**Seize the power**

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Recently, an upcoming drama ‘Hadsa’ being aired on TV has come under fire for depicting the Lahore motorway incident where a mother was raped in front of her children in 2020. The horrific incident had gotten a lot of media attention and sparked protests countrywide at this heinous crime.
The distressed victim has now accused the private channel of being insensitive for creating a drama show based on her life. She contacted a journalist to help her get Hadsa off the air. According to the journalist, the victim of the horrific incident is badly triggered and re-traumatised and feels this drama will once again bring attention back to her and interfere with the process of moving on with her life and attempting to put this incident behind her.
People are supporting her and criticising the channel for commercialising her trauma for ratings and profit. Hadiqa Qiani, the main lead of this drama, clarified that the drama does not depict the motorway incident and that the rape incident is an unfortunate part of our society and that these difficult conversations need to take place.
I know that taking consent is valid if this was the depiction of the true story covering every angle and in this case, only the main event seems similar and that too has been disguised with some change in narrative perhaps to prevent the reaction that’s coming in now. However, after watching a few episodes of this drama, I could understand why the victim is feeling triggered as the narrative is quite similar to the motorway incident. It is understandable for the victim of this heinous crime who must have been trying hard to process the trauma and move on why this was traumatising once again.
Trauma and adversity create procedural memory in the brain and any small or insignificant thing can provoke it and can be emotionally daunting for the victim. On top of that, this drama rather than being progressive has certain aspects that enable victim blaming and shaming. For example; the rape victim in one scene states that ‘respect once lost cannot be recovered.’ Earlier there was a drama called Ruswai based on a similar subject and the title says it all.
This reinforces the shame in the victim and associates this physical act of abuse as a woman’s respect being lost; never to be attained again. This is why most victims of sexual acts remain silent, especially women, and rape is a very serious act. A woman feels her respect is associated with the loss of her virginity or an act of sex against her will. This mindset needs to change and we as women need to understand that our respect is about how we look at ourselves and our as human beings and not associated with sexuality or with how other men treat us. This is the power that men have been given over decades and unfortunately, it’s heavily ingrained in our systems and women are guilty of enabling this mindset as well.
Psychologically speaking, most victims experience shame because they internalise the shame that belongs to the abuser but unfortunately the victim unconsciously becomes a host for this debilitating sense of humiliation and guilt. Most victims who did not get to process the trauma continue to feel shame after the incident and for years at end.
More open conversations need to take place to create awareness and the media has to act more responsibly than they currently are. This is not the first time a drama has been made on this subject and rather than aiding to take the power away from the perpetrators; such dialogues and scripts continue to give power to those who inflict such acts.
We have to change the narratives about rape and where ideally the justice system should play a major role in preventing such crimes to take place, this is the role we can play by changing our lens of looking at acts of sexual violence. We have to work towards seizing the power and respect that belongs to the victim under all circumstances and society needs to reinforce this message.