

East or West, Society Today is Unable to Protect Women

The Epstein Case Highlights Lack of Protection of Women

Recently I watched a Netflix documentary about Jeffery Epstein, and how he recruited girls into his web of illicit activity. I remember this case when it was reported globally, and due to the high profile status of the people involved, this case is still drawing attention. However, it wasn't until I watched the documentary that I understood the details of the case. The documentary "Filthy Rich" contains interviews with the people who were involved, including the victims, the police and some of the people who knew Epstein.

The first episode of the Epstein documentary is called "Hunting Grounds." It goes into the details of how Epstein recruited young girls. The focus was on Florida, although later episodes showed his activities in other areas in America. He set up what became known as a pyramid scheme. Young girls recruited other young girls for him, allowing him access to a school full of girls. Key aspects of the scheme were the type of girls he targeted, and the area from which they were targeted. He lived in the ultra-rich area Palm Beach, and his victims were from West Palm, an adjoining poorer area.

Many girls that fell prey to his scheme were between the ages of 14 to 17 years old. Many of them had been abused before and/or were from families who cannot be classified as stable. Many of the girls had parents who were on drugs. Many of the girls had spent some time homeless. Epstein focused on girls who were vulnerable. They were lured to his home by the promise of money, typically \$200 dollars, to give a rich man a massage. Once they entered his home and began the massage he took advantage of them. Many of the girls, while shocked, uncomfortable and upset with the encounter, went back simply for the money. Some of the girls did not continue to massage Epstein themselves, but became recruiters and brought other girls to him.

The third episode "The Island" discussed the abuses that took place on his private island. Many famous people such as Bill Clinton and Prince Andrew visited him there. There is a lot of discussion regarding how men of power, influence and wealth were involved in abusing young girls.

The fourth episode "Finding their voice" detailed how the victims began to speak out. It also showed more interviews with some of his victims who have chosen to reveal their identities publicly. These women were drawn into Epstein's web with offers of education and work opportunities.

The police in Palm Beach began an investigation in 2005, this investigation was passed on to the FBI, and until his death in 2019, Epstein was investigated, arrested and even convicted, but not for the full extent of his alleged crimes. The judiciary failed the victims, former Palm Beach County State Attorney Barry Krischer made decisions that led to Epstein only being leveled with the lesser charge of solicitation of prostitution, despite the young age of the girls. This led to the Palm Beach Police contacting the FBI to take over the investigation in an attempt to get it taken seriously. The case was given to former South Florida U.S. Attorney Alex Acosta. The system allowed Acosta to make what became known as a Sweetheart Deal with Epstein, who agreed to plead guilty in Florida state court to two felony prostitution charges, serve eighteen months in prison, register as a sex offender, and pay restitution to three dozen victims identified by the FBI.

This plea deal, which his lawyer, Alan Dershowitz helped to negotiate, also granted Epstein immunity from all federal criminal charges, along with four named co-conspirators and any unnamed "potential co-conspirators". At the time, this halted the investigation and sealed the indictment, and the deal was not revealed to the victims. It was these conditions that essentially meant Epstein was not held fully accountable his crimes, that led to the use of the term 'sweetheart deal' and drew the most criticism.

Why is the Epstein Case Relevant to Us?

I chose to discuss the Epstein case because it was caused by the flaws that exist in Western Society. We need to be aware of these flaws, because we are encouraged to follow the West, their ideas, their laws and the way they organise their society. So we see a rise of incidences which have certain similarities, within our own secular societies, where the flaws in society are making our girls vulnerable.

Let us take a look at an example in the East, which has shocked Pakistan.

The Bahawalpur's Islamia University incident blew up in July of this year, 2023. It was reported that police recovered about 5500 porn videos of hundreds of female students of the university. They also reported recovering drugs and obscence material from the varsity's chief security officer and the university's treasurer and a transport officer. The police report claimed that a "group of teachers" was involved in the sale of narcotics and the sexual exploitation and blackmail of female teachers and students. Police stated that female students were asked to make nude videos and send them to the security officer as a way of gaining marks. This was apparently also done for recruitment to any post in the university. Another accusation is female students and women employees were also forced to be part of indecent dance and sex parties. The university's vice-chancellor is denying all accusations, and saying it is part of an attempt to defame the university.

And is this an isolated case? Not according to research and statistics. Crimes exploiting girls and women have been increasing in Pakistan. The media is full of cases where women are being attacked and abused.

These two cases have certain similarities which is why I chose them.

- The men involved are in positions of power and influence.
- Influential men targeted the vulnerable.
- The girls are coerced through threats related to their future prospects.
- The society they live in allows the free mixing of men and women, so inappropriate relationships are not easily noted.

Could the Exploitation of Women Occur under the Islamic State?

It is inconceivable that these cases could occur in the Khilafah (Caliphate), as the concepts and laws that exist in an Islamic society protect women.

Let us see why Epstein's case could not occur in the Khilafah state.

In Islam, girls have a Wali, a guardian who is their protector, and this is their father. In cases where he is absent, or unsuitable, another wali is appointed according to Allah's laws. The Shariah rulings oblige the father to protect his daughters. Shariah law gives the father the right to know where his daughter is at all times, and to restrict his daughter's movements. He is obliged to ensure she is in a safe environment, whether this is at home, or when she leaves the home. The Wali is also obliged to ensure girls are taught the Shariah rulings related to their responsibilities, and this includes those related to the social system. Some of the laws in the social system include:

- A Muslim girl cannot be in seclusion with a non-mahram male.
- She cannot remove her clothes and show her hard awrah (including her chest and belly) to another woman.
- She cannot show her hard or soft awrah to a non-mahram male.
- There is a defined dress for women when outside the home which includes their khimar and jilbab. Within the home there is an awrah which must be covered, the extent of which depends on who she is with.

For all the feminists who cry oppression, these laws lead to our protection. If the laws of Islam were implemented, Epstein would not have been able to create his pyramid scheme. He could not get girls to come into his home, into a room alone with him, or to agree to the rest of his corrupt demands.

A Muslim girl who understood the hukm shar'i and lived in a society where it was implemented, would not have found herself in the situation described by the victims. She would have understood her own accountability to Allah (swt) for committing haram. She would not have been tempted to travel to an unknown non-mahram man's home to massage him for money. She would carry the concept of rizq and not be tempted to commit haram in order to earn money. Her Imaan would have given her the understanding and the strength to refuse to be manipulated by a predator, into removing her clothes or to accept his touch.

When we look at the situation of the young girls who agreed to travel with Epstein because he promised work or educational opportunities. Islamic hukm come to mind that would have ensured that these women would not have entered into this situation.

-A Muslim woman can not travel over 24 hours without her mahram.

- She is not allowed to stay alone in a strange place with people who are not trusted, i.e. those who are not practicing God-fearing people.

I have said a Muslim woman, but any woman of any religion, who lived in the Islamic State, and had exposure to Islamic concepts and lived according to the laws of the state, would be protected from these situations.

It is also inconceivable that the Bahawalpur's Islamia University case could occur in the Khilafah state.

As I have said when looking into the Epstein case, there are Islamic laws that would have ensured the girls protection, and they also apply here. Additionally there are Shariah laws related specifically to this case that would have prevented it occurring.

Islam legislates the separation of men and the women, with the only exceptions to this rule being specific circumstances that Islam has allowed such as work and in the marketplace.

Where men and women meet, mixing is not allowed. This means that there is no socialisation and building of friendships between the non-mahram.

The education system would ensure the separation of girls and boys within educational institutes, and focus on female teachers and administration in the girl's educational institutions.

Mixed parties are definitely haram whatever the circumstances within the party.

As for the videos that were made, without any doubt this is not allowed in Islam. Islam encourages modesty and decency. The concepts of rizq and qadaa (fate) which would be built within society, would act as a protection and a barrier to being tempted into haraam for the sake of wealth or opportunity.

I am not victim blaming, I am pointing out how the system that exists in the world today, has created a situation where women can be exploited and are left unprotected. They can enter into dangerous situations where they are unable to handle their own protection and are too young and/or vulnerable to understand how to deal with corrupt situations. The confidence which women are told they will gain by mixing with men is a total fallacy. Today, within educational institutions, coffee shops, even within our family and friends' gatherings, free mixing and socialising between men and women who are non-mahram is encouraged. The rise of the boyfriend and girlfriend culture is facilitated by this mixing, phones and social media. Girls are being groomed to respond to male interest and to actively seek it in their dress and their mannerisms.

This culture is causing problems to the extent that even Western men and women are now speaking up, and criticizing the direction society has headed into; as undermining the family structure, and destroying healthy legal relationships between men and women. Women have become entertainment for corrupt men.

What we need to understand is confidence and strength come through your concepts. It does not come by spending time with the opposite gender, in situations that are designed to lead to corruption and exploitation.

Keeping Quiet When You Must Speak Out!

In both cases, Epstein and Bahawalpur, can we believe that people who were not directly involved did not know what was happening?

We have the example of Alfredo Rodriguez, Epstein's former house manager, who was sentenced to eighteen months' incarceration in 2010. This was after being convicted on an obstruction charge for failing to turn over to police a journal (which he was trying to sell!), in which he had recorded Epstein's activities.

In Bahawalpur, Pakistan; what about the people in the university who must have helped arrange the parties?

In an Islamic society, it is unthinkable that so many people would have seen the munkar (evil) occurring, and would then ignore it. This is against one of the most fundamental concepts that we hold as Muslims, based on numerous Islamic evidences, enjoining the mar'ouf (good) and forbidding the munkar.

Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾ **“The believers, both men and women, are guardians of one another. They encourage good and forbid evil, establish prayer and pay alms-tax, and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is they who will be shown Allah’s mercy. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise. [TMQ Surah At-Tawbah:71].**

Islam obliges the protection of the Muslim women. It is alarming but not surprising, to see how this concept has declined in today’s secular societies.

Islamic history also shows us how the women were protected during the time of the Prophet (saw). The Jew in Madinah whose deliberate actions led to the uncovering of a Muslim woman, was killed by a brave Muslim who saw the incident. He himself was martyred. The munkar cannot be ignored because the perpetrators are influential, wealthy, or well connected.

Abu Sa’id al-Khudri reported that the Prophet (saw) said, «مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ وَذَلِكَ أَضْعَفُ الْإِيمَانِ» **“Whoever amongst you sees an evil, he must change it with his hand. If he is not able to do so, then with his tongue. And if he is not able to do so, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of faith.” [Muslim]**

With this concept established in society, as opposed to the concepts of freedom and individualism, would these crimes have been possible? Would society have allowed the criminals to flourish? Of course not!

Muslim Nation States, where Islam is not Implemented Comprehensively, Cannot Protect Women

We are not presently living in an Islamic society, but the laws of Islam are still obliged on us. Teach your children their Deen, and also warn them of the dangers of the society we are living in today. We do not protect them by keeping them ignorant. Predators exist in our communities and online. Make sure your children understand how to apply the Islamic rulings in all situations. Make sure they know how to avoid situations that may lead them unwillingly into a dangerous situation where they can be abused.

And above all, work to re-establish the guardian of all humanity, the Khilafah (Caliphate) on the Method of Prophethood, the shield of all our daughters, as a sincere obedience to Allah (swt).

Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
Fatima Iqbal