**Reparative reform**

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I recently saw a video clip of a student being brutally abused and beaten up by three other students for allegedly refusing to drink alcohol. In the video, the three female classmates sit on her face and body, hurling abuse and hitting her while laughing. A male voice is heard cheering on this horrendous act while he records this act of bullying. An FIR was lodged against the girls, but the local court has approved pre-arrest bail for the three girls.

Many shocking elements in this incident were disturbing. Firstly, despite knowing that youngsters commonly consume drugs and alcohol, it still makes me uneasy and concerned. Secondly, a female is culturally and inherently symbolised as gentle and nurturing and seeing them inflict such violence deeply disturbed me. Thirdly, I understand the power of emotions, predominantly anger and rage, that can drive people to commit regrettable acts, but the humour these girls found in doing this chilled me to my bones. The cold pathological way this act was committed with the element of exhibiting it and recording it with witnesses present qualifies it to another level of viciousness beyond simple bullying. This was cold and calculated, and the face of one of the girls, with the smile on her face, is unnerving as it pops up in my memory now and then.

[National Challenge Cup 2023: Five matches decided](https://www.nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2023/national-challenge-cup-2023-five-matches-decided)

It’s a terrible thing that has happened. I can imagine that countlessly such incidents are happening around in schools and colleges; not recorded, not reported, and unnoticed. Perhaps the fact that it was recorded is a good thing, as awareness about such incidents is one aspect of many that hold the key to changing the culture of bullying. It cannot be eradicated because I believe the capacity for violence and persecution exists in all of us. Some of us get lucky that we are raised in ways that nullify our persecutory potential. The incident is history and now comes the crucial part. How to deal with these young girls and help the victims of this act?

Unfortunately, in the times of the social media boom, where the advantage is that in a country like Pakistan, where the justice system is unjust, social media fills in the shoes by creating enough noise for some accountability to get activated. Of course, it comes with a caveat where the victims get no privacy and get exposed, and the trauma doesn’t get the chance soon enough to be healed and integrated. So how to deal with this situation? And, more importantly, with the stakeholders involved? Firstly, I pray that the victim’s family encourages her to seek therapy and supports her in this process. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of awareness of the dire need for therapy regarding such traumatic incidents. Secondly, schools need to take serious notice of the bullying culture and see the precipitating factors and how the school contributes to it. What are the rules and regulations, and how are they implemented? I firmly believe every school needs a school counsellor who offers space for students to seek counselling and has awareness campaigns on bullying, the use of drugs, and other issues that arise within an individual’s psychological development in these crucial years.

[PCB releases PSL 2023 anthem 'Sab Sitary Humaray'](https://www.nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2023/pcb-releases-psl-2023-anthem-sab-sitary-humaray)

Most importantly, what to do with the perpetrators? There is noise around arresting these young girls and granting them strict punishment. Had I not been a therapist, I might have joined others on this bandwagon and rooted for it.

But I now understand that punishment only leads to behavioural change for a limited time. Yes, there has to be accountability for these girls, but more importantly, it is to develop a model that offers them reformative measures. It is essential to understand and for them to understand what prompted such violent tendencies in them. What prompted this act? What’s the primary family like? Why these girls are so troubled is the question to be asked. It’s essential to get a mental state examination done. They need to be sent to therapy along with strict measures or steps taken to make them think about their actions, for example, community service. Imprisoning the youth will damage their physical and mental health, impede their educational future, and expose them to more abuse, and the cycle will continue.

[Nation stands with judiciary for protection of constitution, says Imran](https://www.nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2023/nation-stands-with-judiciary-for-protection-of-constitution-says-imran)

Let’s aim at facilitating reforms that will repair the perpetrators and the victims.