such issues<sup>62</sup>. The fact that a demonstration that challenges the hegemony of hyper-masculinity is seen as a clash and an issue by higher ups in the government demonstrates how deeply these notions are embedded within the policy circles.

Some women parliamentarians agreed with the dominant male interpretation of Aurat March as being against 'Pakistani' traditions and values. "By coming out on roads and raising slogans that are not permitted by values observed by our society, religion or family, what kind of power do [the marchers] want? ...We will support it[Aurat March] as long as it does not trample on Pakistan's honour," said a prominent politician<sup>63</sup>. The dominance of these perspectives within policy circles has an impact on women legislators, further validating the lesser status accorded to women politicians. Out of 62 available cabinet seats, "The PTI coalition government appointed only four women as ministers — three in the center and one in Punjab. The 15-member cabinet in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has no female representation at all"<sup>64</sup>. With fewer women in positions of power and influence, it becomes

62 Staff, I. (2020). PM Imran Khan says Aurat March is a result of cultural differences like it's a bad thing. Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://images.dawn.com/news/1184828>

63 Will support Aurat March as long as it 'doesn't trample on Pakistan's honour': Awan. (2020). Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1538881>

64 Shah, A. (2019). Activists condemn minimal female representation in PTI government. Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1362906/world>

more convenient for the legislature itself to adopt a masculine identity.

Fauzia Viqar, former chairperson Punjab Commission on Status of Women feels that male parliamentarians engage only when their own power is at stake. "They [male parliamentarians] feel that women related issues are not their problem. They only get engaged when they feel that their own privilege is being threatened. The domestic violence act really gave them out. It was derided, it was mocked, across the board it was seen as the deal breaker. The issue at hand was not that women were being beaten up, the issue at hand was them being seen in a feminine light by wearing a bracelet", says Fauzia Viqar.

These attitudes are present across party lines. During the election campaign, women attending a political parties' rally were insulted by a member of opposing political party and taunted of not being from "honourable families because their dance moves implied where they had actually come from"<sup>65</sup>, implying caste and lineage based prostitution. Another politician, who is a familiar face on TV, has landed in legal trouble for passing sexist remarks in the parliament, has a history of such commentary on television, including asking women to 'act like women'<sup>66</sup>, insisting on women's submissiveness and stringent maintenance of traditional gender roles.

"There are people in the parliament who believe in gender rights and equality but there is no institutional support in place which could facilitate these Parliamentarians for policy making", says Dr Musadik Malik. In the absence of these mechanisms, men in the legislature can condemn laws for women protection by calling them a threat to "domestic lives" and be dismissive of women from opposition parties, telling them to go back to their homes and kitchens ("*Jayen, jayen. Apnay ghar ka choohla jalayen*")<sup>67</sup>

These impact legislation. In debates around the cyber crime law, a large part of the discourse on the regressive law focused on protection of women and children. Not only were women infantilized with children, the law itself has been designed as an oppressive tool for furthering national security based narratives. It is used for governing citizens in the same way that a dominant male head of family exerts power and controls on his family in the guise of keeping them safe from external harms.

Such opinions and biases play out in courts as well. In 2018, the Supreme Court heard an unusual case of a woman seeking the removal of the name of her abusive father and replacing it with her mother's name instead. The Supreme Court and later the Council of Islamic Ideology both ruled that removing the father's name from official documentation would be unIslamic and against Sharia.<sup>68</sup>

65 Women who attended PTI's rally aren't honourable: Rana Sanaullah. (2018). Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/04/30/women-who-attended-ptis-rally-arent-honourable-rana-sanaullah/>

66 Talal Chaudhry making a habit of passing sexist remarks on live television. (2020). Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2094730/1-talal-chaudhry-making-habit-passing-sexist-remarks-live-television/>

67 First 100 days of PTI's government: Controversies. (2018). Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1855078/1-first-100-days-ptis-government-controversies/>

68 Ghizali, R. (2018). Bint-e-Pakistan cannot be used in place of father's name, rules CII | The Express Tribune. Retrieved 30 June 2020, from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1957590/1-bint-e-pakistan-cannot-used-place-fathers-name-rules-cii/>

The ideologies animating hegemonic masculinity permeate the bureaucracy as well. The state adheres to religious right power centres as a norm<sup>69</sup> such as the facilitation of 'Haya March' in Islamabad as a counteract to Aurat March. As an illustration, the Aurat March organizers spent weeks trying to get permission for the event. On the other hand, the countering 'Haya March (Modesty March) announced and were immediately granted permission<sup>70</sup>.

Another institution that regularly attempts to influence legislation related to regulation of women's bodies is the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII). In 2016, the CII came under heavy criticism for preparing a draft bill for 'protection' of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, that held that "a husband should be allowed to "lightly" beat his wife if, among other things, she refuses to dress properly or turns down

overtures for sexual intercourse"<sup>71</sup>. The CII was also in strong opposition of the Women's Protection Bill passed in the Punjab province in 2016. The CII held that in "Islam, the man's status is superior to that of woman's" and that they are fundamentally opposed to a law that will allow "authorities to punish a male member of the family for mistreating women". This demonstrates that the CII's opposition to pro-women legislation is rooted in the belief that men of a family hold a superior position to the women, and should be allowed to treat the women as they want to, without any intervention from the state<sup>72</sup>. In the past the CII has also ruled that "DNA cannot be used as primary evidence in rape cases" and lended support to the Hudood that require "women alleging rape to get four male witnesses to testify in court before a case is heard"<sup>73</sup>.

## 4.2 Civil Society Responses

Interviewees from civil society groups observed an increase in the understanding of hyper and hegemonic masculinities, but this understanding hasn't translated into interventions so far. There is also a concern that there is a lack of research and scholarship, especially to understand how masculinity is emerging in digital spheres in the local context. "Generally groups focused on gender based rights have been raising their voice

against women and other gendered minorities but the focus has been on seeking protection, prevention of violence and demanding strategies to punish aggressors - less focus has been put on fighting one of the root causes which is toxic masculinity," says Sehar Tariq.

69 Tehrik-e-Labbaik gets representation on Punjab panel for textbooks? | SAMAA. (2017). Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://www.samaa.tv/news/2017/11/tehrick-e-labbaik-gets-representation-on-punjab-panel-for-textbooks/>

70 Ali, K. (2020). Jamia Hafsa students claim responsibility for defacing feminist mural in Islamabad. Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1538478>

71 *Who are the Pakistani group proposing to 'lightly beat' women?*. BBC News. (2016). Retrieved 19 September 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36413037>.

72 Khan, S. (2016). *Is it time to reform Pakistan's Council of Islamic Ideology?* | DW | 17.05.2016. DW.COM. Retrieved 19 September 2020, from <https://www.dw.com/en/is-it-time-to-reform-pakistans-council-of-islamic-ideology/a-19262444>

73 *CII rules women's protection law 'un-Islamic'* | The Express Tribune. The Express Tribune. (2016). Retrieved 19 September 2020, from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1058773/top-pakistani-religious-body-rules-womens-protection-law-un-islamic>

There was a consensus among respondents that all corrective efforts heavily focused on oppression of women without adequate engagement with narratives around masculinity itself. Rizvan Saeed, a gender rights activist and scholar explained, "The senior feminists were/are very wary about giving space to masculinity related discussions. Perhaps their fear is genuine as there are possibilities that men take over the space that women have created over decades of struggle."

As an example of an organized movement, all respondents mentioned Aurat March as the most critical contemporary challenge to hegemonic masculinity. The Women Action Forum, WAF, was another example cited, a nationwide women's movement founded as resistance to General Zia's dictatorship and now in its fourth decade. Its challenging of military regimes, state institutions and oppressive laws like the Hudood Ordinance were seen as a way of addressing hegemonic and militarized masculinities.

Respondents also highlighted informal but potentially potent efforts initiated by young people to challenge hegemonic masculinities in their own contexts. Younger feminists talked about informal, mostly digital collectives and groups, where women engage in feminist discourse such as The Feminist Collective<sup>74</sup>, Pakistan Feminist Network, Girls at Dhabas and other related closed groups.

"Now hyper masculine narratives are being challenged more. Younger feminists are robust

about the critique. There was not much work on bodily autonomy, sexuality - you couldn't talk about these things and now because of the digital media you do see a more visible discussion on these identities," says Zoya Rehman.

There also has been an increase in individuals who have taken to social media to create a feminist discourse, some of which directly targets hegemonic masculinity. Sabahat Zakriya's Feminustani<sup>75</sup> is one such example. Others have used performative art, such as the Auratnaak standup comedy, using humor to make the challenge to masculinity more palatable.

There is an emerging content trend of men challenging hegemonic masculinity and posing feminist concerns. One example is Hassan Kilde Bajwa, a popular vlogger<sup>76</sup> who deconstructs hyper masculinity and its impacts through real life examples. "There isn't enough discourse on what masculinities should look like. Men are just supposed to know what they are. I was told by my father that boys don't cry and now suddenly, we are being told that it is okay to cry if you are sad. The change is monumental". Bajwa says that he is trying to help men understand how the male identity, rooted within hypermasculine ideals, is problematic. "I never say what women should do or what they should feel. I address men and talk about how men need to improve", says Bajwa.

Muhammad Moiz, a highly popular vlogger has created an online avatar, Desi Bombshell Shumaila Bhatti<sup>77</sup>, who Moiz describes as a 'quintessential middle-class Pakistani young woman with

74 The Feminist Collective - <https://www.facebook.com/tfclahore/>

75 Feminustani - <https://www.facebook.com/feminustani/>

76 Hassan Kilde Bajwa - <https://www.facebook.com/danistaner/>

77 Desi Bombshell - <https://www.facebook.com/BombasticBabe/>

spikes of confidence and insecurities'<sup>78</sup>. Using visual and aural filters, Shumaila lays bare the hypocrisies and absurdities of local culture, including commentary on men's sense of entitlement, through a character that is raw, reflective of the class and culture she belongs

to. Without using the word 'feminism', she is able to critique the extended family system, societal norms and status of women. However, Moiz admits the positive response his character gets has to do with the audience knowing he is a man and viewers respond to him as a man.

### 4.3 Youth groups' and hegemonic masculinities

The environment for political discourse is restrictive in national educational institutes. Moral policing is commonplace, operationalised through surveillance of male/female interactions, different dress codes and hostel curfew timings for male and female students and constant sexual harassment of the latter<sup>79</sup>. The three decade old ban on student unions and political activities on campuses has affected the development of independent political thought within students and student movements. Ammar Rashid, a political commentator and activist writes the demonisation of political discourse and activity has resulted in, "The stifling of intellectual freedom and closing of students' minds"<sup>80</sup>.

One example that demonstrates how harmful masculinity operates on-campus is the Balochistan University Case that came to light in

October 2019, involving sexual harassment and the use of hidden cameras to surveil and record students on the Balochistan university campus.

The footage recorded from CCTV cameras was reportedly used by university staff to blackmail female students. According to FIA, at least 12 videos of harassment of female students were investigated. The clips were said to be of a "personal nature and involved the mingling of female and male students. The clips, recorded using cameras covertly installed at places like washrooms and smoking areas on campus, were then used to sexually harass and blackmail students"<sup>81</sup>.

The students were filmed in washrooms and other personal spaces and then had to succumb to both financial extortion and sexual exploitation for the fear of dishonoring their families<sup>82, 83</sup>.

78 Abid, A. (2020). Meet the man behind Shumaila Bhatti -- a solution to all desi girls' problems | The Express Tribune. Retrieved 14 June 2020, from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1199450/meet-man-behind-shumaila-bhatti-solution-desi-girls-problems/>

79 The respondents in the youth group are only representative of large urban cities, and the responses may not be fully representative of youth interventions and experiences in smaller cities and other areas.

80 Rashid, A. (2020). If student unions are bad for education, why are our controlled campuses ranked among the worst in the world?. Retrieved 9 June 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1519162>

81 A. Shah, S. (2019). FIA interrogates 3 officials over involvement in harassment scandal at Balochistan University. Retrieved 18 June 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1510832>

82 This case was demonstrative of operationalisation of hegemonic masculinity and its direct impact on female students. Media coverage about the incident mentions that "teachers and members of the administration had asked for sexual favours or money in return for not sharing videos with the families" and quotes a student saying "My mother stitched peoples' clothes to save money to send me to medical school. They will call me back if they think that their honour is on the line".

83 Shahid, S., & Masood, T. (2019). Balochistan University students speak out against surveillance. Retrieved 18 June 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1513952>

An investigative piece on this case reveals that girls from the Hazara community were “particularly vulnerable to harassment” as they are members of a much persecuted minority, additionally these girls “are not seen as having the ‘protection’ of Hazara men, only a handful of whom risk going to a university” that is situated in an area where many sectarian killings have taken place<sup>84</sup>. This demonstrates that the intersectional differences between the female demographics makes some additionally vulnerable.

There are other examples of institutions dismissing vulnerable and targeted women to stand in support of men accused of sexual harassment. In 2014, Abid Hussain Imam, a faculty member at the varsity’s law department was accused of sexually harassing a female student. The accused belonged to a politically connected family. When the accusation was made, various members of the law department, including the head of department made public statements in support of the perpetrator and called the young victim ‘mentally unstable’. The case was eventually escalated to the Ombudsman, where the accused was found guilty and ordered to be removed from service<sup>85</sup>.

In January 2019 a number of pictures allegedly taken by CCTV cameras in major cities installed under the government’s safe city projects went viral on social media<sup>86</sup>. The pictures showed

couples in intimate positions and raised concerns about the monitoring and involvement of officials in charge in leaking the photos<sup>87</sup>. They were shared on Facebook and Twitter and attracted lewd commentary and slut shaming of the women involved.

In 2019, accusations of rape on NUST university campus emerged. Public calls for investigations into the case promoted a tweet thread from NUST that openly accused the rape victim of malafide intentions<sup>88</sup> showing that educational institutions continue to place male perpetrators in positions that allows them to exert power over vulnerable students.

One of the methods of intimidation of young women that is increasingly becoming common are ‘raids’. Raids indicate a method of harassment where a group of men get together to bombard hate speech, rape threats, sexually explicit content and other intimidating material to the victim. The victims’ inbox is flooded with messages within a matter of minutes or she is added to a group where her morphed pictures are shared with graphic, sexualised commentary. After Aurat March 2019, these ‘raids’ occurred with an alarming frequency, attracting some media attention. At the centre of the attention was a boy named Sed Qureshi, who ran multiple ‘dank’<sup>89</sup> groups and publicly posted videos featuring animal abuse and other kinds

84 Notezai, M. (2020). *UoB’s video scandal: the tip of the iceberg*. DAWN.COM. Retrieved 19 September 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1578777>

85 LUMS teacher found guilty of sexually harassing student. (2014). Retrieved 30 June 2020, from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2014/11/01/lums-teacher-found-guilty-of-sexually-harassing-student-2/>

86 Azeem, M. (2019). Leaked Safe City images spark concern among citizens. Retrieved 18 June 2020, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1459963>

87 Pictures allegedly taken from Safe City cameras stir controversy. (2019). Retrieved 18 June 2020, from <http://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/pictures-allegedly-taken-from-safe-city-cameras-stir-controversy/>

88 Read NUST’s official tweet thread on rape allegations here. The tweet thread was published hours after the rape allegation was made. - [https://twitter.com/Official\\_NUST/status/1209500489785729026](https://twitter.com/Official_NUST/status/1209500489785729026)

89 Urban Dictionary: Dank. (2018). Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Dank>

of violence<sup>90</sup>. Dank is slang, popularised by the famous 'Urban Dictionary' that usually means "exceptionally unique or odd memes".

In Pakistan, 'Dank meme' groups have generally been used to share explicit and sexual memes against women or the LGBTQI community. In 2019, LUMS, a premier private sector university came into limelight for DankPuna, a group with over 600 members outed for making rape jokes and sharing rape depictions focused on university teachers and students. It resulted in protests by students at the campus and protestors got much online support<sup>91</sup>, and continued till the dean agreed to take disciplinary action. Among the 8 admins of the Dankpuna group, 2 were suspended for a semester.

"I was added to a Facebook 'raid group' where a group of men harassed women together. However, even though I come from considerable privilege I wasn't able to take the case forward myself because of familial constraints", says Marha. Her experience is not unique. Filing a complaint with the FIA is not encouraged by families. "When I was getting attacked online and wanted to contact FIA, my mom said aur tamasha lagay ga (it would simply bring more attention)," says Sidra Khan. Even when women find the will and support to report to FIA, delays in the legal process mean the incident is long over by the time FIA acts. In response, many young women are increasingly turning to social media platforms to name, shame and demand justice.

In June 2020, a hashtag campaign #TimesUp surfaced online with students publicly naming male students and faculty members who have systematically targeted women on campus. The responses, specially from men, largely continue to question the integrity of women who 'placed themselves in a position to be exploited'. However, there is also increasing support for those coming forward. The #TimesUp hashtag and the emerging discourse on how women are treated by fellow male students and faculty members, demonstrate that the digital spaces are now being used as a battleground where young women are trying to collectively take a stance.

There seems to be consensus among all respondents from youth groups that students, at least at the higher education level, are becoming increasingly aware of the role their gender plays



90 Lodhi, A. (2019). Dank memes: The rise of social media incel groups in Pakistan's digital space. Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://www.techjuice.pk/dank-memes-the-rise-of-social-media-incel-groups-in-pakistans-digital-space/>

91 Staff, I. (2019). Pakistani Twitter supports Lums female students after sexist Facebook group is exposed. Retrieved 10 June 2020, from <https://images.dawn.com/news/1182337>

in determination of their identity and conduct. "Your religion, your sect, your ethnicity, your class, every identity creates different kinds of groups. They understand different things by it depending on who they are", says Shizza Malik, an active member of Aurat Haq, a Karachi based women's cross class diverse political group, "There is an increase in the number of young people who are engaging with these ideas. They might disagree with it, but at least they are discussing it."

There is an acknowledgment that understanding of concepts of masculinity is connected to class and access. All the interviewees used the words 'class, access and privilege', stating that understanding these ideas (and the discourse to challenge them) is dependent on having access, not just to information but also having the access to a conducive peer group. "Sometimes we who have access and privilege to learn about these concepts use this jargon, we isolate others" says Amna Ashraf.

When asked about how youth and student groups are challenging hegemonic masculinity<sup>92</sup>, the respondents talked of two organized movements as being pivotal, the Aurat March and the Student March. All respondents saw Aurat March as a largely youth led movement, citing it as the prime example of how young people are challenging patriarchal norms. All respondents believed the movement would gain strength in the coming years, despite the threats and opposition. They appreciated how it had lustered public presence of people of different genders and orientations. Interviewees also pointed out that those engaging in hate speech online are now forced to defend their notions of gender roles and thus, are engaging

with and exposed to concepts that were previously unknown to them.

Almost all students highlighted the non-structured, fluid personal and collective initiatives. They mentioned gender sensitivity clubs, feminist clubs and societies, small awareness raising campaigns on and outside campuses, online discussion forums and support groups, which engage in discussions on various themes regarding gender politics including masculinities. Students and youth groups also react through protests and demonstrations, usually focused on a single point agenda.

Many young people ran digital campaigns and online responses. #MeToo, #JahaizKhoribandKaro, #BreakTheToxicCycle, #TimesUp were cited as examples of hashtags that challenge masculinity in the digital sphere. There was an acknowledgement that hashtag campaigns often attract vitriol, but most respondents saw the opposition as an opportunity for further engagement. Technology in itself is seen as an enabler that has helped young people and feminist activists challenge hypermasculine narratives.

Respondents also talked about responding to hypermasculine banter at home, with families and close networks. Some found that after sustained discussions, changing thinking of family members was possible. Other respondents identify the family circle as a 'gap in the responses'. Young women found it easier to publicly challenge hyper masculinity and give speeches about it than to challenge family members in their own homes.

<sup>92</sup> All respondents from youth groups expanded their response to challenging patriarchy and enlisting feminist values when elaborating how young people are responding to hyper-masculine narratives

## 4.4 - Media and the discourse on masculinities

The media in Pakistan is a male dominated industry. There are only two women who are currently serving top editorial roles at mainstream national news outlets<sup>93</sup>. The nature of the industry also creates the space for objectification of women - women reporters for example are routinely asked for screen tests which male reportes do not have to go through. There was a consensus among all respondents that the industry has a rudimentary understanding of gender issues and the need of challenging hegemonic narratives on masculinity.

“There is a very clear generational difference in the newsrooms - most people at senior levels, who grew up in a different era, adhere to traditional roles of masculinity, so even when we do create something more progressive or are a part of a progressive conversation, you will see them snickering and making fun of the conversation because they just can’t relate to any other form of masculinity than the one they themselves practice”, says Noreen Zehra.

Tanzeela Mazhar, a senior journalist who has been facing court proceedings on charges of

defamation after taking her boss to court for sexual harassment fears the lack of awareness goes well beyond simple ignorance. “We don’t have many feminists within the media industry, we have a very small minority, people will say we support women rights but we are not feminists. It is very, very difficult to collectively challenge traditional gender roles,” says Tanzeela Mazhar.

Small groups of people, working within the media industry have, have worked in different ways to challenge narratives that strengthen hegemonic masculinity, both within the industry on screen. One way has been to raise awareness within organizations. Some took the form of editorial control to weed out problematic content, and some in the form of formal and informal discussions amongst colleagues in the wake of pivotal events. In some cases, it is the more junior team members who are challenging the inner biases of their senior team members. “A lot of new women reporters are very vocal. Internally women have started protesting editorial decisions and if they are not heard, they raise their voice on social media,” says Badar Alam.

## 4.5 - Analysis of stakeholder responses

Notions of idealized hyper-masculinity permeate through state institutions and civil society, and present severe challenges for the youth, including inside educational institutes. This much is obvious with the ‘hegemonic’ label; this manifestation of masculinity is dominant and pervasive and perpetuated largely through active consent or passive acceptance by those it impacts, and by coercion - use of force, abuse, castigation and sanction when it is transgressed.

However, to go back to Gramsci’s postulation, hegemony is never complete, because the dominant are not the entire majority. As evident in this section, hyper-masculinity is contested in every stakeholder group, however weak or strong or new the challenge.

The cumulative momentum for change may be stalled by the differences within groups that impede collective work. Starting from

<sup>93</sup> Referring to the situation in June 2020. Quatrina Hossain currently heads PTV and Mahim Meher leads Saama Digital.

generational differences, to urban & semi urban divide, to class relations, to differences in the way resistance should be orchestrated, divided opinions over the disruptive effect of donor funding, and competing for resources, many factors combine to create an environment where groups are unable to effectively collaborate.

There is also a lack of consensus on the issue of working with men. Some women want to work in women only spaces and actively hold that educating men is not their burden. Male allies are often seen and dismissed for 'engaging in tokenism' and women who do choose to work with men face criticism for it. While there are some genuine concerns about the inclusion of men in feminist struggles, others feel the need to engage. They point out the need for alliance building, how adversarial exchange alienates some potential allies, and raise the question that if men are the problem, how the problem can be solved without their engagement.

Ideas that challenge hegemonic forms of masculinity are still seen as a Western import. Local movements have had limited success in creating locally relevant, accessible knowledge. All respondents verbalised the need to 'make the movement more inclusive'. However, inclusion appears to be a challenge they are still grappling with. Some respondents talked about the inability to translate gender related terminologies in a way that it becomes accessible to the mainstream. Interviewees expressed frustration about 'losing the nuance'. Local language and contextualised discourse on masculinities seems to be severely lacking.

Digital and social media have democratized access to knowledge, breaking through class divides which previously limited exposure to globalized discourses to the ambit of the privileged. Middle and lower middle class have

increased opportunities to engage with people with different identities, different perceptions of gender and embody different forms of masculinity. Some respondents cautioned that feminism is increasingly seen as a 'cool' and 'elite' thing to do, resulting in performative wokeness and works as social capital that helps in upward mobility. However if feminism, formerly dismissed across the spectrum, is now cool - that in itself speaks of change.

Honour remains a perennial concern of hegemonic masculinity articulated in every sphere, including the parliament. Women in public spaces and in the public eye are expected to carry the weight of the honour of the whole nation instead of just their own. Any deviations from the ideal of a submissive, modest woman is seen as an affront to national pride and narratives on social media platforms. An analysis of statements, comments and legislative actions by both current and previous governments and political actors indicate a very specific pattern of engagement with hyper-masculine narratives and powers - embodiment and placation.

In essence, hegemonic forms of masculinity continue to effect political, policy and social responses to gender based issues. The discourse around traditional gender roles is growing and hyper-masculine ideals are increasingly being challenged in both virtual and physical spaces. However, challenges remain - with the discourse on the need to change traditional gender roles growing, there is also increased polarisation and more vocal resistance to change. At the same time, feminist ideals, including those that seek to change ideas of masculinity are seen as 'elite' and consequently, there is an increase in performative allyship.

# Way Forward

## Section 5

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5.1 - Findings

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5.2 - Way Forward

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## 5.1 Findings

### Online and offline spaces have become contiguous and sociologically integrated

The window in which online space could be a neutral levelled field with unqualified liberatory potential for women has now closed. The baggage and biases of the offline material world have taken root. Technology's capacity to both liberate and subjugate is well established. Women undergo a similar spectrum of experiences in both, from bullying and harassment to voluntary interactions, as much a conduit to ecommerce and global connectivity as to sexualized solicitations, attacks and abuse. However, online spaces are also the venue for contestations and pushback, presenting a site which can be reclaimed.

### The perceived continuity of hegemonic masculinity conceals its active perpetuation

Discrimination, repression and violence against women was carried over into online spaces, but unmoored from the traditional structures responsible for their evolution and perpetuation. Resorting to the historicity of traditional masculinity blurs how it reasserts and reinvents itself. By wielding disciplining narratives of culture, religion and modesty, offline and online worlds connect and converge into recreating hegemonies even as the context in which they first emerged has changed.

### Dominant, harmful masculinity is undergoing changes

While there is no evidence that it is dissipating, dominant harmful masculinity is in flux and is increasingly challenged. Across every stakeholder group there is contestation. The pushback responses range from nascent to

historical; organized to unstructured; collective to individual, and across all age cohorts. The combined velocity may not yet be in a position to fragment hegemony but there are emerging signs of its fracturing. It can now follow either of two trajectories: Reasserting the traits that earn it the 'toxic' label but in face of increasing contestations, lose its hegemonic status. Alternately, adapting and reinventing its form and manifestations to one that accommodates sociological and cultural changes, for instance in the recent past, it shifted focus from confinement of women to surveillance of women.

### Women's online presence and assertion is driving the change

Women sharing their stories of trauma is creating understanding and compassion and drawing attention to their struggles, even though some continue to jeer. Despite concerns about 'wokeness' or 'pretend allies', highlighting abusive content and sharing personal on-ground experiences is eroding the collective ability of denying the scale of the problem. Women have also started vlogs, FaceBook groups, video primers and study circles to explain feminism and share women's experiences. As an indicator, feminism is now debated, even if poorly understood – the earlier referencing was usually only to women's rights.

### Young men are also starting to publicly challenge hegemonic masculinities

At a much lesser scale, some men have started to share their own experiences of sexual abuse and violence. Some have started vlogs and podcasts on rethinking hegemonic masculinity, these are slowly increasing in popularity though the audience is currently small. Its virulent,

inimical forms are gradually retreating to closed off private all-male spaces, but surge forward publicly when celebrities and prominent influencers validate and endorse it. Technology is both an enabler and a contender for hyper-masculine narratives.

### **Questions on representation have emerged as a way of undermining women's politics**

As political correctness takes hold, dominant masculinity opposition to women's rights has been replaced with disciplinary narratives to delegitimize feminist politics. Women's movements are challenged as being unrepresentative, called out for not speaking about what impacts the most marginalized women and in doing so, a) invalidate experiences of women who speak out, and b) show a lack of understanding of integrated patriarchal systems, and that the most marginalized, poor rural women, the primary victims of honour killings, are persecuted for the exercising the same bodily autonomy that urban educated women are demanding.

### **Legitimation of sexist content is as problematic as content production**

Original sexist content can be drowned out by either ignoring or condemning it. Its reproduction on the other hand, creates its validity and velocity. At times men initiate attacks and take provocative positions to increase followers. Condemning them gets no traction as it is written off as 'liberals outrage'; the purpose is to find clique acceptance, not general popularity. It may be more useful to explore ways of lowering circulation and validation than inhibiting sexist content creation.

### **Even sexist content can open up space for dialogue and exchange**

All sexist content is not necessarily misogynist or hate speech; much is a conditioned response and reflection of mainstream values. Few offline spaces allow for exchange of ideas and perspectives among citizens. Online adversarial and caustic responses seal off opportunities for fostering dialogue and growth in thinking. There is evidence that sustained online engagement can have a positive impact but it is difficult to gauge when interactions can be productive and when they add to hostility. Eristic arguments are common online.

### **Social media can work as a course corrector and flag issues for traditional media**

Issues first identified on social media get picked up by traditional media, both print and broadcast. There is a carry over of media platforms – print news journalists have large Twitter followings and are influential; TV news anchors have vibrant Facebook pages. Sometimes it works: a stand off between a playwright known for sexist views Khalil-ur-Rehman Qamar and feminist activist Marvi Sirmed started on television and carried over onto social media and created a storm of outrage, which resulted in mainstream media disassociating from him. Sometimes it doesn't: Various popular personalities on TV continuing enjoying popularity despite regularly drawing ire online on promotion of sexist view. Better strategies are required to understand and engage some influencers while challenging others.

### **Notions of masculinity shape and influence the policy environment**

The parliament and other official decision-making carry the baggage of hegemonic masculinity, as reflected in low numbers of women in such positions. When present, they are confined to working on 'women's concerns' and away from issues like national security, considered male

purview. Male honour translates into national honour in parliament, needing defending and vigilance. Institutions like the Council of Islamic Ideology remain preoccupied with women's bodies and agency. What women call patriarchy, men in official positions call culture, social values and religious sensibilities.

### **Ideas of masculinity result in protectionism, a problematic framework**

Protectionism is a problematic framework. Concerns on violence against women are invariably recast in protective frameworks which shelter and not enable women, and male predation is naturalized, even where condemned. It perpetuates hegemonic masculinity and men's role as guardians and detracts from women's rights as rights not largesse. It has been used to camouflage anti-democratic practices as safeguard for women – the electronic crimes act which constrains freedom of expression and media freedoms was justified as for protection of women and children. Yet laws that actually protect women frequently get blocked or passed after a significant struggle, such as the one on domestic violence in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and Punjab respectively.

### **Allies and alliances critical to challenge legitimacy of hegemonic masculinity**

## **5.2 Way Forward**

This research is too preliminary for the authors to set out prescriptions for state institutions, political parties, civil society and donors. The usual formulas are problematic in this case.

The state has used protectionist arguments for furthering anti-democratic practices and laws, including restricting freedom of expression and surveilling and proposing regulation of online spaces. Caution is required for proposing any

Societal norms are a critical site for establishing the divergence between legality and legitimacy. Law reform can only address legality; till social structures concede legitimacy to the laws, they will remain sporadically implemented. To eliminate violence and discrimination against women, norms and the normative function of hegemonic masculinity must change. Creating allies and strengthening allies is critical to broadening the conversation.

### **There is a considerable and obstructive knowledge gap on masculinity**

Little research has been conducted and published on masculinities in Pakistan. Whatever little is present is a generic broad stroke on hyper-masculinity which assumes masculinity has set characteristics and fixed identities. There is limited understanding of its relational nature and how manifestations of masculinity are formed and expressed vary with material realities, class, modes of production, religion, region, ethnicity, sexuality, language and education. This study on masculinity and online abuse has confined itself to secondary data but recognizes and underlines the importance of primary data and engaging with men. Further knowledge production is necessary for a nuanced understanding of the mechanics of enabling change.

regulatory changes.

People's movements have been divided by and critical of funding support as distorting organic directions and growth. Caution is required for proposing any support beyond solidarity and facilitating collaboration.

Yet the need for awareness raising, building capacities and extending outreach remains important, and largely unmet. At best, this report

can, and does, reiterate the need for dialogue and engagement to arrive at a collective decision on how best to address these. It recommends holding workshops and dialogues with varied, relevant stakeholder groups to share the findings of this study and solicit suggestions on what future directions can and should be charted.

This research intended to probe the manifestations and evolutions of hegemonic masculinity in Pakistan's online spaces in reference to its bolstering of violence against women, and to explore perceptions and responses of stakeholders. It is cognizant of its limitations. Online spaces are not representative and may or may not be reflective of trends in dominant masculinity across the country. In looking at online exchanges, certain articulations stayed beyond the purview: militarized masculinities; structurally embedded discriminations; experiences of different women's movements with localized patriarchies; how masculinities intersect with class, location

and religious groupings; the interface between hegemonic and alternative masculinities. Even with regard to violence against women, there is little literature on perpetrators, their world views and influences.

As Pakistan progresses from having its legal scaffolding in place and turns towards implementation of laws and creating legitimacy for gender equality beyond mere legality, such knowledge production becomes critical. The turn towards social structures and democratizing the private space will assume increasing importance, and hegemonic masculinity warrants focus as among the primary societal obstructions.

#### Recommendations for further research:

- Comparative studies on multiple masculinities and dominant forms with reference to class, form of work/ mode of production, location, religious grouping, education level and other such variables
- Perpetuation of hegemonic masculinities



in the entertainment media and different online spaces such as youtube and closed, members-only all male groups

- Study of violent masculinities including those convicted by courts, and ideation of violence
- Study of representations of masculinities within entertainment media
- Study of the growing digital influencer culture and the masculine identities represented and promoted by male influencers on different digital platforms

# Annexes

## Section 6

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## Annex 1

### Glossary

AM	Aurat March
API	Application Programming Interface
CC	Creative Commons
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CII	Council of Islamic Ideology
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid
DRF	Digital Rights Foundation
FIA	Federal Investigation Agency
KP	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersexed
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
MMfD	Media Matters for Democracy
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PML-N	Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz)
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek Insaf
TLP	Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan
TV	Television
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WAF	Women Action Forum

## Annex 2

### Methodology for technical data analysis

Sentiment Analysis

Hashtag: #AuratMarch

Platform: Twitter

### Definitions

#### Total tweets:

The total number of relevant tweets retrieved from the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) for the analysis time period, which included the #AuratMarch hashtag and were categorised with English or Urdu as the listed language.

#### Net tweets:

The net number of tweets retrieved from the Twitter Application Programming Interface (API) for the analysis time period, used for the statistical analysis. These differ from the "Total Tweets" in the following ways:

- Exclude retweets
- Exclude conversational replies
- Exclude tweets which only contain media and no text
- Ignore thematically irrelevant tweets e.g a photo of cookies with an aurat march hashtag
- Include slang conversion for artificial intelligence definitions e.g 'troll' => "person who deliberately stirs up trouble" | "coz" => "because" | "enuff" => "enough" | "lmao" => "laugh my ass off" => "to mock" or "to find humorous"

### Calculations:

All percentages have been rounded to one decimal place.

### Data Aggregation

The data was retrieved using the Twitter API. Preprocessing included conversion of formats, trimming of data columns and data scrubbing.

### Sentiment Analysis

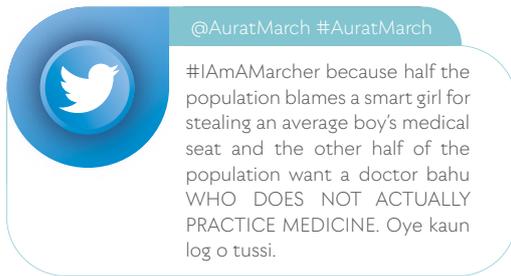
Natural Language Processing (NLP) is a subset of artificial intelligence which uncovers insights from large amounts of unstructured data. For this project, the content of each tweet - with metadata removed - was used as the unstructured data. We used Machine Learning (ML) to improve the performance of the *data classification model*, by increasing the volume of data it was exposed to.

Models also have to be trained or extended to account for specific terms, which can be industry-specific e.g SARS for "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome" or linguistic representations e.g "Aurat" or "Badtameez" - key weighted Urdu terms written in Roman English.

### Applied Examples



The aforementioned tweet - made on the 15th of March, 2019 from London, England - was eventually classified as negative without the linked URL being evaluated.

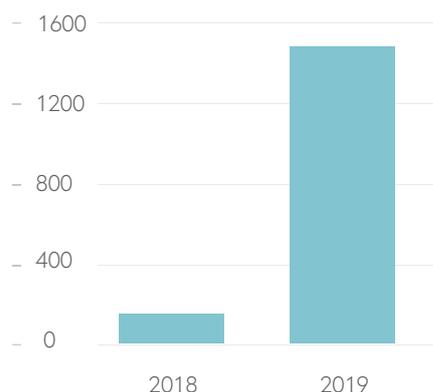


Whereas this tweet made on the same date from Lahore, Pakistan was categorised as positive.

The objective is to give machines the ability to understand intent by understanding language, and use that ability to determine sentiment, and sort, evaluate and categorise data. The sentiment analysis for polarity classification was run using a trained natural language processing model which categorised outputs as either positive, negative or neutral.

Instances of extensive Urdu dialogue written in Roman English were evaluated with human assistance.

Negative tweets YoY 2018-2019



The trend line between 2018 and 2019 shows a sharp spike in negative sentiment, while the same trend line experiences a significant decline in growth between 2019 and 2020, illustrating a decline in the growth of negative sentiment.

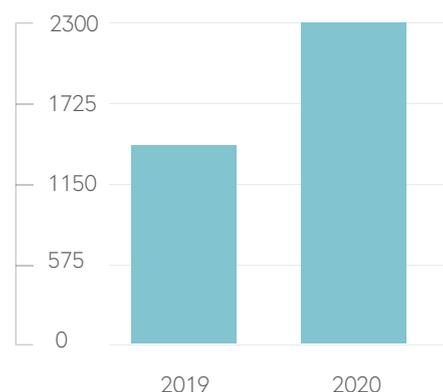
Positive tweets increased by 651.3% between

## Overview - Net Tweets

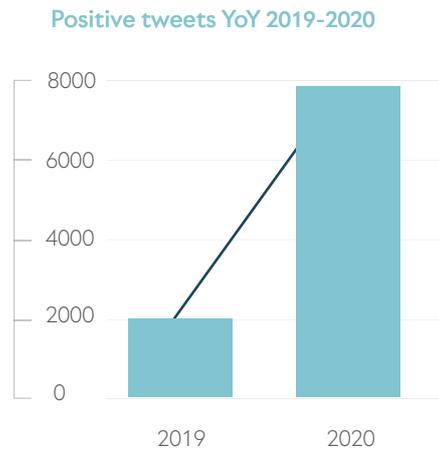
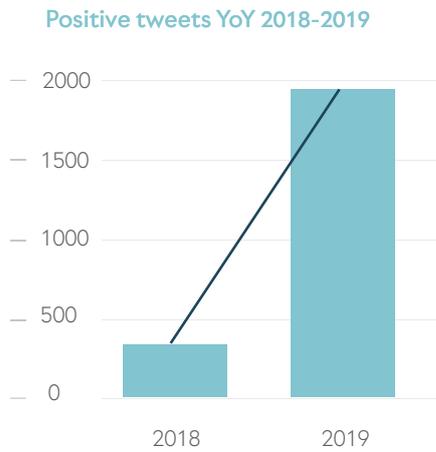
### 2018 - 2020

The primary increase in sentiment from 2018 to 2019 was negative. The total number of tweets saw a year-over-year increase of 1081.2%, while the analysed net tweets - after accounting for retweets etc - increased by 722.5%. Of those, In 2018, negative tweets accounted for 25% of all tweets. In 2019 that figure rose to 37% but represented a 1099.2% *increase* in actual numbers, the largest sentiment gain over the preceding year. The trend line between 2018 and 2019 shows a sharp spike in negative sentiment, while the same trend line experiences a significant decline in growth between 2019 and 2020, illustrating a decline in the growth of negative sentiment.

Negative tweets YoY 2019-2020

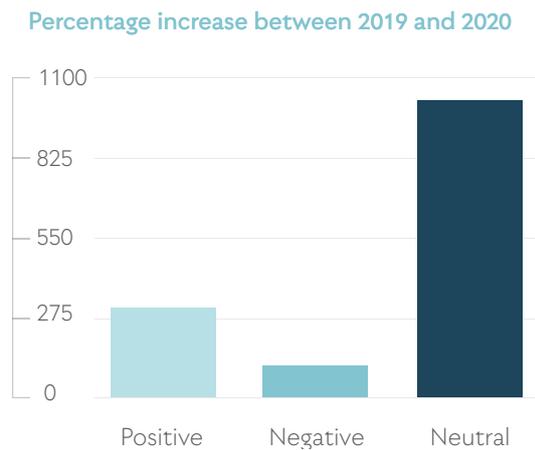
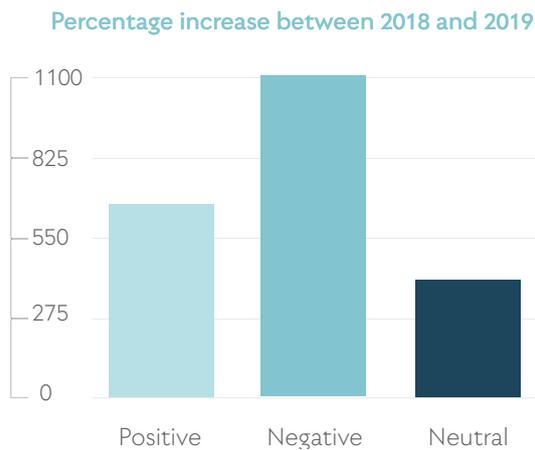


2018 and 2019, while the increase between 2019 and 2020 was 301.7%. The trends are visible in the charts below and illustrated

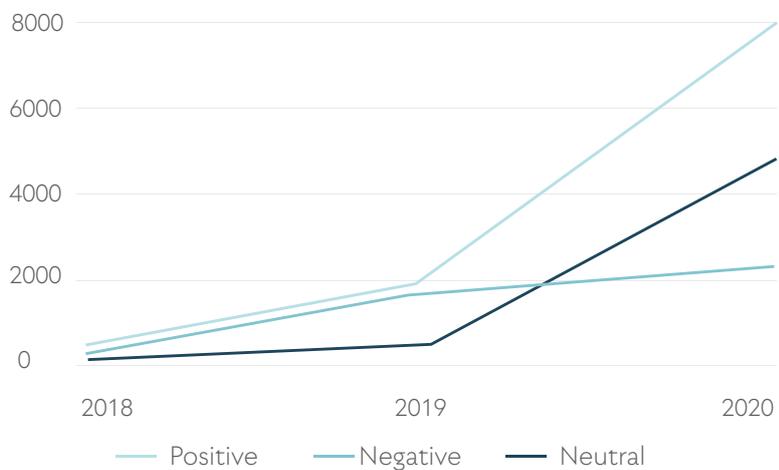


The increases in sentiment types were documented and compared to gauge the highest increase. The visual representation (below) of the increases illustrates that the

conversation skewed largely negative as the volume and velocity of tweets increased in 2019. The tone shifted to a more neutral stance in 2020 at the expense of negative tweets.



The line graph tracks the shifting sentiments over the time period, but also illustrates an increase in overall volume in 2020; a brief overview of corroborating activity on Google - stemming from Pakistan - is appended below.

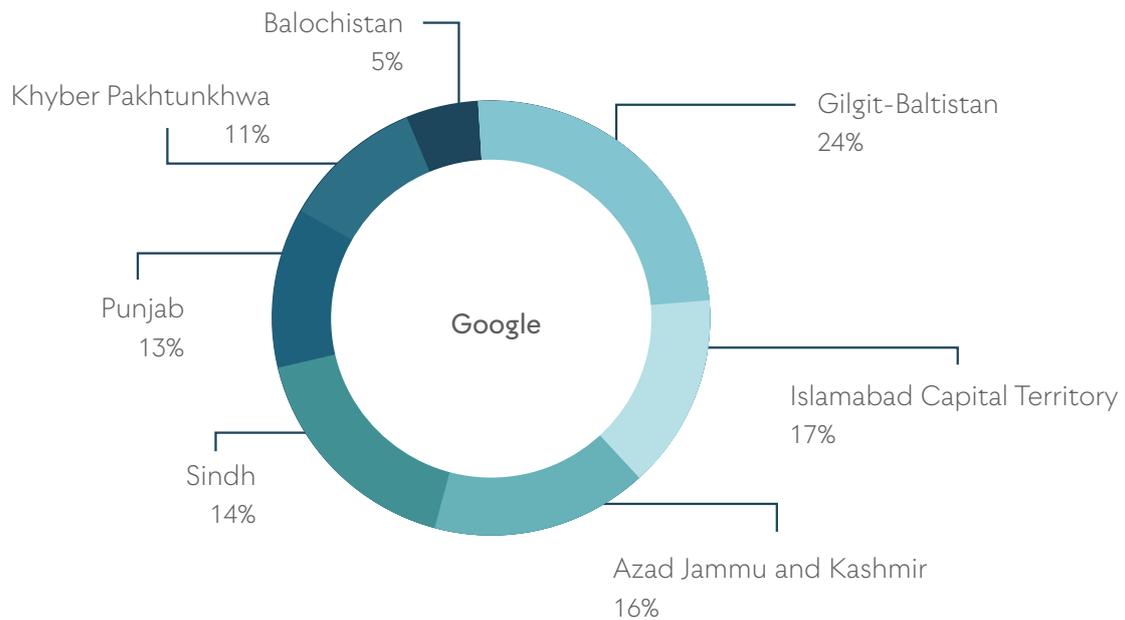
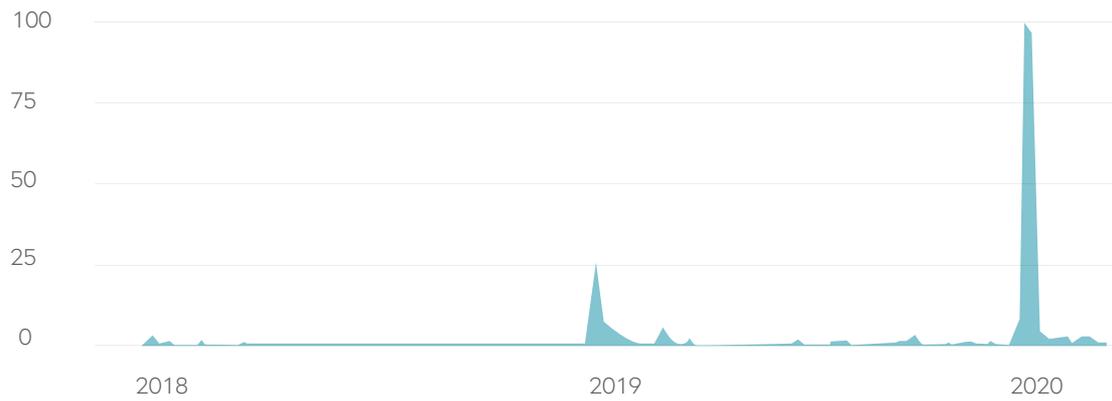


## Google Trends

Search Term: "Aurat March"

Country: Pakistan

April 2015 - April 2020



\*Federally Administered Tribal Areas registered zero searches

## Annex 3

### List of Interviewees

	Interviewee	Affiliation
<b>Youth Groups</b>		
1.	Marha Fathma	FemSoc president at LUMS
2.	Nayab Gohar Jan	Feminist activist
3.	Amna Ashraf	Student activist, previously associated with Aurat HAq
4.	Shiza Malik	Student activist, Habib University, Aurat Haq
5.	Ayesha Izhar	PRSF, Student March Organiser
6.	Hasnat Alam*	Student Activist, Private University, Karachi
8.	Sana Baig	Student, IBA, Member Aurat Haq
<b>Media &amp; Digital Content Producers</b>		
9.	Badar Alam	Former Editor, Herald
10.	Mehmal Sarfaraz	Founder, The Current
11.	Noreen Zehra	Executive Producer, Geo News
12.	Nazish Zafar	Multi Media Producer, BBC Urdu
14.	Tanzeela Mazhar	Freelance Journalist & Feminist Avtisit
15.	Soofia Khurram	Playright
16.	Hassan Kilde Bajwa	Digital Content Producer
<b>Parliamentarians</b>		
17.	Dr Musadik Malik	Senator, PML-N
18.	Romina Khursheed Alam	MNA, PML-N
19.	Saman Jafri	MNA, MQM
20.	Wajiha Akram	MNA, PTI
21.	Faisal Karim kundi	MNA, PPP
22.	Jamila Gilani	MPA, ANP
<b>Civil Society</b>		
23.	Fauzia Viqar	Former Chairperson, Punjab Commission on Status of Women
24.	Zoya Rehman	Lawyer, Organiser AUrat March, Islamabad
25.	Sidra Saeed	Pakistan Lead, Repoliticising Feminism
26.	Shmyla	Digital Rights Activist, Organiser, Aurat March Lahore

27.	Seher Tariq	Feminist Activist, Auratnaak.
28.	Leena Ghani	Aurat March Organiser, Lahore
29.	Rizwan Saeed	Gender Rights Activist, Formerly Associated with Hum Qadam, Rozan
30.	Fatima Faisal	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
31.	Rafia Asim	Dastak
32.	Shabana Arif	Technical Advisor, National Commission on Status of Women
33.	Saleha*	Feminist activist, associated with a women rights organisation in Karachi
34.	M. Moiz	Digital Content Creator
35.	Dr. Ayesha	Academic, Professor Gender Department Qaid - e - Azam University

*Interviewees with \* have been anonymised on their request.*

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United Nations Development Programme  
4th Floor, Serena Business Complex,  
Khayaban-e-Suharwardy,  
Islamabad, Pakistan

Tel: +92-51-835 5600  
Fax: +92-51-2600254-5

[www.pk.undp.org](http://www.pk.undp.org)