**A whole new world**

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August 12, 2021

I grew up with two brothers and in spite of being an only daughter, I wasn’t really raised in an overprotective manner. I was always a tomboy and to date, in spite of experiencing my share of being harassed by men and realising in different ways that I do exist in a male-dominated society, I wasn’t greatly affected by it. I never really felt unsafe whether it was walking at night or driving back home after dinner.

In these last two weeks, with one incident after another of violence against women, I no longer feel safe. I have stopped walking outside unless there is daylight and there are enough people around. I have stopped the long drives alone that I loved to unwind myself with. Islamabad is home and a city that always made me feel secure, but not anymore.

Being a therapist I did my initial assessment before taking in any new clients male or females, but honestly speaking after Noor Mukadam’s violent murder, I am mistrusting the men who want to seek therapy. What if there is a Zahir Jaffer amongst them? I no longer fight back to crude messages on my social media fearing how men will receive my protest and whether I will make someone angry enough to hurt me. I no longer feel safe in my city and it’s distressing to say the least.

[US cutting staff at Kabul Embassy to 'core diplomatic presence'](https://nation.com.pk/13-Aug-2021/us-cutting-staff-at-kabul-embassy-to-core-diplomatic-presence)

While there is safety in the external world for women, there is un-safety in relationships too and irresponsible statements like the one made by Sadaf Kanwal makes women more vulnerable and insecure.

In her newfound excitement of playing a ‘housewife’, she said something without realising what kind of impact it would have on men and women both. First, to say that a woman is not ‘mazloom’ (oppressed) and she is strong are both true. Women are oppressed here and there are countless stories of this oppression and the unfair gender discrimination that is rooted in our society. Saying that a woman is strong is a universal truth whether it’s the fact that child bearing is a testimony of physical strength or that a woman’s EQ (emotional quotient) is higher than a man’s.

But romanticising that strength and negating the oppression means you are making many women who are already in denial of their abusive relationships further doubt themselves and dismiss what they are going through. You are also encouraging misogynist men when you say ‘oh I should know more about my husband than he should know about me.’

[PM to inaugurate new 66 NADRA offices today](https://nation.com.pk/13-Aug-2021/pm-to-inaugurate-new-66-nadra-offices-today)

A society where gender equality is a fantasy, why would you make such a statement? Again, talking about feminism and Aurat March with disdain is unfair. Feminism or Aurat March is simply recognition of equal opportunities and rights for men and women. It is simply saying we are a human being first before we are men and women and feminism doesn’t mean that if the man is earning for the family, the wife being the homemaker should not cook or clean. It simply means that once the man comes back and the woman is done for the day, both should have an equal right to rest and do what they feel like doing. Sadaf’s statement takes away this equality and creates un-safety in intimate relationships.

This sense of un-safety for a woman is not only existing in relationships but also externally in the world for a woman, be it professionally or just being in a world where men find it their right to touch inappropriately when they feel like or send countless obscene texts because you have caught their fancy.

[Soldier martyred, terrorist killed in South Waziristan: ISPR](https://nation.com.pk/13-Aug-2021/soldier-martyred-terrorist-killed-in-south-waziristan-ispr)

The question is, what’s the way forward? As women, are we only going to tweet our protests or hold placards once a year at Aurat March? There have to be better options than that.

For starters, I have been seriously thinking of joining MMA classes to learn how to defend myself. I can imagine a few snickering when reading this but for me it’s a sense of empowerment if I can be physically stronger. I would also urge many women who read this, to get out of abusive relationships especially if they are not married yet. Don’t look at abuse in terms of ‘oh he only did it 3 or 4 times.’ If there is even a single event of violence, seek help and don’t take it lightly. Once married, it gets more tricky, so get out before that. Don’t go out alone at night unless you go in groups or take trusted males with you.

For a while, it is important to accept that we are not safe. Let’s be more aware of this reality and protect ourselves. Also as women with a voice, we must raise it with responsibility and understanding of how it would impact both genders. Jane Goodall said, ‘The small choices we make each day can lead to the kind of world that we all want for the future.”