The persecuted victim

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A week ago, I came across a video that went viral on social media. It showed the employee of a well-known local bank harassing and inappropriately touching a woman inside the bank. It’s believed that the woman was also employed at the bank.

As a woman I have experienced harassment myself. It ranges from being inappropriately touched to a man trying to pull me into a car in one of the posh commercial sectors of Islamabad. It includes being stared at, followed while driving or sent inappropriate messages time and again. Do I, a modern educated woman, feel harassed? Indeed, yes! Do I feel unsafe in those times? Yes! Am I vigilant with my guard up when I step out of the house? Yes, to that too for most of the time. Do I deserve to be thinking about my safety when I leave my home, to think about which hours of the day or night to choose when driving alone, to constantly block weird men on my phone? No!

It curbs my sense of freedom and more importantly, prevents me from being comfortable in my skin as a woman outside the safety of my home.

[Two soldiers martyred in South Waziristan](https://nation.com.pk/19-Nov-2020/two-soldiers-martyred-in)

Is there anything worse than the aforementioned? Are you wondering what it is? Well, what is worse is that after I take all the precautions trying to protect myself, I still get sexually harassed now and then. I still have to be the one to look away when a man refuses to lower his gaze. I also have to look towards other men to help me when someone tries to pull me into a car, with my heart beating fast trying to discriminate between the offender and protector. Which one should I call out for help and trust?

Again I ask. Is there anything worse than actually experiencing the harassment? Yes, there still is. And that is to be blamed for allowing that harassment to take place. For being shamed for not protesting loudly. To be judged for the silence assuming all kinds of ideas for what that silence meant.

I read comments of various men and women questioning the woman’s reaction to being groped. Why did she not turn around and slap him? Why didn’t she say anything? It seemed as if she was expecting it. It’s also assumed that she must be having an affair with the banker; thus the silent response.

[Danish study raises questions on efficacy of mask use against Covid-19](https://nation.com.pk/19-Nov-2020/danish-study-raises-questions-on-efficacy-of-mask-use-against-covid-19)

The callousness and heartlessness of these comments overwhelm me. Have these people never experienced the ‘freeze’ response to a threat? An incident like this shocks the body mind system. Yes, turning around and slapping is a possible response. But being pushed into a momentary coma is a very natural response. I know from experience what the body and mind freezing feels like. One wants to imagine that it didn’t happen to you. The persecutor’s shame gets ejected into you and you are trapped in the claws of that shame that unfortunately didn’t belong to you from the get go.

Child sexual abuse is extremely common in Pakistan. Much more than I had ever imagined it to be till I joined the field of mental health. Did anyone consider that the woman in the video might have been experiencing such abuse for a long time? That she was never supported and taught how to say no.

Another important factor to consider is that hypothetically speaking, even if the woman was having an affair with the bank manager and having intimate relations, that is no justification for him to publicly touch her. We all have complete rights on our bodies and it’s up to our choice and us as to when to say yes or no! What life choices a woman takes doesn’t give the green signal to men to harass them. Simply put, even a ‘fast and taizz larki’ according to some narrow-minded people, who project their own illicit thoughts and actions onto others, needs to be respected and given her physical and functional space in this world.

[AC directs authorities to present Shehbaz, Hamza in bullet proof cars](https://nation.com.pk/19-Nov-2020/ac-directs-authorities-to-present-shehbaz-hamza-in-bullet-proof-cars)

Let’s stop absolving the men of their wrongdoings by shaming the women for not holding the flag of piety and virtue high. Let’s make this world safe for all.