
Media Reporting, the Rise of Victim Blaming and Honour Killings in Pakistan

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70670/sra.v4i1.2504>

Abstract

This study examines how Pakistan media manipulate reporting reports rape cases, examining the Legal Framework, Victim Blaming, and Honour Killings in Pakistan. The study analyzed how news media influences the reporting of rape incidents through the macrostructure model of Van Dijk's macrostructure model of CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), and Rise of Victim Blaming and Honour Killings in Pakistan, data is collected from the famous Pakistan news cable channels and social media platform. The finding of this study exposes how media report rape cases and victim blaming. Based on these finding, the study recommends some measures to mitigate this issue of victim blaming and Honour killing in Pakistan.

Introduction

Sexual violence is one of the most serious human rights violations, which has profound and lasting effects on the physical, mental, psychological and social life of the victim. In Pakistan, rape is not only a criminal offense but also a social problem, which often results in serious consequences such as victim blaming, social stigma, discrimination and sometimes honor killing instead of providing justice and protection to the victims. Due to the patriarchal system, gender inequality and traditional social values prevalent in society, rape victims are often held responsible for the crime themselves. Their character, dress, lifestyle, mobility and personal decisions are questioned, while the responsibility of the real culprit is pushed into the background. This mindset not only causes victims to suffer severe psychological stress and social isolation, but many also avoid crimes due to fear, embarrassment and social backlash.(Akram and Yasmin 2023)

The phenomenon of victim blaming in Pakistani society is also an important reason for the increase in crimes like honor killings. Many families and communities associate the incident of sexual violence with the honor of the family, which sometimes results in extreme measures such as torture or murder against the victims, considering them as the cause of family disgrace. Weak law enforcement, institutional flaws, social biases and irresponsible media reporting also play an important role in exacerbating the problem. Especially when the media reveals the identity of rape victims, makes their personal lives unnecessarily the subject of debate or presents events in a

sensational manner, it not only hurts the self-esteem of the victims but also strengthens the tendencies of Victim Blaming in society, which eventually strengthens the possibility of child abuse and violence.(Huda and Kamal 2025)

In society, media plays an important role in determining the public opinion by providing the information to a wide public. News channels, newspapers and online platforms deliver updates about international and national issues, political events and social problems. People usually get knowledge from these resources to form their views. For example, the way a new story, incident or decision by government are presented can influence how individuals understand the situation and make opinion. (Gurung and Chauhan 2025)

Additionally, social media is a very powerful tool in influencing people opinion now a days, everyone gets instant updates. Online social media platform such as X, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube allows users to share their views, ideas and information instantly. But all information on social media is not true, some of the people or political parties use social media for some kind of proper agenda.(Shah 2024)

However, media plays a positive role in bringing sensitive crimes like rape and sexual violence to the attention of the public. If the media does not report such incidents, many of these cases may never come to light and the public may remain unaware of them. Media reporting not only creates awareness in society but also draws the attention of relevant agencies, law enforcement officials and policy makers to these serious issues, increasing the chances of justice for victims. There is no denying the fact that many incidents of sexual violence go unreported due to social stigma, fear, family pressure and other reasons. So, the cases that come to the public's attention through the media are likely only a limited fraction of such incidents, whereas the actual number could be much higher. In this context, the media's efforts to raise public awareness by highlighting such sensitive issues, conveying the voice of victims to society and playing an important role in strengthening the justice delivery process are commendable. (Hu, Jonathan et al. 2017)

Literature Review

Rape is the unlawful and un-consent able sexual activity with women resulting in trauma for lifetime of the women. Pakistan and other countries are facing this consequence of rape due to the lack of awareness, poverty, unequal power balance, etc. according to the United Nations declaration on the eradication of Violence against women (1999) women are not safe in their homes which is the only safe place for them.(Violence 1999)

Women and young girls are the victims of the rape. Rapists usually target teenage girls and senior citizens. They forcedly intercourse with the female, resulting the sexual violence. Rape is pervasive social problem. (Moore 1998)Rape is the most serve trauma resulting in the long-term negative outcome such as suicidality, abuse etc. Rape is the heinous crime that impacted the people and the society all over the world it is a horrible crime with terrible consequences. According to human rights commission of Pakistan there are at least 11 rape cases reported daily.(Khaleel, Ungku Mohd Nordin et al. 2024)

In most of the cases in Pakistan, allegations of rape are usually on the victim. The institutions and the others also blame the victim for the committing of the rape rather than the convict or the person who has committed the rape. This is the negligence in the system of the state where they allege the victim who is currently passing through the distress tensions and through the trauma due to the rape which has been committed against her Rather than protection provided by institution, they are leave with the express and the allegations on them.(Kazmi, Tarar et al. 2023)

Historically, there are many studies which shows the rape victim blaming by the observers. The observers are likely to blame the victim of their own misfortune. Rape is persuasive crime in the modern society. The crimes of rape and sexual assaults have usually a low reporting report.

Holding the victim accountable for their own sexual assault is turned as victim blaming it is very common in Pakistani society. As a sexual assault damages, the respect and reputation of the victim's family that's why victims are held responsible for the crime rather than the offender. (Kazmi, Iftikhar et al. 2023)

Previously Reported Rape Cases in Pakistan

In Lahore motorway rape case, the woman who was driving her car, unfortunately ran out of fuel and on the advice of a relative she reached out the motorway police for assistance. After half an hour, two men with guns came into her car and robbed her and raped her in front of her two children. After that, the victim was blamed. The victim passed through the traumatized circumstances a senior police officer Umar Sheikh on the national television in an interview blame that why the victim did not choose the GT road. If she wants to travel at 10 pm, why didn't he check the fuel of the car before going? These remarks by the police shows the unjust justice system and the victim blaming of rape victim. The senior police officer has the duty to protect the citizen rather than blaming her for travelling alone at night instead of capturing the rapist. (Akram and Yasmin 2024)

Another incident in Lodhran, where the police have arrested two people which were involved in the rape of a minor girl and also a boy. The complainant said that her daughter was disappeared while playing in the street of her house the complaint and her and her husband found her in the nearby house of the suspect which was attempting to rape her. The police arrested the suspect on Wednesday. In the second event within 10-year boy was raped the complainant said that his son was taken by the suspect into his house where he allegedly raped him. (May 7, 2026)

Moreover, there was another incident in the October 2024 which was held in the Punjab College Lahore. The protests were taken place across the Punjab where the report said that they had been an alleged rape at the Punjab College Lahore campus. Media reports initially states that the college administration was involved these were the initial reports, later the news channel didn't confirm that the administration was involved in the rape of that girl, or the rape has been committed.

In another rape attempt which was on the female last student at the Karachi University where four men involving three staff members of the Islamic learning department and one student of the physics department on 28 July 2006 attempt to rape a female law student. The authorities of the university have not reported the case to the police while the voice chancellor of the university of Karachi Dr. Pirzada Qasim only suspend the suspects for a few days. Even though the incident was published in newspapers, the victim was prevented from lodging up police complaint.

Honor killing

We had an honor killing case Bano Satazkai and Ehsanullah Samalani which take place on June 4, 2025. This honor killing takes place in remote desert area Degari/Sanjidi near Quetta, Baluchistan Pakistan. Both with executed by a group of armed persons. several footages been shared on social media shows that Bano was walking seven requested steps before her brother shot her after the fatal shooting of Ehsan Ullah.

According to the first information report, Sardar Shahbaz Khan SatAKZai, who is the local tribal chief ordered the death because they have an immortal relationship. (Naz, Tariq et al. 2025)

Initial report stated that two were married against their family approval, later it was known that they were also married and have children.

Bano Bibi received seven bullets in her head abdomen and chest while Ehsanullah received nine bullets in chest and abdomen. Police arrested 13 suspects in debt on a killing case video.

Among those arrested were tribal chief Sardar Shahbaz Satkzai and several members of his family. After initial investigation, all the accused were produced before the Anti-Terrorism Court and Sessions Court, where the tribal chief was sent to jail on judicial remand. The last words by Bano

BiBi were "you can only shoot me, nothing else" and after this she was shot and she fell ground to next to her lover's body.

Protection under Law:

According to constitution of Pakistan article 9 guarantees that no person shall be deprived of life save in accordance with law every person has the right to live and no one can grant him this sentence except in accordance with law.

Moreover, according to article 25 of the constitution of Pakistan 1973 our citizen is equal before the law and law provide them equal protection more over the Pakistan penal code also criminal is the owner killing as an intentional murder. Furthermore, the family members could not pardon the killer.

Legal Framework Governing Media Reporting of Rape Cases in Pakistan Press Ordinance 2002

The Press Council Ordinance, 2002 by and large offers for the establishment of the Press Council of Pakistan. The motive and main focus of the press council is "to enforce the moral code of ethics, as set out in the timetable to the ordinance." The press council is also mandated to "maintain the highest professional and ethical standards of newspapers and newsgroups so as to make them greater responsive to the problems and issues of the society in Pakistan." The preamble of the ordinance makes a reference to public recognition "and free flow of information". However, it states that the free flow of statistics and freedom of expression "is subject to non-infringement of national interest." The Preamble of the Ordinance states: "WHEREAS freedom of the press and public awareness is the foundation of democracy and the function of democracy and the principles of accountability depend inter alia upon the free flow of information and freedom of expression without infringing on national interest. (Khanam and Rahimon)

Before we step into a sexual assault or rape case, we should always be aware of the trauma it has imposed on the victim already and avoid adding insult to the injury by coupling it with social stigma and dishonor. Such factors play major role in creating barriers that hinders other victims to report such heinous crime against them. Reporters and editors must keep in mind that sexual assault is a crime of violence, power, and control rather than a criminal offense. Journalist should not frame details of the assault to suggest that victim's behavior caused the crime (such as being on foot alone at night, drinking alcohol, etc.). The crucial part is that now a days no News article treats acquaintance rape less than stranger rape. The use of the word Acquaintance is intentionally made as compared to Date rape, which again draw links of victim's relation with the abuser in past that somehow compensates the severity of the offence.

Victim's past relation with the abuser and sexual assault/rape offence are two distinct things. Whenever there is asexual assault/rape case News Organization are advised not to interview the victim right away the crime, as majority News Organizations has this as a policy that prohibits disclosing a victim's call without their consent. If the victim is willing to give an interview, they prefer to use alias instead of their real name as it is crucial yet difficult to hide victim's private details. It's important to keep in mind that this is victim's choice.

Sexual harassment and rape are common concerns in our society, with at least 11 rape cases reported in Pakistan each day. Six years ago, according to official statistics, 23,000 rape cases were reported to police across the country, with total convictions of 77 per cent containing 0.3% of the total percentage.⁹ Laura Palumbo, communications director at the National Sexual Violence Resource Center in the United States, says there can be a long-term healing plan to overcome the damage done to the victim with the victim taking long-term emotional, physical and mental health care. She said: "there is a lot of discrimination and barriers to those who are sexually abused, and most survivors never report this thing for fear that they will not be believed or supported.

In the Zainab rape case, the Islamabad High Court issued a notice seeking the identity of the victim,

her personal information, sexual relations and sensitive information related to rape. The petitioner argued before the court that "revealing the identity of rape victims in television channels and newspapers is an illegal and punishable offence." In this regard, reference was made to Section 14 of the Ethical Code of Practice of the Press Council of Pakistan Ordinance 2002, which states that images or information revealing the identity of victims of sexual offenses and honor-related offenses cannot be published or broadcast. (AHMED)

However, media coverage of rape and sexual violence cases in Pakistan is often irresponsible and insensitive, which is a clear violation of Article 14 of the Code of Ethics of the Press Council of Pakistan Ordinance 2002. However, despite these violations media outlets do not face effective legal accountability or adequate sanctions that could force them to report responsibly in accordance with the law.

Justice Athar Minallah gave PEMRA and the Interior Ministry a fifteen-day deadline to provide the Court with an explanation for their violations of the Press Council Ordinance 2002.

The Criminal Law Amendment Act of 2016 prohibits and criminalizes disclosing the victims identify. As per sections 354, 376, 376A, 377 and 377B of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), "whoever prints or publishes name or any matter which may make known identity of the victim of an offence, commits a cognizable offence punishable" under 376 A of PPC. The same petition that was submitted to the IHC also stated these facts under PPC "The disclosure of the identity of such victim is provided under subsection (2) of section 376A of PPC, with the permission of the parent, guardian, victim or the court.(Thio 2020)

Furthermore, section 8 of the Electronic Media (Programmes and Advertisements) Code of Conduct, 2015, provides that the TV channels should ensure that greater vigilance shall be exercised in managing themes, sites or scenes depicting crime and violence, including rape and other sexual harassment.

"Subsection 6 of section 8 provides that identity of any victim of rape, sexual abuse, terrorism or kidnapping or such victim's family shall not be revealed without prior permission of the victim or victim's guardian where the victim is a minor.

Media Reporting, Victim Blaming and Honour killing cases in Pakistan

Rape case	News Channel / Media	Reporting
Punjab College rape case Lahore	Bol News	Initially the Boll News channel reported that the rape is committed in the institution after investigation they change their stance and reported that girl was not raped instead she was fallen from the stairs
Noor Mukadam case	Social media	Noor Mukadam was kidnapped, tortured, raped and then murdered by Zahir Jaffer. Initially the social media platforms blame the victim for the act done later the young activists and social workers carry protest for justice, women safety and victim blaming

Motorway Rape case	Dunya News	the woman was travelling alone with her children and their car ran out of petrol. Two men reached there and rape the woman in front of her children. The police officer start blaming the victim that why she was there at that time, why she chose motorway instead of GT road and why she ran out of petrol knowing that she is traveling a distance
Minar-e-Pakistan TikTok Assault Case	Social media	TikToker Ayesha Akram was assaulted by crowd at Minar-e-Pakistan on Independence Day. Instead of condemning the attackers, many online users blamed her clothing, public presence. Or TikTok activity
Bano Satakazai and Ehsanullah Samalani Honour killing Case	Social Media/Dawn News	Bano Satakazai and Ehsanullah Samalani were killed in the name of Honour in Sanjidi (Dagari/Degari) area near Quetta, Baluchistan, Pakistan. Video went viral on social media after that Dawn gave immediately coverage to the unfortunate incident. Police arrested 13 suspects in debt on a killing case video

Table 1

In Punjab college rape case, initially many news channels, including Bol News, reported that a girl was raped in the basement of Punjab College, it was said that the college driver and security guard were involved in the rape. The news sparked student protests across the country. After this news, police arrested the security guard from Sargodha who was on the leave. After investigation, it was found that nothing had happened. The girl had been admitted to the hospital since October 4 and fell down from the stairs due to a spinal injury. This was confirmed by her father in an interview with the media. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz also confirmed that there is no truth in this. It is a fabricated story. Nothing like that happened to the girl. FIA arrested several people who spread fake news. Rape case is a very sensational matter for a girl. It makes a big difference in her life and mental health. Media should investigate the news first in such cases.

Noor Mukadam murder and rape case, Noor Muqaddam was a Pakistani Jordanian woman, who was murdered. She was 27 years old and the daughter of former Pakistani diplomat Shaukat Mukadam. She was murdered on 20 July 2021 in a mansion in Sector F-7/4, an upper neighborhood of Islamabad. Noor was kept in custody for two days. She was tortured, raped and then beheaded with a knife. Noor Mukadam was in a relationship with Zaheer Jafar. Zaheer and his family were arrested, on social

media many people said that why she went there, if she hadn't gone there, this incident wouldn't have happened, this is the result of her act that's why she was murdered. People started victim blaming on social media. In February 2022, a sessions court in Islamabad had sentenced Zahir Jafar to death for the murder of Noor Mukadam.(Wali, Farooqi et al. 2025)

In the Lahore Motorway rape case, the unfortunate woman driver ran out of fuel on motorways, and on the advice of her relatives, she called the motorway police for help. Half an hour later, two armed men approached her car, robbed her, and raped her in front of her two children. Afterwards, the victim was charged. She went through this traumatic ordeal. CCPO Umar Sheikh, blamed the victim during interview on Dunya News for choosing the motorway instead of GT Road. He said that if she wanted to travel at 10 p.m., she should have checked the fuel before leaving. These remarks by the police highlight an unjust legal system that blames victims of rape. It is the duty of police to protect citizens, not to blame a woman for traveling alone at night instead of arresting the rapists. (Maqbool 2022)

In Minar-e-Pakistan TikTok Assault Case, Ayesha Akram, a nurse by profession and TikTok She was attacked, harassed and robbed by a large mob at Minar-e-Pakistan on August 14, 2021 during Pakistan's Independence Day celebrations. She and her team were making a TikTok video when they were surrounded by hundreds of men. According to her, the mob tore her clothes, physically assaulted her, and stole jewelry, cash and mobile phones. Despite efforts to help some people, the crowd was too large to control. Dolphin police officers later rescued him in a critical condition and provided him with water and clothes. After this incident many social media users blamed her dressing and bold activity on social media instead of condemning the attackers.

Bano Satkzai (Bano Bibi) and Ehsanullah Samalani were allegedly killed in the name of honor in Sanjdi (Dagari) area near Quetta district of Baluchistan. According to officials, the two were accused of being in a relationship that some of their family members and local tribal elders described as against tribal traditions. According to various reports, the two wanted to marry each other or had married without the consent of the family, however, officials have expressed different positions on whether they were legally married or not. According to investigators, a tribal jirga ordered the killing of the two, after which they were taken to a deserted desert area and shot dead.(Raza)

A video of the heartbreaking incident was also made, which later went viral on social media and caused a wave of grief and anger across the country. Police later arrested several accused, including tribal chief Sardar Shahbaz Satakzai, some relatives of the victims and other allegedly involved people. Authorities have registered a case of terrorism and handed over the investigation to the Serious Crimes Investigation Wing. Human rights organizations, political leaders and government officials strongly condemned the killing, calling it a serious violation of fundamental human rights and calling for severe punishment for all those responsible. The incident once again sparked a national debate in Pakistan on honor killings, the role of illegal jirga, and the protection of the fundamental right of every individual to choose a partner of his choice.

Authorities in Baluchistan have arrested 13 suspects, including a tribal chief, in connection with the brutal murder of a man and a woman. The tragic incident came to light through a viral video, which showed the two allegedly being killed in the desert for "Karukari". The incident took place in Sanjdi near Quetta a few days before Eid-ul-Adha. According to police, the tribal chief allegedly ordered the killing of the two, while a video of the incident was made and posted on social media to create fear among the people.

After the incident, Baluchistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti ordered immediate action, which resulted in the arrest of the accused and a case of terrorism was registered against them. Further investigation has been handed over to the Serious Crimes Investigation Wing. The tragic murder has been strongly condemned across the country. Officials called it a serious human rights violation, while Pakistan People's Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari called the accused "savages" and demanded justice. Senator Sherry Rehman stressed the need to end outdated customs and protect basic human rights.

Human rights activists have also called for respect for women's right to make their own life decisions. Honor killings are still a serious problem in Pakistan, with more than 340 such incidents reported across the country during 2024 alone.

Journalist and professionalism

According to the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) report issued on JANUARY 29, 2026, the rate of literacy in Pakistan stands 63% lowest among South Asian countries. In such alarming situation it is very important to have check and balance. Rape cases are very sensitive and only a hand full of journalist holds professional degree and training. The curriculum standards for media ethics courses ought to be raised. Our expert reporters are unable to handle the delicate nature of rape and sexual assault cases. The media outlets should raise the bar for their interview panels and concentrate primarily on the recent graduates' writing, speaking, and above all ethical and mental behavior. Universities should focus on degree holders' body language because they will likely have to deal with sensitive reporting in the future. It is a sad fact that the educational system is not intended to shape young people's personalities. Before sending journalists to the professional mass media field, all media organizations primarily anticipate journalism schools to help them develop their communication abilities. It is insufficient for students to become better journalists or reporters without raising the caliber of the curriculum.

Measures to prevent these types of unfortunate incidents

- There are strict laws and severe penalties against honor killings in Pakistan, and the courts are playing an effective role in delivering justice. However, honor killings are still occurring despite these legal measures. To address the root causes of this problem, the government should establish more schools in rural areas to promote education and raise awareness about human rights, women's rights and gender equality.
- Religious scholars should clearly inform the public that Islam does not allow the killing of anyone in the name of honor but emphasizes the sanctity and justice of human life. At the same time, tribal elders and local community leaders should also play an active role in promoting peaceful conflict resolution, respect for human dignity and the rule of law. These measures can be important in preventing serious crimes like honor killings in Pakistan
- The media should use appropriate and sensitive words that highlight the oppression faced by the victim, rather than limiting the issue to one individual and presenting it as "girl" or "woman" because rape affects not only the victim but the entire society.
- Journalists should avoid asking the victim uncomfortable questions or making accusations, as this can cause further trauma.
- The victim should not be interviewed immediately after the incident as they may be traumatized and emotionally disturbed. Instead of focusing on the victim, the media should focus on analyzing the mentality and motives of the rapist behind such a heinous crime.
- Media should investigate the sensitive news first like rape or sexual assault because it makes a big impact in woman life and mental health.
- People have no right to judge the sins of other people. God will judge them in the final day. People must understand that they are not God who judges the sins of others or make decisions. Courts are established to decide and punish crimes. Counseling people in such sensitive matters is very necessary.

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