

# **Media and Gender: Pakistani Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

In the present era the value of gender equality are being accepted and promoted in almost all regions of the world. For the emancipation of women in every field, economic independence is of paramount importance along with creating awareness among them about their rights and responsibilities- the recognition of their vital role and the work they do at home. The media is considered as the most potent and influential mean in this regard as it has the capacity of persuading and molding opinion. The relationship of the media and the women is important because whatever image women have in our country is influenced by media. It is thus vital, to utilize the media for improving the status of women in Pakistan and divulging their role in national development. In this context the present paper tries to highlight the situation of media and gender with reference to Pakistan and evaluate it at three levels:

1. State of women employment in media
2. Portrayal of women in media
3. Media coverage of gender issues.

The paper finds that at all levels in media organizations in Pakistan, women are under-represented and do not occupy decision-making or top positions. The study also outlines the reasons of stumpy participation of women in media. The review of relevant literature, interviews and general observations confirm that images of women in media is stereotype and marked for sale. Print media particularly the Urdu press has failed to respond significantly to the reality of changing roles of women whereas TV channels are in process to gradually shifting from the orthodox portrayal of women. The study explores that Urdu press have bias reporting, derogatory language on gender issues as compared to English press and electronic media. It also briefly reviews the studies conducted in west regarding western media and gets the identical results. At the end the paper also presented recommendations for the improvement. It also furnishes the copies of Gender Sensitive Language Guidelines, Guidelines for Media Practitioners and Management for Portrayal of Women in Media and a Gender-Sensitive Code-of-Ethics for the Print Media in Pakistan as annexure.

# **Media and Gender: Pakistani Perspective**

## **Introduction**

In the present era the values of gender equality are being accepted and promoted in almost all regions of the world. The importance of gender equality for sustainable people-centered development is well accepted and it is widely recognized that gender inequalities create inefficiencies and hamper growth. Man and woman can neither reach excellence without the cooperation of the other. Although it is almost impossible now to speak about rights and equality without at least mentioning gender, the treatment is often superficial; as though by the mere mention of the word 'gender', or with a meager representation of women, gender issues through media is not enough. There is a need to uncover the various levels of unequal gender issues that can enable or limit the progressive development of women in our society. The implications are that the women are denied opportunities of equal growth, development and self realization.

For the emancipation of women in every field, economic independence is of paramount importance along with creating awareness among them about their rights and responsibilities-the recognition of their vital role and the work they do at home. The media is considered as the most potent and influential mean in this regard as it has the capacity of molding public opinion. It is an important and powerful tool that affects all aspects of our life. The media, both broadcast and print, play an important role in defining what we think, who we are and what our place is in society. The media also help define how issues are interpreted and evaluated. It can work for the development of women and gender equality. Thus the relationship of the media and the women is important because whatever image women have in our country is influenced by media. It is thus vital, to utilize the media for improving the status of women in Pakistan and divulging their role in national development. In this context the present paper tries to assess the issue of media and gender with reference to Pakistan.

**The issue of gender and the media is discussed at three levels:**

1. State of employment of women in media
2. Portrayal of women in media
3. Media coverage of gender issues

## Literature Review

### International Studies on Portrayal of Women in Media:

It is worth mentioning that only Pakistani media is not portraying women in a typical way but the review of content of analytical studies done in USA reveals that working women are under representing in advertisement. Cantor (1972) found that women in TV commercials were mostly shown in occupational roles. Women's popular image was of the mother or housewife. As with the other media, newspapers show a sexist bias in the treatment of women and men, in the language used, and in the comic strips that are serialized. (cited in Furnham, A. & Bitar, N. (1993).

Dickey, J. (2006) in "*Out of Focus*" says that advertisement portray women as sex object. Her body is arranged the way it is, to display it to the man looking at the picture. The picture is made to appeal to his sexuality. Although the models are beautiful, the images produced are distortions of reality. Her function is to sell a product. Her humanness is irrelevant-only look is important. She is women made "perfect" in the eyes of man.

In his article "Sex Sells", Steven Heller argues that the advertisement stimulates human libido. The industries use women as a symbol of sex to portray false images in order to sell their products. Similarly another study by Dodd et al (1989) explores that the photos of women tend to focus more on their bodies and photos of men are found to focus more on their faces. (cited in: Portrayal of women in Pakistani media" a study compiled by the Women's Division of Pakistan.)

Jake Lake and Brad Wadden says in the portrayal of women in the Media that advertisements promote extreme thinness or a thin waist and big breasts, misleading because these models don't represent the majority of the population. These ads have women in them looking good but very seldom are they talking. These ads put pressure on women to get that "thin look". This extra pressure leads to low self-esteem and eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia. Women are also portrayed as domestic laborers. Women are very seldom showing as career oriented in these ads.(cited in Amber, S. 2002)

Hall et al (1994) reports that in most of advertisement majority of women featured appeared in leisure wear or swimwear. Although the largest category of male apparel in work clothes; very few commercials showed women in work clothes.

In daytime soap operas, viewed primarily by women, characters also are presented in traditional and stereotypic ways, although the subject matter has become more contemporary in recent years. Women on such shows as “All My Children” and “General Hospital” (which can be seen on Star World and America Plus) more often are depicted as nurturing, hopeless and displaying avoidance behaviors than are men on these shows. Men, more than women, are depicted as directive and problem solving, although at least one study suggests that neither sex demonstrates competent coping strategies on such shows.

## **National Studies on Gender and Media**

Tasneem Ahmar, Director of a Pakistani Civil Society Organization - UKS, explains in ‘Challenging Trend’ that the lack of the gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender based stereotyping that can be found in media easily. Any attempt for change will have to concentrate mainly on changing the attitude of media by sensitizing them on gender issues and inducting women journalist at top positions.

A gender writer Tazeen Javed (2005) mentioned in national daily, ‘The News’, that the women present by the media can easily be codified in categories such as, a women dependant on man , as an overachieving house wife, as physically beautiful and sexy. Newspapers, especially local language newspapers, are not careful about the importance of the style of the reporting, and tend to ignore the extremely adverse affect of sensational reporting on the victims and their families. The Urdu terms generally used for victims include those dosheeza, charhati jawani, badnaseeb nokhez kali, hawwa ki beti,etc. as if that is not enough, the phrases use to describe such incidents usually include phool masal dala, abrurezi, moonh kala ker diya, barbad kerna,etc. has been dishonored. The words used for the culprits are jinsi darinda, bheria, shetan, nashey main must, shatan ke chalay etc. this gives the impression that abusers are not responsible for the crime as they are often overcome by devil or are under the influence of alcohol.

She expressed that images of women in magazines are being marketed for sales and enhancing profits at the expense of serious treatment. It is observed that women magazines are focusing heavily on the domestic side of women and trying to prove that every woman needs to be a perfect cook, a tailor, and housekeeper and also be beautiful. The intellectual qualities of women are mentioned nowhere. Their abilities as equal partners in developments are lost between cooking oils and fairness creams.

Marium Yunus writes in daily ‘The Nation’ that there are many advertisements which cannot be termed as decent. Apart from this, it has been noticed that women are used in some of the advertising campaign of a product, which simply do not suit them .For example; there is an advertisement of a popular shaving cream, in which a woman is used. .Such cases are indicative of the fact that women are used as a product for commercial purposes.

A study hold by UNDP, Islamabad on “Representing the Unrepresented: Portrayal of Women in Pakistan Television Programs” concludes that over a period of time women’s roles in television dramas have become secondary, passive and glamorous. Women’s roles in “family” context lead to perpetuate the belief that women’s true place is home. Roles of working women are cast dubiously. The same trend can be witnessed in the ever increasing numbers of teleplays that focus on women being the focal point of domestic peace and harmony. These practices are detrimental to women’s rights movement.

Research studies dealing with the portrayal of women in Pakistani media are not always negative. The most well known study is a statistical compendium compiled by the Women’s Division of Pakistan, a government department responsible for research and for formulating policies regarding the role and status of women in Pakistan. The study, though based on a purely administrative model, provides significant information. Some of the most important inferences of the study are that:

1. the mother is depicted as sedate and quiet person always solving problems
  2. the wife is shown as a cloying, eager to climb in the social circle, fashion-loving because of her choices of clothes, But otherwise she has a passive role as compared to her husband
  3. the daughter is portrayed in the context of a future marriage
  4. A female in love is typified as pretty, proper and dignified
- (Women’s Division Pakistan)

A research study “Portrayal of women in the media in Pakistan” (2003) conducted by Simorgh, (a Non Governmental Organization (NGO) working for gender equality in Pakistan) shows that 75 percent of television commercials are aimed at women, only 25 percent are convicted as purely for male consumption. 48 percent commercials depict women only whereas 30 percent men only. Men and women together are depicted in 48 percent of commercials. In advertisement women show as dumb consumer who need advice. It shows that household is the task of women alone but this is their pride and happiness. The fact that women are never shown in any roles defines the proper place of women in the home.

Uzmat Rasool in his article “unethical Ads” (The News; 6.12.99) says that advertisers have great responsibility because they portray the society. Women are portrayed in advertisement in stereotype roles whose duty is to serve and care about her family. In 1988, Ad week conducted a survey of 3000 women about how women are depicted in advertisement and if these images are matched with reality. Less than two percent respondents agree and 32 percent strongly disagreed.

A national study on ‘monitoring and sensitization of the print media on the portrayal of women’ conducted by AKS (a research, resource and publication centre on women and media) concludes that Urdu newspaper have higher non supportive coverage of gender issues and sensationalized those.

It indicates that Urdu newspapers have biased reporting on sensitive issues and used stereotypical images of women. These newspapers did not portray women as equal citizens and misreport or ignored their genuine issues. Headlines are crafted to attract readers and images of women conveyed in headlines, is a serious concern for the educated class.

A study holds by Allama Iqbal University, Islamabad regarding coverage of women issues in daily press, targets issue of domestic violence, and states that coverage of domestic violence in leading Urdu daily press is supportive and regular. Although newspapers are highlighting the issue in positive manner but at some places derogatory language is used. The issue is covered in news pages more frequently as compared to opinion pages. The study suggests that more space at editorial pages should be devoted for such issues to demonstrate its importance. It further suggests that relevant journalists must provide training for covering gender issues with a better approach.

## **Methodology**

In order to develop an intellectual, historical and theoretical context of state of women, portrayal of women in media and media coverage of gender issues international and national literature is reviewed. The review answered how the field of gender and media has been previously studied. This supported to frame the check list for the in-depth interviews with media professionals. The review has focused largely on materials that have been published over the past 10-12 years.

Interviews of editors of newspapers, bureau chiefs of television and radio channels, directors of NGOs and those of the media practitioners were conducted on the issue of employment and Portrayal of women in media which is considered to be the most effective change agent. Further the concern on media coverage of gender issues was also discussed with them in the light of the facts gathered through literature review.

Being key persons in their respective organizations, newspapers editors and bureau chiefs of television channel, they have greater say in the matters of employment, portrayal, and projection or otherwise of the stories related to women.

They divulged that the relationship of the media and the women is important because media plays a significant role in image building of women in Pakistan, thus its role cannot be ignored. Being a watchdog, media has realized its duty towards gender issues and have brought changes in its plans and policies in favor of women for the betterment of this deprived segment of the society in Pakistan.

## **Employment of Women in Media**

At all levels in media organizations in Pakistan, women are under-represented. There are more men around than women with an impression that men are more important, competent, dominant, dependable, and studious than women. Adnan (2007) said “less than five per cent of the total journalists’ fraternity is women in Pakistan. Women who are working in the field of media often do not occupy decision-making or top positions. They are propelled into specific areas which are relatively powerless.” In media industry women are often unrecognized and concealed within the limits.

Gender discrimination in division of work is evident through the beats assigned to the employees in media. ‘Soft’ issues like fashion, culture, arts, women institutions, and lifestyle are often consigned to women media practitioners, whereas ‘hard’ and what is considered ‘serious’ beats like finance, economics, law, court, crime and politics are often assigned to their male counterparts. Consequently the main or headline stories that appear on front or back pages are reported by male journalists confirm their professionalism that strengthen their position and credibility. On the other hand, news on soft issues reported by women is pushed to inner pages or supplementary segments of the media. Thus the women are not enjoying a position to demonstrate their potential. In a survey of the front pages of 11 leading newspapers, the National Organization for Women found that women by-lines are negligible.

Tasneem Ahmar, Director of a Pakistani Civil Society Organization - UKS, argues that media profession has, traditionally been a male-dominated one in Pakistan. Women are under represented in the media due to low hiring conditions and sexual discrimination at the workplace. Further, they are excluded from the kind of power to make decisions about media portrayal that those at the top rungs of the media ladder often enjoy; for instance, no woman has ever been Editor of an Urdu newspaper. She said that gender stereotyped views and attitudes, such as the attachment of productive incapacity and women’s reproductive roles can hinder women’s opportunities to assume decision-making positions.

Tasneem Ahmar expressed that gender inequality in the media is not only a women’s issue, but a question of discrimination and therefore a human rights issue. She said “In Pakistan men design and define media policies, priorities and agenda including how women are portrayed and presented. It is most often men who make decisions about hiring staff. In fact, through out in the history of Pakistani media no woman has ever been editor of an Urdu newspaper and only one woman Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, (The Muslim) has been the editor of any English daily. The official wire service Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) has never had a woman Director General. The Herald was the only English political monthly that had a woman editor as well as a predominantly female staff. In Urdu and regional language press (that captures more than 80% of the newspaper market); there are very few women workers. However in English language press the number of women journalists is greater as compared to Urdu press yet far less than male staff.



The state-controlled Pakistan Television Corporation has had one woman reaching the top position of Managing Director and another woman that of Director Programs in the last 42 years. Similarly Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) has a reasonable women presenters but a very few number of producers. With the introduction of private sector in electronic media a lot of new TV channels and FM radios are now working in Pakistan. These TV and FM radio channels in contrary to the traditional attitude of media are hiring more women than men at variety of position e.g. producer, assistant producer, reporter, editor, designer etc. They are satisfied with their performance and comment that women workers are not only competent but more dedicated, hard worker and sensible.

At first sight, changing this picture would seem satisfactory: as women become more and more emancipated and take an increasing share of paid employment, gender portrayal will change of its own accord. We have now reached the stage where the number of women journalists in Pakistan is increased as compared with the past, yet there is little to stipulate that this has change the content of programmes or the image of women they project specially through broadcast media. Stereotyping is not removed and indicates that having more women does not mean unbiased, gender sensitized programmes and better projection of women.

### **Women's Portrayal in the Media**

Consistently throughout Asia, women have been portrayed in the media as victims, subservient, nurturing, sacrificing and objectified sexualized beings. This not only inaccurately represents the diversity of women's lives, roles and experiences within this complex and rich region, women's contributions to the socio-political and economic development of society are often neglected.

Print and broadcast media in Pakistan present females and males in stereotyped ways. Most of the time it project that men are important for their intellect and personality, and women are important for their general attractiveness and figure. Men are often portrayed as serious and estranged, but the women are portrayed as light-hearted and spontaneous. It does not provide a balanced picture of women's diverse lives and contribution to society in a changing world. The typical Pakistani female lead in our Popular Media (print and broadcast) was submissive economically dependent, in need of affiliation and more often shown in home bound activities such as cooking, cleaning, knitting, gardening, etc. Women are depicted in far fewer situations, are less likely to be working, and more often are shown in a negative way.

### **Portrayal of Women in Print Media**

Various studies have been carried out and articles published in national dailies regarding Portrayal of women in Print media have proved that Portrayal of women is stereotype and needs to be improved.

A gender writer Tazeen Javed stated “in all forms of media, we have come across images of women as weak, childish, dependent, domestic, gullible, irrational, and scheming creatures. Such roles persuade women that their role in society, regardless of their education or aspirations, is only that of a house wife and lacking intellect. There is a patronizing tone in every printed feature, communicating a feeling of inferiority in women. They are represented as not being able to make important decision or do important things”.

Tasneem Ahmar, gives her overall assessment of the South Asian - and particularly, the Pakistani media and states "As things stand at present, the worst elements of the press have stereotyped and de-humanized women, turning them into commodities to be voyeuristically 'consumed.'" She quotes “It is said that bare breasts are used to sell everything, be it drinks, jeans, kitchen faucets, cars, medicines, juice,” and Pakistan is no exception. Only, in our print media, the bare breasts are made more prominent by the black ink used by the publications that want to sell their newspapers through women’s bodies.

Tazeen Javed states “even magazines devoted explicitly to women have failed to respond significantly to the reality of changing roles of women. A content analysis of editorial samples from several leading English language monthlies published exclusively for women clearly indicates that most of the articles contain material to teach women how to be a super mom, how to get thin thighs in thirty days, fashion boss, make-up tips and show-biz, gossip.”

Similarly the Urdu language short story magazines particularly portray a submissive and docile pictures of women, whose ultimate achievements in life is to get married and serve their husbands and in-laws till death. When asked, the editor of Urdu monthly said: “This is what our readers want”. Photo features published in press also centre on social functions and comparatively little importance is given to sensitive issues. Letters to editors and stories, although claiming a less significant position, do indicate the interest taken by viewers in women and activities or issues linked to them. If more attention is paid in this direction, the interest of readers as well as writers can be positively enhanced.

## **Portrayal of Women in Television**

Recently private sector is allowed to own electronic media in Pakistan. Therefore the current scenario of the electronic media is entirely changed. Various new TV and FM radio channels are working and competing with local and foreign channels successfully. Number of women working behind and in front of the camera is increasing day by day. The facility of cable television foreign and Pakistani satellite channels is accessible and affordable to people of all income groups. It provides the variety of channels and the choice lies with the viewers, therefore every channel is emphasizing on programmes of entertainment and glamour.

Thus the increasing shades of violence and glamour on the electronic media can be seen with the passage of time due to the competition among the channels which enhances the undue projection of attractive and beautiful women faces.

Zafar Abbas, Resident Editor, Dawn, said he is dissatisfied with the portrayal of gender issues in the national media. Television, he said, is portraying the gender issue in negative manner in the society. Women folk make more than 50 per cent of population and they deserve better treatment. But, he aid the national electronic media is presenting women as sex symbols while they are making their mark in other fields of life as well. He said the role of the women should be acknowledged at all levels. The national electronic media should restrain some limits while using females in modeling and other certain activities, he added. A previous study by UNDP, Islamabad on “Representing the Unrepresented: Portrayal of Women in Pakistan Television Programs” concludes the same.

Adnan Rehmat, Country Director, Internews Pakistan, said that women can be better economists, banker, journalists and what not but they are being presented as a mere showpiece to sell commodities, from children’s nappies to modern cars and what not, in the national print and electronic media.

Recent studies conducted on private TV channels regarding portrayal of women in television conclude that these channels are in process to gradually change the stereotypical portrayal of women. In some of the programmes women are shown in diversified and against orthodox roles. Career women are exposed in positive roles and authoritative in various programmes. Some of the dramas have shown positive roles of urban working women. Creative drama productions are allowed to show the lives of heterogeneous population instead of limiting it to any particular group. Women are participating in discussions and heard. More programmes on gender issues are being telecasted by the television channels. Thus the situation is encouraging and supportive to the gender cause.

### **Portrayal of Women in Advertising**

A quick glance through newspapers and TV gives a strong indication of how society views women. It is observed that many advertisements portray women in stereotypical roles that limit their capabilities. This is true to a large extent, and the trend has existed since ages. Critics expressed that gender stereotypes are even more explicit in TV commercials than in regular programming. In order of frequency, women are depicted as predominantly concerned with their appearance, their housework, and family matters. In contrast, men are more likely to be shown working, playing, eating or being nursed.

Marium Yunus described in her article that women dominate commercials for house hold cleaning products and goods that involve children and beauty merchandise. Women featured in commercials are most often found in a home setting and playing roles as wives or mother rather than as professionals.

Women are more often shown as submissive, men are more often shown taking up authoritarian roles. Men are almost always (96%) the authoritative, dominant voice-overs in commercials, even when the products are aimed at women. Thus again, males are depicted as the competent working authority; female as vain home makers and consumers.

Syed Talat Hussain, Editor, AAJ Television, said he is satisfied with the portrayal of gender in news and current affairs programmes but really dissatisfied with gender depiction in advertisement and entertainment. “Women are being presented as an object for selling commodities in television commercials and newspapers advertisements,” he said, adding that it was an unfair illustration of the women folk in the media.

A study on “Portrayal of women in the media in Pakistan” conducted by Simorgh explains that in fashionable products advertisement, it shows that women are idle, spendthrift, vain and mainly concerned with their skin, hair and looks. This kind of projection reinforces notions of the women as sexual objects that have been placed in this world for the pleasure of the male. Every step, move and touch is slow, hesitant and unsure as though she does not exist as material being, is totally incapable of doing anything. It shows the impression of a weak, helpless creature that can have no confidence in herself and her abilities to do anything but to be a manufactured dream. Another category is the western oriented women. She embodies evil. She may be a part of a gang of criminals or their leader just like in cigarette ads. Her western bold dress and looks suggests that she is a loose, immoral woman and a danger to men’s morals and to the society.

Uzmat Rasool (1999) reported “our advertisements tend to be more glamorous and neglect the fact that they are violating the prevailing societal norms. Ironically, it is through this format that women continue to receive the maximum exposure. The effects of such a market-oriented exposure can never benefit women in the long run. By presenting stereotypical/traditional portrayals of women, their serious and grave issues resulting from changing times can never be addressed forcefully.”

## **Media Coverage of Gender Issues**

Coverage of diversified and gender issues always depend upon the media policy. Whereas media policy of Pakistan has always been determined by the government and the party in rule, thus the coverage of gender issues varies accordingly. The history of Pakistani media has recorded that gender issues and women’s appearance received greater coverage in some regimes than others. But all the time a deficiency in the coverage of gender and women issues is felt because journalist are not trained and sensitized.

A national study on ‘monitoring and sensitization of the print media on the portrayal of women’ conducted by AKS pointed out “Pakistani media, specially the Urdu and regional language press, indulges in a particular kind of gender-insensitive behavior whereby the language used is not only abusive and sexist, but also extremely judgmental, lacking any investigative or analytical value. The usage of irresponsible language shows the lack of professionalism in Urdu press and enhances the need of gender sensitization among the journalists. On the contrary to Urdu press, English press is giving supportive treatment to women related news. Its reporting is balanced, unbiased and based on facts. Its coverage of gender issues is extensive and positive. English press portrayed women and their achievements and other issues objectively. This is encouraging for all concerned and there is hope that situation will improve over time.”

The reporting and projection of most of the abuse cases in print media creates sexually provocative images of women which generate negative impact on the society. Tasneem Ahmer points out that the women in the cases of rape are the worst victims and reported as they themselves responsible for the crime. A lot of newspapers report with a bias against these women and reinforce the existing non-supportive attitude of the society towards women. As for television coverage of rape and other forms of violence against women, it is noted with much resentment that many a times these victims of violent acts are put through double humiliation with extensive and most of the times unnecessary coverage. This is most evident in cases where high government officials are shown visiting the place of crime and sympathizing with the victims and the families. It is felt that reporting on violence against women that includes domestic and institutional atrocities needs much improvement.

Saleem Bokhari, Group Editor, The News, said if stories on genders and development sector are good, no editor can resist and will give best possible display to such stories. He said our media still is using women as a tool for promotion of products but times are changing and the women folk are assuming vital portfolios. From national politics to judiciary to public administration, women are out there to prove their vitality in every sphere of life. They can no more be confined to the four walls of the house, he commented, adding that they are playing their part in the national development shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts.

It is observed that media in Pakistan is used to expose physical and sexual features of women without any hesitation and consideration of media ethics whereas averse to highlight issues of gender and social awareness e.g. HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, abortion, sexual harassment, women trafficking, sex and flesh trade, etc.

Aslam Azhar, former chairman of Pakistan Television, believes that portrayal of women and the current practices of drama productions must be analyzed in the context of “rampant commercialization of television in the world”. In Pakistan the situation is not different. Dramas are produced in order to get commercial coverage from advertising agencies.

In such circumstances television dramas are becoming more and more glamorous and showing images of upper class. Private productions are being encouraged by PTV management to bring more business. But this resulted in a diminished quality drama currently shown on television. Women and media and women's representation on television is not an isolated and a separate issue from women's struggle for legal and equal rights in the society. Whenever there will gender equality in the society, portrayal and coverage of women issues will improve.

Agha Masood Shorish, Director News & Current Affairs, Pakistan Television, Islamabad, said the gender issue has come to the light during the last four to five years. Earlier, it was considered to be a taboo subject to be talked about. He disagree the fact that women are being presented as a sex symbol to promote commodities in the national media. But, they (women) too have become more professional with the passage of time. He argue that it is mere a myth that media is using women for promotional activities.

Mujahid Mansoori, In charge of Daily Jang Development Reporting Cell, said media, is playing an effective role to create awareness on the issues related to the gender sensitivity. He said He said voices of the women folk are being given importance and they are appearing in the national press and on electronic television channels. He said women have proved themselves that they can play their role in augmenting the national development. He said women are becoming journalist, anchor persons on television channels, bankers, politicians, bureaucrats and pilots. So the women folk have a passion and energy to accelerate in different fields of life.

Pakistan Television has devoted special time for women in the morning and 'Khawateen (Women) Time' is one such program which is trying to focus on issues about women and introduces women who are playing a constructive role in the society.

## **Analysis and Conclusion**

We live in communication age and mass media has become an integral part of our daily life. Media, the agent of social change, both reflects and shapes society and is extremely influential. The power of mass media in forming opinion cannot be underestimated. We make our daily decisions and even determine our ideological beliefs based on media content reflected to us. Of all the sources of gender stereotypes, the media are the most persistent. Thus its role in projecting images and role of women cannot be ignored. Gender discrimination and gender sensitization in Pakistan are stormily debated issues. No doubt, awareness of gender discrimination is there but the issue of its elimination is still undecided.

Gender patterns in Pakistani media are analyzed on the basis of the participation and position of women in the media. The media in Pakistan continues to be male dominated as the ratio of male-female workers is heavily imbalanced in favor of men.

Less than five per cent of the total journalists' fraternity is women and very few of them have made it to the top ladder, this indicates that the 'male world' view prevails and holds sway in the media discourse. Women journalists are not preferred to a part of policy making team. They are not assigned hard beats and rarely selected for overseas trainings/courses/study visits which discourage them for pursuing careers in journalism. Women's under-representation in media outlets is hurdle in their better portrayal. It is media's institutional flaw that it has not taken up the issue of gender balance in employment as it should have taken up. This gender imbalance is directly connected with various issues including low salaries, absence of a congenial atmosphere to female journalists, sexual harassment at work places and late working hours required in this profession carry a social stigma for women.

All forms of mass media, from newspapers to radio and television, have accepted as the pioneer of modernity. But as far as portrayal of women in the media is concerned, modernity of appearance and presentation is found only and not of intellect, thought and content. For years research into gender portrayal has consistently revealed the pattern that men appear in roles with a higher status, e.g. as experts and authorities, while women appear principally in lower-status roles as e.g. victims and passers-by. Reporting on the changing roles of men and women in society often implicitly assumes that women are principally responsible for child-rearing and home-making while men are responsible for income and management. Images of women in the media mostly depict women as sex objects, in domestic roles, or in less active postures than men deeply influence the understanding of women and the society in which they live.

The review of relevant literature, interviews and general observations reflect that press, especially the Urdu press publishes lot of news items and advertisements which used provocative and sensational words to describe women however English press is giving supportive treatment. Headlines of Urdu newspapers are not only abusive and sexist but also extremely judgmental; lacking any investigative or analytical value. Similarly Editorial content and advertisement in all major newspapers as well as magazines, with exclusive female readers, still reflect negative images of women, as being submissive, frivolous, and manipulative and as decorative objects. Here the concern is that the majority of the readers rely exclusively on Urdu newspapers thus it needs to be sensitive about nature and type of coverage given to such issues.

The electronic media have more important role in this regard as it has an enormous impact in shaping the psyche of the people in Pakistan. The encouraging element is that television channels in Pakistan, to some extent, has started airing some programmes which are women-oriented and are depicting a positive image of women. But the overall picture still is far from objectivity and mostly their image is fairly stereotypical. Women appear on screen less often and hold the floor for less time than men especially in talk shows on national issues. There is no limit of negative portrayal of women in television commercials which is damaging, both for the country and for the women folk.

Most of the media owners are only interested in making money through advertisements. Issue of gender equality is trivial for them and they are not gender sensitized. Stereotypical images in advertisements are hazardous as these are influential for forming public opinion. Through images women are being brainwashed to either perform their reproductive duties rather than productive ones or put their physical beauty on top priority. On the other hand their achievements are paid little or no heed to be highlighted through media. Therefore a balance between commercial and real social sector coverage is required.

Media is biased against women in many areas which affects their images and hamper women's development in society. A popular belief and justification for stereotypical images of women and making gender issues sensational is that it is the demand of masses. This is a lame excuse on the part of the media professionals. They should realize that it is destroying the morality of the society whereas a gender sensitive media can influence the policy-makers and equip women through information; particularly rural women that can help them make better decisions about their lives. What required is certain level of commitment to put up good work for have-nots.

The Government of Pakistan and some of civil society organizations have now realized the fact that contribution made to development by both women and men should equally recognize through media. They have made some efforts to raise the awareness on gender inequality and women's development in our society which has started contributing towards the better media coverage of gender issues. These bodies have also framed guidelines and code of conduct for media practitioners and professionals. They regularly arrange and hold workshops for the capacity building of journalists on gender issues.

## **Recommendations**

Continued and committed actions are urgently needed to practice gender based approach (gender-neutral and non-sexist) in order to change the deeply embedded stereotypical images of women in the media. It is immediately required to train and sensitize everyone attached with media and responsible to cover gender issues i.e. reporters, writers, owners, editors, advertising agencies, news agencies, freelancers, etc. on gender issues and enable them to understand, recognize, acknowledge and project the multi-dimensional roles played by women in society.

- It is recommended to initiate a process of dialogue so as to produce greater diversity in the media images not only of men and women but also of ethnic minorities. And in this process, program-producers, critics and viewers must share the responsibility.
- Women should appoint in every section of the organization and mainly at the decision making level for the improvement of women portrayal and gender equality in the media. Media should portray the best of women and men companionship instead of conflicts.



- The media greatly influence public opinion and women place in society. It also has the potential to perpetuate and reinforce negative and stereotypical images of both women and men. Therefore, necessary guidelines should be circulated among all the media organizations/ journalists.
- The usage of offensive and derogatory language is the most sensitive area especially of Urdu press while addressing gender issues in media. The training of the journalists is required in this area and the guidelines prepared by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) might be useful. (See annexure A for UNESCO gender sensitive language guidelines).
- How women should portray in the media and break gender stereotypes is a difficult question. However South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA) provides general guidelines for media practitioners and management for portrayal of women in media. These guidelines can be helpful. (See annexure B).
- For the better coverage through print media a gender sensitive code of ethics designed by UKS will be supportive. (See annexure C).
- Traditional roles, Violent and degrading images of women have a negative effect on women and their participation in society thus screening of the programmes, photographs and content with gender based approach is unavoidable for the media practitioners. Further projection of negative and degrading images of women in media i.e. style of advertisements is essentially be changed. The picture of the women should not appear only at the covers of the magazines and newspapers to brighten a black world but also recognized as a guiding light for others.
- The media professionals can play an important role in promoting a constructive image of women through programmes which focus more on the projection of the hard working urban and rural women who are doing commendable job for national development.
- Media should emphasize on hiring of only post graduates of 'Media Studies' (who are equipped theoretically and practically) because an educated and sensitized practitioner can take actions in order to produce unbiased and gender sensitive material, that works for the improvement of the lives of women and thereby bring positive changes in society as a whole.
- Some of the universities in the country have a subject of *Women Studies/ Gender Studies* at Masters' Level and *Human Rights* at B.A (Hons) and Masters' Level and are producing gender sensitized degree holders. Departments of mass communication have also introduced courses of 'Gender and Media', development reporting, development communication etc, and are generating such graduates who can perform well in this regard when entered in the field. It is therefore recommended that such courses should be made compulsory for better results.

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### **Annexure A**

#### **Gender Sensitive Language Guidelines:**

The guidelines worked out by **UNESCO** for gender sensitive language:

- Use gender-inclusive pronouns, they are usually the most accurate e.g. they, their, them.
- Be careful about gender-neutrality it sometimes results in inaccurate over-generalisation about the different roles that women and men play in society e.g. farmers, traders, entrepreneurs.

- Be careful about language that perpetuates sex-role stereotyping.
- Language that uses non-sexual distinctions sometimes results in denial of differential treatment / impact between the sexes.
- Language that consistently names or lists one sex first may leave the impression that that sex is more important.
- Language that trivializes female exploitation, subjugation or restriction.
- Language that excludes the role of men in family life denies the reality of men's lives and perpetuates sex-role stereotyping.

## **Annexure B**

### **General Guidelines for Media Practitioners and Management for Portrayal of Women in Media**

By South Asia Free Media Association (SAFMA)

The guidelines have been classified under three headings:

- stereotype
- Content
- Guidelines especially for management of media institutions

#### **Guidelines for Practitioners/Management - to break Gender stereotype:**

To break the stereotypical imagery and coverage of women in electronic and print media:

- Resist stereotyping along gender, race, caste, ethnicity, class, religion, and age or language barriers.
- Ensure that portrayal, representation and reporting recognizes women as equal (and non exploitative).
- Avoid stereotyped gender portrayals that associate particular roles, ways of behavior, personal and social attributes, or use of product and services with people on the basis of gender.
- Recognize the changing and diverse roles of women in today's society as equal partners.
- Highlight development issues pertaining to women and their achievements through a balanced, gender-based approach that recognizes the substantive, creative, productive and dynamic aspects of women's lives.
- Resist the portrayal/representation of women as cultural repositories of particular ethnic or social group.

## **Guidelines for Practitioners/Management on Content Approach:**

To ensure balanced and representative content:

- Achieve better balance in the use of women and men as experts and authorities, and give equal prominence to the achievements of both men and women.
- Avoid the use of gender insensitive and derogatory vocabulary and images.
- Do not include images of messages which condone incite or misuse representation of violence against women and/or which tend to exploit the sexuality of women.
- Incorporate gender perspectives in the regular treatment of content rather than isolate or include only occasionally.
- Acquire and ensure the approval of the concerned survivors before publishing/broadcasting incidents of rap/abuse, valence, HIV/Aids. Maximum care should go into protecting the piracy of victims/families in the case of minors. Identity of the concerned survivors should be kept confidential under any circumstance.
- Report and interpret events and processes objectively, striving for accuracy , fairness and disclosure of all essential facts related to the essence of the matter instead of playing on the patriarchal, sexist or moralist sentiments.

## **Guidelines for Management:**

The role of the management of media institutions is key in bringing about the changes in breaking the stereotypical image of women and publishing/broadcasting in the right environment.

The following support from the management to sensitize the professionals is required;

- Develop well-defined gender policy with in the organization with mechanism to implement and monitor its use and effectiveness.
- Gender sensitization workshops to participate in or held regularly to increase awareness of the importance of gender portrayal/representations in the media.
- Ensure that regulatory boards and preview committees are gender sensitive and equally represented by men and women.
- Increase the participation of women in training opportunities/ programs.
- Increase the number of news and features (including drama) to ensure gender and cultural representation.
- Develop guidelines for policy regarding advertising for advertising agencies and commercial production houses to encourage positive and realistic portrayals of women in advertising.

## **Annexure C**

### **A Gender-Sensitive Code-of-Ethics for Print Media in Pakistan**

By UKS- (A Research and Publication Centre working on Women and Media).

#### **Right to Privacy**

- Caution against identification should be employed in cases involving rape, abduction, acid throwing incidents, sexual assault on children or news regarding **HIV/AIDS**. Names and photography of victims, or other particular indicating their identity, should not be published.
- Due to restraint should be observed while reporting official visits to the victim of rape/sexual assault.
- In the events relating to a VIP giving away charity, the event should not be presented in a promotional manner. Pictures of the recipients of the charity or 'zakat' should not be published.
- Maintain the secrecy of the sources of confidential information.

#### **Pictorial Depiction of Women**

- Whenever possible pictures of glamorous women are to be replaced with pictures of women who have achieved successes in various fields.
- There is a pressing need to remove disproportionate pictures of foreign women in skimpy sports wear and beauty contests etc.
- And replace it with positive portrayal of local women in sports.
- Uncaptioned pictures of the women appearing in most newspapers (at events and gatherings) needs to be published with the permission of the subject.

#### **Rectifying Under Representation of Women**

Short terms as well as long-term goals need to be outlined for achieving gender equilibrium in the newspaper work places .As a short term goals, newspapers owners/editors should be urged to include one third in their offices.

#### **Projection of Gender Roles in Advertisements**

- Advertisements from sexologists (offering potency dugs etc.) and quacks should not be published by a newspaper. Not only do these ads indirectly signal violence and sexual aggression but also portray a false image of masculinity, equating it with physical prowess.
- Maximum restraint should be exercised regarding the publication of vulgar and provocative ads of movies.
- There is a growing need for advertising agencies to project healthy gender roles. i.e. Show men engaged in domestic activities and involved with children as well as discourage the co modification of women's images in advertisements of shaving creams, cigarettes etc.

#### **Quality Coverage of Women Issues**

- There is a strong need to highlight serious issues facing women i.e. drug abuse, disability, trafficking

- Rather than talk about physical attributes (dress, hairstyles, beauty) of a person (man or woman), emphasis should be on the event they have been featured in.
- Women working in all professions should be treated with honor e.g. acting nursing, air hosting, and activism.

### **Maintaining Professional Standards**

- Judgmental words and phrases should not be used in news reports. Only the facts should be given.
- Newspapers have every right to report on controversial issues but maximum caution should be exercised to ensure that :
  1. The event is not distorted to tilt public opinion.
  2. The use of judgmental words and opinions is avoided ;
  3. If a certain aspect of story needs highlighting, the reporters should reflect the opinions of the public rather than projecting their own. The opposing point of view should be reflected.
- There should be comprehensive criteria determining 'news worthiness' which needs to be debated within an organizational structure of newspaper. Are elopement cases, which do not fall under any major news category (i.e. politics, business, crime) worth reporting at all?
- The marital status of woman and the number of her children need not to be mentioned in rape or elopement cases.
- A whole list of gender insensitive vocabulary like "kunwaari maan" "khoobroo dosheeza" etc. should be replaced with an alternative gender sensitive vocabulary.
- Follow up to a crime story also needs to be highlighted i.e. if the perpetrators of a certain crime were convicted or not.