SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF ONLINE HARASSMENT ON FEMALE JOURNALISTS AND ACTIVISTS IN PAKISTAN

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"Thesis submitted to the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, for the partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Pakistan Studies".

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation submitted by MS.HUMAIRA MUNIR entitled:

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is accepted in this present form by National Institute of Pakistan Studies,

Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad for the Degree of Masters of Philosophy in Pakistan Studies.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original work. Every attempt is taken to identify where other people‟s contributions are involved, with appropriate references to the literature and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions. There has been no previous publication or presentation for any part of this thesis for any other degree or certificate. Dr. Ahsan Kamal of the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad has supervised the completion of this thesis.

Date: **Humaira Munir**

Dedicated to the challenges in my life that turned me into a warrior lady…..

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Abstract

How do female journalists and activists in Pakistan perceive, experience and cope up with online harassment? Any action that targets others with force or threats is considered harassment. The use of technology has brought a new era of communication and connectivity, but it has also brought new forms of harassment and violence. Journalists and activists use digital spaces to express their opinions and get harassed in the digital spaces in all over the world. Scholars have delved into the incidents of online harassment to female journalists and activists in Pakistan but those studies don"t shed light on the traumas faced by those victims caused by online harassment. The present study focuses on the traumas faced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan due to the harassment they face in digital environments during the course of their professional life. The study focuses on the feminism theory using a gendered lens to analyze the traumatic experiences resulting in the impacts on the psycho-social health of the victims. The study relies on the Primary and Secondary data. 10 Semi-structured open ended interviews were conducted to female journalists and activists of Pakistan who have faced online harassment on different social media primarily on Twitter. The findings draw attention to the widespread negative impacts of online harassment on mental health, safety and productivity of female journalists and activists in Pakistan. The study indicates a number of contributing factors responsible for the digital abuse and the ways to counter it. The study urges a comprehensive strategy to successfully combat online harassment, including legal reforms, media platforms vigilance, public awareness initiatives and support services.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Technology has given us a world in which almost anyone can publish a credible-looking Web page. Anyone with a computer or a cell phone can post in online forums. Anyone with a moderate amount of skill with Photoshop or other image manipulation software can distort reality. Special effects make even videos untrustworthy. We have a problem here. (Gillmor, 2004)

Any action that targets others with force or threats is considered harassment. Harassment is a constant global public health concern, and those who engage in it are at a significant risk of developing mental health issues (Srabstein & Leventhal, 2010). It is generally defined as intentional behavior to harm another person, repeatedly, and involving a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim (Olweus, 1999). Harassment that formerly only occurred offline or in person has now spread online due to the growth, development and wide use of digital communication systems (Musharraf, 2017). The use of technology has brought a new era of communication and connectivity, but it has also brought new forms of harassment and violence. Cyber harassment, also known as online harassment, is a growing concern globally. Online forums have developed into safe places for harassment. Harassment that involves the use of electronic media is known as online harassment. Email, instant messaging, text messages, and photographs viewed from a phone or computer are all common forms of harassment. Harassment comments and images may also be posted on websites, blogs, chat rooms, and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. Online harassment is another name for cyber bullying, especially when it includes adults.

The landscape of journalism and activism in Pakistan has seen significant changes in recent years as a result of the advancement of digital technology and widespread adoption of online platforms. This change brought up possibilities and problems for female journalists and activists that must be thoroughly examined. While giving them a strong platform to voice their thoughts, engage with audiences, and promote social change, the internet has also made them vulnerable to the risks of online abuse. Their work life has been disturbed by this prevalent problem, and it has resulted in significant socio-psychological consequences that extend beyond the digital sphere.

Through a socio-psychological lens, this study aims to explore the experiences of online harassment that Pakistani female journalists and activists have to deal with. Recognizing the wide-ranging consequences of online harassment, the study seeks to understand how it affects the mental health, emotional strength, and self-perception of these women who experience online abuse. The study will also give information on the possible societal consequences they may experience, such as career losses, social discrimination, and restrictions on their freedom of speech.

There are two main debates around which the thesis revolves. Firstly it intends to understand the socio-psychological impacts of online abuse on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. This entails exploring these people's mental health as well as the severe suffering that results from ongoing digital abuse. The study also looks at how such online harassment affect people's perceptions, sense of identity, and self-confidence, which can have an impact on their personal and professional life. In order to develop suitable support systems and strategies to successfully address the issue, it is essential to comprehend the seriousness of these impacts.

The second debate this study intends to delve is the understanding the coping strategies used by female journalists and activists to deal with online abuse. Coping mechanisms include a broad range of tactics, routines, and social networks that people turn to in order to deal with the psychological, emotional, and professional difficulties brought on by online harassment. In this context, the study explores the ways these strong women care for themselves despite difficulty, seek assistance from people and groups, and give priority to their privacy and security to safeguard them from additional damage.

Over the years, press freedom and human rights activism have faced major difficulties as a result of these continuous attempts to threaten, discredit, and negatively impact their work. Cyber harassment is a form of psychological violence that can have severe socio-psychological impacts on the victim. Journalists should not have to work in fear due to their job or gender. However, resistance to female journalists in male-dominated industries such as the news media is not a new phenomenon. Feminist media researchers from all around the world have long emphasized the issue of female journalists‟ safety, particularly the issue of harassment in the workplace and in public (Joseph, 2005; Ross, 2004).Physical assault and threats are common forms of harassment,

and some victims have been arrested or imprisoned on false allegations. Their right to privacy and freedom of expression may be restricted by governments and other strong entities through monitoring and spying methods. There have been examples of smear campaigns and defamation to damage their reputations, as well as media limitations and censorship to manage the flow of information.

Many of the techniques employed in online harassment are similar to those used in more conventional types of harassment. In the past, using offensive or threatening statements included using direct verbal insults. Harassment in online spaces typically takes the form of electronic communication (Hunter, 2011). The journalism process and news gathering have always been driven by technology. Audio, visual, and digital advancements over the past century have significantly altered how journalists approach and carry out their daily job (Lasorsa et al., 2011).The ability for journalists to produce, alter, and share material with others using very easy tools has really changed how journalism is practiced since the emergence of new media technology (Gambarato & Alzamora, 2018; Pavlik, 2001).Online forums have developed into safe places for harassment, with journalists and activists being frequently the targets of abuse, doxxing, and trolling. The phenomenon of online attacks against female journalists and other communicators – such as writers, bloggers, activists and academics – poses an emerging challenge to human rights, particularly to the realization of freedom of expression and gender equality (Parmar, 2016).

The situation of freedom of expression in Pakistan has been a source of worry in recent years. Pakistan ranks 150th out of 180 nations in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index, reflecting a dramatic deterioration in freedom of the press in recent years (Asfandiyar, 2013). In Pakistan, journalists and activists encounter a variety of problems, including threats of assault and harassment. Pakistan is a country where journalists and activists are fighting for their rights and freedom of expression. The country has a history of gender-based violence, and the internet is no exception to this. Female journalists and activists in Pakistan are vulnerable to online harassment, which can range from online trolling to severe forms of harassment, such as stalking and threats.

Digital media have become an important aspect of journalism. Journalists are using social media to find news sources, share news stories, and to engage with audiences (Koirala, 2020).The rise

of cyber harassment against female journalists and activists in Pakistan has become a major concern for human rights organizations, media houses, and the government. Major debates in the literature relate to the harassment incidents that the female journalists and activists face but this study specifically intends to view the experiences of online harassment by female journalists and activist in Pakistan through a socio-psychological perspective. This study will explore the various forms of cyber harassment faced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan, including online trolling, cyberstalking, doxxing, and threats. It will examine the frequency and severity of the harassment and the impact it has on their mental health, work, and personal lives. Another debate that this study intends to address is that of the coping strategies adopted by the female journalists and activists of Pakistan. This study suggests the strategies that other female journalists and activists can opt when it comes to their freedom in digital spaces.

The literature review chapter covers in detail the existing literature on the online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. It discusses in detail the ways in which gender inequalities and power imbalances contribute to the experiences of women in society. In the context of online harassment, it is found in the literature that the online harassment faced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan is rooted in patriarchal values and norms that seek to silence women's voices and limit their power and influence.

This study aims to investigate the traumatic experiences of online harassment faced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan through a socio-psychological perspective. Online harassment involves the harassment on social media like Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter etc. This research is based on the harassment experiences of the female journalists and activists in Pakistan primarily focusing on their experience on Twitter and other forums like Facebook and Youtube.

This study primarily focuses on the experiences of female journalists and activists in order to add to the body of knowledge already available on digital harassment in Pakistan. The study aims to broaden the comprehension of the complex effects of online harassment on these women's lives by using a socio-psychological perspective. In the end, the findings will not only increase awareness of the problem but also guide the creation of focused interventions and assistance programmes that mitigate the negative consequences of online harassment and provide a secure

online environment for female journalists and activists. The findings of this study will help to understand the socio-psychological impacts of cyber harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. It will also provide recommendations for the government, media houses, and civil society organizations to address the issue and protect the rights of female journalists and activists. This study is a significant step towards raising awareness about the traumas faced by the female journalists and activists of Pakistan in the form of cyber harassment and its impacts on their lives and freedom of expression in general.

1. Problem Statement

For female journalists and activists in Pakistan, the development of digital technologies and the widespread use of online platforms have presented both opportunities and challenges. They have been subjected to various forms of online harassment, but the internet has also given them a platform where they can express their opinions, connect with audiences, and advocate for social change. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of the online harassment of female journalists and activists and the traumas they face, through the socio-psychological perspective.

There are two main components to the problem statement. Recognizing that online harassment can have far-reaching effects beyond the digital realm, it first aims to investigate the socio-psychological effects. This incorporates looking at the mental prosperity, profound pain, and views of female journalists and activists who experience online harassment. Additionally, it addresses the potential social repercussions, such as professional setbacks, social stigmatization, and restricted expression.

Second, the focus of the problem statement is on comprehending the strategies that female activists and journalists use to combat online harassment. The strategies, practices, and support networks that people use to navigate and manage the psychological, emotional, and professional challenges posed by online harassment are referred to as coping mechanisms. This includes looking into ways to take care of oneself, getting help from friends and organizations, protecting one's privacy and security, and participating in activism or advocacy to solve the problem.

2. Research Questions

Online harassment has become a distressing reality for female journalists and activists in Pakistan, posing significant socio-psychological challenges. This study is an attempt to find the fact that how do female journalists and activists in Pakistan perceive, experience and cope up with online harassment?

This study will also try to answer the following supplementary questions that have not been raised in previous studies.

2.1 Supplementary Questions

1. What are the particular experiences of the online harassment faced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan?
2. How do the women journalists and activists perceive the nature, causal factors and sources of online harassment?

3. How do the women journalists and activists cope up with the harassment they face in digital spaces?

In first question, I have focused on the real life experiences of online harassment faced by prominent female journalists and activists in Pakistan. Second question focuses on the perceptions of the female journalists and activists in Pakistan regarding the harassment they face in digital spaces in terms of the nature, causal factors and sources behind those attacks. In third question I have focused on the strategies adopted by these female journalists and activists in Pakistan to combat the digital harassment.

3. Significance of the Study

After reviewing a whole lot of literature it has been noted that scholars have written about the online harassment incidents related to female journalists and activists of Pakistan but very little has been written which focuses on the traumas caused by this type of harassment.

This study holds significant importance for understanding and addressing the traumas faced by the female journalists and activists in the form of online harassment. By investigating the socio-

psychological impacts of online harassment and coping mechanisms utilized by these individuals, the study can provide valuable insights with far-reaching implications. Firstly, it can empower and support female journalists and activists by identifying effective strategies and support networks to mitigate the negative impacts of online harassment. This knowledge can contribute to enhancing their resilience, mental well-being, and professional growth, enabling them to continue their vital work in advocating for social change. Secondly, the study's findings can inform the development of policies, guidelines, and interventions aimed at combating online harassment. By understanding the specific challenges faced by these individuals, policymakers and organizations can implement targeted measures to protect their rights, ensure their safety, and promote their freedom of expression. Ultimately, the study's significance lies in its potential to foster a safer and more inclusive digital environment, promote gender equality, and contribute to the overall well-being and empowerment of female journalists and activists in Pakistan.

4. Methodology

Since I was trying to explore the socio-psychological impacts of online harassment to female journalists and activists of Pakistan, I have chosen a qualitative method (semi-structured interviews) to give my respondents enough space to give their responses through open ended questions and later note down their responses regarding the impacts of harassment on their social and mental life. I did not want to choose the quantitative method because I was exploring the socio-psychological impacts of harassment based on their experiences and their opinions which is difficult to quantify.

This qualitative research approach involved the collection of the primary data through semi-structured in-depth ten interviews. The respondents of my research involved famous journalists and activists of Pakistan whose opinions were recorded with the consent of the respondents. The sample was designed in a way to include equal number of the respondents from both categories.

The interviews were conducted both in-person and on zoom depending upon the busy schedules of the respondents.

Along with primary sources, the data collection for this research also includes the secondary sources too. The opinion and experiment based research data has been collected through open-

ended semi structured qualitative interviews using primary sources. The secondary research data has been collected using secondary sources such as books, news paper articles, reports in electronic media, research papers in journals, and documents from websites, etc. available on the topic.

5. Limitations of the Study

The following are the limitations of the proposed study. The proposed study may not be able to comprehensively capture all the socio-psychological impacts and coping strategies related to online harassment among female journalists and activists in Pakistan. The complex and multifaceted nature of the topic might require a more extensive and in-depth investigation, which may be beyond the scope of a single study.

A literature review is an essential component of any research since it determines the level of prior work done in the relevant field. However there has been very little research in my field of study. In addition, the sample size of my study could be viewed as a limitation.

Despite these limitations, the proposed study can still provide valuable insights into the perceptions, experiences, and coping strategies of female journalists and activists in Pakistan regarding online harassment, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the issue and informing future interventions and support mechanisms.

6. Organization of the Study

This research consists of five chapters. The first chapter is of „Introduction", which gives necessary background of what this study is about and why is it important? Furthermore, the significance, limitations, and organization of the study have also been discussed in the introduction of this chapter.

The second chapter compromises a „Theoretical Framework" and „Literature review". The theoretical insights include conceptualizing essential terms and interpretations of specific concepts. Moreover, a theoretical framework has been constructed to give a foundation that will support and guide the subsequent analysis by combining and evaluating relevant theoretical debates of the feminist theories in the literature.

There are three different types of debates around which the literature revolves. Firstly, the literature explores the major debates about the socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan, particularly cyber sexism. Scholars argue that cyber sexist abuse causes women to feel alienated and unsafe. In-depth research is needed to understand motivations, impact, and strategies to reduce online harassment. Addressing nuances and giving voice to women is crucial. Secondly, the literature discusses the role of social media platforms and technology companies in addressing online harassment. It calls for diversity in decision-making and accountability to create a safer online environment. Four stakeholders, including digital platforms, journalism, law, and universities, have the power to influence practices and contribute to cultural change. Thirdly, the literature explores the debates on Pakistan's cyber laws and their effectiveness in addressing online harassment. Challenges include a weak legal system and limited enforcement. Scholars recommend long-term follow-ups, safety training, legal support, and financial protections for journalists and activists. Collaboration between government, media organizations, and journalists' unions is crucial for safety measures and fair trials.

The third chapter includes the „Research Methodology". This chapter details the precise research technique and study design, including the research sample and method employed in the current study. This section also explains how the research data was collected using primary sources for collecting primary data and secondary sources for collecting secondary research data. In addition, this section includes a detailed field work plan and explains which type of data analysis approach was used to analyze the collected research data.

The fourth chapter is on „Data Analysis". This chapter includes the qualitative analysis of data collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews from female journalists and activists of Pakistan. The Qualitative Thematic method has been used to analyze empirical data to get an in-depth view. "Online Harassment" is the „Global Theme (GT)" in this study. Harassment experience, impact on work life, harassment on organization"s policies, impact on social life, impact on mental well-being, coping strategies are six „Organizing Themes (OT)". Fourteen other „Basic Themes (BT)" have also emerged in the empirical data analyzed in the fourth chapter.

The last chapter is based on the „Conclusion“ of the empirical findings as well as my analysis and contribution to the more significant debates on the literature of online harassment. It is divided into two sections, that is discussion and conclusion. The discussion section will elaborate and analyze the study findings, confirm or contradict an existing theory and explore the relevance and significance of my work. The conclusion section will address the main research question, summarize and reflect on the research and recommend future research on the topic.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The „Theoretical Framework" and „Literature Review" for this research have been developed and discussed in this chapter. The theoretical insights include the conceptualization of key terminology and interpretations of specific concepts. An overview of the cyber laws in Pakistan is included in this chapter to understand the history of cyber laws in Pakistan. Moreover, by combining and evaluating relevant theoretical debates on online harassment perceived via a feminism-centered perspective in the literature, a theoretical framework has been constructed to give a foundation that will support and guide the subsequent analysis. Major existing debates in literature regarding online harassment, socio-psychological impacts of online harassment on female journalists and activists and cyber laws in Pakistan have been explored in this chapter to understand the major debates in existing body of knowledge and to find out the research gap.

2.1. Conceptualizing online harassment in global spectrum

The rapid growth of information communication technologies has brought closer the citizens of the virtual world (Afsana, 2020). The aggressive harassment of women online is a topic that is receiving increasing attention from the media, academia, and the general public(Megarry,2014).Online harassment is a growing and alarming problem that involves the use of digital communication tools and platforms to engage in constant, unwelcome, and frequently hostile behavior towards specific people or groups. Because the internet and social media are so widely available and used, online harassment has grown to be a serious issue that affects individuals all over the world from all origins and across all geographical borders.

Online harassment is defined as "Harassment through the use of technology such as the Internet and cellular phones" (Fauman, 2008). Online harassment, which refers to the use of the internet to harass, intimidate, or degrade someone, is one of the most prevalent types of online harassment. To emotionally affect their victims, cyber bullies use a variety of strategies, such as sending unpleasant messages, spreading rumors, uploading humiliating information, or posting harsh comments. Cyber bullies are frequently empowered by the anonymity and distance offered

by the internet world, making it simpler for them to attack others without suffering any immediate consequences or accountability.

Another common type of internet abuse is stalking and harassment. The use of the Internet, email, or any electronic communication tool to intimidate, harass, or scare one or more victims to a criminal level is known as cyber stalking (Petrocelli 2005).This comprises sending frequent, unwelcome texts, emails, or remarks with the intent to disrupt someone's privacy, disturb them emotionally, or create a hostile environment. Online stalkers may follow their victims' online activity, keep checks on their personal information, or continuously poke into their private life. Such continuous and obsessive behavior can have serious psychological effects on those who suffer from it, including anxiety, fear, and a loss of sense of security.

Online harassment often involves hate speech and discrimination, which highlights the unpleasant aspects of the digital world. Any statement that mocks an individual or a group based on a characteristic such as race, color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, or another feature((Nockleby, 2000). When people or groups are targeted because of their color, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender, or other traits, online platforms may serve as an ideal platform for hate speech. Online information sharing is anonymous and simple, which could increase discriminatory behaviors or allow the quick spread of toxic views. Such platforms have potential to be extremely toxic and can help push certain individuals to the margins of the society.

Doxxing, another type of internet harassment, is when someone's private or personal information is shared publicly without that person's consent. It is a particular kind of online harassment and bullying which aims to terrify, harm, frighten, and threaten its targets(Garrick ,2022).Information like addresses, phone numbers, employment data, or financial records is included. Doxxing's main goals are to violate the victim's privacy, cause them emotional pain, and maybe expose them to offline danger like stalking, identity theft, or physical assault. For the victims of doxxing, the effects can be serious and long-lasting, frequently resulting in emotions of helplessness, fear, and a loss of control over their personal data.

Online harassment in the form of sexually explicit material, sometimes referred to as unlawful sexual content, may be extremely harmful. It entails the sharing or distribution of graphic or personal images or films of another person without that person's permission, sometimes with the intention of humiliating or controlling the victim. In addition to attacking the victim's privacy, this action puts them at risk of serious emotional suffering and possible harm to their personal and professional life.

The purposeful attempt to cause conflict and discomfort by conveying inflammatory, provocative, and scary statements to a particular target is known as trolling, which is increasingly recognized as an unethical online behavior(Buckels,2014).Online mobs and trolling are both types of abuse that occur often. Online trolls purposefully cause hostility and upset others, frequently picking on particular people or groups of people. They enjoy in causing confusion, propagating false information, and causing unrest in online communities. Trolls regularly coordinate their attacks, creating online armies that increase their effect and the pain that their victims face. Such attacks can have severe effects, including psychological suffering, harm to one's reputation, and even the suppression of targeted voices.

The effects of online harassment are extensive and harmful to the well-being of individuals as well as families. Anxiety, desperation, low self-esteem, and isolated social life are just a few of the unpleasant emotional and psychological impacts that victims usually feel. When people are exposed to online harassment on a regular basis, an unpleasant environment can develop that lowers trust and stop people from taking part in online discussions expressing their views, or freely interacting with others. The online harassment can have real effects on victims' personal relationships, possibilities for an institution or employment, and general quality of life.

To successfully address and avoid the problem, it is essential to understand the root causes and key aspects of online harassment. Since people may feel free from social norms and consequences while communicating online, anonymity plays a big part in how people behave when they are online. Because marginalized people may be more vulnerable to abuse, the digital gap, which can be defined by differences in access to technology and digital literacy, can contribute to the impact of online harassment. Social and cultural factors also affect how people

behave in digital spaces. Online harassment is made worse by gender and power dynamics, which often target women, minorities, and other marginalized groups.

2.2. Socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists of Pakistan

The word socio-psychological refers to something relating to, or involving a combination of social and psychological factors (Merriam, 2023). Online harassment of Pakistani female journalists and activists has a significant and deep socio-psychological impact. Female journalists and activists face particular and increased forms of online harassment since they are at risk of gender-based discrimination, professional difficulties, and digital risks. This has a significant effect on their well-being, job, and freedom of expression. I am going to dig into the psychological impacts, professional complications, social factors, and more general implications for public discussion and women's rights as I am going to explore the socio-psychological effects of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. There have been studies that describe the harassment incidents of female journalists and activists in the digital spaces but very little have been written about the traumas caused by those incidents. I am going to explore the narratives of the victim female journalists and activists who have faced the abuse, this makes my study unique in a way that others have described the incidents of online harassment from their own perspective but I have focused on the narratives of the victims which eventually shed light on the psycho-social impacts of the online harassment on the life of the female journalists and activists in Pakistan.

In the workplace and in public, harassment and discrimination against female journalists is a global problem. A significant concern to the participation of female journalists is the personal attacks made through online comments, threatening emails, and social media postings. Online sexism is becoming frequent for many female journalists, even in nations where the profession is generally secure (Adams, 2018). Online harassment targeted towards Pakistani female journalists and activists has a serious psychological effect. These people face a constant attack of insulting comments, threats, harassment, and character assassination, which usually target their gender, reputations, and private lives. Online harassment can have a psychological impact that increases anxiety, stress, sadness, and fear. They experience a continuous state of constant monitoring and

mental stress as a result of it, which destroy their feelings of safety and security both online and offline. The overall effect of online harassment can cause self-censorship, which restricts their capacity for free expression and participation in public discussion.

In Pakistan, the socio-psychological impacts of online harassment also have consequences for the careers of female activists and journalists. They risk having their professional reputation, openness, and potential for advancement affected by online harassment and smear campaigns. The harsh online environment may discourage female journalists from covering particular subjects or going for investigative reporting, which reduces the diversity of voices and viewpoints in the media landscape. Additionally, it widens the gender gap in journalism by making it more difficult for women to begin or advance in the industry owing to the higher dangers of being harassed online.

Online harassment promotes power disparities and gender-based discrimination that already exist in society. Threats of sexual assault, objectification, and sexist remarks are frequently used for female journalists and activists. This is a reflection of deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs and an effort to frighten and silence women who question societal norms or promote gender equality. The internet turns into a struggle for maintaining gender inequality and improving societal control over the words and bodies of women. As a result, there is a hostile environment that limits women's involvement and representation in public discourse, which has an effect on the quality of democratic participation as a whole and the realization of women's rights.

The effects of online harassment on Pakistani female journalists and activists go beyond the level of the individual and have an influence on the larger environment of free speech. Online harassment has the effect of suppressing not just individual voices, but also the diversity of viewpoints and the capacity of the media and civil society to hold the privileged answerable. When female journalists and activists are targeted, it sends a terrifying message to others who might worry about similar consequences, which can result in self-censorship and a restriction of the public sphere. This weakens the foundational values of a strong democracy and obstructs the advancement of human rights and gender equality.

2.3. CYBER LAWS IN PAKISTAN

Cyber laws have significantly changed since the introduction of the internet in Pakistan in order to keep up with the rapid speed of technological development and address new issues in the digital world. As legislators struggled to understand the possible effects of this new technology, there was little regulation into effect during the early years of the internet's development in the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, as internet usage increased and cybercrime increased, it became clear that comprehensive laws were required.

The term "cyber law" refers to a type of legislation that is meant to regulate crimes committed online, in cyberspace, or by the use of digital resources. Until now Pakistan has passed the following cyber laws.

2.3.1. The Telegraph Act, 1885

Despite the fact that current technology has made this Act ineffective, it is still in place to increase the ability of the federal and provincial governments to interfere in the public rights to privacy. Unlimited powers are used by the government in the name of the public good without the involvement of the courts. In the event of a public emergency or for the protection of the public, the government may seize the telegraph. However, according to The Telegraph Act of 1885, there is also some punishment if someone unlawfully enters telegraph offices and tampers with telegraph messages.

2.3.2. Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organization) Act, 1996

According to this Act, any illegal telecommunications-related activity must be reported to the court by the Telecommunication Authority or Frequency Allocation Board. According to the Pakistan Telecommunication Act of 1996, the court has the authority to issue a warrant for a search of any location where criminal activity is taking place, as well as to seize any equipment being used in crimes or to conduct investigations in this field.

2.3.3. National I.T.Policy and Action Plan, 2000

In 2000, the Pakistani government adopted its IT policy. This policy aimed to pass legislation that addressed cybercrimes. After reviewing the UNCITRAL Model Laws and the laws of several common law and civil law nations, this approach was adopted. The "International Consensus Principals on Electronic Authentication" created by the Internet Law and Policy Forum were judged appropriate to be followed in the creation of this policy while taking into consideration the strategies used by other nations (Mushtaque et al., 2015).IT policies and action plans are created to increase individual data security and safeguard the E-commerce process (National IT Policy, 2000).The instrument is a significant step towards securing the internet.

2.3.4. Electronic Transaction Ordinance, 2002

The adoption of the Electronic Transactions Ordinance in 2002, which gave digital signatures and electronic transactions legal status and legitimacy, was a significant first step in the development of cyber laws. This measure was taken in an effort to advance online shopping and provide foundations for safe online purchases.

2.3.5. Electronic Crimes Act, 2004

According to the guidelines of the 2002 Electronic Transactions Ordinance, this Act was passed with the help of the ministry of information technology. The many offences relating to cyberspace were defined as cybercrimes under this Act. This Act (Electronic Crimes Act, 2004) addressed cybercrimes such as unauthorized access, criminal data access, data loss, system damage, electronic fraud, electronic forgery, misuse of devices, misuse of encryption, malicious code, cyber stalking, spamming, spoofing, unauthorized interception, and cyber terrorism. As a result, this Act did not have a body for enforcement. Apart from that, the activities that were made publishable by this Act that were also poorly defined. The descriptions of crimes were far too unclear to be understood.

2.3.6. Cyber Security Council Bill, 2014

A senator named Mushahid Hussain Syed presented this bill to the senate on April 14, 2014 (Mushtaque et al., 2015). In this bill, it was proposed to establish a council to address local and international cyber security challenges and to create a 10 to 20 year vision for cyber security along with laws and recommendations. As a result, the government has not yet passed the Cyber Security Council Bill of 2014.

2.3.7. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, (PECA) 2016

In the years that followed, the government saw the necessity of addressing cybercrimes and enhancing cyber security. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) was created as a result in 2016. By adding broad measures to address online harassment, hacking, cyber terrorism, and other online offences, PECA represented a turning point in Pakistan's legal framework for the internet. It also sought to defend crucial infrastructure from online threats. The National Assembly adopted the bill for this Act in April 2015, and the Senate voted on it in August 2017. After the terrorist attack on the Peshawar school, this Act was passed. It was incorporated into the Pakistani government's national action plan to combat terrorism within the country. The Act defines a number of new cybercrimes, including cyber stalking, cyber spoofing, phishing, cyber harassment, illegal access to an information system or device, illegal access to information or data, illegal interference with information or data, illegal interference with an information system, cyber terrorism, blasphemy, and cyber fabrication. However, the Act's language is not easy to understand and clear.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (2016) requires more specific language to protect privacy and freedom of expression. The act outlines the consequences of using someone else's identity for fraud, deceit, or falsehood, as well as unlawful interception and hacking of data. Law enforcement agencies may intercept information for national security purposes, and the court may issue warrants for investigation officers to share data within seven days. Service providers may retain data for a minimum of one year, while the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority

can block access to certain information. The Act also authorizes the federal government to share data with foreign intelligence agencies without court intervention.

However, no internal human rights document is highlighted to support these provisions. The Act protects individuals and the state, protecting individuals against crimes like identity or data theft. Women are protected, but the Act is not sufficient to secure individual privacy, and no commission is established to safeguard data and information protection (Zahoor, 2020).

The rise of social media and online forums presented additional difficulties for the government in protecting digital rights and online freedom of speech. As a result, the courts have been very important in helping understand and clarify cyber laws in order to protect people's rights while also balancing national security concerns. Numerous significant decisions concerning cyber laws have been made by the Pakistani Supreme Court, setting important legal trends.

The protection of data privacy is also proving to be a critical problem in the digital era. Pakistan has drawn inspiration from international data protection frameworks like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union in this respect. To secure people's personal information and control how organizations gather, handle, and store data, efforts have been made to develop effective privacy laws.

Additionally, the administration has acknowledged the importance of cyber security as a top concern for the country. To increase overall cyber security, joint efforts have been made to increase awareness of cyber threats, conduct cyber security training, and establish public-private partnerships.

2.4. Theoretical Insights

The proposed study draws theoretical insights from larger debates on online harassment perceived via a feminism-centered perspective, the literature cited below offers insightful theoretical information that sheds light on the common problem of online harassment, discrimination based on and gender-based violence. The book "Haters" by Baily Poland digs into the issue of internet abuse and examines the gendered dynamics at work. Poland examines how sexism is reproduced and increased in online spaces from an intersectional feminist viewpoint, underlining the necessity for a feminist framework to address this problem.

The severe spread of misogyny through internet platforms is examined in the book "Gender Trolling: How Misogyny Went Viral" by Karla Mantilla. Mantilla explains how gender trolling is firmly embedded in structural injustices and power structures rather than just being the result of individual behaviors by analyzing a number of case studies. According to this feminist viewpoint, it is important to recognize that online harassment is a symptom of larger patriarchal systems and practices.

An article by Zoya Rehman titled "Online feminist resistance in Pakistan" illustrates the tenacity and fight of women when confronted with online abuse. It highlights the value of feminist activity in opposing patriarchal standards and taking back online places. Rehman's study adds to the greater feminist conversation by shedding light on the manner in which women are navigating and combating online sexism.

The articles by Sadia Jamil, "Safety Threats Impunity and Professionalism: Journalists' Dilemma in Pakistan" and "Culture of Impunity and Safety of Journalists: Is Safe Journalism a distant Dream in Pakistan?" investigate the relationship between internet harassment, gender, and journalism. Jamil emphasizes the difficulties experienced by female journalists, such as sexual harassment, threats, and discrimination, via a feminist viewpoint. These stories highlight the gender-based power structures in the media and the urgent need to provide safe places for female journalists.

In addition, "Hate Crimes in Cyber Space" by Danielle Keats Citron presents a feminist viewpoint on the ethical and political ramifications of online harassment. Citron argues for legislative changes to protect victims and emphasizes the need of identifying online gender bias as a type of hate crime. This feminist study draws attention to the gendered aspects of online harassment and the pressing need for comprehensive solutions to the problem.

Overall, the theoretical revelations drawn from above body of knowledge highlight the significance of feminism in comprehending and combating online abuse. It demonstrates how gender-based violence, bias, and discrimination may be sustained and increased in online spaces. These works contribute to a feminist discourse that aims to build inclusive and secure digital environments for everyone by exploring the interconnections of gender, power, and technology.

Drawing upon the above theoretical debates, I am of the view that my research is specifically focusing on the socio-psychological aspects of online harassment. The existing literature provides insights into the types of online harassment, the challenges faced by women and the role of social media platforms, but there is limited exploration of the socio-psychological effects on the individuals targeted. Understanding the emotional well-being, mental health consequences, and coping mechanisms employed by female journalists and activists subjected to online harassment is crucial for developing effective support systems and interventions.

Feminist theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. This theoretical lens recognizes the gendered power dynamics that shape their experiences and seeks to analyze and challenge the underlying structures of patriarchy and gender inequality.

At its core, feminist theory highlights the oppressive nature of patriarchal power structures that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and subordination. It acknowledges that online harassment is not a gender-neutral phenomenon but disproportionately affects women, reflecting and reinforcing societal norms that seek to silence and control women's voices. This analysis brings attention to the ways in which online harassment acts as a manifestation of patriarchal control, aiming to marginalize and intimidate women who challenge traditional gender roles and norms.

An intersectional approach within feminist theory further illuminates the complexity of the experiences faced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan. Intersectionality recognizes that individuals hold multiple intersecting identities, such as gender, race, class, and religion, which contribute to their experiences of oppression and privilege. In the context of online harassment, intersectionality helps to understand how different forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, and religious bias, intersect and compound the harm inflicted upon these women. It underscores the importance of considering the intersecting dimensions of identity and power when analyzing the socio-psychological impact of online harassment.

Feminist theory also acknowledges the existence of a digital gender divide, which refers to the unequal access, representation, and participation of women in digital spaces. The digital gender

divide encompasses issues such as limited online presence, digital literacy gaps, and gendered online norms that contribute to the vulnerability of female journalists and activists to online harassment. Through this lens, it is possible to examine how gendered power structures and discriminatory behaviors continue to exist in online spaces, restricting women's freedom of speech and increasing already-existing gender inequalities.

Within feminist theory, there is recognition of the agency and resistance of women in the face of online harassment. It emphasizes the importance of solidarity, collective action, and support networks in challenging online misogyny and creating safer spaces for female journalists and activists. This perspective emphasizes how persistent women are in reclaiming their voices and standing up for their rights in online spaces.

In analyzing the impact of cyber laws in Pakistan, feminist theory sheds light on the ways in which legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms either protect or fail to protect women from online harassment. It critiques the existing legal system and highlights the need for comprehensive legal changes that address gender-based violence, discrimination, and threats faced by women journalists and activists. Additionally, feminist theory underscores the importance of cultural and attitudinal shifts to challenge patriarchal norms and promote the safety, well-being, and equal treatment of women in both online and offline spaces.

By employing feminist theory as a theoretical framework, I intend to analyze the socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan through a gendered lens. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the power dynamics, societal inequalities, and forms of resistance that shape their experiences, and ultimately contributes to developing strategies to address the existing gaps in protection and support for women in online spaces.

Now that the theoretical framework has been developed, the next section will deal with the debates revolving around the online harassment, its socio-psychological impacts on female journalists and activists of Pakistan and the status of Cyber laws in Pakistan.

2.5. Literature Review

When it comes to the literature review this chapter consists of the overview of the preceding literature on current research issue. When I was going through the literature regarding the socio-psychological impact of online harassment to female journalists and activists of Pakistan I found the literature on the very topic in different categories i.e online harassment/ cyber bullying, the social and psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists and reports and articles regarding the cyber laws in Pakistan. I will be discussing the existing literature focusing on these themes and find out the existing gap in the literature.

2.5.1. Major debates on Online Harassment

The internet has developed with a remarkable speed over the last decade. It has brought revolutionary changes in the field of communication. With the ability of the connectivity of the world, internet has turned the world into a global village by reducing the distances and by making people able to communicate with each other in the blink of an eye.

The rapid growth of internet attracted the cyber offenders to plunge into cyber world, where victims can be easily targeted without any obvious risk. This has resulted to rise in the number of cyber threats to an alarming rate. Cyber communication crimes are hidden threat to the both developed and developing countries.

Internationally there have been many debates about online harassment. Baily Poland discussed cyber harassment in his book Haters (2016) as Cyber sexism as a significant issue on the internet, causing women to feel alienated and unsafe. To make the internet more accessible for women, websites, ISPs, and web developers must prioritize usability. However, there is a lack of data on cybersexist online abuse, and in-depth research is needed to understand motivations, impact, and strategies to reduce prevalence. He argues that cyber sexism requires sensitive research, addressing nuances of online harassment, and giving voice to women who are often ignored. The Internet can improve if we make a serious effort to alter the status quo.

Kevin Veale in his book Gaming the Dynamics (2020) explored the relevance of social media platforms and online spaces to harassment and their social contexts. The technology industries' blindness towards harassment and weaponization can be resolved by involving a greater diversity in decision-making. The rise of unionization in technology and creative industries presents a

promising opportunity, but it requires accountability from unions on diversity and representation. The status quo is untenable and harms people, and change requires people's action.

Jacqueline Vickery and Tracy Everbach in the book Mediating Misogyny (2018) argues about the prevalence of online harassment and critique systems and ideologies that perpetuate misogyny. The authors emphasize the need for holistic, structural, and systemic change, addressing a white supremacist patriarchal culture. Four stakeholders, digital platforms, journalism, the law, and universities, have the power to influence practices and contribute to structural cultural change.

The same sexism that encourages various types of harassment and abuse of women in "real life" also underlies gender trolling. Karla Mantilla in her book Gender trolling: How Misogyny Went Viral (2015) intends to educate the general public about a pervasive and harsh type of harassment towards women. She describes the problem, how it could affect women's life, and how to put a stop to it. She raises the debate of important insight into this Internet phenomenon. She offers legal and legislative ideas for enhancing the environment for women online while also differentiating this violent kind of trolling from others. She also addresses the legal boundaries around the issue, such as privacy, anonymity, and free expression online.

A clear and concise introduction to the world of cybercrime and the need of cyber awareness for everyone may be found in the book "Cybercrime and Preventive Measures", a book written by Priyanka Tomar and Sanjay Gautam (2021).Major debates of the book are centered on email-related cybercrimes like phishing, spamming, spoofing, email bombing, etc., as well as the tactics used by cybercriminals to lure victims.

Robin Kowalski in his book "Cyber Bullying" (2008) discussed the means of cyber bullying through which the harassment has increased a lot. By the use of email, instant chats, and other digital messaging platforms, cyber bullying has increased in frequency. He argues particular difficulties. Information regarding the type and frequency of cyber bullying through the use of email, messages, chat rooms, and other digital messaging systems is provided in this empirically-based website, investigates the function of anonymity in cyber bullying consists of parent and student interviews as well as focus group responses provides a resource with advice on how to prevent and stop cyberbullying for teachers, parents, psychologists, and policymakers.

The first clearly international and multidisciplinary view of hate speech online is presented in the book “Digital Hate: The Global Conjuncture of Extreme Speech” by Sahana Udupa, IGINIO Rdone and Peter Hervik (2021). Beyond Euro-American accusations of "fake news," the authors highlight regional idioms and customs and investigate the fundamental ramifications for how community is envisioned, actualized, and harshly upheld throughout the world.

2.5.2. Major debates on Socio-psychological impacts of online harassment on female Journalists and Activists

Zoya Rehman in her article “Online feminist resistance in Pakistan”, (2017) argued that Digital media is being used by feminist activists in Pakistan to counter limits on public space. Online spaces do, however, come with hazards and difficulties, such male-dominated internet security narratives and unfavorable government discourse. Language hurdles and the movement's perceived exclusivity are major obstacles to its success. Feminist collectives must defend online spaces, create varying material, and use the power of the internet to combat efforts to suppress women's voices online.

Suvi Vepsa in her article “Anticipating and managing the risks of online harassment: Research, Reports, Guides and Recommendations” (2021) argues that media is considered as the agent of social change. It plays an important role in quick transfer of information. Journalists all over the world use internet sources and social media i.e Facebook, Twitter for managing their jobs. Journalists have always faced harassment in their work due to the nature of their job. With the advent of the internet, however, and particularly, social media, the harassment has become more common and taken new forms. These days‟ social media is an increasingly significant part of journalist‟s work, both in searching for topics and increasing their visibility. For many journalists social media platforms offer an important work environment and tool, which is used for reaching audiences and building their professional brands.

Lucy Westcott in a report titled, “The threats follow us home: survey details, risks for female journalists in US” (2019), raised the issue that Online harassment was identified as the biggest issue for journalists with threats of violence or harm coming from trolls, the public and readers, listeners, and viewers.This issue has no boundaries and is equally problematic for the journalists round the globe. Even in countries that are relatively safe for journalists, online misogyny is becoming the norm for many female journalists.

Michelle Ferrier and Nisha Garud in their article “Troll Busters: Fighting online harassment of women journalists” (2018) debated that the perpetrators can use a combination of online and offline attacks that threaten the employment and safety of journalists. In the case of women writers, misogynistic and racist attacks can create a chilling effect that silence their voices online and create a deterrent to freedom of expression that ultimately erodes the freedom of press.

Journalists should not have to work in fear due to their job or gender. Since the internet first became available in Pakistan in the early 1990‟s, the use of digital platforms in order to access and share information and opinion has constantly grown in the country. The interface of personal computers, smart phones and digital cameras with internet technology and social media have redefined journalism and allowed a new dissemination role to facebook , Twitter, blogs and websites.

Jhon Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond and Richard Tait in the book “Anti Social Media? The impact on Journalism and Society” (2018) argues that in both positive and negative ways, social media has transformed journalism and larger society. The newspaper business is collapsing as a result of its inability to compete with social media platforms, despite journalists' access to strong tools. Individuals can contribute to the global dialogue, but at the cost of aggressive and intimidating trolling that puts the right of free speech in danger. Political campaigning has been changed by social media, but its recent abuse in the US and UK threatens democracy. With contributions from top authorities in journalism, politics, and digital media as well as the most recent academic studies, the authors acknowledge the good and consider strategies to reduce the negative.

Sadia jamil in her article “Red Lines of Journalism” (2020) argues that Pakistani journalists face various risks and challenges, including psychological, financial, legal, topic- and gender-specific, public, and digital threats. These include hacked, threatened, blackmailed, sexually harassed, data stolen, cyberstalked, malware, and phishing emails. Pakistan's government has improved physical security for journalists, but understanding the intertwining of digital and physical safety is delayed. A UNESCO report highlights that many journalists killed in recent years were easy targets due to their digital tools. She argues that female journalists self censor to avoid the harassment caused by their digital activities.

Danielle Keats Citron in his book “Hate Crimes in Cyber Space” (2014) emphasized that it is very difficult to face the online harassment because people can go to any extant to harm the victim without any fear. In order to fight the digital insecurity it is important for journalists to report the crimes they experience. Same patterns can be seen in the cyber world harassment case as were in the physical world. To avoid the pattern of the subordination and exclusion in the cyber space it is quite essential to focus on the cyber laws.

Sadia Jamil in another article “Safety Threats Impunity and Professionalism: Journalists Dilemma in Pakistan” (2018) highlights the significant impact of contextual factors on Pakistani journalists' safety, highlighting threats to their physical, psychological, emotional, and financial well-being. Journalists resort to self-censorship and compromise on objectivity, truthfulness, and accuracy to avoid threats from various sources. She highlights collective actions by government, media organizations, and journalists' unions to promote safe, free journalism in Pakistan, addressing public interest and right to know.

Sadia Jamil in another article “suffering in silence: the resilience of Pakistan‟s female journalists to combat sexual harassment, threats and discrimination” (2020) explores that Pakistan‟s journalists confront severe safety risks across the country and impunity to crimes against them allows the perpetrators to go unpunished. The country is recognized as one of the deadliest places for working journalists in the world. She argues that Pakistani female journalists are more vulnerable because they are not only prone to safety risks and sexual harassment, but also they face gender discrimination when it comes to their recruitment and equal pay-scale.

Aroosa Shaukat and waqas NAeem in their research document “Women Journalists and the Double Bind”, (2020) explored that Pakistani women journalists face challenges such as sexual harassment, social media attacks, and religious and cultural factors that target them based on gender. These factors affect their safety and mental well-being. Despite these challenges, they continue to carry out their professional duties and fight against online violence. Documenting threats and factors that silence women journalists is crucial for addressing these challenges and supporting their freedom of expression and access to information.

2.5.3. Major debates on Cyber laws in Pakistan

Muhammad Khan in an article in the Dawn "The state of cyber security" (2021)highlighted the fact that according to the 2017 Global Cyber security index, the United Nations International Telecommunication Union ranked Pakistan 67th alarmingly lower than india at 23rd and Bangladesh at 53rd.

Sadia jamil in her article "Reporting under fear and threats: The deadly cost of being a journalist in Pakistan and India" (2021) argues that the abusive and repressive nature of ruling governments and military has curtailed journalists' freedom of expression and media freedom in Pakistan and India. These laws, including the Pakistan Penal Code, Official Secrets Act, Defamation Ordinance, and Investigation for Fair Trial Act, pose fatal safety risks for Pakistani and Indian journalists. However, concerns over journalists' rights are now replaced by the fear of staying alive during reporting.

Sadia jamil in her article "Culture of impunity and safety of journalists: Is safe journalism a distant dream in Pakistan?" (2019) said that there is a limited scope of safe journalism in Pakistan, with journalists facing various safety threats that affect their physical, psychological, financial, legal, social, and emotional well-being. Pakistan's legal system and judicial framework are weak, making it difficult to provide protection and counter the culture of impunity. To combat this, the government, media organizations, and journalists' unions should work together to implement long-term follow-ups, safety training, consultations, legal support, financial protections, medical insurance, safety equipment, and financial compensation for journalists' families. The culture of impunity can only be ended through progress towards fair trials and caution in foreseeable risks in conflict and non-conflict situations.

Zahid Yaseen in his article "The Women Harassment Act 2010: Impacts on Pakistani Society" (2019) criticizes the status of cyber laws in Pakistan and says that the criminal justice system in Pakistan is weak, with inefficient law enforcement and limited public pressure. The Pakistani parliament, led by aristocrats and religious forces, promotes women as personal property and control. Civil society lobbies for women's rights, but religious forces hinder progress. To reduce violence against women, attitudes must change, and legal changes must be made to protect them. Political decision-makers often fail to condemn prejudiced practices and anti-female laws, reducing confidence in investigative and judicial mechanisms. Efforts to modify laws and

implement anti-harassment legislation are hindered by limited legal knowledge of executive organizations and authorities, who often lack personal experience with women's issues.

2.5.4. Summary of the literature review

This literature review focuses on the socio-psychological impacts of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. The review is divided into three main themes: online harassment/cyber bullying, the social and psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists, and cyber laws in Pakistan.

The frequency and consequences of online harassment and cyber bullying are examined in the first theme. Researchers like Baily Poland point out cyber sexism as a serious problem that makes women feel uncomfortable and alienated online. In order to eliminate harassment in the technological industry, Kevin Veale emphasizes the necessity for diversity in decision-making. To address online sexism, Jacqueline Vickery and Tracy Everbach advocate for comprehensive, structural, and systemic reform. Karla Mantilla focuses on gender trolling and provides legal solutions to make it better for women to be online.

The socio-psychological impacts of online harassment on female journalists and activists are explored in the second theme. In her article, Zoya Rehman explores how feminists in Pakistan are using social media to challenge restrictions on public space. Suvi Vepsa draws attention to the growing incidence of abuse experienced by journalists, particularly on social media. According to Lucy Westcott, threats of violence and harm originating from many sources make internet harassment a significant problem for journalists throughout the world. Nisha Garud and Michelle Ferrier place emphasis on the terrifying impact of assaults on female authors that are sexist.

The third theme focuses on cyber laws in Pakistan. Muhammad Kahn highlights the need for improved cyber security in the country. Sadia Jamil discusses the curtailment of journalists' freedom of expression due to repressive governments and laws. The weak legal system and culture of impunity in Pakistan pose significant safety risks for journalists, particularly female journalists. Zahid Yaseen criticizes the state of cyber laws in Pakistan and calls for changes to protect women from violence.

In conclusion, this literature review offers a summary of the body of knowledge about the socio-psychological effects of online harassment on Pakistani female journalists and activists. It emphasizes the need for structural reform to combat online harassment, stresses the difficulties journalists experience, and advocates for changes to the legal system and cyber laws to safeguard the safety and freedom of speech of journalists. Further research is required to comprehend the causes, effects, and methods for reducing online harassment as well as evaluate the success of Pakistan's current cyber laws.

2.5.5. Gap in the existing literature

Based on the literature review provided, the research gap in the study of the socio-psychological impacts of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, while the literature acknowledges the prevalence of online harassment and its impact on female journalists and activists, there is a lack of in-depth research specifically focusing on the socio-psychological aspects of this phenomenon. The existing literature provides insights into the types of harassment, the challenges faced by women, and the role of social media platforms, but there is limited exploration of the psychological effects on the individuals targeted. Understanding the emotional well-being, mental health consequences, and coping mechanisms employed by female journalists and activists subjected to online harassment is crucial for developing effective support systems and interventions.

Secondly, there is a need for more comprehensive research on the effectiveness and enforcement of cyber laws in Pakistan. While some literature briefly mentions the cyber laws in the country, there is a research gap in terms of examining the practical implications and challenges faced in implementing these laws to protect female journalists and activists from online harassment. Further exploration is needed to assess the adequacy of existing legal frameworks, identify gaps in enforcement, and evaluate the overall effectiveness of these laws in addressing online harassment. Additionally, I will try to focus on the experiences of victims navigating the legal system and the barriers they encounter in seeking justice and holding perpetrators accountable.

The current study can contribute to a deeper understanding of the socio-psychological impacts of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan, as well as inform the development of effective preventive measures, support mechanisms, and legal frameworks to combat and mitigate the effects of online harassment in the country.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The third chapter is devoted to "Research Methodology". This chapter details the precise research technique and study design, which includes the research sample and method being employed in the current study. It also explains how the research data was collected using primary sources for collecting primary data and secondary sources for collecting secondary research data. In addition, this section includes a detailed field work plan as well as information on the type of data analysis approach that was used to analyze the collected research data.

3. Study Design

3.1. Sample

A random sample for chosen from the journalists and activists in Pakistan. The primary data is collected through semi structured in-depth ten interviews, made field notes, and recorded the interviews with the consent of the respondents. The sample was designed in a way to include equal number of the respondents from both categories i.e journalists and activists.

The interviews were conducted both in-person and on zoom depending upon the busy schedules of the respondents.

Female journalists and Activists belonging to different parts of the country were included in the sample just to make sure the data reflects the accurate picture of the situation.

The interviewees are Respondent A (Socialist-Feminist, Political Leader from KPK, President of Women Democratic Front(WDF), General- Secretary of AWP and a leading member of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM).), Respondent B (Lawyer, Human Rights professional and news analyst, legal advisor for international commission of Jurist, Human Rights activist & columnist, Respondent D(Human Rights Activist,working for Human Rights Commission of Pakistan since 2007), Respondent H (Director Mohsinini Resource Centre, Activist, Analyst on the issues of social Justice with special focus on Gender), Respondent G (Human Rights Activist), Respondent F (Project coordinator Violence Against Women(VAW), Human Rights Defender), Respondent C (Journalist, Anchor, Trainer, communication specialist, writer, Rights activist and Advocacy Manager at

Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ).), Respondent J (Joint Secretary National Press Club Islamabad), Respondent I (Journalist, Columnist & Photographer), Respondent E (Multimedia Journalist, Researcher).

3.2. Method

Since I was trying to explore the socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan, I have chosen a qualitative method (semi-structured interviews) to give my respondents enough space to give their responses through open ended questions and later note down their responses regarding the impacts of harassment on their social and mental life. I did not want to choose the quantitative method because I was exploring the socio-psychological impact of harassment on female journalists and activists of Pakistan based on their experiences and their opinions which are difficult to quantify.

3.3. Data Collection

Along with primary sources the data collection for this research also includes the secondary sources too. The opinion and experiment based research data has been collected through open-ended semi structured qualitative interviews using primary sources. The secondary research data has been collected using secondary sources such as books, news paper articles, reports in electronic media, research papers in journals, and documents from websites, etc. available on the topic.

Among the books the most notable on cyber harassment and socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists are;

Haters by Baily Poland (2016), Gaming the Dynamics by Kevin Veale (2020), Mediating Misogyny by Jacqueline Vickery and Tracy Everbach (2018), Gender trolling: How Misogyny Went Viral by Karla Mantilla(2015), Cybercrime and Preventive Measures by Priyanka Tomar and Sanjay Gautam (2021),Cyber Bullying by Robin Kowalski (2008), “Digital Hate: The Global Conjuncture of Extreme Speech” by Sahana Udupa, IGINIO Rdone and Peter Hervik (2021), “Anti Social Media? The impact on Journalism and Societyby Jhon Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond and Richard Tait2018), Danielle Keats Citron‟s book “Hate Crimes in

Cyber Space" (2014), Online incivility or sexual harassment? Conceptualizing women's experiences in the digital age by Jessica Megarry, Cyber Bullying: Bullying in the Digital Age by Michael Fauman(2008).

Apart from these books, local newspaper articles published in Dawn, the News and The nation, etc., reports in electronic media by World Bank and Aurat foundation, reports by Digital Rights Foundation, research papers in Journals, and documents from websites are also consulted for collecting secondary research data. I have also been following different social media forums and web pages dedicated to journalists and activists in Pakistan.

3.4. Field work plan

My field work took almost6 months from June 2022 to December 2022 due to the busy schedule of the respondents as both female Journalists and Activists from my sample were engaged in their activities and it was difficult for me to take an appointment from them as per my desired dates so I waited for them to spare their valuable time for an interview for my thesis. 2 interviews were taken in person while other were taken on ZOOM meetings as per allowed by my supervisor. Finally, the collected data was analyzed in May and June 2023.

3.5. Qualitative Thematic Analysis

To analyze the collected research data, I have used "Thematic Analysis" method. It is widely used as a fundamental method for analyzing qualitative data. Thematic data analysis consists of six steps (Guest, et al., 2012). The first step is familiarization that is first I familiarized myself with the data by reading it repeatedly. The second step is coding in which I generated initial codes. In the third step, I organized codes based on similarities to generate themes. In the fourth step, I reviewed the emerging themes. The fifth step included defining and naming the emerged themes. In the sixth step, the presentation and elucidation of themes then helped me answer my research question.

Now that the research methodology for this study has been discussed for this research. The next chapter will deal with the qualitative analysis of data collected through semi-structured open

ended interviews from prominent Female Journalists and Activists of Pakistan who are working in different parts of the country.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

In the literature, there is a widespread belief that female journalists and activists all over the world face harassment when it comes to the use of social media whether it is Twitter, Face book, YouTube or Instagram. Online spaces are fraught with the abuse of women (Poland, 2016). This study examined the online harassment experiences faced by the female journalists and activists in Pakistan when it comes to their experiences at social media primarily on twitter. Women are often considered as a weak entity of the society but the courage and determination while fighting for their cause, regardless of their background turns the table for them.

The purpose of this study was to find out that how do female journalists and activists in Pakistan perceive, experience and cope up with online harassment? This study is an attempt to investigate the traumatic experiences of online harassment faced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan through a socio-psychological perspective. Very little research has been done on this issue in previous academic studies, particularly regarding the socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. This study also intends to figure out the factors that affect female journalists‟ and activists' work and their right of freedom of expression in Pakistan?

This study also examined the impact of online harassment on their work life, their social life, and mental well-being and also examined the coping strategies that helped them to counter the abuse. It also suggests the strategies that these journalists and activists adopted to counter the abuse and analyzed from the viewpoint of the women journalists and activists the role of cyber crime laws in Pakistan when it comes to the protection of the cyber rights of the individual.

The purpose of this chapter was to analyze the socio-psychological impact of online harassment on female journalists and activists in Pakistan. In this chapter, I described the qualitative analysis of data collected through semi-structure open-ended interviews from Pakistani female journalists and activists, who are working in different organizations to learn about their struggle as a

journalist or an activist in a patriarchal society like Pakistan. So in a way, this chapter will help the reader understand the issues that have been raised in my research question.

I used the **Qualitative Thematic Method** to analyze the data to get an in-depth view of what is there in the data. "Online Harassment" is the **Global Theme** in this study (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The harassment experience, impact on work life, harassment and organization"s policies, impact on mental wellbeing, impact on social life, coping strategies are six „Organizing Themes".

1- The Basic Themes that emerged in the harassment experience are Digital/Online Harassment or Threat, harassment experience, nature of the attacks and sources behind the attacks.

2- The Basic Themes that emerged in the impact on work life are effect on work life, gender aspect, harassment and professional cause and abuse and specific topic.

3- The Basic Themes that emerged in the harassment and organization"s policies are harassment of individual and organization, policies of organization and trainings for handling online abuse.

4- The Basic Themes that emerged in the mental well-being are abuse and mental-health, co-relation between online and offline harassment.

5- The Basic Themes that emerged in the impact on social life are role of family and friends, support/oppose.

6- The Basic Themes that emerged in the coping strategies are individual strategies, Criticism on cyber harassment laws in Pakistan by female journalists and activist of Pakistan.

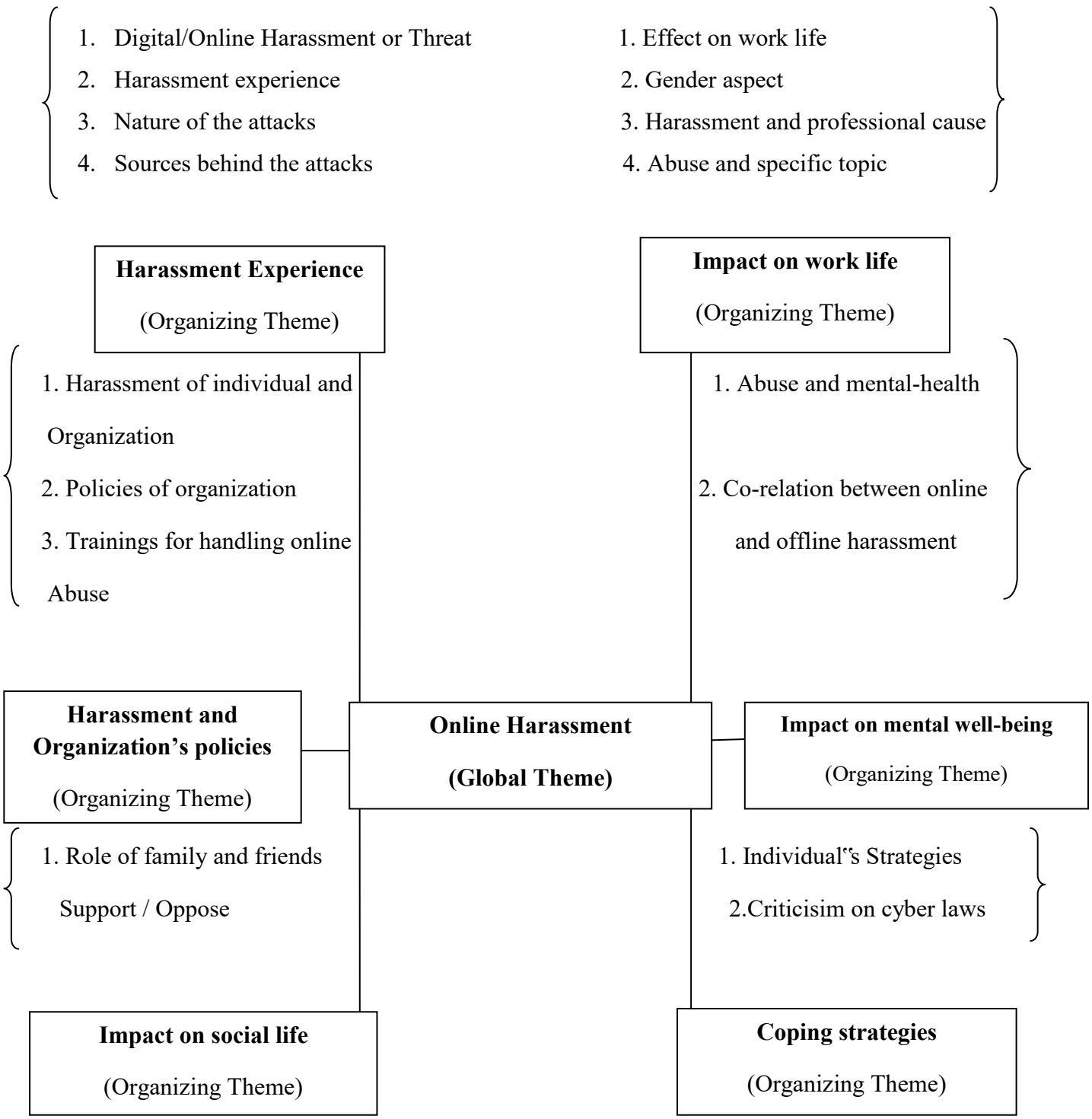
1. Digital/Online Harassment or Threat
2. Harassment experience
3. Nature of the attacks
4. Sources behind the attacks
1. Effect on work life
2. Gender aspect
3. Harassment and professional cause
4. Abuse and specific topic
Harassment Experience
(Organizing Theme)
Impact on work life
(Organizing Theme)
1. Harassment of individual and Organization
2. Policies of organization
3. Trainings for handling online Abuse
1. Abuse and mental-health
2. Co-relation between online and offline harassment
Harassment and Organization's policies
(Organizing Theme)
Online Harassment
(Global Theme)
Impact on mental well-being
(Organizing Theme)
1. Role of family and friends Support / Oppose
1. Individual"s Strategies
2.Criticisim on cyber laws
Impact on social life
(Organizing Theme)
Coping strategies
(Organizing Theme)

Fig (1.1) Table of Thematic Analysis

4. Organizing Themes

The six Organizing Themes, **harassment experience, impact on work life, harassment and organization's policies, impact on social life, impact on mental well-being, coping strategies** did not emerge from the data because I used a deductive approach in thematic analysis and came to the data collection with some preconceived themes on my theoretical framework and existing knowledge obtained through a literature review.

4.1. Harassment experience

Harassment is a form of discrimination. It includes any unwanted behavior that offends or humiliates a person. When I asked my respondents about their experiences of online harassment, the data revealed the **Basic Theme**s of „digital/online harassment or threat", „nature of the harassment", „sources or factors behind the attacks".

4.1.1. Digital/Online Harassment or Threat

Because of widespread discrimination based on power dynamics, and deeply rooted gender biases, female journalists and activists are frequently attacked online. Online harassment, threats, doxxing (public publication of private information), and targeted attempts to discredit or suppress them are some of the different ways that harassment can occur. According to most respondents, the person whose voice/views are against the interest of the powerful entities is considered to be wrong and targeted online.

When you are working against the interests of the political entities of the state then there is a greater chance of the harassment as the powerful entities would try to silence your voice so as to avoid any resistance. Respondent B seconded this opinion about the online harassment faced by the entities that are being trolled online in the following words;

"If you are vocal and you have a strong opinion about anything there is a greater possibility of the backlash online".

Activism and journalism was very easy before the advancement of the digital age as people only had to defend themselves in the real world but as the time passed and with the rapid growth of internet the cyber crimes paved the way for the harassment of the journalists and activists as they use social media for the expression of their work.

Respondent A, when asked a similar question expressed her views as;

"Politics was easy before the digital age. Phenomenon of social media was not common at that time like in 80"s,because I as a political worker had not to defend myself for my political cause or political activities. After the information revolution the state and entities that were anti socialists made co-ordinate attacks".

Social norms present in the society play an important role when it comes to the comparison between online and offline world. If we talk about the developed countries who believe in the equality of men and women when it comes to the point of basic human rights then we can say there is possibility of lesser harassment of women as compare to the societal norms present in the Pakistani society which is based on the patriarchal structures.

According to Respondent C Pakistani society does not allow women journalists and activists to express themselves even in the digital spaces. She stated;

"Online spaces are like reflection of our offline thinking. Whenever a woman is vocal and she tries to express her opinion she is being trolled to stay quiet. People don"t like opinionated woman both in online and offline spaces".

It takes a great courage by an individual to harass someone in the real world but same person can harass someone easily when find a chance in the virtual world as he/she finds himself safe when harassing someone being anonymous or we can say that the anonymity provides them an invisible shield between them and the victim. Respondent D supported this argument in the following words;

"Every individual (male or female) is at the risk of harassment as people believe that they are at the distance of a click only and can easily harass someone."

She further stated;

"Koi news ya Vlog ho gai tou aap ke kaam ko chor kar aap ke „bodypart and make up" ko troll kia jata hai."

Pakistani social media sphere has been a very „hostile place" for woman journalist, activists and defenders. There are no ethics for the use of social media as people would not mind commenting anything without thinking that their comment can offend someone.

Respondent C shared similar opinion by saying;

"One thing is to be noted that it is not necessary to be trolled because you write about some specific topic. People would simply come and comment on your DP, your appearance, your dress etc".

Respondent F agrees with Respondent C as she shared her experience in these words;

"Few years back, I posted a live video about Hazara Culture. Being the founder of Hazara Culture day I asked people to celebrate and join this day, a person living in Australia said in the comment „Be Haya, Be Sharam, Dupata Theek Se Nahi Liya Hua". People don't see what you do, they just don't bother to even think for once what and why they are saying".

The majority of respondents agree that online harassment is more common when people voice strong opinions against authoritative figures, such as government political institutions. Online harassment is more likely to affect vocal people, and this is because strong forces are working to suppress differences and avoid resistance. The level of harassment that people, especially women, experience is greatly influenced by societal norms and cultural views. Online harassment of women may be less prevalent in Western nations that prioritize gender equality than in patriarchal settings like Pakistan.

Online anonymity offers a cover for harassers, making it easier for them to target and insult people without suffering consequences. Because of this anonymity, both men and women are at risk of harassment. People don't seem to think twice about posting insulting and unpleasant comments on social media in Pakistan, where there appears to be a lack of ethics when it comes to commenting. The personal experiences of the interviewees highlight the severity of harassment experienced by journalists and activists. Beyond attacking someone's opinions and beliefs, online harassment frequently targets one's physical appearance, clothing, or other

unnecessary factors. Women journalists and activists in Pakistan struggle to express themselves in both online and offline spaces. Women's opinions are not properly appreciated, which results in harassment and attempts to silence them.

The growth of the digital age and the quick development of the internet have created new opportunities for online abuse and criminal behavior. Attacks of this nature target activists and journalists who use social media to share their work.

Based on the above debates by the respondents, it can be concluded that the data reflect a serious pattern of online harassment experienced by journalists and activists, especially women, who express opinions that are in conflict with established power structures or cultural norms. Social media and the growth of the digital age have made this issue worse by allowing trolls to target and suppress those who disagree. Social media's lack of ethics and respect for limits adds to the hostile environment and presents significant threats to free speech and safety in the virtual world. Now that we have demonstrated digital and online‟ harassment, the following **Basic Theme**, „nature of harassment', will go into further detail.

4.1.2. Nature of harassment

Online harassment refers to a broad variety of criminal behaviors and uncomfortable actions carried out on digital networks. Harassment online can have a multifaceted nature that frequently takes on numerous forms, each of which has negative effects. For instance, online harassment involves the purposeful and repetitive targeting of a person with insulting, hateful, or threatening comments. This kind of harassment is particularly prevalent on social networking sites, where offenders may humiliate and insult their victims through comments, direct messages, or public posts. Cyber bullies may become more bold as a result of the anonymity and cover offered by the internet, making it simpler for them to do emotional harm without suffering immediate consequences. Online harassment has many forms like sexual harassment, blackmailing, hate speech, stalking, identity theft and physical threats. When we talk about the nature of online harassment its severity varies person to person and situation to situation.

When I was in conversation with my respondents during the interview, all of them agreed with each other about the nature of the harassment they face. However there was some variation in

their course of work after which they were harassed online. The reason of the online trolling can be political as my respondent B shared her experience in the following words;

"There was a case relating to Kulbhushan Jadhav in the International Court of Justice. As I work for the very organization I received the judgment and I tweeted about it and gave my opinion in a tweet. The response was unexpected for me as my picture was morphed with Kulbhushan and I received ,,rape" and,,death threats"".

She said that this trolling can be called as harassment because it was very co-ordinated and organized campaign which never leaves you, it follows you everywhere Twitter, Email, Facebook, it has same organized pattern, word by word same abusive language.

Same views were shared by Respondent G When a similar question was asked, She responded;

"Whenever we express ourselves, paid content start trolling against us and give us different titles as tumhary jaisi ,,Gashtiyan" hoti hain jo is tarha ke kaam karti hain"

Online harassment that targets a person or group based on their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or other personal qualities is known as hate speech. The use of derogatory and biased language can contribute to a hostile and poisonous online environment, marginalizing and silencing specific populations. Hate speech is very common in online harassment; people will simply talk ill about you if they don"t like you regardless of your work, gender, class. They will just comment on your post randomly without thinking about the feelings of the other person. Respondent C agrees over this phenomenon and expressed her views like;

"Harassment to me is a random phenomenon; people will come and abuse you for no reason. People have threatened me of ,,physical assault",,threats of rape" and,,kidnapping"".

In a male dominated society like Pakistan character assassination of a woman is common in practice if someone wants to silence the voice of a prominent figure. Same attitude is being faced in the digital spaces by the female journalists in Pakistan; Respondent I agree over this phenomenon and expressed her views when conversing with me;

"Waqas Goraya(V-logger) had launched the worst campaign against me. He used to say that female journalists take ,,perks and privileges for their posts. He morphed my pictures and was

later arrested by the law enforcement agency in Pakistan though he took asylum and these days he is living in Netherlands".

Activism is not easy in a country like Pakistan where activists and journalists are vulnerable to online harassment. Political workers receive threats on daily basis which include death, rape and physical assault. Life of a female activist is prone to online harassment due to their political journey as they use social media to defend their political cause online. During my conversation with Respondent A regarding this issue she stated;

"I have been threatened to be shot in my face. They abused me as „ kanjari" and „gashti", received morphed pictures and other threats like ‚baari hai aap ki'".

Respondents B and G recall incidents of trolling campaigns that were planned and carried out, followed them across different online platforms, and used foul language. The victims' mental and emotional health may be negatively impacted by this type of organized harassment since it may be so upsetting and irritating. Respondent C agrees that harassment can be random and without cause, showing that it is not necessarily connected to a particular act but can sometimes happen randomly, increasing the unpredictability and anxiety related to it.

The responses also stress the common, poisonous environment of hate speech in internet spaces, where people are assaulted regardless of their occupation, gender, or social status. In a male-dominated country like Pakistan, where attempts to suppress powerful individuals are widespread, female journalists and activists, like Respondents I and A, are subject to character assassination attempts. This emphasizes even more how vulnerable women are in online environments and the dangers they run while fighting for political reasons online. The cases of Respondent I and Waqas Goraya show how online abuse may result in real-world repercussions and legal repercussions for offenders.

The responses emphasize how severe and diverse online harassment is in Pakistan, specifically targeting individuals for their political beliefs, activism, and gender. It highlights the urgent need for safer online environments, more knowledge, and the adoption of practical solutions to stop online harassment and safeguard people's rights and well-being, especially women who frequently experience the worst of such abusive behaviors.

Based on the responses from my respondents it can be concluded that the nature of the harassment is usually the same like; hate speech, trolling, texting, sexual threats, blackmailing etc . In most cases, „death and rape" threats are very common usually these threats are given to silence the voice of a person to forbid him/her from raising his/her voice against the privileged classes. Female journalists and activists in Pakistan are being harassed online due to the nature of their jobs. As they express their views on social media, people harass them, whether for political reasons or general hatred.

After demonstrating the nature of the harassment a female journalist or activist faced, the following **Basic Theme**, „sources or factors behind the attacks" will be analyzed in greater depth in the next section.

4.1.3. Sources and factors behind the attacks

Harasser is someone who is involved in harassment to someone. He/She can be anonymous or known to the person being harassed, or he/she can be hired by someone due to political or personal reason for the said cause. When we talk about harassment to journalists and activists we usually refer to the organized campaign by some troll army who is given special task to harass the individual to silence the voice of individual. The integration of cultural, sociological and the political factors in Pakistan are responsible for the online harassment of female journalists and activists.

During my interviews many respondents shared their experiences and expressed their opinions about this issue. They highlighted the factors involved behind the attacks like political, gender discrimination, religious extremism and class.

Respondent B shed light on the political factors behind the attacks while referring to the Kulbhushan Jadhav case in the following words;

"In the beginning, when the trolling started against me on twitter, I didn"t know many people like Dr Sheren Mazari, Malika Bukhari and Dr Shehbaz Gil. They accused me as if I am on agenda, when this statement came out different media persons also followed the trend so as PTI troll army, lawyers and other politicians".

According to her all this campaign was started against her just to silence her.

Another respondent Respondent G highlighted the „class" factor behind the harassment to the activist, as to her activists are harassed to silence their voices or they are threatened just to forbid them working against a specific cause.

She expressed her experience as;

"Once there was case in Jhal Maghsi in which Nadir Maghsi had abducted a minor girl and tortured her for about three months. Her family approached me and when I tried to support her, we were being threatened and the victim's family had to bear the consequences as their houses were bulldozed. I was being threatened like „Do you know you are a woman, wherever you go you will be followed"".

Respondent A agrees with Respondent G and stated that it is very difficult for activists to guard their struggle for their cause, as after the information revolution the state and entities who were anti socialists made co-ordinate attacks.

She stated;

"I am related to „Socialist Movement" so they declared socialists as „kufaar". I belong to „Pushtoon Nationalist Movement" and they called pashtoon nationalist as „ghaddar", I am a „Feminist" as well and after the rise of feminist movement the anti-feminism entities blamed us for „blasphemous acts"".

Religious extremism is also another factor behind the online harassment to female journalists and activists. If a female journalists or an activist dares to work on a sensitive issue then she can face the consequence in the form of harassment by religious extremist groups as well. In an unpredictable political environment, female journalists and activists who cover delicate subjects like religious extremism and violations of human rights risk being harassed online. As a tool to sabotage these women's credibility and silence their voices, those with interest in holding onto position or authority may try to harass and discredit them. Similar views were shared by my Respondent E who, when asked in this regard shared her experience in the following words;

"After the murder of Sabeen Mehmood, I expressed my views online and was trolled by people, the attack was so organized that the screenshots of my post were shared on the wall of „Lashkar-e-Jhangvi" and „Sipah-e-Sahaba". It was mainly done to silence us because we were agitating

against the murder of Sabeen and the state did not want us to point our fingers to the so called establishment of the country".

Respondent A when asked a similar question responded in detail and shared her experience in the following words;

"We have to fight to secure/guard the struggle we do for our cause on social media. As the state has given the authority to politicize the religion against the feminist, so mainstream media is also involved in sabotaging our cause because the religious scholars will claim on the mainstream media that these so called feminists are the cause of all „behayai" in the society".

Online harassment to the activists or journalists is also carried out by the privileged classes in the society, people belonging to those classes take advantages and make use of their higher positions in the society. If a crime is done by someone from the elite class then all the administration tries to provide shelter to him/her. My Respondent D agrees to this argument by sharing her experience in the following words;

"Once I was given the task to bring a story by my mentor Matiullah Jaan, I came up with a story on my friend journalist Shahina Shahin who was murdered in 2020 due to breaking the taboos. I talked to the investigative officer, and came to know that a high profile person was involved in the matter and it was not an easy task to take his name, so when I came up with the story I was threatened and asked that why I highlighted the story as the administration did not want to involve that person".

Another important factor that emerged after the analysis of the data related to online harassment faced by the female journalists and activists is the prevalence of the gendered norms in the society. Pakistan, like many other countries, struggles with deeply rooted patriarchal norms and gender inequity. Women's rights activists who speak out against established gender norms may experience harsh criticism from those who want to keep things as they are. Women in these positions are viewed as threats to the existing power structures by the patriarchal point of view, which motivates online harassment campaigns aimed at silencing or discrediting them. Gender discrimination is very high in a patriarchal society like Pakistan. People simply don"t like the vocal women whether it is in the real world or in the virtual one and they try to suppress their

voices by trolling them online or offline. Similar views were shared by My Respondent I who referred to her online harassment experience by Waqas Goraya and stated;

"He was not known to me, he actually works against those ladies who work for the positive image of the country. He works against all the pro Pakistani females who are getting prominent and are working on the defense issues".

The above responses shed light on the numerous causes of online abuse directed towards Pakistani female journalists and activists. The interviews with various responders provided insight into the level of complexity and variation in these attacks. The respondents mentioned situations in which they were accused of having hidden intentions or attacked by troll armies and politicians connected with particular ideology. Political issues play a big role in the harassment campaigns. It is clear that internet harassment is used to silence critics and suppress opposing views, especially in situations involving sensitive topics or agitation against influential people or organizations. This demonstrates how the internet is being used as a weapon to silence free expression and frighten individuals who call for justice or change.

The analysis of the responses shows that other elements, such as gender discrimination and religious fanaticism, play a role in the harassment of journalists and activists. Religious extremist groups and people that want to impose their conservative values and dominate the narrative especially target female journalists and activists, subjecting them to threats, abuse, and character assassination. In a patriarchal country like Pakistan, gendered norms are common, and women face criticism for speaking up and becoming prominent in their areas, particularly when acting so in opposition to traditional values or calling for social and political reform. The data also suggests the role of privileged groups in protecting criminals, making it challenging for journalists to report on such situations without coming under threats or pressure from people in authoritative positions.

Based on the discussion with my respondents it can be concluded that the factors involved behind the attacks like political, gender discrimination, religious extremism and class are responsible for the online harassment to female journalists and activists of Pakistan in which usually the harasser is unknown to the victim as he/she feel secure and strengthen when hidden at

the other side of the screen. Sometimes people harass the other person maybe because of the personal disliking and by using hate speech the harasser may feel pleasure.

Journalism and activism are fields where people involved are prone to threats because of their work as well. If you work for the entity in power or you work against the interest of the power dynamics of the state then there is always a chance to be trolled as social media is not a neutral space. What happens in the society is reflected on social media no matter if it is Twitter, Facebook or other social media.

After discussing the sources or factors behind the attacks the next organizing theme „impact on work life" will be analyzed in the next section.

4.2 Impact on work life

Harassment no matter which type is very traumatic and it affects all the spheres of the victim"s life, including their work life. Journalists and activists in Pakistan may have severe and adverse effects as a result of online abuse. These professionals may be impacted in a variety of ways by the hostile atmosphere that is constantly present due to the potential of harassment and abuse in digital spaces. When I asked my respondents about the impact of harassment experience, the data revealed the **Basic Theme**s of „effect on work life", „gender aspect", „harassment and professional cause", „abuse and specific topic".

4.2.1 Effect on work life

Your work life is affected when you face some unusual situation, but it also depends on the individual as well. Some people don"t bother about the online harassment and continue their work and feel the harassment as a challenge where as some may feel harassed and insecure and may not find themselves in a position to focus on their work. During my conversation with my respondents, they expressed their views and shared their experiences. I received mixed opinion during my field work as the social background of the female journalists and activists is also important when it comes to the online harassment.

When asked from the Respondent G, she expressed her thoughts as;

"Yes! It is affecting us and our work life, as we have to think about our safety, the safety of the victim and we along with the work have to struggle to avoid the risks as well".

When similar question was asked by the Respondent D, she shed light on the consequence of the harassment one has to face when it comes to work life. She stated;

"The nawab's story disturbed me and affected the quality of my work as I could not focus on my work and I felt difficulty to bring out the crux of what I was working on".

When a female journalist or activist face harassment it becomes difficult for her to talk openly about her work because of the fear of the harassment. Journalists and activists may become fearful and scared as a result of harassment. Reporting on sensitive or controversial subjects may cause them anxiety, especially if they think they could experience further abuse or violence. Their capacity to act as champions for social change may be restricted as a result of this anxiety. During my Conversation with the Respondent F she shared her views about the harassment"s impact on the individual"s life. She expressed her views in the following words;

"You are more careful to talk, carefulness leads you to self censorship, and then you do not say many things due to cultural and religious sensitivity".

Sometimes the impact is very intense and journalist or activist can lose her job. My Respondent A shared another experience where she had to quit her job due to her activism;

"There was a time during my journey as an activist when I was protesting against a General and was holding banners in my hand. My organization XYZ issued me an explanation letter. I replied whatever I do after my working hours is none of your business as it is my right and freedom of expression and there is a difference between crime and political struggle and I as an activist fight for democracy. I took premature retirement due to the pressure from my office and lost my job".

Contrary, to the fact that harassment experience affects the work life of an activist or a journalist, Respondent H disagrees with others and said it is only up to the individual that what type of a person you are and how you respond to these kind of experiences she expressed herself in the following words;

"No! It did not affect my work life. It depends on what type of a person you are; I am a person who if pushed back by someone doesn"t sparethe other person".

The above responses show an extensive range of viewpoints on the ways in which online harassment impacts the professional lives of female journalists and activists. Different viewpoints from respondents have brought attention to the personal nature of the influence. Online harassment is a serious problem for certain people, such as Respondent G, as it not only threatens their personal safety but also makes it more difficult for them to do their jobs well. According to Respondent F, increasing caution and self-censorship might result in fear of risks and consequences, which can make it more difficult for people to express themselves freely and share their work publicly. Extreme incidents of online harassment, like that of Respondent A, can lead to job loss and force people to choose between their activism and a successful career.

Not all respondents, however, believe that online harassment has a direct impact on their professional lives. Respondent H offers an alternative viewpoint, highlighting the importance of the person's personality and coping skills. According to Respondent H, some people could view harassment as a challenge and keep working because it makes them want to fight back even more.

The respondents' varied viewpoints and experiences can be determined by a number of elements, including social background, individual strength, and the degree of the harassment experienced. It is important to keep in mind that various people might be affected by online harassment to different degrees. While some people may be able to deal with it without it significantly interfering with their professional lives, others may experience more severe difficulties.

In conclusion, the responses show that, in many ways, online harassment may have an impact on the professional lives of female journalists and activists. Some people believe it leads them to be less confident, self-conscious, and afraid of the consequences, which affects their work efficiency. Extreme circumstances might possibly lead to job termination. However, some people view harassment as a challenge and carry on with their career despite the unpleasant encounters. How people respond to online abuse is also influenced by their social backgrounds and unique coping methods. Given its possible impact on the mental health, safety, and professional life of people impacted, it is important to recognize and address the problem of online harassment. It can also be highlighted that harassment affect the work life of the individual whether it is a journalist or an activist however in some cases it depends on the individual‟s personality constraints as well. To harasser it is just an act of routine matter or it may not be an issue of great

importance but the victim faces the consequences. The impact of the harassment depends on the individual as people have different levels of tolerance towards different situations. Some people have the ability to ignore the pressures whereas some tend to affect more.

After demonstrating the affect of harassment on the work life, the next **Basic Theme** „Gender aspect" will be explained in further detail.

4.2.2 Gender Aspect

Women and minorities are disproportionately the targets of online abuse. Misogyny and deep-seated gender biases in society support the idea that women should be silent and subservient. The harassment of female journalists, activists, and public personalities who question set gender norms frequently aims to silence or scold them for their straightforwardness. According to the research findings, gender aspect plays significant role in the terms of the harassment in the digital space like twitter, facebook and other social media. All the respondents agreed to the point that women are harassed online due to the patriarchal norms of the society. Whatever happens in the society reflects in the digital spaces as well.

Respondent A shared her views in the following words;

"There is a divide on the social media, when we talk about people. Mainly „Ashrafiya" is sitting on twitter and „janta" use facebook. Political worker male or female prefers to go on twitter for their expressions as PM, journalist and other office holders are sitting there. Twitter too is a patriarchal space „jo power structure samaj mein hai wo wahan reflect karta hai". „riasat ka difah on cyber space", basically it is a battlefield of the wars of the ideas. It reflects the power dynamics we have in our society along class lines, gender lines, along nation lines. „Jo larai samaj mein hai wo cyber space mein hai"".

Gender is also targeted politically. She further shared her experience in the following words;

"We did a play in which everyone was wearing black masks on the faces. There was a girl with short hair and the boy with long hair. People threw a rope on the long hair boy thinking him to be a girl that too was trolled on social media as „Mard ko kutta banaya hua hai"".

Pakistan is a country with a predominately conservative culture and strong religious beliefs. Women's rights, equality, and progressive ideals may face resistance from individuals who see

such initiatives as at odds with conventional beliefs and conventions. This is especially true for female journalists and activists. Dissident voices might express their disagreement on online forums, often using abuse to jeopardize these women's reputations and discourage them from advancing their causes. Pakistani society is very biased when it comes to the point of women‟s rights. Women are usually asked to stay quiet and they are not allowed to express themselves. Respondent C also believes in gender biasness present in the society. She expressed her opinion in the following words;

“Gender biasness is very common in Pakistan, our society has made people believe that there are certain fields where women can"tparticipate and they don"thave rights to say anything, it is a way to segregate women from the bigger picture, same is happening in the society as in the online spaces”.

Respondent F agrees to the point that gender discrimination is a common factor in Pakistan; she expressed her views in the following words;

“Yes! It is like a stereo type that women can"ttalk about their fundamental rights and as people will start looking at you with a specific angle as „Ye to madir pidar aazad hai, behaya hai"”.

Gender discrimination is so common that female activists and journalists cannot perform their duties properly because of the socially constructed mindset of the people this involves the media houses as well who gave rise to the objectification of a woman as an entity. Respondent H adds another aspect to this debate and stated;

“Female activists are harassed due to their gender because you objectify a woman; female body is being objectified on media. When women are online or offline they face same kind of approach and it is mainly because of the media projection”.

It is always believed in the country like Pakistan that women are easy to be harassed. If you want to just stop a women from doing something simply her character assassination can be used a tool to achieve your target. Respondent J agrees to this debate and expressed herself in the following terms;

“Women are considered as „Easy targets"even in the field of journalism. To make someone stop doing from something, simply talk nonsense about her character. Women are not considered

brilliant rather if she reaches some status, she is considered to be characterless, who must have „paid someprice" for thestatus."

Respondent I agrees with Respondent J when it comes to women being a soft corner, she expressed her views as;

"They talk about the character, and use the term „prostitute"for the females. On twitter they talk in Urdu/express their views in Urdu and directly talk about their character first, charges of corruption comes later".

Respondent I shared some screen shots as attached:

Women who are vocal and have some strong opinion are usually disliked by the harassers, because it is the so called standards of the society that women should focus on the family and must not indulge in the matters of their rights and politics. Women are targeted because people usually do not like opinionated women, Respondent B stated;

"I do believe that women are disproportionally attacked although males talk about the same thing but trolling of women is at a different level. They believe the women to be vulnerable and who so ever will talk in public domain will be trolled, usually in a sexualized manner. They tell in detail what exactly and how exactly she will be raped. Or they make allegations of oversleeping with someone or they threaten to leak your video etc".

The responses above emphasize the key significance that gender plays a major role in online harassment, particularly in Pakistan on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook. All of the respondents agreed that women are unfairly targeted as a result of deeply entrenched patriarchal social norms that are reflected in the online world. The interviewees discuss how character assassination, objectification, and sexualized threats are used against women, especially activists and journalists, which reflect society's bias against women's rights and their involvement in public debate. The stereotype that "easy targets" are women and the common belief that outspoken women should put their families first rather than standing up for their rights and getting involved in politics both contribute to the harassment that women experience.

In Pakistan, there is a clear bias against women's rights and their right to express themselves, since they are frequently discouraged from expressing openly. Women who challenge traditional norms are faced with hostility and derogatory remarks about their character, which puts them into doubt and affects their professional capabilities. The objectification of women's bodies in the media as a result of gender inequality helps to normalize harassment. The responses highlights that the gender-based harassment is a widespread problem that affects female journalists, activists, and other women in public places both offline and online. There is a pressing need for action to stop this harassment and undo the deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes that support gender inequality and discrimination in Pakistani culture.

From the responses above it can be concluded that Yes, gender plays a significant role in the struggle of women, whether being a journalist or an activist. In a society like Pakistan female journalists and activists face online harassment because of the patriarchal norms present in the society. In a male dominated society, it is very easy for someone to harass a woman because as to the harasser a woman can be silenced only when they talk about her character.

After discussing the gender aspect in the online harassment the next **Basic Theme** „Harassment and professional cause" will be discussed in detail.

4.2.3 Harassment and professional cause

To have the idea of the impact of harassment on the professional life of the individual few questions were incorporated in the interview. All of my respondents agreed to the fact that harassment did not affect their professional life and did not affect their cause. According to the

respondents the harassment experience gave them strength to fight for their cause with determination. After the discussion with my respondents few aspects emerged from the data which can help someone to focus on one‟s job while someone face harassment, which include determination and self censorship.

Respondent A informed me that she left her job but there was no change in her activism.

Respondent F agrees with Respondent A and stated that activism is done for a specific cause and once you are in this profession it runs in your blood then and you cannot separate yourself from it. She expressed her opinion in the following words;

"Activism is done for a cause, so I never thought to change my profession".

Similar views were shared by Respondent G over the issue of determination for the cause, if the activist gets silenced then who will bring the change in the society? Who will break the socially constructed taboos? She expressed her views in the following words;

"Never thought to change my profession; if I will be quiet many people like me will be made quiet. Harassment always gives me more strength for my cause".

She quoted Allama Iqbal‟s poetry

تن ذی بد مخلف سے نگھبرا اے عقبة

تو چلتی ہے تجھے اونچ اڑان کے لئے

Respondent F shared her opinion in the following words;

"Whatever opinion I have in the perspective of Human Rights does not change due to online harassment but with the passage of time I have more ways to say things. I am part of the Social Network of HRCP, Violence against women and Girls and Women Action Forum (WAF). These Forums help me do things on their behalf as the network takes the responsibility of my actions".

Self-censorship may be used by those who experienced or suffered online harassment in order to prevent new attacks. They might stay back from publicly expressing their thoughts, beliefs, or identities in order to avoid drawing criticism or the possible consequences from harassers. Self censorship phenomenon plays a vital role when you are vulnerable to the harassment being a weaker subject considered by your opponents. It is a tool to combat online harassment used by female journalists and activists all over the world as it gives them enough strength to face the harassment. My respondents gave their opinions about the Self censorship whether it was of help for them or not.

Respondent J agrees to the benefits of self censorship and expressed her views as;

"Self censorship is a reality when it comes to the safety of a journalist. Being a journalist, I believe I should be in search of news, rather than becoming a „Headline"in the news".

Respondent C agrees with Respondent J over the issue of self censorship and believes that if for our own safety we take the edge of self censorship then it does not mean that you have failed and stated;

"Self censorship is a reality, sometimes you want to stay away from abuses and then you self censor, you can change what and where to express".

On one hand if there are journalists and activists who believed in the benefits of self censorship there are few who believe that it is not necessary to self censor rather waiting for the right time to express themselves is a good strategy. Respondent B talked about the phenomenon of self censorship from a different perspective and stated;

"It depends on who you are when you talk about the harassment. I never thought to censor rather I think about the „timings",whether I should talk about the specific issue at this time or not".

The information received from the respondents shows how they feel about the impact of harassment on the professional lives of journalists and activists. Surprisingly, every single responder agreed that harassment didn't compromise their determination to fight for change; on the contrary, they all felt that it enhanced it. Even while harassment caused some people, like Respondent A, to quit their jobs, it had no effect on their activism. This shows that their

commitment to changing the world continues in the face of challenges because their love for their cause is deeply rooted in their skin.

The value of the determination in the face of harassment is an important finding that came out of the data. Respondents F and G emphasized that activism is a mission dedicated to a particular cause rather than merely a career. They have the ability to battle online harassment due to their determined commitment and to keep fighting for social change. The fact that they all expressed the same emotion about not thinking about changing careers in the face of difficulties indicates their passion and purpose are connected, giving them the motivation to keep fighting.

Another important finding from the data is the role of self-censorship as a coping strategy to deal with online abuse. J and C, two respondents, recognize that self-censorship is necessary to protect the safety of journalists and activists and to prevent them from becoming headline news themselves. In considering their vulnerability to assault, they believe that practicing moderation in the expression of some opinions becomes necessary. The data further shows different viewpoints, with Respondent B claiming that they do not prioritize self-censorship. Instead, they choose to plan the time of their responses, showing that activists and journalists choose a variety of tactics to deal with the difficulties caused by harassment.

After analyzing the above responses it can be concluded that even though online harassment might be upsetting however it does not effect that determination of the female activists and journalists. Instead, it strengthens their commitment to bring about change and gives them the strength to keep going in the face of difficulties. Some individuals adopt self-censorship as a coping mechanism out of concern for their safety, while others strategically time their expressions. In general, the data highlights the determination and enthusiasm of activists and journalists who continue to work for social justice despite online abuse. Harassment does not affect the professional cause of the female journalists or activists; rather it gives them strength to bounce back with new challenge. Self censorship phenomenon is of great value in terms of the safety of the journalists and activists both, as it helps them to secure themselves and their cause. Self censorship is the only way to avoid harassment. This helps to ignore the abuse and false propaganda started by the haters.

After discussing the harassment impact on the professional cause, the next **Basic Theme** „abuse and specific topic" will be analyzed in detail.

4.2.4 Abuse and specific topic

Harassment may be focused at certain subjects or problems. The intention behind harassment frequently comes from biases, or desire to frighten or silence those who voice ideas on particular issues. Sometimes the harassment is done because the journalist or activist has worked on some specific topic. When a female journalist or activist works on some sensitive issue or an issue which can hurt the sentiments of a specific community then there is a chance of online trolling. These issues are mainly related to religious biasness, cultural identities this issue when discussed with my respondents was dig deeper to find the reality.

Respondent G, when asked a question relating to the issue expressed that religion biasness is very common in Pakistan. Though it is present in all the societies in the world by the ratio is high in Pakistani society.

She expressed her thoughts in the following words;

"Religious biasness is found in all societies but it is very high in Pakistan so we think more before saying something related to religion".

She stated further about her experience in the following words;

"Once I said something about Maulana Tariq Jameel and someone in the comment section said, Oh! You are a woman, what do you know about religion or what do you know about religious scholars?"

Respondent C agrees with Respondent G on the issue of abuse due to specific topic and stated;

"There are some specific issues when you are sure that you will be harassed i-e blasphemy, Aurat march, religion, culture, gender rights etc".

Women are considered as weak and are usually said to work in a way where they cannot be trolled. So usually they are being advised to work on the issues which are light in nature and which has minimum chance of getting backlash.

These views were shared by Respondent D in the following words;

"Women are asked to work on soft beats. I used to work on crime stories and was trolled".

Similar views were shared by Respondent J, she further gave an in-depth meaning of the issue in the following words;

"If you work on a critical issue then there is a chance of backlash. So usually women are

suggested to work on soft beats and are advised to avoid such stories that may lead to harassment".

The responses above emphasizes the serious nature of online harassment that female journalists and activists come across, especially when they cover sensitive topics that can question cultural or religious standards in Pakistan. Respondents G and C stress that religious bias is entrenched in Pakistani culture, making it challenging for journalists and activists to publicly voice their opinions on certain themes without worrying about being victims of internet trolls. The example provided by Respondent G, in which she faced negative comments about her gender and knowledge when talking about a religious scholar, shows the hostile environment that women face in this kind of scenario.

The experiences of the interviewees also provided insight into the common biases against women in society. Women are advised to avoid comments by staying away of controversial topics and instead work on less serious ones. The difficulties that female journalists and activists face due to gender are further illustrated by Respondent D's experience of being harassed when reporting crime stories and Respondent J's claim that women are frequently advised to work on "soft beats". Employment for women tends to be discouraged allowing maintaining gender inequality and limits their capacity to contribute to major debates on fundamental domains.

The analysis of the responses points to a disturbing trend of religious bias and online harassment experienced by Pakistani female journalists and activists. Due to the commonality of online harassment, women are discouraged from working on important issues, which reinforces gender stereotypes and limits their capacity to openly voice their opinions. In order to address this problem, society, media sources, and government must work together to establish a more secure environment where women may have key discussions without being afraid of harassment and

discrimination. A more open and tolerant society may be created through supporting different points of view and promoting gender equality in media and activism.

Based on the responses from my respondents it can be concluded that whenever a journalist or an activist work for some specific sensitive issue he/she is being harassed, whenever the content of a journalist or an activist is working on the issues related to religious sensitivity, religious biasness and cultural identities there is a possibility of online harassment. Online Harassment has nothing to do with the gender, both male and female activist and journalists face online harassment, who ever will work in the public domain, will be trolled.

After discussing the **Basic Theme** „harassment and specific topic" we will move to the next organizing theme „harassment and organization"s policies"

4.3 Harassment and Organization's Policies

When a person works for an organization the organization takes the responsibility of the safety and security of the individual when it comes to the sensitive fields like journalism or activism. Activists and journalists are always prone to the harassment as during their journey they work for different organizations. When I conversed with my respondents the data revealed the **Basic Theme**s of individual"s „harassment and organization" and „trainings for handling online abuse".

4.3.1 Harassment of Individual and Organization

All the organizations have some code of conduct which is followed to run the affairs of the organization in a smooth manner. When female journalists or activists use digital spaces to express their opinion then there is a possibility of getting harassed online. When individual is harassed it may affect him/her as the organization he/she is related to may or may not be ready to support him/her. When I was in conversation with my respondents I came across two types of experiences. Some organizations support the worker in case of the online harassment whereas some organizations prefer to stay away from being controversial due to the harassment experiences of their workers.

Respondent A explained how her organization gave her leverage and supported her over the course of her political struggle and shared her organizations policies about the online harassment in the following words;

"We have online self defense system and anti harassment policies which we have adopted. If someone from the organization write something which is against the cause of the organization then he/she is bound to delete that content as it is against the rule, we have set boundaries and have our own mechanism to guard ourselves".

Respondent I says that it depends on the organization you are attached with when it comes to the matter of online harassment; she expressed her opinion as;

"In case person is harassed there is a committee in our organization that helps, my organization took stand for me during the harassment I faced. Once I wrote an article for independent related to those rape victims whose dead bodies were being raped. I was harassed for writing about the incident and at that time my organization stood beside me".

Respondent J stressed on the need of the unity of the journalists so as together they can fight against the online harassment. She expressed her views when asked this question as;

"If a journalist faces harassment it is better to inform the Union of Journalists where his/her issue can be taken up."

During the interview she shared a press release where harassment of women journalists was condemned by the press club.

President
Shakeel Anjum
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NATIONAL PRESS CLUB ISLAMABAD

9th January 2022

Stop harassing female journalists through social media platforms. National Press Club Islamabad. Expressing concern over the increasing trend of harassment of women journalists on social media by National Press Club, President Shakeel Anjum, General Secretary Anwar Raza and other officials said in a joint statement that women journalists are the strong and powerful voice of Pakistan,

We will not allow their voice to be suppressed under any circumstances, they said, adding that the federal government needs to take immediate steps to discourage this trend on a priority basis.

In a statement, the national Press Club expressed concern over the growing trend of harassing and degrading female journalists on social media. Increasing incidents of harassment are reprehensible.

Joint Secretary of national Press Club Shakila Jalil said that a foreigner in the Netherland, named Waqas Goraiya has been started trend of abusing, harassing on senior journalists including Javeria Siddique, Samera Khan, Mona Khan, Shifa Yousafzai, Anam Elahi, Sehar, Fariha Idrees, Gharida Farooqi., Bushra Aamir, Ambreen Fatima,Sana Tauseef, Cynthia Richie, Maleeha Hashmi and others. waqas Goraiya have continued his derogatory remarks, bad words, plus abuse and harassment to women journalists, which deserves no less condemnation.

National Press Club has demanded the federal government to take immediate steps to discourage this trend on priority basis.

Officials of National Press Club said that journalism and journalists are already facing various problems in Pakistan. Many journalists have been killed. Many have gone missing, many journalists have lost their jobs, hundreds have had their salaries cut, and in order to stifle the voice of women journalists, al systematic campaign has been launched against them on social media and harassment has taken place. Is synonymous

National Press Club believes that freedom of expression is a fundamental right of journalists as well as every citizen, but in exercising this right, civilization should not be lost.

Anwar Raza
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Human Rights organizations usually let their female workers to fight for their cause even if there is a chance of online harassment; Respondent F expressed her views over the policies adopted by her organization in the following words;

"I am part of social network of HRCP, Violence against Women and Girls (WAF). These forums let me do things on their behalf. If I feel it necessary to inform my organization I freely inform them, we have some policies to handle such situations".

Until now we have discussed the policies of the organizations who support their workers in the case of online harassment, however there are few organizations who have strict polices when it comes to the issue of online harassment, Respondent B explained how her organization did not want her to be involved in any controversial matter and shared her organizations policies about the online harassment in the following words;

"I work for the International Court of Justice and my organization don"t like their employee to become controversial. I am the legal advisor of the organization and they are officiated with someone. When I was trolled in the Kulbhushan Jadhav"s case I told them, people troll me for my work. As I work for those who are wrong from the rule of law. My organization was concerned about my safety".

Respondent D seconded the stance of Respondent B on the issue of online harassment and shared her views about the role of the organization in case of the harassment in the following words;

"You work in online spaces at your own risk. There was a time when we were asked by our officials to stay away from social media, Means whatever happens to you on social media will be your responsibility."

The responses of my respondents show the broad range of experiences and limitations around online harassment that female journalists and activists in various organizations have to deal with. With an online self-defense system and anti-harassment rules and regulations, respondent A's organization is active in tackling harassment and ensuring that whatever is unfavorable of the organization's cause is promptly removed immediately. In her positive experience, Respondent I describe how the organization stood by her when she was the target of harassment because of an article she had written. Respondent J emphasizes the necessity of journalistic unanimity in the

battle against harassment and advises enlisting the assistance of the Union of Journalists. The Human Rights organization of Respondent F encourages its female employees to support their causes even if it results in online abuse and has procedures in place to deal with such incidents.

The data also demonstrates that certain organizations have adopted different strategies. The International Court of Justice, the employer of Respondent B, desires that its staff stay away of controversial topics to protect their reputation. Employees are accountable for their online presence, according to Respondent D, who also notes that they had previously been told to avoid social networking sites because of the dangers involved.

The analysis of the responses shows how different organizations react to online harassment. While some organizations take a pro-active and helpful stance, providing safeguards and assistance, others could take a more cautious approach in order to stay away of issues. This demonstrates the significance of organizational policies and support systems in tackling the problem of online harassment experienced by female journalists and activists and highlight the requirement for a coordinated effort to combat such harassment in digital environments.

After the detailed discussion with my respondents it can be concluded that organization plays an important role when it comes to the safety of the individual. Both journalists and activists belong to some organization and it is the responsibility of the organization to safeguard the interests of the individual similarly it is the responsibility of the worker to abide by the policies of the organization. If the organization support the female workers in any case relating to online harassment and give them confidence to stand at their back in such situation then the female worker can yield better results in their jobs.

After discussing the **Basic Theme**s of harassment of individual and organization the next **Basic Theme** „Training for handling online abuse“ will be discussed in detail.

4.3.2 Trainings for handling online Abuse

The harasser‟s failure lies in the self support system of the victim. Personal trainings to fight against the abuse are a must in order to avoid the harassment. All over the world trainings are being provided by the organizations to handle harassment in digital spaces. How the female journalists and activists can avoid the unpleasant situation created by the online harassment depends on the level of training they receive to secure themselves in virtual world.

It should be the responsibility of the organization to which the female journalists or activists are attached to that they provide digital training to their workers. All my respondents gave their opinion when asked similar question. The responses pointed out that there are few organizations that provide trainings to their workers whereas few organizations do not train their workers to secure themselves digitally.

When I asked a question about the digital trainings by the organization my Respondent J expressed her trainings details by her organization in these terms;

“I received trainings by Bites for all and digital rights foundation in which I was trained to secure my mobile, laptop and other gadgets, how to secure my data and passwords, emails, etc”.

Respondent A also informed about the trainings of counter harassment policies and expressed her views as;

“Yes we have received trainings; we have social media secretaries and education committee. We have been trained how to secure ourselves”.

Respondent F responded the similar questions in these terms;

“Yes I have received trainings in different capacity building programs”.

There are few organizations who do not train their workers digitally. During my field work many Respondents pointed out the fact that their organizations did not provide any digital training to them and keeping in view the need for the training as to learn the ways to secure themselves digitally they received the trainings arranged by different private organizations at their own.

Respondent C shared her experience and she stated;

"There is no mechanism of training in our media houses but there are organizations who train journalists as nonprofit organizations. I have attended many sessions of training from these organizations".

Respondent D also agrees with Respondent C and stated;

"No my organization had not given any training regarding the tactics to avoid the digital harassment however I attended a few trainings on personal level through different NGO"s".

Respondent E agrees with Respondent C and Respondent D and shared her experience regarding the issue and stated;

"My organization did not train me rather I received personal trainings through private organizations".

The responses above emphasize the value of training in digital literacy in combating online harassment, particularly for female journalists and activists who are frequently the targets of harassers. The replies from the respondents show that although certain companies make it a priority to train their employees in digital skills, others do not. People who receive training frequently pick up important abilities for protecting their online accounts, data, and devices. Nonprofit organizations and NGOs fill in the gaps created by certain media organizations and offer the essential training for building ability to assist people in defending themselves against online harassment. According to the research, a person's personal safety is highly dependent on how active they are about searching out training on their own if their employer does not offer it.

While some media organizations train their staff members on anti-harassment guidelines and online security, others lack any official systems for this type of instruction. The dependence on outside organizations and NGOs to fill this training gap points out the need for more thorough and consistent internal efforts. When someone are repeatedly threatened and abused online, it can have a serious negative impact on their mental health. Digital training should be seen as an important organizational responsibility that guarantees a safer working environment for employees. Collaboration between media outlets and NGOs can result in good change and build a better structure of support for effectively combating online abuse.

After the detailed discussion with my respondents it can be concluded that trainings in the organization in terms of online harassment varies organization to organization. Few organizations train their employees whereas others do not. Digital Trainings to handle online harassment is very essential in these times especially in a society where women are considered as easy targets by the harassers. Role of NGO‟s is to be appreciated as they are working to make some better change for the ease of the female workers. So the personal safety of the individual lies in the fact that he or she should get personal training so that the challenges of online harassment can be dealt with.

Now that we have discussed all the **Basic Theme**s related to harassment and organization policies we will move onto the next organizing theme „impact of mental well-being‟

4.4 Impact on Mental Well-being

Being the target of harassment is a horrifying and unpleasant experience that may have a significant impact on one's emotional and mental health. As soon as the victim realizes they are being targeted, there tends to be an initial feeling of shock and disbelief. Harassment of any kind leaves a long lasting impact on the life of the victim. My fourth organizing theme is impact on mental well-being. Among ten of my research respondents when asked mostly agreed on the fact that the harassment experience lasted great impact on the mental well-being of the victims. The analysis of their viewpoints highlighted two **Basic Theme**s i-e „Abuse and Mental health‟ and „co-relation between online and offline harassment‟.

4.4.1 Abuse and mental health

Harassment abuse and mental well-being are interrelated to each other. If a female worker is harassed online it leaves long lasting impact on the mental well being. Anxiety and worry become stronger as the harassment continues. The victim could be preoccupied with thoughts of how soon and where another incident will happen. This increased attentiveness can be psychologically demanding, impairing sleep and making it harder to focus on everyday chores. The victim can be reluctant to take action or ask for assistance out of fear of revenge or the increase of harassment.

Respondent G shared her views on the issue and said that being an activist she had to think about both, her cause and her family, she expressed her views in following words;

"The abuse effected my mental well-being as I am not alone my sisters are there too".

She further stated her experiences when she felt stressed in the following words;

"Once I was working on the issue of missing persons from Balochistan and people were abducted from the D. Chowk and Press Club then I felt insecure and realized that I am being traced".

She further stated;

"Once I was working for bounded labor and the owners of that area were very resourceful. I used to take other people with me because I felt insecure as they could hurt me".

When a female journalist or activist is harassed online without any reason then she starts questioning herself, Respondent C expressed her views, when a question related to this issue was asked, in the following words;

"You start questioning yourself that why it is happening with you and it is a very bitter experience".

Respondent D agrees with Respondent C and stated;

"Waqt se pehly insaan boorha ho jata hai.When the false charges of contempt of court and blasphemy make a normal human being unable to take it as it creates fear which affects the mental health".

During my conversation with Respondent B she shared with me how badly she was trolled and how she felt afterwards. She expressed her opinion in the following words;

"Campaigns usually disturbed me as I did not want the people to troll me. I used to think what wrong am I doing but after that I got used to it. Sometimes I think how come so many people can hate you? Then I think that the harasser"s a&count may be fake it may not be real".

There are few cases when the online harassment experience resulted in a mental torture to the female workers. When the issue was discussed with Respondent I she shared her experience and told me during the conversation how she felt after the harassment, she stated;

"There was a campaign run against me during 2019 and after that I had anxiety attack and I recovered after great effort and thought not to bother it anymore".

Respondent F agrees with Respondent G on the issue and stated;

"Activist"s life is always under threat and some how it affects our mental life as we belong to some family and concerned for their safety".

The experiences shared by my respondents emphasize the disturbing connections between online abuse and harassment and their serious effects on the mental health of female activists and journalists. Respondents G, C, D, B, and I discuss what it was like to deal with experiencing online harassment and how it affected their mental health in the long run.

Like Respondent G, female activists frequently become targets of violence because of what they stand for, and the abuse they face leaves them with lifelong psychological traumas. They carry the burden of care for their families and other activists in addition to their own particular suffering. Respondent G's experiences of feeling unsure of herself and tracked when working on sensitive topics like missing persons and bonded labor serve as an example of how strong the stress and fear can be. Respondents C and D emphasize the negative impacts of such harassment even more, stating that it undermines these workers' general mental health by instilling dread and self-doubt.

False accusations of blasphemy or contempt of court add to the psychological toll, leaving people unable to handling their anxiety and fear. The experience of Respondent B shows that continued trolling may be extremely upsetting, leading one to wonder why they are being singled out, and ultimately desensitizing them to the abuse. The story of Respondent I reveals how online harassment may become so severe that it results in anxiety attacks and negatively impacts a person's mental health.

Despite their courage, female activists like Respondent F claim that they always worry for their lives, and this anxiety negatively affects their mental health. Their stress levels are increased by the intense strain of their defending job and the ongoing exposure to internet abuse, which causes mental suffering. As Respondent F points out, this emotional pressure is primarily founded in their concern over the safety of their family. The collective experiences of these responders show

how upsetting a reality it is that online abuse can have on the mental health of female employees who speak up for their causes. The anonymity and reach of the internet world encourage the spread of abuse, leaving these courageous people who are actively working to bring about constructive change in society with long-lasting emotional scars and mental health difficulties.

From the discussion above it can be concluded that the harassment effect the individual‟s mental health no matter the victim is a journalist or an activist. As both have families and they are concerned about the people they are living with. The harasser may harass someone just for fun or for no reason at all or for money if hired by someone. But the experience lasts great impact on the psychological and mental health of the victim as he/she continues to think what wrong he/she has done that people are trolling them.

After the discussion the next **Basic Theme** „Co-relation between online and offline harassment‟, will be discussed and analyzed in detail.

4.4.2 Co-Relation between Online and Offline Harassment

Fear is not good for health whether it‟s physical or mental health we talk about. The harassment lasts great impact on the mental well being as we discussed in our previous **Basic Theme**. Digital spaces are usually the reflection of the society, we can‟t separate both. Harassment both online and offline is correlated. Online harassment sometimes spills over into the real world, worsening the effects on the victim's safety and wellbeing. It's important to be concerned about the relationship between online and offline harassment because it shows how destructive online behavior may have real-world dangers.

When asked about the correlation between online and offline harassment my respondents gave their valuable opinions and shared their experiences which highlighted the issue of the correlation.

Respondent A when asked about a question regarding the correlation of online and offline abuse shared many experiences in which she has faced online harassment due to her political content on Twitter she expressed her opinion in the following words;

"I felt threatened and I had to secure myself by switching of my location and I had to stop public appearances so as to feel safe from the harassers as I had a fear that they can trace me in the physical world and harm me".

Respondent B when asked a similar question expressed her views in the following words;

"At the time of the vote of no confidence (during the tenure of Imran Khan) I felt threatened and I had a fear of being hurt, I was not even comfortable while going for groceries".

She further stated;

"It's like the US vs. THEM scenario, like a battle between HAQ and SUCH, JHOOT/GHADDAR vs KUFAAR. I felt the fear of being labeled. The targeting comes from the people in power not from the trolls. This targeting leads to the threats in physical life".

Respondent J agrees with Respondent B on this matter and stated;

"Definitely there is a correlation between online and offline harassment, all we have to do is, to work with greater care. If working on any critical issue then the people around must be informed that if there is any unpleasant situation then your people can reach you".

Respondent I open up about her experience of harassment and her fear of getting harm in the following words;

"When I faced harassment by Waqas Goraya, and my late husband journalist Arshad Sharif had to face charges of FIRs against him I felt insecure while going out".

The fear of the follow of the attacks to the real world is real as my Respondent H shared her fear of getting hurt in the following terms;

"Once I made a video on YouTube on transgender and it was after two days that a person broke into my house approached my bedroom window and was peeking inside when he was hushed away by my servant".

As discussed earlier social media is a reflection of the society the activities of the female journalists and activists follow them where ever they go. Respondent F also agrees with others

about the issue of correlation between the online and offline harassment and shared her experience in the following words;

"When I was working against Hazara Killing I was feared of getting hurt and used to think that whatever is happening with me on Social media I can get hurt and this disturbed me mentally as I used to fear as someone will throw a bomb from the window of my house. My mother uses facebook and gets worried when she sees the hateful comments against me and asks me talk on soft issues".

The above responses emphasize the serious effects of online abuse on people's mental and physical health, showing a connection between online and offline abuse. The story of Respondent A shows how online abuse may cause a fear of real-life danger, causing her to take safety precautions like turning off her location and avoiding public events. Similar to how Respondent A experienced anxiety at a political event, Respondent B's experience demonstrates how powerful individuals' online harassment can be felt as physical threats and discomfort even during routine activities like grocery shopping. According to Respondent B, who sees a "US vs. THEM" situation that might lead to labeling and even targeting, extending the harassment from the virtual to the actual sphere, the power relations between groups further complicate this problem.

Respondent J's opinion on the relationship between online and offline harassment emphasizes the necessity of care and dialogue. Respondents I and H, who both experienced harassment that made them, feel insecure in their physical environment, shared experiences that show a real fear of threat. Activists and journalists, like Respondent F, who spoke of being frightened of potential violence when she was working against Hazara Killing, often, express the fear of the attacks extending into the real world. According to Respondent F's mother, who expressed concern for her daughter's safety after seeing hurtful comments on social media, the suffering and mental distress caused by these situations affects not only the victims but also their families.

After discussing with all the respondents and after analyzing the responses it can be said that there is a strong correlation between online and offline harassment. If you are being harassed digitally then there is a greater possibility that the abuse can follow you home as well. It affects the individual in a way that the fear of getting harm follows him/her everywhere. You can't

sleep, you can‟t go out, you can‟t express how you feel to the people among you and you don‟t want them to be worried for you as they are concerned about you. Similarly, the person who is being harassed has a family and is equally concerned about the safety of the family.

In conclusion, the data clearly indicates that there is a significant link between online and offline harassment. The fear of physical abuse, discrimination, and real-world threats caused by online abuse highlights the need of finding a meaningful solution. Effective steps must be done to protect people's mental and physical health as digital spaces continue to reflect society, especially those working on critical issues or expressing their thoughts online.

After discussing the **Basic Theme**s in this section the next organizing theme „impact on social life‟ will be discussed and analyzed in the next section in detail.

4.5 Impact on Social Life

An individual's social life can be significantly disrupted by harassment, having severe effects on their interactions and relationships with others. The psychological toll of being harassed might result in isolation and social retreat. Because they are afraid of suffering more abuse, victims may stop taking part in social activities, both offline and online. People who experience harassment frequently may struggle to feel relaxed and at ease in social situations, which can result in feelings of alienation and loneliness.

My fifth organizing theme is „impact on social life‟. Among 10 of my research respondents, 5 were journalists and 5 were activists. When asked if the online harassment had impacted their social life, in reference to the „role of family or friends‟ as a **Basic Theme** and the analysis of those responses two sub themes also emerged i-e. „Oppose‟ and „suppose‟.

4.5.1. Role of Family and Friends

Supporting and helping those who are being harassed online is greatly helped by family and friends. Their involvement can significantly impact how the victim handles the issue and overcome the obstacles caused by the harassment. Family and friends play a vital role in the life of an individual, especially if we refer to the case of online harassment; we see how much a family and friends can contribute to the cause of journalists and activists just by their support. Victimization of women in a society where women‟s opinion are often neglected due to the patriarchal norms present in the society is considered as a major issue. Family, which includes

the parents and siblings, is considered as an institution which dominates the life of a female worker throughout her professional career.

During my research I asked few questions about the role of family and friends during the online harassment to female journalists and activists. I received the responses which I further categorized in two sub themes as;

1) Support

2) Oppose

4.5.1.1 Support

Support means you have a back for whatever you do; you receive appreciation, encouragement, pride etc when it comes to the support from the family or friends.

7 out of my 10 respondents shared that their family and friends support them in their cause even after the incidents of online harassment they faced in order to perform their duties either as a journalist or an activist.

When challenges result in support and appreciation from the loved ones it gives another level of determination. Respondent A when asked a question regarding the role of her family and friends during her journey as an activist seconded this phenomenon and expressed her views in the following terms;

"My family is a political family, they support me. Threats are accompanied by appreciations. Some says „Maadar-e- Inqalab", „pashtoon ki Dalair Beti", and you know it"s a very pride feeling for me. My husband is an activist and is very supportive".

She further shared an experience when she was in trouble and was rescued by family and friends. She stated;

"In April 2018 I was abducted in Lahore and was transferred to a „gumnaam maqam", so they came and rescued me".

Sometimes the online harassment reaches to the family and that is the biggest challenge for the female journalists and activists. My Respondent A shared an incident which confirms the above statement. She stated;

"My activism also affected my personal life which includes my kids. As I do revolutionary politics so in a way my kid"s safety is at stake as they can be approached by those whose interests are against my cause. Once my son was picked up when he was only 17 years and was on bike, He called his brother and said „poliœ ne utha liya hai" and then someone cut the line. He was later found in CIA centre in Rumna. When asked the reason for his abduction some silly statement was issued as „He was on bike and a pashtoon so was abducted on the basis of some doubt"".

The support and advice from family and friends at the time of the online harassment can play major role in the struggle for the survival of the female workers being harassed.

Respondent I expressed her views in the following words;

"My late husband Arshad Sharif used to advice me not to give strict opinions; obviously he was concerned about me and always supported me. My in-laws and family was worried due to harassment I faced but later on family and friends supported me and helped me and advised me to ignore the issue".

There are ways through which the family and friends can be secured which include the separation of your professional and private life. Respondent B when asked the similar question responded as;

"I never shared the ugly side of it. My husband is an activist and is very supportive; we used to discuss things together. I am very careful about my private life and it was a smart idea".

Respondent F also agrees on the point of support she received. When she was asked a similar question she stated;

"Yes, my husband and male family members always supported and encouraged me. Husband always asked me to ignore the trolls and focus on my cause".

4.5.1.2 Oppose

Opposition comes with some challenges. You have to put extra power when you want to run against the flow, sometimes it is not easy for a journalist and an activist to fight for their cause when they find discouragement from family and friends. During my field work when I asked my respondents whether they were opposed or supported by their family and friends, 3 out of 10 respondents told me that they faced opposition from their family and friends.

Respondent H shared her opinion about the opposition she faces from her family in the following words;

"My elder brother does not like what I do; he wants me to write on safe corners".

She further stated;

"My husband tried to stop me to work for HRCP and tried to stop me to go for protests".

Sometime family and friends are more concerned about the safety and well being of the female workers rather than realizing the fact that their job involves the risk factor. Respondent C shared her experience when asked similar question and told me that she faced mixed reaction from the family. She stated;

"Though my family supported me but sometimes they asked me to stay away from the things which can harm me as they are concerned about my safety".

She shared an incident when she had an argument with her younger brother. She stated;

"The abuse affected my family life as my younger brother who is 15 years younger than me and does not like threats against me on twitter, one day came to me and said „baji I don"t like the threats on twitter"however I advised him to ignore it".

Respondent D agrees with Respondent H and Respondent C and shared her experience as;

"My family was not supportive as they are not very literate, only my elder sister supported me and used to accompany me".

The experiences shared by my respondents show how important friends and family are in the life of female journalists and activists, particularly in light of online abuse. The first sub-theme,

"Support," shows that despite encountering instances of online abuse, the majority of respondents (7 out of 10) experience great support and encouragement from their family and friends. The responses are inspired and determined to continue working because of this encouragement. The presence of relatives who are active in politics and activism strengthens their network of support. To deal with online abuse, it is also recommended by family and friends to keep personal and work lives apart and to ignore trolls and negative remarks. This network of support plays an important part in the resistance and survival of female employees who are subjected to harassment.

The second sub-theme, "Oppose," on the other hand, highlights the difficulties experienced by certain female journalists and activists who run into resistance from their family and friends. According to the research, 3 out of 10 respondents experienced opposition and discouragement from those in their close social networks. The safety and wellbeing of these female employees are sometimes discussed by family members, who then advise avoiding anything that could harm. Their activism and journalistic activities may be affected by such opposition, which will need them to work harder to get around. In these situations, respondents tend to get into issues with family who might want them to work in more secure surroundings or on less controversial subjects.

The responses highlight the significance that friends and family play in the lives of female journalists and activists who experience online harassment. The encouragement, pride, and will to carry on with their task despite difficulties are all encouraged by the support received from loved ones. On the contrary, opposition from family and friends might provide further challenges, demanding that these women handle opposing viewpoints and show strength in pursuing their objectives. Overall, a strong support network of family and friends may make a big difference in how well-being and efficacy of female employees in fighting back against online abuse and standing up for their rights.

After discussing the impact of harassment on social life the last organizing theme „Coping strategies“ will be discussed and analyzed in detail in the last section.

4.6 Coping Strategies

Coping strategies means strategies that are being followed by someone to overcome the consequences or impacts of some phenomenon. They can help the individual to curb the effects of the unpleasant experience someone faces in the form of online harassment. Coping strategies are methods and tactics people adopt to cope with and adapt to the difficulties, pressures, and challenges they face in life. Coping techniques are intended to reduce the negative emotional effects of tough situations and aid people in regaining control and feeling good about themselves. Depending on the type of a source of stress, the person's personality, and their resources, several coping mechanisms can be adopted. When I asked my respondents about their experiences of online harassment and the coping strategies they adopted to overcome the abuse in the society like Pakistan, the data revealed the two **Basic Theme**s of „individual‟s strategies‟ and „cyber harassment laws in Pakistan‟.

4.6.1. Individual's Strategies

When it comes to the strategies the individual follows to combat online harassment the strategies varies from person to person and situation to situation. It may include the strategies of digital trainings, self censorship, being vocal about the issue and engaging oneself in lighter activities etc.

My respondents when asked few questions relating to the coping strategies they followed to overcome to the abuse gave their opinions.

Professional and digital training is essential when we talk about the harassment in the digital world. Female workers should know the ways they can adopt to secure themselves digitally. Respondent J gave her opinion about the coping strategies women journalists should adopt in the following words;

"I have used all these strategies when I faced the harassment during my journey as a journalist that women journalists need to train themselves professionally, they should keep the proofs of what they are doing, keep their professional life private, should adopt safety measures and should be equipped with some backup plan in case of harassment, means proofs and screen shots should be kept safe so that it can be used in future to file a complaint in FIA".

If the female journalist or activist is being harassed in digital spaces then she must think for a while about her strategy she can adopt to avoid the situation. Respondent B shared her experience and gave her views in response to a similar question when asked, in the following words;

"Very few females in Pakistan talk in the legal field, people on serious positions take me serious although I have been trolled a lot I used to think in the beginning that if I don"treact to this the issue will be resolved, later I thought to change my strategy i-e what and where to say is to be decided by me. I feel humanizing helps a lot, for example if we talk to the person who harassed me in comments I come to know that they are many in number who are doing their jobs for what they are being paid. Women activists need to take care as men think of women as an object and in a patriarchal society like Pakistani where men are taken more serious as compare to women, to make their voices heard women need to work very hard".

Changing the way someone use the social media can also help a lot. Female workers who face online harassment can find ways to engage themselves in other activities on social media which can help them in ignoring the abuse. Respondent I when asked a similar question agreed to the phenomenon of using the social media in a lighter way and shared her coping strategies in the following words;

"I engaged myself in lighter activities on social media. I think it is better to keep yourself engaged with your families, you can block or deactivate you account for some time. One should not bear the harassment in silence, should not hide, should work on different beats and empower yourself by working hard. One should not share his/her personal life just to get some fame. One should not make such statement that make him/her controversial and should not break any new without authenticity and proof".

She further highlighted an element which cause the harassment of female workers i-e the comments on the personal life of the political entities she stressed on this point in the following words;

"One thing to be kept in mind to avoid any unpleasant situation is to avoid talking about the personal life of the political people rather talk about their work".

It is not always necessary to respond to all the comments and sometimes ignorance of the unpleasant trolling can be a solution to the problem. Respondent C shared her views when asked a question during the interview in the following words;

"Best is to ignore, delete and block people. Don't go through all sort of comments, always take screen shots as proof as you should have something in hand when you file a complaint in FIA".

Self censorship can play a major role if you want to stay away from the unpleasant situation caused by the online harassment. It can help you getting back your confidence, lowering down the temperature caused by the abuse and can help the individual to identify they ways one can work in a better way. My Respondent E confirms the benefits of self censorship and expressed her opinion as;

"Self censorship helps, if for your own safety you take some time off then it"s not your failure. One should take help and should talk to people. Journalists must train themselves, they should know about risk mitigation factor".

Respondent A agrees to Respondent E on the account of self censorship. She stated;

"I opted for self censorship, turned my location off and made no public appearances".

The responses emphasized on the value of professional and digital training, securing digital evidence, and keeping privacy, in order to defend yourself. Many emphasized the need of avoiding trolls and concentrating on fun activities or using social media more responsibly. Another common strategy was to ignore and block offensive remarks. One of the primary issues that came up was self-censorship, with several respondents stressing the need to exercise caution while addressing the private lives of others and to refrain from making controversial statements without sufficient evidence.

After analyzing the experiences of online harassment to female journalists and activists it can be concluded that there is no universal approach of preventing online harassment since different techniques are employed depending on personal preferences and the type of harassment that is experienced. Some respondents focused on being mentally tough and temporary social media inactivity, while others thought to empower themselves via education and training. As a result of the understanding of the necessity for legal remedies in cases of extreme harassment, the need to

collect evidence for future complaints was emphasized. Overall, the results highlight the need for comprehensive measures to combat online harassment and establish a safer digital environment for everyone, especially for women who frequently experience excessive levels of abuse and trolling. These efforts must include both individual methods and larger social reforms.

After discussing the coping strategies of both journalists and activists the last **Basic Theme** of the „Cyber harassment laws in Pakistan" in the eyes of journalists and activists of Pakistan will be discussed and analyzed in detail.

4.6.2. Criticism on cyber harassment laws in Pakistan by female journalists and activist of Pakistan

Pakistan is a country where female journalists and activists are facing serious threats in the cyber space. There are cyber laws against the cyber crimes all over the world; Pakistan also has cyber laws for the protection of the individuals in the cyber world. Laws are usually made to secure and guard the interests of the individual. If someone faces online harassment he/she should be protected under the cyber laws of the any state. The cyber harassment should be dealt seriously and journalists and activists must be protected under the umbrella of the cyber laws in Pakistan. To have and insight of the opinions of the journalists and activists about the existing cyber laws in Pakistan and whether they protect the rights of journalists and activists I asked few questions related to the issue from my respondents. After the discussion few factors emerged which were common in the opinion of my respondents and are mainly responsible for the failure of the cyber laws existing in the country. They include issues relating to implementation, non cooperation of law enforcing agency, flaws in the Cyber Laws, bias role of law enforcing agency.

Law becomes ineffective when it is not implemented properly. Pakistan has the problem of the ineffective implementation of the cyber laws thus making them useless. My respondents highly criticized the role of the useless and unimplemented laws of cyber harassment. Respondent E criticized the law of PECA. She expressed her opinion in the following words;

"PECA's law was basically enabling people to harass journalists and activists".

She further stated;

"There are the issues of implementation, there are laws but they are not good enough as there is no culture of journalist"sprotection in Pakistan".

Respondent G agrees to the Respondent E and gave her opinion in the following words;

"Cyber laws in Pakistan are merely on papers as we do have implementation issue".

During my research my respondents criticized the role of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).Respondent H shared her experience during her journey and criticized FIA in the following words;

"There are laws but the fact is, when you go to FIA they do not cooperate. Once 2 cases of black mailing came to me and I referred them to FIA, the lady (victim) called me and told while crying that it was disgusted experience as ladies in FIA on duty shouted at me and I would not go there again".

Respondent A also criticized FIA, she stated;

"There is law in FIA and there you face another level of harassment. FIA is only there to harass people; there is no use to go there".

Respondent B also agrees with Respondent A and criticized the role of FIA. She expressed her views in the following term;

"Law of PECA is basically law of criminal definition response. FIA is very slow".

Respondent J also criticized the FIA so as the other did. She stated;

"If someone goes to FIA and complains they say if a person lives in UK and harass you from there what can we do against him?"

FIA has flaws too. The system of filing the complaint is disliked by the journalists as my Respondent I shared her experience and said;

"Process in the FIA is very slow and time consuming, in Goraya"s case how could I walk in FIA and tell them about the harassment I face from him and how could I tell them that he

calls me prostitute? There is no mechanism of complaining online to FIA. There are laws but implementation lacks in Pakistan".

Biased role of FIA is also criticized by my respondents. If an institution is biased how it can provide justice to the victims? Respondent C shared her experience about the cyber laws in Pakistan in the following words;

"We do have laws against cyber crimes, we do have PECA but laws are useless. I know few colleagues who went to FIA and there they faced more harassment. See there should be some mechanism, if there is any complaint against any journalist regarding his/her content then FIA is very quick in blocking the account of his/her but if a journalist goes to FIA due to abuse the FIA sleeps over that complaint".

She further shared her experience in the following terms;

"My personal videos were uploaded once and I wrote to FIA but I got no response from them. Media industry needs to revisit its policy regarding gender balance in their news rooms and their policies regarding gender portrayal".

Respondent F shared her opinion on the issue as;

"There are laws of cyber crime but there are many issues in them they should be altered so that they can protect the activists".

After analyzing the responses it can be concluded that although there are cyber laws in existence in our country, they are not effectively implemented due to a number of problems, which leaves these people's rights unprotected. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) is criticized by respondents for its biases in handling complaints and for its lack of cooperation with law enforcement. The respondents also criticize for the poor implementation of cyber laws. A sense of powerlessness develops among victims of cyber harassment as a result of the FIA's delayed and inefficient reaction time as well as the absence of an online complaint system.

The opinions voiced by the respondents point to a general lack of trust in the efficiency of the system and the agencies in charge of enforcing cyber laws. The primary grievances focus

on the idea that the rules fall short in addressing the complex nature of cyber harassment and that there is a gap between the legislation as written and how it is actually put into practice. The problem goes beyond just whether laws exist; it also examines their efficacy, efficiency, and sensitivity to the demands of victims, particularly journalists and activists. The FIA's biases further damage the system's legitimacy as well as its ability to handle justice impartially.

There is a need for a comprehensive strategy that addresses the gaps in current cyber laws, strengthens the capacity of law enforcement, and promotes a mindset that places a priority on the safety and well-being of people using the internet in order to adequately protect journalists and activists. It is clear that the situation right now requires immediate attention and modifications in order to make sure the cyber laws achieve their intended purpose and protect the rights of people in Pakistan who are exposed to online harassment.

Now that empirical data for this study has been analyzed, while keeping the purpose of the study in mind in this chapter. The current research findings will be linked to research aims and objectives in the following chapter as well as whether the findings support my hypothesis or not.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Through a socio-psychological lens, this research tried to explore the experiences of online harassment that Pakistani female journalists and activists have to deal with. Recognizing the wide-ranging consequences of online harassment, the study tried to understand how it affects the mental health, emotional strength, and perceptions of these women who experience frequent online abuse. The study has also explored the possible societal consequences the victims may experience, such as career losses, social discrimination, and restrictions on their freedom of speech. This is the last chapter of the thesis which is divided in two sections. The first section includes the discussion while the second section is conclusion.

5.1. Discussion

The first part of this chapter deals with the discussion. In this thesis, the data collected from interviews with various female journalists and activists in Pakistan sheds light on the prevalent issue of online harassment faced by them. The Qualitative Thematic method was used to analyze empirical data to get an in-depth view. “Online Harassment” is the „Global Theme (GT)“ in this study. Harassment experience, impact on work life, harassment on organization‟s policies, impact on social life, impact on mental well-being, coping strategies are six „Organizing Themes (OT)“. I will discuss the organizing themes in detail one by one which will help the reader to understand the issues raised in my research question in detail.

5.1.1. Harassment experience

In this theme, the data collected from interviews with various female journalists and activists in Pakistan sheds light on the prevalent issue of online harassment faced by them. 'Digital/Online Harassment or Threat', 'Nature of Harassment', and 'Sources and Factors behind the Attacks' were three basic themes that also emerged in the empirical data analyzed in the fourth chapter. These themes highlight the severity of online harassment, the diverse forms it takes, and the underlying factors contributing to the attacks.

The first theme, "Digital/Online Harassment or Threat," highlighted the fact that online harassment encompasses unpleasant behavior that humiliates and offends people. According to the findings, respondents experienced harassment when their opinions differed from those of influential groups, such political institutions. The research indicates that societal norms and cultural beliefs have a significant role in influencing the level of harassment women suffer, and those female journalists and activists who voice their ideas on social media frequently become targets of harassment. Online anonymity also acts as a shield for harassers, allowing them to attack and insult others without being held accountable.

The second theme, "Nature of Harassment," investigated the various kinds of online harassment that respondents had to deal with. These included character assassination, sexual threats, blackmailing, and hate speech. Threats of "death and rape" were frequently used, especially to harass and to silence victims. Due to their activity, political ideas, or resistance to prevailing power structures, female journalists and activists were frequently the targets of harassment. Digital spaces were full with hate speech, regardless of career, gender, or status.

The third theme explored sources and factors behind the online harassment under the heading "Sources and Factors behind the Attacks." The data revealed that harassment was often a part of coordinated attacks run by troll armies, politicians, and people with predefined intentions. Political elements significantly influenced the attacks since those who voiced their ideas against influential groups were subjected to organised and systematic harassment. Online harassment was significantly influenced by gender discrimination and religious extremism, with female journalists and activists targeted for questioning patriarchal norms and fighting for political and social change.

The data presented a nuanced and complicated picture of online harassment in Pakistan. Due to their jobs, political views, gender, and work, the respondents experienced threats and attacks. It became clear that online harassment was frequently used as a tool to silence opposing perspectives and control the narrative. Female journalists and activists were particularly vulnerable to attacks from a variety of sources, including privileged persons trying to quiet them and religious extremist organizations.

The results of this organizing theme highlight the urgent need for safer online environments and improved knowledge of how online harassment affects people's mental and emotional health. Additionally, it emphasizes how important it is to address the underlying causes of such harassment, such as gender discrimination and religious fanaticism. To properly prevent online harassment and protect the freedom of expression and safety online, practical solutions must be put into place, including legal constraints and social media platform regulations.

The data collected through interviews with Pakistani female journalists and activists revealed the major problem of internet harassment and its different forms. Conversations revealed that online harassment is frequently used to suppress opposing viewpoints, maintain power dynamics, and silence opponents. The attacks were significantly influenced by elements including political agendas, gender discrimination, religious fanaticism, and class. Female journalists and activists were particularly targeted for their work and advocacy. The findings are in line with Olweus(1999) who believes that online harassment is an intentional behavior to harm another person, repeatedly, and involving a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim .A broad strategy is required to address the underlying causes, create safer online environments, and put in place effective measures to protect people from online abuse.

5.1.2 Impact on work life

The data collected from the respondents gives insight on the effects of online harassment on the work life of female journalists and activists, the gendered nature of abuse, how abuse impacts their professional cause, and the abuse they face when they talk about certain topics that are sensitive. The results highlight the complex and varied nature of online harassment as well as its consequences on people in the online world.

Online abuse is a traumatic experience that has an impact on all spheres of the victim's life, including their career. According to the study findings, each individual's experience with harassment at work can be different. While some people see harassment as a challenge and keep working, others feel intimidated and uncomfortable which makes it difficult for them to focus on their responsibilities as an Individuals' perceptions of and reactions to online harassment depend mostly on their social backgrounds.

Online harassment's gender aspect is important, especially in a patriarchal society like Pakistan. All of the respondents agreed that because of deeply embedded stereotypes, women are disproportionately targeted for online abuse. Women are frequently told to be quiet and refrain from speaking up, which silences their voices in online as well as offline environments. The experiences of the interviewees show how gender discrimination is pervasive and how women who challenge societal norms are confronted with disapproval and derogatory comments about their character.

The responses reveal incredible determination and commitment to their work as journalists and activists in the face of internet hostility. They support social change and are prepared to take on the difficulties that come with it. They aren't distracted from their objective due to harassment; on the contrary, it makes them more determined to keep fighting for their cause. Self-censorship is a coping strategy used by some people to protect them from more harassment, while other people purposefully time their words to minimize criticism.

The data also showed that journalists and activists working on particular sensitive topics like religious biasness, cultural identities, blasphemy, and gender rights are frequently the targets of internet harassment. The findings are in line with Aroosa Shaukat and Waqas Naeem work (2020) who stated that Pakistani women journalists face challenges such as sexual harassment, social media attacks, and religious and cultural factors that target them based on gender. To avoid harassment, women are urged to focus on "soft beats" and stay away from topics that are controversial.

In Pakistan, online harassment of female journalists and activists has serious implications. Their professional lives are impacted, with some people suffering serious consequences than others. Due to societal norms and biases, women experience disproportionate amounts of abuse when it comes to online harassment. The interviewees show persistence and determination in pursuing their career goals despite the difficulties. Self-censorship is one approach to deal with abuse, but it also emphasizes the difficulties that women experience when trying to have a voice. Furthermore, those working on very delicate themes are frequently the targets of abuse, which further limits their freedom of expression.

In order to combat online harassment, society, the media, and the government must work together to establish a more secure environment where people may express their viewpoints without being harassed or subjected to discrimination. Promoting gender equality, encouraging a diversity of viewpoints, and offering assistance to people who are the target of online harassment are critical steps in creating a more tolerant and friendly society. In order to ensure that their voices contribute to significant social change in Pakistan, female journalists and activists should be given the freedom to carry on their job without being subjected to harassment.

5.1.3. Harassment and Organization's Policies

The data collected by interviewing with Pakistani female journalists and activists sheds light on the pervasive issue of online harassment and how it affects both their professional and personal life. Three main themes are discussed: the impact of harassment on work life, the gendered nature of harassment, and organizations‟ responsibilities in dealing with online harassment. The data also emphasizes how important the training is for effectively preventing online abuse. The issues faced by female journalists and activists in digital places were explored in this theme, along with their repercussions.

The first subject, "Effect on work life," reveals the significant impact of online harassment on the professional lives of female journalists and activists. Respondents discussed how they had experienced harassment, felt uneasy, and found it difficult to concentrate on their work because they were afraid of online abuse. Intense harassment even forced some people to resign from their jobs or risk having them terminated. There were varying perspectives some respondents expressed resistance and perceived harassment as a challenge that pushed them to defend themselves. This theme emphasizes how individual the effects of online abuse are and how differently people react to it.

The second theme, "Gender aspect," focuses on how gender is an important factor in the harassment that female journalists and activists experience. All respondents believed that women are unfairly targeted in Pakistani society as a result of deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Societal biases that prevented women from speaking up on a variety of topics, especially those related to religion, culture, and women's rights, frequently served as the basis for harassment. The data emphasizes the objectification of women in the media, which supports gender

inequality and leaves them subjected to violence. The need of challenging patriarchal beliefs and promoting an inclusive and respectful environment for women in digital platforms is highlighted by this theme.

The third theme, "Harassment and Organization's Policies," explores how organizations might help their female employees who suffer from online harassment. The experiences of the respondents were quite diverse, with some organizations actively offering support, such as anti-harassment policy, training, and help, while others opted to avoid controversy. The data emphasize how crucial organizational policies and assistance programmes are to effectively combating online harassment. Additionally, it emphasizes the necessity of coordinated efforts to stop harassment and safeguard the security of journalists and activists.

The emphasis of the fourth theme, "Training for Handling Online Abuse," is on the value of digital literacy and training in combating online harassment. While some organizations provide training for their employees, others do not, leaving people to seek out private training from NGOs and outside organizations. According to the data, this kind of training gives people the knowledge and abilities they need to effectively defend themselves online and deal with abuse. It also emphasizes the vital role that NGOs play in bridging the training gap and pushing for a more secure working environment.

When taken as a whole, these themes shed light on the difficulties experienced by female journalists and activists in Pakistani society. Their freedom of speech is restricted, and the harassment they experience online has an adverse effect on their ability to perform their jobs. A comprehensive approach is needed to address this problem, including confronting stereotypes, putting in place strong organizational regulations, and offering extensive training for dealing with online harassment.

Organizations must develop strong anti-harassment policies and give employees‟ thorough training if they want to effectively combat internet abuse. This may involve training staff members on privacy protection, internet safety, and harassment reporting procedures. In order to bridge the training gap and promote a safer working environment, NGOs and outside organizations can play a significant role.

Additionally, media organizations and digital platforms need to take responsibility for making the internet a safer place by enforcing strict rules against abuse and harassment. In order to successfully address online abuse, media organizations, NGOs, and governmental entities can work together to generate comprehensive strategies.

Additionally, promoting an inclusive and respectful environment for women in digital spaces requires educating people about the effects of online harassment and confronting social biases against women. Online cultures of respect and empathy may be promoted and contested through public campaigns, seminars, and educational activities.

The data from the interviews with Pakistani female journalists and activists highlights the widespread issue of online harassment and its numerous negative effects on their life. The findings highlight the pressing need for collective efforts to stop harassment, fight gender inequality, and build safer online environments. We can work to create a welcoming and secure atmosphere for female journalists and activists in digital spaces by educating people with digital literacy, putting in place efficient organizational procedures, and encouraging a culture of respect and empathy online.

5.1.4. Impact on Mental Well-being

The data gathered from the interviews with Pakistani female journalists and activists sheds light on the pervasive issue of online harassment and its significant negative effects on their mental health. All of the respondents agreed that harassment incidents had a long-lasting impact on their mental health. Two major themes emerged from the analysis of their points of view: "Abuse and Mental Health" and "Co-Relation between Online and Offline Harassment."

In response to the subject "Abuse and Mental Health," the respondents shared how being harassed online affected their mental health. Due to the constant fear of being singled out and attacked online, many spoke of feeling stressed, worried and insecure. They were worried for the safety of their loved ones because the harassment also affected their families. The findings showed a strong connection between online abuse and mental health, with the victims of the harassment experiencing psychological distress and self-doubt. False allegations and persistent trolling, according to several responders, have caused anxiety attacks and had a detrimental

effect on their mental health. The experiences made clear the mental distress and emotional strain caused by internet abuse.

According to the data on the subject "Co-Relation between Online and Offline Harassment," there is a direct link between online abuse and physical threats. Numerous responders highlighted how the online harassment they experienced made them feel uncomfortable and frightened in real life. These female activists and journalists were quite worried about the online attacks extending to the real world. They described how harassment campaigns and being targeted by influential people had forced them to take safety measures, stay away of crowds, and live in continuous fear of physical violence. The data revealed the negative consequences that online abuse has on people's mental and physical health, illuminating the true harm it can do to a person's life.

The findings as a whole emphasize the pressing need to address online harassment and its effects on mental health. The respondents' personal experiences provide insight into the anxiety and emotional toll that persistent online harassment causes. Harassment in online places is not isolated; it may also occur in real-world, which has an impact on a person's sense of security and wellbeing. Since many respondents emphasized that women are disproportionately targeted as a result of social biases and patriarchal practices, the data also reflect the more general issue of gender-based harassment.

To address these challenges, collective action is required at various levels and cooperation is needed to address these issues. The need for stronger legislative safeguards against online abuse and harassment is essential. To guarantee that victims have access to justice and that offenders are held accountable for their crimes, effective laws should be put into place. Digital platforms must also fight online abuse more actively by implementing strong reporting procedures and safeguards to stop and delete harmful information.

Organizations are essential in helping employees who experience online abuse. This involves providing mental health assistance, digital training, and aggressive procedures to guard against abuse of their employees. People who get training in digital literacy and online safety are better equipped to defend themselves and deal with harassment.

The way that society views harassment and gender in particular has to change. Online cultures of respect and empathy may be promoted via public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives that oppose patriarchal standards. The promotion of a secure and welcoming atmosphere in online communities where people may openly express their opinions without fear of harassment or retaliation should also be prioritized.

The stories that the respondents described also emphasize how crucial it is to foster a sense of unity among journalists and activists. Collaboration and support networks can provide people a sense of security and strength when dealing with online harassment. This can involve unions in general, professional associations, and non-governmental organizations together to promote a more secure and civil online space.

In conclusion, the data collected from the interviews with Pakistani female journalists and activists sheds substantial light on the effects of online abuse on mental health. The experiences that respondents recounted highlight the urgent need for group action to stop online harassment and make the internet a safer and more welcoming place. A comprehensive approach is needed to address online harassment, including cultural change, platform accountability, legal safeguards, and organizational assistance. We can create a culture where people may openly express their opinions without fear of retaliation and where protecting and valuing mental health is a top priority by working together.

5.1.5. Impact on Social Life

The data obtained through the interviews with Pakistani women activists and journalists gives insight on how online harassment affects their social life. Family and friends, which are essential in a person's life as a support system, are important in how these women deal with online harassment. In respect to the role of friends and family during online harassment, the data analysis identified two sub-themes: "Support" and "Oppose."

In the sub-theme "Support," it is evident that even if they experience online harassment, the vast majority of respondents (7 out of 10) receive tremendous support and motivation from their family and friends. For the responses, this support is a source of inspiration and strength. Their spirits are boosted by the supportive remarks and pride that their loved ones expressed in response to their activism or journalistic work. The data reveals that the respondents' families,

who are also active in politics and activism, are aware of the difficulties and dangers encountered in these professions and support them wholeheartedly. These females are able to endure and carry out their crucial job because they have a strong network of support. The recommendation to keep one's personal and professional life distinct was also addressed by respondents.

The sub-theme "Oppose," on the other hand, makes it clear that 3 out of 10 respondents experienced opposition and discouragement from their family and friends over their activism or journalism careers. The respondents described times when their families showed worry for their safety and well-being and gave them advice against taking part in activities that would invite online harassment. These women may face additional difficulties as a result of this opposition, which will force them to negotiate opposing viewpoints and maintain their determination in achieving their goals. Despite the opposition, some responders still work under difficult conditions and make an effort to change the world.

The data highlights the important role that friends and family play in the lives of female journalists and activists, especially in the face of online harassment. These women are empowered by support from loved ones to overcome the difficulties created by online harassment and carry on their important job. Family and friends' words of support and encouragement boost their commitment to fight harassment and injustice. For these women, the network of support offered by family and friends becomes a vital source of inspiration and emotional support.

On the contrary, resistance from personal social circles can provide challenges and lead to conflict since respondents may disagree with their family's wishes for them to work in less risky places or on lighter subjects. However, the experiences of these individuals show their commitment and determination in pursuing their objectives in spite of challenges. Some respondents felt the need to explain to their family members the nature of their employment and how crucial their activism or journalism was to bringing about a good change in society.

Overall, the data reveals how important family and friends are to female journalists and activists who experience online harassment. While opposition can cause difficulties which call for courage and conviction, support and encouragement from loved ones boost their mental and emotional well-being. The existence of a solid support system can significantly impact these

women's capacity to combat online harassment and fight for their rights. The information also emphasizes the necessity of raising awareness among families about the nature of their loved ones' jobs and the significance of speaking out against online abuse.

As a result, this research emphasizes the varied and complex role that friends and family play in the lives of female journalists and activists who experience online abuse. These women are better equipped to carry out their important job and overcome the difficulties caused by online harassment because they have a strong support system. Opposition from close social circles, on the other hand, may bring extra challenges that call for resiliency and tenacity. In order to provide a friendly and enabling environment, it is crucial to raise awareness and understanding among families about the nature and relevance of their loved ones' activism or journalism. In the conclusion, the influence of friends and family on these women's social life highlights the significance of community and cooperation in combating the problem of online harassment.

5.1.6. Coping Strategies

The data gathered from the interviews with Pakistani female journalists and activists gives insight on the strategies that women use to deal with online harassment and their criticisms of the country's current cyber harassment regulations. These themes are discussed in depth in order to comprehend the wide range of coping strategies used by these women and the limits of the legal system in defending their rights.

The first organizing theme, "Individual's Strategies," demonstrates the many strategies these women use to combat online abuse. Many responders emphasized the value of professional and digital training, realizing how crucial it is to arm oneself with the knowledge and abilities needed to protect one's online presence. Maintaining digital evidence, such as screenshots, was emphasized as being an essential tool to support claims of harassment. Some respondents advised using caution while disclosing personal information online, keeping personal and work life separate, and using social media for lighter activities to avoid trolls and negativity.

In order to reduce the possibility of harassment, a number of respondents emphasized the importance of self-censorship, carefully selecting their topic and wording. They did, however, see the significance of taking precautions and speaking up on significant issues. Strategies like ignoring and blocking abusive comments were often mentioned, showing an effort to stay away

from potential dangers. Adaptability and ideas of female journalists and activists as they deal with the difficulties of internet abuse were demonstrated by these coping mechanisms.

"Criticism on Cyber Harassment Laws in Pakistan," the second organizing theme, drew attention to the shortcomings of the current legal system in defending the rights of female journalists and activists who are the targets of online abuse. The respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the implementation and efficiency of Pakistan's cyber laws, which are intended to handle cybercrimes like online harassment.

The respondents highlighted the inadequate implementation of cyber laws as one of their main concerns. Despite being in place, the rules are not effectively implemented, leaving those who are the targets of internet abuse without any protection. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), which is in charge of managing cybercrime investigations, has come under fire for responding slowly, refusing to cooperate, and treating complaints in an unfair manner. The responders discussed situations where FIA provided insufficient assistance to victims, adding to their pain.

Another criticism of internet harassment laws was their weaknesses. The respondents emphasized how vulnerable victims are as a result of the complexity of cyber harassment, which is not adequately addressed by current regulations. Major barriers to victims seeking remedy were the absence of an accessible complaint process and a digital platform for reporting abuse.

The legal system's biases were a major source of worry. Respondents described incidents in which cyber harassment offenders remained unpunished but victims frequently faced criticism and further harassment while seeking justice. This bias continued in the content moderation process as well, as complaints about some journalists were dealt quickly while those about harassment were dealt slowly or not at all.

A comprehensive understanding of the difficulties experienced by female journalists and activists in Pakistan is provided through the discussion of coping mechanisms and criticism of cyber harassment regulations. While the coping mechanisms show their adaptability and tenacity in the face of online harassment, the legal system's criticism highlights the urgent need for institutional improvements.

The results show that to effectively combat online abuse, a comprehensive approach is required. The application of current cyber rules has to be improved urgently, first and foremost. This may be done by improving the capability and instruction of law enforcement organizations, including the FIA, to deal with cybercrime matters quickly and competently.

Improvements to the law are necessary in order to eliminate the loopholes and restrictions in the present anti-cyber harassment legislation. The regulations should be comprehensive, careful of the particular difficulties posed by online harassment, and provide precise definitions of offences as well as suitable punishments. These reforms must to be focused on defending the rights and security of victims, especially journalists and activists.

Legal restrictions alone won't be enough to stop internet abuse. Campaigns to educate the public on cyber ethics and ethical social media use can help to foster a respectful and peaceful online society. A safer and more inclusive digital environment may be created by media organisations by actively supporting gender equality and sensitivity in their newsrooms and content.

The data reveals the complex and varied forms of online harassment that Pakistani women journalists and activists experience. Their use of coping mechanisms reveals their determination and commitment to carrying on with their task despite obstacles. However, the criticism of the current cyber harassment legislation highlights the urgent need for thorough revisions to safeguard people's safety and rights online. All parties involved, including law enforcement agencies, lawmakers, media outlets, and civil society, must work together to address internet abuse. We can fight to make the digital world safer and more inclusive for everyone by putting effective safeguards into place and fostering a positive atmosphere. The findings are in line with the work of Sadia Jamil(2018,2019) and Zahid Yasir(2019) who stated that Pakistan's media culture of impunity negatively impacts journalists' and activists‟ well-being, affecting physical, psychological, financial, legal, social, and emotional well-being. To combat this, the government, media organizations, and journalists' unions should collaborate to implement long-term follow-ups, safety training, legal support, financial protections, medical insurance, safety equipment, and financial compensation. Addressing religious forces and contextual factors is crucial for promoting safe, free journalism in Pakistan.

5.2. Conclusion

How do female journalists and activists in Pakistan perceive, experience and cope up with online harassment? The data collected while conversing with Pakistani female journalists and activists puts a clear emphasis on the prevalent and extremely upsetting problem of online harassment. This study has shed light on how online harassment affects people's perceptions, jobs, mental health, social connections, and coping mechanisms, among other elements of their life. The data, which was derived from the interviews, highlighted many themes, revealing the complexity and diversity of the online abuse that these women had to deal with.

The nature of the online abuse experienced by female journalists and activists is one of the main themes that emerged from the data. It became clear that online harassment affects people in every aspect of their life, negatively impacting their mental and emotional health, ability to carry out their jobs, and even their safety in public. The interviews made clear how the respondents experienced tension, worry, and a sense of fear as a result of the constant harassment, threats, and hate speech. Some of them took safety precautions and avoided public gatherings owing to their worries about physical danger brought on by internet abuse.

The study also demonstrated how online harassment was frequently employed as a tactic to silence critics and repress those who call for social and political change. Respondents who voiced criticism of strong entities, such as political parties and fundamentalist religious groups, were often singled out and persecuted. The political character of online harassment and its capability to influence public opinion were further highlighted by this pattern of coordinated efforts by troll armies and politicians.

It is important to recognize the contribution of patriarchal attitudes and gender inequality to online harassment. Because of deeply rooted societal biases that prevent women from speaking out for themselves, female journalists and activists have experienced disproportionately high rates of attack. The data revealed that women who fought for women's rights, challenged social norms, or worked on certain sensitive topics were disproportionately harassed. The objectification of women and their marginalization are perpetuated when the internet environment is used as a battleground for gender-based attacks.

This research also highlighted the effects of online harassment on their work life. Respondents reported having trouble focusing on their work and experiencing insecurity as a result of their concern for online harassment. Extreme harassment even forced several respondents to abandon their positions or risked having their employment terminated. The research demonstrated that online abuse affects more than just certain journalists or activists; it also suppresses freedom of speech and a variety of perspectives in the media landscape, having an influence on society's access to information and balanced reporting.

The findings revealed these women's resiliency and ingenuity in the face of online harassment within the context of coping mechanisms. To defend themselves from online abuse, they developed a variety of individualized techniques, including digital and professional training, self-censorship, and selective sharing of personal information. Additionally, the encouragement from loved ones and friends was extremely important in enabling them to carry on with their job in spite of opposition and threats.

The data, however, also demonstrated the shortcomings of Pakistan's current legislation against online harassment. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the implementation and efficacy of the nation's cybercrime legislation, despite the existence of such legislation. Victims seeking justice faced substantial challenges due to the poor response from law enforcement authorities, the biased treatment of complaints, and the absence of user-friendly complaint systems. Those who experience online abuse were not adequately protected by the present legal system, leaving them open to additional victimization.

The data collected by conversing with Pakistani female journalists and activists highlighted the pressing need to address internet harassment and its numerous negative effects on their life. Online harassment is not a separate problem; it is closely tied to gender discrimination, political motivations, and cultural expectations. The information demonstrated how it affects real-world safety, work obligations, and people's mental and emotional well-being in addition to the digital environment.

In conclusion, the information offered in this thesis sheds light on the problem of online harassment that Pakistani women journalists and activists deal with. The interviews provided insight into the severity and variety of online harassment, the underlying causes of the assaults,

and their significant effects on people's mental and emotional health. Overall, the results of this thesis highlight the pressing need to address online harassment as a significant societal issue with far-reaching effects on Pakistani people, society, and the media environment. The results of the interviews served as a call to action for all parties involved to work together and establish a more secure and civil online space where the voices of female journalists and activists may flourish and make a real difference in society. Pakistan may advance towards a more inclusive and tolerant society that values freedom of speech and the empowerment of all its inhabitants by implementing effective measures to address online harassment and its underlying causes.

Recommendations

To counter the challenging issue of online harassment there is need of a thorough and diversified strategy involving multiple stakeholders. Stronger legal safeguards against online abuse are urgently needed, first and foremost. To maintain its efficacy and offer complete support to victims, the current cyber harassment rules need to be changed. To handle cyber crimes quickly and competently, law enforcement organizations, like the Federal Investigation Agency, need to be properly trained and resourced.

Additionally, to counteract online harassment, media outlets and digital platforms need to be vigilant. This involves putting in place reliable reporting systems and content management guidelines that guarantee a secure and peaceful online community for all users. In their newsrooms, media organizations can also do a lot to promote gender equality and combat patriarchal attitudes towards reporting.

The cultural practices that support gender discrimination and online harassment must be challenged, and this requires public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives. Through these programmes, people may be inspired to participate in debate and constructive conversation online without resorting to harassment and abuse.

A comprehensive approach that includes legal reforms, digital platform laws, public awareness campaigns, and victim support networks is required to successfully handle online harassment. To discourage criminals and safeguard people from online abuse, it is essential to strengthen cyber harassment laws and enhance their application. By developing effective reporting methods and

content moderation standards, media organizations and digital platforms must actively support safe and respectful online environments.

It is necessary to question cultural norms that support discrimination against and objectification of women in order to address the gender component of online harassment. Campaigns to raise awareness among the public should support gender equality and encourage compassion and understanding among all users. Digital literacy and training may provide women journalists and activists the power they need to better defend them online and deal with harassment's problems.

Victims should also have easy access to support systems, mental health services, and legal assistance so they have the resources they need to deal with the emotional and practical difficulties they encounter. By creating a sense of community among journalists and activists, it is possible to fight online harassment and provide a secure online environment.

Governmental entities, media organizations, civil society organizations, and people must work together to tackle internet abuse. We can work towards a safer and more inclusive online environment where people can engage in meaningful conversations without fear of harassment or intimidation by promoting a culture of respect and empathy online, combating gender discrimination, and offering thorough support for victims.

In the end, the public, civil society, media organizations, and governmental entities must work together to tackle internet abuse. We can get closer to a society that values gender equality, freedom of speech, and respect for all people by building inclusive and secure digital spaces where varied voices may freely express themselves without fear of harassment or backlash.

Interview Guide

Name:

Age:

Marital Status:

Province:

Questions: For the convenience of the respondents the interview guide has been divided in six themes.

Harassment Experience

1. For how long have you been in this profession?

2. Have you ever been threatened digitally? Or have you ever been harassed digitally? If yes please share your experience.

3. What was the nature of those attacks?

4. Was the harasser known to you?

5. What kind of sources were behind the threats?

Impact on work life

1. Did the experience affect your work life?

2. Do you think female journalists/activists face harassment due to their **gender**?

3. Did you ever think to change your profession after the harassment?

4. Did the harassment ever affect your opinion and journalistic content?

5. Did you avoid reporting/discussing about specific topic after the abuse?

Harassment and Organization's policies

1. Did you inform your organization?

2. Are there any policies adopted by your media house to handle such situation?

3. Have you ever been trained to handle an online abuse?

4. Do you think self censorship can play any role to avoid the situation?

Impact on Mental well-being

1. Has the abuse affected your mental well-being? If yes how?

2. Have you been provided (physical safety support, psychological support, digital security training) after the harassment?

3. Do you think there is any correlation between the online and offline harassment?

4. Did you ever felt insecure while going out after the abuse? Or you thought that the abuse will follow you offline as well?

Impact on Social Life

1. What was the reaction of your family after the experience?

2. Did it affect your personal life? Your relation with your husband etc.

3. Did the abuse follow you home and became a threat to your family? Especially kids.

4. How far your family and friends were helpful while you faced the harassment?

Coping strategies for Female Journalists or Activists

1. What strategies you followed to overcome the abuse?

2. Do you think there is any law in place in Pakistan that specially focuses the issues of online and ICT facilitated violence against women journalists/activists as a crime?

3. Generally, how safe and secure or insecure do you feel as a female journalist/activist in a male dominated profession of journalism in Pakistan?

4. How in your opinion, can journalism/activism become more female friendly profession and how can female journalists/activists overcome the work-related and gendered-related and challenges they face in this profession?

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Interviews

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Date: 27-6-22

Respondent B (Lawyer, Human Rights professional and news analyst, legal advisor for international commission of Jurist, Human Rights activist & columnist

Date: 24-6-2022

Respondent C (Journalist, Anchor, Trainer, communication specialist, writer, Rights activist and Advocacy Manager at Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ))

Date: 14-7-2022

Respondent D (Human Rights Activist, working for Human Rights Commission of Pakistan since 2007)

Date: 10-9-2022

Respondent E (Multimedia Journalist, Researcher)

Date: 1-7-2022

Respondent G (Human Rights Activist)

Date: 15-10-2022

Respondent H (Director Mohsinini Resource Centre, Activist, Analyst on the issues of social Justice with special focus on Gender)

Date: 16-10-2022

Respondent I (Journalist, Columnist & Photographer), Respondent E (Multimedia Journalist, Researcher)

Date: 24-6-2022

Respondent J (Joint Secretary National Press Club Islamabad)

Date: 23-6-2022

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