GENDER BI-ANNUAL

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Editor's Note

We are delighted to bring the second issue of the SWGI Gender Bi-annual to you. As before, we feature a diverse range of voices from multiple fields of work. This issue brings a special focus on issues of gender inequality which affects the intimate, cultural and economic lives of women. Our contributors explore various facets of the discourse through their particular expertise.

Reading the pieces as they came in, I was struck by how the set of themes, issues and policy solutions are repeated across different contexts and remain consistent regardless of the disciplinary lens applied. This highlights that while the specifics of the challenges faced and addressed in working towards gender equality may vary depending on the setting, the broad strokes of how to achieve gender justice remain the same.

In Practitioner Voices, a development practitioner reflects on how settings of conflict and ensuing displacement increase the prevalence of child marriages. Another piece in the section examines the challenges surrounding access to justice for cases of gender-based violence. Academic Work features two contributors, with one discussing nuances of backlash against feminist gains; while the other looks at data from multiple countries on how education affects work opportunities available to women. In our Gender & Design section, the first piece discusses the power of advertising platforms in propelling gender equality themes; the second sheds light on the gendered nature and impact of digital technologies along with how gaps in technology design can be addressed. Finally, in Student Features our contributors consider the prevalence of child marriage in Pakistan.

We hope that you enjoy the issue and we look forward to receiving your pieces.

DR. HADIA MAJID
EDITOR
Lahore University of Management Sciences

STOLEN INNOCENCE
CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE MODERN WORLD

AMNEH SHAIKH-FAROOQUI

You sold me to an old man, father.
May God destroy your home, I was your daughter.

- from a compilation of anonymous Afghan folk poetry or landay collected by Eliza Griswold

According to the United Nations, Pakistan has the 6th highest number of girls married before the age of 18 in the world. Child marriage remains prevalent due to deeply entrenched cultural traditions, poverty, lack of awareness and access to education, and lack of or perceived lack of security for women and girls. It has also sustained, despite legal efforts in recent years, by gender norms that prioritize the role of girls as wives and mothers.

The situation is even more dire in countries ravaged by war and violent conflict, like in neighbouring Afghanistan. Here, shattered by extreme poverty and terrified for their daughters' personal and bodily safety amid conflict, displacement and migration, the drivers of child marriage in communities have only been strengthened and continue to negatively impact girls' wellbeing.

For many refugee families, displacement-specific challenges have exacerbated girls' vulnerability to child marriage. For others, especially when mothers are determined to break the cycle and find better opportunities for their children, some resistance to prevalent protection-heavy social norms is seen, leading to marriage postponement and higher levels of education among girls.

"When I was younger, I used to feel angry but I know my parents had no choice. They owed my

husband a lot of money and he demanded they cough up the cash or hand me over in marriage. I was 12, he was 69. He had a 25-year old son from a previous marriage - I became a mother to a man older than myself." – S, now 32 years old and a widow.

Exchange marriages, or *watta satta* as they are called in Pakistan, are alarmingly common in Afghanistan too. Young girls are married off to settle blood money, tribal disputes and property feuds.

"Do you know what a *churail* looks like?"

I laughed, because we'd been teasing each other about our love of long naps and pulao and wondering if that might have something to do with our weight gain. Like many long-suffering people, Afghan women have learned to use laughter as a survival skill.

"No! I didn't think they were real. Have you seen one?"

"I live with one! Come over one day and I will show you."

Her tone changes: "It's my husband - there can be no bigger *churail* than him."

R was married at 15 to a man who was 25 years old. She is determined that her daughters will not meet the same fate. This is often a source of conflict with her husband.

Most middle-aged refugee women I met were married between the ages of 12 and 15. They are not educated or their education was halted as soon as they got married. Multiple marriages are common.

The women speak of broken families when they are sent to Pakistan after marriage ("I

> ## " Exchange marriages, or watta satta as they are called in Pakistan, are alarmingly common in Afghanistan too. "

have not seen my mother and brother in 20 years. I don't even know if they are alive"). There is a clear sense of yearning for childhood. For loved ones lost. For the beauty of the mountains and the streams they knew. But they can't go back to the childhood they lost and the sense of country they yearn for. Conflict, poor living conditions, lack of opportunity and the desire to educate their children all keep them in Pakistan.

Yet, things are slowly beginning to change among the refugee groups. Many more girls are now being educated and marriage is being delayed. Poverty, displacement and unfulfilled dreams remain common themes in conversations but there is some hope too. Most women cite not being educated as their biggest regret and it is the younger girls' biggest aspiration. They want to be doctors and architects and change the world they live in.

The artwork above was based on one of a series of stories addressing agency, identity and representation from

the perspective of Afghan refugee women and girls. It was developed as part of a pilot economic empowerment project delivered in partnership with the UNHCR in Karachi, Pakistan. The artworks were based on the author's (and project lead) interaction and interviews with refugee women and girls and illustrated using images and stories collected from the field by the author. These were finalised with community input and then handworked by the women artisans themselves. The pieces unmask the lived experiences of a generation continuing to deal with the legacy of conflict and deprivation, where the capacity of traditional handworks to connect people with place, time, history and a sense of being is confirmed. The author acknowledges the inherent tension in the ownership of the piece – does it belong to the artisans that stitched it, the teams that supported the development of investigative narratives and livelihood opportunities via a social development initiative, the donor agency that financed the project or the illustrator who eventually captured the content as an image? But perhaps these conversations are too rooted in an immediate and narrow capitalist understanding of ownership of communal creative output. Perhaps the focus should be the role such works can play in building more empowered narratives such as a shared awareness and understanding that no child should be a bride, no child should become a mother and all girls deserve a chance to a full and happy life.

Amneh Shaikh-Farooqui is an activist and social entrepreneur whose work lies at the intersection of social justice, gender equality, sustainability, and fashion.

Image: https://www.instagram.com/art_zenith/

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

ALIYA KHAN

Access to justice comprises elements necessary to enable citizens to seek redress for their grievances,[1] including a legal framework that grants human rights, widespread legal awareness and literacy.[2] Availability of affordable legal assistance must be assured.[3] Dispute resolution must be timely, efficient, and impartial.[4] It is only through these elements that access to justice for women can truly be realized.

In Punjab, women face unique challenges due to cultural and social subordination. Limited access to education, awareness, opportunities for economic empowerment, and mobility

contribute to an inadequate access to justice.[5] In criminal justice matters, women's first point of entry into the system is the police, although experts contend that it should instead be a healthcare facility, to allow for timely medical examinations.[6] A lack of confidence in redress mechanisms set up by the government also limits reporting of cases and "efficient dispute resolution".[7] Data sourced from the Punjab Bar Council evidences that only 1 woman and 3 men were provided legal aid in 2020, depicting an abysmal state of institutional legal aid provision, a key element of access to justice.

Apathetic attitudes[8] and corruption within the Police, coupled with lengthy trials often discourage women from pursuing cases.[9] Evidence obtained from the Prosecution Department shows that convictions in cases of violence against women have overall remained low at 5 – 6% since 2016, while acquittals have been recorded at 95%. Low convictions present a serious problem for women's access to justice; one that demands adept solutions.

Outcome of Crimes Committed Against Women (2020)

6842   5553   1747

2018   2019   2020
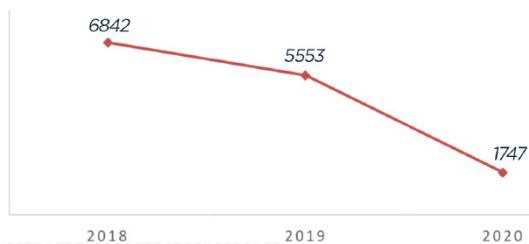
Source: Punjab Gender Parity Report 2019 & 2020

Outcome of Crimes Committed Against Women (2020)

Acquittals 95%
Convictions 5%
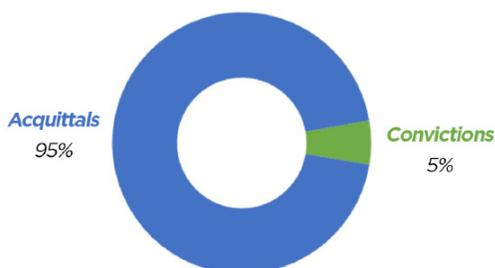
Source: Punjab Gender Parity Report 2019 & 2020

Furthermore, delays in adjudication, often caused by frequent adjournments, vacant seats in the judiciary and poor case management add to women's plight.[10] Survivors of gender based violence (GBV) are vulnerable to prejudicial and insensitive comments of Investigating Officers, medical staff at District Headquarter Hospitals (DHQs), lawyers, prosecutors and Judges,[11] thus exposing survivors to a fresh cycle of violence and contradicting the essence of "justice".[12] Although 4 women police stations exist in Punjab, these lack jurisdiction to function separate from main police stations. Medico-legal examinations are also rarely conducted for victims of sexual violence. Research also shows

Image: Shonagh Rae for https://www.nytimes.com/

unavailability of rape kits at some DHQs.[13] Out of Court settlements and financial compromises, frequently entered into even for non-compoundable sexual offences, also limit justice for women.[14] Although all 36 districts in Punjab have at least 1 shelter home for women, travel distance and limited mobility results in women starved for residential options if they choose to leave abusive homes. Furthermore, there exists no long-term rehabilitation or reintegration plan by the Government for women victims of violence.[15]

Setbacks in women's access to justice are also evident through primary data obtained by the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women. The 12 Government-managed SBB Human Rights Centers provided redress to only 1,747 women in 2020, attributable to partial closure of the SBBHRCs and limited redress facilities (such as shelter, legal aid, counseling and rehabilitation services) during the pandemic. Some positive developments, however, have shaped the way for better access to justice for women in the last few years. During 2020, the GBV Court in Lahore continued prosecuting cases of sexual violence. Punjab Police Helpline (15) was used extensively to report crimes committed against women; an increase of 107% was noted in the magnitude of calls received from 2019 to 2020. Punjab Women's Helpline (1043) provided legal guidance and advice to women regarding criminal, family law, human rights, employment, and inheritance matters. Following the same trend, data sourced from Punjab Women Protection Authority shows uninterrupted operation of the Violence against Women Center in Multan in 2020. Furthermore, presence of women's help desks and dedicated female staff for GBV cases in 230 police stations in

> " *Apathetic attitudes and corruption within the Police, coupled with lengthy trials often discourage women from pursuing cases.* "

the province by 2020 is a noteworthy milestone. Similarly, the number of police stations in Punjab have also been on the rise since 2018; data shows a total of 720 police stations across the province by 2020, compared with 715 in 2017, thus depicting an improvement in reporting mechanisms.

Another positive development for women's access to justice is the passage of the 2021 Anti-rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, which inter alia disallows the "two-finger test" in 2021. Furthermore, addition of more women in Punjab Police; more female prosecutors in the Punjab Public Prosecution Service; periodic gender sensitive training curricula for Judges and Prosecutors; construction of new Violence against Women Centers in Punjab; plans to inaugurate GBV Courts at district level; and active helplines for women's legal aid and information are welcome developments in Punjab. Loopholes in implementation of these valuable measures must, however be addressed immediately so as to ensure that women's access to justice improves across the province. To further strengthen access to justice, strategic plans and programs for judicial reform must be developed and service delivery improved. Apart from strengthening the judicial system, these measures are also crucial for achievement of SDG 16.[16]

Aliya Khan has over 10 years of experience working in the development sector on gender-related projects. She has been working with the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women and UNFPA since 2016.

1. (Marchiori, 2015)
2. (Martinez-Soliman, 2018)
3. (UNODC, 2013)
4. (Peace, United States Institute of)
5. (UNDP, 2005)
6. (Aurat Foundation, 2012)
7. Ibid.
8. (Ali, 2014)
9. (Rehman, 2014)
10. (Stiftung, 2016)
11. Salman Akram Raja versus The Government of Punjab, through Chief Secretary, Civil Secretariat, Lahore and others; 2013 SCMR 203
12. (Asif, 2018)
13. (ADB, 2021)
14. (Women Development Department, 2020)
15. (USAID, 2017)
16. Targets of SDG 16 can be accessed at http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/

Image: https://supwr.org/

UNDERSTANDING BACKLASH TO SUSTAIN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

SHANDANA KHAN MOHMAND

Women's struggles across the world have sought to redistribute power to achieve equality between women and men. Many of these have seen some real and hard-won successes. These gains have ranged from changing the discourse

> *A more subtle yet quite explicit form of backlash is the vilification and stigmatisation of women activists, and their words and actions.*

around feminist demands and the quest for equality, to changes in laws, policies, and implementation. They have also included changes in social norms that have shifted how different genders engage with each other, and enabled women to claim (or re-claim) more public space, both physical and virtual.

However, backlash against feminist gains is also now a visible phenomenon around the world[1], and especially in South Asia. Backlash is often a reaction against specific moments of gains by women – shifts in power have consequences[2][3] – or it may be more structural.[4] It may be a response to real changes in power dynamics between women and men, or it may even be a response to perceived changes, or even the threat of change. It is always, however, an attempt by men (and women) to re-assert and maintain patriarchal privileges and controls.

Backlash may be expressed in different ways and have various motivations (see this blog on how our various vocabularies for it in South Asia speak to the varieties of backlash). In its most extreme and recognisable form, backlash takes the form of violence or the threat of violence. This includes violent attacks on women's rights activists; intimate partner violence; making explicit threats of violence (including sexual) against those active in public spaces; intimidating women, and creating a sense of insecurity and unsafe public and private spaces for women. A non-violent but equally aggressive and

visible form of backlash is the passing of regressive laws and harmful administrative reforms that undermine women's struggles, restrict women's rights organisations and mobilisation strategies, and limit, if not outright reverse, progress towards equality. Laws that limit women's political participation or make it tokenistic; limit decision-making spaces for women or put decisions that are pertinent to them in the hands of men; and the creation of women-unfriendly official procedures are all forms of backlash that limit women's equal citizenship.

Part of the challenge of recognising and documenting backlash is that it is very often expressed in less obvious forms than these. A more subtle yet quite explicit form of backlash is the vilification and stigmatisation of women activists, and their words and actions. Their behaviour may be depicted as inappropriate, unacceptable, pushing the bounds of social norms – all aimed at creating discourse around the 'wrong' type of woman compared to an idealised 'good' type that upholds social and religious values. Struggles may also be delegitimised in the process, leading to a lack of recognition of the group or the issue as being relevant to larger society or 'other types' of women. In yet more subtle forms, the agendas of women's struggles may be co-opted, appropriated, and thus subverted by reactionary groups led by both men and women. Conservative groups may publicly support the same equality project as women

Image: https://supwr.org/

> *The programme is studying 16 struggles in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan.*

activists and their allies, but with 'tweaks' made to make the agendas more palatable to social contexts. This is usually targeted at maintaining rather than changing the status quo. Vilification, delegitimisation, and co-option can be particularly powerful forms of backlash because they seek to polarise public discourse on gender equality.

Together with types of backlash, it is also important to understand the reasons for such backlash against women's demands for equality. There is older literature that suggests that larger macro-economic, political, and social forces generate backlash against women's advances.[5][6] There is a need to update this literature to establish whether backlash has indeed intensified (or simply become more visible), and the particular current configurations of economic, political and social change that are producing it.

The variety and magnitude of current backlash can make the successes of feminist struggles look tenuous to both those inside and outside the struggles. It speaks to the very real contemporary challenge that women face of sustaining gains in the face of this backlash, and how they must collectivise and strategise

to not just sustain what they have gained, but to push it further and gain newer ground. Observing, documenting, and allying with women's struggles as they forge new paths in the face of backlash is an area of investigation that promises to help us understand what works in defending women's rights, and what does not.

The interplay between these factors – from success and gains; to backlash; to strategies to counter backlash – defines the framework for an ongoing ESRC-funded programme we call SuPWR (mostly because it is about superwomen, but more formally because it spells Sustaining Power for Women's Rights). The programme is studying 16 struggles in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Watch this space for more as we address one of the greatest challenges of all times – ensuring equality between women and men.

Shandana Khan Mohmand is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex, where she leads its Governance research cluster and the IDS Pakistan Hub. Her main area of research is inequality and inclusive politics.

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EVOLUTION OF
GENDER GAPS
IN EDUCATION AND WORK

Evidence from Two South Asian and Two Sub-Saharan African Economies

ANDY MCKAY

For a long time, females in many countries have suffered substantial disadvantages relative to males in education and work opportunities. The last thirty years have seen large investments to try to achieve universal primary education by 2015, associated with the Education for All Initiative and the Millennium Development Goals. While this goal was not realised, important progress was made, and school attendance by young people increased substantially. To what extent did this reduce gender gaps in educational attainment? And has it led to equal post education opportunities for both young women and young men?

This comment draws on a research project which analysed labour supply of young females in four countries, two in South Asia (Bangladesh and Pakistan) and two in sub-Saharan Africa (Ethiopia and Rwanda), working collaboratively with researchers from these countries (LUMS was the Pakistan research partner). Education is a critical factor shaping a young person's labour supply and available work opportunities. But another very important factor also shaping work and education opportunities for young people is the issue of family

formation (marriage and childbirth). These are choices young people often face simultaneously and each choice can affect the others.

We consider here the evolution of the gender gap in education attainment and how this relates to work and family formation outcomes. For this purpose, we use comparable data for the four countries collected by Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), not because it is the best source of labour data (it is not), but because it has data on each of these three aspects, is the same for all countries, can be compared over time, and it allows a specific focus on young people. We assess how these outcomes have evolved for young women and men between an earlier and later survey in each country, separated by between 16 and 27 years depending on the country. We focus on young people in the 20 to 29 year age range, by which time they should have completed school education.

Figure 1 reports gender disaggregated primary completion rates for these four countries in the earlier and later years. In all countries except Rwanda, more males than females had completed primary education in the year of the first survey (between 1990 and 2000 depending on the country). The gender gaps were larger in Ethiopia and Pakistan. The Figure shows that primary school completion rates for this age group have increased substantially in each country. The percentage of young females who now have finished at least their primary education more than doubled in three of the countries, and almost doubled in the fourth, Ethiopia. The increase in completion rates was greater for females than males in the Asian countries, reducing their gender gap, but this was not the case in the African countries. In the later year in Bangladesh more females than males had completed primary school. It is also striking from these figures that primary school completion is still

very far from universal in all of these countries.

Figure 1: Percentage of 20 to 29 year olds with primary education or above, by gender
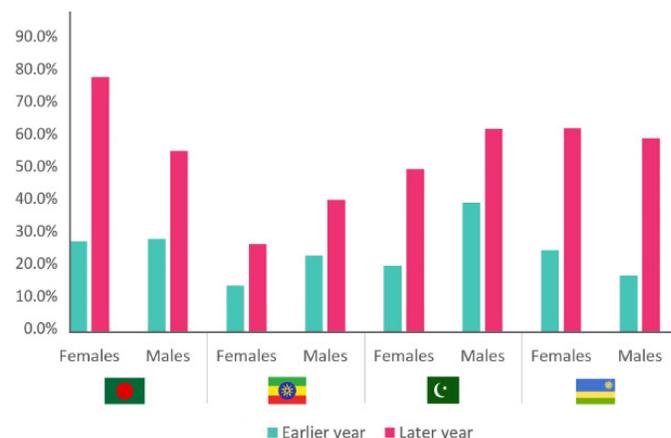
Fewer from this age group though have achieved education at secondary level or above, reflecting the policy emphasis on primary education; but there have also been substantial increases over this period (from a low base) and a narrowing of the gender gap. Again, the most successful country has been Bangladesh, where now many more females than males are educated at this level. There is also no gender differential in secondary education in Rwanda. But in Ethiopia and Pakistan, as at primary level, a significant gap remains in favour of males. In summary the gender gap is in favour of females in two of these countries but remains sizeable in favour of males in the other two.

Figure 2: Percentage of those working who are employed in better quality jobs (office jobs, sales, services)


Equally important though is what education enables young people to do afterwards, among which work is a very important consideration. In each of these countries almost all men worked in both the earlier and later surveys. The extent to which females in this age range worked varies by country but is always much lower than for males. The proportion of women able to work fell in all countries except Bangladesh, irrespective of their higher education

levels. There is evidence though in these same countries that more of those women who work undertake activities such as office jobs or jobs in sales and services (Figure 2), which may be considered better quality work and is probably enabled by their higher education attainments. However, it is very important to recognise that many with completed primary or some secondary education could not access these better quality jobs, the number of which expanded much more slowly than education levels. In Bangladesh the number of women working increased but the share of them doing better quality jobs fell.

Figure 3: Percentage of 20 to 29 year olds first cohabiting at less than 18 years
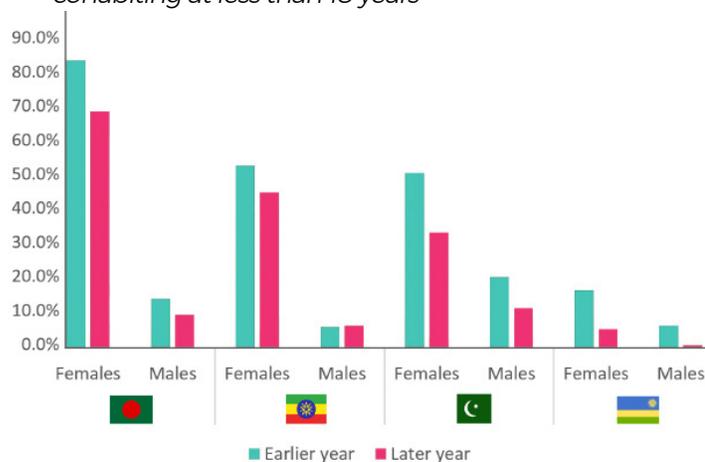
In relation to family formation, the data presented in Figure 3 shows very clearly large number of young women in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Pakistan entering into marriage or partnership before the age of 18 years, sometimes under parental influence. Though this has decreased over time, it remains substantial. Significant numbers also became mothers before they reached 18 years. Early marriage or childbirth is accompanied by the end of education in almost all cases, though the causality here is unclear. Some may leave school for many reasons including poverty, poor quality of schools, inadequate provision for girls, or a perception of limited work prospects. Others may marry or become pregnant at young ages and leave school as a result. Figure 3 shows there is a very strong gender dimensions to this: many fewer men entered into partnerships or

became parents before 18 years, meaning that many young women are forming partnerships and having children with older men. This earlier entry into family formation for young women substantially limits both their education and work opportunities; these constraints do not exist in the same way for males.

In summary the data shows that for these four diverse countries the past 20 to 25 years have been marked by important increases in levels of educational attainment and a consistent reduction of the gender gap. This has been an important achievement. But at least two countries considered here (and many others) are far from achieving gender parity. Some of those who have achieved higher levels of education, female and male, have often been able to access better quality work in three of the countries, but equally many of those who are now more educated have not been able to access such jobs. There are many more educated young people than there are good jobs. A very large part of the gender gap in work outcomes and also in education though reflects the much greater tendency for young women to form partnerships and have children at younger ages. Even if this has been decreasing over time, it remains very prevalent in three of the countries.

Reducing the gender gap in education, which has happened in all four countries, is only a small part of reducing wider gender gaps which continue to persist.

Appendix:
The data are derived from DHS surveys for the four countries and related to nationally representative samples of young women and men aged 20 to 29 years old at the time of the survey.
The survey years are as follows:
Bangladesh: 1993-4 and 2017-19
Ethiopia: 2000 and 2016
Pakistan: 1990-91 and 2017-18
Rwanda: 1992 and 2019-20

Andy McKay is Professor of Development Economics at the University of Sussex, UK. He researches on various development topics including questions of poverty and inequality, labour and gender.

TIME TO GET ANGRY

A FEMALE ADVERTISER'S PERSPECTIVE

HIRA MOHIBULLAH

Rage.

Irrepressible; almost palpable. A fiery place of inspiration for many of the world-acclaimed, gender-advocacy campaigns that have hailed from BBDO Pakistan. Where over the years, with our long-standing partnership with UN Women Pakistan, we've strived to build a better world for South Asian women through the power of act-vertising.

Rage without direction is destructive but learning to harness that blazing fury has been an illuminating journey.

One that began with finding myself at the onset of a very painful conversation back in 2016 with two other female creatives.

"Did you hear?! The Council of Islamic Ideology says it's okay for men to lightly beat their wives!!"

Now as advertisers, we often lead multiple lives, easily slipping into the shoes of consumers to extract real-world insights. But this experience was different. Because when it came to envisioning the life of a powerless, voiceless woman, who would keep facing domestic violence owing to an irresponsible proposal put forth by a government body- the vicarious pain, anguish and helplessness was too much to contain.

And in a fit of rage, that was more guiding than blinding, we decided to do something about it. The idea came to us in that conversation and unlike any other domestic violence campaigns ever created, we decided to showcase women asking men to beat them, but at things they were good at.

Then came the hurdle. All we had was the idea, and no money to put behind it. Contrary to how we typically carried out projects, we were short of the exorbitant advertising budgets that came with any given commercial campaign.

But what we learnt very quickly was that this wasn't any campaign, because it came packed with an intent that could move mountains and a binding vision that ultimately rallied the most powerful names in the industry together – from the director Jami to the cast: Meesha Shafi, Amina Sheikh, Sarwat Gilani, Naseem Hamid, Momina Mustehsan, Fiza Farhan, Samina Baig, Hajra Khan, and Noorena Shams – completely pro-bono!

We didn't know it at the time, but being able to launch the campaign grounded us with the reminder that our place of privilege gave us a certain responsibility. One that could restore some semblance of balance in the world, even if it were for just one person.

Over the years many such conversations began, and I found our old friend, Rage, rattling us into action. When the Senate body rejected an amendment to the child marriage act claiming it to be un-Islamic, we partnered with renowned designer Ali Xeeshan to make a statement against child marriages. As a showstopper at the country's biggest Bridal Couture Show, out walked a little girl wearing a school uniform embroidered with bridal motifs. The 'Bridal Uniform' was symbolic of the unfair trade-off that happens at the time of most such marriages, with a little girl's right to a childhood and to an education taken away from her. Again, without spending a

dime out of our own pockets, we piggy-backed on the media present at the show, making sure our message resounded loud and clear, not only through the country, but the entire world. A year later, the little girl became the face of a news report that announced the Senate's approval of the bill raising the minimum marriageable age to 18. She was also woven right into the social fabric of advocacy at the Aurat March, as a painted placard condemning child marriages. When a woman was

> ❝
> *Are we showcasing the diverse roles that women lead through our campaigns? Are we actively looking for opportunities to advocate for them?*
> ❞

killed because of unmet expectations around dowry, we called out dowry-demanding men by coining a new word for the act of demanding dowry: "Jahezkhori," (equivalent to an abusive phrase, loosely translated to "Dowry mongering"). Using one of the most recognized symbols of marriage in the country, we disseminated the message with hands decorated

in henna, held up to say, "Jahezkhori Band Karo" or "Stop Dowry mongering."

In this journey, we have found that while the female perspective has been paramount to the process, tantamount have been the male allies. They were equally invested in seeing a balanced world, collaboratively pushing the ideology and vision forward as one team.

From the above it is clear that the role of inclusion and gender-diversity within advertising is two-fold. The first component is internal; do we have enough women at the table to reinforce a positive female POV? And the second is external; are we using that POV to responsibly build a progressive representation of the female image in media?

With the perception-molding power that advertising and media hold, the important questions to ask ourselves remain: are we showcasing the diverse roles that women lead through our campaigns? Are we actively looking for opportunities to advocate for them? Most importantly though, are we riled, incensed, and enraged enough to trail-blaze a path to empowerment for women through our work?

In a world of shrinking attention-spans, the future of creativity will be built by waging war on mediocrity; and that's Hira's vision. Named as one of AdAge's 40 under 40 and #21 most awarded creative director by The Drum's World Creative Rankings in 2020, Hira Mohibullah currently works as Executive Creative Director at BBDO Pakistan, where she uses the power of advertising to impact social change in Pakistan.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

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MARYAM MUSTAFA

I moved back to Lahore 3 years ago after more than a decade of living abroad. The city had moved on, grown, evolved and I no longer recognized the streets, the trees or the neighberhoods. Unfazed I relied on Google Maps to help me re-learn the city of my birth, thanking the gods of technological innovation that allowed me to freely naviagate my

way independently through the maze that I felt Lahore had become. Until the night I needed to come home from a work event at an unknown hotel in a unrecognizable part of the city. I remember turning to Google Maps without much thought and without much thought following the directions which led me to narrow, back streets with little traffic, few residential homes, no street lighting and utter blackness. Given the city and country I now call home, I am grateful I made it home without incidence. Google Maps is not designed to provide you the 'safest' way home – only the most efficient. The shortest. Not the most well-lit. Not the most crowded. There are no options to say 'hey it's late, I would rather take the most well-lit, crowded path home'. Google Maps is not designed for or I would imagine with women. And this it turns out is the case with most technologies. Typically, these are designed for/with the average user in mind who is usually a white male in the Global North (literate, financialy stable, not from a vulnerable or marginalized population) – it is rarely a woman and almost never a woman in the Global South.

While digital technologies are increasingly being used in developing countries to enable economic growth, employment, and empowerment, there is growing agreement that the impact of these technologies in the Global South is not gender neutral but instead amplifies the existing gender inequalities within these countries.

Pakistan is a country where the total literacy rate is

> **"**
>
> *The women who are the intended beneficiaries of these technologies are disdainful of the simplicity, limitations and naivete of such applications.*
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> **"**

approximately 59 percent, with less than 47 percent of women being literate and more than 71 percent of men. It also ranks 151 out of 153 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index Report 2020 index published by the World Economic Forum. It is the worst performing country in the Gender Gap index in South Asia and according to the mobile gender gap report, women are 38 per cent less likely than men to own a mobile phone and 49 per cent less likely to use mobile internet (most low-income users do not have wifi). Pakistan is also a patriarchal context where women are restricted in their use of physical spaces- a country

where just the simple act of 'loitering' becomes a form of resistance. A 2009 study carried out by the Human Rights Watch estimated that approx. 10 – 20 % women have suffered some form of abuse. In reality this number is much higher – abuse in Pakistan is typically not reported. Another study by the United Nations found that 50% of married women have experienced sexual violence and 90% have been psychologically abused.

How do you begin to understand the design of technologies for/with women in this context? What would enabling technologies look like? And what would they enable?
Given the disparity in the literacy rate in Pakistan, access to technologies does not only refer to physical access to a device – it is a deeper problem requiring contexztualized design of technologies for populations that have specific constraints – like language, literacy and limited access to wifi.

Additionally, most if not all current smartphone technologies and interventions work from a very Western centric framework of privacy – so the assumption is one phone per person that they can use a phone lock on and that is physically only theirs to access. However, this is not the model of phone usage for much of the Global South and in particular for women in the Global South. Women in South Asian countries like Pakistan only have access to mobile phones and to the internet as shared resources - which means they have access to a male family members phone for a short time during the day. How then

> ❝ *Our participant was an older woman who ran a small home-based business, and she asked us what we thought Digital Financial Technologies could possibly do for her?* ❞

phone based services. The rationale is that having access to mobile wallets on your phone bypasses traditional constraints of mobility and documentation required to open bank accounts for women. However, in our work[1] on understanding the financial life cycles of micro-entrepreneur women in Pakistan and the potential for digital financial services we find women unwilling to use mobile wallets. One particular participant's response highlights the gaps in technology design. Our participant was an older woman who ran a small home-based business, and she asked us what we thought Digital Financial Technologies could possibly do for her? She was aware of digital financial services for managing money, but had never had enough disposable income to 'save' in the sense of 'putting it in an account and forgetting about it'. Putting it into a digital account did not enable her to pay her vendors, contribute to her rotating and savings credit association (her primary method for saving), help her save for her daughter's dowry or pay her child's school fee. And so her question was what did we think digital mobile accounts/financial services could possibly do for her? Another concern with exisitng digital financial technologies has been that of privacy. The women we worked with use informal hidden mechanisms for saving money and simply digitizing this without much thought to this context means making their savings transparent to male family members.

And so, while these digital technologies are pushed as the one stop solution to women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion, the women who are the intended beneficiaries of these technologies are disdainful of the simplicity, limitations and naivete of such applications.

In contrast, almost all women we have worked with are prolific Youtube users – mostly because it allows them to use voice search to find the things they want to see. One older woman whom we initially met relied on her daughter to search for the drama's she liked to watch. We met with her again 3 months after our initial conversation to find her daughter had taught her to use the voice search function Youtube provides to become self-sufficient in it's use. We find women are more than happy to learn the use of technologies, to carve out time to engage with applications when there is purposeful value added to these applications. When thought and care is extended in designing **with (not for)** women.

Maryam Mustafa is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Computer Science at Lahore University of Mangement Sciences. She works at the intersection of technology and gender and draws on qualitative and participatory methods to study and create tecnologies for underserved populations in the Global South.

do we design for privacy of applications like WhatsApp? In my work I find low-literate women to be prolific users of Whatsapp because it allows communication using voice messages. However it affords them no privacy as their husbands and their own contacts, chats and media are all on one applications.

Similarly, there has been a great deal of interest in recent years in deploying digital financial services to promote financial inclusion amongst women in the Global South through use of mobile money platforms and mobile-

1.   Mustafa, Maryam, et al. (2019) "Digital Financial Needs of Micro-entrepreneur Women in Pakistan: Is Mobile Money the Answer?." *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems.*

Image: www.girlsnotbrides.org

NIP THE 'JUVENILE' IN THE BUD

HOW CHILD MARRIAGES CRUSH THE MANY FACETS OF DEVELOPMENT

◆

RABIA SAEED
MINAHIL FATIMA

> " *The most cited reasons of early child marriages in the literature are: poverty and economic vulnerability, illiteracy, and gender inequality.* "

Pakistan's mainstream culture is heavily dictated by patriarchal norms and great emphasis is laid on the institution of marriage. It is very common for girls, particularly in their twenties to have unwarranted questions hurled at them. Comments of the sort: "When are you getting married?" "Your biological clock is ticking so you need to have kids soon!" are very common. Here, for a vast majority of women, their significance as a contributing member of society is oftentimes limited to their reproductive role. This cultural preference for marriage and children goes hand in hand with women, often underage girls, getting married at a younger age.

According to UNICEF, 3.3% of girls in Pakistan are married off under the age of 15 while 21% of girls married off are under the age of 18[1]. The most cited reasons of early child marriages in the literature[2] are: poverty and economic vulnerability, illiteracy, and gender inequality.

Yet, a major factor is the prevalence of patriarchal norms and customs like bride price, dowry, vani or swara (marrying minor girls to end tribal disputes or murder charges), watta-satta (a simultaneous, exchange marriage of brother-sister pair to another brother-sister pair). Here, the girl-child is considered a burden: lower emphasis is given to education and economic independence, and the parental responsibility focuses on marrying her off instead. The same mindset considers the purpose of marriage to bear more children with little regard to investment in the children's human capital and their emotional well-being. Hence, we keep seeing high prevalence of child marriages in countries like India, Brazil, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Pakistan[3].

It is worth noting how a phenomenon that stems out of poverty unfolds; and for the most part engenders even more poverty while going hand-in-hand with low women empowerment. Despite laws being passed,

implementation remains poor. The relevant legislation in Pakistan is Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929) which states the age of 18 for boys and 16 for girls to be eligible for marriage. However, variation exists across provinces. Furthermore, different legislation pieces in Pakistan define 'child' differently so there is no uniformity to begin with.

Girls who are married young often do not complete their education, leading to fewer job prospects in the future[4]. Poorer economic outcomes and lower financial independence in turn affects their role in decision-making at home. Early marriages also in general result in early pregnancies. Pregnancies among younger women generally tend to be complicated, and babies born to young mothers are often underweight further endangering the lives of mother and child[5]. Young mothers, still navigating their youth are pushed into a huge responsibility of raising a tiny, completely vulnerable human being – robbing both the mother and the child of their respective childhoods.

There is also evidence linking early marriages to poor mental health and abuse. Research shows that intimate partner violence is a common consequence of early child marriages: young girls aged 15-19 have had the highest reported cases of domestic violence i.e., 24.3% in the last 12 months[6].

In a counterfactual world; we'd like to explore how the development trajectory of these countries would have differed had it not been for girl-child marriages that likely severely destruct the productive potential of young girls, and hence a significant proportion of the population, by focusing largely on their reproductive roles. It's high time we let the 'juvenile' bloom instead of nipping it in the bud.

Rabia is an Economics graduate student who is keen about inclusive development and growth. She also cares about the climate crisis and is passionate about creating awareness for the same.

Minahil Fatima is an Econ-Math senior who takes an avid interest in analyzing economic discourses from a gendered perspective. In her free time, she enjoys painting and loves to cycle.

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