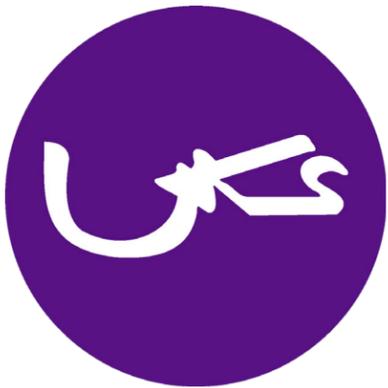


Content is 'queen'



PROJECT REPORT

STRENGTHENING AND AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF WOMEN
IN THE MEDIA IN POST-PANDEMIC PAKISTAN



WACC

communication for all

PROJECT REPORT: Strengthening and amplifying the voices of women in the media in post-pandemic Pakistan. A media and public awareness advocacy campaign that aims to challenge negative gender stereotypes by focusing on the stories, battles, and experiences pakistani women go through in their everyday lives during a pandemic.

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Director's Note

They say, “content is king” – perhaps aptly since news media the world over refuses to see or acknowledge the queens in our midst. The Covid-19 pandemic has simply underlined this gendered prejudice: women have, at best, been afterthoughts in the mainstream news media in Pakistan while simultaneously being the receptacle of physical and emotional abuse in the cultural media.

The pandemic has laid bare and magnified society's many fault lines. It has also challenged the beasts within: is our praxis aligned with the people whom we are trying to benefit? Have we been able to connect and communicate with a younger demographic? What kind of power dynamics are at play in the mainstream media and are we guilty of (subconsciously or unconsciously) recreating any of those?

At Uks Research Centre we take great pride in our work over the decades on monitoring and documenting news and cultural media content from a gender lens. The academic content we have produced over the years has helped shape the discussion on the deep denial of women's representation in the mainstream news media in Pakistan as well as the toxic tropes associated with women's representation on cultural media.

And yet, the pandemic bared for us that women in Pakistan are an in-

convenient truth that most still do not want to speak on the television screen or in print.

The absence of women's concerns on television and in print is a crisis that exists in plain sight but one that blinds even the best of us: under 4% of all women's reported violence is reported on mainstream news media but the men of the media remain in denial. By not communicating women's key concerns to the wider public, the media itself is guilty of creating horror when a case of sexual violence gains national traction – neither the public nor the government knows how to deal with such crimes since these topics are (willfully) kept away from public discourse.

With the help and support of WACC, the past year was an attempt to turn content into queen – knowledge is power and this year the thrust of Uks' work has been about the proliferation and consumption of feminist content among Pakistani women of all age groups but particularly, the younger demographics.

WACC allowed us to test certain hypotheses – all of which have critical ramifications for right based organizations and wider civil society in Pakistan and are detailed in this report. One of these hypotheses was about whether the mainstream Pakistani news media has lost a younger Pakistani women's audience since it doesn't report on them.

Unfortunately, based on the data we were able to gather through the duration of this project, the trend is certainly for younger women demographics to have moved away from mainstream Pakistani media for their news and insight. And when juxtaposed with the fact that younger Pakistanis have borne the brunt of the pandemic in terms of broken relationships, joblessness and general dissatisfaction with life, the situation is more urgent than the languid reporting in the media seems to suggest.

This project and the associated dissemination of content also allowed us, a research organization, to realign our structural needs as we ventured into content creation and wider social media. That, in turn, enabled us to build digital feminist communities in more meaningful ways than ever before.

From being focused solely on research endeavors, we have had to open the organization to more creative young Pakistanis to create content that could cater to an audience in their respective demographics. That meant younger and fresher ideas permeated our organization – inspired by young blood, we also began seeing creative sides of veterans with serious academic pedigree come through.

Connecting our research with younger Pakistanis in a meaningful manner was always the intent of this project; that we began this

process at home perhaps added to deep, meaningful conversations around feminist praxis in Pakistan in the pandemic era. WACC allowed us to break demographic boundaries in very healthy ways, and for that, we are forever grateful.

Our hope was that in extraordinary times, we provide extraordinary respite, solace and solidarity to women in Pakistan – most of whom have been silent warriors, keeping things afloat while all else has been collapsing around them. Without glamourizing or valorizing internalized abuse, this project was an attempt to provide reaffirmation to Pakistani women about the great value of their love, labor, intellect and emotion. It was also an attempt to tell them that help from the sisterhood is always at hand.

This report details our processes and content with the hope that other organizations in developing countries as well as within Pakistan will benefit from our experiences. As feminist practitioners we understand the rollback of hard-won freedoms that many of our colleagues are braving at this very moment. The good news, however, is that more women and men and children are waiting on more content that speaks to them and their real concerns. A newer world is possible and it will be built through the healthy accommodation of women's lens and voices.

Tasneem Ahmar

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
UKS RESEARCH CENTRE

project overview

Project concept

Culture and religion in Pakistan are both influenced by the state, and which, in turn, makes representation of women in the media almost always an uphill task. This project is an attempt to puncture the patriarchy

at source: by defining the agenda ourselves, constructing content that can be replicated, and influencing how women are being reported on in the mainstream media.

By inspiring reporters and editors with new, cutting-edge ideas and social research, our hope is to push back against prevalent toxic tropes about women. This project will directly benefit women in the media, and through them and their voice, the ordinary Pakistani woman.



THE PROBLEM:

Portrayal of the modern Pakistani woman in the mainstream media is unrealistic and laden with the most misogynistic undertones. This

impacts how Pakistani perceives its women and how it treats them.

The matter of media portrayal of women, however, does not remain restricted to the screen or the paper. Not only does it have real-life ramifications, it also impacts women and feminist allies working in the media industry. Their voices are often silenced in the herd and their genuine concerns laughed off by industry veterans.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION:

In over two decades of monitoring media content, we can see a consistent trend and pattern of casting women as evil incarnate. Many years ago, during the era of General Ziaul Haq, television had begun defining what a chaste woman was. The needle is still stuck at the same place. This year, some four decades later, women were held to be the major reason why the Covid19 pandemic had befallen on the country.

At Uks, we can back these claims using our trove of data collected over two decades of monitoring media content in radio, print and broadcast. We also have plenty of anecdotal accounts of how women are pressured and ostracised in the industry through our network of women in the media, Pakistani Women's Media Network.

PROBLEM SOLUTION:

Changing perceptions cannot be achieved through solo flight but has to be done through a concerted community effort. Our proposed project engages more editors/organizations than ever before, and through them, reaches more women journalists to better capture the everyday realities of women in all their shades and hues.

One element that is reported by a number of young women journalists is a lack of mentoring which, in turn, means that many young journalists are short of ideas and perspectives on how to report women.

Perhaps this is also a comment on the intellectual capabilities of male editors but nonetheless, women reporters don't have many examples of journalism to inspire and to better themselves.

Through this project, our focus is to popularize ways of reporting women that are far removed from the prevalent toxic, hateful tropes about women that are deployed in the industry today.

Not only are we helping generate ideas for reporters, our hope is that senior editors and assignment editors can find a higher intellectual plane for them to productively engage in.

project activities

**women's
conferences**

women's conference



CONFERENCE TITLE

Will the media start reporting reported rape?



December 10, 2020

International Human Rights Day



CONTEXT

Less than 4% of reported cases of rape and other sexual violence make it to the print and television media



DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Rape is the 'missing' story in Pakistani media**
- **Not reporting rape is tantamount to withholding fundamental rights from women**
- **Is the media equipped to report on sexual violence?**
- **Reported stories are laden with ethical concerns**



key learnings

- There is continued denial from men journalists/news anchors around the extent to which stories of sexual violence go missing on mainstream media, both print and television
- Denial comes from senior journalists
- Recent job cuts in the media industry have impacted the will to pursue cases of gender-based violence
- Editors and anchors are receptive to printing statistics around gender-based violence if civil society assumes the responsibility of compiling and referencing each case. This would make accessing information easier and help with policy interventions

ence #1



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press
coverage



women's conference



CONFERENCE TITLE
Attire, desire and rape



April 17, 2021



CONTEXT
PM Imran Khan, in an interview with foreign media, held women's dress codes as responsible for growing sexual frustration and crimes among young men



DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Women as citizens with agency and rights**
- **Proliferation of ignorance using the state's might**
- **How unsafe have women and sexual minorities become after the PM's interview?**
- **PM's personal moral code versus criminal justice system**
- **Ethical reportage of sexual violence has been sacrificed to sensationalism**

WHY DID



WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

ATTIRE

PANELISTS



key learnings

- There has been a marked spike in sexual violence against women and girls across the country in the immediate aftermath of the PM's interview
- Sexual violence aimed at boys has also risen but stories aren't making it to the fore
- Men of the media are partaking in shaming rights activists on social media when they raise concerns about the rise in sexual violence
- Anti-feminist partisanship has seen men from all political parties provide support to the PM's perspective
- PM's personal moral code is being assumed as the nation's moral code

ence #2

WHAT THEY WORE DON'T MATTER

they were still raped



RENCE E, DESIRE AND RAPE



APRIL 17, 2021
2PM - 3PM

- 1. Bina Shah
- 2. Munizae Jahangir
- 3. Adeela Akmal
- 4. Mehmali Sarfraz
- 5. Fareiha Aziz
- 6. Nasim Zehra

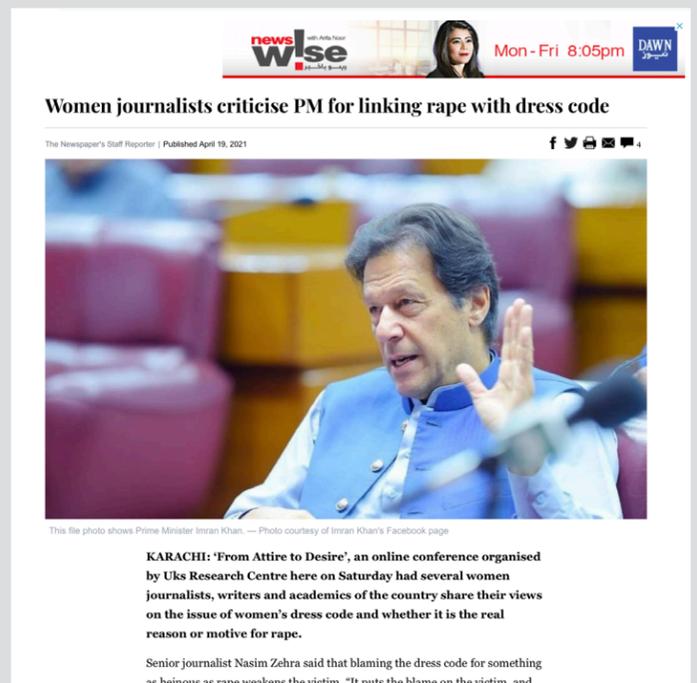
- 7. Shazia Hasan
- 8. Afia Salam
- 9. Asma Shirazi
- 10. Mahnoor Sherazee
- 11. Lubna Jerar Naqvi
- 12. Sadia Mahmood
- 13. Quratulain Siddiqui



WACC
communication for all



press coverage



Dawn.com
Published: April 19, 2021
Link: <https://bit.ly/3mvtkOh>

women's conference



CONFERENCE TITLE

Lahore motorway gang-rape case: reporting with empathy and preventing retraumatisation



June 12, 2021



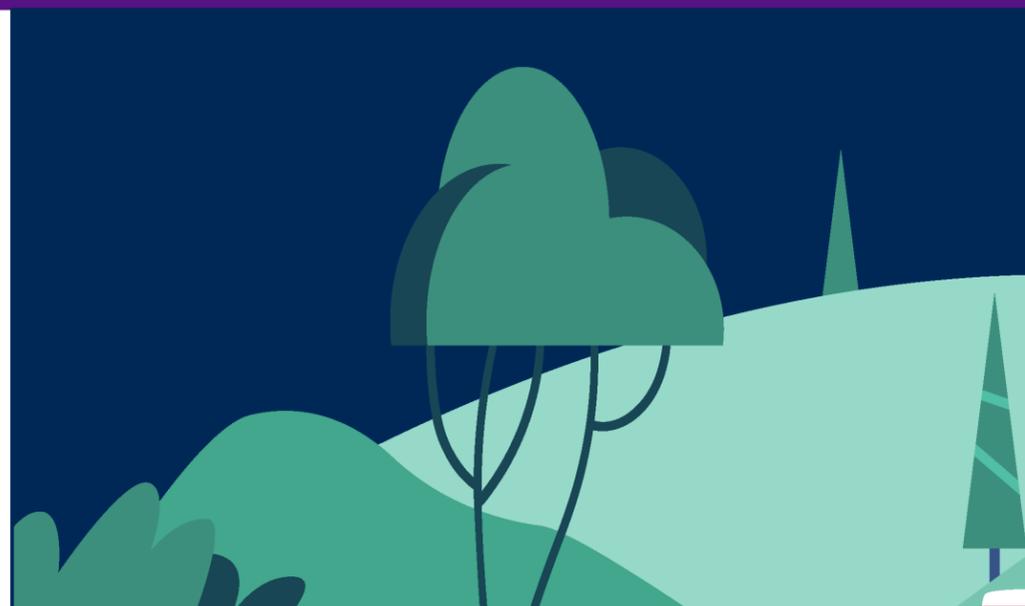
CONTEXT

The gang-rape of a mother caught the nation's attention and ire. But as the media began paying attention, it became clear that journalists had no idea about how to report with empathy



DISCUSSION POINTS

- **Children as active witnesses in cases of gender-based violence: how to protect them without retraumatizing them**
- **Recrimination and pursuit of justice versus publicised tropes of vengeance**
- **Reporting with appropriate trigger warning to warn survivors of other sexual crimes**



WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

LAHORE M

REPORTING WITH EMP

Amidst the national outrage, w
How to report keeping childre
retraumatizing the su

PANELISTS

1. Asha Bedar
2. Zehra Kamal
3. Sophia Saifee
4. Tahira Abdullah
5. Fatima Najeeb
6. Adeela Akmal
7. Shazia Hasan
8. Afia Salam
9. Nasim Zehra
10. Munizae Jahangir
11. Lubna Jerar Naqvi
12. Fareiha Aziz
13. Shaista Yasmeen
14. Tasneem Ahmar



key
learnings

ence #3



OTORWAY GANG-RAPE CASE: PATHY & PREVENTING RETRAUMATISATION

ve forgot the children who were subjected to watching their mother being raped.
en in mind is a key concern but equally crucial is how to report the case without
rvivor and reporting to empower her rather than to reopen her wounds



JUNE 12, 2021
1PM - 2PM

- Collective national ire was driven by tropes of vengeance and religious injunctions
- Incident was treated as a one-off by the media, with most preferring to not talk about other incidents of similar nature that did not receive nationwide attention
- Keeping their humanity in tact while reporting is a difficult balancing act: most men turn to violence as the response to sexual violence
- Little focus on how to re-educate, modify behaviour and rehabilitate perpetrators of sexual crime

women's conference



CONFERENCE TITLE

Women journalists in the pandemic: the labour of carrying added burden and stress



July 6, 2021



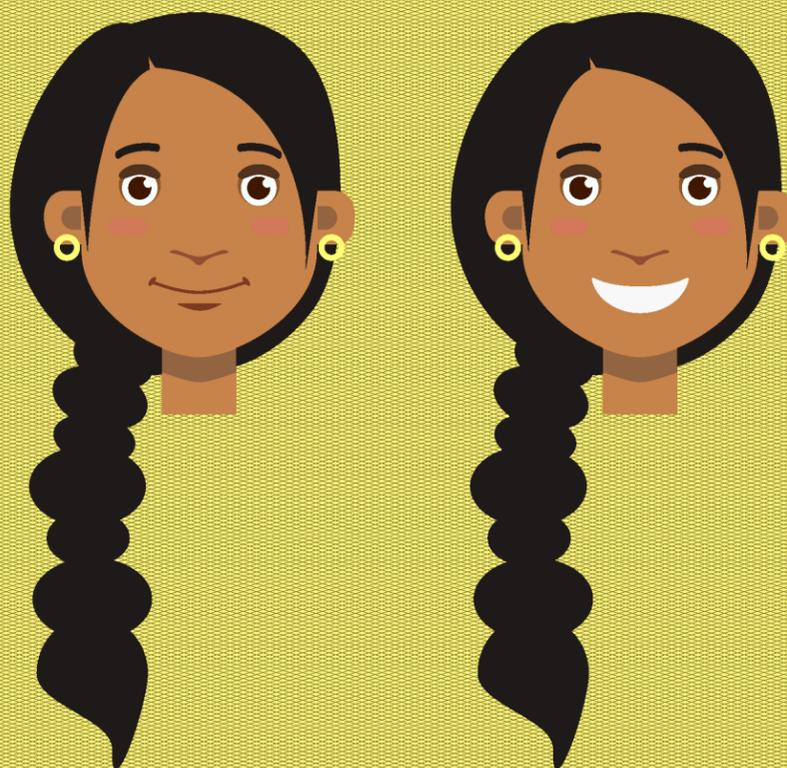
CONTEXT

Significant stories from the pandemic that have gone unreported include women journalists' work-home imbalance and the mental health toll that it took



DISCUSSION POINTS

- **In a shrinking industry, what sort of pressures did women journalists undergo to keep their jobs?**
- **For women journalists, what all took place under the guise of "in the line of duty"?**
- **What sort of expectations, both at home and at work, were associated with women in gainful employment?**



WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

WOMEN JOURNALISTS THE LABOUR OF CARRYING

If women weren't burdened enough by the pandemic
And as always here was little a
How did this dynamic play out a



key learnings

ence #4



JOURNALISTS IN THE PANDEMIC: CARRYING ADDED BURDEN (AND STRESS)

Before the pandemic the situation worsened manifold after the virus reached Pakistani shores. Acknowledgement of the toil as well as the toll the added labour was having on women. Among women journalists? And how did they brave the new challenges they were facing?



JULY 6, 2021
1PM - 3PM

- Family structures are fast changing as a result of the pandemic. Suddenly women are now heads of household since the men of the family have passed away
- Journalism was just one of the many jobs that women have pursued. Many took to other jobs or attempted a side hustle, most often an e-commerce operation
- Mobility remained a major concern
- Many women journalists risked their pregnancies in the line of duty as media organizations largely sent reporters out in the field without due protection or protocol
- The emotional toil of not being able to hug their children is an unspoken tragedy that women journalists have had to live with

media moot

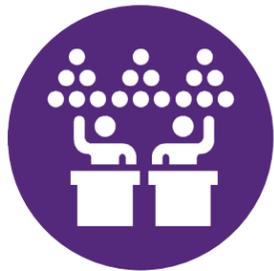


CONFERENCE TITLE

Is the media reinforcing toxic tropes in news reportage?



September 8, 2021



CONTEXT

Following an interview by the Prime Minister where he held women responsible for men “losing control” there was a spike in reported sexual violence. Meanwhile a battle of feminist versus anti-feminist was being played out on screen, with men anchors and reporters using the Prime Minister’s cover to normalize the worst toxic tropes that exist about women.

Closing conference for the project and showcase of Uks and WACC work



SCREENING: WOMEN’S COUNTER-NARRATIVES



digital stories



satirical news



women journalists’ conferences on VAW



MEDIA MOOT

*BEYOND IZZAT, GHAI RAT, CHAADAR AND
CHAAR DIWAARI, PURITY AND PIETY*

**IS THE MEDIA REINFORCING
TOXIC TROPES IN NEWS
REPORTAGE?**



**SEPTEMBER 8, 2021
4PM - 6PM**

OF COURAGE AND FORTITUDE

content and gender audit

manel watch



WACC

communication for all

Manel watch

There is no room for all-male panels or “manels” as they are commonly known on mainstream news media. And while the pandemic showed us how in vogue manels continue to be — to the extent of contributing towards turning the pandemic into a gendered crisis — we wanted to showcase the period after a young woman was slaughtered to death in Islamabad. The case encapsulates sexual violence, murder, blackmail and mental health as underlying themes; there are eminent women practitioners who ought to have been given a platform to explain things but none of them made it to the screens.

We monitored primetime talk shows on some of Pakistan’s 24/7 news channels from July 20 till August 6, 2021. With millions of women in distress over what had happened, there was a case to be made that media coverage of the incident should have been driven by women. It could have acted as a watershed moment of sorts: public debate could have sparked larger policy action. There were questions from which everyone could have learnt from: irrespective of personal belief systems how would such a case be tried? What sort of systems exist to protect women and where do the lacunae exist? Why are women always the ones shouldering the cost of men’s mental health matters?

Tabulated results showed, however, that the bulk of these shows had manels and women were conspicuous by their absence. A few shows had marginal representation of women, either as hosts or panellists. Some shows boast a woman

moderator but she is treated more as eye-candy for the men “experts” sitting to her left and right. At times she throws in a comment or a query, but that’s about all. This extreme tokenism, for us, was just as bad, if not worse, than when there are no women present. This gender-imbalance was a stark reminder of how male-dominated our media is. Barring a few exceptions, these manels not only presented a less nuanced view of the incident, they perpetuated and reinforced patriarchal mindsets and tropes such as vengeance and counter-violence.

Uks has been suggesting a balanced approach for all media content, be it print or electronic. But that necessitates that the editorial and creative process is gender-balanced as well. Manels perpetuate and reinforce patriarchy, sexism and exclusion, and sometimes there are blatant misogynistic remarks that are screened on air. The murder of the young woman, for example, was often turned into a victim-blaming and shaming exercise. Many men repeatedly expressed their ire at the Aurat March [Women’s March], without realizing that it is only a march organized on Women’s Day (March 8) every year rather than it being an organization of any sort. The deceased woman had been pictured once holding a placard at a women’s protest in Islamabad; the argument given on television was that “women of that ilk” would face the same or similar fate.

There were only a few talk shows that challenged this perspective and took up this murder case as a violence against women and human rights issue.

**digital
stories**

digital story #1: **S**

They say sports build character: meet a mother who is a trailblazer for her daughters and many others, inspiring not just the will to persevere but also the courage to build the next generation.



CONTENT CONSUMPTION

2,057

Reach

177

Engagement

30

Likes and reactions

25-34 years
18-24 years

Women demographic engaged

Supporting hope



digital story #2: T

Two young women create an online marketplace of baked goodies to help women trapped in abusive situations earn a livelihood during the pandemic



CONTENT CONSUMPTION

27,017

Reach

2,922

Engagement

47

Likes and reactions

45-54 years
35-44 years

Women demographic engaged

Reach out abuse



digital story #3: W



Will of fire



When the going gets tough these women get tougher. Inventive and resourceful, they are the primary breadwinners of their homes

CONTENT CONSUMPTION

18,648

Reach

11,092

Engagement

3

Likes and reactions

25-34 years
35-44 years

Women demographic engaged

digital story #4: Pol



The system might be rigged against women and children but some are still striving to change it from within

CONTENT CONSUMPTION

20,971

Reach

11,336

Engagement

3

Likes and reactions

25-34 years
35-44 years

Women demographic
engaged

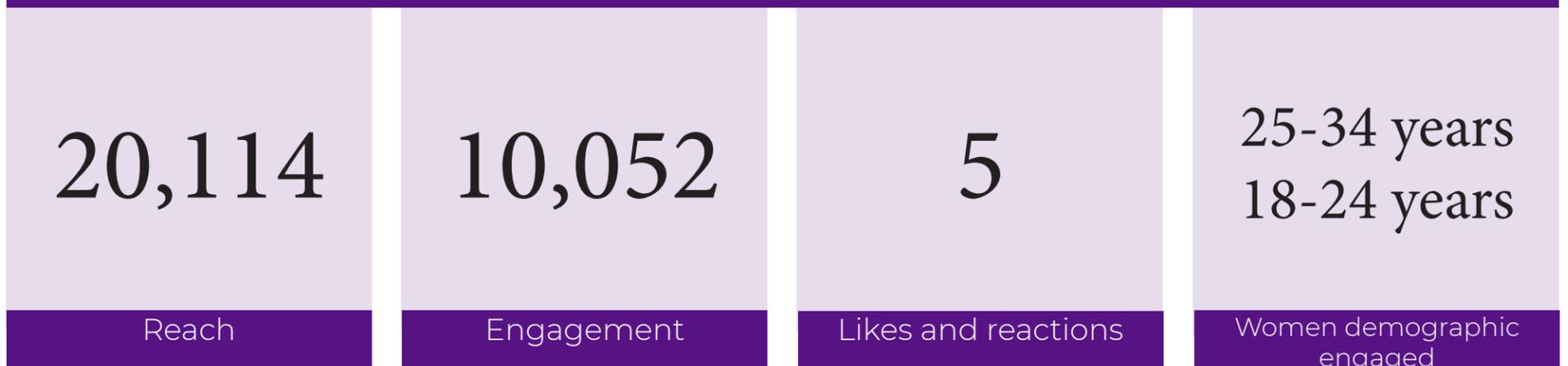
Political Matriarchs





digital story

CONTENT CONSUMPTION



Mobility concerns have always been gendered - they have historically been the ones that have prevented women from achieving little and large victories. But times are changing now as a culture of more women riding their own bicycles, scooters or rides operated by women takes root. More visibility translates into greater claim over public space for women. Long may it continue!



y #5: **Won't tire, won't stop**



digital story #6: **fi** **violence in the**

After the pandemic sparked a brutal rise in abuse cases a new app was launched to provide help, protection and legal services to survivors of domestic violence. The best part: it has the active patronage of the government in an attempt to bring culprits to book.

This story had the greatest reach on social media and recieved the most likes and reactions. Interestingly it was the 25-34 year olds who watched it the most - perhaps reflecting the age group for whom domestic violence was a very real concern during the pandemic.

CONTENT CONSUMPTION

38,969

Reach

1,838

Engagement

66

Likes and reactions

25-34 years
35-44 years

Women demographic
engaged

Fighting domestic pandemic



digital story #7: **M** **in VAW reporting**



CONTENT CONSUMPTION

17,193

Reach

10,020

Engagement

5

Likes and reactions

25-34 years
35-44 years

Women demographic
engaged

Missing ethics in the media



The absence of ethics in VAW reportage is not a topic that is commonly taught at the university level. And perhaps that's due to how widespread the absence of ethics is that it is considered normal to divulge a survivor's name, age, address, medical history and any other detail that can be found, live on television before million of viewers. Even as she waits for justice, another crime has already been committed against her.

digital story #8: M



A woman in the heart of the metropolis of Karachi collects garbage to build bricks and homes for the homeless

CONTENT CONSUMPTION

19,135

Reach

9,078

Engagement

5

Likes and reactions

25-34 years
35-44 years

Women demographic engaged

Mothering nature



digital stories: key metrics

Average Reach: 20,513
 Total Reach: 164,104
 Total Engagements: 56,515

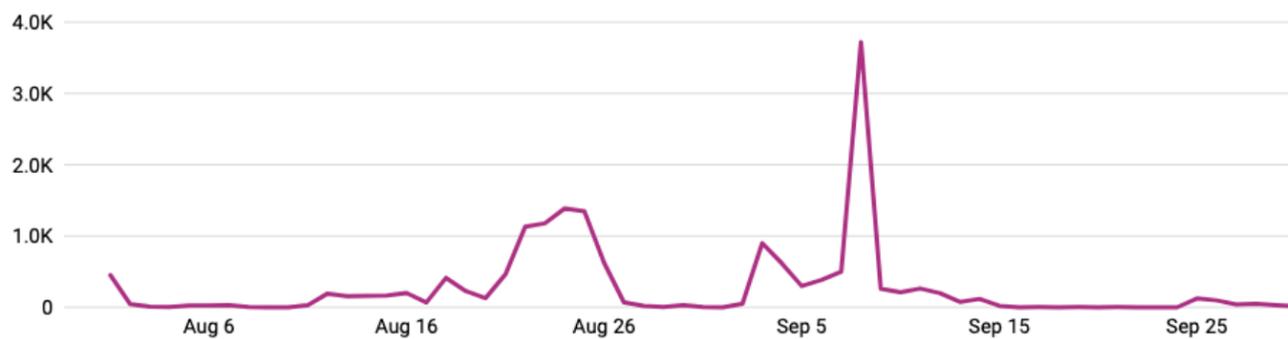
Facebook Page Reach ⓘ

456,205 ↑ 18.0K%

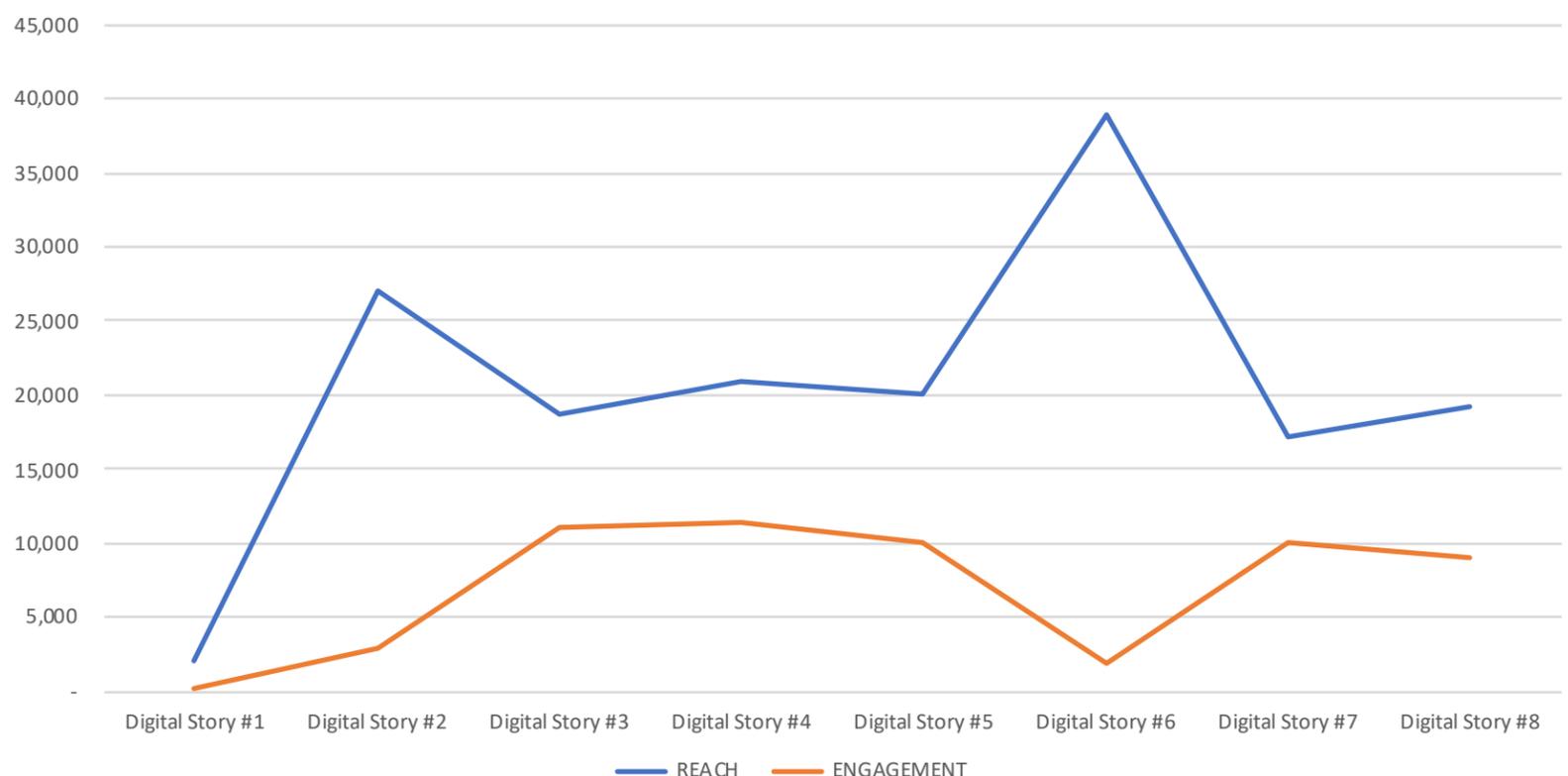


Instagram Reach ⓘ

13,096 ↑ 163.6%



Uks-WACC Digital Stories: Reach v Engagements



**satire
news
bulletin**

overview

Our flagship program was a mini web series titled, “Khabr Banazr Aurat” or News from the lens of women.

The idea of this show was to provide comic relief to women and girls of all ages with news delivered the way they’d want it to be delivered. It was also to provide validation to women worried or frustrated with concerns such as fathers or husbands refusing to get vaccinated against Covid-19.

This is where, in particular, Uks was able to harness the exeburence of its young guns and the incisive lens of its veterans as satire news items dealt with concerns that were weighing down women and children of all households.

The five-episode series was wildly popular, helping us understand the space for content that women wanted to engage with and consume.

خبر بنی

اہم خبر

کو بھی شادی سے مشروط کر دیا جائے گا۔ ● لڑکیوں کی طرز پر لڑکوں کی بھی

web-series highlight



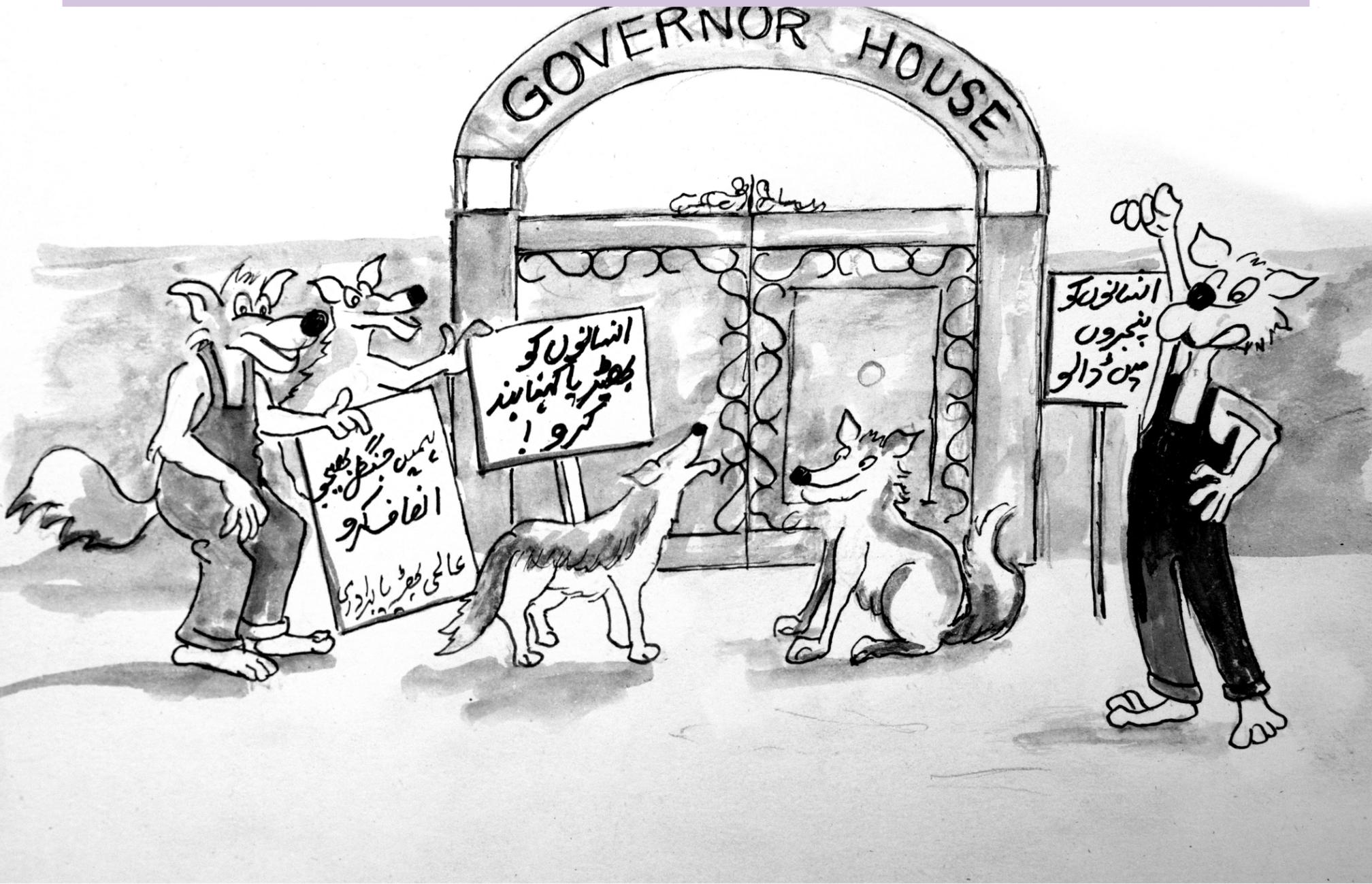
SATIRE NEWS H
vaccinated, thro

ights



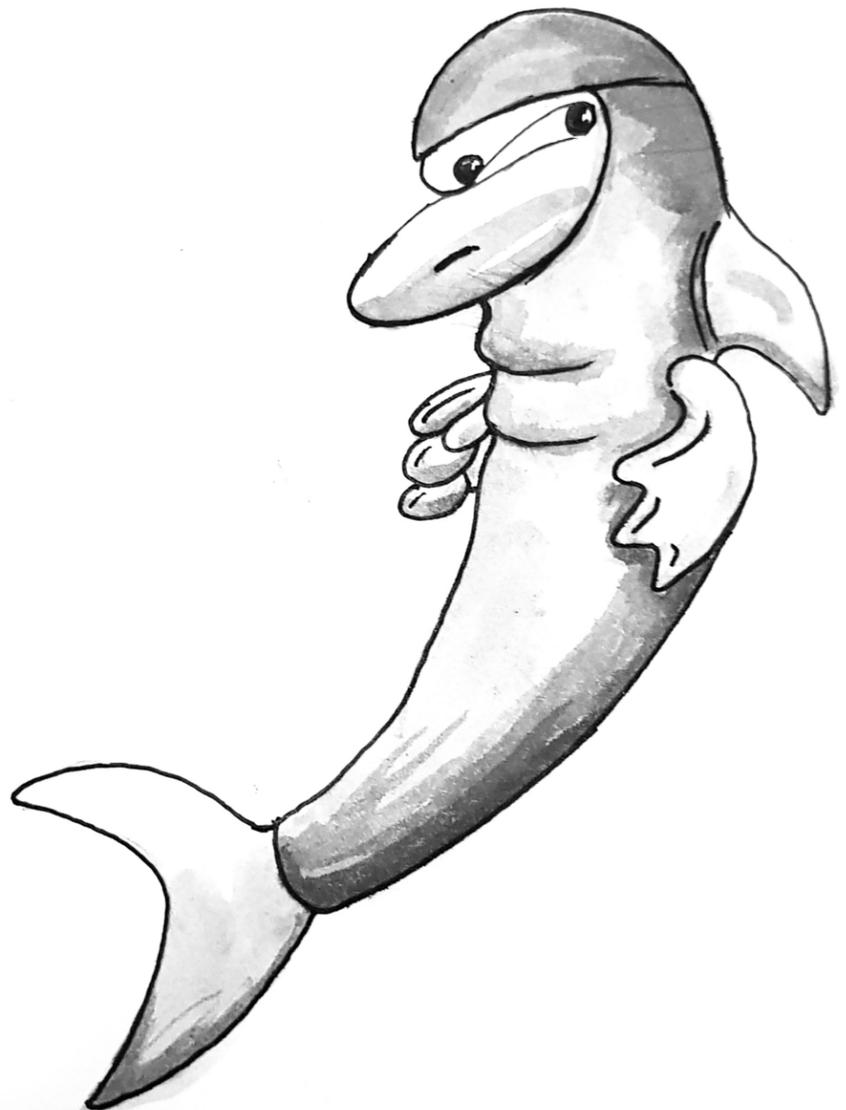
HEADLINE: Wives form an alliance against husbands refusing to get beaten to withdraw all household amenities

SATIRE NEWS HEADLINE: Wolves protest being compared to men; demand that men be caged while they be let out





SATIRE NEWS HEADLINE:
Campaign begins to
fully cover and clothe all
animals (so as to avoid any
temptation for men)





SATIRE NEWS HEADLINE: Men to be charged thrice the fare after women boycott travelling in public transport due to harassment by men

SATIRE NEWS HEADLINE: Male virginity tests now available after breakthrough scientific discovery; declared pre-condition for marriage



web series: key metrics

Reach

Engagement

Likes and

Episode 1

26,630

11,006

2

Episode 2

64,498

4,907

23

Episode 3

58,311

10,987

11

Episode 4

92,738

10,281

14

Episode 5

135,396

12,339

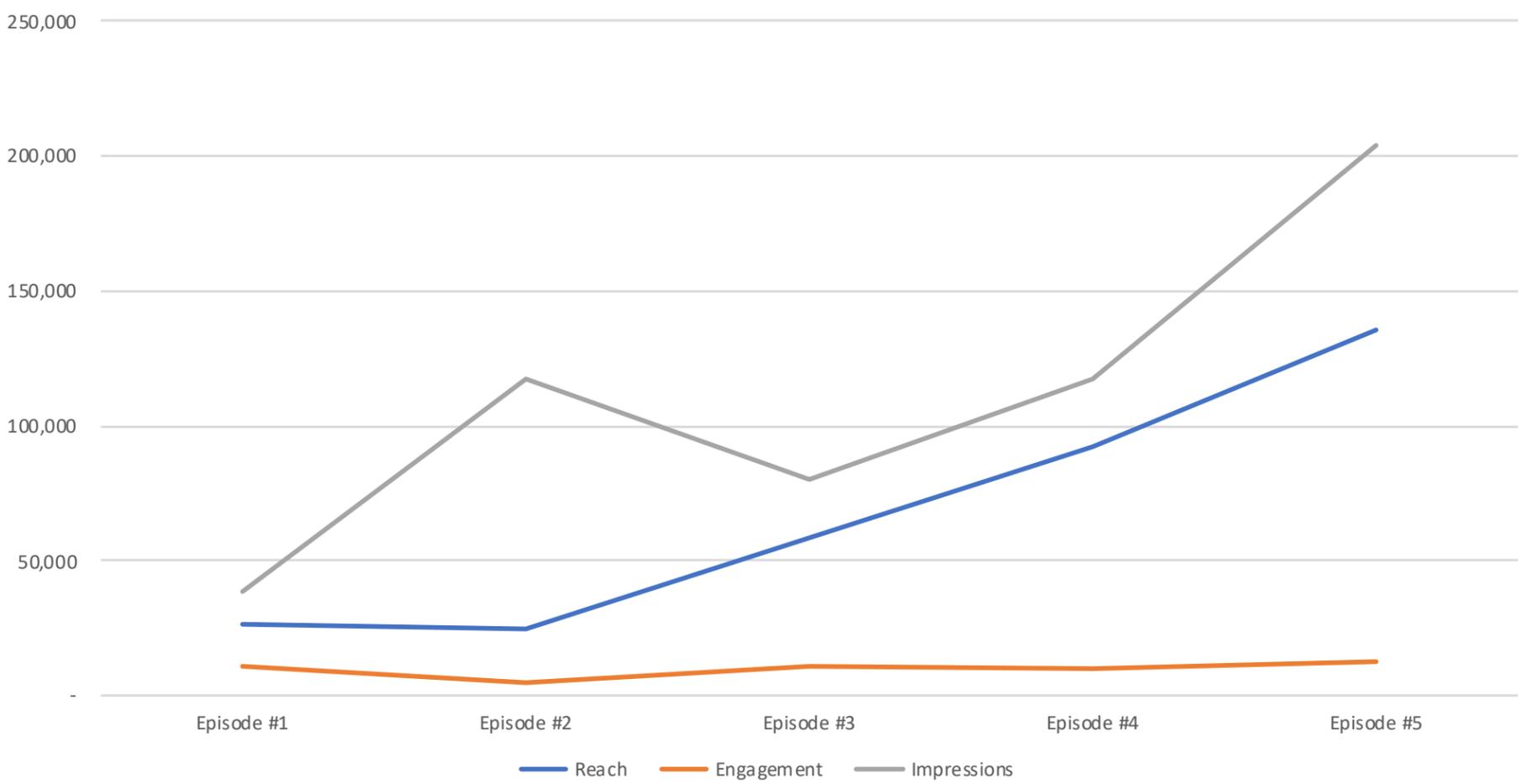
50

metrics

reactions	Shares	Impressions	Women demographic engaged
9	4	38,450	25-34 years 35-44 years
36	11	117,359	55-64 years 35-44 years
11	6	80,522	25-34 years 55-64 years
47	14	117,294	55-64 years 45-54 years
08	38	204,153	25-35 years 18-24 years

Average Reach: 67,515
 Total Reach: 337,573
 Total Engagements: 49,520
 Total Impressions: 557,778

Uks-WACC Web Series: Reach v Engagements v Impressions



**fellowship
for women
journalists**

What began as a group of 18 journalists from various organizations was slowly whittled down to a group of seven working journalists, all women, as most others could not cope up with the rigour being demanded in completing assigned readings and the necessary fieldwork.

That said, a smaller number turned into a blessing in disguise as we could focus on serious journalists in our midst. Another associated advantage was that some organizations had sent men to the fellowships; all of them ultimately decided the effort to learn was beyond their capacity. This meant that women participants felt more secure and more at ease while discussing both the assigned readings as well as the stories they were working on — some topics in both cases have historically been taboo or associated with shame (and by extension, not to be discussed around men).

The cohort then took shape as a mix of women from privileged and underprivileged backgrounds as well as different religious backgrounds. Two of these women journalists, in fact, belonged to socially regressive areas — not only were they now able to communicate on parity with their peers, they were also able to find ways to better communicate their stories as well as how to write them better. We managed to produce two stories that went to print while the others are still being crafted and re-crafted.

The fellowship has now morphed into a working group to share ideas, hone narratives and providing feedback. This became possible after women journalists expressed a desire to keep engaging with Uks and their mentors. Some wanted consistent oversight on what they were writing and how to write better and tell more engaging stories. Uks has obliged, providing mentoring as well as academic resources on a voluntary basis for the time being. There are requests, not just by the cohort but also by some women journalists who attended classes from time to time, to turn this into an organized journalism lab for women; we are working on identifying future funding partners with whom we can build something substantial moving forward.

Fellowship cohort

Journalist: **Suzanne Masih**

Organization: **Independent Urdu**

Topic: **Women's fear of public spaces**

Story Synopsis:

The idea of having to interact with strange men fills many working women with dread. There is unacknowledged mental toll of identifying whether a man is a threat or not. Some women choose to abandon claim to public space to preserve mental peace.

Link to the story: <https://www.independenturdu.com/node/76696>

Journalist: **Adeela Akmal**

Organization: **The News**

Topic: **Working women's income: is it really hers to own and keep?**

Story Synopsis:

Family structures in Pakistan are oppressive for women in many ways. Among the more insidious forms is the claims over working women's income, be it from parents or siblings, or from husbands and in-laws. This leaves many women questioning the notion of love altogether and whether love is merely transactional.

Link to the story: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/900904-stories-from-the-working-womens-wheel-of-life>

Journalist: **Fatima Hurriya**

Organization: **Dawn**

Topic: **Patient-facing doctors' health during the pandemic**

Story Synopsis:

Doctors health in Pakistan during the pandemic was a less spoken about subject, particularly those who faced patients and their relatives. Mob attacks, abuse, manhandling, harassment and murder threats all feature in this tale

Journalist: **Hina Khan**

Organization: **Frontier Post**

Topic: **Navigating public transport in women-unfriendly cities**

Story Synopsis:

In the capital city of Islamabad public transport is largely used by house help, usually Christian women from low-income backgrounds. How they navigate harassment is an art in itself

Journalist: **Fizza Kanwal**

Organization: **Mashriq News HD, Quetta**

Topic: **Living with disability a double jeopardy for women**

Story Synopsis:

Being a woman in the conservative society of Balochistan is already jeopardy enough but being a woman who is also disabled condemns her to the worst possible treatment at the hands of society

Journalist: **Tayyaba Gull**

Organization: **Khyber TV**

Topic: **Cultural shocks for women moving cities in search of employment**

Story Synopsis:

Moving cities to pursue a job isn't new but what is often less spoken about are the cultural shocks many women face when they move to larger cities. Sometimes this also causes crippling existential dread and women return to what they perceive as "home"

Journalist: **Shireen Karim**

Organization: **Freelance**

Topic: **Women's everyday fight on the bus stand**

Story Synopsis:

Getting to place from place is a battle in Gilgit Baltistan as public transport owners try and fleece women with twice the fare over flimsy concerns. Matters are made worse by the police, who don't want women to travel but for other reasons

ہوم پیج «خواتین» عوامی جگہوں میں خواتین غیر محفوظ: 'مردوں سے بات کرنا ہوگی'

عوامی جگہوں میں خواتین غیر محفوظ: 'مردوں سے بات کرنا ہوگی'

آنکھیں جھکا کر چلنا، اپنی چال، کپڑوں اور رویے کا ہر سینکڑا جائزہ لیتے رہنا اور ہزاروں کی بھیڑ میں بھی اکیلے لاکھوں خواتین عوامی جگہوں میں روزانہ اپنے اندر سمیٹے ہوئے چلتی ہیں۔

سوزینا مسیح منگل 24 اگست 2021 10:00



Stories from the working women's wheel of life

Adeela Akmal | [Political Economy](#) | October 17, 2021

Navigating through age-old gender roles has never been easy for women as they perform exhaustive working women, especially married ones, what is supposed to be a passion and source of personal expectation or a burden



The proposal came through a matchmaker aware of her six-digit pay cheque. He was everything 28-year-old Aasia* wished in a partner: educated, soft-spoken, the right amount of religious, respectful to his elders and most of all self-reliant. She thought she was being rewarded for her good deeds. But what had appeared like a bouquet of roses soon turned into a bed of thorns.

“My *nikah* was solemnised a month prior to the wedding so we could get our documents ready to travel for an *umrah*. During that month, I got a job offer from another firm. I was offered four times what I was earning,” says Aasia. “I told my husband about the job, and he didn’t make it a big deal of it. In fact, he never reacted. I knew his pay was less than mine, but neither my family nor I ever considered it a problem.”

Two days before the wedding, Aasia received a furious call from her husband, who complained about the “junk” that had been sent in the name of dowry. He accused her mother of “not having the *saleeqa* [propriety] to send her daughter off”. Shocked and terrified, Aasia’s mother tried to comfort her daughter and arranged for everything demanded in dowry the next day.

In the traditional set up, a woman’s responsibilities are considered to revolve around her home, whereas the man’s job is to support the family financially. Aasia found herself doing both.

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**content
analysis**

Anatomy of GBV

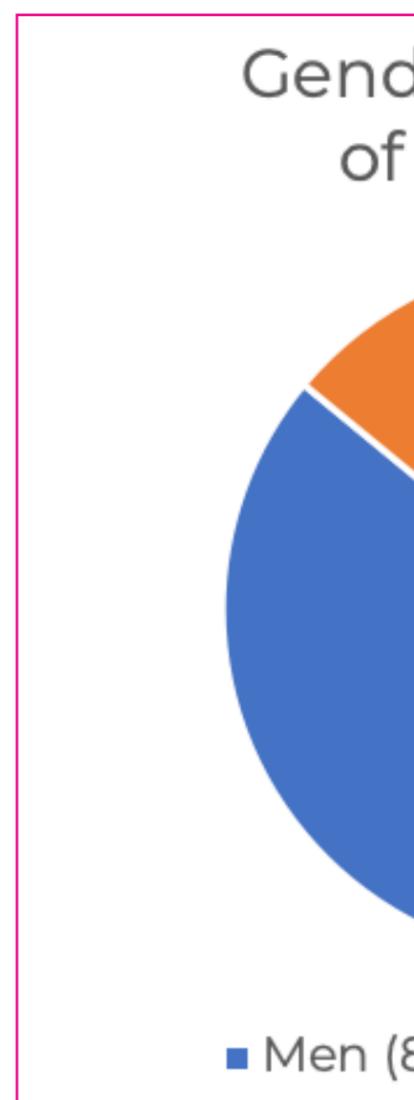
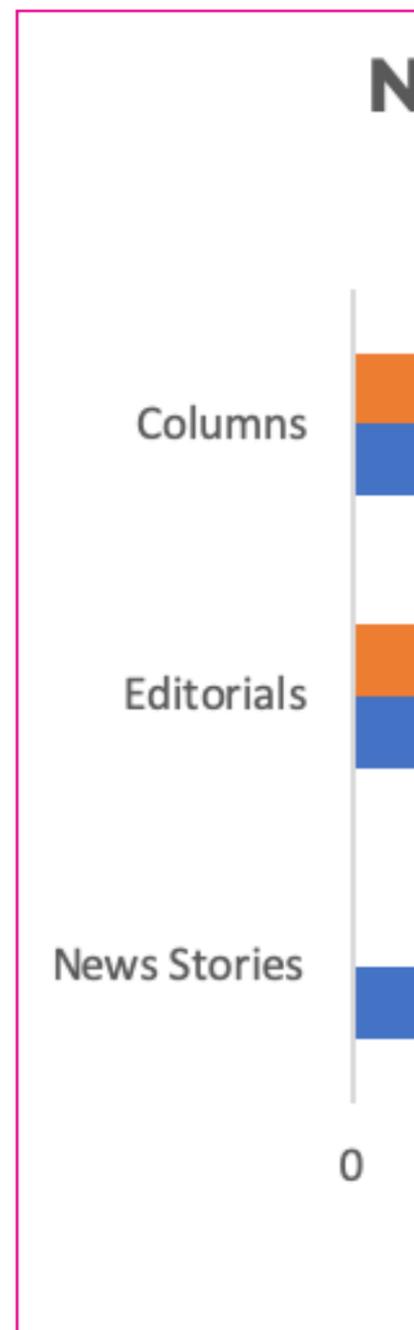
The slaughter of a young woman in the heart of Islamabad, the federal capital, shook the nation to its core. The nature of the murder meant that it did not escape media attention. And once the news hit the airwaves there was almost no chance for the accused to flee the country or the city. He was soon arrested and thus began legal proceedings, and with it, media proceedings.

That said, the words of George Gerbner and his cultivation theory ring profoundly true today: mass produced content always cultivates and shapes the behavior of the audience.

We took this opportunity to assess how a case that has the nation's attention has been reported on by the mainstream national media. We monitored a total of 103 news items from leading Urdu and English newspapers between July 20, 2021 and August 5, 2021.

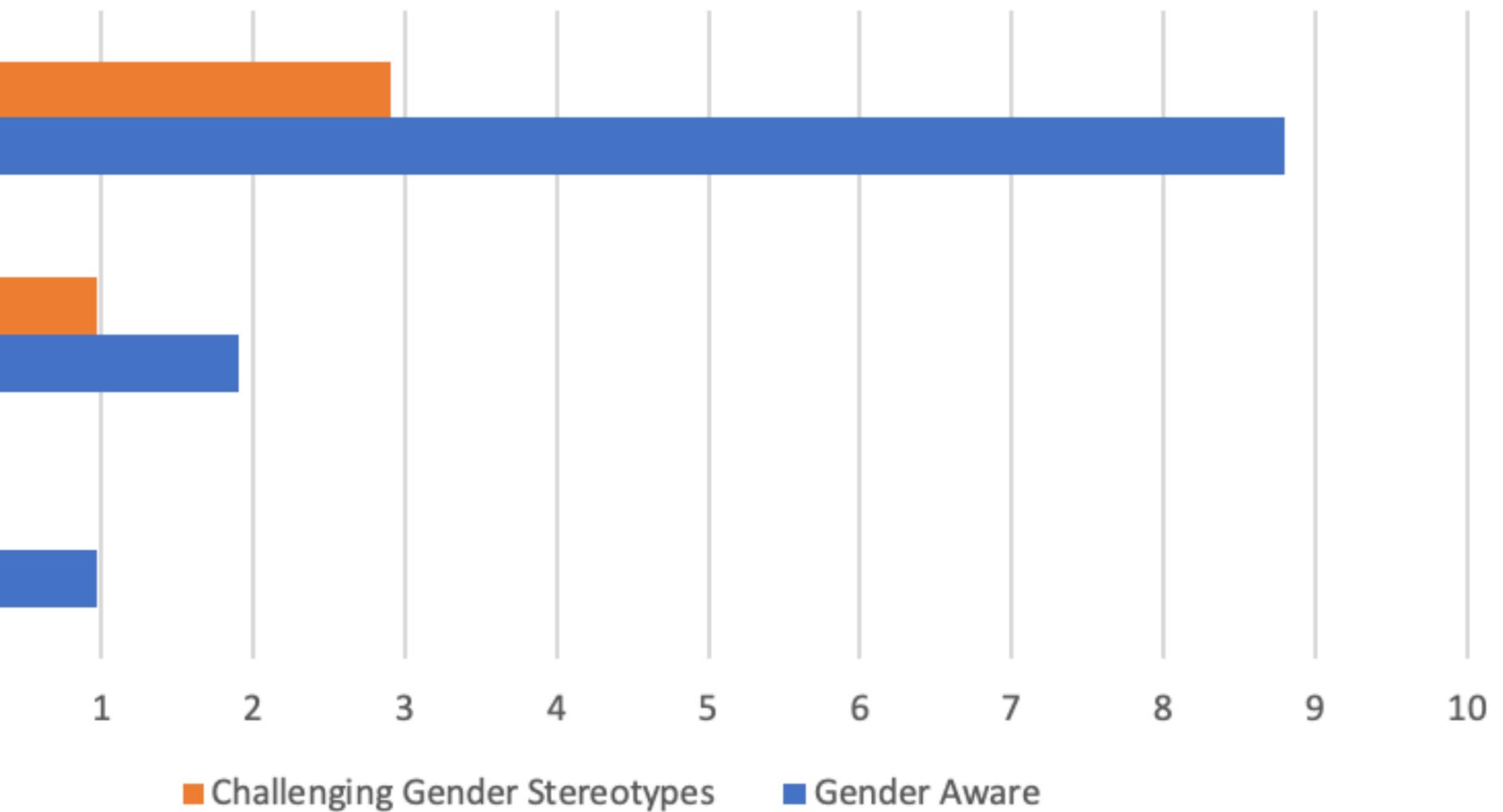
Assuming that the main function of mass communication is not to change but sustaining and propagating the power structure, the reportage of the case is instructive in how little has changed in the assumptions of gender-based reportage. For example, the case is still referred to by many using the victim's name rather than the accused. This shifts focus onto the victim rather than the aggressor. One reason for this phenomenon, and a crucial one at that, is that men are still shaping gender-based crime reportage and its news treatment (as evidenced by the percentage of men as sources of news versus the miniscule percentage representing women).

There are positives to report, too. Tonality of reportage this time round has been acceptable; in other words, when the men of the media want to they do show that they know better. Consistency of practice is another matter, however.

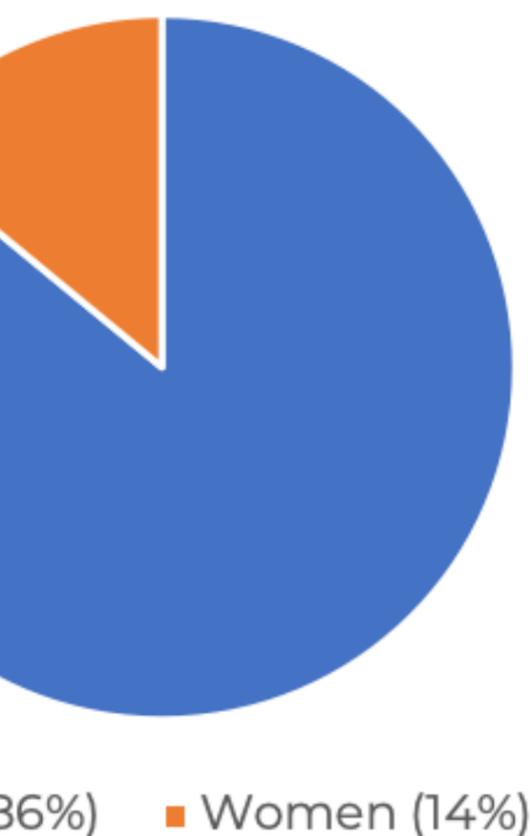


reportage

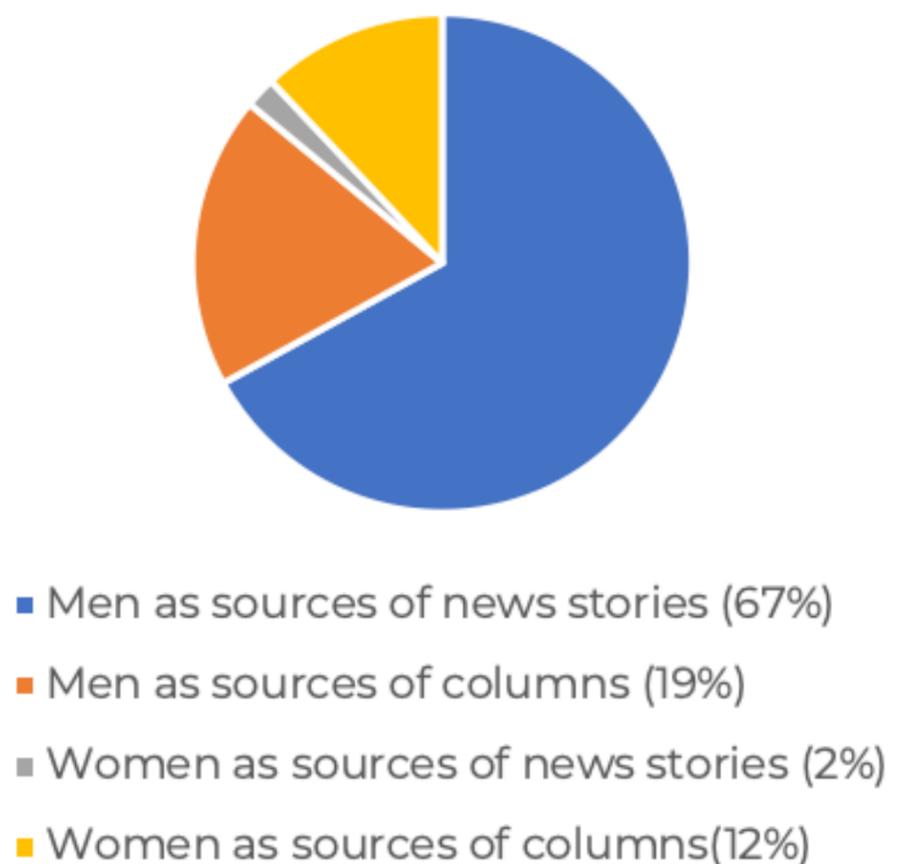
News Items that were Gender Aware and Challenged Gender Stereotypes (%)



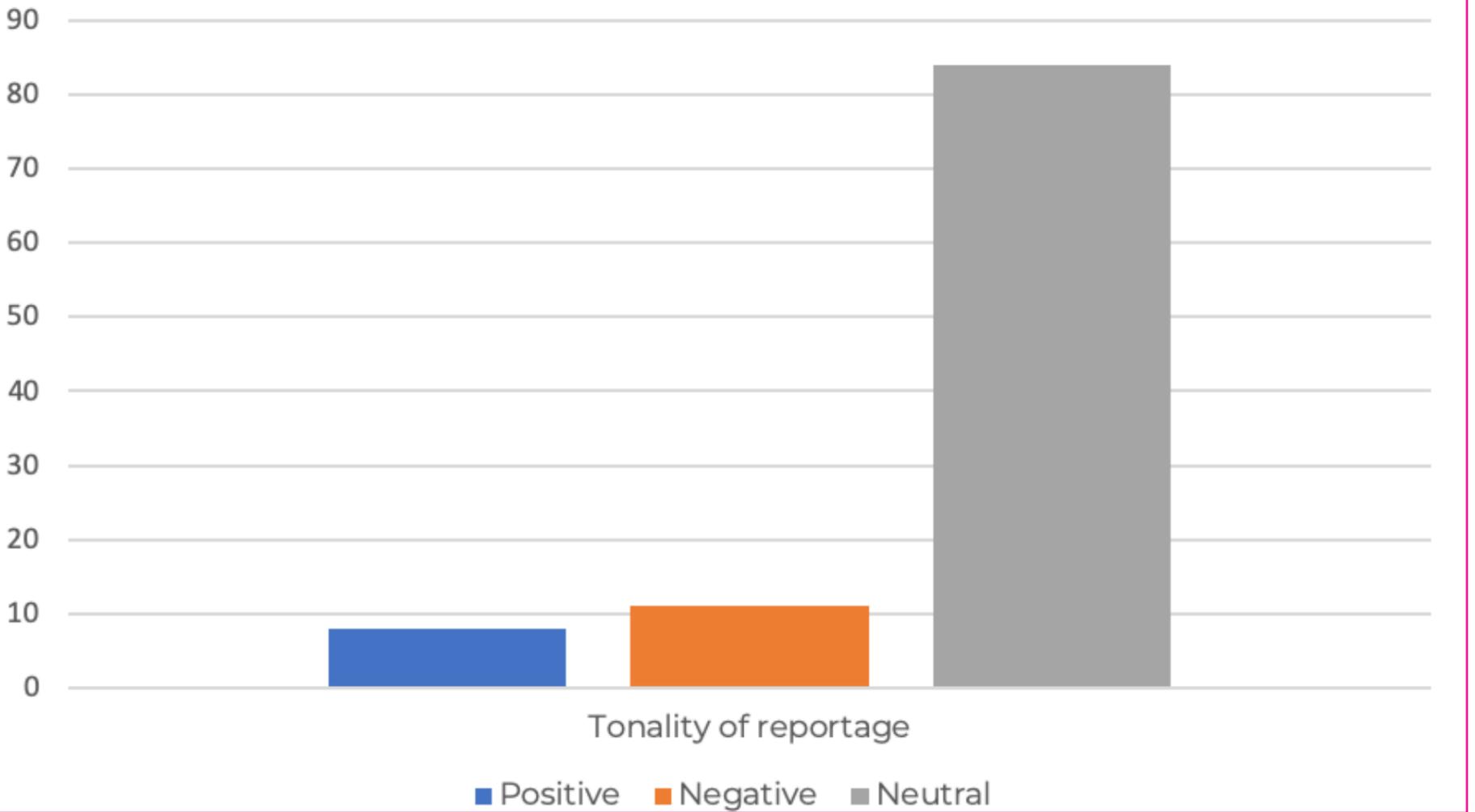
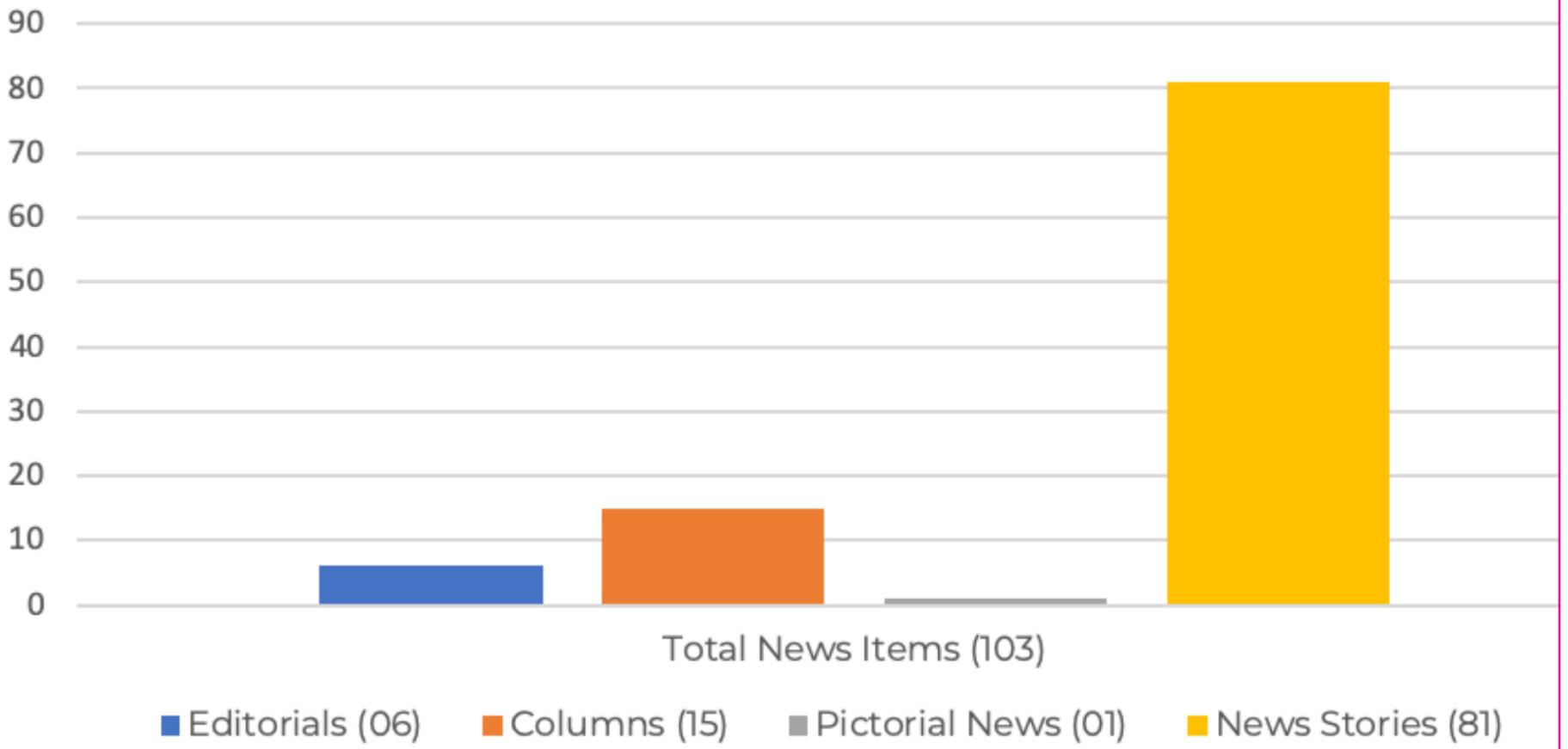
Gender Breakdown Sources (%)



Content category breakdown (%)



Breakdown of total items monitored



**gender
audit**

Introduction

It is imperative for human rights defenders working with women journalists to take stock of the everyday realities that these women work with.

It is because of years of feminist struggle that women journalists today walk into organizations with greater protection mechanisms in place for them — at least by law.

But the everyday reality is less sanitized as enforcement of these mechanisms is almost non-existent. And with job cuts in the media industry now routine whatever little that did exist also seems to have taken a beating.

Where women were now primed to succeed they are being actively pushed back by organizational bureaucracies.

As part of the Uks-WACC project, we began a process of establishing a baseline survey on women journalist's employment status from a human resource perspective.

The main purpose was to document changes to women journalists' workforce post pandemic and in relation to the on-going crisis in the media industry including financial crunches, downsizing of the organisations, etc.

What struck us throughout that process was how human resource managers were reluctant to respond to our questions, most of which pertained directly with the protection mechanisms in place for women at media organizations. The following section details our major findings.

Participating news organizations

Geo News	National electronic media
GNN News	National electronic media
Dunya News	National electronic media
Aaj TV	National electronic media
Khyber TV	Regional electronic media
Radio Pakistan	National radio
Dawn	English-language daily
The News	English-language daily
APP	Bilingual; News wire
Ausaf	Urdu-language daily
Independent Urdu	Urdu-language online news portal
Balochistan Express	Regional Newspaper

Methodology

Respondents

Our researchers divided respondents into four groups:

1. Editors (Print)
2. Editors & Programme Directors (Electronic and Broadcast)
3. Human Resource Managers
4. Working journalists

Separate survey questionnaires for each group were developed and distributed among the staff of the participating news organizations.

In view of the ongoing pandemic, face-to-face interactions were prevented and questionnaires were shared with recipients through Google forms.

Sample size:

A set of four questionnaires was developed in-house by Uks staff.

Each questionnaire was targeted at each of the four respondent categories defined by our team.

The questionnaires were distributed among 48 respondents.

As many as 29 interviewees responded.

Data collection

The method used for data collection was cross-sectional survey, as it allowed researchers to go through the study at a single point in time and to look at numerous characteristics at once.

Data was gathered over a three-week timeframe: from June 1, 2021, till June 22, 2021.

Data collection tool

Questionnaires were designed to measure changes posed by the pandemic in women's workforce in the media industry as well as gender-related policies and sexual harassment policies within participating media organizations.

A method of simple random sampling was adopted.

The four tools comprised in total 68 questions, out of which 15 items were shared with working journalists, 22 were shared with human resource officers, 24 were shared with the group named as editors & director programmes and 7 items were shared with editors.

Responses

Trends



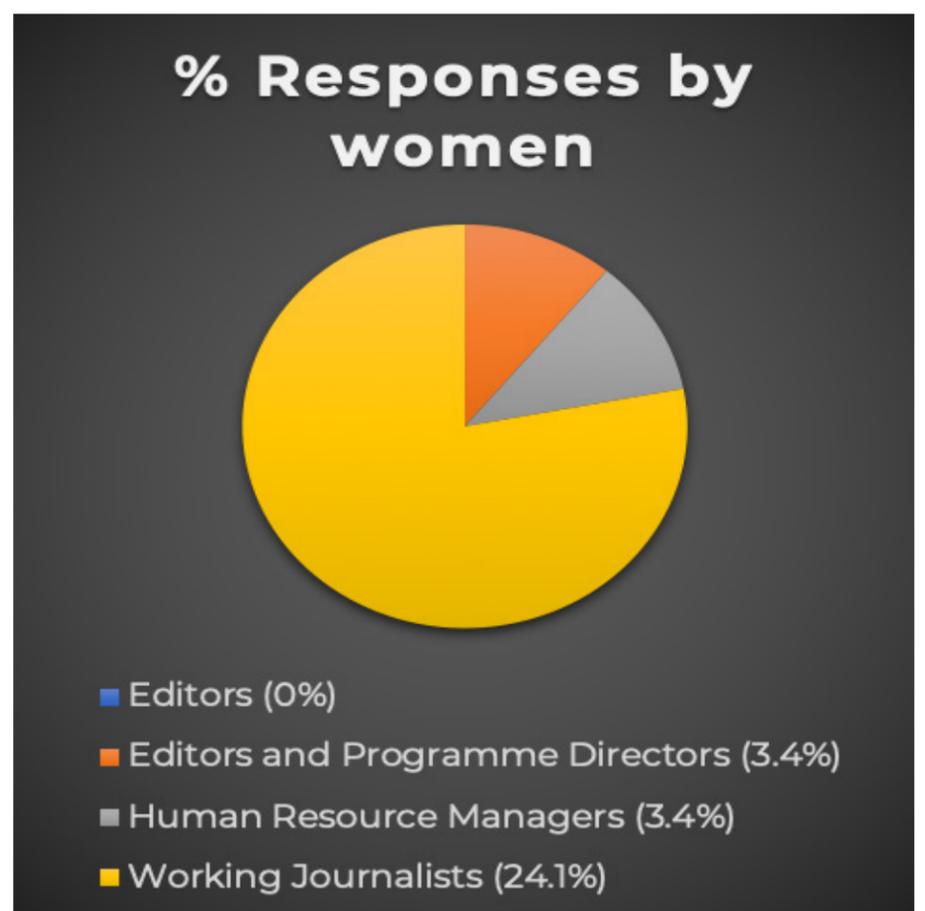
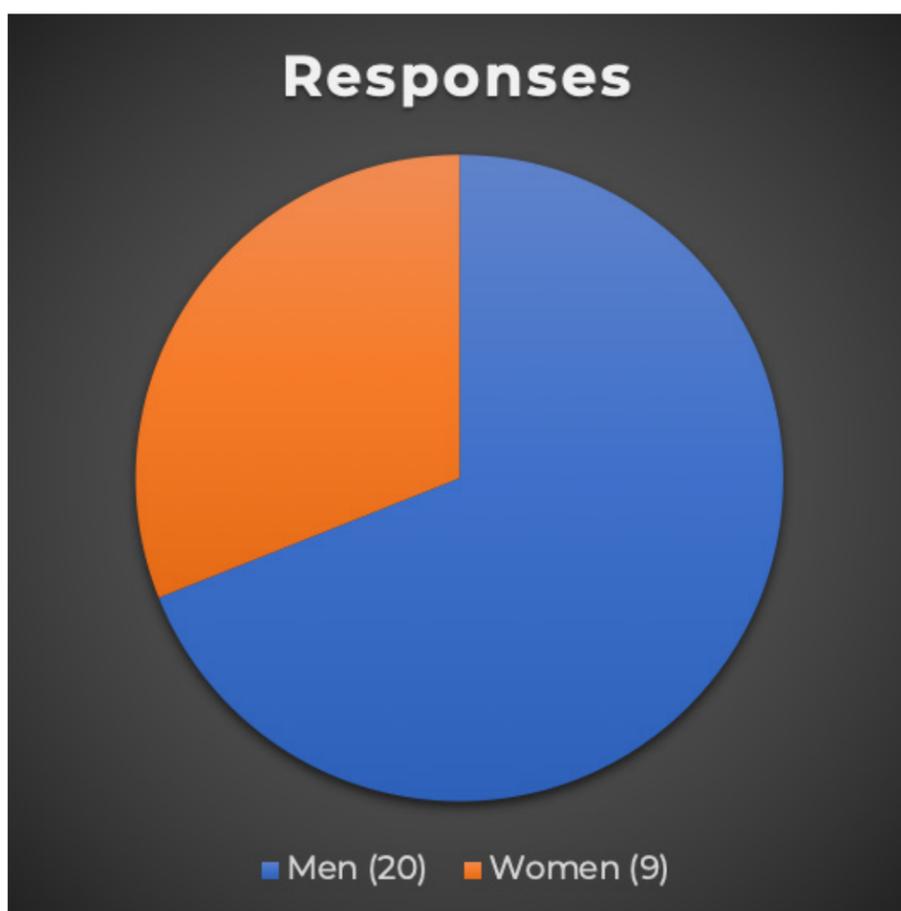
Organization	Editors	Editors and Programmes Directors	Human Resource Managers	Working journalists
Geo News	Did not submit	Did not submit	Submitted	Submitted
GNN News	Did not submit	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted
Dunya News	Did not submit	Did not submit	Submitted	Submitted
Aaj TV	Submitted	Did not submit	Submitted	Submitted
Khyber TV	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted
Radio Pakistan	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted
Dawn	Submitted	Submitted	Did not submit	Did not submit
The News	Did not submit	Did not submit	Did not submit	Submitted
APP	Did not submit	Submitted	Did not submit	Submitted
Ausaf	Submitted	Did not submit	Submitted	Did not submit
Independent Urdu	Submitted	Did not submit	Did not submit	Did not submit
Balochistan Express	Did not submit	Did not submit	Did not submit	Submitted

Survey results

GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES

Only 31.03% of total responses were from women respondent out of which 24.13% were working journalists while 3.4% were human

resource managers and another 3.4% were programme directors. Sadly none of the responses that were logged were by women editors.



ORGANIZATIONAL GENDER POLICY

Responses logged into by editors shows that 80% of organizations have a gender policy but none of their organizations have yet codified and formally written these policies. In other words, the significance of an orally existing gender policy can and should be disputed.

In fact, HR departments of various organizations state

quite the contrary — they state that since no written documents exist then for all official purposes there is no policy to talk about.

Were a policy to exist, it would include associated costs, for which the organization would have to budget accordingly.

As things stand, since no policy exists there is no

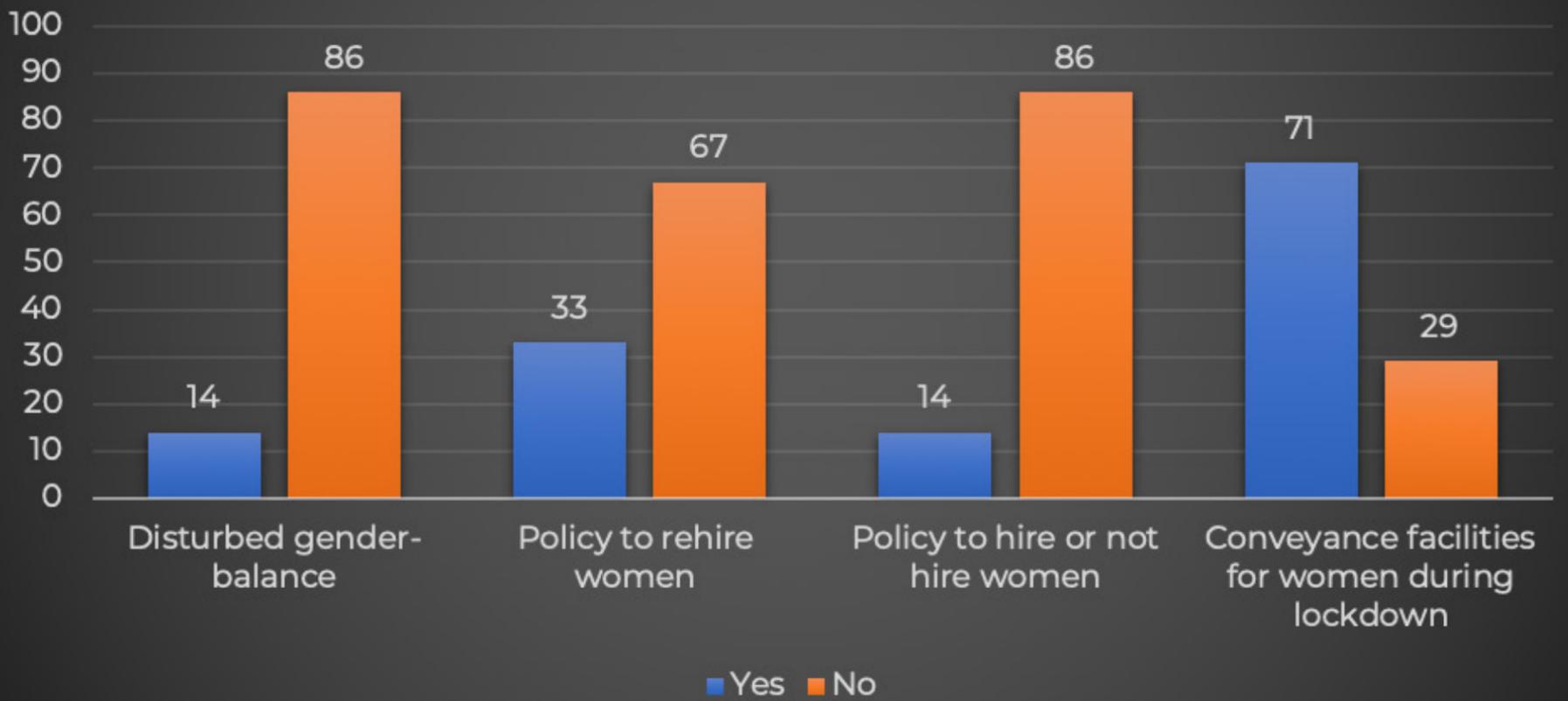
question of any expenditure that could be incurred on, for example, gender sensitivity training for men journalists, or training on ethical concerns in gender reporting, or even on separate break rooms or rest areas for women.

According to the responses

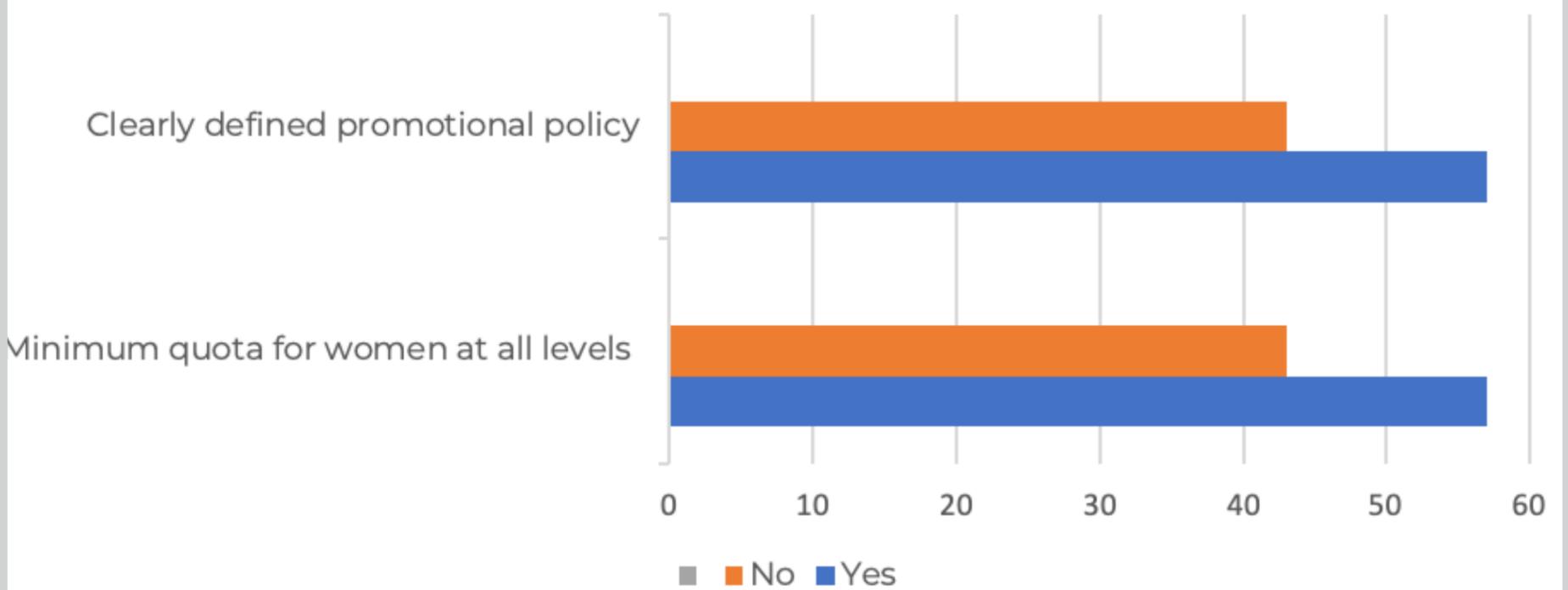
logged by HR officers 43% of participating media organizations did not even have clearly-defined promotion policies.

Meanwhile, and quite significantly, 86% of participating organizations did not have a policy of hiring women.

HR policy on women media workers during the pandemic

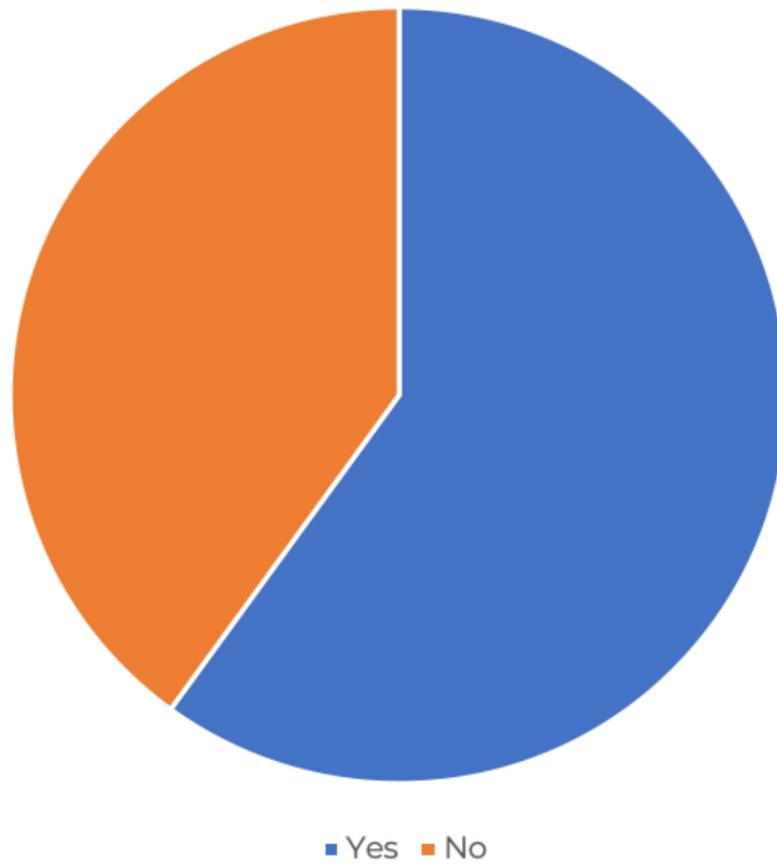


Promotion Policies



The two charts above were compiled from accounts submitted by HR managers of organizations participating in the survey. For many concepts such as maternity leaves are absolutely alien.

Is the Sexual Harassment Bill put up in your organization where all employees can read/review it?



WOMEN EDITORS AND CONTENT

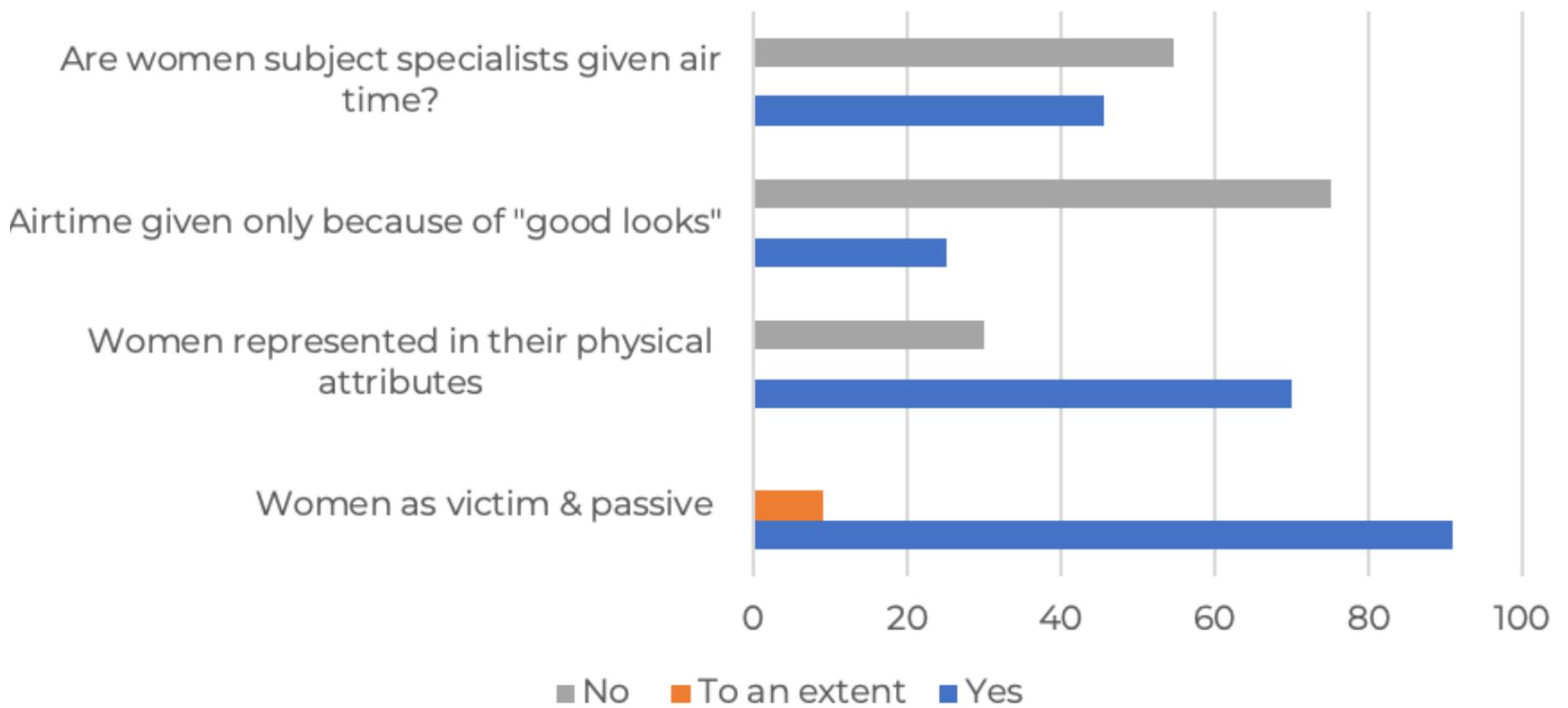
Although women media workers are striving their best to survive and excel in the field, only a handful of women are in decision-making or policy-making positions in their organizations.

This translates into content: no or few women in decision-making positions means no or a paltry number of gender-aware news content and gender-sensitive news reportage.

When we asked journalists for their input on content currently being produced, 91.7% of working journalists agreed with the statement that images of women in the media content emphasizes and exaggerates physical aspects of women.

Another 41.5% of working journalists agreed with the statement that pictures published often reflect women being happy with exploitation.

Women journalists' perception on state of women in the industry



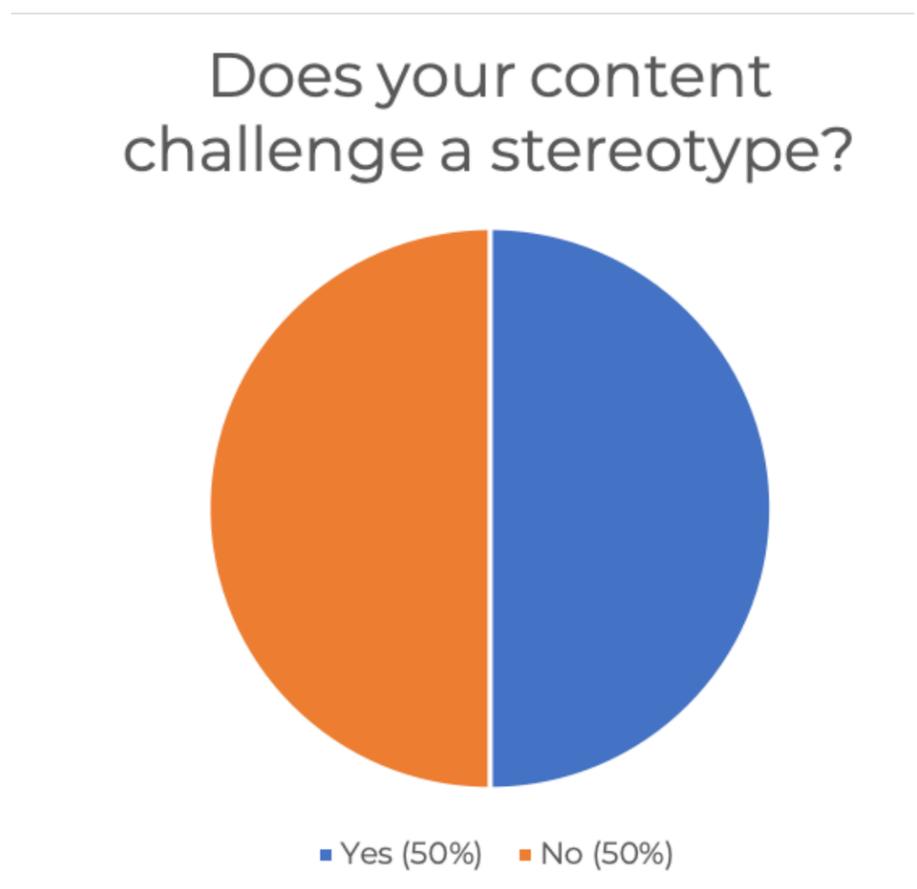
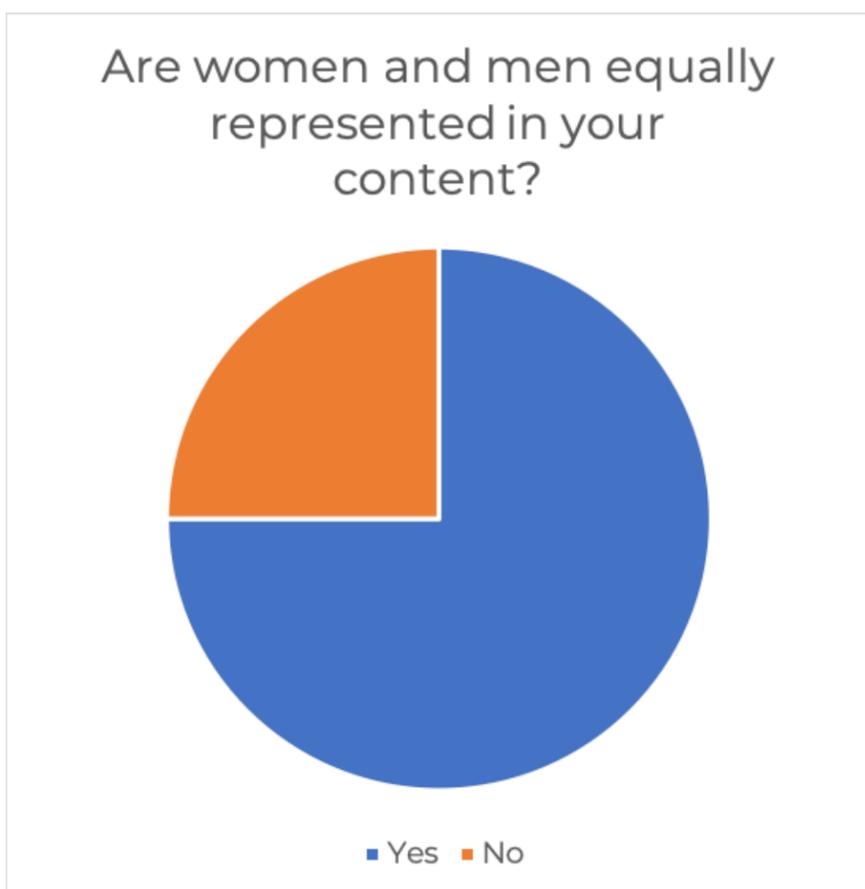
While the period during which this survey was conducted saw an increased focus on sexual violence incidents were being reported, many men respondents presented that as evidence that enough was being done.

However, there is a cultural context at play: in Pakistan sexual violence stories are only reported when they provide fodder for sensationalism. The crime has to be gory enough for the media to treat it as "newsworthy." Less

than 4% of all reported sexual violence is otherwise reported on electronic media.

There is more to gender-aware and gender-sensitive reporting than the bare minimum currently on screen, necessary as that might be.

The following pie-charts capture how the men of the Pakistani media perceive gender balance in content currently on air:



**feminist
analysis**

We began this project with the hope and belief that through our work and our activism, Pakistani women will find some form of relief from their everyday grind.

Pakistani women are nowhere near as invisible as the mainstream Pakistani media would have us believe. This invisibilisation is tantamount to gaslighting — of everything that women have been through during the pandemic and even before, of the innumerable everyday victories of millions of Pakistani women, who have forged ahead despite the structural barriers erected by Pakistani patriarchs. If anything, the pandemic has shown how the enterprise of young Pakistanis is helping thousands of young women in distress.

The story of Pakistani women, much like the story of women around the world, is pieced together through the myriad lived experiences that we share.

WACC's support for what we believed ought to be done came at just the right time. At Uks, we realized that the deep denial of women's causes and concerns in the mainstream media would colour how public debate and discussion was going to be framed during the pandemic. In most cases, if not all, it would lead to women bearing very real consequences and make them even more unsafe.

With a rollback of hard-won feminist freedoms currently being attempted by the patriarchs of society, building and seeding a sisterhood that could form a feminist response to the pandemic in the media was imperative.

Through this project we managed to connect with many celebrities and young activists interested in how the Pakistani





media was shaping public discourse around the pandemic and its societal costs. Backed by our data, collected and tabulated daily, we were able to make the argument that the media's sexism and misogyny was far more intentional than it seems at first.

And perhaps it is that validation that young Pakistani women needed to connect with Uks. This project was conceived as one that could give strength to each and every woman who interacted with it. And it did precisely that: women content creators, writers and journalists connected with Uks in order to find out how they could help out and whether they could be part of our discussions.

We were working on a number of content hypotheses through the activities of the project. The first was the space that existed for women-friendly content but it wasn't being filled since no media organization was building content for women.

In other words, should there be an editorial focus on women-friendly content, women will interact with your content. Should women's key concerns be addressed they will listen. Should women be spoken to rather than talked at will they will express more.

Our most popular digital story was about a young woman whose newly-launched app helped women report domestic violence from the confines of her home. And it was most widely consumed by 25-34 year old women. Our content was delivered in such a manner that it was easy for any woman anywhere to understand what to do when in distress.

The woman connected to the internet in Pakistan today is likely an urban woman. Around her are stories of how women are being abused and beaten inside homes,



how their personhood is slowly taken away from them through familial and societal pressures, and when she is wronged, for her to be gaslighted.

These were concerns that we tried to address through our content. Mainstream Pakistani media's blindedness on women-centric concerns is such that unless it is a story of woe and helplessness, they cannot fathom the range of experiences that women go through.

Much of what we did revolved about the blind spots of the media; there are countless stories of courage and conviction in Pakistan that could inspire the younger generation.

Another key insight is that men want to engage and interact with feminist content. The typical experience of civil society organizations is that their social media inbox are lined with abusive emails. Our experience this time round was that men



wanted to know when the next conference was, when the next digital story was or even, when the next satire news bulletin would be issued. This is apart from the heavy audience numbers that men contributed to in consuming feminist content.

This phenomenon is heartening in many ways. This is the same country where an empowered, urban woman of privilege was slaughtered in 2021. Media debates around

the incident didn't at first question the crime; it questioned her character.

It is not as if Pakistani men are unwilling to learn and to introspect, as our social media experiences showed this time round. The fact that men's minds are accepting of their contribution in propping the patriarchy and are willing to make changes to undo the damage means that perhaps our work is also gathering more allies in society.

