

**TALK 3**  
**PAKISTAN**

## **The Role of the Media in Eroding Marriage and Family Life**

My dear sisters, respected guests, Assalamu Alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakaatuhu!

The question I would like to explore today is the impact of the media on our families. To understand the extent and nature of that impact, let us take Pakistan as an example.

It is reported that about 55.7 percent of households in Pakistan have a colour TV, the actual statistic is apparently higher, as they don't include black and white TV's; this also doesn't take into account the fact that families often gather together to sit and watch a single TV. It's also estimated that about 17% of Pakistanis are internet users, though again the actual percentage may be higher, if you include the traffic of people attending internet cafes.

The statistics give us a glimpse of the reality, and the reality is that today the Media is having an immense influence in the Muslim World including Pakistan. In Pakistan, where poverty is widespread, TVs and smartphones are common amenities possessed by the public. They allow the young and old at every level of society access to TV entertainment, and social media, local and global. In the last 15 years, we have also seen an increase in the production of magazines aimed at women, men and specifically the youth. Newspapers also have a magazine attached purely with the purpose of showcasing gossip and entertainment.

These different forms of media have become a pervasive influence on our society. Consciously or subconsciously people look to them for inspiration and guidance, and the values pushed through the media have become a basis for their actions.

This situation has increased since the time of General Musharraf where he allowed the private media to flourish, increasing the access to cable and satellite channels, and the internet. During this time the print media also flourished. Despite being owned by a limited number of people, i.e. there are three main media giants in Pakistan, there is a lot more available to the general public, in Urdu and English.

Correspondingly, most people feel the impact of the media in their lives, especially in their families, and on the youth of Pakistan,

If we look at the local Pakistani media, there is a clear change that has taken place over the last couple of decades; one which is the topic of discussion in every group of men or women who are concerned about the impact on the family relationships in our society. Pakistan has moved from dramas where non-mahram actors were prohibited to touch each other, to dramas where the actors are openly interacting in their desire to express their art and portray the so-called reality of married life. Male and female actors have become media stars, emulating the western paparazzi and engaging in relationships outside marriage where they profess their so-called 'love' for one another. The clear lines and boundaries of the past, which were influenced by our religion, have been replaced in the name of modernity, freedom, and art.

These dramas or movies have sought to strike the Islamic values and principles and to program the viewpoints, attitudes, lifestyle, fashions, aspirations and behaviour of their viewers in the Muslim lands, including their views and expectations of marriage and marital life to conform to Western liberal ideas such as the concepts of personal and sexual freedom, and to use these non-Islamic ideas as a basis for our approach to a relationship, undermining marriage and eroding the harmony and unity of the family structure. Western liberal ideas and lifestyles are being promoted in our societies as natural and normal, and that is of course being allowed and supported by the governments of the region and their Media Policy.

General Musharraf began the trend of allowing unregulated cable and satellite access in Pakistan, which has given people unrestricted access to Indian and Western media. We can see the impact of this in our society, as these actors and actresses become idols, as the values

they uphold, the way they dress and the lifestyles they live become seen as modern cool and trendy!

Pakistan has already been facing the problem of the influence of the Hindu culture on our people, through the concept of Asian culture, and our shared history, their customs have strongly influenced the approach to marriage and the relationship between the husband and wife and the extended family. The problems that arise from these customs and traditions are often the subject of the many dramas and talk shows. The traditional overbearing control of the mother-in-law over her son and his wife, in all aspects of their lives is a constant source of tension and misery in many marriages, and is often portrayed by the media in tragic and comedic situations. Unfortunately, the solution which is given to such problems, often come from western culture, not Islam.

The sad thing is that this isn't just the case in Pakistan but across the Muslim world. Last year, Turkey's Culture and Tourism Minister, announced proudly to his parliament that Turkey ranks second in TV series exports after the US and first in Europe.

How can this ever be a source of pride, when we can see, how the complete package portrayed by such media productions promotes the Haraam relations, and encourages, glamourises and celebrates the mixing between men and women and even extramarital relationships under the corrupt western banner of "love conquers all"? They have also promoted the publishing of nudity on screen and promiscuity in relationships. Some even promote prostitution and homosexuality. They normalize such actions and make them acceptable as well as pushing that the only motivation of a relationship between a man and woman to be one based on "love" or sexuality, and calling for full freedom, free from the restrictions and limits placed by Islam.

These drama serials and movies make their stories of love and romance attractive for their viewers and a general guide of how to approach relationships with the opposite sex, including expectations in marriage. However, what they offer them is far from reality for they present unrealistic expectations which lead to the formation of a false vision for those who are seeking marriage, where the perception of marital life is like a "fairy-tale" and predominated by love and romance without paying attention to the responsibilities of marriage, and to what real life holds of hardships, challenges and difficulties.

Furthermore, the ideal husband in these films and serials is a handsome, elegant, young, rich, man, who brings constant gifts for his wife, and the wife is portrayed as a beautiful, charming, attractive woman, always free for parties, clubs and travel with her husband as if this woman does not have any responsibilities in marriage or family duties. As a result, the young men and women watching these dramas look for specifications of those whom they will marry according to the physical standards and materialistic capabilities presented by these serials and movies rather than the qualities of Deen and righteous behaviour that Islam promotes in both the husband and wife. However, these young people will soon thereafter collide with the reality, and the responsibilities and duties placed on them after getting married.

This is a prelude to failure in married life because each party is looking for the appearance without the substance, and each party is looking for someone who lives with him/her as a "love story" as seen in dramas.

The way of thinking developed by the Media is not limited to those seeking marriage but has also reached the married couples. The followers of these dramas, especially women, find their lives monotonous and have become obsessed with the lifestyle presented in the dramas, and demand unrealistic or unachievable standards of living. All these unrealistic expectations open the door of marital problems, disputes, discontent and unhappiness when one's spouse does not measure up to the false vision manufactured by the media, which may eventually lead to divorce.

An article published in one of the Oxford Academic journals, *Journal of Communication*-(January 2006), by Professor Chris Segrin (*Department of Communication at the University of Arizona*), mentions that: "One explanation for the high divorce rate in our society focuses on the

idealistic expectations with which many people enter into marriage. **The media** have been cited as **the source of or major contributor** to these expectations.” The media focuses the purpose of marriage as the fulfilment of individual desire or needs. It dissociates the marriage from society or the good of the human race. The use of the individualistic approach continues from the idea of the purpose of marriage, through all aspects of marriage and married life.

Furthermore, these dramas/movies undermine or even attack the clearly defined role and responsibilities that Islam details for the husband and the wife as well as re-defining the Muslim woman’s view of success and what will bring her happiness. For example, they present the situation of women to us in one of these images: either she is powerless and oppressed and has no control of anything or no value in society, and in this context, the main role of the woman being a mother and housewife was attacked and was blamed as the reason for her misery. She was portrayed oppressed, unfulfilled and suffering because she is a woman who is imprisoned in her home. She has no job except taking care of her home and raising her children. And this is how they plant in the minds of women that the solution to their problems lies in the rebellion against this role of being a wife and mother and their responsibilities in it.

In the second image, she was presented as able to dispense with men and manage her affairs and provide adequately for her own needs and make her decisions all by herself, as she is free and independent in her actions, doing whatever she wants without restriction. She throws everything that restricts her freedom behind her back, including the Islamic limits and laws. This image of a woman is presented as the ideal and desirable one, to be followed, or to be achieved. As a result, the respect between husband and wife and the incorrect behaviour towards the spouse has become wide spread among Muslim families, leading to broken family ties and divorces.

In addition, in western thinking, gender roles in marriage and family life are not distinguished, and differences between the man and woman in their duties is not allowed under the premise of gender equality. The western ideals of “gender equality” and “feminism” are also promoted by the media in the Muslim world and has destroyed the balance of roles and duties between a Muslim husband and his wife, and has taken away from their minds the concept of contentment and happiness within the roles that Allah (swt) has assigned.

These productions have also portrayed rebellious behaviour of children towards parents acceptable or even as an admirable quality of the youth. This is in addition to nurturing negative attitudes towards in-laws or extended family. All this has contributed to the fracturing of family relationships.

Now let us look at the damaging effects of the electronic communication media such as WhatsApp, or social media apps such as Facebook. While they used to unite family members who were separated by distance or who lost touch over time, they now often help to break them up; it is indeed an extraordinary paradox!! With the remarkable widespread of social media sites, homes have become unfenced and privacy has been eliminated from the lives of individuals and families. The secrets of many homes have become open to all, and the details of their private lives are published, causing many problems at the family level, such as divorce and marital disputes.

According to various studies and reports, these sites, are primarily responsible for the high global divorce rates. Taking a look at some of the figures highlights the magnitude of the problem. In Palestine, Sharia courts pointed out that half of divorce cases take place before the wedding party, and specialists refer several reasons for this; most notably the online communication. According to statistics published in 2016, the last three years witnessed a significant increase in the number of divorces in Jordan, which increases each year by over 1000 cases from its previous year, noting that the modern means of communication, Facebook, WhatsApp, are the most prominent reasons for the rise in divorce cases. Studies indicate that communication sites caused 50% of the divorce cases in the UAE. The Family Guidance Section in the UAE estimates that marital disputes increased by more than 5000 cases in 2015, of which 50 to 60% are related to electronic websites, and 1,000 of them ended in divorce.

These frightening statistics and figures show how these sites and applications on smartphones have portended family disputes for those who allow them to possess their lives. This addiction can also make parents fail in the performance of their duties towards their children in education, guidance, giving them the necessary affection and in listening to them and their problems which may lead children to dangerous turns and make them behave wrongly.

In terms of spouses, this addiction will lead to neglect and poor communication between spouses and their failure to perform their duties towards each other; it widens the gap between them and increases the scale of the problems in marriages.

On the other hand, these sites and apps have facilitated the extramarital relationships between men and women, and in the absence of piety and fearing Allah (swt) – it led to high rates of infidelity, which is one of the main reasons for high rates of divorce as confirmed by the Courts' records.

This is the tip of the iceberg of the poison and malignant ideas bombarded by the media upon the sons and daughters of the Muslims, which seek to corrupt the Ummah by planting Western concepts and distorting Islamic concepts, and by presenting the Western lifestyle as a distinctive lifestyle to be followed. It should also not be forgotten that western governments impose their influence upon the Muslim countries through using the media. It is an important colonial tool!!

Therefore, we must stand against these influences of the media and the corruption and immorality it broadcasts and promotes, whether in dramas or movies or music, or the electronic communication, the social media. We must deal with them seriously and carefully and we must not leave the sons and daughters of the Muslims as tools in their hands or an easy bait for the regimes' media mouths. We, therefore, call on all the Muslims to take their part in caring for their families and protecting them from all that corrupts and poisons them, Allah (swt) says in Surat At-Tahreem, verse 6: ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَظٌ شِدَادٌ﴾ **“O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe.”**

We should also account the governments of Muslim lands for their role in supporting the existence and spread of such media in our Muslim lands. We must raise our voice on their subjugation to Western powers and their following of their policies. May Allah (swt) protect this Ummah from all evils and raise it high, Aameen.

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