



UKAAS - The Reflector E-Newsletter Fall/Winter 2019

(July 2019 – December 2019)

Uks Research Resource and Publication Centre

Empowering Women within and through the Media!

EDITORIAL

MEDIA'S INFATUATION WITH THE 'EVIL WOMAN'

"The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself," wrote Virginia Woolf in her essay *A Room of One's Own* published almost 100 years ago. The essay is among the most influential feminist texts which makes the case that women who wanted to write fiction needed two things: money and a room of their own, literally and figuratively.

We were reminded of Wolf once again as controversy brewed around the television drama serial, *Meray Paas Tum Ho (MPTH)*. Had a woman written the series, the narrative would not be replete with worn out tropes about women that in real life terms have very toxic and often violent outcomes. And while *MPTH* is not alone in churning stereotypes about virtue and vice in women, the popularity it gained among audiences across Pakistan means that hate against women was consumed hook, line and sinker. Those associated with the production claimed to have presented a positive portrayal of women through the narrative; in truth, the television serial was a representation of life seen through a man's lens and biases.



The protagonists in *MPTH* are a happily married couple with a son. They come across a man who is richer than the husband. The wife, who is super beautiful, is swept off her feet by the rich man. The wife — 'greedy and materialistic as women are' — eventually decides to abandon her husband and child and leave with the rich man.

This plotline is as old as Adam and Eve. There wasn't anything unusual, exceptional or unique; it was very much in line with other dross that appears on the media. What drove audience numbers towards *MPTH* was controversy — after all bad publicity is also publicity and in *MPTH*'s case, viral publicity.

Much of the controversy centred on the writer of the series. In one morning, show, he spoke of what he believed to be the 'worth' of a woman. Another gem offered by the writer was how women can be equal to men if they started to kidnap and rape men. His real wrath was reserved, however, for feminists, who he described as an 'organisation of bad women.' With such provocative hot takes, the serial and its writer were the subject of discussion on social media for many weeks, creating hype around something that did not really deserve it.

To understand the kind of success it received, the channel broadcasting the serial decided to screen the last episode in cinema houses and it played to packed houses. Not that the last episode was worth the wait or the hype but the sold-out tickets, huge profits raked in, and millions of eyeballs captured, what should we gather?

For starters, serials such as *MPTH* that feed off assassinating women's character almost always gain eyeballs. To gather an audience that hates the woman protagonist is an ordinary deed on television; the feat is about presenting the life of a man who is a victim of marital abuse, emotional abuse and mental abuse.

The success of *MPTH*, in fact, allows us to understand confirmation bias when it comes to discussing men and relationships. There is a tendency among many men to dismiss everyday violence aimed at women — sexual, emotional, mental or physical — but instead to argue that in fact men are victims of far more. When serials such as *MPTH* emerge, it provides legitimacy to such ideas which, in turn, serve as the bedrock of maintaining the patriarchy. It is no coincidence that the writer of *MPTH* is a man and no coincidence that many men were vested enough in the plotline that they went to the cinema to watch the last episode.

It wouldn't be amiss to suggest that ignorance was presented as the norm in the drama series; the worrying part was that it sold like hot cakes. Equally worrying is how we are consuming the content via dialogues, actions and emotions without understanding, let alone questioning, the overt and covert messages of toxic masculinity, misogyny and sexism.

Most of our serials cast "good women" in a domestic situation because the home is a woman's place and "good women" stay home, are submissive, sensitive and caring. The career-oriented, independent and ambitious women are "bad women" — their life choices show us that these rebels are uncaring and unhappy. This is the reality of the treatment meted out to women of our country, who constitute nearly half of the total population, from a pre-dominantly masculine and regressive lens.

Perhaps we need a more comprehensive dialogue on the impact of these soaps and drama serials.

Society is fast changing with more women in the workforce than ever before. Old tropes still have takers but newer tropes, more enlightened and reflecting reality as it stands, have far fewer advocates. The television serial format is about one continuous meta-narrative and smaller, sub-narratives. In terms of normalising the right kind of attitudes (no demonisation of women, no violence against women, trauma and depression are real, so on and so forth), drama serials have a tremendous to play and the opportunity to do so.

The trend till now has been to demonise women-friendly measures as an "agenda" — at times said to be driven by the West, sometimes by the "liberal lobby" and "civil society," and at others by "anti-Islam" forces. What we are struggling to see is how women-friendly attitudes help in building society for the better. Only once we have this dialogue will we be able to move away from traditional stereotypes and unfair expectations that are laden on young Pakistani women and men.

**Tasneem Ahmar,
Director.**

THE LANGUAGE OF DEMONIZATION

July 24th, 2019: Staying with the theme of everyday demonization of women, *Uks* invited editors, reporters, television anchors and other media professionals for a roundtable discussion in Islamabad on whether language is being used as a weapon against women. Held on July 24, 2019, the conversation was organised under the *Uks* Dialogue for Change initiative.

Uks Director Tasneem Ahmar initiated the dialogue by explaining that language often becomes a vehicle of violence aimed at women. The language employed as threats, abuses and harassment is gendered while the actual threat often involves the targeting of a woman.

One of the male participants explained that this issue is not particular to women; men also faced the harassment but the nature of harassment is different. The majority of men consider this abusive language as a part of their manhood while others are peer pressured into using the same abusive language. Another participant discussed and agreed with this viewpoint and argued that men had a warped sense of pride and enjoyment and using abusive language was often a show of utterly-outdated masculinity.

A woman editor present shared her experience about how she and her family faced threats and harassment. She explained that there is a myth that illiterate people are involved in these kinds of activities. But she and her family, especially her children, faced threats of abduction from literate and educated people. She explained that society does not accept the progressive mindsets and writers who have political opinions and are vocal about it.

Ahmar asked the audience about how many women took a stand against such kind of abusive behaviours and threats and chose not to become a passive sufferer? A woman replied that she made a Facebook page to post sarcastic content and memes against stereotypical images of women in our society. Despite not revealing her identity, she has received a lot of threats online.

Some participants agreed that harassment and abuse is not only from men rather women also play a role. Women use abusive language and are insensitive with other women. Ironically, they promote negative culture of abuse and give room to others to follow this culture. Both, women and men, are a part of this problem and together they can rid this society of abuse.



Another question raised during the conversation was about the kind of measures we should take to prevent abusive behaviour? This question was in the context of social media, where people can hide behind anonymous identities. When we choose to ignore or block the abuser, we are not assessing the problem. So, proper measures should be taken to address this issue. In response of this many women shared their stories of resistance. In our society, a woman has two options to survive either she chooses to suffer due to cultural boundaries or she become someone who resists and raises her voice against all the verbal and mental abuse.

One of the female activists suggested a proactive approach against this offensive behaviour, arguing that many times a clear and regressive message is necessary to be delivered at the abuser. Some suggested that the least proactive approach is to stare at the abuser just to show the gesture of unacceptance. In response to that, one of the participants shared her own

experience and stated that women resistance against gender insensitive content and verbal abuse is not taken seriously. Women face objectification from their male bosses and colleagues at workplaces. The most alarming situation is when some of the women can't vocalize their concerns against the abuse and accept it as a part of prevalent approach. There must be policy of zero tolerance against such kind of behaviours so that women do not face social and job security issues.

If a strategy to counter such abuse is being made, it must start at the household level because children learn swearing from home and swearing culture penetrates children through parents. They memorize all such words and use it in their daily talk being unaware of the meanings of these words.

Some participants showed their concern about technology which, in their opinion, is the cause of spreading immorality amongst children because they have access to mobiles, internet and other social media easily. The other side of the argument is that it is the responsibility of parents to monitor them and teach them the use of technology in a positive way. The use of swear words in videos, cartoons, movies and media is also a very alarming phenomenon of the current world. The role of the family is crucial and significant to teach their future generations morality, ethics and respect towards others specially women. To address this issue, school's curriculum needs to be updated by making moral and ethical education an integral part of it.

All participants agreed that this abusive culture against women came into existence about a decade or two ago. In the past, women did not suffer this kind of frustration in society. A psychologist among the audience explained that the use of inappropriate language is not limited to gender rather language and insensitive words are used to pressurize and hurt others mentally and emotionally. The worst form of abuse is emotional narcissism.

It was unanimously decided that realisation is there but practical steps are yet awaited to be taken. Some measure needs to be immediately formed and implemented while others need long term planning. For example, many jokes that are often shared through social media are unethical and abusive. To discourage such trends, social media campaigns must be initiated with different hashtags. Ahmar briefed the audience that *Uks* took initiative on this sensitive issue by starting a campaign of #NOTFUNNY to condemn and register the sexist and gender insensitive jokes.

The roundtable ended with the unanimous conclusion that there must be legislation against such threats, harassment and abuse and in places where it exists, what is the implementation level? If implementation is the issue, who is the responsible actor? At a personal level, WhatsApp and E-mail groups should be made to address this issue with offending parties.

Facebook Live video- The DFC was recorded and shared live on Facebook, please click on the link (<https://www.facebook.com/uksresearch/videos/2707983179231493/>)

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING AT AND BY UKS

July 17th, 2019: *Uks* Director Tasneem Ahmar along with several women journalists met with Federal Ombudsperson, Secretariat for Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace, Kashmala Tariq, to discuss women-friendly workplaces and policies for women journalists. More meetings are planned to work together in forming enabling work environments.



31st July, 2019: *Uks* Director Tasneem Ahmar was interviewed by the Daily Jinnah on the subject of sexism in media and how *Uks* has been tirelessly working to eliminate negative portrayal of women in the media. She mentioned how the media is exploiting women's issues, objectification of negative image, making jokes out of serious issues, and other matters often for the sake of their ratings.

Link: <http://dailyjinnah.com/epaper/page.php?id=9&edition=islamabad&dt=30-072019&fbclid=IwAR06fAKNK9SMh11WKb7MdxzoygCSXdBQGFuCbmiDSvvhEh0tq3loiGbJs>



PARTICIPATION IN SEMINAR

December 9th, 2019

The SDPI’s 22nd sustainable development conference was held in Islamabad with this year’s theme discussing sustainable development in a digital society and how to cash in on the Fourth Industrial Revolution where artificial intelligence is driving progress. *Uks* Director Tasneem Ahmar was invited as a guest speaker to talk about the role of women in a digital society. Through her presentation, ‘Women in the Media: Then and Now,’ Ahmar shared her experiences of working with the media. Her journey of 40 years revealed that it’s never been easy for women to work in media, but they have not stopped following their dreams of becoming journalists. She said that working women, including media women, have seen and experienced all kinds of obstacles, from whispers, gossips, sexist remarks/jokes to trolls, abusive threats and virtual raid and lynching. She also stressed upon the need for women in the media to be proactive, resilient and confident. Surrendering to today’s digital harassment and onslaught is not the answer, fighting back is. Because thus digital space also provides women huge opportunities to bring forward and amplify their voices and concerns. It also gives many women an opportunity to work from home.



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM 2019

Uks launched a social media campaign to show its solidarity with the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence Campaign. In-line with this year’s theme the campaign focused on the **“ENDING GBV IN THE WORLD OF WORK BY SUPPORTING ILO-190”**.

Pre-campaign posts: *Uks* created campaign awareness through social media posts by stating certain facts and figures for understanding what’s the current scenario of GBV in Pakistan.





Since the theme was to advance women’s rights by ending gender-based violence (GBV) in the world of work, this year’s Global 16 Days Campaign aimed to mobilize women to take action across movements and to promote new alliances. By bridging movements, collectively work toward the campaign goal: #RatifyILO190. To make these standards a reality in the lives of women around the world by ensuring a wave of national ratifications of ILO C190 on ending violence and harassment in the world of work.

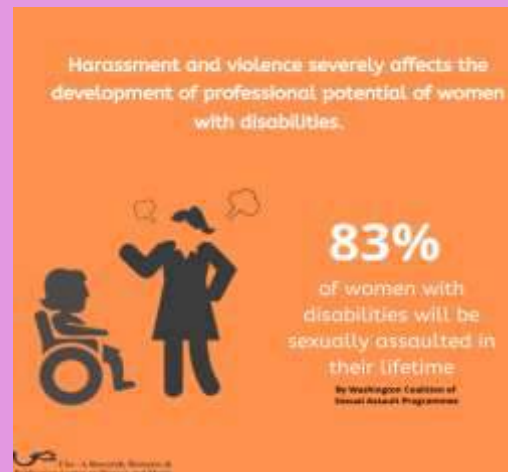
Links to some of the campaign’s highlights:

<https://www.facebook.com/uksresearch/videos/426626658214804/>

<https://www.facebook.com/uksresearch/videos/506199196638867/>

<https://www.facebook.com/uksresearch/videos/2832117667014675/>

<https://www.facebook.com/uksresearch/videos/732704337214030/>



JOURNALISTS EXCHANGE PROGRAMME

7th December, 2019



Uks welcomed a group of four American journalists associated with the Gaylord College, University of Oklahoma as part of our journalist exchange programme with the International Centre for Journalists. This was the second batch of journalists from the US out of four; the delegation was led by Dr Joe Foote and included two women and two men. The purpose of this partnership is to enable American journalists to take an up-close look and insight into the world of politics and the media in Pakistan.

The American journalists arrived in Pakistan on December 1, 2019. And just like previous visits, this group, too, had an itinerary that included visits to press clubs, media houses, academic institutions, civil society organizations and the US embassy. The American journalists conducted a two-day workshop in Islamabad with about 30 journalists from different media houses around "impactful journalism." The group spent three days in Islamabad and four in Karachi, with excursion trips and visits to shopping malls and bazaars giving our guests a



feel of Pakistan and returning home with positive memories of the country.



Impactful journalism: A small footage regarding experiences and learning of participants post workshop:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63aumlm2FLs&feature=youtu.be>

WORKSHOP: THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

Organised by Shirkat Gah, with Uks Director Tasneem Ahmar as the Lead Trainer and Shaista Yasmin as a facilitator, media trainings were conducted in 8 cities of Pakistan: Karachi, Hyderabad (Sindh), Vehari, Lahore (Punjab), Jafferabad, Quetta (Balochistan), Peshawar and Mardan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).

The main objective of the training workshops was understanding the production of meaning and the politics of representation. The workshop included a detailed analysis of visual/verbal narratives,

the uses and misuse of gender stereotypes to show how meaning can be produced without denigrating women and /or trivializing their issues. An exercise based on verbal and visual narratives was conducted to enable participants to demonstrate their skills in news reportage of VAW issues also to get the delegates to learn the essential ins and outs of managing a report about women issues — from how VAW cases ought to be reported in the media, the language employed, themes, so on and so forth.



Thematic areas:

In today's world of fast media travel, sensationalism, breaking news bulletin, instant blogging and social media journalism, sticking to old tools of ethical, fair, balanced reporting may seem impossible. But the workshop tried to make the media recognize the impact of information on the masses. It focused on how to produce ethical and gender-balanced news and views in order to promote societal norms, creating a change in consciousness, and being a conscious, ethical and civic partner in breaking and covering news.

Ethical journalism is about consciously being aware of the news content, its impact on the society at large, its projection, its content balance and the citing of gender balance

(<https://drive.google.com/open?id=173gkMDZ7hriT4a1OfQSw6AlpTweL89Qe0>)

The topics discussed were as follows:

- Identifying the gender gaps/biases in media coverage
- Changing mind-sets through a new, gender-sensitive narrative
- The concept of 'honour' and its impact on women.
- Addressing structural deficiencies in terms of headlines, hidden or visible gender biases in the content/context/nature of various news, current affairs and soaps/serials shown on different television channels
- Through the spoken or written content, both audio and visual.
- Acts of violence against women including 'honour crimes' and their influence on viewers' behaviour towards VAW
- The tunnel-vision approach towards women's and human rights issues.

- The presence or absence of guidelines to take up issues of women's participation
- Improving the knowledge and understanding of journalists regarding VAW

Achievements of the workshop:

The feedback from the participants was very positive. They said that after the workshops they had a better understanding of gender issues, violence against women and women's rights. Their reports in their respective newspapers or electronic media also indicated this change. Perception about Aurat March greatly changed and they supported the concept of Aurat March, perceptions about Qandeel Baloch also changed completely, particularly in Mardan, Jafferabad and Vehari.



They got to know about sustainable development goals and various conventions which are ratified by Pakistan. Their presentations showed their interest and knowledge about gender-sensitive reporting and were very positive feedback regarding NGO's which media usually portrays negatively.

We also managed to form WhatsApp groups in all 8 districts with training participants to continue conversations we had started in the workshops. Some journalists were very active in the various groups and initiated good discussions on gender-insensitive reporting in the media and on social media. The positive aspect was that working journalists are keen to write about SDG's and they want to report maximum on it. Participants urged the organisers to bring these workshops to their respective communities as well so that their understanding and awareness can also increase

UNICEF Media Monitoring

In addition to Uks' internal media monitoring through the gender lens. Uks is also monitoring 20 + print and online publications- Urdu, English and regional languages. Media Monitoring of print and digital media in Pakistan for news related to UNICEF and its programmes in the country. The purpose of this assignment is to generate this knowledge base of media coverage of development issues, children's issues, child rights and UNICEF and to provide an early warning system for negative or important news coverage.

Following are the monthly media analysis reports which are formulated every month by our team for UNICEF.

UNICEF Monthly Media Monitoring Report

July, 2019



<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1uYDdIGt0dVXx7-vW3aq54k-sLkI0h8Wg>

UNICEF Monthly Media Monitoring Report

August, 2019



<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1sUqvqKt9F1Lr0W-VK5IsDuQJIP8Ix84>

UNICEF Monthly Media Monitoring Report

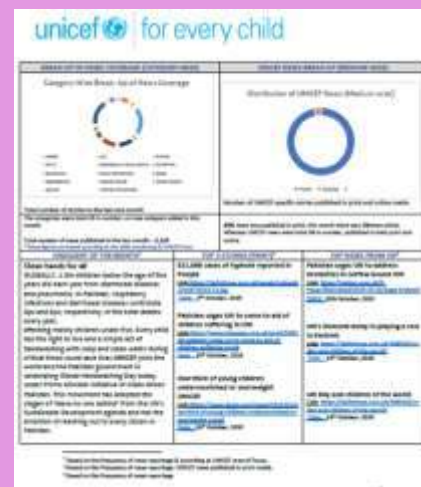
September, 2019



<https://drive.google.com/open?id=18KfgVJHATlBa0qVBrt3lFTL1ALrVmyM0>

UNICEF Monthly Media Monitoring Report

October, 2019



<https://drive.google.com/open?id=18KfgVJHATlBa0qVBrt3lFTL1ALrVmyM0>

UNICEF Monthly Media Monitoring Report
November ,2019



<https://drive.google.com/open?id=18KfgVJHATIBaoqVBrT3IFTL1ALrVmyMQ>

UNICEF Monthly Media Monitoring Report
December,2019



https://drive.google.com/open?id=1KTLzLzqPGp0DNbR_cSvhPDK7Fu_cyPm

Media Matters for Women

CONTENT THAT SHINES:

It isn't as if Pakistani dramas serials are all dross. Far from it. Some directors and producers continue to centre topics such as rape, child molestation, sexual assault and acid attacks. But while it is necessary to discuss what has traditionally been considered taboo on mass media, equally important is to gauge whether these subjects have been treated with care. Or are they perpetuating myths and fallacies? Is the depiction an attempt to help educate the audience and change mind-sets or is it merely glorifying the perpetrator by blaming the victim?

The following are some drama serials capturing everyday issues in their many nuances:

Mujhay Beta Chahiye

Mujhay Beta Chahiye revolves around a man's desire to have a son. Salman, the father, in his desire to have a male child, neglects his daughters and wife, scolding them and berating them at every given opportunity. He does not care about his new-born daughter who is sick and needs immediate medical attention. Due to her father's apathy, the new-born passes away. The story is fascinating because it correctly depicts how even the educated class in our society sometimes have this mindset where they consider the birth of a baby boy as more of a blessing than that of a baby girl.



Dar Khuda Say

Dar Khuda Say deals with sexual harassment at the workplace, with a man taking advantage of a victim's helplessness to create fake pictures of her and spreading them around. The drama raises some important questions on gender discrimination and different societal standards when dealing with women and men. Gender is an important dimension of social stratification because societies give more power and resources to men than women. Gender equality can only be achieved when what is right for a man is also right for a woman. But questions do rise about why, despite sexual harassment laws and legal awareness, does a victim continue to be helpless and not in a position to take stand.

***Cheekh***

Cheekh goes against the established wisdom that women are meek, submissive bodies. Instead, *Cheekh* presents the reality of women in Pakistan being warriors, willing and able to fight for their rights, and seek legal assistance in pursuit of justice. The character of Saba Qamar as a resilient and strong woman gives hopes to women who choose not to suffer and raise their voice against male dominance and violence. The ugly, depressing reality that the serial also captures is the kind of hurdles a woman has to face from her family, society and system when she raises her voice against injustice of any kind.

***Khas***

Khas is truly a special drama as it confronts the taboo of emotional abuse in marriages. Emotional violence in marital relationship is among the most neglected issues as intimate partner violence involves physical and tangible violence. *Khas* highlights male dominance in marital relationships and shows how a narcissist husband carries out psychological abuse through verbal assault, showing dominance and controlling behaviour, and the degradation and demoralizing of his wife's self-esteem. Society does not take into account the fact that emotional abuse is more dangerous than physical abuse and there is no sense of shame for the victim. When women speak up, they are told to stay mum.



CHANGING WINDS IN THE ADVERTISEMENT INDUSTRY?

Much like drama serials, advertisements are equally crucial in changing harmful norms, practices and attitudes in society. This is content that most people will have repeated access to — on their phones, on their computers and on the television.

“Harmful stereotypes can be reinforced by advertising, can restrict the choices, aspirations and opportunities of children, young people and adults,” argues Ella Smillie, the lead on the gender stereotyping project run by the Committees of Advertising Practice in England. “They contribute to how people see themselves and their role in society. They can hold some people back from fulfilling their potential, or from aspiring to certain jobs and industries.”

While not all gender stereotypes are harmful, depicting gender-stereotypical roles or characteristics as being only available to one gender and never carried out by another is likely to be a problem. Ads should avoid suggesting that an individual’s happiness or emotional wellbeing should depend on conforming to an idealised gender-stereotypical body shape or physical features. Ads should take care not to explicitly convey that a particular children’s product, pursuit, activity, including choice of play or career, is inappropriate for one or another gender. Mocking someone who doesn’t conform to gender-stereotypical appearances or activities is never likely to be acceptable.

Uks has been stressing on the lack of gender sensitivity and damaging stereotyping in a large proportion of advertisements on Pakistani media. Two decades of advocacy later, Uks is delighted to see change in the content in adverts. We are sharing some heart-warming examples here:

Full props to Colgate, whose TVC casts a girl shows as the protagonist, joining up with a group of boys to play football. Some boys resist her inclusion in the team but she overcomes the detractors with her confident smile and wit — a reflection of self-belief and inner strength.



Dalda cooking oil’s advertisement with the hashtag #MeriAwaz questions gender stereotypes about girls’ women’s need to be healthy and fit and not thin to be socially acceptable.

The NIDO Bunyaad TVC shows a little school girl with high hopes of continuing her education despite her parents’ precarious financial condition. She does not give up and sends out fee concession applications to the school office until one day, her request is approved.



The Ariel soap TVC calls for women to break free of repressive traditions and pursue careers. In the ad, women representing different professions, including journalism and medicine, push dirty sheets out of view. The sheets are printed with sentences stating common refrains used to oppress women in Pakistan. The ad ends with the captain of Pakistan women’s cricket team saying, “Stay within the house ... these are not only sentences, but stains.” The advertisement, in its own

way, encourages women to clean off the stains in the society that hinder them from pursuing their dream vocations.



Stylo Shoes' advertisement 'Girls stand tall' is all about giving women and girls confidence and courage to step out and break any barriers imposed by society that are hampering their progress and success. Shoop Noodles by Shan pushed the boundaries further than most with their tagline 'Trust tou must hai'. The advertisement shows how women can and do change the tyres of their car without the help of any man. The advertisement is brilliant in exposing socially-constructed notions of femininity and masculinity as well as dispelling the myth that women need men for even the most mundane tasks such as changing tyres.

National Foods Limited launched an advertisement with the maxim 'Nayi soch kay nayay zaiqay' by focusing on the joint efforts of a man and a woman during preparation of meals. A man participating in chores hints at the secrets of a healthy marriage in modern times, where women are not boxed into housework or the kitchen. Modern marriages are often about balance in gender roles and National Foods promote gender equality within the household through their advertisement.



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