



JAN-MAR
2009

Paper
Human Rights Reporting in Pakistani Media

Paper

Human Rights Reporting in Pakistani Media

Safdar Sial

Introduction

Pakistan's Urdu and English print and electronic media understand and present human rights issues in a variety of ways. The manner in which newspapers, magazines and television channels portray human rights issues and defenders, and victims of violations and abuse shapes people's opinion. It also affects policymaking and legislation. This study intends to determine how journalists and media organizations view and report human rights issues in Pakistan. Conversely, an effort has also been made to investigate how the people, human rights organizations and activists see the role of the media's coverage of human rights issues.

The study also aims to explore journalists' capacity for well-informed, investigative and rights-based journalism. Meanwhile, public perceptions of human rights issues have been studied with a special reference to the impact of contemporary media reporting approaches. These approaches have been documented and analyzed, especially journalists' attitude towards victims, treatment of human rights issues as well as the patterns and quality of reporting. An analysis of the opinions and content has also been included with excerpts from news items, reports, editorials and debates to better comprehend the media coverage. The environment for reporting on human rights issues was also studied to comprehend the threats and pressures which limit journalists' capacity for investigation and reporting. Another objective was to evaluate the role of the media and the mindset of journalists to improve and fill the gaps in human rights reporting.

There is no dearth of literature and reports on human rights issues in Pakistan. A great deal of statistical and narrative data is also available on the subject. Human rights violations in Pakistan, including violations of rights of women and children, arbitrary detentions, enforced disappearances, harassment of families of the disappeared, excessive use of force by state agents and unlawful killings are regularly monitored, highlighted and protested against by a number of human rights organizations in the country and abroad - the prominent ones include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Asian Human Rights Commission, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Defense of Human Rights and *Aurat* Foundation. These and other human rights organizations are engaged in raising awareness about human rights and lobby whenever any important case arises. They also produce and disseminate reports on human rights issues, which are reproduced and discussed in Pakistani print and electronic media.

Media organizations are another source of information, analysis and reports on human rights in Pakistan. Rights issues have become a regular feature of the electronic media as well. Be they cases of enforced disappearances and illegal detentions or curbs on rights after promulgation of the state of emergency, Pakistani media has played a key role in keeping human rights in the limelight.

Rights' violations and abuse is the focus of a substantial volume of reports, books, literature and data on human rights issues in Pakistan. However, how these issues are investigated, reported and analyzed in the media largely remains an unexplored area. This study is an attempt to remedy that. The study also

explores how the reporting on human rights issues is being influenced by the environment within and outside media organizations.

Methodology and Approach

The study was conducted over a period of four months, starting July 1, 2008. A representative cross-section of 35 Urdu and English daily newspapers, and weekly and monthly magazines, was selected for monitoring and analysis. Nine television news channels were also monitored from July to October 2008. The coverage of the issues and the opinions expressed in the print and electronic media was also examined.

Besides researching newspaper archives and media monitoring, interviews and surveys of journalists and rights activists were also conducted.¹ A sample of 108 print and electronic media journalists from Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta and Islamabad was selected for the survey. The questionnaire contained both open- and close-ended questions. A similar survey was conducted with a representative sample of 221 people in these cities to learn about the public perception regarding human rights issues and reporting. As many as 15 interviews were also conducted with senior journalists, experts and rights activists to have an in-depth analysis of the subject. During the final month of the study, data collected from archives, interviews and surveys was analyzed.

Enhanced and extensive media monitoring over at least a six-month period and inclusion of regional media (Urdu, Pashto, Sindhi and Baloch media) could have provided a better insight into the patterns of human rights reporting. Moreover, electronic media monitoring was limited to programs, talk shows and one hour of main news bulletins daily. Similarly, surveys and interviews could also be extended to local journalists/correspondents and the general public. However, the shortage of time was the major constraint in this regard.

Public Perceptions of Media Reporting on Human Rights

As far as people's understanding of human rights is concerned, 21 percent of the respondents to the public survey said they get information on human rights from media reports. Fifty percent of the 221 people surveyed in five cities attributed their knowledge of human rights issues to all sources of information including the print and electronic media, home, mosques and textbooks, etc. Ten percent of the respondents acquired their knowledge about human rights issues from home, 3 percent from mosque, and 9 percent from syllabus, while 7 percent denied receiving knowledge about human rights from any of these sources (Table 1). The majority of the respondents (53 percent) preferred the electronic media to get information on human rights issues, 35 percent relied on the print media and 12 percent mainly on the internet (Chart 1). While the majority of the respondents (85 percent) was generally satisfied with the media's reporting on human rights issues, 11 percent were not (Chart 2).

Table 1: Sources of public knowledge on Human Rights issues

Sources	Responses (%)
Home	10%
Mosque	3%
Media	21%
Syllabus	9%
All sources	50%
None of these	7%

Chart 1: Which is your preferred media for information on human rights issues?

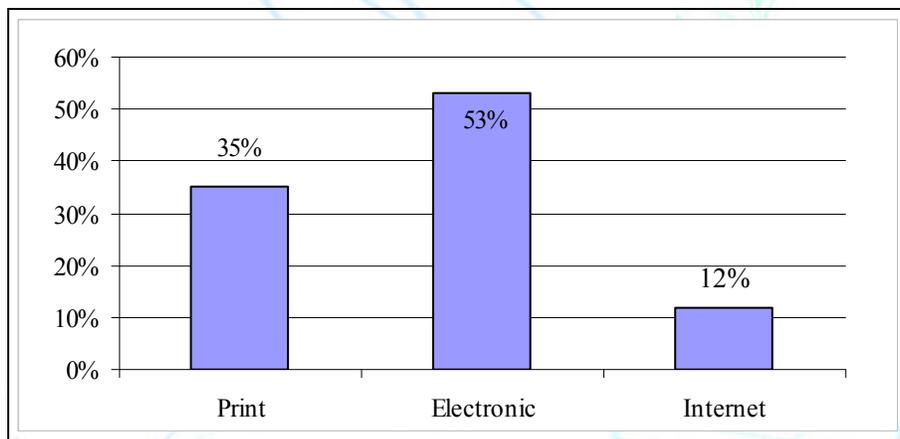
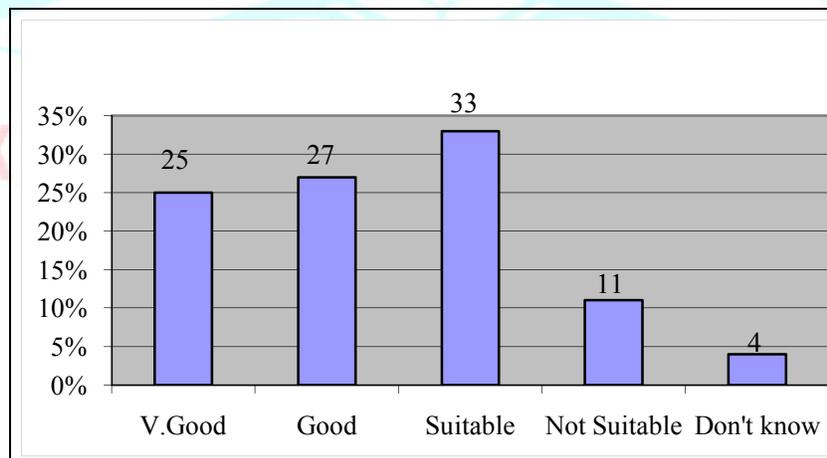


Chart 2: How do you rate the effectiveness of media in reporting human rights issues?



Journalists' Perceptions of Human Rights

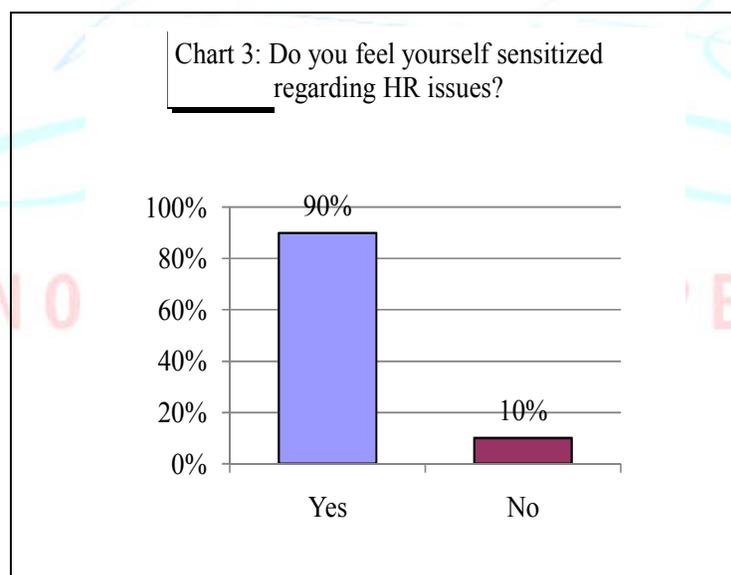
Journalists' understanding of human rights issues was almost similar to that of the general public, gauged through the PIPS public survey.² Almost half of the journalists (48 percent) perceived human rights as provision of basic needs, improvement in living standards and equal opportunities. As many as 17 percent respondents equated human rights with social freedom.

Sixteen percent linked human rights to human dignity and 19 percent saw them as rights advocated by Islam. The perceptions of 108 journalists from across the country regarding human rights - collected through a questionnaire form - are documented in Table 2.

Table 2: Journalists' Perceptions of Human Rights

Perceptions	Responses (%)
a. Improvement in living standards	24%
b. Fulfilment of basic necessities of life	18%
c. Equal opportunities	6%
d. Protection of human dignity	16%
e. Social freedom	17%
f. Rights provided by Islam	19%

While reporting issues and incidents, journalists do bear in mind the ethical obligations to ensure victims' self-respect and dignity are not undermined. The media survey also found that the majority (90 percent) of journalists questioned thought they took great care in reporting human rights cases (Chart 3).



Journalists' Training for HR Reporting

Journalists were also asked in the survey about their training background regarding human rights reporting. As many as 52 percent of the respondents said they had attended at least one training workshop on human rights in their career, and 75 percent said that they had also benefited from these workshops and improved their understanding of human rights (Table 3 and Chart 4). On the contrary, observations made by these journalists during the PIPS media survey showed that a large number of the journalists lacked formal training and academic background in their respective reporting spheres.

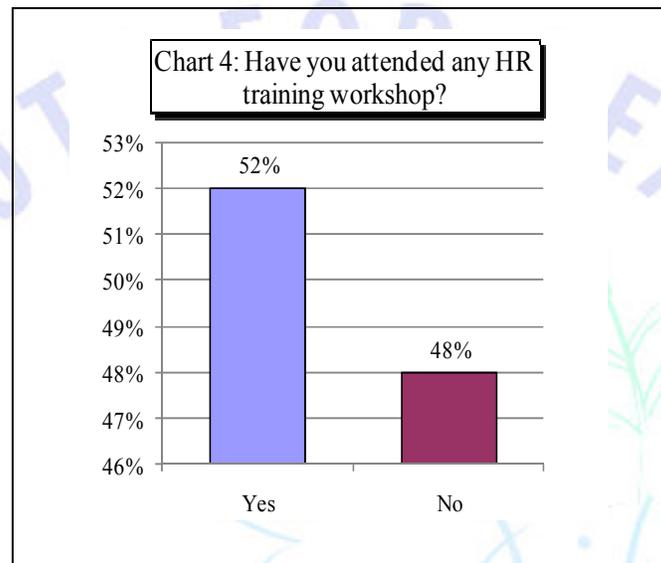


Table 3: Did you benefit from the training workshop?

Responses	Percentage
Yes	75%
No	25%

The concept of training for human rights reporting is very complex, says Zafarullah, who has extensive experience of media reporting. Journalists mainly attend workshops to file a story for that day. It is rare that they use the tools, shared in the workshops, in their reporting. Secondly, the concept of specialization has not yet taken root in media organizations, especially in the Urdu media, and the media keeps transferring journalists from one reporting field to another. The situation is comparatively better in the English media where journalists are not forced to cover an array of multiple beats. Human rights reporting in the electronic media also lacks investigation and research.³

Limitations in Human Rights Reporting

Investigative and research-based reporting needs resources. Such expense is neither a priority for the media organizations nor for the journalists. The salary journalists command is mostly determined by their image and is not necessarily commensurate to the amount of work they do for the organization.⁴ Lack of resources or absence of allocation for investigative reporting compels media organizations to

pursue small event-based packages in the electronic media and narrative stories in the print media, which lack thoroughness.

Incidents of human rights violations, particularly against women and children in the name of cultural and tribal traditions, mostly occur in rural areas far from big cities. The burial alive of five Baloch women in a far-flung Balochistan village, 80 kilometers from Osta Muhammad town in district Jaffarabad is an example. Journalists find it difficult to travel to such remote areas. Local journalists and correspondents who cover such events generally lack the ability and knowledge to appropriately investigate and report on human rights violations. Even the electronic media uses local correspondents to get reports and details on the events.

Sometimes even the knowledge of local journalists and correspondents is limited to superficial information due to socio-cultural and traditional constraints. Tribal elders and feudal lords also create hurdles in the way of victims of human rights abuses communicating with journalists. Some examples of such limitation cited by journalists in their reports during the monitoring period include:

- a) It is believed that using the influence of the PPP minister and his brother the incident was kept away from the media.⁵
- b) The names of those girls could not be ascertained due to tribal traditions and restrictions.⁶
- c) However, he (the divisional inspector-general of police) said the tribal system is in place here. People are very much frightened. No one has so far come forward as a witness of the incident. Even the heirs of the victims are not coming to collect the dead bodies.⁷
- d) No one is ready to be a witness (in the case of women's burial alive in Balochistan): Rehman Malik⁸
- e) Because some influential people of the area were involved in this incident, the local journalists (in Naseerabad) did not provide much detail. Therefore, the incident could not be appropriately covered by the newspapers published from Quetta.⁹

The journalists investigate and report amid a range of threats, pressures and curbs, including curbs and censorship from within their media organization, and external constraints. Those areas of Pakistan which are notorious for human rights violations have a strong historical background of rituals and norms which the local people do not deem as human rights violations. Secondly, the feudal system and illiteracy are so dominant in such areas, particularly in rural Sindh, southern Punjab and Balochistan that any voice raised against human rights abuses and violations can easily be suppressed.

Sometimes journalists also face threats from state institutions while reporting about human rights issues. Seventy-five percent of the respondents in the PIPS media survey said that they had received verbal, telephonic or written threats at state and societal levels while investigating and reporting about human rights issues. As far as internal curbs and censorship are concerned, 54 percent journalists said their editors/general managers gave priority to their reports on human rights issues, 41 percent accused their editors of expediency, whereas 5 percent stated that their reports on human rights issues were completely ignored.

The threats journalists face in big cities such as Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta and Islamabad seem to be lower compared to small towns and far-flung areas of the country where a journalist may even be killed for highlighting human rights violations. Journalists associated with the Urdu media are more vulnerable than their colleagues in the English media. The former have to bear in mind the mental and educational level of their readers/viewers, most of whom have no or very little education. On the other hand, journalists from the English media do not have to worry much about these things. The journalists stated that that was why the English media provided more coverage to human rights issues. Seventy-

two percent of the respondents were of the view that they were restricted to minimal reporting without any investigation. Only 28 percent said they were able to brush aside these pressures.

Some analysts also see political factors interfering with journalists' performance in human rights reporting. According to Naureen Tawakkal, "Pakistani media is still working under the influence of political parties, which makes unbiased reporting impossible. In democratic societies, journalists work as think-tanks and directly affect government policies. The quality of our human rights reporting does not compare with the international standards. This is due to unprofessional attitude of our journalists, media organizations and our political elite."¹⁰ According to another expert, Peter Jacob, the lack of resources and the absence of unbiased organizations have contributed immensely to the fragile situation of Pakistani media.¹¹

Attitude of the Journalists

Lack of Conviction and Commitment

A number of factors – dearth of training and professional education, skepticism about rights issues and rights organizations, structural, organizational or financial constraints – are responsible for lack of conviction and commitment among journalists covering human rights. It was observed during the media monitoring as well as in conducting the survey, that around 75 percent of the journalists reporting on rights issues, were not convinced of the significance of their area of reporting and that they were not interested in investigation. They were not committed to exploring and highlighting the issues in the human rights context. The following abstract from a three-column detailed report demonstrates how the journalist's interest results in a comprehensive report.¹²

(Lahore) Police have liberated two sisters and their father from a 15-year-long-bondage imposed by none other than the man's son... The victims were identified as Babu Nazir Ahmed, a retired WAPDA employee, and his two daughters – Riffat, 35, and Nighat, 27 – who were present in the house which was reportedly locked from outside by their brother Qaisar Mehmood... A Rescue 1122 official said they broke the lock of a room and recovered Riffat, adding the door was [also] locked from inside and terrified, she was not ready to come out of the room... One of the CMIT members and political secretary to the Punjab chief minister, Tanveer Alam Butt, talking to the newsmen, claimed that some locals had told the team that the three victims had been confined to the house for the last 15 years by accused Qaisar... Some local residents alleged that Qaisar, who was also an ex-employee of WAPDA, had confined his father and sisters and used to torture them mentally besides disallowing them to leave the house... However an elderly woman, Sharifaan Bibi, who introduced herself as paternal aunt of the girls, told Dawn that Qaisar had not confined them. His only sin, according to her, was that he neither married himself nor managed the marriages of his sisters... Dressed in stinking clothes, they (victims) were unable to speak to the media and paramedical staff apparently owing to their poor state of mind... Kiran Dar, an MPA, who was included among the rescuers, told Dawn that some locals had planned in a meeting to inform the government and media about the alleged confinement of the girls and their father... Saddar division SP Faisal Ali Raja told Dawn that the medical report of the three victims would determine the offense, if any.

But at the same time, in some cases, the level of conviction and commitment is remarkable. Rauf Klasra's name, for example, is among the journalists who wrote – amid heightened threats and pressure – a number of reports and follow-ups on the issue of burial of five women alive in Balochistan. The following extract from one of his articles describes the pressure in which he was investigating and reporting the incident:¹³

The tone of IG (police inspector general) Nawaz, who made a phone call from Quetta to this reporter, was not only threatening but he also used strong language to express his own views and even made a taunt at one stage, saying: 'I have come to know that you, Mr Klasra, are the new champion of women's rights in Pakistan'.

Indifference

Considerable indifference was noted among journalists regarding human rights violations and issues, more so in the Urdu media. Around 50 percent of the news and reports monitored lacked any investigation. The news items were little more than narration of basic details of incidents. Reports in the Urdu media were mostly based on reports prepared by human rights organizations or translations from the English media and lacked personal investigation and interest.

Even some full-page reports on rights issues in the Urdu media lacked investigation and analysis. A report in an Urdu newspaper on September 8 on violation of women's rights in Balochistan opened with a rhetorical 150-word introduction. While narrating the burial alive of five women, it relied on about 1,000 words from a report by the Asian Human Rights Commission -- a 300-word statement of the Balochistan police chief, around 500 words narrating a press conference by the divisional inspector-general (DIG) police, and another 250 words describing the press conference of a Balochistan Assembly member from Naseerabad, Sadiq Umrani, and a statement by the Senate deputy chairman.¹⁴ Many such reports on rights issues were monitored, in both the Urdu and English media, which were mere compilations of related events and developments, or reproduction of press statements or reports by NGOs.

Skepticism

It is not uncommon for journalists to get confused while reporting on human rights issues, on account of conflicting accounts of events. Zafarullah, an experienced journalist himself, observes that the journalists covering human rights issues often have many contradictory versions to reconcile and report. There is a fusion of culture, traditions and religion in Pakistan.¹⁵ On top of this confusion, many journalists were skeptical of human rights organizations, and termed human rights as anti-Islam western agenda. Requested to comment on the training workshops organized by human rights organizations, many of were wary of the human rights organizations' agenda for such workshops. "Every NGO has its own agenda.... I just get networking opportunities in such workshops," says a journalist.¹⁶ Such skepticism was quite explicit in some reports and a little less so in others. A few extracts from such reports are given below.

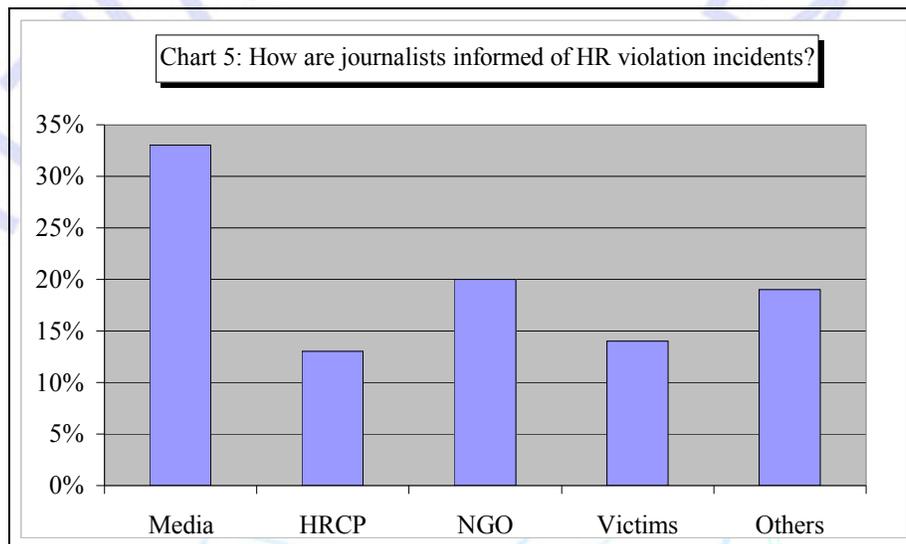
- i) Pakistan is a developing country where more than 70 percent people are forced to live below the poverty line.... Due to rising crimes in the country sexual abuse of children is also on the rise.... Protecting the children and providing them a safe environment for growth has become a real challenge.... According to a report, more than 3.3 million children in Pakistan are victims of child labor. It was revealed in a workshop organized by a working group the other day that more than 2 million children have become victim of sexual abuse.... In the NWFP, people have a religious mindset and often do not report such cases.... After president Pervez Musharraf came into power and raised the slogan of enlightened moderation many NGOs were established in the country, especially in the NWFP, and vowed to protect the rights of children. These NGOs got millions of rupees in the name of so-called rights of children and women from local and international donors.... The government should take action against such NGOs and recover those charity funds after a proper audit.¹⁷
- ii) Last month, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) had sent a letter to Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani stressing the need to abolish the death penalty.... Most of the NGOs in Pakistan argue

that the death penalty is an inhuman punishment but they should also be asked if murdering somebody is a human act.¹⁸

This decision (to commute the death penalty to life imprisonment) will encourage the terrorists.... The decision is meant to benefit foreign and local terrorists.¹⁹

Reporting Patterns: Sources and Content

The media survey revealed that 33 percent of the journalists asked learn about incidents of human rights violations through media reports themselves, 13 percent through the Human Rights Commissioner of Pakistan (HRCP), 20 percent through other human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 14 percent through the victims and 19 percent from other sources (Chart 5).



During the process of preparing follow-up reports, 41 percent journalists said they contacted victims, 23 percent claimed using sources in the police, 20 percent relied on NGOs' reports and 16 percent consulted media reports (Table 4).

Table 4: Journalists' sources for investigating and reporting HR cases

Source of information	Percentage
Contact with victims	41%
Police reports and press releases	23%
NGO reports	20%
Media reports	16%

Considerable disparity was noted during the survey and the media monitoring, regarding the sources journalists access while reporting about human rights issues. The media monitoring found that no more than 10 percent journalists, mostly from the English media, actually contacted the victims and/or their relatives to investigate an issue. During the survey, however, 41 percent said that they did so. The

survey also found that the print media relies to a considerable extent on the electronic media and human rights organizations for retrieving news and reports on human rights issues.

The media monitoring found that even some exclusive stories in the print media were based on 'tips', typically from an anonymous source, and were easily expanded into reports after inserting a few comments from government officials and NGOs.

The following report, a two-column news item based on such a 'tip', is reproduced in its entirety to highlight the lack of basic information about the incident and the crude narration of such reports.

Asian Human Rights representative Baseer Naveed has said that three more women have been 'buried alive' in Naseerabad. According to the representative, the names of these women are being kept secret. The reason for their 'burying alive' was said to be their protest against the burial alive of three women in Naseerabad.²⁰

The electronic media seems in a rush to break the news even before the basic information has been ascertained. Details are added later after media organizations approach their regional correspondents, police and other sources. Reporting of human rights issues is generally confined to describing the event's nature, place and time and is devoid of investigation. This pattern of reporting, and even analysis, is very common in the print media as well as in special programs, such as talk shows, on the electronic media.

Treatment of Human Rights Issues

News Items and Reports

The electronic media in Pakistan is event-based. While reporting human rights violations, it sensationalizes, rather than highlighting the human rights significance of the case. Headlines in the Urdu media are more sensational compared to the English media. Their emphasis is not on human rights, but on police brutality, criticism of government laxity, journalist's opinion in the religious, political or social context, or some statement or viewpoint of a person even if it undermines the basic concepts of human rights and state Constitution.

Sometimes, the media publishes or telecasts statements that might cause incitement and provoke rights violations. Such a statement broadcast by a leading television network against *Qadiyanis* in 2008, became the reported reason for the killing of three people from the *Qadiyani* community.²¹

The media monitoring also found that at times journalists' own views blur the facts, to varying extent. Though that perception usually surfaced in the text of the news, sometimes personal bias appeared in the headlines as well.

Articles and Editorials in Print Media

From July to October 2008, 21 articles and seven editorials were written on human rights issues in the monitored English and Urdu media publications.

Most of these articles were focused on a single issue of human rights violation. Very few articles treated these issues in the appropriate human rights context. Most of them merely used human rights issues to

criticize the government and politics, feudalism and tribal traditions, religion and the socio-cultural setup in Pakistan.

At times, the media – mainly English newspapers and magazines – presented an unbiased analysis, based on domestic outlook of socio-political, cultural, religious and constitutional perspectives. Only a handful of articles discussed human rights issues in a global perspective, like Nauman's *Human rights violations in historical perspective*,²² Rizwana's *Children of conflict*²³ and Irfanullah's *Saza-e-Maut* (capital punishment).²⁴

The following extract from an editorial published in *Dawn* on September 3, analyzed the issue of burying five women alive in Balochistan. It discussed customary laws as a parallel justice system challenging the writ of the state, the role of the state, political and legal perspectives, women rights, and the role of the civil society and the media. During the period under discussion, this was perhaps the only analysis highlighting violations of women's rights and attacking the state and its legal system.²⁵

It is ironic that the official emphasis remains on the 'idea' of the victims being buried 'alive' rather than the fact that the acts were gruesome crimes against the state where reports of the murders were concealed, FIRs denied, the allegations against the women not verified and the slain women never granted a chance to present their side of story. Other than being a venue for outright murders that demonstrate how worthless are women in tribal cultures, Pakistan is perhaps one of the few places on the globe where government officials can publicly defend the slaying in the name of 'customary laws and traditions' with impunity or openly accuse the media of giving the matter 'out of proportion' coverage. It is shocking that even in this pandemonium the concept of women's rights which have been recognized by the courts – in this case the right of women to marry a man of their choice – has escaped the understandings of the powers that be. The only positive outcome of this episode, if one may describe it so, is that it has brought civil society, hundreds of rights activists and the media together to highlight the brutality and violation of the rights of the women.

However, more than half of the editorials and articles lacked an unbiased and realistic analysis of the rights issues based on logic and rationality. It was more visible in the Urdu media. The following extract discussed the abolition of the death penalty in Pakistan.²⁶

It is bizarre that the newly-elected Pakistani government quickly responded to 'suggestion' of the Human Rights Watch (HRW)...while there are many important national issues which have been placed on the backburner.... According to the 1973 Constitution, no law could be enacted which is repugnant to the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and *Sunnah*. If we look at the legal system of Islam, it presents the concept of *Qisas* (retribution) and the right to pardon the murderers is granted only to heirs of the victim.... If our government holds the view that criminals after spending 14 years of imprisonment, especially in Pakistani jails, would become saints and preach some virtues after returning to society, then I must say that our decision-makers are either 'innocent' or unaware of the true conditions in our society.

There were very few examples of a reasoned debate on human rights issues in the Urdu media. In the following extract from an Urdu article, the writer has argued against the abolition of the death penalty in the religious, legal and social contexts.²⁷

The debate on the death penalty should be in three perspectives (*Shariah*, legal and social) It will be debated in the *Shariah* perspective when it is related to those guilty of murder. In this case, the Quran has a clear verdict about *Qisas*. *Qisas* means the death penalty for murderers (al-Baqra: 871, 971). However, the Quran has given the victims' heirs the right to forgive the culprit

of their own free will. The discretion of state in this regard can be seen in two ways. First, can the state reduce the punishment if a court imposes the death penalty on a person found guilty of murder? Secondly, can the state still insist on punishing a convict if the victim's heirs forgive him? Experts of Islamic jurisprudence unanimously hold that the state cannot forgive or change the punishment to other than *Qisas* against the will of heirs of the victim. Most of them also agree that the state cannot punish a convict if the victim's heirs forgive him/her. Renowned Islamic scholar Javed Ghamedi, however, has a different opinion in the latter case. He says murder is a crime against an individual as well as the state and society. Sometimes, the victim does not have heirs or his heirs seem disinterested in pursuing his/her case. As we see in cases of honour killing that the father or brother of the girl are involved in her murder and are also pursuing the case as the family of the deceased. In such cases, Ghamedi thinks, the state has the right to punish the convict even if the heirs forgive him.... If we see the situation in its legal perspective, the government again does not have any such right. According to...the Constitution, the president has the right to abolish a sentence declared by an authority or the court, but the Supreme Court has given a verdict in *Sakina Bibi case* that in *Hudood* and *Qisas* cases the president cannot abolish the penalty... If we see this in the social perspective, we understand that hatred against crime is in human instinct. There is no society in the world that does not have laws against crimes. Every law has termed the offenses against life, property and dignity of humans as crime and suggested strictest punishments in this regard. There are two opinions on the death penalty in secular countries. However, human experience tells us that the death penalty's abolition is tantamount to encouraging crime.

Electronic Media Reports and Programs

The electronic media has a relatively more regular focus on human rights issues than the print media. During the media monitoring, it was learned at least two regular programs/talk shows on human rights issues were being regularly telecast by two private TV channels; *Aurat Kahani* (The story of woman) on ARY One TV and *Sach ka Safar* (The journey of truth) on TV One. No special pages covered human rights issues in the print media. Some other programs on various TV channels intermittently addressed human rights issues.

The electronic media's coverage was somewhat more investigative, presenting viewpoints of the victims and/or their families. Human rights activists and experts were invited to these programs to talk about human rights issues.

Rhetoric, instead of in-depth analyses, was visible in some electronic media programs mainly due to lack of research work by the anchorpersons and their teams.

Language, Style and Tone

The English and Urdu media have distinct groups of readers and viewers with different backgrounds, understanding and concerns. The difference in audience does influence reporting patterns. A relatively small segment of Pakistani society, including human rights and civil society organizations, is concerned about rights violations. The English media mostly caters to their information needs. The Urdu media has to take into account the sensitivities and concerns of a large portion of population. In its view, it requires simplistic treatment of the issues in order to make the reports and news items consumable.

Due to its educated and enlightened audience, the English media has considerable space to report the human rights issues in the appropriate context. The Urdu media faces language-related pressure from society, depending on the nature of the issue being reported. It cannot treat the issue in a manner which may irritate

its audience. A clear difference in the reporting patterns is visible in the use of terms, analysis framework and communication perspective.²⁸

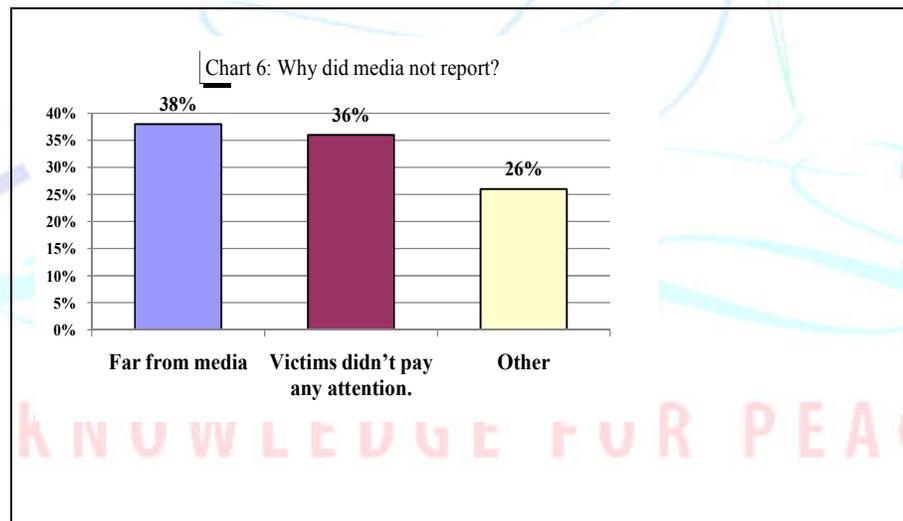
During the media monitoring it was noted that unlike reports in English media, Urdu reports consisted of a mere narration. There were very few original investigative reports in the Urdu print media. Mostly it carried reports translated from English newspapers or magazines.

The same division was visible in the electronic media. Narration without any investigative input, sensationalization and event coverage were prominent common features of the Urdu electronic media. But the talk shows/programs on human rights issues gave an edge to electronic media in general. Although human rights is not a distinct reporting area, English media reporters were found more aware regarding human rights issues.

Quality of Human Rights Reporting

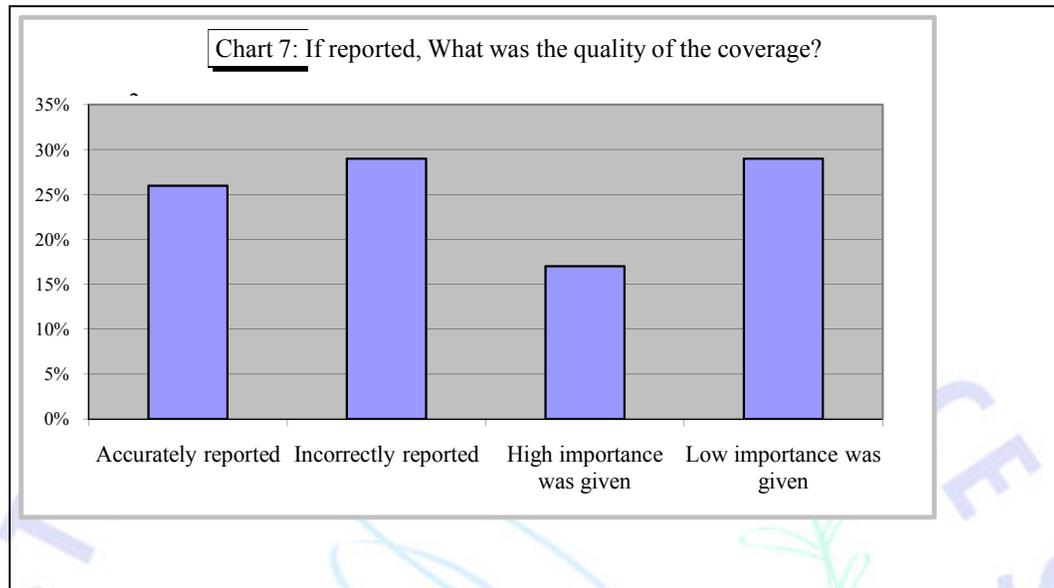
Lack of trainings and threat management, internal and external pressures and curbs on journalists have affected the quality of human rights reporting in the print media. Although, the journalists questioned say they have diverse sources of information to investigate human rights issues, the utility of these sources remains debatable in the given reporting environment of journalists' vulnerability. Consequently, the news items and reports lack in quality.

The public survey found that 65 percent of the respondents or their close relatives experienced human rights violations but only 29 percent of them were reported and the remaining 71 percent were not discussed by the media. Asked about the reasons for lack of reporting, 38 percent of the responding journalists cited their inability to access the victims or their relatives in far-flung areas; 36 percent said the victims do not pay attention to highlighting their issues in the media; while 26 percent stated reasons other than these two for the lack of reporting. (Chart 6).



In Pakistan, media persons ignore human rights issues at times, however, sometimes people themselves hide incidents of rights violation to save their "honor" or social status. Moreover, the people are skeptical of journalists' role and 29 percent of the respondents to the public survey complained that journalists did not report their cases accurately, while 26 percent thought that their cases were reported

appropriately. Around one-third (29 percent) of the respondents believed that the media did not think that cases of violation of their rights were important. (Chart 7).



Senior journalists and experts on human rights reporting argue that there is a visible difference between the quality of reporting in Pakistan and abroad because in Pakistan, journalists collect their information on human rights violation issues from secondary sources and the issues are generally reported incorrectly.

Urdu newspapers, in particular, continue to lack investigative reporting and objectivity. But the limited freedom the media has received in recent years is leading to a gradual change in the situation.²⁹ According to Shaista, Pakistani media only highlighting negative aspects of the issues distinguishes it from human rights reporting abroad.³⁰ Moreover, the media in the developed countries enjoys a fair degree of independence whereas Pakistani media is not as independent.³¹ This factor is also, at least partially, responsible for mediocre reporting.

Range and Authenticity of Sources

During the media monitoring, it was noted that most of the news and reports on human rights issues in the print media ascribed the information to sources who requested anonymity. Many byline reports³² also appeared with such unidentified sources. In the electronic media, regional correspondents were the main source of news and reports on human rights issues. The sources journalists rely upon while investigating and reporting on human rights issues include:

- a) Police
- b) Statements and press conferences
- c) Reports issued by human rights organizations
- d) Comments mostly from non-victims and non-offenders, including rights activists, political leaders, police, local authorities in the area where the incident occurred, and even journalists/analysts

e) Anonymous sources

Police are a major source of news and reports on incidents of human rights violations. Almost a quarter of the news items and reports were based on statements and press conferences. The electronic media was found to be more efficient in contacting the victims and their families and even broadcasting their interviews. The English media was deemed to be more responsible regarding its sources of information and investigation.

Conclusion

Media reports on human rights influence people, but there is a lack of investigative reporting on human rights issues in Pakistan. The journalists do not have the required expertise and training to investigate and report on rights issues. Only a few journalists are committed to human rights reporting whereas most of them are either indifferent to or skeptical of rights issues. The environment is comparatively better for human rights reporting in the English media where journalists are not forced to work in multiple areas and have an educated audience. The Urdu media relies much on sensationalization, a narrative devoid of investigation and personal bias. A balanced and impartial analysis of the issues is largely missing.

Investigative and research-based reporting needs substantial resources, which are not being made available to the journalists.

There are many sociocultural, political and religious constraints in human rights reporting. Journalists from main cities face difficulties in traveling to remote areas where rights are violated most often. Local journalists and correspondents that cover those events have a one-dimensional approach to reporting rights violations. In order to get their reports and details on the events, even the electronic media uses local correspondents – who lack the training to properly investigate the issue.

PAK INSTITUTE FOR PEACE STUDIES
KNOWLEDGE FOR PEACE

Notes and References:

- ¹ The writer wishes to thank the interviewees, interviewers and those who conducted the surveys. The survey team and interviewers included Yousuf Ali, who conducted surveys and interviews in Peshawar, Malik Siraj Akbar in Quetta, Zahid Hasan in Lahore, Masroor Hussain in Karachi, and Sajjad Azhar and Shahzada Saleem in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Shagufta Hayat, Saba Noor, Abdul Mateen and Mansur Mahsud also helped immensely to make this study possible.
- ² The survey was conducted in Lahore, Peshawar, Quetta, Islamabad and Karachi, and the term 'PIPS media survey' will be used to allude to this survey throughout the study.
- ³ Zafarullah Khan, interview with Sajjad Azhar, Islamabad, September 2008.
- ⁴ Nadeem Iqbal, associated with Urdu journalism, interview with Sajjad Azhar, Islamabad, September 2008.
- ⁵ Rauf Klasra, *Jang*, Islamabad, August 27, 2008.
- ⁶ Rauf Klasra, *Jang*, Islamabad, August 23, 2008.
- ⁷ *Intekhab*, Quetta, September 3, 2008.
- ⁸ *Intekhab*, Quetta, September 6, 2008.
- ⁹ *Express*, Islamabad, September 8, 2008.
- ¹⁰ Naureen Tawakkal, member Shirkat Gah's Rapid Assessment Team, interview with Zahid Hasan, Lahore, October 2008.
- ¹¹ Peter Jacob, Executive Secretary, National Commission for Justice and Peace Pakistan, interview with Zahid Hasan, Lahore, October 2008.
- ¹² *Dawn*, August 3, 2008.
- ¹³ *The News*, Karachi, September 11, 2008.
- ¹⁴ *Express*, September 8, 2008.
- ¹⁵ Zafarullah Khan. Interview, *op. cit.*
- ¹⁶ Daniyal, a Karachi-based electronic media journalist, an interview with Masroor Hussain, Karachi, August 2008.
- ¹⁷ A special report by M Fayaz, *Mashriq*, Peshawar, August 31, 2008. The report is based on another report prepared by an NGO and has extensive data on child abuse. This full report – more than 2,500 words and 3 columns – contains nothing else than the NGO's compiled data. The writer has only added his views critical of the role of NGOs.
- ¹⁸ *The Post*, July 9, 2008.
- ¹⁹ *Ummat*, Karachi, July 7, 2008.
- ²⁰ *Jang*, Islamabad, September 27, 2008.
- ²¹ 'HRCP slams Ahmedi killings', *Daily Times*, Islamabad, September 11, 2008.
- ²² *The Post*, Islamabad, September 8, 2008.
- ²³ *Dawn*, Islamabad, September 21, 2008.
- ²⁴ *Jinnah*, Islamabad, July 13, 2008.
- ²⁵ *Dawn*, September 3, 2008.
- ²⁶ *The Post*, July 9, 2008.
- ²⁷ *Jang*, Islamabad, July 7, 2008.
- ²⁸ Mubasher Bukhari, associated with Geo TV, based at Lahore, interview with the writer, Lahore, Nov. 2008.
- ²⁹ Tanveer Afzaal, editor monthly *Nawa-e-Insaan*, interview with Zahid Hasan, Lahore, October 2008.
- ³⁰ Shaista Jan, former director CSC, interview with Zahid Hasan, Lahore, October 2008.
- ³¹ Naureen Tawakkal. Interview, *op. cit.*
- ³² News item bearing the name of the reporter.

About Institute

The Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an independent, not-for-profit non governmental research and advocacy think-tank. An initiative of leading Pakistani scholars, researchers and journalists, PIPS conducts wide-ranging research and analysis of political, social and religious conflicts that have a direct bearing on both national and international security. The PIPS approach is grounded in field research. Our surveys and policy analyses are informed by the work of a team of researchers, reporters and political analysts located in different areas of conflict in Pakistan. Based on information and assessments from the field, PIPS produces analytical reports, weekly security updates and policy briefings containing practical recommendations targeted at key national and international decision-makers. We also publish survey-based reports and books, providing in-depth analysis of various conflicts or potential conflicts.



Pak Institute for Peace Studies

Post Box No. 2110, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Tel: +92 - 51 - 2291586

Fax: +92 - 51 - 2100651

www.san-pips.com

Email: pips@san-pips.com