

Zard Patton Ka Bunn: Television as a Tool for Social Change

Kashf Foundation, in a collaborative partnership with Momina Duraid Productions, produced Zard Patton Ka Bunn, a drama serial that aired from May to October 2024. The focus note presents findings from a third-party impact assessment of the drama's effect in the light of the theory of social and behavioral change in terms of influencing viewer awareness, attitudes, and practices across a sample of 500 respondents, while highlighting the role of media as an instrument of social advocacy and mindset change.

Across the Global South, development programs have long grappled with the challenge of shifting deeply held social norms on scale. Conventional channels for reaching low-income communities, including government social protection schemes, public health communication campaigns, and NGO field outreach, are constrained by geography, literacy requirements, and the sheer scale of the population they seek to serve.

A growing body of evidence suggests that purposefully designed entertainment media can be a highly effective tool for shifting awareness, attitudes, and social norms at scale. The thinking behind this model of social and behavioral change through entertainment media is based on the premise that people often behave according to what they believe to be socially acceptable. Well-designed media campaigns and interventions that are grounded in the theory of social change can influence attitudes and norms as often people learn by observation or by relating to narratives, characters and their lives. It is for this reason that well-crafted stories, narratives or dramas can have a far-reaching impact on shifting norms and challenging deep-seated attitudes.

The entertainment-education model embeds educational content within compelling narrative formats and has been shown to increase audience knowledge, create favorable attitudes, and drive behavior change in ways that conventional public messaging rarely achieves.¹ The critical balance lies in ensuring that media for social change neither becomes overly didactic or sermonizing, nor drifts toward sensationalizing or commercializing the issue. That is the central challenge in developing an

effective media-based strategy for social and behavioral change.

Television is the natural home for this model in Pakistan. With user penetration estimated at approximately 70% of the population² and cable penetration in urban areas at 97%,³ it is the country's most widely accessible information channel. For low-income households with limited access to formal education or institutional services, primetime drama serials are a primary window through which complex social issues enter household discourse. Undoubtedly, drama serials in Pakistan have a huge cultural impact as they reach a broad range of audiences. However, from a gender perspective and social behavior aspect many mainstream serials reflect and reinforce patriarchal norms, even when they appear to be progressive on the surface.

A common pattern is normalizing women's worth and value through marriage, sacrifice, obedience and the classic depiction of the victim who is eternally and quietly suffering. This is further exacerbated by the overt romanticization of physical abuse and violence and the normalization of toxic masculinity. Women are prized and objectified, and the good woman is the one who is forgiving, patient, self-sacrificing and obedient.

From a social perspective this issue is important as consistent exposure to such narratives not only normalizes but solidifies such behavior within households to be socially acceptable. It is for this reason gender sensitive media entertainment is important for it do not simply entertain but they also transform and construct social reality.

¹ Singhal, A. & Rogers, E.M. (1999). Entertainment-Education: A Communication Strategy for Social Change. Routledge.

² Statista (2025). TV & Video Market - Pakistan. User penetration estimated at 69.71% in 2025. [statista.com](https://www.statista.com).

³ Gallup Pakistan & Gilani Research Foundation (2025). TV Viewership Trends 2023-24. Cable penetration in Pakistan's urban areas: 97%. [gallup.com.pk](https://www.gallup.com.pk).

Research consistently shows that stories can influence people's beliefs and attitudes. A meta-analysis of 74 studies found that storytelling can positively influence beliefs, with people often changing their views in ways that align with the messages conveyed in the stories. The study also found that even small effects can be important, especially when people are repeatedly exposed to similar narratives, as these effects can build over time and lead to meaningful and lasting changes in attitudes.⁴ Another study on the impact of storytelling found that people often adjust their real-world beliefs based on the experiences of characters in a story. Interestingly, whether a story was presented as fact or fiction had little effect on its ability to influence beliefs.⁵

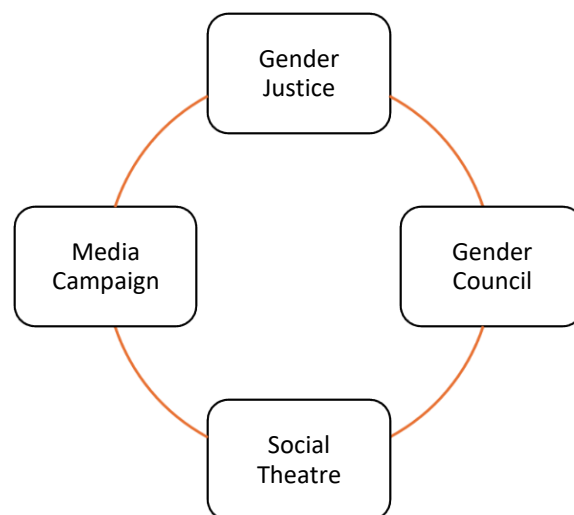
In Pakistan, the drama serial has long functioned as a form of collective household viewing, with families gathering together in a pattern that sustains cultural transmission and social commentary.⁶ Kashf Foundation has built directly on this cultural reality, producing a body of media content addressing persistent issues of girl's health, education, gender-based violence, women's economic participation, child sexual abuse and human trafficking.

A. Media Within Kashf's Broader Social Change Strategy

Kashf Foundation's approach to social change rests on the recognition that financial access alone is not sufficient to empower women as engaging positively to change women's lived realities is equally important. Deeply held social norms, gender discrimination, and community-level attitudes towards women's roles limit the impact of financial services unless they are accompanied by sustained efforts to shift the environment in which women live and work. Since its inception in 1996, Kashf has deployed social advocacy as a core

pillar of its work alongside its financial products, insurance, and capacity building programs.⁷

Kashf's social advocacy interventions aim to create awareness about social issues and gender discrimination at the community level. The programs target both men and women, reflecting Kashf's understanding that to truly empower women and girls, it is essential to ensure that men, family members, and society at large are part of the change. Kashf uses multiple interventions simultaneously to address a range of social issues impacting women. The interventions are organized around four core tools: Gender Justice Trainings, Gender Councils, Social Theatre, and Media Campaigns.



Gender Justice Trainings engage women clients alongside their husbands in a structured dialogue on gender norms, women's rights, and gender equality. Kashf considers the inclusion of male family members integral to its approach, recognizing that attitudinal change within the household requires engaging men at every step. In FY 2024-25, gender justice community training reached 15,707 participants.

⁴ Braddock, K. & Dillard, J.P. (2016). Meta-analytic evidence for the persuasive effect of narratives on beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors. *Communication Monographs*, 83(4), 446-467.

⁵ Green, M.C. & Brock, T.C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701-721.

⁶ Kothari, S. (2005). From genre to zanaana: Urdu television drama serials and women's culture in Pakistan. *Contemporary South Asia*, 14(3), 289-305.

⁷ Kashf Foundation. Social Advocacy Programs. kashf.org/social-advocacy-programs. Accessed May 2025; Kashf Foundation Annual Report 2024-25. kashf.org. March 2026.

Gender Councils were established by Kashf Foundation to engage communities in advancing women's empowerment through dialogue, collective problem-solving, and advocacy. Each council includes eight community members, equally divided between men and women, alongside two Kashf representatives. From 2022 to 2025, Kashf established 50 Gender Councils across Pakistan, engaging more than 3,200 community members. In FY 2024-25, 400 Gender Council participants were recorded.

Social Theatre uses the principles of theatre for development to initiate change within communities through short interactive performances on key social issues. Kashf's theatre programs address themes including child marriage, girls' education, and family planning, generating dialogue in settings where other channels cannot reach. In FY 2024-25, theatre performances reached 47,021 participants across Kashf's operational network, with Kashf doubling its theatre outreach to raise awareness about the consequences of early marriage.

Media Campaigns extend Kashf's advocacy reach to audiences that community-level programs cannot access. Kashf Foundation is the first microfinance institution in Pakistan to produce awareness-raising campaigns through mainstream media. Its television productions are grounded in the lived realities of low-income women and are designed to surface structural barriers, the impact of familial support, the importance of male allies, and prevailing societal attitudes towards women. Each production addresses multiple interconnected themes, reflecting Kashf's understanding of multidimensional causes impacting women's economic engagement.

Within Kashf's media campaigns portfolio, television drama is the most valuable in terms of outreach. A serial drama sustains audience engagement over weeks and months, builds emotional identification with characters over time, and creates the conditions for normative shift that goes beyond momentary awareness.

Kashf's television programs span eight productions to date:

1. *Rehaai* (HUM TV, 2013): Child marriage and the constraints faced by women from low-income households. Outperformed its closest competitor in TRP ratings for most weeks of its run and was later adapted for radio on FM 101 to extend its reach to communities with limited television access. Ultimately also influenced policy through the introduction of the Sindh Child Marriage restraint in 2013.
2. *Udaari* (HUM TV, 2016): Child sexual abuse, women's economic empowerment, and the legal hurdles faced by low-income households. Touted as the most popular television drama of 2016, it consistently outperformed all other channels in its timeslot across 25 weeks and won multiple awards at the Lux Style Awards, HUM TV Awards, and IIPA Awards. It was the first drama aired on Pakistan television on this topic and sparked discussion and ultimately led to the changes in the Pakistan Penal Code in 2016 where stronger provisions for the rape of minors were introduced along with recognizing sexual abuse of children more explicitly under the PPC framework.
3. *Aakhri Station* (ARY Digital, 2018): HIV, drug addiction, mental health and depression, forced prostitution, and domestic violence, told through seven individual women's stories in a mini-series format.
4. *Dil Na Umeed Tou Nahi* (TV One, 2021): Human trafficking, child labor, forced prostitution, and child marriage. Won Best Drama Award, Best Child Actor Male, Best Child Actor Female, and Best OST at the Fuchsia Magazine Awards 2022.
5. *House Full Batti Gul* (Web series, in collaboration with Global Affairs Canada): Population growth, resource strain, and

women's health, told across five episodes in a lighthearted yet thought-provoking format.

6. *Kuch Ankahi* (ARY Digital, 2023): Women's agency, unpaid care work, and prevailing social norms, presented as a light-hearted reinterpretation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, produced in partnership with Global Affairs Canada.
7. *Zard Patton Ka Bunn* (HUM TV, 2024): Girls' education, family planning, maternal health, women's mobility, child labor, and access to justice. The drama highlighted the critical nexus between the education of girls and the fertility rate, while also exposing patriarchal norms that prevent women's education.

B. *Zard Patton Ka Bunn*: Key Themes and Messages

Zard Patton Ka Bunn takes its title from the poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, where yellowing autumn leaves evoke a social landscape marked by hardship and struggle. Set in a rural, conservative community, the drama follows the journey of a young woman who aspires to a career in medicine, in the face of resistance from her brothers and the social milieu in which she lives. Through Meenu's journey, the narrative addresses girls' education, the consequences of the absence of family planning awareness for women's health, maternal mortality and the critical role of skilled birth attendants, women's mobility and economic participation, child labor, access to justice, and the enabling role that male family members can play in supporting women's ambitions.

The drama reflects Kashf Foundation's understanding that these issues do not exist independently of one another. A girl denied education is a woman denied economic empowerment. A household without access to family planning is a household exposed to the compounding vulnerabilities of poverty, maternal risk, and child labor. The narrative was designed to

surface these connections through story rather than instruction, allowing viewers to arrive at understanding through identification with characters whose lives reflect their own.

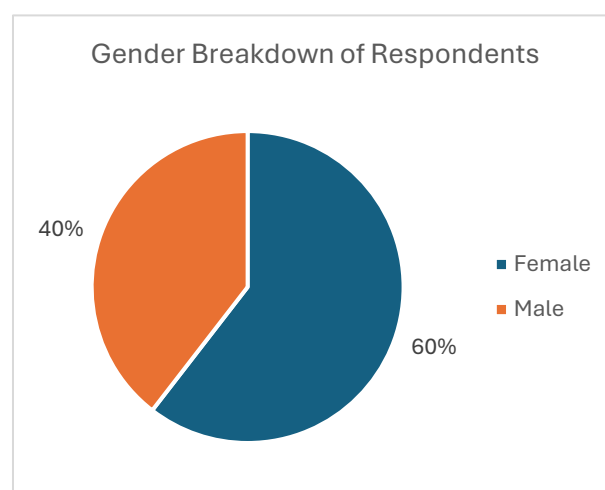
C. Impact Assessment Results

Sampling Methodology

Drawing on the theory of social and behavioral change, Kashf Foundation commissioned a third-party to assess the drama's impact on viewer awareness, attitudes, and behavior. The assessment was conducted with a sample of 500 respondents drawn equally from Karachi and Lahore, all of whom had watched *Zard Patton Ka Bunn*. Of the 500 respondents, 250 were surveyed in the field and 250 through a Digital Collection Point. Field surveys were conducted with women only, while the Digital Collection Point included both men and women.

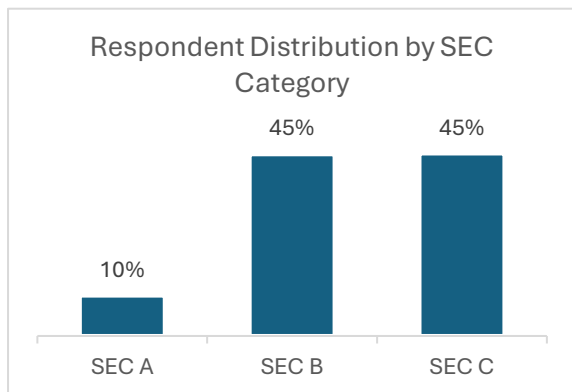
Respondent Profile and Exposure

Respondents were selected across socioeconomic categories, gender, and respondent type to reflect Kashf's core audience segments. In total, 60% of the respondents surveyed were women and 40% were men.

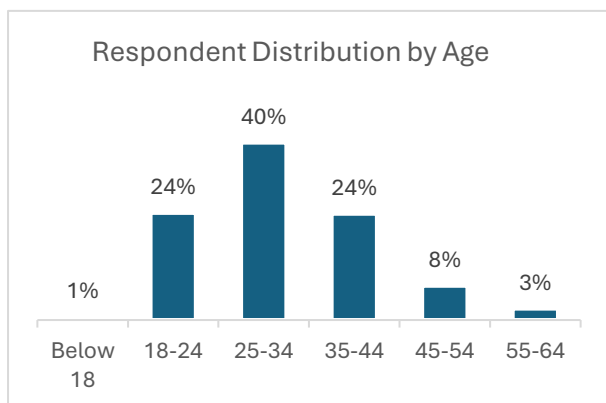


The socio-economic framework classifies households by monthly household income: SEC A covers households earning above PKR 100,000 per month, SEC B covers those earnings between PKR 30,000 and PKR 100,000, and SEC C covers those earning below PKR 30,000. The sample consisted of

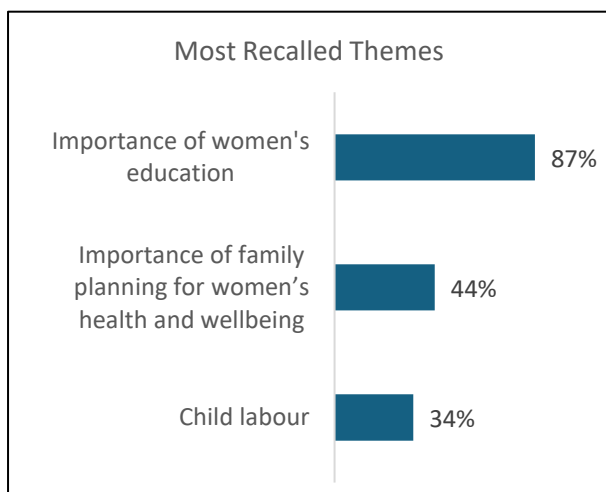
10% SEC A respondents, 45% SEC B respondents, and 45% SEC C respondents, broadly reflecting the income profile of Kashf's primary client base.



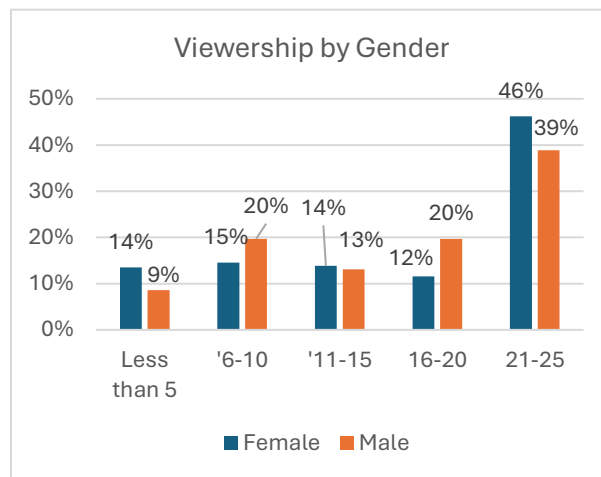
The largest cohort fell within the age group of 25-34 years at 40%, followed by 18-24 and 35-44 at 24% each respectively.



The assessment further examined the respondents' exposure to the serial, which was a critical piece in assessing the reach of the drama. Approximately 60% of both men and women had watched at least 16 episodes of the 25-episode serial, showing ability of the drama serial to engage



its audience, as sustaining the interest of the audience is critical from a social change perspective. It is only through sustained engagement that audiences are able to internalize messages and ultimately change attitudes and ultimately behavior.



From Exposure to Awareness

The assessment also explored how exposure to the key themes in the drama led to issue identification, attitudinal reflection and reported behavioral changes. This was undertaken through exploring the recall of key themes, acquiescence with value statements post viewing, shifts in belief, and self-reported actions taken as a result of watching the show. Findings were disaggregated by gender, socioeconomic status, age, and education level.

Women's education was the dominant theme recalled by 87% of respondents, a figure that held consistently across all demographic groups. Family planning for women's health and wellbeing was the second most recalled theme at 44%, followed by child labor at 34%. The outcomes of the survey reveal that the serial by embedding multiple social themes that were well crafted and well balanced was able to lead to a high level of recall of the core themes in the minds of the viewers.

The respondents were then asked about the impact of the serial on key social issues highlighted in the serial. Approximately 70% of the respondents reported prior awareness (somewhat or very aware) of the issues portrayed in the drama serial; however, post-viewing awareness increased

substantially across all dimensions, ranging from 84% to 91%.

The highest levels of change in awareness were reported regarding the impact of inadequate healthcare facilities on women’s health and well-being, as well as issues related to access to justice for women and low-income households.

Reaching the Intended Audience

Any media campaign is designed with an end audience in mind therefore the results further reviewed impact on awareness by SEC categories. Undertaking this analysis was particularly important from a message penetration perspective and in terms of informing about the relevance of the overall campaign.

SEC A participants demonstrated higher baseline awareness of the issues, however the greatest impact in awareness levels was seen among respondents belonging to SEC B and SEC C Categories, particularly with respect to the importance of skilled health professionals, family planning, and child labor, ranging as high as 90%.

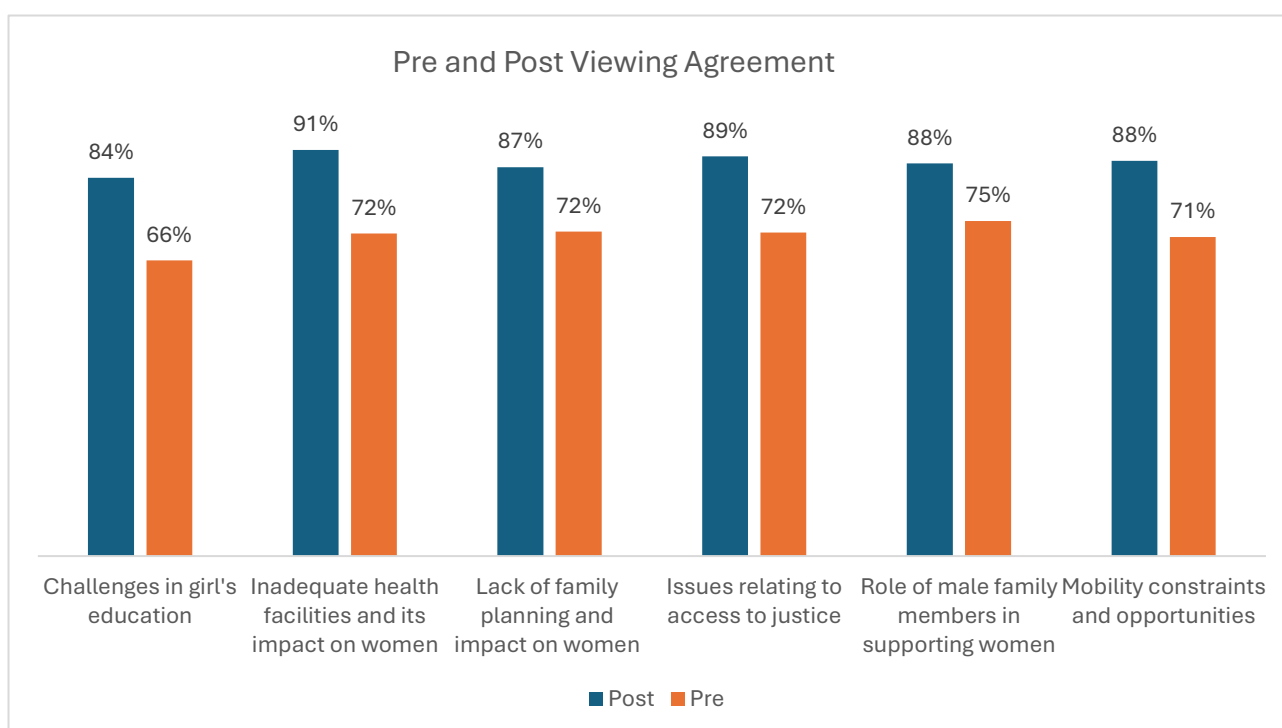
It is important to note that respondents belonging to SEC B and SEC C categories largely represent lower-income groups, which is an audience where investing in last-mile efforts is extremely important

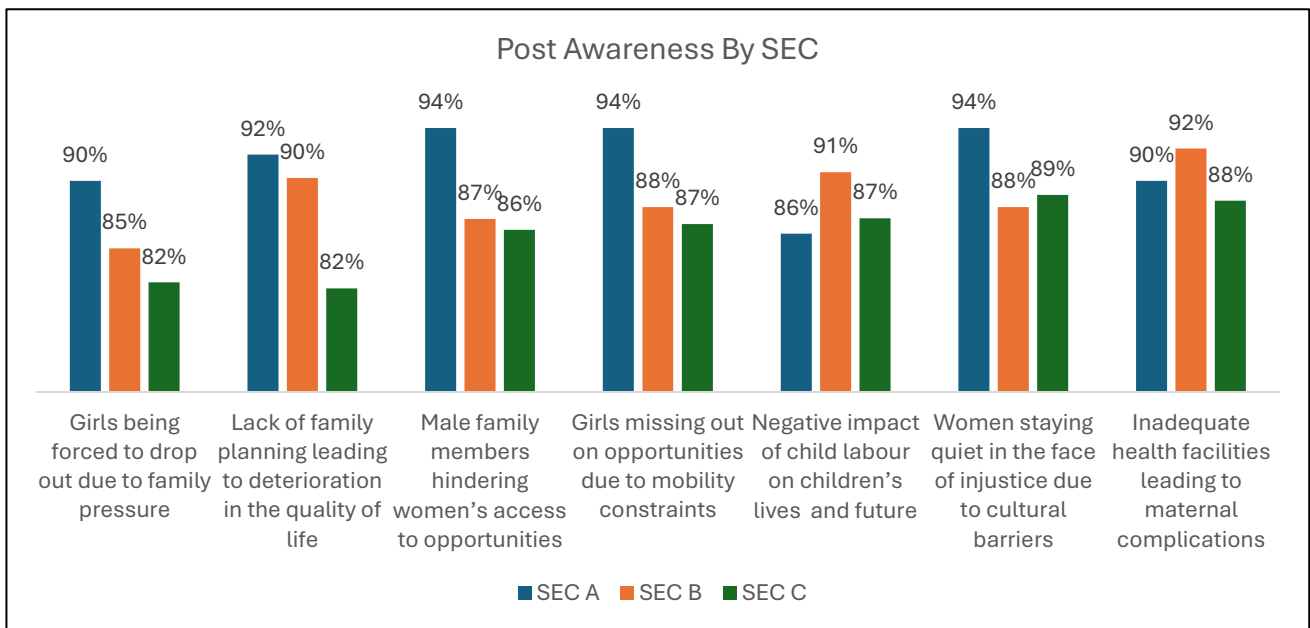
when it comes to media campaigns. The high levels of awareness reported post-exposure suggest that the serial was successful in reaching its intended audience and effectively communicating the social messages that Kashf aimed to convey.

Gender-disaggregated data revealed high post-viewing awareness among both men and women. Approximately 90% of women reported awareness across all issues, compared to around 80% of men. This also somewhat questioned the underlying premise that it is women who watch drama serials and not men. The results highlight the fact that if narratives are well designed, they can equally pull in and engage male audiences.

From Awareness to Normative Change and Advocacy

The outcomes of the survey highlight that the drama did not just impact awareness levels positively but also influenced social discourse and advocacy. Around 87% of respondents reported encouraging women to make decisions about their own lives, while an equal proportion supported women’s active participation in conversations regarding their marriage. Furthermore, 85% reported discouraging child labor and 85% stated that women’s independent mobility was important. In addition, 79% reported speaking to others about the importance of girls’ education.

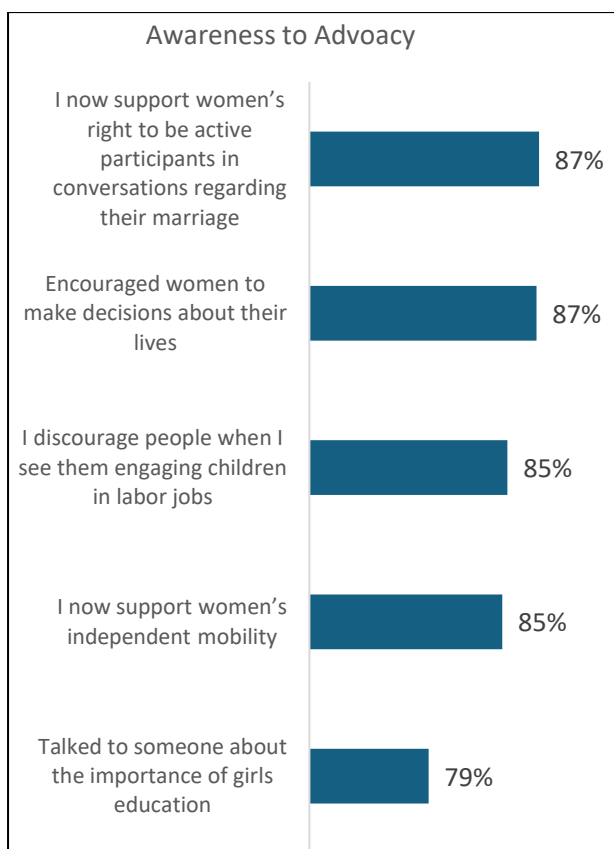




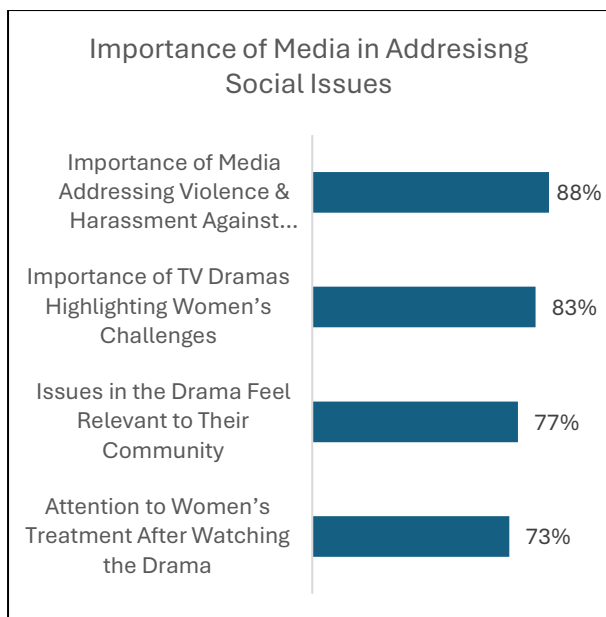
From a social and behavioral change perspective these findings are significant because they indicate a movement from passive viewership to active reflection and to some extent action. The critical finding relates to how such messages become a conduit of change within households.

Shifting Media Narratives towards Gender Sensitivity

Respondents were asked how they felt about media addressing important societal issues to create awareness and drive change. A large majority of the respondents viewed this positively: 88% considered it very or extremely important for media to address issues such as domestic violence, financial abuse, and workplace harassment. Similarly, 83% felt it was very or extremely important for TV dramas to highlight the real challenges faced by women in society, while 77% reported that the issues portrayed in the drama were very or extremely relevant to their own communities or surroundings. These findings are important within a social norms debate, and reflect public support for edutainment content, that goes beyond what is being shown on television screens, thus setting the stage for greater efforts for the media to do more in this respect.



Most notably, 73% of respondents stated that they began paying closer attention to how women are treated in their own households and communities after watching the drama. This shift suggests deeper reflection on prevailing gender norms, and the fact that nearly three in four respondents reported such heightened attention indicates that the drama's impact extended beyond surface-level attitudinal change.



Media Advocacy as an Investment in Gender Equality

The impact assessment of *Zard Patton Ka Bunn* highlights the transformative potential of entertainment media in shaping social attitudes and expanding public discourse on gender and social justice issues in Pakistan. The findings demonstrate that when social messaging is embedded within compelling and culturally resonant storytelling, media can move beyond awareness creation to influence reflection, dialogue, and normative change at scale.

The drama's strongest contribution lies in its ability to connect structural issues that are often discussed in isolation. By linking girls' education with maternal health, family planning, women's mobility, economic participation, and child labor, the narrative reflected the interconnected realities of poverty and gender inequality experienced by low-income households, especially women. Rather than presenting these themes through direct instruction, the serial enabled audiences to engage with them emotionally through relatable characters and lived experiences. This narrative approach proved particularly effective in generating high levels of recall and engagement across socioeconomic groups.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the serial resonated very strongly with lower- and middle-

income viewers, the very audiences that are often hardest to reach through conventional advocacy channels. The results also challenge the assumption that socially conscious drama appeals primarily to women. Male respondents reported substantial engagement with the issues portrayed, reinforcing the idea that well-crafted narratives can create shared spaces for reflection within households and communities.

The assessment further points to a broader public appetite for media that addresses substantive social concerns with nuance and responsibility. At a time when mainstream entertainment frequently reinforces patriarchal norms and stereotypes, *Zard Patton Ka Bunn* offered an alternative framework centered on women's agency, aspiration, and dignity. The strong viewer response indicates that audiences are not only receptive to such content but increasingly expect media to engage meaningfully with the realities shaping everyday life.

Ultimately, the experience of *Zard Patton Ka Bunn* demonstrates that television drama can serve as more than entertainment in Pakistan's social context. It can function as a powerful vehicle for empathy, public conversation, and gradual social change. For Kashf Foundation, media-based advocacy represents an important instrument for advancing social change and contributing towards the vision of a poverty-free and gender-equitable society. By using storytelling to challenge entrenched social norms and amplify the lived realities of women and low-income communities, Kashf seeks to create an enabling environment where women can exercise greater agency, access opportunities, and participate fully in economic and social life.

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Authors: Romesa Razzaq and Anaum Ather Rana
 Editor: Roshaneh Zafar
 Phone: +92 (42) 111 981 981
 E-Mail: info@kashf.org
 Website: www.kashf.org