



Glorification of Misogyny and Violence in Pakistani Tv Dramas and its Impact on Young Women in Karachi

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ABSTRACT

Pakistani TV dramas package and glorify misogynistic behavior as gestures of romance. It systematically portrays man-handling, eve-teasing, stalking, assault as normalized behaviors necessary to control women. Stereotypical tropes are reinforced regarding both genders, sustaining the status quo between them. Such content when aired on national television distorts the notion of consent, self-expression, freedom, and right to dignity in the minds of the audience. This research aims to explore how Pakistani TV dramas have portrayed violence against women under the guise of romantic myths over the past fifteen years and how this narrative when displayed to the audience contributes to the normalcy of abuse against women. The study aspires to provide insights that can benefit women in Karachi to understand how various storylines incorporated in dramas glorify violence under the pretext of romance, honor, and tradition. The research consists of both qualitative and quantitative analysis, in which 250 women were included in the survey and seven industry experts were interviewed.

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1. Introduction

Media is a powerful tool that has an undeniable influence on the minds of people and society at large. Globally, television is an effective medium used for the dissemination of information and entertainment. It has had a great impact on cultural norms and values including fashion, language, food, marriage ceremonies, etc. Television affects the average person's social, personal, and political life. Human civilization is ancient and revolves around socio-cultural norms. Drama explains social and cultural issues, which is the most powerful and easy way to communicate (Faiz, Khalid, & Mahmood, 2020). TV dramas are popular pick by adults for entertainment in the country. It is the most watched medium not only in Pakistan but also in other areas of the world, predominately among female South Asians. Pakistani dramas and serials portray women from every societal class; they exist as characters within the binary domains of pious and evil, traditional and progressive, home-maker and career woman but for the most part, they are defined in relation to their male counterparts. Bhargava (2009) defines gender stereotypes as "a psychological process which illustrates structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of men and women.

As dramas are reflective of a society's traditions and practices, it is observed that Pakistani dramas use misogynistic language and glorify acts of violence against women as gestures of romance. Dramas and serials incorporate dangerous romantic myths and co-relate them with features of violence against women ranging from stalking and eve-teasing to sexual harassment and domestic violence. Men are characterized in these dramas as having hyper-masculine traits. They evade accountability until a woman comes and fixes them. This rhetoric

is constantly used in TV dramas where a woman sustains the abuse until the oppressor has a change of heart or she is saved by another good man. For example in the drama serial *Hum Kahan Key Sachay Thay*, Aswad marries Mehreen just to get revenge. He subjects her to psychological abuse and puts her under great emotional distress. Despite this, Mehreen accepts him in the end, romanticizing an unhealthy relationship and trivializing victims of mental torture. Similarly, another drama serial *Kaisi Teri Khudgharzi* romanticized psychological abuse and Stockholm syndrome. The male lead is the pure embodiment of toxic masculinity. Shamsheer, the male protagonist gets the father of the female lead in prison for a fake case. He forces the female lead Mehak to break her engagement. To escape his harassment, Mehak has to fake her death and relocate. He eventually tracks her down and forcibly marries her. In a turn of horrifying events, Mehak falls in love with him. From stalking to kidnapping, all violent acts are endorsed in the drama serial. In a cesspool of questionable content, the Pakistani TV industry has managed to produce better serials like *Udaari*, *Sinf-e-ahan*, *Sar-e-rah*, and *Kuch Ankahi* that are progressive, light-hearted and shed light on how a strong woman is integral to not only the family's progress but to the society's as well.

In recent times, *Kuch-Ankahi* has proven to be a breath of fresh air for audiences. It's fun, and thought-provoking with a never-ending list of progressive female characters. The drama takes a humorous and organic approach to serious issues relating to women's religious and legal right to property. It explores societal marriage pressures and workplace harassment, all the while never letting the script get too gloomy. Similarly, the mini-series *Sar-e-rah* also brings an unconventional twist in its storyline to the masses. It explores and delves the viewer into the lives of different marginalized people as they navigate through life by bypassing various hurdles. Glorification of violent behavior against women is a major issue in Pakistan. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2020 reported that 90% of women have been victims of domestic violence at the hands of their husbands or families. Around 47% of married women have been subjected to sexual abuse. The country was ranked globally 4th for discrimination and harmful cultural traditions targeted against women. Violence against women is criminalized in two out of four provinces in Pakistan (Sindh and Baluchistan). In Punjab, it is treated as a civil infraction yet prescribed preventive and remedial measures. In a country, where violence against women is perpetuated at such an alarming level, it is highly irresponsible to repeatedly make content that glorifies it. Study will enable women to distinguish between violence be it emotional or physical and a healthy romantic association. Young women will be able to comprehend how regressive stereotypes employed in dramas stigmatized women in real life.

2. Literature Review

Rutledge (2022) in the article titled "Violence against Women on Netflix" examined the connection between media violence and aggression. According to an article in the Washington Post, viewership statistics and industry experts revealed that many of Netflix's trending shows "spotlight gruesome violence, often committed against women". Violent and aggressive content against women, coupled with Netflix's global influence on audience could result in viewers perceiving crimes against women as normal and acceptable. Constant consumption of violent media affected both men and women. Similarly, Awais, Ashraf, and Shabir (2021) examined the impact of media on women specifically. Most of the content encouraged women to put their partner's needs above their own and practice silence. Women who consumed violent media didn't perceive violence as criminal victimization unless it was expressed in its most explicit form. Content that featured violence against women made its viewership desensitized. Women desensitized to violence were less likely to report it. This phenomenon was more apparent in women who led lives in traditional gender roles. Stereotypical and dramatized representations of violence against women in media distorted the reality around it. Diving deeper, Akhter (2021) asserts that media has an undeniable influence on society at large. TV dramas are widely watched in every household in Pakistan and often shape people's views and perceptions. Majority of the content displayed in dramas repeatedly reinforces a negative view of women. Most Pakistani dramas have glorified psychological abuse, assault, and domestic violence. Damsel in Distress and knight in shining Armor are heavily romanticized tropes. Women are regarded as weak and need constant saving from men in the face of their problems Projection of women mostly centered on the honor of the family with little regard for their own dreams and ambitions. These dramas constantly uphold patriarchal norms and values which affects the way people perceive women in general (Chien et al., 2021; Jianjun et al., 2021; Shair et al., 2021).

Adding to that, Samraat (2021) examines how patriarchal values and rigid gender roles translated on the big screen impacted notions of masculinity and femininity. The imminent patriarchy became the forefront of Bollywood in the 1960s and 1970s. Blockbusters of the era glorified men with hyper-masculine traits while curtailing women to either the damsel in distress or the submissive female relative of the lead protagonist. Women were subjected to sexual violence in order to further the plot for the male lead. Throughout different eras, Bollywood has produced films that employ misogynistic portrayals of women and glamorize toxic masculine traits correlating them with romance. Movies like Kabir Singh are harmful for young impressionable minds as they completely distort the notion of consent and glorify physical assault against women. Bollywood through its decade's old depiction of men has institutionalized the regressive modes of patriarchal structure. (2021) concludes that majority of Pakistani dramas are dedicated to presenting a heteronormative visual culture to the masses. The dramas strongly adhere to patriarchal norms and traditions of the society, which, in turn maintains and reinforces the status quo between both genders. Though, in recent times, there have been positive depictions of some female leads that have not conformed to the conventional narrative. These depictions do offer a relatively more progressive outlook yet underneath the liberated women lies a stereotypical homemaker who has to put her family's needs above her own. Interestingly enough, Alvarez (2020) in the article "What myths of Romantic Love hide in Twilight: A Feminist's Perspective" explains that in the film the establishment of patriarchal power dynamics is evident yet over shadowed by romantic myths. There is a power imbalance in their relationship; Edward is much older than Bella with more economic and physical power. Bella is a vulnerable target, submissive to Edward's will to either kill her or refrain from doing so.

The film tries to neutralize the audience's reaction towards Edward's dilemma and invoke feelings of admiration and pity for his self-control. This works as a metaphor for abusive relationships in which the abusive partner is justified because their love can overcome anything. Likewise, Kaya (2019) while talking about popular Turkish dramas examines that prime-time television continues to treat gendered violence (compromising of abuse, harassment date- rape, rape, and domestic violence) regularly for social relevance and its allure. Mainstream narratives often portray victims of rape as extremely beautiful women, who fit in the archetype of a traditional good girl. Such a narrow representation is harmful as it reinforces stereotypes and re-produces social hierarchies. Some-times rapists are presented as good men who are stricken by the beauty of their victims and hence over time fall deeply in love with them. An unnecessary sexual tension is built between the rapist and the victim. A lot of time and money is spent to aestheticize the male gaze. *Iffet*, a popular show about a rape victim was packaged as a story of love, passion, and betrayal. By eroticizing violence against women, the media industry makes millions per year (DeVecchio, 2011 as cited by Kaya, 2019). Furthermore, Ashfaq and Shafiq (2018) examine the stereotyping of women into good and bad in Pakistani dramas. The good woman is supposed to compromise on her opinions, bury her sentiments, and sacrifice her dreams for the family. A good wife or daughter-in-law must give up her freedom and seek approval of her in-laws. On the contrary, a bad woman is described as selfish, liberal, modern, authoritative, and verbally outspoken. She is expected to focus more on her ambitions, career and self-grooming.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this research, the theory proposed is backed by a significant social theory rooted in psychology i.e. ambivalent sexism theory.

3.1. Ambivalent sexism theory

The ambivalent sexism theory was first coined by professors of psychology, Peter Glick and Susan T Fiske in 1996. The theory entails that sexism compromise of two sub-components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism represents negative stereotypes about a gender and views women as overly emotional, incompetent, and sexually manipulative beings. Whereas benevolent sexism romanticizes women as the object of heterosexual affection and reverses them in the roles of mother, wife and daughter. This form of sexism appears harmless but in reality is damaging to gender equity and restricts a woman's personal, political, social and professional opportunities. Both the components together reinforce traditional gender roles and preserve the patriarchal social structure.

4. Methodology

4.1. Hypotheses

H.1 The intermingling of love and violence has led to the acceptance and normalization of abuse against women.

H.2 Consumption of TV dramas has led to perpetuate a state of victim-mentality among the female populace.

H.3 Pakistani dramas distinguish between good and bad women by co-relating them with rigid traditional gender roles.

H.4 Pakistani dramas promote toxic masculinity

It will consist of a mixed method approach comprising of both qualitative and quantitative analysis. It will be conducted in two stages: the first half will consist of a Google survey of 250 respondents, which will be shared online with Facebook female-centric groups besides Instagram twitter and WhatsApp. There will be 20 questions in total. In the second stage, in-depth interviews of seven professionals, belonging to different backgrounds of a script writer, psychologist, producer, actor, lawyer, social feminist and a student will be sampled. The reason for opting mixed method is to strengthen the study and elevate its credibility by conducting a precise interview analysis. SPSS software will be applied to examine the survey data, frequency charts and histograms will be employed in the presentation of quantitative data. The software Quirko will be used in examining the qualitative data, coding and generation of various themes will be achieved through it to minimize human error and add value to the interview analysis.

4.2. Sample Size

The universe of the study was social media users in Karachi. Karachi is one of the biggest urban centers in the country and the city alone consists of 50% TRP meters hence, it serves as a good case study to portray the preference of one urban center as the choice of the whole country. Further, the population entailed female youth of Karachi belonging to the age group ranging between 18 and 35 years. Women specifically from this age bracket have been selected as they represent young impressionable individuals and thus the effect of media narratives can easily be analyzed. The sample size for the survey was 250 respondents.

4.3. Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling technique will be used keeping in mind that the women selected should be from the age groups of 18 to 35, and all of them should be active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms.

5. Findings And Analysis

The majority of the respondents i.e.41.7 % fell within the 25 to 30 age bracket followed by the second highest group i.e. 35.4 % was aged 18 to 24 years while 12.2 % of the respondents were older than 30 belonging to 31 to 35 years while 9.4 % were older than 36+. It was observed that age played a significant role in determining how deep the impact of dramas had on young women.

Figure 1: Breakdown of Respondent's Age

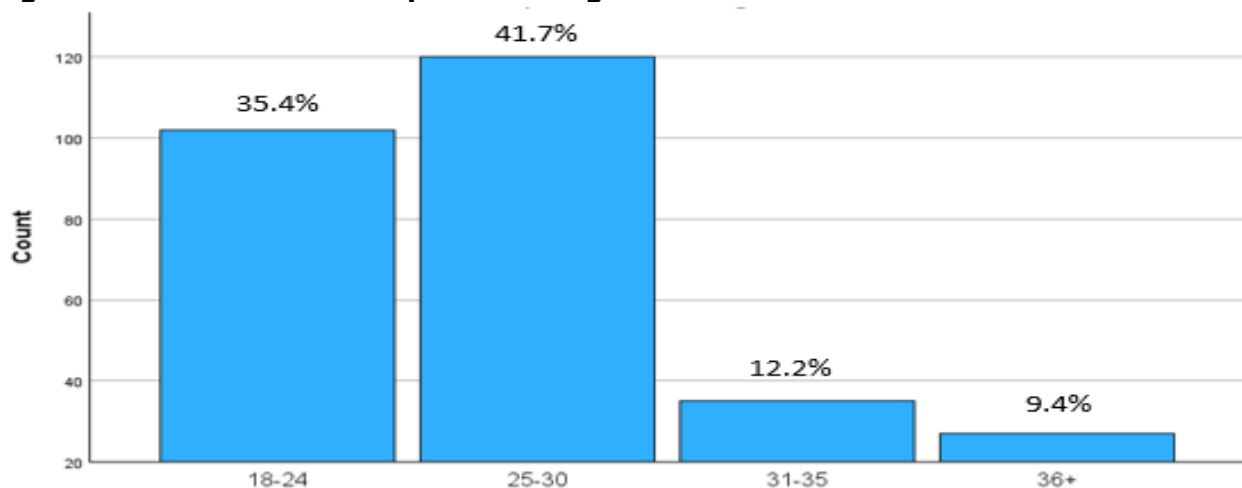


Table 1: Age

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | | 4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| | 18-24 | 102 | 35.4 | 35.4 | 36.8 |
| | 25-30 | 120 | 41.7 | 41.7 | 78.5 |
| | 31-35 | 35 | 12.2 | 12.2 | 90.6 |
| | 36+ | 27 | 9.4 | 9.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 288 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Figure 2: Breakdown of Marital Status of Respondents

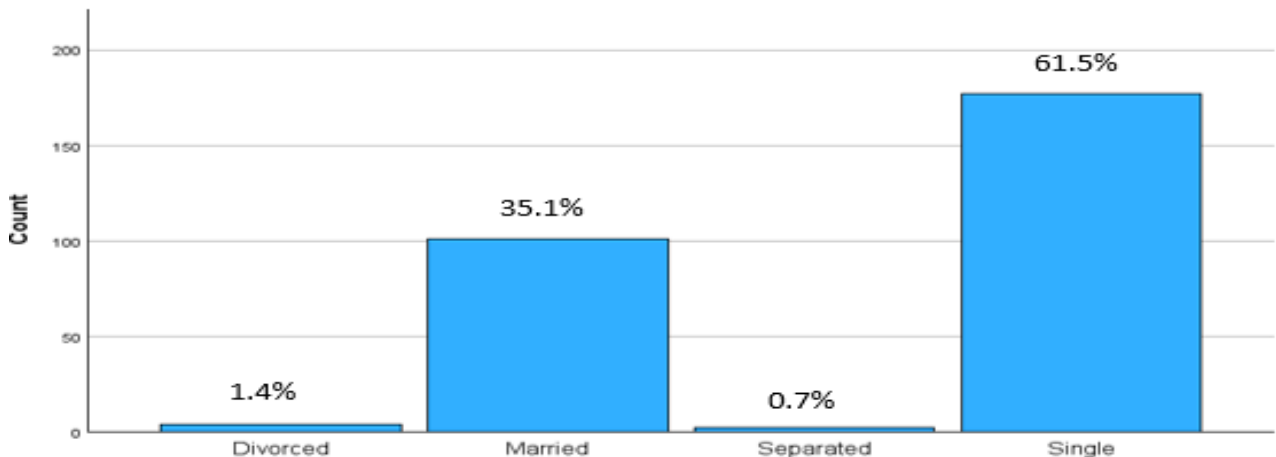


Table 2: Marital Status

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | | 4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| | Divorced | 4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 2.8 |
| | Married | 101 | 35.1 | 35.1 | 37.8 |
| | Separated | 2 | .7 | .7 | 38.5 |
| | Single | 177 | 61.5 | 61.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 288 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Majority of the respondents i.e. 61.5% were single, around 35.1% were married followed by 1.4% who were divorced while the remaining 0.7% were separated.

Figure 3: Breakdown of Occupation of Respondents

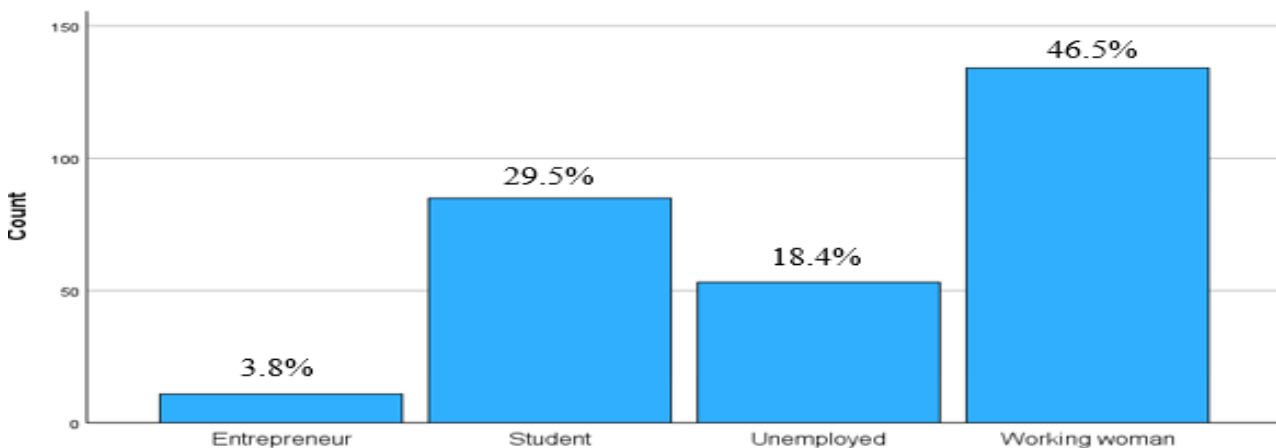


Table 3: Occupation

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|---------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | | 5 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 |
| | Entrepreneur | 11 | 3.8 | 3.8 | 5.6 |
| | Student | 85 | 29.5 | 29.5 | 35.1 |
| | Unemployed | 53 | 18.4 | 18.4 | 53.5 |
| | Working woman | 134 | 46.5 | 46.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 288 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Working women i.e. 46.5% were the majority followed by 29.5% of students, while 18.4 % of respondents were unemployed and the remaining 3.8% were entrepreneurs.

Figure 4: Breakdown of Educational Qualification of Respondents

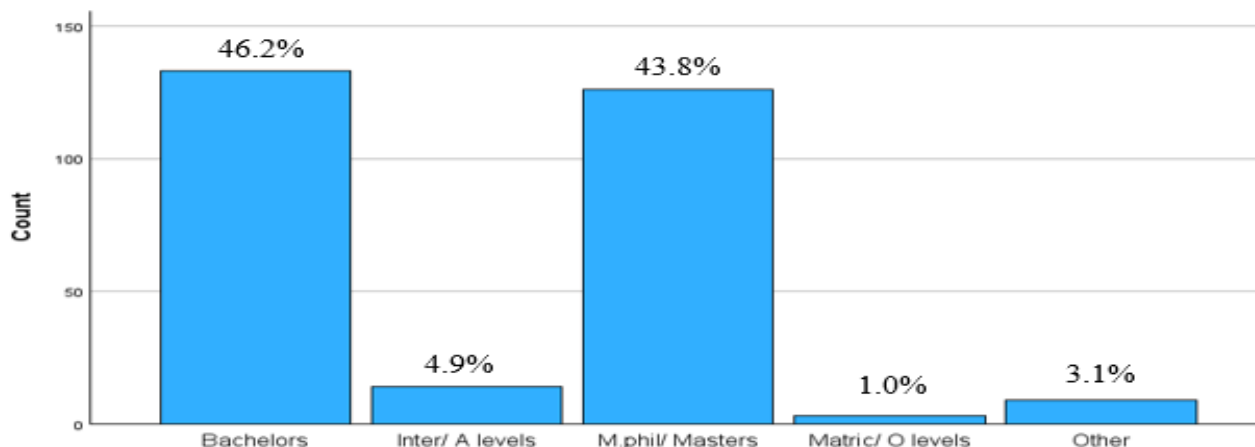


Table 4: Educational Qualification

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | | | | |
| Matric/ O levels | 3 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Inter/ A levels | 14 | 4.9 | 4.9 | 52.1 |
| Bachelors | 133 | 46.2 | 46.2 | 47.2 |
| M.Phil./ Masters | 126 | 43.8 | 43.8 | 95.8 |
| Other | 9 | 3.1 | 3.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 288 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Diversity was seen in the educational qualifications of the respondents. The most dominant group possessed a bachelor’s degree i.e. 46.2%, followed by 43.8 % Masters \M. Phil., 4.9 % had done Inter or A levels while 3.1% of respondents chose “others” in their educational qualification. The remaining 1% had completed their Matric/ O Levels.

Figure 5: Frequency of Watching Pakistani TV Dramas

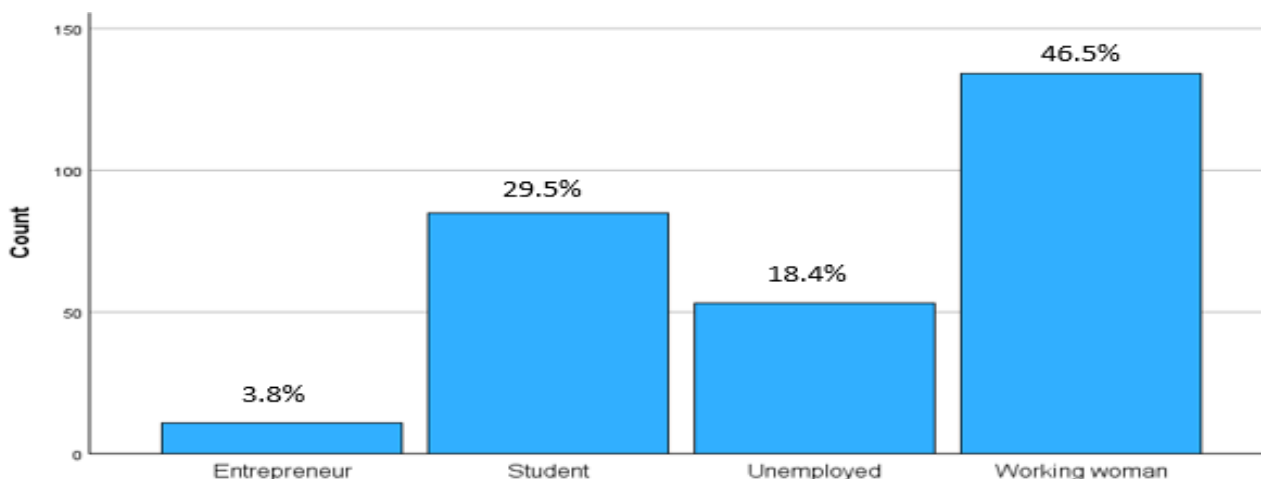


Table 5: How often do you watch Pakistani dramas

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | | | | |
| Always | 15 | 5.2 | 5.2 | 6.3 |
| Never | 16 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 11.8 |
| Often | 54 | 18.8 | 18.8 | 30.6 |
| Rarely | 87 | 30.2 | 30.2 | 60.8 |
| Sometimes | 113 | 39.2 | 39.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | 288 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Around 39.2% of the respondents had watched dramas “sometimes”, followed by 30.2%, who viewed dramas “rarely”. About 18.8% of respondents would “often” watch dramas. Approximately 5.6% of people had “never” watched Pakistani TV dramas and the remaining 5.2% had marked “always”.

Figure 6: Breakdown of Accurate Representation of Women in TV Dramas

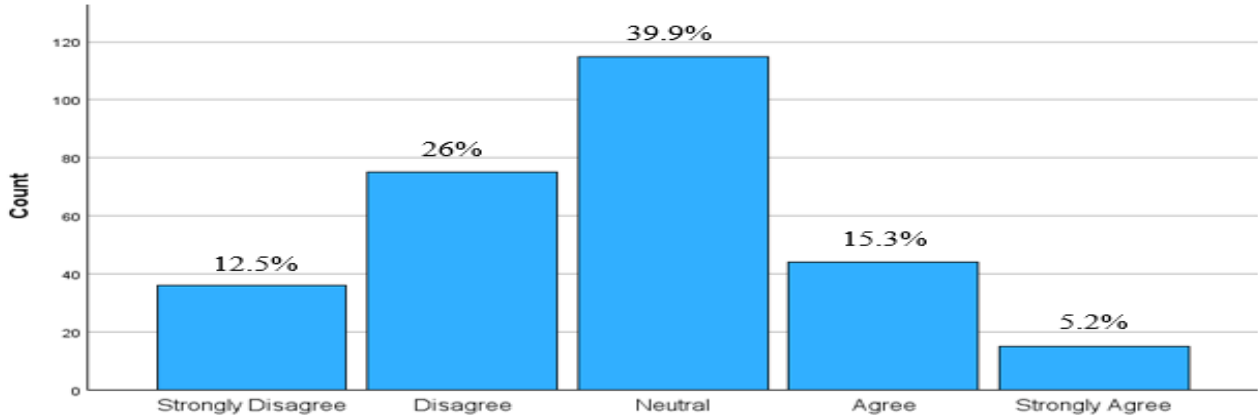
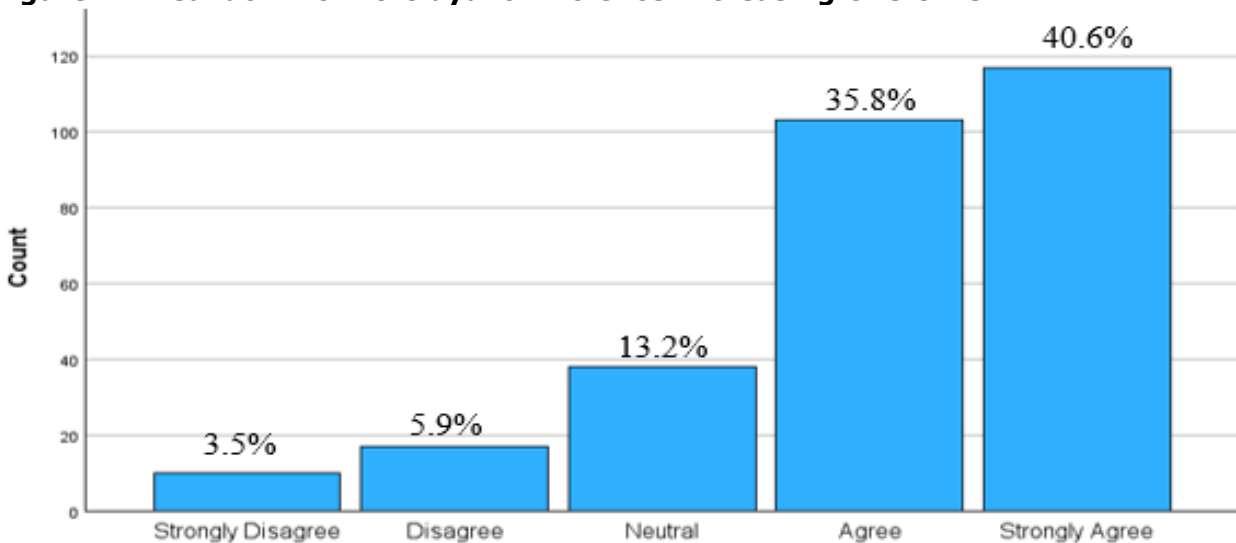


Figure 6: Do you think Pakistani TV dramas accurately depict the lives of women in Pakistan

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|---------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 36 | 12.5 | 12.6 | 12.6 |
| | Disagree | 75 | 26.0 | 26.3 | 38.9 |
| | Neutral | 115 | 39.9 | 40.4 | 79.3 |
| | Agree | 44 | 15.3 | 15.4 | 94.7 |
| | Strongly Agree | 15 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 285 | 99.0 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System ¹ | 3 | 1.0 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

Approximately 39.9% of respondents were “neutral” about the realistic portrayal of onscreen women, followed by 26% who “disagreed” with the notion. Around 15.3% of respondents went with the option “agree”. About 12.5% of respondents didn’t believe that the onscreen portrayal of women mirrored real life and hence “Strongly disagreed” with the notion whereas the remaining 5.2% strongly agreed with the given statement. Overall data showed that viewers were unsure whether TV dramas depicted women in a realistic manner or not.

Figure 7: Breakdown of Portrayal of Violence Increasing Overtime



¹ Missing system refers to unanswered/blank responses on the questionnaire

Figure 7: Do you think that the portrayal of violence against women in Pakistani TV dramas has increased over time?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 10 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 3.5 |
| | Disagree | 17 | 5.9 | 6.0 | 9.5 |
| | Neutral | 38 | 13.2 | 13.3 | 22.8 |
| | Agree | 103 | 35.8 | 36.1 | 58.9 |
| | Strongly Agree | 117 | 40.6 | 41.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 285 | 99.0 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.0 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

An overwhelming majority of the respondents 40.6% felt that violence against women had increased in Pakistani TV dramas and hence went with the option of "strongly agree". Another 35.8% marked "agree". Approximately 13.2% remained neutral about the statement, while 5.9% of respondents "disagreed" and the remaining 3.5% "strongly disagreed" with the perception.

Figure 8: Breakdown of Desensitization towards Violence against Women in Real Life

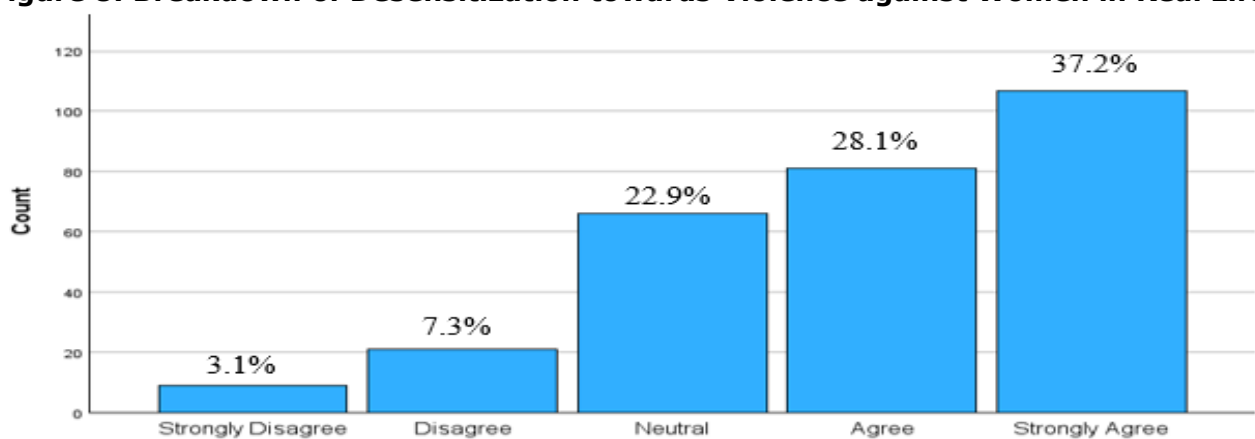
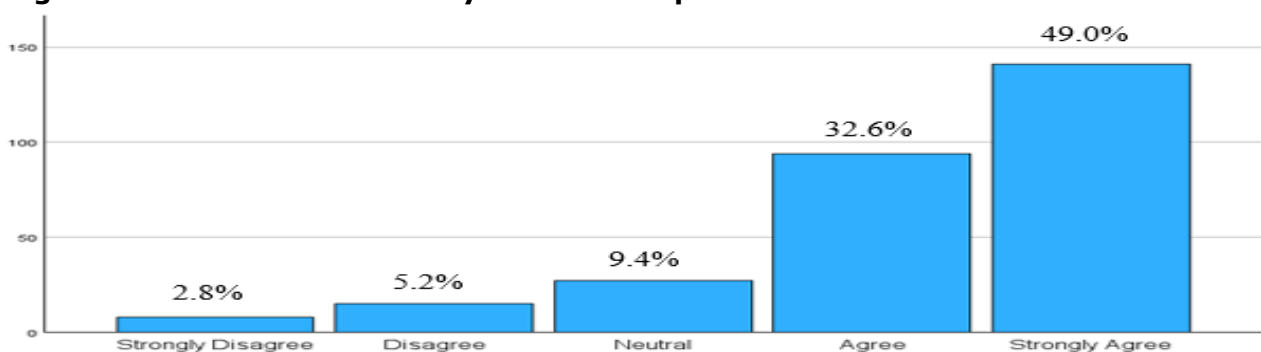


Figure 8: Do you believe that the Depiction of Violence against Woman in Pakistani TV Dramas can Desensitize Viewers to the Issue of Violence against Women in Real Life

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 9 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| | Disagree | 21 | 7.3 | 7.4 | 10.6 |
| | Neutral | 66 | 22.9 | 23.2 | 33.8 |
| | Agree | 81 | 28.1 | 28.5 | 62.3 |
| | Strongly Agree | 107 | 37.2 | 37.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 284 | 98.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 4 | 1.4 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

Figure 9: Breakdown of Portrayal of hot-tempered man in Pakistani TV dramas



A significant portion of respondents 37.2% believed that depiction of violence onscreen could desensitize viewers to real-life violence against women and opted for "strongly agree". Around 28% of respondents also felt the same and hence choose "agree". About 22.9% of

respondents remained "neutral", 7.3% "disagreed" and the other 3.1% of respondents opted for "strongly disagree".

Table 9: You think the Portrayal of hot Tempered man in Pakistani TV Dramas has increased Over Time?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 8 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 |
| | Disagree | 15 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 8.1 |
| | Neutral | 27 | 9.4 | 9.5 | 17.5 |
| | Agree | 94 | 32.6 | 33.0 | 50.5 |
| | Strongly Agree | 141 | 49.0 | 49.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 285 | 99.0 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 3 | 1.0 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

A dominant majority 49% "strongly agreed" that the portrayals of the hot-tempered man had increased on television over time. An estimated 32.6% of respondents "agreed" with the statement. Around 9.4% of respondents remained "neutral". Another 5.2% marked "disagreed" and the other 2.8% of respondents "strongly disagreed" with the statement. The data showed that the majority felt that the trope of hot-tempered man had surged in TV dramas.

Figure 10: Breakdown of Subjective Analysis

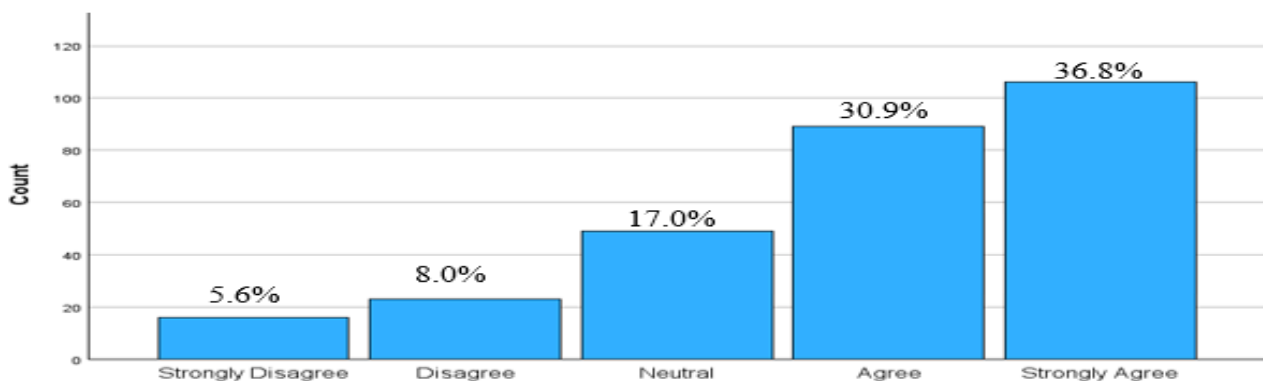
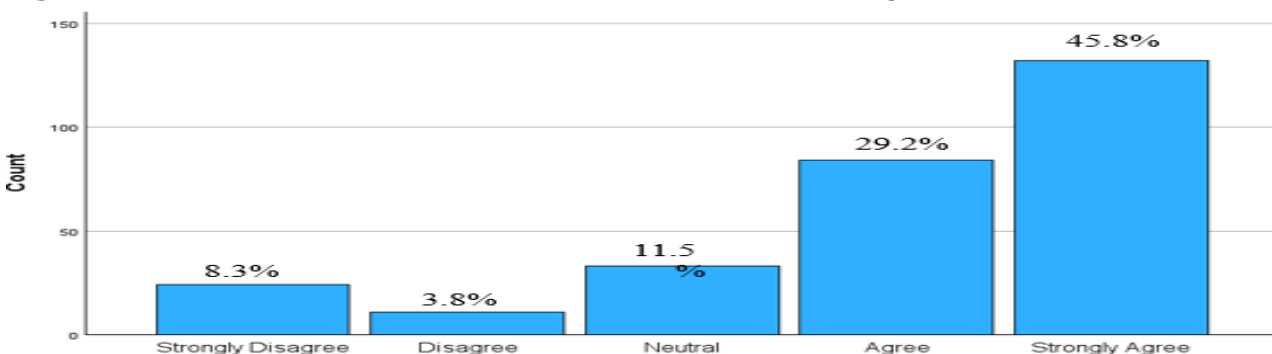


Figure 10: The Male Protagonist after a Heated argument pins the Female Protagonist Harshly, against a Wall. The Aforementioned Scene is often used and Classified as a Love Swept/ Passionate Moment in TV Dramas

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 16 | 5.6 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| | Disagree | 23 | 8.0 | 8.1 | 13.8 |
| | Neutral | 49 | 17.0 | 17.3 | 31.1 |
| | Agree | 89 | 30.9 | 31.4 | 62.5 |
| | Strongly Agree | 106 | 36.8 | 37.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 283 | 98.3 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 5 | 1.7 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

Figure 11: Breakdown of Abuse Inflicted on Female Lead by Male Lead



In their subjective analysis of the aforementioned scene, a staggering majority i.e. 36.8% "strongly agreed" that such scenes are often incorporated into storylines to depict a passionate moment between two characters. This was backed by 30.9% of respondents who also "agreed" with the statement. About 17% of respondents remained "neutral". Around 8% of respondents "disagreed" and the other 5.6% "strongly disagreed". The data revealed that viewers perceived that heated moments of violence between characters had undertones of romance.

Table 11: I have watched a Pakistani drama where the male lead verbally \physically abused his love interest

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 24 | 8.3 | 8.5 | 8.5 |
| | Disagree | 11 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 12.3 |
| | Neutral | 33 | 11.5 | 11.6 | 23.9 |
| | Agree | 84 | 29.2 | 29.6 | 53.5 |
| | Strongly Agree | 132 | 45.8 | 46.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 284 | 98.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 4 | 1.4 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

A percentile of 45.8% admitted that they had watched dramas where the male lead had verbally/physically assaulted the female lead and therefore ticked "strongly agree". Approximately 29.2% also "agreed". Around 11.5% of respondents remained "neutral" about the statement. Approximately 8.3% were seen as "strongly disagreeing" with the statement and the remaining 3.8% also opted for "disagreed".

Figure 12: Frequency of Forgiveness Demonstrated by the Female Lead

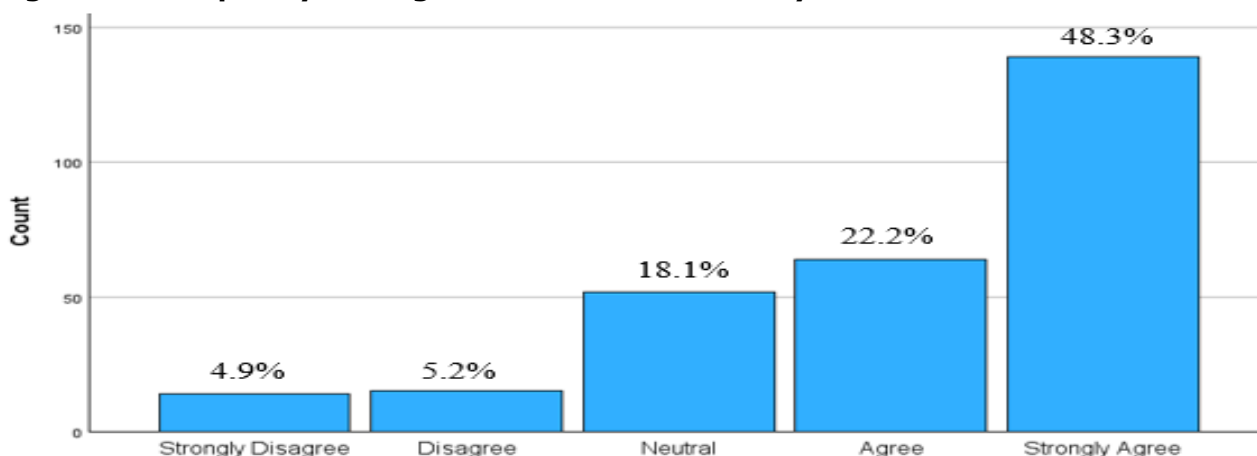


Figure 12: In most Pakistani Dramas Forgiveness for the Abusive Male Lead, by the Female Lead, is shown to be High Yielding for both Characters

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 14 | 4.9 | 4.9 | 4.9 |
| | Disagree | 15 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 10.2 |
| | Neutral | 52 | 18.1 | 18.3 | 28.5 |
| | Agree | 64 | 22.2 | 22.5 | 51.1 |
| | Strongly Agree | 139 | 48.3 | 48.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 284 | 98.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 4 | 1.4 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

A whopping 48.3% "strongly agreed" that forgiveness by the female lead for all the actions of the male lead was incorporated in dramas to make it look high-yielding for both parties, followed by 22.2% who "agreed" as well. 18.1% of respondents were "neutral" regarding the statement. About 5.2% of respondents marked "disagree" and the remaining 4.9% marked "strongly disagree". The data exhibited that viewers felt that the act of forgiveness by the female character was a recurring trope in dramas.

Figure 13: Breakdown of Intermingling of Love and Violence Leading to Normalization of Abuse

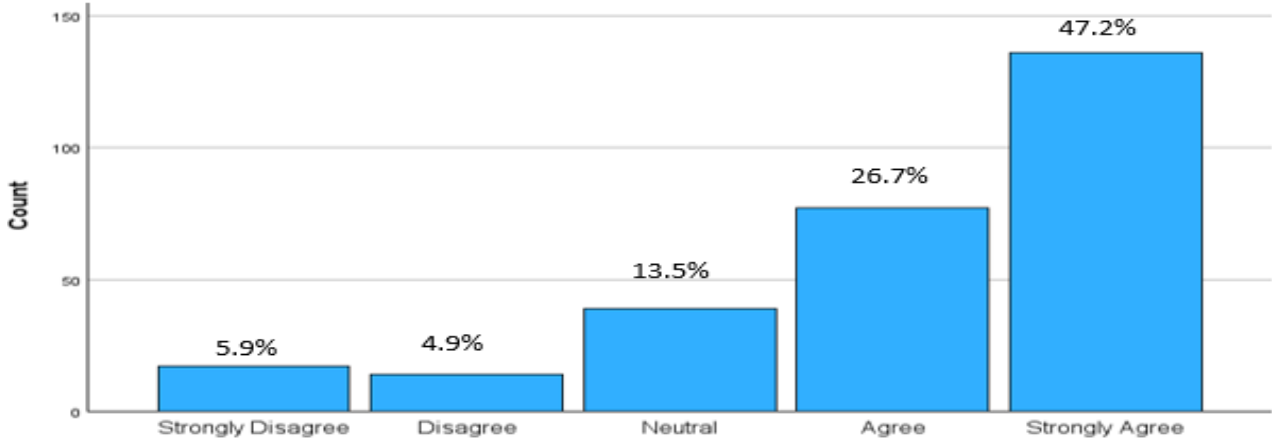


Table 14: Do you think the intermingling of love and violence in Pakistani TV dramas can lead to the normalization of abuse against women in real life?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 17 | 5.9 | 6.0 | 6.0 |
| | Disagree | 14 | 4.9 | 4.9 | 11.0 |
| | Neutral | 39 | 13.5 | 13.8 | 24.7 |
| | Agree | 77 | 26.7 | 27.2 | 51.9 |
| | Strongly Agree | 136 | 47.2 | 48.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 283 | 98.3 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 5 | 1.7 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

A substantial 47.2% perceived that the intermingling of love and violence led to the normalization of abuse in real time. About 26.7% also “agreed”. A portion of 13.5% of respondents remained “neutral”, neither confirming nor denying the statement. 5.9% of respondents went with “strongly disagree” followed by 4.9% of respondents who also “disagreed”.

Figure 14: Breakdown of Respondent’s views Regarding Victimization of Women on Screen

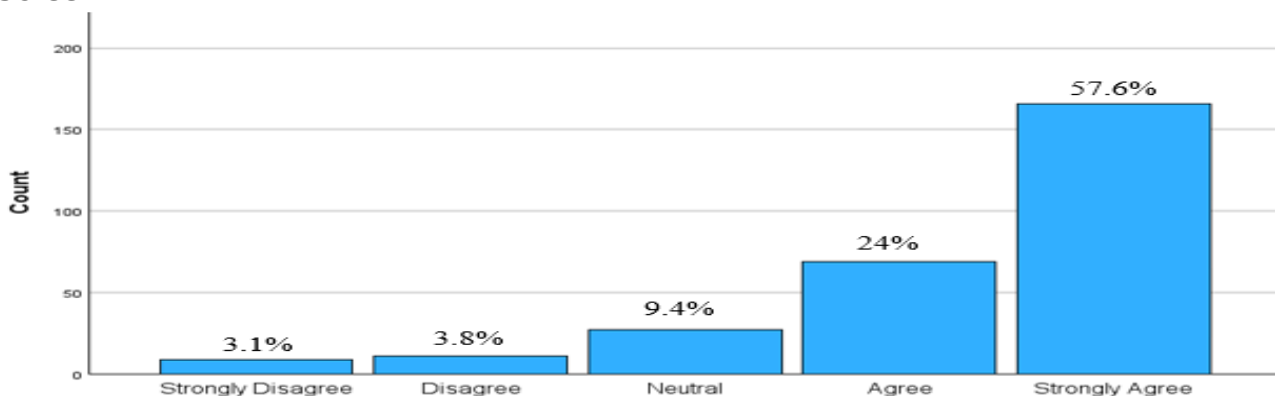


Figure 14: I have often witnessed a female character in Pakistani TV dramas being portrayed as a victim?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 9 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| | Disagree | 11 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 7.1 |
| | Neutral | 27 | 9.4 | 9.6 | 16.7 |
| | Agree | 69 | 24.0 | 24.5 | 41.1 |
| | Strongly Agree | 166 | 57.6 | 58.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 282 | 97.9 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 6 | 2.1 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

An astounding majority 57.6% admitted that they had seen female characters victimized and hence "strongly agreed". Around 24% of respondents also "agreed". Only 9.4% of respondents remained neutral, followed by a small portion of 3.8% of respondents who "disagreed" and an even smaller 3.1% of respondents "strongly disagreed" with the statement that they had witnessed female characters being depicted as victims onscreen.

Figure 15: Breakdown of Respondent's view Regarding Perpetuation of Victim-Mentality

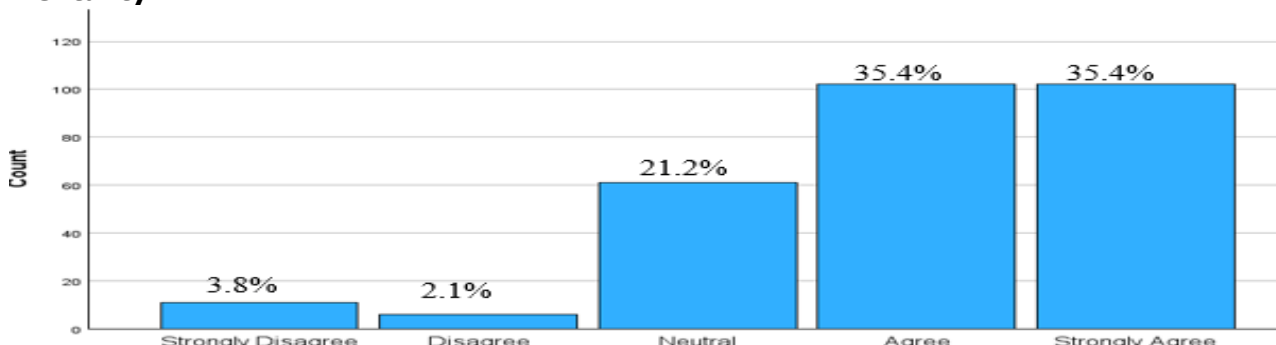


Figure 16: Do you think that the portrayal of women as victims in Pakistani TV dramas can perpetuate a state of victim-mentality among the female populace in real life?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 11 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 3.9 |
| | Disagree | 6 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 6.0 |
| | Neutral | 61 | 21.2 | 21.6 | 27.7 |
| | Agree | 102 | 35.4 | 36.2 | 63.8 |
| | Strongly Agree | 102 | 35.4 | 36.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 282 | 97.9 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 6 | 2.1 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

Interestingly, 70.8% of respondents marked "strongly agree" and "agree". These respondents were of the opinion that portraying women as victims led young women to believe that they were helpless and the oppressed gender. A percentile of 21.2% opted for "neutral" followed by a small portion of respondents 3.8% who "strongly disagreed" and 2.1% who opted for "disagreed" as well.

Figure 16: Breakdown of respondent's views on labeling non-traditionally dressed women

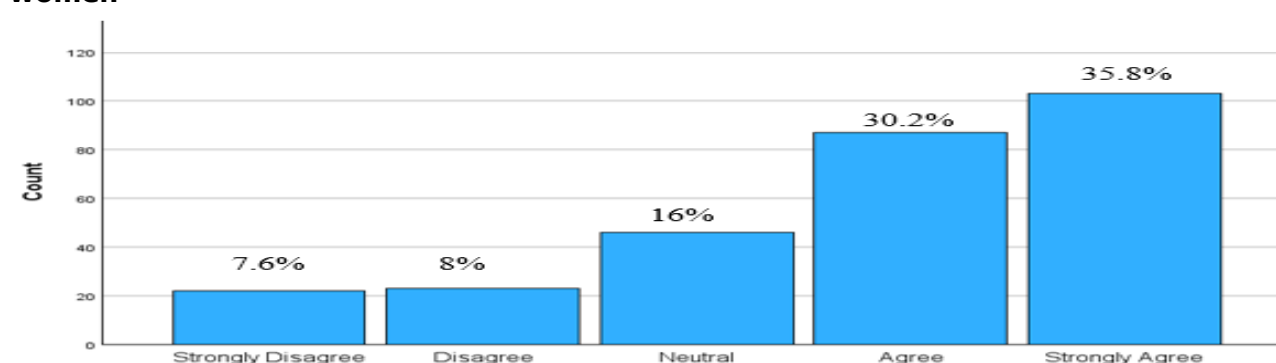


Table 16: I have viewed the more nontraditionally or immodestly dressed female character on television as 'indecent' or a 'seductress' in TV dramas

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 22 | 7.6 | 7.8 | 7.8 |
| | Disagree | 23 | 8.0 | 8.2 | 16.0 |
| | Neutral | 46 | 16.0 | 16.4 | 32.4 |
| | Agree | 87 | 30.2 | 31.0 | 63.3 |
| | Strongly Agree | 103 | 35.8 | 36.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 281 | 97.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 7 | 2.4 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

Around 35.8% of respondents had marked "strongly agree" that they had viewed the non-traditionally dressed woman Zas indecent. Another 30.2% marked "agree". About 16% of respondents were "neutral", followed by 8% who opted for "disagree" and a small portion of 7.6% who went with the option of "strongly disagree". The data illustrates how character framing has an impact on its audience.

Figure 17: Traditional Roles Onscreen Leading to Gender Stereotypes

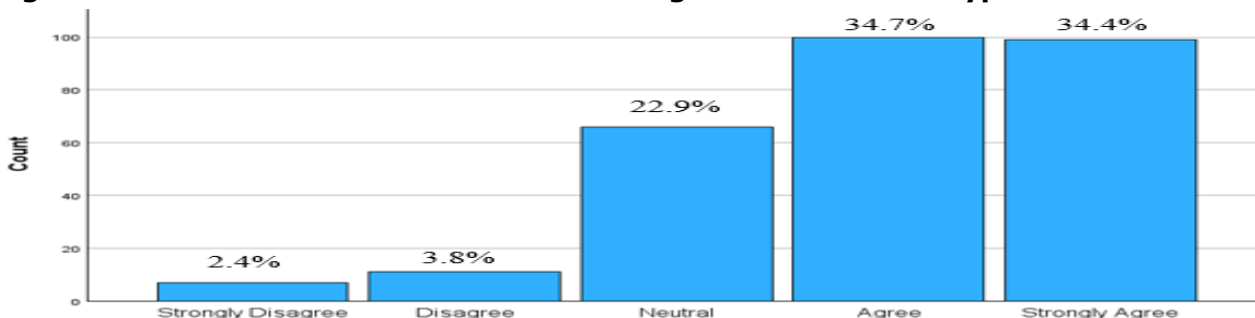


Table 17: you think the portrayal of rigid traditional gender roles in Pakistani TV dramas contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in real life?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly Disagree | 7 | 2.4 | 2.5 | 2.5 |
| | Disagree | 11 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 6.4 |
| | Neutral | 66 | 22.9 | 23.3 | 29.7 |
| | Agree | 100 | 34.7 | 35.3 | 65.0 |
| | Strongly Agree | 99 | 34.4 | 35.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 283 | 98.3 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 5 | 1.7 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

The results of this graph were overwhelmingly asymmetrical. Approximately 34.7% opted to "agree" with the notion, followed by a close-cut 34.4% of respondents who "strongly agreed" that rigid depictions of gender roles lead to gender stereotyping overall. About 22.9% of respondents neither agreed nor denied and hence opted for "neutral" while 3.8% of respondents "disagreed" and 2.4% "strongly disagreed".

Figure 18: Promotion of Toxic Masculinity

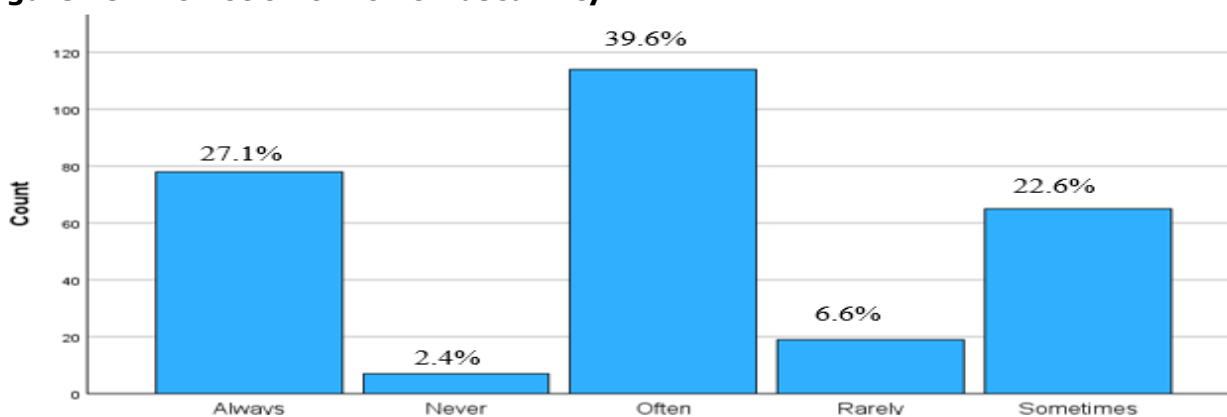


Table 18: Have you often witnessed the promotion of toxic masculinity in Pakistani TV dramas?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Always | 78 | 27.1 | 27.1 | 28.8 |
| | Never | 7 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 31.3 |
| | Often | 114 | 39.6 | 39.6 | 70.8 |
| | Rarely | 19 | 6.6 | 6.6 | 77.4 |
| | Sometimes | 65 | 22.6 | 22.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 288 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

An astounding 39.6% marked "often" when asked how often they had witnessed the promotion of toxic masculinity in Pakistani TV dramas. About 27.1 % of respondents opted for "always" to the question and 22.6% ticked "sometimes". 6.6% of respondents went with "rarely". Around 2.4 % opted for "never". The data showed that the majority of the viewers felt that male characters often embodied the traits of toxic masculinity.

Figure 19: Co-relation between Toxic Masculinity and Acceptance of Abuse

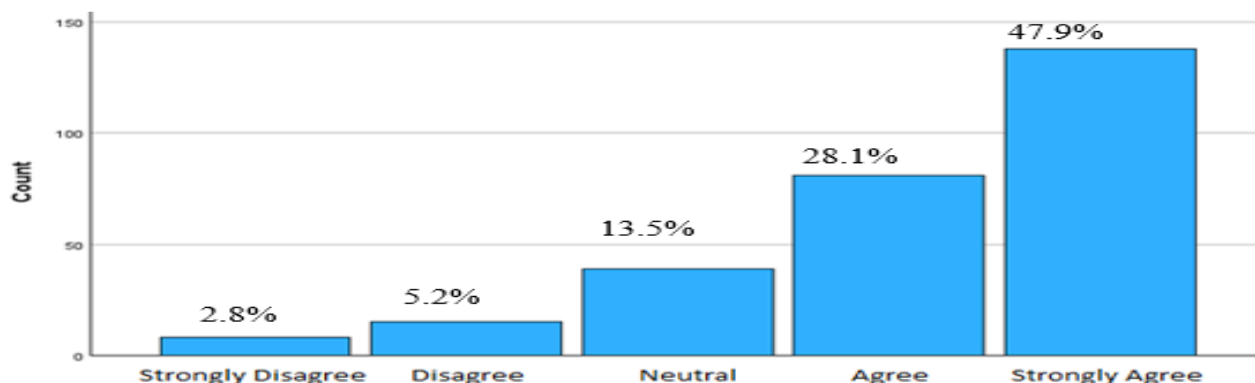


Table 19: Do you think the promotion of toxic masculinity in Pakistani TV dramas can lead to the acceptance and normalization of abusive behavior among men in real life?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 8 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 |
| | disagree | 15 | 5.2 | 5.3 | 8.2 |
| | Neutral | 39 | 13.5 | 13.9 | 22.1 |
| | Agree | 81 | 28.1 | 28.8 | 50.9 |
| | Strongly agree | 138 | 47.9 | 49.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 281 | 97.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 7 | 2.4 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

A substantial 47.9% agreed that the promotion of toxic masculinity is co-related with the normalization of abusive behavior in men, thus they opted for "strongly agree". Approximately 28.1% also "agreed". Around 13.5% opted for "neutral", 5.2% of the respondents didn't "agree" and another 2.8% felt the same and went with the option of "strongly disagree".

Figure 20: Breakdown of Respondent's views Regarding Accountability in TV Dramas

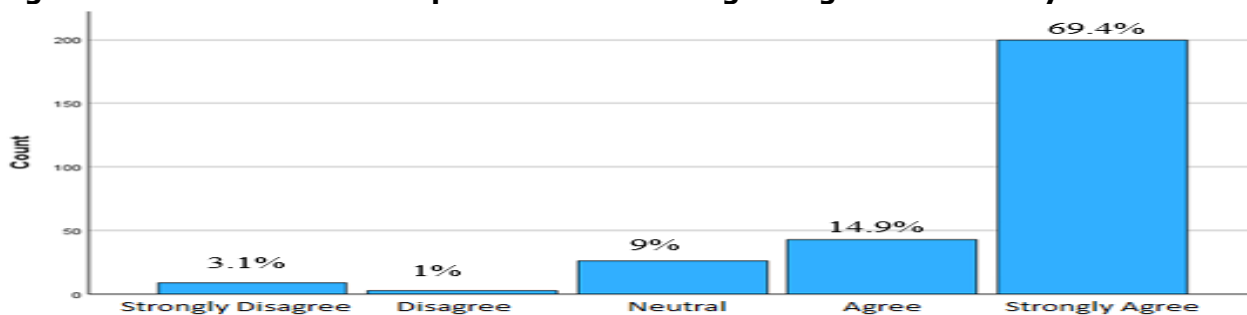


Table 20: Do you think Pakistani TV dramas should take responsibility for the messages they convey to viewers?

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Strongly disagree | 9 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| | Disagree | 3 | 1.0 | 1.1 | 4.3 |
| | Neutral | 26 | 9.0 | 9.3 | 13.5 |
| | Agree | 43 | 14.9 | 15.3 | 28.8 |
| | Strongly agree | 200 | 69.4 | 71.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 281 | 97.6 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | System | 7 | 2.4 | | |
| Total | | 288 | 100.0 | | |

When inquired regarding the responsibility of the drama industry in packaging their narratives to the masses, a substantial 69.7% "strongly agreed" that TV dramas should be accountable for their messages. Another 14.9% of participants opted for "agree". About 9% of respondents picked "neutral". An estimated 3.1% went with "strongly disagree", followed by 1% who opted for "disagree".

6. Interview Analysis

6.1. Distortion of Healthy Relationships

The interlacing of romantic love with themes such as violence and physical assault is a relevant and growing concern within and outside the entertainment industry. Many Interviewees to a great deal believe that the inclusion of such themes distorts a viewer's perspective of what a healthy relationship dynamic should entail. Instead, it incorporates romantic myths that are often counterproductive and prove to be a hindrance in the way of sustainable communication among individuals. A social feminist writer from Lahore said,

My analysis is that post Humsafar's immense success; the drama makers have developed a consistent template. While the context varies, certain tropes and character prototypes often appear such as the helpless wife, rich husband, kind but absentee father-in-law, or the scheming mother-in-law/cousin. There are three to five characters in every drama that keep on changing. In these storylines, the mixture of romance with violence is always a recurring storyline. Of course, it disrupts the viewer's perspective of what a healthy relationship should look like

This statement was endorsed by the lawyer; she added that in her observation the Pakistani community is heavily influenced by prime-time. Consuming such content was spoiling the interpersonal connection between spouses. She was of the opinion that men were presented in such a manner that depicted that they had absolute power and could inflict domestic violence on women and not be held accountable. She also quoted that *"They show violence and cover it up with romance like the recent drama Terebin"*

Elaborating further on contemporary Pakistani dramas, the clinical psychologist from Karachi shared her insight

"If you open social media sites, everywhere Terebin is the talk of the town. Not only young girls but also women in their forties are romanticizing and taking influence from this drama. The serial includes multiple shoving, and slap scenes with romantic background scores, which unnecessarily instigate violent tendencies".

Not everyone observed the same insight; the Industry insiders had varying views. While a senior actress from Karachi agreed that relationships were presented in an excessively romanticized fashion devoid of logic, the producer and scriptwriter had their own interpretations. An industry based- producer from Karachi elaborated that there were other factors at play

"I think what we see on TV is what is happening around us. So I think our perception of relationships is already distorted. TV only enhances the problem, while there are other factors involved like childhood experience and our surrounding environment".

The script-writer agreed that romance was intermingled with bitterness and other disjointed themes yet the audience loved it. She concurred that the audience was not impacted or influenced by such content. They only took it as mere entertainment.

6.2. Impact of Dramas on Women's Perception

Pakistani dramas play an important role in both shaping and reinforcing societal norms. Over the years, women have been more heavily depicted in stereotypical roles that characterize them as weak and feeble. The frequency of such roles creates a narrative that women are oppressed. Almost all interviewees had strong differing opinions regarding the impact that dramas have on young women. A common viewer from Lahore said

During my childhood, my first exposure to Pakistani TV dramas taught me that violence is part and parcel of a woman's life and she should accept that. It was only when I started

talking to my friends and was introduced to contemporary literature that I began to disassociate from that ideology and developed a different perspective."

The social feminist writer had a rather interesting take that there are several studies that show that TV influences behaviors while there are others that report completely the opposite so in a Pakistani context we can never be sure. When talking about the undertone messages of these dramas, the actress was convinced that TV dramas loved to show women as victims and inferior to men, yet the reality of the situation was different.

The lawyer in her assessment revealed that women are getting unrealistic ideas about being independent from dramas. They want equality without corresponding responsibility. She'd witnessed young girls getting enchanted by romantic dramas, opting for court marriage and when the marriage would fall apart, they would cite they had been victimized. The script writer differed with the statement

"Women are striving and making great progress in a variety of fields but to be amused, these same women watch these romantic dramas. So I don't think that anything is being perpetuated."

6.3. Overt Distinction between Good and Bad Woman

Pakistani dramas have certain characterizations when it comes to distinguishing the good versus the bad woman. When asked about their subjective analysis on the matter, majority of the interviewees had noticed a pattern that women who were traditionally dressed, suffered in silenced and gave up their agency were deemed as good women whereas those who spoke for their rights and wore western clothing, had jobs were deemed as bad women. The producer shared his thoughts on the matter

"I think there's a very stereotypical portrayal of good and bad women in the media. A bad woman is shown as wearing shirts with jeans, sporting short hair with no dupatta, and smoking. A good woman would be someone in a kurta shalwar with a dupatta, having a very conservative outlook towards life."

The script writer elaborated on how she herself distinguishes between the two categories. In her writing, the character's backstory, prevailing situation, and personality of the character is taken into account.

6.4. Public Backlash and Financial Incentives

There is always public backlash on social media against themes of violence but Pakistani dramas still produce the same content with reoccurring storylines and tropes. The interviewees shared that the reason behind it is perhaps profits and financial incentives. The script-writer revealed the process behind the scenes

"There is a set formula of success in TV shows and that formula is based on TRP. If the show has good TRP then it means that it is a hit and all the other writers, directors and producers want to replicate that success."

The lawyer and feminist writer believed that it all came down to viewership and TRPs.

When asked, the producer felt such decisions came down to certain factors. The first factor is that sex and violence sell naturally worldwide and the second is that in our Pakistani culture, domestic violence and hitting especially women come very naturally, the society has a lot of pent-up issues, which are picked up by writers. The actress felt very strongly about the hypocrisy of viewers when it came to watching certain shows.

"I believe the people watching them are hypocrites. They will create uproar on social media and pretend that they are a different breed of people, who do not watch these kinds of dramas but in reality, they do."

6.5. Promotion of Toxic Masculinity

The term Toxic Masculinity been gaining a lot of friction lately. It is loosely defined as a dominant form of masculinity wherein men use dominance, control, and violence to assert their superiority and power. The producer acknowledged the existence and promotion of toxic

masculinity in dramas, he was of the opinion that the industry wasn't even aware of what they were doing. He hoped that in the future the industry will be able to distinguish between healthy and harmful masculine behavior. The feminist writer was of the opinion that there was a lack of nuance in writing male characters on screen. There are just two or three characters and those too are oddly written. The male lead is either very grumpy, angry, or just consumed by financial stress. Each participant had their own interpretation of the concept. The lawyer didn't believe in the existence of toxic masculinity at all. Instead, she felt that women were now becoming insufferable and way too dominating on screen. She acknowledged the existence of toxic femininity. The psychologist felt that since Pakistan was a male-dominated society certain traits in male characters were more promoted than others, but she felt that there was a shift

"I think that this trend is now changing; I believe that female leads are equally getting more toxic. Both the male and female leads are exhibiting toxic traits."

The script writer acknowledged the existence of both toxic masculinity and toxic femininity in TV dramas.

"By showcasing such men with these traits, we are not promoting them but raising awareness. We have multiple social media platforms like soul bitches, soul sisters Pakistan, where women are talking about this problem which entails that such men exist. Our main purpose in the media is to promote entertain and raise awareness among the masses. We do receive backlash for it but it is important to highlight such behavior."

She further added that it was solely on the audience for romanticizing such characters and promoting them.

6.6. Desired storylines and traits

Interview participants outside the industry were asked what kind of storylines and desired traits in male and female leads they would like to see on-screen. A common viewer expressed that she wanted to see strong, independent women who have agency and are career-orientated. In terms of a male lead, she wanted soft, gentle, and kind men. The feminist writer wanted characters that were complex and morally grey. She wanted emotionally vulnerable men depicted on screen. As she said,

"I think Pakistan itself has a huge potential for exploring so many storylines. I would like to see adaptations of Pakistani classics like Punjabi, Pashtun, Balochi, and Sindhi literature. We have Waris Shah; we have so much literature that can be adapted. We can make biopics on our political figures"

The psychologist wanted to see strong male and female leads, who had a good work-life balance. She wanted storylines centered on self-made men who overcame adversities to build a home and she desired for more storylines around simple housewives and how they navigated their lives. The lawyer expressed for diversity in storylines, she wanted morally strong characters within stories that centered upon social issues.

6.7. Balancing Creative Process and Gender Equality

The interviewees were prompted to provide suggestions on how industry stakeholders (Writers, Directors, Producers, and Channel owners) can produce engaging and compelling storylines while also balancing and encouraging gender equality. The producer suggested a way out

"If we have to integrate gender equality, get rid of toxic masculinity it'll take decades to make the audience understand. What we can do is integrate gender equality and more diversity into different departments of the industry. More women cinematographers, writers, production designers, and directors should be employed."

The psychologist suggested that by researching and uploading surveys, the writers could have a better perspective of what the audience really wants. She felt scriptwriters in the industry needed rigorous training to perfect their craft. The script writer had an insightful perspective

"The stakeholders should interact with the audience constructively. They should explain their side of the narrative and take feedback from the audience."

Not all were hopeful that a change could occur. The feminist writer expressed that unless a policy came through regulatory bodies, she didn't believe that the industry would introspect.

7. Discussion

In this section of research, we will analyze the hypotheses and conclude if they were proved or rejected.

H.1 The intermingling of love and violence has led to the acceptance and normalization of abuse against women.

While analyzing the data collected through quantitative and qualitative sources, a collective 73.9% of survey participants felt that combining themes of romance and violence leads to acceptance of abuse. The interview participants were also of the opinion that such interlacing of themes distorts a viewer's perspective and has a significant impact on young women.

H.2 Consumption of TV dramas has led to perpetuate a state of victim-mentality among the female populace.

Approximately 81.6% of survey respondents had witnessed a female character be victimized on screen and a further 70.8% of respondents felt that such portrayal did lead to indicate victim mentality and helplessness among women. The qualitative data seems to vary around the subject, considering diverse factors such as age, viewing per hour of content and social status. The younger the women, the more they were influenced by the content of TV dramas.

H.3 Pakistani dramas distinguish between good and bad women by co-relating them with rigid traditional gender roles.

By observing the data presented by the interviewees, all experts suggest that a good woman endures and conforms to the patriarchal customs and a bad woman is one who speaks her mind and is independent. The characteristics of both these tropes are dictated by conventional gender norms prevailing in society.

H.4 Pakistani dramas promote toxic masculinity

According to survey stats, a combined of 66.7% respondents expressed that they had often witnessed the glorification of toxic masculinity at display and the result coincides with the participants of the interviews. Most of the experts believed that the phenomenon was promoted on television whereby a man exhibiting these traits gets everything he wanted in the end, subconsciously sending a message that such antics will be rewarded. Some experts have also noted that there is a definite increase in toxic femininity as well.

8. Conclusion

The research gives a unique insight into understanding how abuse in Pakistani TV dramas is intermingled with romantic love, hence blurring the line between passionate and harmful relationships. It has produced reliable data backed by quantitative and qualitative angles on how stereotypes and narratives wielded by dramas have a significant impact on societal perceptions. They can perpetuate harmful behaviors and regressive gender norms. Furthermore, the depiction of vulnerable women on screen highlights the nuanced ways in which different age gaps within the viewership engage with the content. The study provides an intricate understanding by industry experts on narratives and storylines that are motivated by profits. Moreover, the ever-increasing depiction of hot-tempered men emphasizes the need for a more sensible approach to male character development. In the broader context, the study serves as a reminder of the power and ethical responsibility of creating content. The industry stakeholders should examine the narratives they promote and engage in constructive feedback with the audience.

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