**Is Violence Inherent or Ingrained?**

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July 27, 2021

Recently, the gruesome murder of Noor Mukkadam, daughter of a former ambassador of Pakistan, shook the whole country. No one in their wildest dreams could have expected reading about such a heart-wrenching incident, that too, in one of the poshest areas of Islamabad. However, a few days earlier, news had surfaced about Qurat-ul-Ain succumbing to death after being tortured at the hands of her husband. Before that, Muhammad Raza Ali had fired and killed his wife, Bushra, and seriously injured his children. Before this, there was the case of Usman Mirza. These are just a few of the episodes highlighted in the past few weeks. Many such cases have come forward over the past years, but recently, every new day comes with an even more horrible incident.

We need to ask ourselves where we are going wrong in our social and psychological development? What is giving rise to such chaos? Well, as a psychologist with research in personality studies, I find it essential to add my two cents. Such violent and perverse behaviour does not come simply from one angry fit. Many personality psychologists would agree that the roots of such behaviours lie deep within childhood. Research shows that numerous factors contribute to shaping such an aggressive and frustrating personality. These factors include persistent instances of aggressive or violent behaviour; being a victim of physical or sexual abuse; exposure to violence (whether domestic, in the community or through media); access to drugs or alcohol and exposure to firearms. Moreover, socioeconomic factors, like poverty and lack of education, also play a role in the development of anti-social tendencies.

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Analysing the situation in Pakistan, we come across some grim realities. According to the data collected by a local publication, around 22,000 cases of abuse were reported to the police in the past six years. The statistical reports obtained by White Ribbon Pakistan claimed that over 15000 cases of honour crimes and 1800 cases of domestic violence were registered between 2004 and 2016. And as suggested by media reports, cases of violence against women between January 2011 and June 2017 exceeded 51241. According to a 2018 UN report, there were around 7.6 million drug addicts in Pakistan. This rate was rising by another 40,000 every year. Pakistan is known to be one of the top consumers of porn regardless of the ongoing ban on such websites. Furthermore, based on a 2017 survey by the Small Arms Survey in Pakistan, an estimated 44 million firearms were owned by the public, of which only six million were registered. All this is in addition to moral policing and misogynistic interviews regularly propagated by various channels, state-level opposition to domestic violence bills and the support for gender-restrictive behaviours. Victim-blaming attitudes towards issues like harassment and abuse are also found to be rather prevalent.

The reason for discussing these statistics and risk factors is to help everyone understand that as a society, we have developed an environment, extremely conducive to the development of such sick and violent personalities. A child living in a household where he has complete access to firearms; is told women are usually at fault for the traumatic situations they go through; gets his mistakes justified; hears people talking how very few clothes or women getting out of home leads to abuse on TV; sees his parents stuck in abusive relationships, and is frequently beaten for little things, would and could never grow up with a healthy mind.

Even though we have created a horrendous mess, it is not too late to fix things. The current environment can be changed with the design and implementation of appropriate policies. The first best thing that the government needs to ensure is that these violent and abusive behaviours are punished without any justification. People with a history of violent behaviour should be kept under observation by the authorities. Furthermore, violent incitement towards particular groups of people or individuals on media should be banned as it propagates the acceptability of violence. As a part of long-term policies against such violent mindsets, there is a dire need to make education mandatory for everyone. Guidance counsellors and psychologists should be hired in all schools so that problematic behaviours can be dealt with as they start to appear. Teachers should also be trained to screen out problematic behaviours (intense anger, extreme irritability, extreme impulsiveness, bullying) so that they can be dealt with at the grassroots level before reaching a point where they require legal action. Strict action is also required to overcome the drug epidemic that is going on in Pakistani youth.

Whether you like to admit it, Pakistan is going through a crisis. The sooner we accept the gravity of the events taking place around us, the sooner we would be able to work towards a solution. I am sure that regardless of their political ideologies, no decent human would want to see more demons the likes of Zahir Jaffar, Umar Memon or Usman Mirza on our streets. No decent human would want to see another Qurat-ul-Ain or Noor Mukkadam brutally murdered. Our society is on its way to a moral decline and the only remedy rests in prompt justice, effective policies, and early intervention.

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