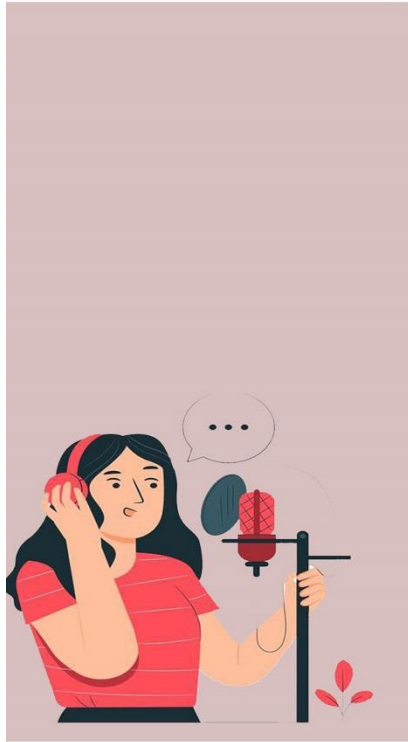


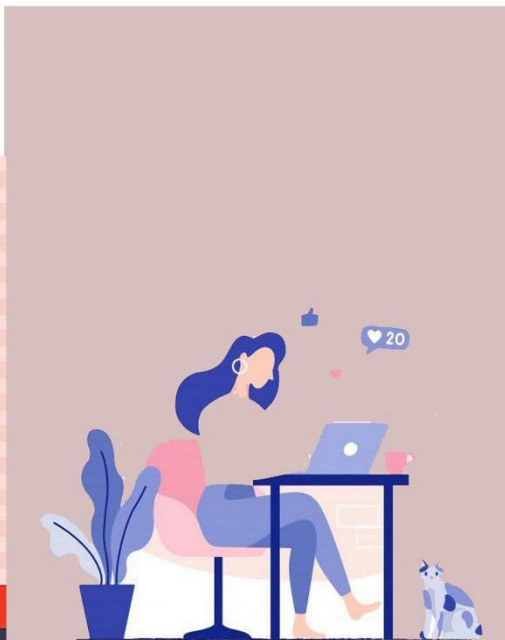
UKAAS- THE REFLECTOR



SPRING-SUMMER/MARCH-JULY 2020



COVID-19: MEDIA AND GENDER EQUALITY



EDITORIAL

WHY ARE REALITY CHECKS IMPORTANT?

Globally, and Nationally, there are various mechanisms and policies instituted to provide a protected and safe working environment for women journalists. In Pakistan, however, women journalists who constitute about 7 per cent of the journalism workforce, are confronted with numerous complications and constant discrimination that begins with their entry into the job market. They range from a lack of workplace safety and basic facilities such as transportation, and separate toilets, to less or no guarantee of jobs and above all, instances of harassment of all types. While it is true that there are women in the media in Pakistan, who, despite the odds, brave it out and continue to work, that number is far too low. This poor representation of women in media is in spite of the fact that they outnumber male students when studying media or journalism at universities. This gender bias is linked to the problematic portrayal of women in our local media spheres. We cannot address one without analysing the other. This was the theme I chose to shed light on as a panellist at a recently held webinar.

This webinar was organized by Journalism Initiatives on Gender-based violence (JiG) and United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA). The discussion involved a conversation on the new report on combatting 'Violence against Women Journalists', by Dubravka Simonovic, the UN Special Rapporteur on 'Violence against Women, its causes and consequences'. Krishanti Dharmaraj, Executive Director for Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), moderated the webinar. The panellists included:

- Jafar Irshaidat from Jordan- a Communication Specialist for UNFPA, Regional Syria Response Hub;
- Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson from Samoa, acting as an advisor to CWGL Journalism Initiative on GBV and was the former Chief Editor of CWGL Journalism Initiative on GBV and an independent pacific journalist;
- Meilssa Upreti, the Vice Chair of the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls simultaneously holding the position of Senior Director of the Program and Global Advocacy at CWGL;
- Liz Ford from London, the Deputy Editor, Global Development, at The Guardian;
- Cosette Thompson, an affiliate and consultant with CWGL.

Each panellist was given two questions to respond. Based on my experience in Pakistan, I was asked to explain: what should be the primary steps to ensure the safety and protection of women journalists, especially those practicing it independently. At first, I could have simply said that women journalists in this region need to be connected with national and global organisations that are working on journalist's safety and protection and that they need training in self-defense etc. Instead, I chose to talk about the 'disconnect' that usually exists between pure academic research and ground realities. In this case the issue of women's rights and women journalists. I talked about the current media scenario that includes print, electronic, and social media and did not limit my argument to just the news, but targeted entertainment media and advertisements as well. My contention was the effectiveness of the media in addressing and redressing social and gender gaps. Media plays an important role in society.



It reports on current events, provides information and and entertainment and reinforces predominant cultural and societal values. Thus, media is an important factor in the promotion of gender equality, both within the working environment (in terms of employment and promotion of female staff at all levels) and in the representation of all genders (in terms of fair gender portrayal and the use of neutral and non-gender specific language)

That is the reason that Uks was founded in 1997 to challenge gender inequality in the media industry and eventually eliminate sexist, stereotypical and objectifying portrayal of women in news media content.

The long-term strategic goal is to influence and change media houses' policy and practice through evidence-based interventions that show how gender-ethical news reporting can significantly contribute to a shift in cultural perceptions of women's role in society. At Uks, along with monitoring and analysing media content, we try to bridge the awareness gap on gender issues. One of the reasons for having missed the MDGs (apart from lack of political commitment) was the fact that the media was never made an ally to talk about the goals on a regular basis. We fear the SGDs will receive the same fate. We need to take measures to hammer the message that gender equality is not only a prerequisite for sustainable development; its achievement is vital for sustainability. The media and the public need to understand that this new blueprint for global development "Agenda 2030" that was adopted at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in 2015, sets ambitious targets in its 17 goals one of which is dedicated to "achiev[ing] gender equality and empower[ing] all women and girls"[1]. Uks tried its level best to engage with mainstream and regional media on the importance of Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) adopted at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995. We went as far as translating into Urdu and widely disseminating not only the BPFA, but all the major international commitments that Pakistan is signatory to, so that the Pakistani people can easily read and understand the importance of each document. Unfortunately, the majority of the media has not been responsive or taken responsibility. We see media corporations underscoring the importance of media in the struggle towards gender equality. Gender related inequalities, in participation, and in access to media, limit their potential to become inclusive and democratic spaces. Biases, stereotyping, and unbalanced reporting from a gendered perspective, normalize and further entrench unequal gender power relations at the root of discriminatory attitudes and practices. Gender stereotypes and biases are emblematic of the misogyny that pervades media content. In fact, evidence collected since 1995 through the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) has found that such ideas are reproduced in emerging digital media spheres and allow sexism to influence our culture and history.

The underrepresentation and relative silencing of women's voices, as well as the systemic sexualisation and objectification of women in news, entertainment and social media, effectively barres them from equal participation in public discourse. These attitudes in turn contribute to a cultural devaluing of women that further intensifies gender discrimination. The ongoing negative media portrayal of women has shown to contribute to gender-based violence. Hence, it is not surprising that this misogynistic attitude through gendered images, heavily influences the audience's worldviews and personal lives. It seems obvious and inevitable that we- us- are affected by these experiences and our exposure to visual media displays situations and relationships from primarily men's points of views since media content production is also largely dominated by men. Over the years, Uks has reached out to a large segment of viewers through audience clubs and orientation sessions with media companies. Though focused heavily upon the news media, Uks does monitor and analyse the entertainment media which includes drama serials and advertisements. We at Uks feel that along with news media, Pakistani soap operas and drama serials need to re-evaluate their gender insensitive, sensational and misogynistic approach to content creation.

My response to the second question on what is the best way to respond to the additional challenges associated with the COVID19 pandemic, was that no doubt the global health emergency has emerged as a gendered crisis. And that spells trouble for a country like Pakistan that already struggles with issues of gender inequality and an oppressive culture of violence enacted against women. What we need to focus on is the extent to which women journalists have been impacted by COVID19 and if it is pushing more women in the private sphere into a culturally defined domesticated role. According to DRF (Digital Rights Foundation)- an organization, which works to ensure digital freedoms in the country- there, were a total of 136 complaints of cyber harassment when the lockdown began in March and April. This, compared to 47 complaints logged in the months of January and February marks an increase of 189 per cent. One way of addressing harassment online and off-line is to create networks of female journalists that are available to support each other and accessible by women everywhere.

I am aware that I had deviated from the query posed at me, but I am glad that I ventured into an area that needs everyone's attention. We must acknowledge and connect the impact of various media- news, talk shows, tele-dramas, and advertisements- in our daily lives, and simultaneously acknowledge the narrow stereotypes that are subscribed to the varying versions of identity - especially gender. Non-stereotypical media content is a vital element in promoting and portraying diverse gender identities, which in turn encourages more women to step out into non-traditional fields- journalism being one of them.

**-TASNEEM AHMAR
DIRECTOR**



The above two images are the symbols for male and female, put outside a toilet in a restaurant in Islamabad. I don't think any one has ever noticed or even given a thought as to what these images signify? I found these very disturbing. For me, both the images reflect inequalities based on gender. Using lips as a symbol for women depicts them as sensuous, alluring and inviting, and the moustache for men is a sign of powerful, "honorable" and strong. This is how stereotypes are formed, inducted and reinforced and because of the prevalent patriarchal mindsets in our society, men/boys and women/girls are viewed and valued differently. Imagine the damage these seemingly 'innocent' portrayals do. With serious negative connotations for both women and men, such images reinforce stereotypes in the collective imagination and are then translated into social attitudes and behaviours.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT UKS

ONE DAY TRAINING FOR MEDIA MONITORS ON GLOBAL MEDIA MONITORING (GMMP) TOOLS:

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) is the world's longest-running and most extensive research on gender in the news media. Every five years, GMMP produces a descriptive analysis of the representation and portrayal of men and women in the news across the world. Pakistan became a member of this project in 2010 after Uks was named as the National coordinator from Pakistan, having a rich experience in Pakistani media monitoring. After the previous GMMPs of 2010 and 2015, Uks will conduct the 3rd GMMP for Pakistan in September 2020.



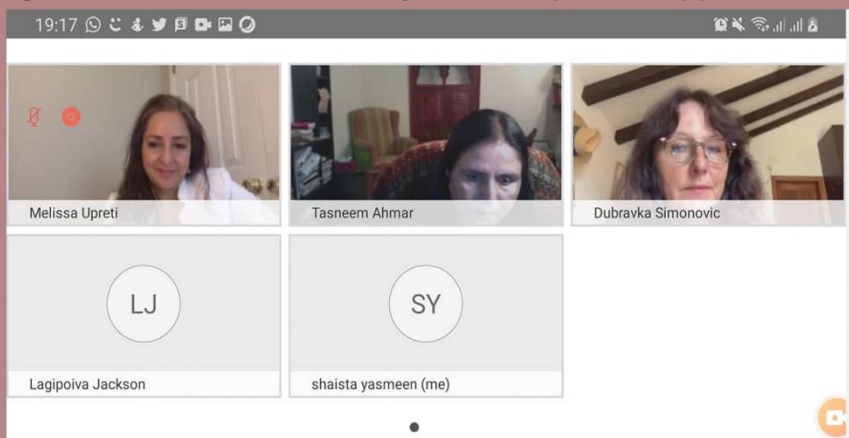
A one-day training for GMMP was conducted by Uks which aimed to familiarize, train, and adapt media monitors with fresh and enhanced tools for monitoring news. This consists of revamped monitoring sheets comprised of questions that a monitor should keep in mind for an in-depth and critical analysis as they monitor different news mediums in order to know what they are supposed to look for and submit as part of the monitoring; which will eventually enrich the GMMP report. Shujaat Ali- who has been a part of both the previous GMMPs, conducted this training.

Others who participated in the training were Rana Yasir, Nida Naeem, Zafran Awan, Hina Parveen, Sidra Ijaz, Shumaila, Ali Haider, Irfan Ali Ansari, Shah Fahad, and Shaista Yasmeen.



WEBINAR

Tasneem Ahmar, Director of Uks Research Centre on Women and Media was part of a Webinar organized by Journalism initiative on Gender Based Violence (JiG) and United Nations Fund for Population Activity (UNFPA) on the “New report on Combating Violence against Women Journalists by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women”



to talk about what the next steps should be to ensure the protection and safety of Women journalists along with additional challenges faced by them during the COVID-19 pandemic

WOMEN IN MEDIA: PAGES FROM THE PAST CONFERENCE



SEMINAR CALLED FOR PORTRAYING WOMEN EQUALLY AND EXCLUSIVELY IN MEDIA



Titled, 'Inclusive and Equal Portrayal of Women by the Media', was organized by Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) in connection with Media4Women Campaign running from 1st to 15th March 2020 in partnership with the Free Press Unlimited. Tasneem Ahmar, Executive Director at Uks Research Centre on Women and Media, spotlighted the issue of the slogan "Mera jism Meri Marzi" recently propagated in the media.

She said this slogan was wrongly portrayed by the media and it was totally against the ethics of journalism. These words were actually a big voice against sexual harassment of women. The society and media are misinterpreting these words, so they should study these words positively and avoid propagating in the wrong way. The men-dominant society needs to respect and protect women, she urged

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN PAKISTAN

Uks launched a campaign of 'Women's Rights and the Feminist Movement in Pakistan'. The campaign showcased views and comments of more than a dozen renowned men and women on how they would describe Feminism in a Pakistani context.

Women's Rights and the Feminist Movement in Pakistan

Uks Research Centre, brings to you a month-long campaign on "Women's Rights and the Feminist Movement in Pakistan." Each day, between the National Women's Day and International Women's Day, Uks will bring to you an assortment of quotes, opinions and Uks' media productions on issues ranging from 'what is feminism?' to 'what's the best way to introduce and familiarise our youth with the concept of feminism?.'

Stay with us through this month-long initiative to create awareness around women's rights and feminism, offer new insights and impressions, help shift perceptions and move from from regress to progress.



DIRECTOR UKS, TASNEEM AHMAR'S COMMENT ON #MOTHERSLEAD CAMPAIGN



A SEMINAR AT THE BAHRIA UNIVERSITY, KARACHI CAMPUS, ON WOMEN IN PAKISTAN.

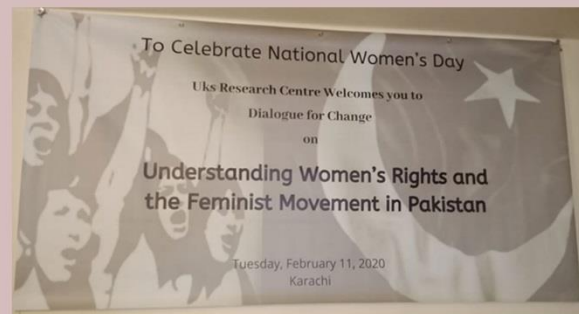


WOMEN CONFERENCE



On March 6-7, 2020, Pakistan Arts Council held a two-day Women Conference in Karachi. Director Uks, Tasneem Ahmar was a panelist in a session on 'Role of Media in Women Empowerment'

TO CELEBRATE NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, UKS HELD A DIALOGUE FOR CHANGE ON "UNDERSTANDING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN PAKISTAN"



TASNEEM AHMAR, DIRECTOR UKS, CURATED AND MODERATED A SESSION AT THE ADAB FESTIVAL, ON 'PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA IN PAKISTAN.



PODCASTS

PODCAST#1

Produced by Uks Research, this online interview podcast with Tasneem Ahmar provides an insight into the challenges faced by women due to gender-biases within the media industry of Pakistan. Ahmar discusses key issues due to which the media portrays Pakistani women in a negative light as well as highlighting its effect on the daily lives of ordinary women. In addition, the podcast also underlines Uks' planning and determination to bring about change to create a bias-free media.

LINK FOR THE PODCAST:

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/GY4CE_NOVIY](https://youtu.be/GY4CE_NOVIY)

PODCAST#2

In this interview podcast, Tasneem Ahmar discusses the effect of the ongoing Covid-19 crises on the women of Pakistan. With a surge in domestic violence to the herculean challenges faced by working women, Ahmar highlights key causes and effects of these problems. She also talks about the initiatives taken by Uks Research to address these injustices as well as pointing out long-term and short-term solutions that can be carried out by the public at large to spread awareness about gender biases.

LINK FOR THE PODCAST:

[HTTPS://YOUTU.BE/WVE57GQX4XO](https://youtu.be/WVE57GQX4XO)

PODCAST#3

This podcast centered the life journey of Tasneem Ahmar to become the founder-director of Uks and Uks itself towards becoming the organization that it is today. Delving into the purpose and achievements of Uks, Tasneem explained how Uks has tackled gender biased media. She discussed the importance of sensitized and positive portrayal of women in media and how she made that possible without any backlash.

LINK FOR THE PODCAST:

[HTTPS://WWW.INSTAGRAM.COM/TV/CB6BBE-HZSN/?IGSHID=1KN5J4011RQ8N](https://www.instagram.com/tv/CB6BBE-HZSN/?IGSHID=1KN5J4011RQ8N)

DIALOGUE FOR CHANGE #1

'How are women journalists coping with COVID-19 in their professional and personal lives?'

May 9th, 2020: Continuing with the 'Dialogue for Change' series, an online interactive session was held to discuss issues faced by women journalists during the COVID-19 outbreak. The discussion included an esteemed panel of professionals with experience in media reporting including: Farzana Ali (Bureau Chief of Aaj TV, Peshawar); Imrana Komal (Reporter from 92 News); Sophia Saifee (Pakistan correspondent for CNN); and Sahar Baluch (from BBC, Islamabad). The discussion was moderated by Shaista Yasmeen from Uks.

COVID-19 has adversely impacted many facets of life, whether it be health, education, industry, or the economy. Amidst these challenging times, the media has failed to adequately represent the concerns and hardships faced by female journalists in Pakistan. Not only has this led to an uninformed audience, but has also failed to address the problems faced by female journalists and left a gap in accountability. Thus, this panel of female journalists gathered to engage in an extensive dialogue on the personal and professional challenges faced by women during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, particularly journalists.

Shaista Yasmeen: The dialogue began with the first question: **How are women journalists affected by the novel Coronavirus personally and professionally?**

Farzana Ali began by pointing out the importance for self-protection for journalists.

“THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE HAS CHANGED BECAUSE THE FEAR OF INFECTING A LOVED ONE IS MORE DAUNTING THAN REPORTING ON TERRORISM OR ON PLACES LIKE KP THAT FACED MULTIPLE BOMBINGS, NATURAL DISASTERS, AND NOW A PANDEMIC. THE FEAR OF STAYING ALIVE IS A STARK REALITY IN ALL THESE SITUATIONS AND JOURNALISTS MUST CONTEND WITH THAT FEAR ON A PERSONAL SCALE RATHER THAN JUST REPORTING ON IT.”

It is important for the journalist to safeguard her health and safety under the current conditions because the role should be to spread the news, not become the news. She then discussed how journalists must be careful when engaging with people of differing views, especially those who doubt the existence of the virus itself or believe it is an international conspiracy. For her, this current period is the most challenging, especially since she personally knew people who contracted the virus and how her organization stepped in immediately to isolate everyone.

Sophia then discussed the importance of health and safety regulations implemented by organizations themselves. Recently, she was denied permission to attend a World Health Organization (WHO) event, which was being held indoors with many other journalists present. However, the organizers were forced to host the event on-line when many journalists refused to attend. However, she then counters that by arguing that despite organizational protection, the onus of self-protection as well as educating others about the extent of the pandemic, often falls upon the shoulders of female journalists. She narrated an incident about struggling to convince her male colleagues to avoid putting other office workers at risk by congregating for jummah prayers. Her struggle was indicative of how female journalists often require huge organizational support to maintain a level of authority that male dominated environments often tend to undermine.

Sahar Baluch then explained the strict pandemic guidelines that BBC Urdu imposed like employees being restricted to their cabins in the office, face masks being mandatory, working from home 3 days a week, and the use of the office lift restricted to only one person at a time. Journalists are not allowed to cover press-conferences and for the past two months they have been using the office building for live-shows and PTC. However, she argued that international media companies took employee wellbeing into greater consideration than national ones, where employees faced health and safety challenges as well as job insecurity with the recent layoffs.

Imrana Komal then built up on job insecurity by stating that the current situation does not allow journalists to question the unsafe practices and compromises that are made.

“RECENTLY, I HAD BEEN FORCED TO COVER PROCEEDINGS AT A HIGH COURT CASE WHERE MANY CASES OF COVID19 WERE DETECTED, WITHOUT ANY REGARD FOR MY SAFETY. I WAS ALSO FORCED TO CAUTION MY CAMERAPERSON FROM GETTING TOO CLOSE TO PEOPLE ALREADY PRAYING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY, FOR THE PURPOSE OF CAPTURING A STORY. PEOPLE ARE PRAYING IN CLOSE PROXIMITY IN THE MOSQUES AND SEVERAL JOURNALISTS ARE SIMPLY STANDING THERE TO CAPTURE THE FOOTAGE. HOW DO YOU PREVENT THE VIRUS FROM SPREADING?”

She also criticized the absence to implement safety precautions in local media organizations and a lack of encouragement to follow SOPs, drawing attention to the sanitizer walk-through gates which were only functional during VIP visits. She appreciated the training imparted by Uks on smart work tools which significantly helped her in adapting to the current crisis, but also complained that working from home is perceived as not being a “proper day’s work” and the use of smart tools is regarded as merely a “copy-paste’ job.

Are women’s voices and concerns ignored, over-looked or underestimated in Pakistani media-print and electronic- during COVID 19?

Sahar then talked about women’s concerns being ignored due to restrictions in her field work, especially in domestic abuse cases. She is often told to refrain from interfering on account of these cases being “personal matters.” However, many organizations have created Whatsapp Groups for the purpose of sharing these cases such as that of a girl who tweeted about one such case. Some neighbourhood boys were called in to rescue her and at times, the victims themselves would be unwilling to reveal their identities, necessitating the use of graphics to narrate their stories.



Imrana pointed out that many women are now highly vulnerable due to economic uncertainty and household restrictions, many of whom live in joint family systems with ongoing feuds. Organizations like Uks played a huge role in mobilizing women. She also commented on using online tools to spread greater awareness about issues faced by women during COVID19, especially about domestic abuse despite many people’s reluctance to interfere in “private matters.”

The panel was then asked to share their views on whether there is an urgent need for the media to be gender-sensitive, especially given the challenges surrounding the detection of disease and access to treatment?

Sahar started by discussing the strict regulations for covering infected patients at BBC Urdu. Journalists are not allowed to visit hospitals nor invite visitors and the one female patient she found, refused to share her story. This makes it difficult to write about gender sensitivity, especially with the increasing focus on writing about successful women to inspire others.

Farzana further shared her views on the importance of following ethical guidelines and respecting people’s privacy. While reporting on issues faced by female hospital staff, very few were willing to be displayed on screen while others had to be reassured that they would remain anonymous.

Sophia built up on that point by narrating a story about covering the stranded Pakistani students in Wuhan. Her editor was very keen to include women in the piece but she had to remain gender sensitive with her procedures without disrespecting anyone’s privacy.

Link for DFC #1:
<https://www.facebook.com/uksresearch/videos/27073593073456/?sfnsn=scwspmo&extid=5j9jHeuyPhVbh2Li&d=n&vh=e>

DIALOGUE FOR CHANGE #2

COVID-19 Times: What does the 'new normal' mean for you, family, friends, workplace, as well as the global impact?

Since the lockdowns began, people have gradually adjusted to the new lifestyle. Some aspects however continue to be a constant: the death toll and rising domestic-violence cases. The purpose of this dialogue was to get a range of views about the challenges rising out of this pandemic and what the "new normal" means to the panelists.

This was the theme for the second Dialogue for Change (DFC) organized on July 25, 2020 which attempted to explore the complexity and normality of the 'new normal' of COVID-19. Moderated by Tasneem Ahmar, Director Uks Research Centre, the discussion panel comprised of a diverse range of working women including: Cheena Chhapra (Entrepreneur); Faiza Mushtaq (Head of Liberal and Social Science at IBA); Rashida Dohad (Executive Director, Omar Asghar Khan Development Foundation); Huma Khawar (Development Consultant); and Asha Bedar (Clinical Psychologist).

Tasneem Ahmar began by asking the panelists to talk about the 'new normal' that the pandemic brought?

Rashida Dohad began by expressing that though she missed socializing, she has tried her best to inculcate healthy habits in her daily life. She added that the conversation is highly dominated by COVID19 and being conscious of hearing about people getting sick or dying.

Asha Bedar added how it has been stressful adapting to the uncertain situation, not knowing what the "new normal" may mean and that not knowing what one is adapting to can cause long term anxiety.

“WHEN THE VIRUS FIRST BROKE OUT, THE SLIGHTEST COUGH WOULD GENERATE PARANOIA. HOW NORMALIZED AND MANAGEABLE OUR CONCERNS HAVE BECOME SINCE. THE NEW NORMAL FOR ME WAS ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF CATCHING THE VIRUS AND STILL FUNCTIONING. EVERYONE IS COPING WITH THESE CHALLENGES IN THEIR OWN WAYS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH CHILDREN.”

-FAIZA MUSHTAQ

Following a technical difficulty **Asha** joked about Internet issues being the new normal and that taking everything online is a profoundly different experience. **Tasneem** added that it certainly becomes challenging to deal with tech issues. Her "new normal" was to accept this lifestyle with less shopping and less opportunities to travel.

Cheena Chhapra said that despite the gravity of the pandemic, not much had changed for her. At the beginning, she had panicked since her family were all diabetic, but eventually the panic subsided. Her domestic help left but her children started helping with household chores and ultimately, she settled into the new lifestyle under SOP guidelines.

Huma Khawar analysed the public's reaction, arguing that the government had provided a time frame till June for everything to settle down. However, as soon as June ended, everyone began panicking. She added that while her family worked strictly from home, she does not hesitate to visit informal settlements and generate awareness about vaccinating children from other diseases. **10**

The second question posed by Tasneem was regarding the stigma attached to COVID-19 which leads to people denying that they might test positive for the virus.

Asha commented how exposure to false information has led to a state of denial. She wondered if the stigma stems from the misconception that those infected were “careless” in practicing the SOPs, and perhaps quietly suffering than getting tested is the safer option.

Cheena Chhapra then added to Asha’s point by narrating how well the hearing-impaired kids from her school reacted to being informed about the SOPs. The information was clearly communicated to them and false information can often add to the paranoia of the general public. She added that the attitude one has towards this virus matters a lot.

Rashida Dohad then contradicted Cheena’s views stating that in the new normal, having a positive attitude has its drawbacks. She says it varies and that people fall for conspiracies and superstitions. They are unaware that SOPs must be followed not only for themselves but also for others. Not everyone has the luxury of having a good immune system.

Huma Khawar then highlighted a cultural concern in relation to the corona death cases where families of the victims could not attend the funeral or be around loved ones because they themselves would be in quarantine. They cannot grieve nor even be properly consoled.

Faiza Mushtaq said that the sources of information matter. Not everyone has the luxury of googling what they do not understand. She believed that the stigma attached to COVID-19 is due to the fear of others having to go through rigorous testing and recovery because of one person who is infected. She justified that sometimes there is a logical reason to the stigma, not just superstitions.

Dohad and Khawar were both of the opinion that there were too many mixed messages but lauded the efforts of those working at district level. Dohad explained how she herself saw ACs and DCs working day and night to raise awareness.

Tasneem then asked about the loss of jobs and the sudden surge in domestic violence cases.

“ I PREDICTED THESE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS SINCE THEY ARE COMMON IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS. HOWEVER, MOST SAFETY AVENUES ARE NOW LIMITED, FORCING VULNERABLE PEOPLE TO REMAIN LOCKED IN SPACES WITH THEIR ABUSERS. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATISTICS ARE OUT OF CONTROL, AND THAT THERE SIMPLY ISN'T ENOUGH RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED ON THE TOPIC. ”

-ASHA BEDAR



Tasneem then said “it is noticed that only COVID19 figures were quoted in the media and there was very less reporting of violence on children and women.”

Rashida agreed and said she witnessed an increase in Abbottabad to some extent as cases were being reported to the police. Job insecurities and unemployment are generating anxieties. However, mental health issues were never discussed in either case. Some helplines regarding support against domestic violence had come up but they were inaccessible. She praised Rozan’s work on mental health counselling but agreed that there was minimal media coverage and the government had simply failed to take any action.

Tasneem added that women at home have to double their efforts. However, men often fail to notice these differences, being preoccupied with office work only.

Cheena agreed with Faiza that there is a big burden but at the end of the day TV entertainment is all one is left with when there is nothing else to do. Tasneem agreed with Faiza as well and argued that ad agencies in particular had been the quickest to realizing the work gaps between men and women amidst the pandemic. Asha also agreed that awareness needs to be raised for these issues since existing data is quantitative and very number-centred. She also raised the issue of rising suicide rates as a result of the pandemic.

Huma created a link between the frustration and anxiety caused by loss of jobs for men to domestic violence against women. She commented that women always suffer the most in these situations. The media needs to acknowledge these issues instead of focusing on statistics with regards to the pandemic.

The panel agreed that things had changed a lot over the period of four months and in the near future the situation might take another turn. Tasneem thanked the panellists for joining the dialogue, as they might become the reason for a change.

Link for DFC #2

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=bJs07M7Cw9o>

RADIO PROGRAMMES AND PSMS FOR OAKDF

SEA CHANGE ON AIRWAVES: AMPLIFYING WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19

Executive producer Uks, Tasneem Ahmar produced 'Aurat Mahfooz, tou Ma'ashara Mazboot' which was a series of four radio programmes and ten radio messages on COVID-19 and its impact on women. Aired by FM 101, the series aimed at bringing women's stories, perspectives, and their active roles in the COVID-19 crisis. The programme included minorities and vulnerable groups too and that was a conscious effort on inclusion, making sure that marginalised groups are not left out, stereotyped and/or misrepresented. It also involved, sharing stories of local people who have recovered from COVID-19 or who have supported a loved one through recovery to emphasise on the recovery aspect. The series was produced for Omar Asghar Khan Foundation in collaboration with Oxfam and Australian Aid.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

THE GOOD

ARIEL: #WORKFORHOME

The advertisement features a man working from home due to the pandemic and his wife who is busy cleaning and cooking. The husband is acknowledging his wife's efforts doing household chores and pledges to share the load as he balances both office work with home chores. The advertisement also cleverly tackles the point often raised regarding men not "knowing" how to do chores such as washing clothes and cooking but the husband at least does the bare minimum such as making a sandwich for his daughter, folding the laundry, and washing the dishes which requires minimal effort and skill.



WALLS: #STAYWITHINSEWALLS

This advertisement centres the frustration of the youth self-isolating due to COVID-19. Walls promotes the idea of coping with the lockdown by developing new skills or experimenting with something new. Walls was one of the many brands that quickly adapted to this pandemic and normalized the situation by creatively engaging the youth.

THE BAD

DILRUBA

Dilruba is another bold Pakistani drama that encompasses the life of a teenage girl Sanam, who catches the eyes of many men. After receiving tons of gifts every now and then from different men for a certain period of time, she marries her cousin hoping for a happy ending as she had planned to be faithful to her husband but the tables turn when one of the victims of Sanam's shenanigans, a photographer, is coincidentally assigned to cover Sanam's wedding. The former lover, after blackmailing Sanam once or twice reveals her dark past to Sanam's husband who dies in a car crash the same day. Sanam's life then keeps going down-hill even after she marries a man who is twice as big a flirt as Sanam herself used to be. Apparently Sanam is paying the price for her sin i.e., flattering men to get them to do whatever she pleases.

Analyses:

The drama is running successfully and has about 4.5 Million views on average. The fact that such a large proportion of the public is viewing this drama will eventually believe that every other girl is "Sanam," who runs around breaking hearts and flattering men. This mishandling of portrayal may lead to generalizing women as "gold diggers." Another important point to note is that even on the path towards redemption, Sanam is not forgiven for the mistakes that she made while she was still a teenager. In this society, a woman is always taught to forgive and resist to save her marriage but there is no concept of forgiving and forgetting a woman's past.



MEIN NA JANOO

The story revolves around a young girl named Saira who is destined to share the same fate as her mother who faced verbal abuse all through her married life from her husband and her in-laws for being a “disgrace,” only because she was found standing next to her brother-in-law in her bedroom once. Despite receiving vile remarks from her entire family because of her mother’s



mother’s so-called “flawed character” Saira tolerated this abuse just like her mother always did. Over the course of 37 long episodes, Saira is blackmailed, harassed and kidnapped by her own cousin Nehat upon refusing to marry him. When Saira safely returns to her family after being abducted by her cousin for two whole days her family blames her for the entire incident which had brought shame upon her and the family. She is then married off to a blind man (Nain) in order to “save her honour” but the wicked cousin does not stop harassing her and Saira does not so much as make a sound when her cousin Nehat barges into her house, harassing her for not marrying him, silently in front of her blind husband. Saira’s honour is seemingly at the mercy of Nain who finally kicks her out after having doubts about Saira’s character upon finding Nehat in his house on many occasions quite a few times. Similarly, Saira’s mother’s honour is at the feet of her brother-in-law who magically appears in the final episode of the soap and justifies Saira’s mother’s character. Only after his endorsement, was she forgiven.

Analyses:

This rollercoaster ride of a drama teaches women to tolerate the pain, the shame, the hideous character assassination that is brought upon them by society and in-laws even if it is an accusation or a misunderstanding. It conveys the message that the honour of a woman always depends on the

THE UGLY:

JHOOTI:

Jhooti is a soap opera featuring Iqra Aziz, Ahmed Ali Butt and Yasir Hussain. “Jhooti” caught the attention of the general public since the first teaser of the show in which Nimra (Iqra Aziz) cries standing in front of the mirror, her face covered in bruises from apparently being beaten brutally by her husband. The tables turn when she starts laughing frantically the very next minute, praising her acting skills. Apparently Nirma has a habit of lying in order to get whatever she wants. She lies with conviction and never gets caught. Her biggest desire is to marry a rich man even if she has to lie, steal or kill for it which leads the show further into a dark pit of disgrace.



Analyses:

Combining a mixture of immoral intentions, killing unborn children, wailing over a divorced daughter and blatantly mocking domestic violence, the entire soap in itself was a disgrace to suffering women in Pakistan. Have women not suffered enough? If there is anything worse than Domestic Violence, it has to be such soaps that use this grave matter for the sole purpose of entertaining the general public. In a country where women still struggle to raise their voices regarding domestic violence and abuse, such portrayals jeopardize the progress of women’s rights.

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THE “NEW NORMAL”
COVID-19 IS STILL HERE BUT SO IS GENDER INEQUALITY
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ABDUCTION THREATS AND ABUSES
INSULTING POVERTY LEADING TO COMMERCIAL SEX
PARDAH AND ACCESS TO MEDIA TREATMENT WOMEN'S HEALTH
COVID IS A GENDERED CRISIS EARLY MARRIAGES RAPE
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