

COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT, PUBLIC RELATIONS and DIVERSITY

Issues in Communicating with Muslim Women in Pakistan

1: Situational analysis:

1.1: Pakistani women - Communication challenges: A general analysis

Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world and has the second largest Muslim population after Indonesia. According to the March 1998 census, the total population of the country is 130.6 million with an annual growth rate of 2.6 percent. Women constitute 48 percent of the total population.

Pakistani society, in a social and cultural context, is predominantly patriarchal. Home is defined as the legitimate space for a woman and man dominates the world inside and outside the home. Purdah (veil), sex segregation and violence restrict and control women and communication involving them. In 1996–1997, according to official statistics, women-headed households constituted only 7 percent of total households.

Statistics also reveal the gender disparity in Pakistani society. Literacy rate amongst females is 32.6 % and amongst men is 56.7% while in rural areas it is only 12% among women¹. Alliance against sexual harassment (AASHA) assessment states that 100% of Pakistani women are sexually harassed at home, public and work places.

Lack of skills, limited economic opportunities, and social and cultural restrictions limit women's chances to compete for resources. This dependency on men forms the basis for male power over women in all social relationships.

1.2: Communication challenges: Women in economic development - A business perspective

Pakistan is ranked 135 on the Gender Development Index out of 174 countries. Pakistan ranks lowest in the South Asian region in terms of GDP per capita for women.² On the Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM) 1999, Pakistan ranked 100 out of the 102 countries measured.

In Pakistan, women in the labour force have merely increased from 6.6% in 1968/69 to 13.6% in 1996/97. According to Labour Force Survey, against 30.90 million employed men only 5 million women were employed in 1997-1998.

Women's work in the labour market is not on equal terms vis-à-vis men. Choices of occupation are limited due to social and cultural constraints, inherent gender bias in the labour market, and lack of supportive facilities such as childcare, transport, and accommodation in the formal sector of the labour market. Inflation, high unemployment, and increasing poverty have put enormous pressure on women to contribute to family income.

¹ 1998 Census Survey, Pakistan

² Women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, Nabeel A. Goheer, ILO

1.2: Communication challenges: Women in economic development - A business perspective /cont

In the cultural context, women employment is considered a threat to the male ego and identity. They though participate fully in economic activities in the productive and reproductive sphere. The economic value of women's activities has not been recognized as productive and is not accounted for in the national statistics. Not only are the tasks that women traditionally undertake physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study.

Despite women's legal and Islamic rights to own and inherit property from their families, very few women have access and control over these resources. A micro level survey of 1,000 rural households conducted in 1995 in Punjab found that only 36 women owned land in their own name, while only 9 of them had control over it.

Commercial banks ignore women clients due to their preconceived views on women's creditworthiness because of their dependency on men for physical collateral, high transaction cost of small loans, and difficulties in gaining information about a borrower's reliability. About 60% of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan have opted for traditional business such as parlours, bakeries, boutiques, but the largest number is employed in the garments and handicrafts sector.³

Summarizing numerous challenges faced by Pakistani women, legal obstacles in form of gender biased inheritance and labour laws, policy problems, such as in form of trade and investment policies that ignore the gender differentiated economic roles of men and women as well as cultural impediments are some of the biggest challenges.

1.3: Communication Challenges: Breast Cancer and Women - A health perspective

World Bank in its report, Improving Women's Health in Pakistan, states, "The level of women's health in Pakistan is among the lowest in the world and compares unfavourably to that of women in neighbouring South Asian countries. In Pakistan, one in every 38 women dies from pregnancy-related causes while in Sri Lanka, it is one in 230."

Rural women's health is generally poorest due to the lack of health facilities, lack of information resources and skilled health providers. For example, the maternal mortality ratio in predominantly rural Balochistan is 800 maternal deaths to 100,000 live births, compared to the national average of 340 per 100,000.

Underlying factors of the women health related problem are the lack of awareness of, and attention to, women's health needs; women's lower education and social status; and social constraints on women and girls, including the practice of seclusion.

Majority of Pakistani women are reluctant to consult and expose themselves to doctors because of shyness and social customs. Under this situation talking to or talking about breast cancer is a very sensitive issue. Therefore, Pakistani women are not aware of the danger of breast cancer. Women shy away from discussing this issue with not only medical practitioners but also with their close female relatives and friends.

1.3: Communication Challenges: Breast Cancer and Women - A health perspective / cont..

³ http://www.win.org.pk/page.php?page_id=4

Media whether print or electronic is reluctant to air awareness programs particularly the one related to early detection, self-examination owing to social cultural constraints. Whereas very little information is available in Pakistan and only cases at a very advanced stage are reported.

Information amongst even medical practitioners about this disease is considerably low. In a survey conducted to analyze the information level of nurses on breast cancer the result shows that only 35 % of nurses had good knowledge of risk factors.⁴

Pakistan has the highest rate of breast cancer for any Asian population accounting to 40,000 deaths per year. Approximately 1 in 9 of Pakistani women suffers from breast cancer at some point in their lives. In contrast with the Western epidemiology, the disease occurs at a younger age in Pakistani females.⁵

Pakistani women show an incidence rate of 50.1/ 100,000 and the neighbouring India, with similar socio-cultural background of a young age at first childbirth and breast-feeding practices, has an incidence rate of only 19/ 100,000.⁶

The issue of breast cancer is painfully close to many people's hearts. To bring awareness among the distressed women folk about this dreadful disease is dire need of the time. Female irrespective of their class and category are dying with out having a slightest idea about the silent killer. Proper knowledge and health education must be inculcated among them to confront and ward off the danger. So far Government and media have failed to play a protagonist role in bringing about women health issues.

1.4: Communication Challenge: Violence against women: A societal perspective

In Pakistan one woman is murdered every day, one woman is killed in the name of honour every 5 days, one woman is physically abused and one woman is made victim of sexual violence every 2 hours.⁷ Pakistan is one of the six countries mentioned in the Human Rights' Watch Report, 2000 that shows an alarming rate of violence against women. The non-governmental Human Rights Commission of Pakistan concluded that upwards of 80% of women are victims of domestic violence.

An assessment by Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid (LHRLA) for 2000-2005 highlighted the gravity of the situation. During this duration a total 8589 women were murdered, 4338 raped, 8612 physically abused, 4716 fell pray to karo-kari, 1421 burnt, 352 unidentified corpses of women found, 7336 abducted, 4333 committed suicide, 287 trafficked and 685 fell prey to police torture.

The faulty justice system, biased attitudes of law enforcers and courts, improper investigation mechanism, inadequate medico-legal examination system, late referrals and police delays, fear of society are some of the reasons that bar women from reporting the incidences of violence on them.

1.4: Communication Challenge: Violence against women: A societal perspective / cont...

In most of the cases media particularly the film media promotes the violent acts by presenting a secondary role of women in mother, sister, beloved and wife's characters that support male chauvinism. The

⁴ <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6955/5/6/abstract>

⁵ Breast Cancer in Pakistan - AWARENESS AND EARLY DETECTION Saba Sohail and Shams Nadeem Alam*

⁶ <http://www.pakmedinet.com/11976>

⁷ Violence Against Women, Quarterly Awaz, Issue 4, Volume 1

journalists have also their biases towards the concept declaring it a western agenda. In such situation mass scale awareness on violence against women becomes an uphill task.

Under all such situation women found it immensely problematic to report incidences of violence against them fearing societal reaction that considers them guilty in case of any form of violence that they face.

2: Making PR work to improve communication for women in Pakistan

2.1: Improving communication of business women

Women's Entrepreneurship Project – WEP was launched in 2000 in collaboration with the U.S State Department through the American Embassy in Islamabad. WEP focused on the skills development of women entrepreneurs in the field of marketing and sales, finance and accounting, human resource management, technology management, production management, and quality control, etc.

To develop an effective communication and PR strategy for the project the need was assessment of the stakeholders in this case the women entrepreneur. Around 300 women were interviewed throughout Pakistan to identify their exact problems. These were the businesswomen, the women planning to do a business and the women who failed. Learning from their experience a training program was designed that empowered around 1000 women in Karachi, Lahore, Gujrat and Multan in entrepreneur development skill.

Since developing women entrepreneurship cannot be done in isolation there was a need to involve other relevant stakeholders. Chambers of commerce were involved due to their mandated role of expanding business opportunities irrespective of any discrimination; and the policy/decision makers as economic disparity of women is a policy issues besides being a social and cultural problem. Seeing this need WEG developed National Committee on Women Entrepreneurship Development after several rounds of consultation with relevant stakeholders. The committee is mandated to focus on policy level framework at national level and to create a web of communication and coordination among all stakeholders and allied government departments, which were involved in women entrepreneurship.

The constituent of the committee are policy makers, representatives of national and international financial institutions, international agencies, and civil society organizations.

2.1.1: Case Study: How PR empowered business women

When women entrepreneurship project was initiated, no single women entrepreneur was represented in elected bodies of the chambers of commerce. There was no mechanism available for women entrepreneur to voice their concerns and demand their rights. Even the economic journalism was not bringing up this issue.

During the consultation with women entrepreneur it was felt that in order to promote women economic development, the need is to give them a platform. This formed the bases of women chambers of commerce and the first women chamber was formed in Lahore in 2003 with an aim to function as a pressure group that voices the concerns of businesswomen. There are some 50 women chambers of commerce now functional in all parts of the country.

2.1.1: Case Study: How PR empowered businesswomen /cont....

The Chambers are now providing “one-window” facility to potential women entrepreneur where they are getting assistance required to set up a business, such as in preparing feasibilities, obtaining registration, and establishing infrastructure. For established businesswomen, the Chambers are providing a forum for

debate and discussion, the opportunity to interact with both local and international experts, and facilities for research and development.

2.2: Communication Strategy: Women and breast cancer

With early diagnosis and treatment, a patient's chance of surviving breast cancer is higher than 90%. Unfortunately very little information on breast cancer is available in Pakistan and only cases of breast cancer at a very advanced stage are reported. It is for these reasons that the Women's Empowerment Group has launched a nationwide National Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign to create awareness enabling to help reduce breast cancer mortality amongst Pakistani women.

Breast cancer being a sensitive female issue, WEG opted for the top-to-bottom approach and targeted the decision makers, government officials, journalists and opinion makers in the first phase of the launch of Pink Ribbon Month in Pakistan.

Government of Pakistan remained an important stakeholder. WEG lobbied with the government to include Breast Cancer in reproductive health package and to declare the drugs, testing and therapy imported to Pakistan to cure the disease duty free. To make the importance of the issue felt, WEG invited Cherie Blair the wife of former British Premier Tony Blair who advocated fighting for the disease in her meetings with elected representatives, government officials, medical practitioners and media. It is due to the extensive lobbying efforts of WEG that wife of Prime Minister of Pakistan is Patron in Chief of Pink Ribbon Campaign.

Mass scale awareness was provided on early detection and self-examination through corporate sector support. It was done through the information material, workshops and seminars on the issue. Traditionally media shy away from writing on this disease but they were provided cultural sensitive information, which can be used to spread mass scale information about breast cancer and its gravity in Pakistan.

To cater to rather more educated women an information website was also developed that also provide space for exchange of information, ideas and views with each other in order to form a support group. WEG has also developed patient support groups where survivors share their stories and encourage and motivate others that they can fight this disease.

Volunteerism was promoted that encouraged many to develop information packages for awareness raising in rather more innovative ways such as reaching mothers through children nursery rhymes.

Pakistan's Pink Ribbon Campaign, has won "FrontLine Golden World Award 2005" by International Public Relations Association – IPRA.

2.2.1: Case Study: Breast cancer in Pakistan: the communication challenge

An important challenge for the breast cancer campaign remains as 'talking about the issue'. Women shy away from talking about the issue, media hesitates to air awareness programs, government did not recognize this as a priority issue.

In such situation the project started the idea of women support group with an aim that women survivors shall provide support to the women suffering from the problem.

Initially this idea did not kick off as women survivors were not willing to talk on the issue. They rather very strictly shun the idea of being involved in any of such campaign. Later on, the campaign invited Ms. Leah Pullin from Huston to visit Pakistan, share her experience with breast cancer survivors, and encourage other survivors to play their role in raising awareness on the issue. The visit of Cherie Blair also encouraged not only common women to talk on the issue but also government and media to play their role in curbing the spread of the disease.

2.3: Communication strategy on violence against women

Several campaigns for social change were started in the past to improve the status of women in the society but they all targeted women. This has created a huge gap as women start demanding their rights and men stick to the old age traditions. Resultantly, there were more violent incidences when women demanded their rights. Thereof, the need was to involve men as traditionally they are considered to be right-givers.

The White Ribbon Campaign Pakistan was launched with a vision to create awareness amongst men and boys specifically and general public at large regarding injustice and violation of women's rights. The WEG framework is a strategic approach as it mobilizes men and boys to work on their own and in partnership with women and girls to transform destructive masculinities; end oppressive gender relations; and promote gender equity and equality.

WEG's main focus is on youth through awareness camps, seminars, theatre shows, power sports competitions, information material, and debate competitions in educational institutions. Studies show that most cases of violence occur in industrial workers faction of the society. Thereof, the industrial workers become another strategic stakeholder for whom dialogue was generated through the tool of theatre that was based on images of masculinity and patriarchy. Theatre presented the stereotype image that they have in their minds and they were asked to discuss its pros and cons.

Media and web-based resources were used to raise mass scale awareness and gain volunteer support for expanding the project objectives. Expo-Centers were organized for targeting the general populace and brief them on violence on women. Men were pinned white ribbon and they signed pledges that they won't condone or promote acts of violence. Memorandum of Understanding was reached with the government that they would act to stop violence on women. In addition, to gain more support civil society organizations were oriented with this concept so that they can introduce it in their current campaigns on violence against women.

2.3.1: Case Study: Making men talk about violence on women

The redefinition of masculinity or the dismantling of the psychic and social structures of gender that brings with them such peril is what was achieved during the project. Men were introduced that the paradox of patriarchy is not the pain, rage, frustration, isolation, and fear but compassion, love, and respect, combined with a clear challenge to negative masculine norms and their destructive outcomes.

2.3.1: Case Study: Making men talk about violence on women /cont....

Certain wrong religious interpretations were widely used to justify violence on women. The progressive religious leaders were asked to speak on the issue who debated that violence cannot be justified and cleared the stance of Islam on women rights. This help in changing minds of men who give religious cover to their violent acts and associate such campaigns against violence on women with West.

Cultural sensitive messages in which the most respected image of women in both religion and society, which is mother, was used pleading with men to stop violence on women.

Men also think that there are other issues more important than violence such as poverty, access to basic civic amenities, governance and political process. WEG established links of violence with other social evils and advocated that a tense-home environment contribute to other social evils also such as poverty, terrorism, crime, gender-insensitive planning/budgeting, biased justice, etc.

Men also considered joining such initiatives that talk about women's rights as against their masculinity. To counter this power sport concept was introduced. These local and international games such as kabaddi, arm wrestling, and boxing are linked with masculinity. The champions of these games advocated masculinity is not associated with violence on women but with power that can change societal prejudice.

3: New horizons: Communication for development and diversity: The PielleVision 2015 experience

PielleVision 2015 and WEG joint collaborations to use established communication management and public relations techniques based on 'engagement' for economic, social and health development issues is a new experience. Most of the social development campaigns in Pakistan lack proper stakeholder analysis, image building and marketing techniques. For this very reason, these campaigns do not get the required recognition or provide necessary impact. WEG and PielleVision 2015 are now developing paradigm where public relations and communication management techniques can be used for social development as a specialized field.

At the same time the introduction by the corporate sector in Pakistan of social responsibility is, in itself, a new Public Relations and communication management technique that is being used to build a non-capitalistic and more human image of the sector. Under these programmes the corporate sector is investing in social development programs such as education, and health. This new area needs further exploration. WEG and PielleVision 2015 are developing strategies to partner in ventures for this new horizon.

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