



Examining the Influence of Pakistani Television Dramas Depicting Extramarital Affairs on Youth

Rabia Arshad¹ Durre Shehwar² Nazia Rehman³

Abstract: *This study has examined the influence of dramas depicting extramarital affairs on Youth, focusing on Pakistani Urdu dramas. The portrayal of extramarital affairs in these dramas has increased in recent years, leading to concerns about their impact on Youths' attitudes and beliefs. The main aim was to examine the level of exposure Youth have to these portrayals, explore the association between exposure and its influence on Youth and investigate the potential cultivated effect of Mean World Syndrome. A quantitative research approach was employed and data was collected through a survey, administered to a randomly selected sample of 347 students from the Foundation University Rawalpindi Campus. The questionnaire demonstrated reliable internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.71$. The results demonstrated a positive but weak relationship between the amount of exposure to these dramas and the perceived influence they have on Youth. The correlation ($r = .25$) is weak indicating that greater exposure does not necessarily lead to a greater impact on Youth perceptions of marriage. Negative correlation ($r = -.53$) was also found between exposure to dramas and development of Mean World Syndrome. This suggests that the greater exposure of Youth does not necessarily lead to mistrust on relationships and may not be significant source of influence.*

Key Words: Extramarital Affairs, Mean World Syndrome, Infidelity, Media Portrayals, Media Literacy

Introduction

The media landscape in Pakistan has experienced notable shifts due to the invention of television, which has made it a major source of information, education, and entertainment for a variety of audiences. Pakistani Urdu dramas, in particular, have gained immense popularity, portraying various aspects of society and influencing viewers' attitudes and behaviors. This study has investigated the influence of dramas depicting extramarital affairs on perceptions of Youth, exploring the extent of their exposure towards portrayals of extramarital affairs and association with the impact of these dramas and potential link to the mean world syndrome.

Pakistani dramas hold a significant position in portraying societal aspects, engaging viewers, and addressing sensitive topics (Hadi, 2017). Previous research has consistently shown that the dramas have strong effects on viewers, influencing their attitudes and behaviors (Muneer & Munir, 2020). Another study asserted that dramas have the ability to influence how people view and anticipate real-life relationships (Mujtaba Masood, 2024). Pakistani Urdu dramas have shed light on significant socioeconomic issues, but modern dramas have shifted focus from artistic passion to ratings and profit maximization, neglecting social concerns (Rehman Warrich et al., 2021). Dramas have evolved into influential tools shaping societal attitudes and emotions (Shahbaz, N et al., 2015). Despite their popularity, the impact of Pakistani dramas depicting extramarital affairs on online viewers remains understudied.

Extramarital affair is defined as a sexual and emotional secretive relationship occurring concurrent to a committed, cohabiting relationship. A study found that watching TV generally was associated with less

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of Media and Communication, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan.

² Assistant Professor, Department of Arts & Media, Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan.
 Email: durreshehwar@fui.edu.pk

³ Lecturer, Department of Media and Communication, Rawalpindi Women University, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: nazia.rehman@f.rwu.edu.pk

▪ **Corresponding Author:** Rabia Arshad (rabiaarshad948@gmail.com)

▪ **To Cite:** Arshad, R., Shehwar, D., & Rehman, N. (2024). Examining the Influence of Pakistani Television Dramas depicting Extramarital affairs on Youth. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(4), 141-146.
<https://doi.org/10.55737/qjssh.v-iv.24262>



commitment in romantic relationships. However, reading romantic content was linked to higher conflict engagement and decreased relationship satisfaction (Reizer & Hetsroni, 2014).

The portrayal of extramarital affairs in Pakistani Urdu dramas has witnessed a surge in recent years (Siddique, 2016). However, there are concerns that these portrayals deviate from the reality of Pakistani society (Arafat, Sial & Zafar, 2020). This raises questions about the potential impact of such dramas. The impulsive behavior shown in our Pakistani dramas is common now a days. Majority of Pakistani dramas are based on extramarital affairs, love triangles and physical abuse. These dramas easily get higher rating and becomes part of discussion in our society. Therefore, this study filled the gap and provided valuable insights into how media content shapes attitudes towards extramarital affairs and viewers perceptions, contributing to a deeper understanding of cultivation theory in the Pakistani context.

Problem Statement

Recent years have seen an increase in extramarital affair plots in Pakistani Urdu dramas (Siddique, 2016). This trend raises concerns about its potential influence on young viewers. These dramatic portrayals often diverge from the reality of Pakistani society and play a significant role in shaping societal perspectives on crucial issues (Arafat, Sial & Zafar, 2020). This study has been designed to examine exposure levels, influence on Youth and cultivated effects of Mean World Syndrome through portrayals of extramarital affairs.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine how often Youth are exposed to the depiction of extramarital affairs in Pakistani dramas on television.
2. To find the impact of extramarital affair depictions in Pakistani dramas on Youths' perceptions of marriage.
3. To investigate the relationship between exposure to portrayals of extramarital affairs in Pakistani dramas and mean world syndrome.

Literature Review

There is an understanding in the previous studies that perceived infidelity affects people's perception of the quality, trust, and satisfaction of relationships (Fincham & May, 2017; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). Information about infidelity might also affect the expectations or commitment and behaviors in a relationship (Alexopoulos & Gamble, 2022). In depth interview responses showed the main reasons for infidelity to comprise marital disagreement, social media, electronic media, and absence of Islamic and moral values as mentioned by the participants from Lahore Pakistan (Bibi et al., 2024). Critics have largely condemned Pakistani dramas as these induce negative attitudes, some stating that these introduce new cultural values and behaviors with modernism. Frequent portrayal of the extra marital affairs in these dramas after a conflict-involving- the third person may give wrong impression about the prevailing culture about married life. Likewise, a cross-sectional descriptive study by Alanazi (2021) among married individuals in Saudi Arabia established that the overreliance in social media, particularly in married couples via the WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat could cause marital problems such as jealousy, negligence of family responsibilities, negative interpersonal communication and lack of trust.

While previous drama series have depicted positive interactions between married couples and emphasized the merging of families, modern television dramas portray more complex and individualized family dynamics (Ibrahim et al., 2020). The reality of relationships and how they are portrayed in Pakistani dramas are both examined by Yasin and Khan in (2022). They discovered that the social reality these dramas depicted about the spouses and their lives was frequently more unfavorable than positive. In these dramas, wives frequently sacrifice, tell falsehoods, and cheat, while husbands frequently support, dominate, and betray them. Although many researchers have conducted research in the past, and most of their studies are centered on depictions of unfavorable marital relationships by media. This study fills a crucial research gap by investigating the influence of dramas depicting extramarital affairs on Youth in Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

The cultivation theory by Gross & Gerbner, 1998 is relevant to this study, as it explains how exposure to media content shapes individuals' perceptions. According to Pollock et al. (2021) viewers of TV dramas with favorable narratives about marriage are more likely to have a positive perspective of marriage than those without such storylines. Mujtaba Masood (2024) found a substantial difference confirming t-test results with unequal variances. $t(482.831) = 2.46, p = 0.14$. It was discovered that there are variations in audience perceptions impacted by the representation of married lives in TV dramas was empirically supported by the findings, especially when contrasting married and single people.

Mean World Syndrome, a concept derived from the Cultivation Theory, refers to the finding that those who watch more television than others tend to perceive the world as a more dangerous place (Gerbner, 1998). This phenomenon is thought to occur because frequent exposure to violent and severe events on television leads viewers to believe that such events are more common in reality than they actually are. In the context of this study, Mean World Syndrome helped to examine how exposure to dramas depicting extramarital affairs may influence youth perceptions of the marriage. The present study draws upon the ideas of distrust, anxiety and fear of deception in married relationships as explored by Kemp (2023), who also examined the associations between social media use and anxiety and fear. He discovered significant positive correlations between increased social media use and increased levels of anxiety fear and pessimism. Another study analyzed the Exposure of women to violence-based content on Facebook and its impact on the perceptions and beliefs of women regarding the real world. Results of correlation ($r=0.249, p<.001$) show that there was a statistically significant effect of Exposure to women's violence-based content on Facebook on the perceptions and beliefs of women regarding the real world (Malik, 2022). Thus, this research contributes to the broader literature on the media effects and cultivation, broadening our understanding of the complex relationship between media and individuals' attitudes and beliefs.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are Youth exposed to Pakistani dramas that depict extramarital affairs?
2. Is there an association between exposure to depictions of extramarital affairs and their influence on marital perceptions of Youth?
3. Is there a relationship between exposure to portrayals of extramarital affairs in Pakistani dramas and mean world syndrome?

H2: There is a positive association between exposure to dramas depicting extramarital affairs and its influence on marital perceptions of youth.

Methodology

The research methodology employed a quantitative research technique in the form of a survey analysis to investigate the influence of drama portrayals on youth in Pakistan. Population was selected from the Foundation University School of Science and Technology (FUSST). The sample size based on non probability purposive sampling technique was defined as approximately to be 375 students currently enrolled in the Foundation University Campus. A questionnaire was distributed to 375 individuals, out of which 347 responses were considered valid for the analysis. The sample size was determined to be sufficient for the research study, considering the population and the research objectives.

Operationalization of key variables

Exposure to Dramas

Exposure may be defined as “the extent to which audience members have encountered specific messages or media content” (Slater, 2004, p. 168). This study has operationalized exposure as “Number of hours an individual is being exposed to Dramas depicting extramarital affairs”. Participants were asked about how many hours do they watch dramas depicting extramarital affairs?

Attitude

This study measured attitude through survey questions related to what youth think, understand and feel about issues related with depictions of extramarital affairs.



Mean World Syndrome

Mean world syndrome suggests that individuals may start perceiving real-life situations as being as negative and problematic as what they see on TV shows (Kaur, 2012). In this study, mean world syndrome was assessed by measuring participants' levels of fear, mistrust, and pessimism about the marriage and relationships.

Data Collection

In this study, a self-administered questionnaire was developed by adapting items from two prior studies. Items were derived from the questionnaires used in the following studies (Aslam et al., 2015; Aleem et al., 2021). The adapted questionnaire was modified to align with the specific objectives and context of this study.

A close ended questionnaire was constructed comprised of questions on Drama exposure, portrayals of extramarital affairs and its influence on their perceptions of marriage and mean world syndrome. Nominal level of measurement was used to measure gender and Ordinal level of measurement was used to measure age and education level. 5-point Likert scale was employed to measure impact of dramas depicting extramarital affairs and cultivation of mean world syndrome. Reliability of the scale was $\alpha=.71$ which is reliable for the selected sample size. Validity of the instrument was checked through face validity of academicians. The collected data was analysed using SPSS and Pearson correlation was employed to measure relationship between exposure to dramas depicting extramarital affairs and its impact on Youth's perceptions of marriage and infidelity.

Results and Discussion

There were 347 respondents in all with 50 % males (208 participants) and 40 % females (139 participants). Majority (46%) were aged 18-21, followed by age 22-25 (30 %). Regarding education 66 % were undergraduate students and 34 % were pursuing their postgraduate. In addition to demographic findings, this study also found exposure of youth towards Pakistani dramas depicting extramarital affairs which corresponds to study's hypothesis no 1.

H1: It is more likely that youth are significantly exposed to dramas that depict extramarital affairs.

Table 1

Exposure to Dramas Depicting Extramarital Affairs

Exposure	n	%
less than one hour	34	10%
1-3 hours	155	45%
4 hours	90	26%
More than 4 hours	68	20 %
Total	347	

The results from the table 1 shows that majority of Youth had a significant exposure to dramas depicting extramarital affairs, with combined categories results (1-3 Hours and more than 4 hours) i.e. 45 % and 26%. These findings are consistent with earlier research conducted by (Nielson, 2019) and support hypothesis 1 of this study. It was revealed that most young individuals in America between the age of 18 and 54 use streaming platforms and watch television more than five hours a day. This suggests that viewer's attitude to such particular themes of marriage and love relationships can be influenced by depictions in dramas. The findings related to hypothesis 2 and 3 of the study are demonstrated by table 2.

H2: There is a positive association between exposure to dramas depicting extramarital affairs and its influence on marital perceptions of youth.

H3: There is a positive association between exposure to portrayals of extramarital affairs in Pakistani Dramas and the existence of mean world syndrome among youth.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix of Study's Key Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Exposure to dramas depicting extramarital affairs	2.55	0.915	---		
2. Influence on attitude and perceptions of marriage	3.82	0.902	0.25*	---	
3. Cultivated effect of Mean World Syndrome	16.28	3.105	-0.53**	---	---

Note: $p < .05$; $p < .01$.

The Pearson's correlation results of table 2 show very weak positive correlation ($r = 0.25$, $p < .05$) between exposure to dramas depicting extramarital affairs and influence on youths' attitude towards marriage. The hypothesis 2 of the study is supported relationship is weak but significant. The results suggesting that exposure to dramas portraying extra marital relationships may not be a significant source of influence on Youth attitudes towards marriage however it may still have an impact on individuals' perceptions of relationships. These findings align with previous studies suggesting information about infidelity might also affect the expectations or commitment and behaviors in a relationship (Fincham & May, 2017; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

The table 2 reveals weak negative correlation ($r = -0.53$, $p < .01$) between exposure and cultivated effect of mean world syndrome and conflicting the hypothesis 3 of the study. This indicates that the greater exposure of Youth does not necessarily lead to development of mistrust in relationships. These findings contradict with Gerbner's (1998) cultivation theory that posits those who watch more television than others tend to perceive the world as a more dangerous place (Gerbner, 1998). These results are also opposite to Prior Studies results such as (Kemp, 2023; Malik, 2022). Thus, the provided results do not strongly support the research questions and hypothesis of the study. The correlations observed are very weak and but statistically significant, suggesting that the influence of dramas depicting extramarital affairs on adults, as well as the extent of exposure and susceptibility to mean world syndrome, may not be substantial or very influential.

Conclusion

Thus, the findings of this study imply that although dramas depicting extramarital affairs have the weaker influence on Youths' perceptions, Previous studies demonstrated significant associations between exposure to media content and its impact on viewers. Mean World Syndrome's lack of compelling evidence draws attention to the intricacy of media effects and raises the possibility that different viewers internalize media representations differently. The current research focused specifically on Pakistani Urdu dramas, which may have unique characteristics and the specific theme of extramarital affairs within television dramas may have different effects compared to other media content, such as movies or reality shows. To properly understand the complex relationship between media exposure and perceptions of marriage, future research should examine the impact of mediating factors such cultural variations and personal beliefs. By identifying the potential effects of media portrayals of infidelity, this study can inform the development of interventions that address the negative consequences of exposure to such media content. Media content producers should direct efforts towards promoting healthy relationship values and behaviors among audience.

References

- Alanazi, N. (2021). Married Couples' Perception of the Excessive Use of Social Media and its Impact on Marital Problems in Saudi Arabia. *University of Sharjah (UoS) Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18(1A), 61–94. <https://doi.org/10.36394/jhss/18/1a/15>.
- Aleem, Dr. N. (2021). Depiction of black magic in Pakistani dramas and its impact on viewers an analysis with mixed method approach. *PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology*, 18(10). <https://archives.palarch.nl/index.php/jae/article/view/10212/9382>.
- Alexopoulos, C., & Gamble, H. (2022). Prime Time Affairs: A quantitative analysis of infidelity in popular television programs. *Sexuality & Culture*, 26(4), 1490–1509. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-022-09955-9>.
- Arafat, Y., Sial, N., & Zafar, A. (2020). A Study of Extra Marital Relations in Urdu Dramas: A Qualitative Analysis. *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 20(1), 251–271.



- Aslam, S., Ali, A., Ullah, F., & Munawar, M. (2015). Socio-Ethical impact of Turkish dramas on educated females of Gujranwala-Pakistan. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20(2), 125–131. <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1353149>.
- Bibi, M., Rafique, R., Nazir, A., Zahid, H., Mukhtar, S., & Huda, N. ul. (2024). Perceptions of Married Adults Regarding Extramarital Affairs in Lahore, Pakistan. *Human Nature Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(2), 334–346. <https://hnpublisher.com/ojs/index.php/HNJSS/article/view/517>.
- Fincham, F. D., & May, R. W. (2017). Media effects on relationship satisfaction and commitment. In J. Mattingly (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects* (pp. 1–9). Wiley.
- Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation Analysis: An Overview. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1(3–4), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.1998.9677855>.
- Hadi, A. (2017). Patriarchy and Gender-Based violence in Pakistan. *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, 10(2), 297. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejser.v10i2.p297-304>.
- Ibrahim, K., Amin, S., & Rehman, H. U. (2020). The portrayal of Women as a Victim in Pakistani Private TV Channels: Perception of Women of Twin Cities of Pakistan. *Journal of Peace Development & Communication*, 03(02). <https://doi.org/10.36968/jpdc-v03-i02-05>.
- Iqbal, M. S., Batool, D. S., Kausar, D. S., Iqbal, N., & Malik, H. (2022). Social Media And Mean World Syndrome: Effects Of Violent Facebook Posts On Women. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 407–428. <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/view/14742>.
- Kaur, M. (2012). Media and Violence in Youth: A Study in the context of the ‘Mean World Syndrome.’ *International Journal of Psychology and Counseling*, 2(1), 31. <https://doi.org/10.37622/ijpc/2.1.2012.31-36>.
- Kemp, S. (2023). *It’s a mean, mean world: social media and mean world syndrome*. <https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.1333>.
- Masood, M. (2024). *Marital Life and TV dramas: depiction and influence on perceptions of married and unmarried audience* [Master’s Thesis, Charles University]. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/192061/120476395.pdf?sequence=1>.
- Muneer, S., & Munir, S. (2020). impact of TV content on audience’ perception of materialism. *International Journal of Linguistics Literature and Culture*, 6(4), 62–75. <https://doi.org/10.21744/ijllc.v6n4.906>.
- Nielsen. (2019). *TV streaming across our cities* (Nielsen Local Watch Report, pp. 1–25). <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2019/the-nielsen-total-audience-report-september-2019/>.
- Pollock, W., Tapia, N. D., & Sibila, D. (2021). Cultivation theory: The impact of crime media’s portrayal of race on the desire to become a U.S. police officer. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*, 24(1), 42–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14613557211036555>.
- Rehman Warrich, Dr. H. U., Shehzad, M., & Waheed, Dr. S. (2021). Impact Of Pakistani TV Dramas On The Social Values Of Pakistan. *Webology*, 18(4). [https://webology.org/data-cms/articles/20220415110913pmwebology%2018%20\(4\)%20-%20124%20pdf.pdf](https://webology.org/data-cms/articles/20220415110913pmwebology%2018%20(4)%20-%20124%20pdf.pdf)
- Reizer, A., & Hetsroni, A. (2014). Media exposure and romantic relationship quality: a slippery slope? *Psychological Reports*, 114(1), 231–249. <https://doi.org/10.2466/21.07.pro.114k11w6>.
- Shahbaz, N., Shafiq, M., Zaman, K., & Maqsood, M. (2015). Impact of Turkish dramas on Pakistani female viewers: a case study of Bahria University students. *Journal of Media Studies*, 30(1), 57–69.
- Siddique, S. (2016, April 13). No means yes Pakistan TV s dangerous trend of celebrating rapists and stalkers as heroes. *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1082725/no-means-yes-pakistan-tvs-dangerous-trend-of-celebrating-rapists-and-stalkers-as-heroes>.
- Slater, M. D. (2004). Operationalizing and Analyzing exposure: The foundation of Media Effects research. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 81(1), 168–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769900408100112>.
- Vandenbosch, L., & Eggermont, S. (2012). Understanding Sexual Objectification: a comprehensive approach toward media exposure and girls’ internalization of beauty ideals, Self-Objectification, and body surveillance. *Journal of Communication*, 62(5), 869–887. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01667.x>.
- Yasin, B., & Khan, F. R. K. (2022, August 2). *Analysis of Social Reality of Spousal Relationship Depicted in Pakistan Television Prime time Dramas*. <http://ojs.sbbwu.edu.pk/fwu-journal/index.php/ojs/article/view/965>.