[Zeeshan Salahuddin](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/zeeshan-salahuddin)

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**I, Not Robot**

I would like to think that I am a liberal individual, who does practical work in advancing women’s rights, and actively promotes women’s emancipation through my professional endeavors. Some of that may actually be true. But I am also aware of the fact that I catch myself using sexist language, giggling at misogynistic jokes, and benefiting from patriarchal structures.

I have probably (definitely) offended females with sexist comments, particularly in my 20s, and I have more than likely made some awkward, inappropriate, unsolicited comments. I am always trying to do better, but I am nowhere near what I need to be.

Yet, in my entire life, I don’t remember a single incident where I saw a woman clad in  [insert clothing below the moral police standards here] , and thought to myself, well: clearly she is looking to get violated, and now I must come up with a way to give her what she deserves. And as a man, I am deeply offended and frankly perturbed by the prime minister’s insinuation that I must be a robot to resist such vile temptations.

Tell me, Mr Prime Minister, what seven-year-old Zainab was wearing when she was ‘extensively raped, tortured, and strangled to death’ on her way to Quran class?

In the last 72 hours, I have been accused of being an ‘agent’, a Westernized man who promotes ‘fahaashi’, and a traitor for the simple fact that I have criticized the prime minister for his validation of the rape narrative that begins and ends with the painfully insidious “but what was she wearing/what was she doing there/why was she alone?”

Setting aside the argument that what a woman wears has no bearing on her chances of getting raped, there is a plethora of behavior that comes before this stark violation, which also needs significant political will to address, and massive social shift to change.

There is an endless stream of stories I hear weekly from female friends, where they were harassed by men for the simple crime of walking on the street. This has happened while they wore any conceivable item of clothing, at all hours, in all locations, including the liberal bubble of Islamabad. They have shared harrowing tales of vehicles slowing down to match walking speed, men catcalling and changing direction to follow, outright attempts to start a conversation which has an alarmingly high chance of being asked to step into their vehicle, and them inventing fake brothers, husbands, and fathers on the phone to escape awkward interrogations by drivers. This is not a seasonal thing. This is what Pakistani women face everywhere, all the time, relentlessly.

The two examples (Zainab and Motorway cases) above are often used by rape apologists as incidents where the perpetrators were brought to justice, as if it has some bearing on future incidents. So let us talk about some actual numbers.

Zainab and the Motorway incident are two high-profile cases. On average, there are 11 rape cases reported across the country daily, resulting in roughly 4,000 cases annually, and by one estimate, roughly 22,000 cases in the last six years (data from November 2020). Of these 22,000, convictions have happened in 77 cases. That is an average of 0.3 percent conviction rate in rape cases.

This also does not take into account all the cases that go unreported due to social and cultural stigmas, patriarchal ideals of ‘shame’ and ‘honoiur’, and fear of retribution, preventing women from coming forth.

The formula for deterrence in any society is a good mix between the possibility of getting caught gauged against the severity of the punishment. We have neither. Most rape cases are not reported, so the possibility of getting caught is already quite low. On top of that, a 0.3 percent conviction rate means that even if an arrest was made, it will not result in justice delivered. Finally, the severity may be there in high-profile cases (mostly death sentences), but given the conviction rate, the severity is a negligible factor.

The conversation has to move past the pedestrian arguments now, despite the fact that the sheer imbecility of the apologists demands these be reiterated. Some of the simpler arguments, that bear constant repetition, are as follows. No woman dresses in [insert clothing below the moral police standards here] to get raped. Men are not mindless monsters who will engage in rape at the slightest hint of flesh. Male predators target women, young men, and transgender persons alike.

As cisgender men, we should not feel attacked or ‘oppressed’, we should feel revolted and wrathful for the implication that we are not in control of our actions based on what someone else wears. Either that, or unplug ourselves.

The writer is as a senior research fellow at the Center for Research and Security Studies, Islamabad, and a freelance journalist.

Email: zeeshan.salahuddin@ gmail.com

Twitter: @zeesalahuddin