**Crime or punishment?**

[**Maha Shafqat Khan**](https://www.nation.com.pk/reporter/maha-shafqat-khan)

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“Don’t come to the park at night” warned the perpetrator, who, in tandem with an accomplice, had just subjected a woman to rape at gunpoint under the open sky in F-9 park, Islamabad. Upon the revelation of this horrific crime, the public was quick to express their anger, but unfortunately, this was coupled with an unfortunate tendency to blame the victim. Many people, especially on Twitter, questioned the victim’s presence in the park at night with a male colleague, directing more criticism towards her for simply being in a public space during nighttime, rather than towards the individual who committed such a heinous crime. The concept that being in a public space at night with a male colleague is viewed as a greater wrongdoing than the atrocity of rape is a matter of grave concern, perpetuating a damaging societal norm that shifts the blame onto victims rather than perpetrators. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident. In the span of just one week, multiple cases of rape were reported across the country, including a bus driver and colleague who raped a bus hostess in Vehari, and a teenager who was kidnapped and gang-raped in Karachi. It is a sad reality that the blame is often placed on the victim rather than the perpetrator. The questions arise—what was she wearing? Why was she there? Who was she with?—rather than why did the attacker commit such a crime? How did they get away with it? Why did they act with such audacity and impunity? This raises a larger question—has the state failed to protect women if they cannot even be safe in the capital’s largest park or at their place of work? Instead of punishing perpetrators, why are women being told to restrict their movements and limit their presence in public spaces?

[AMAN-23 Exercise to pave way for more peaceful, secure region: PM](https://www.nation.com.pk/14-Feb-2023/aman-23-exercise-to-pave-way-for-more-peaceful-secure-region-pm)

Women are often viewed as mere sexual objects in societies where they are expected to remain concealed from the public eye. This paradoxical perspective is exemplified by the contrasting behaviour of men who, while abroad, are able to control their urges around foreign women in public places, but feel entitled to assault or police their own countrywomen. These same individuals may choose to shield their sisters from public view, yet stalk women they encounter in public places, perpetuating a dangerous cycle of violence. Despite anti-rape laws being in place, the state has failed to enforce them effectively. In the case of Zahir Jaffar, despite overwhelming evidence and a conviction from a lower court, the case has been pending in the high court for an extended period, proving the lack of speedy justice in the country. In recent years, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, further damaged the cause by making irresponsible statements and providing justifications for rape on national and international media. In the notorious motorway rape case, even the police chief engaged in victim blaming by questioning the woman’s presence outside at the time of the attack. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority’s decision to ban media coverage of the F-9 rape incident, citing concerns over the victim’s identity being leaked, only serves to shut down the conversation and ignore the underlying problem. Instead of asking women to stay indoors, it would be more logical to ask men to remain indoors, enabling women to move about freely and safely without the risk of sexual assault. In Pakistan, the mere act of going for a walk can be a dangerous endeavour for women, who face the constant threat of ogling, stalking, or rape. Despite the prevalence of rape in the country, less than 3% of perpetrators are convicted, leaving a vast majority of victims without justice. The low conviction rates and under-reported cases, due in part to fears of further assault from law enforcement or disgrace from one’s own family, paint a bleak picture for women’s safety. The country’s history of handling rape cases is also plagued by discrimination and unequal treatment. During the era of Zia ul-Haq, the crime of rape was moved from the Pakistan Penal Code to the Zina Ordinance 1979 under the Hudood Ordinance, which resulted in a more oppressive and unequal legal system for women. Despite subsequent amendments to the law, the challenges faced by rape survivors in seeking justice remain numerous. These include poor police investigation, insensitive treatment by law enforcement, insufficient collection and preservation of forensic evidence, pressure from the perpetrator to remain silent, prolonged court proceedings, and pervasive victim blaming by society. All of these factors contribute to a culture of impunity for rapists in Pakistan.

[Everything's nothing but play for Imran Khan, says Sharjeel Memon](https://www.nation.com.pk/14-Feb-2023/everything-s-nothing-but-play-for-imran-khan-says-sharjeel-memon)

The state has a responsibility to ensure the proper implementation of laws and the conduct of thorough investigations by the police. This includes providing witness protection, ensuring speedy trials and convictions, and educating the public on the importance of respecting women’s rights and safety. As a society, it is crucial to normalise women’s presence in public spaces and to educate our sons to view women as equals, rather than as objects of sexual desire or targets for control. We must also hold leaders accountable for their words and actions, and reject any rhetoric that excuses or minimises sexual violence. The frequency of crimes committed against women, whether it be for the sake of “honour” or simply for being in a public place, raises serious questions about the safety and autonomy of women in our society. It makes me ponder, whether all these incidents of violence against women are truly criminal acts, or simply a means of punishing them for simply existing in society?