[**The rich boys**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1647734/the-rich-boys)

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IT is the nicest gig in town. Being a rich young man in urban Pakistan appears to be the very best situation to be born into. Pakistani society, particularly Pakistani public life, is made for men. Add wealth and means to it and you have constructed a life where you never have to say (or be) sorry and can buy anything you want. The rich boys of Islamabad or Karachi or Lahore roam the streets with their bevy of personal bodyguards, looking for the best party, the most fun crowd, the most beautiful girls, acting out the sort of entitlement that only the rich boys of Pakistan can have. Society enables these young men who have never heard ‘no’ for an answer; everyone from their servants to their own family panders to their every need, all the while enabling them in their toxic masculinity.

It is a surprise therefore to see one of these rich boys being held accountable for his alleged misdeeds. Every bit of the [trial of Zahir Jaffer](https://www.dawn.com/news/1637142), the rich boy accused of murdering Noor Mukaddam, will be watched keenly. Zahir Jaffer, the scion of the Jaffer family and its many millions, is accused of committing a heinous, gruesome crime and then calling his parents evidently to evade criminal charges. According to the prosecution, when the parents heard of the murder (they were not in Islamabad at the time) they did not call the police. Instead, they [allegedly asked](https://www.dawn.com/news/1643964) the staff of a rehabilitation centre called Therapy Works to go to their house and get the situation under control. When the staff arrived, the prosecution says, Zahir Jaffer attacked them while standing in a pool of Noor Mukaddam’s blood. Scores of people were supposedly present at the time, but it was ultimately a neighbour who called the police to tackle the situation. If he had not done so, it is very likely that this rich boy would have left the country and would never have had to account for his alleged crimes.

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Accountability is such an anomaly in these cases that one cannot help but wonder if, despite the evidence against him and if proven guilty, the due punishment will be awarded, especially when others among the privileged have escaped it. It is important to remember that he could have very nearly escaped. It is not hard to imagine an alternative scenario where the body as well as other evidence could have been hidden, and the suspect, who is an American citizen, flown to the US.

But even while one rich boy has been jailed for murder, many others roam free. One such case is reported to involve the domestic violence allegedly perpetrated by a scion of an influential Baloch family. According to Wishah Abubakar, she suffered at the hands of her former husband who she claims tortured her. She shared her ordeal via an Instagram video and also reportedly registered a case against him for uploading explicit videos and pictures on social media. There have been rumours of intimidatory tactics being used by Wishah’s husband, and there seems to have been little progress on that case; unless the authorities dig out and present the facts much will remain in the dark.

Given a culture where the privileged and wealthy easily escape the law, it is a wonder that one belonging to this category is being held accountable for his deeds.

These are just some examples that we know about. Such is the toxic masculinity of these rich boys that no one is safe from it. One instance I distinctly remember took place at a store that sells paan. A man was standing at the store purchasing some when a large SUV pulled up and stopped in front of the shop. In an instant, three armed guards emerged and went to the paan seller and told them what they wanted. The paan seller told them that it would take a minute to close another order and then he would tend to them. The rich boy at whose behest all this was being done was angered at having to wait even five seconds. At gunpoint, the guards forced the owner to complete their order first. The man had no option but to comply. The message was simple: the rich boys that go around with several armed guards do not take no for an answer from anyone, and making them wait even for the tiniest bit of time is tantamount to asking to be gunned down.

I recount this incident here because I want to highlight the attitude and the arrogance of this particular category of people, whose grotesque reality has been created by Pakistani society. Money and patriarchal norms make for a deadly combination and yet we as a culture do not make an effort to criticise and stigmatise those who fit the description. Money seduces and charms, and attention from those who have it can mask the relative powerlessness of lesser people. By the time the mask comes off and the true horror is revealed, they have already caught their prey who has two options: relent and bow to their wishes or die.

Noor Mukaddam’s case is important because it is probably the first time a rich boy, if convicted, might be forced to face the consequences of his criminal acts against a powerless victim. Naming, however, is the first step towards eliminating and understanding the ‘rich boy’ as a particular type. Armed guards, fancy cars, endless parades of servants, all mask a bewildering capacity for cruelty. In making ‘rich boy’ a derogatory term, society can rebel and begin to make wealth, arrogance and entitlement be seen as negative qualities that are worthy of derision. An ordinary person in Pakistan has very little recourse against the rich boys roaming the country, but society as a whole still has the power to condemn their hubris, their obstinate refusal to play by the rules. That is precisely what society must be made aware and what it should do.

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