

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

JULY TO DECEMBER 2020

## WOMEN & CHILDREN



### Urban Resource Centre

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## Violence against women

Violence against women continues to grow in Pakistan. Despite the huge media focus on the crime against women of late, the illegal, unethical and unjustified practice is rather rising due to reasons like: the crime not being reported to the police in the first place for family honour or weak social status; the non-cooperation of the police, a flat denial in some cases, to register an FIR; low conviction rate, mainly because of poor police investigation and prosecution; etc.

Just last week, an outrageous incident of sexual abuse against a poor teenage girl happened in Rawalpindi. Reportedly, a group of drunken men stopped the 17-year-old who was returning home at night after performing maid service at a house, stripped off her clothes and posted the video clip online. The men are also accused of gang-raping the girl who says she is “helpless”, “does not have any support”, and is the “sole breadwinner” for her three orphaned brothers. The abused girl alleges that she had gone to the Banni police station but the police refused to file a report, and the accused too threatened her not to speak up.

The police did spring into action, but only when the video surfaced on social media, and they felt the pressure to act. Thus, according to the authorities in Rawalpindi, an FIR was registered against “intoxicated young men [who] stripped a 17-year-old girl naked and made a video” near Saidpuri Gate.

No wonder why Pakistan has, for years and years, been among the top five or six dangerous countries of the world for women, according to multiple surveys. Local media reports say that between 2011 and 2017, more than 51,241 cases of violence against women were reported in Pakistan, but the conviction rate is shamefully low. However, now is the time to make an example out of the “intoxicated young men” who abused a “helpless 17-year-old” so that such offenders are sent a strong signal that the state will not tolerate it anymore.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 10/08/2020)

## Brave women

CONVENTIONALLY women are referred to as weak and fickle. They are also dubbed as cowardly. But all these labels have been given by men in a patriarchal society. It is unfortunate that many women have internalised these qualities and thus reinforce the male perception. One has to be grateful for those fearless women — whose numbers are now growing — who continue to defy the stereotypical image to keep reminding society that women are inherently strong and resilient and are capable of meeting the most difficult of challenges they face.



Last week, we were reminded of this truth when Khairo Dero, a village in Sindh, experienced a harrowing incident. I feel a sense of belonging when it comes to Khairo Dero, and the news of the attack on Ramz Ali literally shook me. Ramz is the project manager of the Ali Hasan Mangi Memorial Trust that Naween Mangi has set up to

promote the development of this small and charming goth in district Larkana.

Ramz is the gentle and kind and honest-to-the-core soul who runs the various projects of the Trust with a firm and efficient hand. Ramz is also the father of my best friend in Khairo Dero, four-year-old Sitara.

Why should anyone want to harm a person like Ramz? One can only guess. It appears to be a case of exploitation of the poor by the robber barons who rule us. The alleged attackers, six in all, are believed to have had motives. They had been pressing Ramz to help them in building their house. The Trust helps in upgrading houses, providing solar panels, building toilets and running a medical facility and it manages a community school apart from being the sponsor of a TCF (The Citizens Foundation) school campus in the village. The alleged attackers are not indigent and do not qualify for assistance.

*After relief came a surge of pride for the women of Khairo Dero.*

The Trust is financed by donors and it spends its funds only on the poor and deserving. Ramz's integrity is impeccable and his shrewd assessment of people enables him to spend the Trust's money judiciously. That is how he has extended his programme to 80 neighbouring villages.

As is generally the case, the real culprit is apparently a wealthy and influential person who uses his position and clout to hire gunmen to pull the trigger. Ramz was lucky. The first attacker used an axe to strike Ramz. In the ensuing scuffle, the axe failed to hit its target. When the second attacker pulled out his gun he was stopped by members of the family. But the most heroic defence came from the women of Khairo Dero, a number of whom threw themselves at Ramz to form a human shield to cover him. Had the gunman tried to fire he would have had to kill a few women to reach his target.

When Naween told me about this I gasped with shock. After relief came a surge of pride for my sisters in Khairo Dero. As for Naween, I have always admired her for her courage and her love for her ancestral village and its development. She chose to give up a lucrative job to spend more time in Khairo Dero even in the sizzling heat of summer. She has now rushed to Khairo Dero to be with her kin in this trying hour.

But whenever we would discuss the needs of the people of Khairo Dero we have always fretted about the women. They seem to be an oppressed lot who need to show more guts and come forward to play their role as responsible members of society. Without them, Khairo Dero could never be a complete entity. True the women have cooperated in sending all children of the village to

school. Otherwise they tend to lead a segregated life. The Trust's consistent efforts to draw women into its staff succeeded in attracting only one woman — Mushkoora — to work for the Trust. She, however, left after a few years.

Will this horrendous incident bring about a change? It should. The women who sprang to protect Ramz Ali did so instinctively and without being asked to. It was something they did without thinking about it and it is this impulsiveness that gives rise to the hope that the time of change has arrived and the women of Khairo Dero will now recognise their inner strength. A small step was taken a decade ago when the first girl enrolled in school. Now some of these girls will be joining college in Larkana when the educational institutions reopen next month. There will be no stopping them thereafter.

It is not just the women who now matter. The men of Khairo Dero have also discovered their own strength. With great efforts, an FIR was registered with the police against the alleged attackers. Two were arrested and four went into hiding only to surrender four days later. The men of Khairo Dero are now learning how to fight for their own rights.

(By Zubeida Mustafa Dawn, 07, 28/08/2020)

### **Police to launch mobile app for women, children protection**

The Sindh police on Tuesday announced launching of a smartphone application and a web portal in an attempt to modernise policing for protection and security of vulnerable groups of society, especially women and children, and called for more efforts to stop human rights violations in the province.

The decision was made at a meeting chaired by Sindh Police IG Mushtaq Mahar who said that the smartphone app and web portal would be first made available for the Women Protection Cell of the Sindh police to prevent human rights' violations against women and minors.

A statement issued by the Central Police Office after the meeting said that training of the Women Protection Cell with regard to the new web portal and the app would begin next week.

The statement said the web portal would be launched as a pilot project.

It said the decision to launch the app was taken in a meeting held via video link with the Sindh police chief.

The participants in the meeting were informed that preparations of the web portal in this regard had been completed.

The meeting was attended by additional IGs of Karachi and Hyderabad, DIGs of Sukkur, Larkana, Shaheed Benazirabad, Hyderabad, Mirpurkhas, zonal DIGs, SSPs and SPs via video link.

Nuzhat Shireen, Anees Haroon, Haya Emaan, Robina Brohi, Aalia Shahid and Marvi Awan represented civil society.

#### **Eight motorcycle 'thieves' held by AVL**

Meanwhile, the Anti-Vehicle Lifting Cell (AVLC) of the Karachi police claimed to have arrested eight suspects during separate raids in different parts of the city.

The suspects arrested, according to an AVLC spokesperson, were involved in motorcycle thefts across the city and their arrests were made during separate raids in Lyari, SITE and Gulberg localities.

The AVLC police also claimed to have recovered five stolen motorcycles and a pistol from them.

He said that the suspects arrested were "habitual motorcycle thieves" and used to sell stolen motorcycles in parts to mechanics and scrap dealers.

The arrested persons included Aftab, son of Gulzar; Shahrukh, son of Hanif; Shahbaz, son of Kali; Faisal, son of Shafi; Ghulam Rasool, alias Bhola, son of Abdul Rasheed; Yasir, son of Nasir; Mehboob, alias Ali, son of Abdul Ghaffar; and Falak Sher, son of Abdul Qadir.

The motorcycles recovered from them had been stolen within the remit of the Nabi Bux, Brigade, Madina Colony and Azizabad police stations.

Legal proceedings and efforts for further arrests are under way.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 07/10/2020)

### **The forgotten children of Ratodero - Pakistan**

The Ratodero HIV outbreak shook the country last year but unfortunately our plight has been forgotten and we struggle to pick up the pieces of this huge blunder, parents of HIV-positive children from the dusty town of Ratodero, Larkana, said on the eve of World AIDS Day.

According to the Sindh AIDS Control Programme (SACP), as of Nov 30 some 42,533 individuals have been screened and 1,438 of them are found to be HIV positive, who were registered at the ART Centre in Ratodero.

Of these, 1,076 are children including 666 boys and 410 girls.



The SACP confirmed that 34 children and four adults from the Ratodero outbreak have died.

What started out as attention-grabbing headlines of 'HIV-positive doctor caught for spreading AIDS in Larkana' ended up as a sordid saga exposing a poor healthcare system and lack of accountability.

*Over 1,000 kids have been tested positive for HIV in and near the small town*

Talking to [Dawn](#), many parents shared harrowing accounts of social boycotts from family, friends and community.

"What has happened in Ratodero is a big mistake and no one has been held accountable. We thought the media attention would lead to some improvement but nothing has changed," said SNH, the father of a young girl, 'Baby E', who contracted HIV after being exposed to contaminated syringes.

It was the father's persistent use of social media that eventually led to Ratodero's HIV/AIDS outbreak being highlighted in the national and international media.

According to infectious diseases experts, it was poor infection control practices (ICP) — including reuse of syringes and unscreened blood — that led to the spread of HIV in Larkana district's general population.

### Rude awakening

"Last year, my daughter was ill. When a local doctor told me to get her checked for HIV I lost my temper but he persuaded me. My head was spinning when I saw her report," the father said. More shock awaited him as he realized there were hundreds of children with the same status.

"I thought my daughter would die, she was so weak. I spent 19 days in Karachi's Civil Hospital and later another 16 days at Aga Khan Hospital. That one month cost me Rs700,000," he said.

An educated, middle-class individual, the girl's father is a rarity among the Ratodero outbreak parents who understands what HIV/AIDS is and its lifelong impact.

The HIV epidemic in Larkana district is also not a new one. The first HIV case was reported there in 1995. Eight years later, in 2003, the city garnered attention when the first outbreak of HIV among injecting drug users (IDUs) was reported. Out of 175 IDUs, 17 were confirmed positive. In 2016, the outbreak in the haemodialysis unit of a public hospital in Larkana made headlines and the number of HIV-positive people in the district crossed the 1,200 mark.

SC said he was struggling since his son's positive status became known. "I am a daily wager. People from my tribe mistreat me and my family. The elders said we are dirty people."

He said he was able to get ARVs [antiretroviral] but does not have enough money to buy powdered milk and supplements, which will give strength to his son. "HIV has made things worse for me and family. I used to go to Larkana looking for odd jobs but work has dried up. People fear HIV more than coronavirus. Many won't allow me to stand near their door, let alone enter the house" he said. MJ, a young mother, shared similar views.

### 'I will sell my kidneys to feed my son'

"One of my sons tested HIV positive and it hurts me so much. My immediate family is supportive but others are not. Playing with other kids ends up becoming an issue as women bar their kids from playing with him," she said.

"We are struggling to make ends meet. We get good milk and food for him now but he is still weak. He is my son and I will sell my kidneys to feed him but my other children suffer as we try to make ends meet," she said.

Talking to [Dawn](#), Dr Imran Akbar Arbani, the doctor who suggested to the parents to get their sick children tested for HIV, said it's an ongoing struggle for the families. "Most parents are very poor and unable to understand what ails their child.

"There is a dire need for a rehabilitation programme. We do some relief work on our own but these children need something sustainable," he said, adding that poor infection control practices must be looked into.

Responding to [Dawn](#), the Sindh Healthcare Commission (SHCC) said the body was working on safe injection practices while it had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Medical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases Society of Pakistan for training of doctors and nurses across the province based on Sindh Service Delivery Standards.

"Since the outbreak we have been trying our best to raise awareness about quackery and safe disposal of hospital waste. We are asking clinics and hospitals not to throw used injections," said Dr Ahmed Raza Kazmi, SHCC's director clinical governance and training.

When asked about the status of the Rs1 billion endowment fund set up in the aftermath of the Ratodero outbreak, SACP additional director CDC-I for Enhanced HIV/AIDS Control Programme Dr Saqib Ali Shaikh said: "Mothers with HIV-positive children will be the

beneficiary of this fund. We have been working on the documentation of mothers, many of whom did not have CNICs. Initially, some 200 bank accounts will be opened up in December. Transfer of money to mothers will ensure the children benefit from this fund." Meanwhile, SNH and other parents said that the government must ensure that their children were not discriminated against. They must be provided educational opportunities while jobs should be given to parents, they added.

The parents also urged Prime Minister Imran Khan to ensure their kids receive 'HIV-positive health cards' and inclusion in Ehsaas programme. They further requested Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, who was elected as MNA from Ratodero, to ensure that the Rs1bn endowment fund was put to use.

(By Sumaira Jajja Dawn, 13, 01/12/2020)