

# NEWSCLIPPINGS

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## WOMEN & CHILDREN



### Urban Resource Centre

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### **Cases of women seeking khula jumped by over 700pc in 2020**

While the pandemic offered a rare opportunity for family reunions, the cases of separation filed in family courts jumped by over 700 per cent during 2020, it has emerged.

Around 5,891 cases of khula (separation) filed by females across the province over the last two years were pending trial before the family courts, the official statistics suggested.

The figures suggested an increase of up to 722pc in the cases filed by the female litigants seeking khula from their husbands over domestic issues during 2020 against the preceding year 2019.

The figures suggested that 632 family suits for khula were instituted across the province in 2019.

However, around 5,198 women approached the courts to seek dissolution of their marriage during 2020.

*'Unlike in dramas, real life is very different and difficult'*

Of them, over 4,050 were instituted in five districts of Karachi.

The statistics showed that around 435 family suits for khula were instituted in the courts of district Malir in 2019 compared to 387 in 2020.

In district West, 98 suits were filed in 2019 compared to 505 in 2020.

In district Central, 154 suits were filed in 2019 compared to 883 in 2020.

In district South, 46 suits were instituted in 2019 compared to 422 in 2020.

In district East, 259 suits were instituted in 2019 compared to 1,249 in 2020.

Islam takes distinction over other religions when it comes to women's rights, going as far as allowing a woman to seek divorce (khula) from her husband if he fails to fulfil his obligations.

The lawyers say one of the reasons why women approach the courts for separation from their husbands is that they fail to fulfil their obligations.

Most of the female litigants avoided talking to the media to explain the reasons for seeking separation from their husbands.

But Advocate Saima Qureshi, who specialises in family litigation, told Dawn that "in most of the cases the husbands fail to perform their social duties towards maintenance and well-being of their wives."

She added: "The second reason is that young girls dream of a luxurious life after marriage as they see in the glamorous television dramas and films. Real life is very different and difficult," she reasoned.

#### **Impact of pandemic**

Year 2020 proved to be hardest in decades, as the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic across the world largely affected the people both in the shape of an economic crisis as well as social behaviours.

The country-wide lockdown during the pandemic resulted in losses of the means of livelihood for hundreds of thousands of people, particularly from the uneducated low-income groups, leading to an increase in the figures of joblessness.

However, the pandemic also offered a rare opportunity for the people to stay indoors and spend time with the family, as the fears of spread of the coronavirus created panic in society.

This, Advocate Qureshi says, also resulted in rise in domestic issues.

"As the male members of the family lost their jobs and spent almost 24 hours at homes it definitely resulted in quarrels in the families since they were unable to make both ends meet," she added.

The lockdown also forced the people to adopt social distancing, which meant the families were compelled to stay indoors most of the time.

"I think, staying at home for the males also contributed to the incidents of domestic torture, thus leading the women to seek khula," the lawyer said.

(By Naeem Sahoutara Dawn, 13, 05/01/2021)

### SBP report

NEXT to the World Bank's forecast on economic expansion in Pakistan during the present fiscal year, the State Bank's growth projections in its flagship State of Pakistan's Economy report for the first quarter of FY2021 will appear far too optimistic. While the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects 2021 says Pakistan's economy will grow by a 0.5pc this fiscal, the SBP believes that it could expand by up to 2pc — in line with the target set by the government in its budget. The central bank has tried to temper its estimate by cautioning that the recovery faces downside risks owing to "intensification of the second wave of the pandemic". Still, it may appear to many as the SBP's desire to avoid stepping on the toes of the government, which is trying to sell the recent improvement in short-term economic trends to the people as a success of its policies.

The SBP bases its growth forecast on current economic data. The recovery in economic activities is evident across the agriculture, industry and services sectors, according to the report. To support its argument, the central bank underlines the change in business confidence as reflected by an increasing demand for subsidised long-term loans for new investments. Furthermore, it adds, external and fiscal sector indicators remain favourable, showing that an emerging recovery has been achieved while keeping macroeconomic stability intact. Indeed, when examined in isolation, current trends do exhibit a turnaround in economic activities. The problem with this report, like previous ones, is that it cleverly hides the negative trends.

The SBP, for example, speaks about external account stability and improvements in its reserves, but does not discuss the costs the economy is paying for maintaining a current account surplus. Likewise, the growth in large-scale manufacturing since the inception of the present fiscal is showcased in the report to underscore an economic upturn, but it fails to inform us that industrial output remains far below the level it had achieved in the previous government's final year. Also, LSM growth remains narrow, restricted mainly to the tobacco, pharmaceuticals and cement industries. The rise in the pharmaceutical industry is attributable to the increased demand for medicines and other products owing to the pandemic, while cement sales owe mainly to the generous construction package and amnesty given on illegal money invested in the real estate sector. Most importantly, the current 'economic revival' emphasises the failure of most of the IMF-mandated policies implemented by the government and SBP before the pandemic hit. This 'turnaround' owes much to the reversal of the harsh stabilisation policies that had brought the economy grinding to a halt long before the global health crisis forced countrywide lockdowns and business shutdowns. What happens when the suspended IMF programme is restored? Will the central bank still be as overly optimistic on the country's growth prospects? (By Editorial Dawn, 06, 07/01/2021)

### Women during the pandemic

ONE year ago, the world ran on different rules. The rhythm of day was different, the management of time was different, people behaved differently and were scared of different things. One custom of that bygone pre-pandemic world was the division of male and female work and space.



In Pakistan, where the number of females in the workforce is below 30 per cent, women mostly stayed at home and men went to work. When the men left in the morning, the women turned to the repetitive tasks of washing and cooking that make a household run efficiently.

All of this changed when the pandemic hit. Men began to stay at home either because they lost their job or because their employer wanted them to work from home. The small respite that their wives and mothers and sisters had during the day when men did not dominate and demand this or that was taken away from the women. As men stayed home day after day, they required waiting on, a cup of tea now, a meal prepared fresh not just for dinner but also for lunch. They dirtied dishes and created a mess.

Schools also closed and the children too made their own demands, their own messes, trapped as they were in the home. Pakistani women thus were caught in a 24/7 cycle of work, trying to sate appetites, calm tempers and maintain harmony in an uncertain and constrained world.

*The constant presence of men and the absence of any external outlet for women have created a pressure-cooker situation.*

Women everywhere are the primary casualties of the coronavirus pandemic, having had to pay the price whether or not they were infected with the virus. Data from around the world substantiates this truth. In China, peer-reviewed studies reveal a 300pc increase in violence against women. In Lebanon, there has been a 45pc increase in violence against women. In the United Kingdom, violence against women has doubled from the 10-year average. Similar increases in violence have also been reported in Germany and Tunisia. Next door in India, the onset of the pandemic has led to at least a 21pc increase in violence against women.

The statistics quoted here are all from peer-reviewed studies in journals. It is very likely that the situation is far worse than what is being reported. In Pakistan, social workers and those who work in shelters and in other facilities that attend to abused women, report an exponential increase. The constant presence of men and the absence of any external outlet for women have created a pressure-cooker situation.

In much of the country, women have to ask male permission to leave the home even for essential tasks; now going out and getting any kind of respite from violence has become completely impossible. Visits from family members and meeting others at family occasions (which used to function as a means to ensure that women were not being maltreated) have ceased, giving abusive men carte blanche to do whatever they want to the women at home.

The situation of working women is just as bad. Those who have been told to work from home find that no one in the household seems to understand that they have to attend to work duties during work hours. These women find themselves forced to watch children and also be available for Zoom calls or other work interactions. Many others, like the 250,000 American women who were let go of by their employers in January 2021, have just lost their jobs and their income. The pandemic has set them years behind their male counterparts in career advancement.

The meaning of all these statistics is that in the post-pandemic world women will be at an even greater disadvantage than they were before it started. Those Pakistani working women who have either been fired or have had to quit their jobs because of the pandemic may not be able to return to work after it is over. The ability to bring in an income plays a huge role in the power women wield in their households; the lost earning potential, therefore will reduce their ability to make decisions in the household and to protect their own rights. This resection of women from the workforce is likely to have society-wide effects where cultural mores that keep women out of the workplace will be strengthened.

None of these realities are being talked about in Pakistan. This past International Women's Day, a television channel hosted a conservative female social worker who could not stop talking about how the pandemic was a blessing in disguise because it permitted families to spend quality time with each other. Some in government have also propagated this kind of fantasy because very few, if any, efforts have been made to collect statistics about exactly how many women are being abused. Nor has there been any work done to provide additional resources to shelters and legal aid cells who are trying to help these women. Instead, the ludicrous fantasy that imagines families living together without any conflict and without women waiting on everyone else all the time, has been nursed and propagated.

Pakistan needs to wake up. The women of the country cannot be expected to shoulder all the burden of housekeeping, childcare, studies and work from home. Vaccinations are now available for the Covid-19 virus but no pre-emptive solution is present for a society and a world that has just been heaping the entire burden of a terrible and catastrophic event on its women. Men must be held answerable for the cruelty and selfishness they have exhibited this past year, attitudes that they have never questioned or considered. Absolute power corrupts absolutely, and indeed that is what has happened to many Pakistani males who stand and watch and live their lives, oblivious to the burdens and abuse they heap on Pakistani women.

(By Rafia Zakaria Dawn, 06, 31/03/2021)

### **Woman victim of 'harassment' commits suicide in Karachi**

A married woman "fed up with blackmailing, harassment and threats" committed suicide in a Shadman Town locality, officials said on Friday. Four of the six suspects nominated in the FIR of the incident have been taken into custody, sources told [Dawn](#).

Shahrah-i-Noorjehan police said that the 41-year-old woman ended her life by hanging herself from the ceiling fan with her dupatta on Wednesday.

The body was taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital to fulfil medico-legal formalities.

Area SHO Liaquat Hayat Mehsud said that on Thursday the family lodged an FIR and nominated six persons in the case. According to the FIR, the complainant, a brother of the deceased, claimed that his sister committed suicide because she was fed up with the "blackmailing, harassment and threats" of the nominated suspects.

He also presented three audio messages of his sister to this effect, which she had sent to her female friend.

The police have registered a case under Section 322 (Qatl-bis-sabab) and 34 (common intention) of the Pakistan Penal Code.

*Family says suspects were blackmailing the woman*

Gulberg SP Mohammed Azhar Khan Mughal said that one of the suspects had allegedly made an objectionable video of the victim and threatened her of putting the same on social media. The officer added that the police were investigating the case.

### **Man held for murder in Clifton**

Police on Friday arrested a suspect, Adam Khan alias Lala, for allegedly killing a Hindu man and wounding another after Holi ceremony in Clifton on March 29, said SSP South (Investigation), Imran Mirza.

Police said the probe revealed that the murder appeared to be outcome of some personal issue.

Deepak was shot dead while Vikas was wounded when they were returning from a Holi programme in Hindu Para of Clifton on the night of March 29.

Elaborating, the SSP added that the held suspect was interested in a Hindu girl who was recently engaged to Deepak. The suspect took this engagement as an issue of his "ego" and wanted the girl not to marry Deepak.

On day of the incident, Adam Khan was drunk and opened fire on Deepak with intention to kill him.

The police recovered the weapon and the motorbike used in the murder.  
(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 14, 10/04/2021)

### Child abuse report

Despite the enactment of new laws prescribing deterrent punishments to the perpetrators of child abuse, these heinous crimes have increased in the country. In 2019, at least 2,846 incidents had been reported, but in 2020 the figure rose to 2,949. The annual report 2021 by Sahil, an NGO engaged in the protection of children's rights, says that of the 2,949 victims, 1,510 were girls and 1,450 boys. On an average, eight children are subjected to sexual abuse daily in the country. The increase in the number of child abuse cases last year over the previous year indicates that the relevant laws have not been enforced in a strict manner. Had they been implemented properly, this would have acted as a deterrent and the number of cases would not have gone up.

The other notable aspect of the sad state of affairs is that of the total number of incidents taking place in 2020, a mere 2,587 were reported to the police. This can largely be attributed to the stigma attached to sexual abuse stemming from societal attitude. Victims and families tend to sweep these crimes under the carpet for it is generally observed that instead of giving a helping hand to the victims, society scandalises such incidents. Society, in most cases, wittingly increases problems of the sufferers in place of showing compassion. In order to bring about a positive change in the society's mindset on the issue, the government, civil society, the media, teachers and all quarters concerned should step up efforts in this regard, especially in view of the increasing incidence of child abuse.

There are certain signs that show that a child has experienced abuse. If parents and teachers are aware of this, it can greatly help reduce the evil. There is also the need to establish child safety cells. Existing laws, particularly the Zainab Alert Act, have helped in preventing child abuse. However, what is needed the most is to ensure implementation of the laws.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 25/04/2021)

### Corporal punishment continues to squander child rights

Curbing crimes against children has long remained an uphill battle for Sindh, where despite the existence of legal framework, right of child are routinely infringed upon in broad daylight. Regrettably and rather shamefully, the province's schools and seminaries continue to remain on the forefront of the violence.

Reports from various districts suggest that teachers at these institutions have been in the habit of punishing minor students by subjecting them to grossly inhumane and degrading treatments, which frequently lead to mental and physical harm.

The latest incident to cause alarm, is a video that went viral on social media, revealing a seminary cleric in Umerkot district berating and torturing three students, hardly between the ages of seven to eight years old. "Why are you people always late? I will murder you if you repeat the mistake once more," the cleric can be heard sniggering in the video, while thrashing the little boys like rag dolls.

Although distressing to watch, the viral video is just a droplet in the ocean of such cases and incidents that make news every day.

Noticing which, some four years ago, the Sindh Assembly had passed The Sindh Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Bill 2016, to protect children from violence in all types of educational institutions and childcare facilities.

In its details, the bill not only sought to outlaw the use of injurious force against children, but also all inhumane treatments and punishments that may lead to any kind of physical or mental distress for the student. In one of its clauses, the bill also paid particular emphasis on the protection of the child's right to be respected for his/her human dignity and physical integrity.

Yet however, where the landmark law may have appeared well rounded on paper, it has had little impact on the lives of Sindh's children, as it still lingers in uncertainty four years after.

According to National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC) Sindh Chapter Member Iqbal Ahmed Detho, the rules of the law have been drafted but have been waiting for final approval. "The law suggests major and minor punishments, ranging from withholding of promotion to dismissal from service, depending on the severity of the crime. In addition to that, it also mandates all educational institutions, be they private or government, to form child protection committees at local level to protect children from all forms of violence including corporal or any other punishment. The child protection committees are bound to investigate and take decision within fifteen days after the receipt of the complaint," informed Detho.

However, a copy of the provincial government's rules for the law, which is available with The Express Tribune, revealed that the child protection committees formed at the local level (after investigation) will refer the cases to District Education Officer for further investigation and action against the person who tortured the child.

"In case of severe case of child abuse, violence injury and exploitation, the committee shall immediately inform police or child protection authority and its concerned officials for immediate action," the rules said adding that the government will have to make arrangements for temporary protection service for safe accommodation of victims who appear to be in need of immediate protection. Furthermore, the rules also specified that all arrangements for such children suffering from any trauma, resulting from violence or abuse, will be the responsibility of child protection authority.

Howbeit, the Sindh Child Protection Authority Act that was passed in 2011 to form the Child Protection Authority, appears to have had little to no impact on the rights of children. "So far, there is hardly any committee formed on a district level to provide relief to the children," said a Sindh government official on conditions of anonymity.

On the other hand, the spokesperson to the provincial health minister while addressing the matter shared that the long awaited anti-corporal punishment bill is currently on the brink of finalisation. "We still take action against whoever registers the complaints or whenever there are media reports of such incidents. The Sindh education minister has been vigilant about this issue and has already conveyed authorities that corporal or other form of punishment will not be tolerated at school level," he told The Express Tribune.

(By Hafeez Tunio The Express Tribune, 05, 30/04/2021)