



UKAAS-THE REFLECTOR

Summer 2024

Editorial

Empowering Women, One Conversation at a Time

Welcome to the Summer 2024 edition of Ukaas, where we reflect on another quarter of impactful initiatives, collaborations, and advocacy efforts. This season was particularly significant as it brought attention to the ongoing challenges that women face across various sectors, from online spaces to political arenas, and the vital role media plays in shaping these narratives.

Our team at Uks Research Centre has been actively engaged in projects that aim to address gender biases and create more equitable spaces for women in Pakistan. Whether it was participating in international conferences or conducting media monitoring on the representation of women during elections, our work underscores the importance of integrating gender sensitivity into every conversation.

This edition of Ukaas, showcases Uks' efforts to spotlight critical issues like online abuse, gender imbalance in media coverage, and the need for more inclusive civic engagement. Each event we participated in or hosted reflects our ongoing mission to create a media landscape that respects and empowers women.

As we move forward, we hope to continue challenging stereotypes and influencing positive change in both the media and broader society. We invite you to read on and join us in this journey toward a more inclusive future for all.

Tasneem Ahmar
Executive Director

UKs Projects

RAISING VOICES FOR GENDER EQUALITY: OXFAM'S WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP EVENT

Uks was honored to be invited to Oxfam's prestigious Women's Voice and Leadership event, where the critical issue of women's rights and gender sensitivity in Pakistan took center stage. Oxfam, along with its diverse range of partners, showcased the significant strides it has made in promoting women's empowerment across the country. The event provided a platform for organizations to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in the ongoing battle for gender equality. Uks' team member, Injie Anis, represented our organization, engaging with key stakeholders to explore how collaborative efforts can continue to drive positive change for women in Pakistan.



REFLECTING AND PLANNING: UKS ANNUAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

On March 5, Uks held its annual Board of Directors meeting at the cosy Chaaye Khaana café, creating a relaxed yet productive atmosphere for important discussions. With a quorum in place, four out of the seven board members—Ms. Fazla Gulrez, Ms. Huma Khawar, Syed Ahsan, and Mr. Farhan Bokhari—actively participated in this strategic meeting. The discussions kicked off with a comprehensive review of Uks' current projects, assessing the progress made over the last year. Attention then shifted to the future, where ideas for upc-

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oming initiatives, strategies for growth, and new partnerships were deliberated. The meeting concluded with optimism about Uks' role in shaping gender-sensitive media practices in Pakistan. The absentees, Ms. Eliya Haider, Ms. Fozia Shahid, and Mr. Rana Jawaad, were missed, but their inputs will be sought for the follow-up meeting.



BREAKING THE SILENCE: UKS' VIDEO ON ONLINE ABUSE & MISOGYNY

In collaboration with WACC (World Association for Christian Communication), Uks released a powerful video addressing the pressing issue of online abuse and misogyny in Pakistani digital spaces. The video, launched on International Women's Day, was a timely reminder of the pervasive challenges women face online, where hateful rhetoric and misogynistic behavior often go unchecked. Through this project, Uks is determined to bring more awareness to these issues, sparking conversations that lead to safer, more inclusive online environments. The video, which

has already garnered attention on social media, aims to inspire action and policy change at multiple levels.

Video link: https://youtu.be/WWnpV0r__lg?si=mSDL8myh4OgFnD3x

TASNEEM AHMAR QUOTED IN MEDIA ON MARCH 8

In a feature article published on International Women's Day, Uks' founder, Tasneem Ahmar, offered a thought-provoking commentary on the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Pakistan. She emphasized the urgent need for proactive measures that bring women to the forefront of all aspects of national development—whether in economic, educational, or professional spheres. Tasneem highlighted that true progress cannot be achieved until women are fully recognized as active and equal members of society, with their voices included in every decision-making process. Her remarks underscored the importance of sustained commitment to women's empowerment, not just as a theme for this year's International Women's Day, but as a continuous goal for the future.

Inspiring Inclusion: Shaping tomorrow

By Sheher Bano

In the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Pakistan has been ranked 142 out of 146 countries - with a 57.5 per cent gender parity - the highest since 2006.

In the report, released in June 2023, Pakistan has been placed near the bottom of both the regional and global rankings, with only Iran, Algeria, Chad and Afghanistan below Pakistan. In 2022, Pakistan ranked 145 out of 146.

However, the country has improved by 5.1 percentage points on the "economic participation and opportunities" sub-index in the last decade to attain 36.2 per cent parity, though this level of parity remains one of the lowest globally, the report pointed out.

Pakistan ranked 143rd in the sub-indicator of economic participation and opportunities. The country ranked 140th in terms of labour-force participation, 71st in terms of wage equality for similar work, 137th in terms of estimated earned income, 139th in terms of legislators, senior officials and managers, and 132nd in terms of professional and technical workers.

Pakistan's ranking in the educational attainment dimension was 138th in 2023. The country's literacy rate is 157th, and its enrolment rates in secondary and tertiary education are 132nd and 104th, respectively. According to UNESCO, Pakistan has one

of the world's lowest literacy rates for women, with only around 45% of adult women being literate.

In the political empowerment dimension, Pakistan ranked 95th. It ranked 94th for women in parliament, 126th for women in ministerial positions, and 36th for years with female/male heads of state during the last fifty years. Pakistan secured parity in sex ratio at birth, boosting

challenges contributing to low indicators of well-being including pervasive gender-based violence, encompassing domestic violence, honour killings, and acid attacks. Despite efforts by organizations like the Aurat Foundation, which reports thousands of cases of violence against women annually, many incidents remain unreported due to societal stigma and fear.

While Pakistan has imple-

theme: "Inspire Inclusion and the overarching theme: Invest in women, accelerate progress", says these themes challenge Pakistan to reimagine its future, one where women are not only participants but leaders in shaping the nation's destiny.

"They underscore the importance of viewing women's empowerment as central to Pakistan's broader developmental goals: when women

and economic barriers contribute to these challenges. Promoting inclusivity means addressing these multifaceted issues, creating safe, supportive environments where women can thrive and contribute to their communities without fear of discrimination or violence," Rehmat avers.

"Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress" is particularly poignant for Pakistan, where investing in women's education, health, and economic empowerment can have transformative impacts on societal well-being and economic development. Pakistani women have shown incredible resilience and potential in various fields, from science and education to politics and the arts. Yet, their full participation is often hindered by limited access to resources and opportunities. Investing in women, in this context, means not only providing financial resources but also crafting policies and programmes that address the root causes of gender inequality," Rehmat maintains.

Endorsing Rehmat's point of view, Tasneem Ahmar, Executive Director Uks Research Centre, underscores the need for sincere political will and action beyond words. "Proactive initiatives are needed that would bring women into the folds of development, be it economic, educational, or professional. Until we recognise women as active members of the Pakistani society and make them part of all de-

cision-making processes, we can't achieve any of it, whether it's the theme for this year's International Women's Day, or the theme for last year, or the theme for the upcoming CSW in a week or two, or whatever is happening in Pakistan."

A women-inclusive society with an accelerated progress is only possible through political commitment, a change of mindset, and acknowledgment that women make up a huge chunk of the Pakistani population as well as the labour force, which is not recognised, and that women are actually unpaid labourers, unpaid workers."

Ours is a gendered society where entrenched stereotypes and societal norms dictate women's status. Tasneem Ahmar emphasises the urgent need to challenge stereotypical media portrayals and amplify women's unheard stories, showcasing them as the true heroes of our society. It's also crucial to highlight the positive contributions of men in advocating for and raising awareness about women's issues. Increasing Pakistani women's participation in the workforce is crucial for economic growth and gender equality. Policy interventions should focus on removing barriers by improving access to finance, enhancing digital literacy, and addressing mobility challenges.

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INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY

sub-index parity by 1.7 percentage points since 2022. Like most other countries, Pakistan's widest gender gap is on political empowerment (15.2 per cent).

It has had a female head of state for 4.7 years of the last fifty years, and one-tenth of the ministers as well as one-fifth of parliamentarians are women.

Comprising nearly half of the population (49 per cent) of the country, women in Pakistan face numerous chal-

lenges contributing to low indicators of well-being including pervasive gender-based violence, encompassing domestic violence, honour killings, and acid attacks. Despite efforts by organizations like the Aurat Foundation, which reports thousands of cases of violence against women annually, many incidents remain unreported due to societal stigma and fear.

Kamran Rehmat, a seasoned journalist and former editor of The News, while commenting on the International Women's Day 2024

are given the tools to succeed, the entire country benefits," he says.

"Inspire Inclusion" in the Pakistani context speaks to the urgent need for societal attitudes and structures to evolve, enabling women to participate fully across all sectors. Despite progress in some areas, Pakistani women often face considerable obstacles in accessing education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Cultural norms, security concerns,

Inspiring Inclusion: Shaping tomorrow

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Research indicates that aligning women's participation with men's could boost Pakistan's GDP by 60% by 2025. Additionally, closing the gender gap in workforce participation could lead to a one-off 30% boost in GDP.

The exclusion of women from the labour force extends beyond specific fields to encompass both organized and unorganized sectors. The media sector is no exception, as statistics paint a concerning picture of gender disparity. According to Iqbal Khattak, Executive Director of national media watchdog organization Freedom Network, "Freedom Network recently released the Gender Audit report of media houses to assess how well women are represented in journalism in Pakistan. The findings are quite disappointing, but we hope this report will generate a great deal of interest and debate within the media and society to encourage more women to excel in all spheres of life."

On the same note, Ghulam Mustafa, Pakistan Coordinator of International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), focusses on an urgent need for the full and equal inclusion of women in the media at the national and international level. "It is imperative that women are not only represented but also empowered to shape narratives, share their perspectives, and hold positions of leadership within media representative organizations worldwide. Achieving gender parity in media not only fosters diversity and representation but also enhances the quality and accuracy of reporting. There is need to breaking down barriers, promoting inclusivity, and creating opportunities for women to thrive in all facets of the media industry, ensuring their voices are heard and their stories are told."

Creating an inclusive society and achieving shared success means inclusion of women as well as other marginalized sections of the society.

Sheema Kirmani, Women Rights Activist, Founder of Tehrik-e-Niswan and Aurat March believes that if the Feminist movement in Pakistan has to succeed, then it must be inclusive.

"I feel women across all classes, religions, and castes face discrimination from birth, which worsens as they age, leading to barriers such as limited access to education, early marriages,

high fertility rates, and poor health outcomes, often resulting in premature death. The Aurat March advocates for the rights of all, including the Khawaja-Sara Community, Binary, and non-Binary individuals, striving for equal rights, pay, and justice. True progress hinges on ensuring every girl receives education and grows into an empowered woman with autonomy over her life, body, and identity."

Ensuring women's inclusion in governance and decision-making is essential, alongside efforts to eradicate discrimination and promote peaceful policies to reduce aggression and violence in our society. Beginning at the family level and persisting throughout



women's lives, discrimination serves as a significant obstacle to their advancement, perpetuates gender inequality, relegating women to inferior positions in society.

"We need to work to try to end discrimination in society to create a world where all women, regardless of background, disability, or identity, get a chance to do something with their lives. Women need a space and they will make their own way, and at the same time will make a path for others to follow. Any country or organisation which invests in women succeeds, we see examples of this all around us. Mao Zedong, the Chinese politician, explained the importance of women when he said 'Women Hold Up Half The Sky.' If half the population is not allowed to work and contribute to the

society, it will pull back the other half. Women are able to multitask and do many things and excel as well," states Lubna Jerar Naqvi, senior journalist and Gender Coordinator, International Federation of Journalists.

Investing in women is mandatory for the prosperity and progress of the country.

Success is typically defined as the achievement of a goal or objective, yet true success cannot be attained without the inclusion of all genders.

"Experience has shown that our country can only grow if we have a shared success of all. We can't make progress if we exclude any segment of the society. We have to take men, women, trans genders and differently able people into our fold to move ahead and invest in all of them," says Mehnaz Rehman, Executive Director, Aurat Foundation.

Investing in women is paramount for progress and inclusivity. Recognizing their untapped potential and prioritizing investments in their education, skills, and talent is essential. Such investments are not just in individuals but in our entire communities and societies. A society's success is truly measured by the collective achievements of all its members. By doing so, we strengthen families, shape future generations, and cultivate equality, resilience, and empowerment.

Achieving true progress demands an unwavering commitment to inclusivity and equity. As we navigate the complexities of a globalized world, let us remember the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, who aptly said, "Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood they live in; the school or college they attend; the factory, farm, or office where they work." It is in these small but pivotal spaces that we must continue our efforts to dismantle barriers, empower all individuals, and forge a brighter, more equitable future for generations to come. Let's unite in building a more inclusive world for women.

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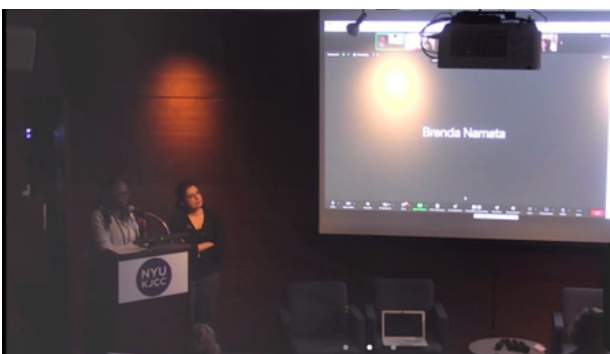
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By increasing the number of constructive news stories within the 'news message system' of Pakistan, the project aimed to contribute to a more informed and solution-oriented media landscape in the country.

PAKISTANI VOICES AT WACC: UKS' SAFE WORDS, SAFER WORLD PRESENTED AT CSW

On March 12, Uks was represented by Shahrezad Samiuddin at the WACC CSW conference in the United States, making Uks the only organisation from Pakistan to participate in this global event. Shahrezad presented Uks' groundbreaking project, Safe Words Safer World, which focuses on the identification and eradication of abusive language in Urdu and Punjabi, specifically directed toward women. As the sole Pakistani speaker, she outlined how this initiative seeks to create a more respectful and inclusive digital environment for women. This presentation, attended by global advocates for gender equality, was a proud moment for Uks and highlighted our role in advancing gender justice. Tasneem Ahmar and Injie Anis joined the session virtually to offer their support and insights. We extremely grateful to WACC and Sarah Macharia for inviting us to this conference.

Link: <https://x.com/CenterUks/status/1767940013566652653?t=RsQnD8ls12Kvh9Im9qyDbA&s=08>



MONITORING DEMOCRACY: UKS EXPOSES GENDER IMBALANCE IN ELECTION MEDIA COVERAGE

On 16 May 2024, Uks presented its findings on the portrayal of women in Pakistani media during elections. The results, which drew considerable attention from various media outlets, including The News, Dawn, and The Express Tribune, exposed a stark gender imbalance in how women are depicted in electoral coverage.

The comprehensive media monitoring study conducted by Uks revealed that despite some progress, women continue to be underrepresented and often misrepresented in both print and electronic media. This imbalance extends to how female political candidates are portrayed, with many receiving significantly less coverage than their male counterparts. When they do appear in the media, the focus is frequently on their personal lives, appearance, or familial ties rather than their political platforms or contributions to national discourse.

The event was given media coverage by major publications like The News, Dawn and The Express Tribune. Uks emphasised the need for a more equitable and nuanced portrayal of women, especially in high-stakes environments like elections. The organisation called on media outlets to adopt more inclusive practices that give women a voice in shaping public opinion and participating fully in Pakistan's democratic processes. The findings also urged stakeholders to work towards policies that ensure gender parity in media representation.

Through this significant work, Uks continues to advocate for gender-sensitive journalism, striving to shift the narrative around women in Pakistani politics. Their elections monitoring report serves as a wake-up call to media institutions, urging them to embrace their responsibility in fostering a more inclusive, representative democracy.

The News: <https://e.thenews.com.pk/detail?id=307570>

Dawn: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1833943/gender-imbalance-highlighted-in-portrayal-of-women-in-media>

Express Tribune: <https://tribune.com.pk/epaper/news/Karachi/2024-05-18/OTRkYjBjOWRkMTgwZTMzZTIwMmViODM3ZWQ4NTJmZmEuanBlZw%3D%3D>

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ONLINE SAFETY MATTERS: UKS AT THE SHE LEADS CONFERENCE

Uks proudly participated in the She Leads conference on June 27, where Injie Anis represented the organisation in a high-profile panel discussion. The event, hosted by the Shoor Foundation for Education and Awareness, brought together civil society leaders, activists, and stakeholders to explore solutions for addressing online gender-based violence (GBV). Injie shared her insights on the prevalence of online harassment faced by women in Pakistan and discussed innovative strategies for creating safer digital spaces. The event was a critical step forward in encouraging broader conversations on the intersection of technology, safety, and women's rights.

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A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY: NCSW CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND EDUCATION

On June 28, Uks participated in the National Commission on the Status of Women's (NCSW) conference on women and education, a collaborative effort supported by UNICEF Pakistan and the British Council. This week-long program aimed to address the barriers Pakistani women face in accessing quality education. During the conference, Injie Anis contributed to group discussions focused on improving educational opportunities for women and girls, offering solutions for enhancing skills-training programmes that equip them with the tools needed for self-reliance. The discussions emphasised the importance of government policies in ensuring that all women, particularly those in underserved areas, have access to the education they deserve.

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PARENTING FOR THE FUTURE: NCSW'S ART OF PARENTING MANUALS LAUNCH

On July 9, Uks attended the launch of the Art of Parenting Manuals at the Pakistan National Council of Arts (PNCA) in Islamabad. This event, organised by the NCSW and its partners, introduced a series of parenting guides designed to help parents navigate the complexities of raising children in today's world. Injie Anis represented Uks at the event, engaging in discussions about how these manuals were developed, the challenges faced in creating culturally relevant content, and how they can serve as valuable resources for parents across the country. The initiative aims to empower parents with the knowledge to raise well-rounded, responsible citizens.

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WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE: NCSW CONFERENCE ON ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Uks continued its active participation in NCSW's efforts to address women's issues, with Injie Anis attending a pivotal conference on July 25 focused on the economic and financial challenges facing women in Pakistan. The event brought together various civil society members and stakeholders to discuss solutions for ensuring safe and equitable working conditions for women in the private sector. During group discussions, Injie emphasised the need for robust reporting mechanisms that allow women to report workplace harassment and hold employers accountable for their actions. The discussions underscored the importance of creating supportive work environments where women can thrive without fear of exploitation or discrimination.

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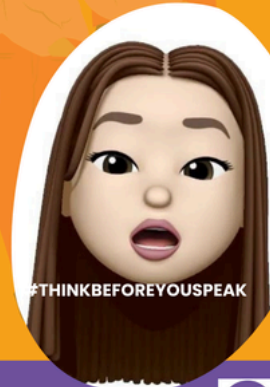
UKS AND WACC'S #THINKBEFOREYOUSPEAK CAMPAIGN IS STILL RUNNING

Uks #ThinkBeforeYouSpeak campaign, in collaboration with WACC (World Association for Christian Communication), is still ongoing. This campaign aims to combat and raising awareness about cybermisogyny. Pakistanis from diverse backgrounds shed light on the pervasive issue of online harassment faced by women in Pakistan. Through social media platforms, this campaign seeks to ignite conversations, challenge societal norms, and encourage responsible digital discourse to foster a safer and more inclusive online environment for everyone. Join the movement, think before you speak, and contribute to the dialogue for a more respectful and equitable digital space. Follow us on our social media accounts to join the movement (and give a quote, if you like :)

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ANOTHER INTERESTING POINT IS THAT NOT ONLY BEING FACELESS, ANONYMOUS, HIDDEN – BUT BEING A PAGE WITH LITERALLY ANIMOJIS (“CARTOONS”) – DOESN’T STOP CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS. IT’S ENOUGH TO VAGUELY KNOW THAT I AM A WOMAN.

I DEAL WITH IT JUST FINE BECAUSE MESSAGES DON’T SEEM TO FAZE ME. MAYBE I CAN THANK ADHD FOR THAT, OR TOO MANY OFFLINE EXPERIENCES THAT MESSAGES FROM STRANGERS COULDN’T HOLD A CANDLE TO.



#THINKBEFOREYOUSPEAK

Swineryy



Misogyny in our society is so deeply rooted that even if a man tries to call out a misogynist, he himself faces a backlash from our society. From our homes to offices, and from mosques to assemblies, there is no place where misogynistic remarks are not passed. When a maulvi in a Quran lecture gives a misogynistic speech in front of a crowd, mostly of young students, this is where they normalize and promote misogyny.

Our society is religious, and looks to a maulvi for guidance. If you call them out, then you know what will happen - Islam will be in danger, and you will be shut down or your life will be in danger too.

SIMILARLY, OUR POLITICIANS, WHO MANY LOOK UP TO, USE MISOGYNISTIC REMARKS WHICH THEIR FOLLOWERS WILL DEFINITELY USE AGAINST THEIR OPPONENTS AND SUCH VIDEOS ARE CIRCULATED ONLINE ON VARIOUS PLATFORMS, RESULTING IN AN UNSAFE & MISOGYNISTIC ENVIRONMENT.



#THINKBEFOREYOUSPEAK

Ibraheem Ahmad



I have had a twitter account since I was 13 and through out these years I've had uncles harass me for my political views, people call me names because of religious differences or simply leave threatening messages anonymously online for me. I am obviously very scared of them, it's weird to be a grown woman and say that you're scared of men online. But that's the society we live in.

SOMEONE COULD MAKE AI REVENGE PORN OF ME TOMORROW AND I WOULD BE ABLE TO DO NOTHING ABOUT IT



#THINKBEFOREYOUSPEAK

Yarmiah Bukhari

Masters Student & Research Assistant



When an acclaimed intellectual like Salman Rushdie painted Benazir Bhutto as Arjumand, "Virgin Ironpants", expecting common male from this part of the world to be respectful towards women voicing their opinions online is just another irony for us women. Not all men but always a man under your comment section calling you names, abusing your gender, or just be a standard misogynist telling you to do something their fathers made their mothers do all their lives.

MIND YOU, THEY DO IT OPENLY



#THINKBEFOREYOUSPEAK

Marwah Khan

Political Strategist



Mediamatters for Women

Our pick of the positives, the downright dangerous and the cautionary tales that turned up in the media in the last 6 months

The Good



Sajal Aly's work is worthy of both praise and examination now and for generations to come. She has once again appeared at HUM's "Zard Patton Ka Bann", in collaboration with Kashf Foundation. Here, she once again plays a dynamic young woman struggling to gain an education in her village despite opposition from her family. A repeated trope, but played with freshness and renewed energy. As of this period, this drama shows that good content does thrive and a star who understands the impact of good stories will always send larger ripples in the Pakistani media.

Mediamatters for Women

The Bad



This time, unfortunately, TV was full of unpleasant incidents that makes one want to throw the remote altogether. At a talk show, host Sahil Adeem and Khalilur Rehman Qamar offended all Pakistani women after declaring "95% of the jaahil." When a woman from the audience stood up to fight off this remark Rehman was openly threatening her with physical harm if she did not stop. It's unfortunate that such hosts can find work. But even more dismaying that authorities designed to curb such actions did not stand up for women to shut them down. Truly, it seems, the media is complicit in degrading women in Pakistan

Mediamatters for Women

The Ugly



At this year's HUM Award shows, many commentators have been raising issue at the sight of Pakistani actresses wearing Western clothes for their "immodesty." One such target of this onslaught was the actress Haba Bukhari, who was admonished online for wearing a dress that showed off her pregnancy bump. Pakistani women in the public sphere have only started being confident about showing their pregnancy to the world, why hide their body? In a country where women are prized for becoming mothers, why must pregnant women be hidden in the shadows? Can she not be seen doing normal things with it? It's bad that women are being targeted anyways, but being nasty towards expecting mothers for dressing up well should not be encouraged. Let pregnant women be, please!



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