

LANGUAGE AND PRINT MEDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF RAPE REPORTING IN DAILY NEWSPAPERS IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores how language used in the newspapers reflects and promotes certain patriarchal notions about sex crimes and how the victims are directly or indirectly stigmatized through it. It also looks at legal aspects of the rape cases and the difficulties faced by the victims in order to get justice. The main source of knowing about the rape cases is the print media. Newspapers not only present the actual reporting of the incident but also serve as medium of reflecting and reinforcing cultural norms and beliefs about the specific cases. In this way these are more influential in forming and shaping certain stereotypical beliefs about the particular aspects. It is also a fact that the press systematically reports only selected cases for all over the country and the main motive of the reporting is mostly sensationalizing and glamorizing. Using qualitative and quantitative paradigms of research, the textual analysis of the news reports taken from four Daily newspapers, one English and three Urdu, is carried out during the period of three months in Multan, Pakistan. The results of the study show that language used in reporting such cases, shapes and reflects ideology (ies) that totally creates unfavorable conditions for the rape victims in the society. There are very rare cases which are reported again with the further details and proceedings in the case. Daily we find an average of two to three rape cases in papers and the next day new events take place of the old and are forgotten.

Keywords: Rape Reports, Language, Ideologies, Newspapers, Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the women in Pakistan have been facing discriminations, inequity and biasness in all the walks of life. They have always been overburdened with the duties and responsibilities at the cost of their rights, be it social rights or the political, economical or civil rights. The denial of access to the fundamental rights in one walk of life causes deprivation of rights in the other walk of life too. This is very obviously evident in the rights of education. All those women who are deprived of the rights of education are also deprived of the right of deciding the marriage and divorce related matters. As a result, the women may have not any access to the communal and social rights. So, because of lack of access to the rights, they may easily be abused mentally, physically and sexually and will never be able to get any justice.

Laws for Rape Cases

On 15 November 2006, The Women Protection Bill was passed by the National Assembly of Pakistan in an attempt to amend the heavily criticized Hudood Ordinance Laws (2008) which govern the punishment for rape and adultery in Pakistan.

The Hudood Ordinance, enacted by military ruler Zia-ul-Haq in 1979, criminalizes adultery and non-marital consensual sex. They also made a rape victim liable to prosecution for adultery if she cannot produce four male witnesses to the assault.

The new Women Protection Bill brings rape under the Pakistan Penal Code, which is based on civil law, not Sharia (Islamic Law). The Bill removes the right of police to detain people suspected of having sex outside of marriage, instead requiring a formal accusation in court under the changes, adultery and non-marital sex is still an offence but now judges would be allowed to try rape cases in criminal rather than Islamic courts. The law also does away with the need for the four witnesses and allows convictions to be made on the basis of forensic and circumstantial evidence. But even after

this bill the responsibility of proving the crime falls on the victim and the main evidence rely on the medical reports. So in this way it becomes very difficult for some cases to prove medically that the assault really took place.

After the emergence of women rights organizations and several feminist movements it is found that there are very few positive changes that have taken place with regard to women's rights. The ample protection of women's rights against state and communal abuses still needs to be addressed. Most distressing and upsetting phenomenon is that instead of decrease in violence, it was noticed that it is on rise in almost every form. A woman was raped every two hours somewhere in the country, while hundreds became victims of 'honour' killings, domestic violence, burnings and murder. With the woman unsafe even within her home, reports of incidents of harassment at the workplace came in more frequently than before, even as laws continued to discriminate against women and their role in the public sphere remained marginalized.

Significance

The present study is carried out on the premises that in spite of the passing of a Women Protection Bill 2006, and the amendments in the Hudood Ordinance 1979, it is still difficult for the rape victims to prove the crime and it is still easier for the culprit to be escaped.

Secondly after the shameful act has occurred the reporting of the event make it directly shameful for women. The victims are made to believe that they have really lost their honour and deserve sympathy. The newspaper reports also clearly reflect the societal patriarchal belief that the honour is mainly related to male-kin of the victim, ignoring the nature of the physical and mental violence occurred to the victim, the aspect of honour is very much highlighted. So the reporting of the rape cases in the press is more often sensationalist and intrusive. The present study is an attempt to explore how the language used in the newspapers reflects and promotes certain patriarchal notions about the sex crimes and how

the victims are directly or indirectly stigmatized through it. It also looks at legal aspects of the rape case and the difficulties faced by the victims in order to get justice.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

By the early 1980's, rape and violence against women became metaphors and symbol of women's oppression and in the process they became central to the feminist discourse. There have been several studies of print media with regard to women which have found the print media guilty of sexism, distortion of image of women and propagation of sex stereotypes.

Zia (1994) carried out her research which was concerned with the locating sex crimes in Pakistan as part of a larger Islamic discourse that is concerned with controlling female sexuality and which has become codified within the Pakistani legal discourse. The study also looked at the role of media, as it reflects and reinforces images of female sexuality, and the social and legal attitudes towards sex crimes.

Vetten (1998) in her report on rape in South Africa, found rape to be the only serious crime still on the increase, according to the South African Police Service (SAPS) statistics for 1997.

A report that was submitted to Government of Pakistan states that out of 2256 cases of rape reports in the last year, 260 were the cases of gang rapes. Punjab province reported the maximum cases of violence against women with 1,509 women being raped and another 233 gang raped. The statistics for the first quarter of 2008 reveal that 428 women have already been raped across the country, while 42 cases of gang rape have been registered. Of these, 330 rapes and 32 gang rapes were reported from Punjab province (2008).

Huma (2005) in her study points out that the complete lack of infrastructure for collecting and analysing semen and other

physical samples makes the gathering of medical evidence more farce than forensic exercise. For instance, the authorities have not made DNA testing of semen samples as well as alleged rapists a mandatory investigation procedure. "DNA testing is unheard of in Pakistan," explains Amna Mehwish, a project coordinator at War Against Rape. "There should be DNA testing facilities in every city but the government has not provided for them since rape is not a priority."

In 2008, in a report, Shields (2008) argues that stereotypical media representations of rape are damaging conviction rates when cases come to court. The study recommends fundamental changes in the way rapes are reported in newspapers and broadcasts. The report asserts that the widespread belief among the public is that women are most at risk of being raped when walking alone in dark or remote areas, but the scenario presented by the news bear little resemblance to the reality of most rapes. According to the statistical data presented in the report, more than 80% of rapes in UK are perpetrated by men known to their victim, and only 13 percent happen in public places. The widespread misconception is largely generated by the media, according to the report. The report criticizes the way in which rape is usually written about on a case by case basis, rather than discussed as a wider social issue.

METHODOLOGY

The data is collected from one English daily newspapers, Dawn, and three Urdu papers; Express, Nawa-e-Waqat, and Khabren., were selected for data collection.

Textual analysis of the news reports is done. For this purpose both qualitative and quantitative analysis is done in relation to the previous studies Vetten (1998), Shields (2008). In qualitative analysis the language of the reports is analysed under the sub categories of headings, subheadings, labeling, naming, adjectives used for victims etc. The use of language and underlying meaning

of the news reports discourse (s) are also discussed in relation to the laws related to this crime.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of crime reports is carried out under two sub categories: 1) Language of the Rape Reports, 2) Discourse of the Rape Reports

Language of the Rape Reports

Headlines: Sensationalist

The analysis of different cases shows that the headlines of almost all the rape cases are mostly sensational and thrilling for attracting attention. Few examples are given below:

Example 1 *Mother's ire, ignominy rob girl of life: Rape victim's fate*
(Daily Dawn, 26 April 2008)

The above headline suddenly attracts attention of its reader and increase curiosity and temptation to read the story. The headline shows that the mother out of rage and humiliation killed a girl who had been raped. The very next sentence rape victim's fate is the reflection of the collective stereotypical thinking that a rape victim's ultimate end is death as she has lost honour and thus has no cause to live.

This is how the language used, shapes and reflects ideology that is totally creating unfavorable conditions for the rape victims in the society. After reading the complete news one get to know that the mother did not actually killed her. She was just accused of murdering her daughter by the person whom she saw raping her daughter. Witkin and his colleagues found that females were more likely to see the stimulus and surrounding field as a whole while males were more likely to separate the stimulus from its context. He named the behavior of males as *field independence*, thereby perpetuating and strengthening the image of male supremacy; he

named the female behavior as *field dependence* and thereby perpetuated and strengthened the image of female inferiority (cited in Spender 1998). After the incident the daughter died at hospital. But the headline gives the reporter's judiciary comments of the case and made the mother a killer who was herself demanding justice for her daughter's rape and death.

Example 2: *Killing two 'lovebirds' with one stone!* (Daily Dawn, 29 May 2008)

Here again the catchy and figurative language is used for a murder case of two people accused of elopement. The headline convert and direct attention of a murder case into killing two people who transgressed the social norms, thus justifying the act.

Example 3: *Raped girl's father wants justice, not money.* (Daily Dawn, 29-05-08)

The identity of the subject is here highlighted by *a raped girl's father* just to make it more sensational.

Example 4 *Doshiza se ziadti ki koshish, Thanedar ne khawateen ke char rishte dar pakar liye*

Shor per mulzim farar ho gaey, khawateen phattay kapron samayt thaanaay gaen.

(Daily Nawa-e-waqt 02 06-08)

(A rape attempt with a young girl. The policeman arrested four relatives of the women. On making noise the culprit escaped. Women went to the police station in worn out clothes.)

Example 5 *Sarfraz ne ghar ghus ker Suriya or uski beti ki bayhurmatti ki, ta svaeren bna ker shetni khel khelta raha.*

(Daily Khabren, 02 May 08)

(Sarfraz forcefully entered in home, harassed Suraiya and her daughter. Took photographs and kept on playing the evil play)

The above examples show how the conscious choices of words are made to make the news more catchy and sensational. Here the words *Dosheeza* (*Virgin/ Young girl*), *Phattay kapray* (*worn out clothes*) and *shetani khel* (*Evil Play*) are used just to catch the attention.

Unrelated Descriptions

The analysis of newspapers shows that these are most of the time filled with unrelated description of the feelings and emotions of the victims which could cause more disgrace to them. As the victims share their sentiments with the reporter but presenting it publicly in papers is unethical as it put them in a pathetic situation.

Example 6 *She said in saraiki, her mother tongue, after feeling uncomfortable to speak... she pleaded with a pale and tragedy-stricken face while keeping her eyes down... her voice broke a number of times during her three minute talk and it seemed as if she would burst in tears but she managed to control her emotions with great pain and agony as was evidenced on her face... (Daily Dawn March 6, 08)*

Example 7 *Sobbing Sabir said while sharing his sentiments with Dawn. (Daily dawn April 26, 08)*

Such a description shows that the reporters are more interested in irrelevant description of the speaking style in the example 1, and are interested in the emotional trauma they *imagine* the women must have felt. There is only brief description of the background of the crime and no information about subsequent legal procedures is given in much detail.

Adjectives used for the victims

In all the rape news the description of the victim and the family is always preceded with such adjectives that are loaded with stigmatized meanings and show the pathetic feelings associated

with them e.g. *Ailing Tahir, dejected Sabir, sobbing Sabir, mazloom khawateen mutasra larki* etc.

Names of the victims

It is found in most of the rape reports that the names of the victims are presented by first letter of her name. The paradox of the situation is that only the name is concealed while all other particulars and specifications are presented in detail, which are more than enough to identify the victims.

Example 8 *His youngest daughter (F) was raped by her maternal uncle..... Tahir, a labourer who is a father of five. I have shifted from Chauburji to Gawalmandi (Daily Dawn May 29, 08)*

Example 9 *A married woman (S) had eloped with her lover Khan Bahadour, both residents of chak 400-JB (Daily Dawn May 29, 08)*

Example 10 *Multan Chak No. 561 TDA Chowk Sarwar Shaheed ki rehaveshee Panchvi jamat ki talba (R) ne btaya.....(R) kay valid Abdur Rasheed ne appeal ki hay..... (Daily Express, June 3, 08)*

(Resident of Multan Chak No. 5 TDA chowk Sarwar Shaheed, student of class 5th, (R) told..... (R)'s father Addur Rasheed appealed that.....)

Example 11 *Basti Sarai Wala kay Mazoor Shakhs Noor Shah ki beti (z) ko zaidti ka nishana banaya*

(The disable person of Basti Sarai raped Noor Shah's daughter) (Daily Khabrain June 4, 08)

So the conscious choice of presenting the name in this way is suggestive. Hiding only the name of the girl shows the underlying honour related issue. By doing so suggests that something dishonoring had happened to her and showing her identity and full

name could cause more disgrace to the family. But in fact this conscious style of naming along with the full description of location and names of the family make it more problematic for the entire family.

It is also found in the most of the cases and headlines of rape reports that the victim is always described by her relation to the male kin, again associating honour with males and showing that such an incident brings the loss of honour to the male members of the family. Ignoring the physical and mental trauma of the affected, the reports just highlight the issue of the honour in relation to the male kin e.g.

- Rape girl's father (Daily Dawn 20-05-08)
- Mazdoor ki beti se ziadti (Daily Khabren 04-06-08)
- Amam masjid ki beti se ziadati (Daily Khabren 03-06-08)

Discourse of the Rape News

Reasons given for the Crime

The reasons that are found in most of the rape cases are pity disputes of families or the enmities between parties or some other causes, the revenge of which is taken by committing this crime. Such a coverage of causes encourage other incidents by the showing the ways to take revenge.

Exercise of Power

The cause of reporting rape cases most of the time is to show and exercise power over both, the female sexuality and on the less powerful. In this way the imposition of patriarchy is maintained in the society.

Troubles for the Family

The glamorous reporting of the case and the identification put the victim and the family in more trouble. On the one hand they have to face the critical situation in the society on the other hand it can

bring more threats to them. The reporters are only concerned with the description of the case not with the problem and its remedies.

This is the reason most of the cases remained unreported because it could only bring them on scene, but not justice. A more recurrent statement that is found in the cases is the warning of the suicide and self burning as a result if justice will not be done.

Example 12 *Agar unhen insaf na mila tu wo khud khshi kar len gay*

(If they will not get justice, they will commit suicide) (Daily Express, May 31, 08)

Example 13 *(E) kay walid ne appeal ki hay ke us ki daad rassi ki jay warne wo apne khandan samet khud sozi karega*

(E's father has appealed to pay an ear to them otherwise they would kill themselves with complete family) (Daily Express, June 3, 08)

In many other cases we find such warnings which promote and enforce them to do so if they could not get justice. So it promotes another form of violence in society. Another thing that such warnings suggest that after such an assault, to survive in the society is not possible as a loss of 'honour' has occurred and it is better to die than to live a dishonorable life.

Role of Law in these cases

As it is said earlier that not all cases are reported and get access to the court, still many which are reported, are not lucky enough to get justice. Yet those who get the opportunity to get heard in the court face a lot of difficulties to prove the crime against them. Even after the new Women Protection Bill has passed, the responsibility of the proof still falls on the victims. The new law has deleted the obligation of four witnesses to have proof of the crime but still it mainly relies on the medical DNA tests which again becomes problematic sometimes for the victim in some cases when;

- 1- The victim is married,
- 2- The victim got delayed in reporting the case, or
- 3- If an effort for rape was made but the victim managed to avoid the actual act of intercourse. etc

In such cases and many others more or less related to such situations one could not get the culprit punished. Now what the law does here for the protection of the woman from the attempts of rape and sexual harassment!

So in rape cases, it is hard to establish the crime by depending only on medical evidence. This is because medical examination is reliable only if it is carried out within 24 hours of the incident, which is not possible in majority of the cases, if the victim is married, then it is many times difficult to prove rape. Even taking bath or washing of clothes destroys evidence.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Violence against women in every sphere of life is the growing issues even in the present modern scenario. The concept of the society at large should be changed towards such crimes and victims, if any improvement is to be brought. The victim has to face double edged trauma after such an incident:

1. Physical torture
2. Negative social attitude towards her which affects her present and future life.

Why the concept of honour is just related to women? Why the sense of fear of dishonor is associated with her and her family? Rather the culprit should have such fears. But these fears are inculcated in her mind from the patriarchal structure of the society from the very beginning. In our present scenario women who has been suffered from such an incident do not get that much respect from her family and society and also faces problem in getting married if unmarried and in her marital life if married.

It is due to these fears many cases remain unreported hence many victims remain deprived of justice. For this purpose efforts are needed on both individual and social level. Media must take this responsibility because it plays a powerful role in shaping and projecting belief system of a society. The sense of dishonor should be towards the culprit. He must have fear in mind of shame and dishonor if found guilty in the society.

On the other hand public and family attitudes towards the culprit should make him realize the shame and make him feel guilty for such an act not the vice versa as it usually happens in our society.

Only this attitude can encourage the victim to raise their voice for the justice and to bring the culprit on the scene. Similarly the fear of severe punishment and reaction of society will also discourage such an act to be happened at all.

Considering the traditions in India, we need to lay the burden of proof in the rape cases more on accused rather than the victims (as is practiced here in Pakistan). The social norms and cultural traditions should also be kept in mind and the procrastination in lodging FIR and conducting of medical examination should also not be seen as crucial in rape cases. We need to develop a society having the sense to understand that given the enormity of crime, there will be family consultations and delays and this should not go against the victim.

To those who object that a woman may falsely allege rape it should be clear that no woman can falsely implicate a man in a crime at the cost of her honor and lifetime repercussions. And the evidences provided by the accused will also be considered by court.

Shields report (2008) provides a fruitful recommendation in relation to rape reporting by suggesting the procedural development of guidelines for the reporting of sexual violence with the view that it must be enforced by both individual newspapers and the Press Complaints Commission.

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