

Alleged rape at private college in Lahore

An HRCP fact-finding report



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan



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Case background and timeline

13 October 2024. The DIG Operations in Lahore issued a statement saying that the Punjab police had arrested a security guard employed at a private college in the city; he had been accused of allegedly raping a student. Several media outlets reported this statement and added that the police had taken this action following news reports on social media. The police were still reportedly searching for the victim.

13 October 2024. A news report from ARY News claimed that a female student at Punjab College Campus 10 had allegedly been raped. The report said that she had been accidentally locked in the basement during the break period [when the incident occurred] and a male teacher had approached the scene on hearing her cries. The guard, identified as Aun, claimed ARY News, had fled the scene, while the victim was in intensive care.¹

Box: The social media content that likely triggered the student protests

By 13 October (and possibly earlier), a number of social media accounts—mostly managed by students and influencers—had begun posting similar details, along with calls ‘for justice’.² Some of the more prominent handles (many of which have since been deleted) included Ahsenetix, Sarcaxxm and noormnk. Subsequently, new accounts such as pgc_victim emerged, sharing claims that a girl had been raped by a security guard, that students had heard shouts and an ambulance onsite and that the ‘victim’ was in intensive care, either dead or alive. This was accompanied by calls of solidarity and prayer.

A significant volume of content posted on social media was about the college’s reaction, including video footage of the principal breaking a student’s mobile phone allegedly to delete evidence, voice notes from the administration threatening students, and screenshots of messages from teachers and administrators threatening students with suspension and ‘grave consequences’. There were also posts alleging that CCTV footage of the site had been deleted and that the basement where the incident had supposedly occurred had been washed down. Students claimed that they were being pressured to stay silent and messages to this effect from college groups were posted online. Meanwhile a blurred video of an unidentified girl was shared, with claims that she had been taken to a private hospital (Evercare) and was under guard by college security staff. As a result of the spate of such posts, many students appeared to believe that a case of sexual assault had indeed occurred and that the college was attempting a ‘cover-up’.

14 October 2024. Students staged a protest in front of the Punjab Group of Colleges against the alleged sexual assault of a female student on the premises of one of the college campuses, Campus 10 in Lahore. These soon turned violent after warnings of strict action by the DSP and college officials were issued against the protestors. Videos began to circulate on social media, showing anti-riot police and other police personnel resorting to violence against the protesting students, leaving 28 injured, according to the press.³

¹ <https://arynews.tv/security-guard-arrested-for-raping-college-student-in-lahore/>

² An exact timeline cannot be established for these posts since many of the accounts were later deleted.

³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1865270>



14 October 2024. During the protests, the Punjab minister for higher and school education, Rana Sikandar Hayat, visited the college to meet the protestors and made the following statement:

Principal deleted video evidence, cameras were turned off, girls have video and audio messages of principal and coordinator. We need to make sure daughters are safe irrespective of the institute. I promise that justice will be delivered, college registration is already suspended, and if they have committed this crime then we should cancel all their registrations to protect the students. The point of view is why the principal was protected and why not that girl. Students are being harassed and told that they will be suspended [*sic*].⁴

14 October 2024. Videos of a DSP (from the morning of the protest) began to surface, warning (female) students to return to their classes, ‘otherwise, it could lead to a new incident.’ As the day progressed, different stories started to emerge, with the official (government) narrative stating that the incident was based solely on misinformation and that there was no ‘victim’. The DIG Operations Faisal Kamran held a press conference to say that there was no victim based on which an FIR could be filed.⁵

14–15 October 2024. ASP Shehribano Naqvi released two video statements, with the second one featuring the father and paternal uncle of the alleged victim; both statements denied that any such incident had occurred.

15 October 2024. The police issued a circular on social media, seeking further information on any alleged victim or the case in general while maintaining the anonymity of the informant.

15 October 2024. The Punjab information minister, Azma Bokhari, denied the incident while blaming the PTI for ‘inciting unrest’ in relation to the case.⁶

15 October 2024. Agha Tahir Ijaz, the director of the Punjab Group of Colleges, released a video statement denying that a rape had occurred at Campus 10.⁷

15 October 2024. A high-powered committee was formed by the Punjab chief minister, Maryam Nawaz, which subsequently rejected all claims of sexual assault.⁸ It said that the incident was based on misinformation.

15–16 October 2024. The alleged victim was identified publicly on social media, although her family subsequently insisted that no such incident had taken place.

16 October 2024. The Punjab chief minister held a press conference at which she dismissed the allegations of rape (and claims that the CCTV footage had been deleted) as ‘a fabricated story’. She accused the PTI of spreading propaganda based on misinformation and urged the FIA to take action against those involved. She also introduced a student who had earlier claimed to have witnessed the alleged incident but had now retracted her story.⁹

Mission’s terms of reference

The result of this chain of events was an environment of acute suspicion and mistrust as students continued to claim that a rape had occurred while government officials and the college administration continued to deny these allegations. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/meganews.tv/p/DBGt2tZiiO2>

⁵ <https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/844048-no-evidence-of-college-students-assault-says-dig-operations>

⁶ <https://www.nation.com.pk/15-Oct-2024/azma-bokhari-denies-confirmation-of-alleged-rape-at-private-college>

⁷ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DBHlxUTvqJl/?igsh=MThlMzVsdHdhOThrw==>

⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2503026/punjab-govt-report-clears-sexual-assault-claims-in-lahore-college-case>

⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1865600>



(HRCF) thus felt it necessary to try and establish whether such an incident had occurred at Campus 10. Accordingly, a fact-finding mission was conducted on 17 October with the AGHS Legal Aid Cell. The mission comprised journalist Fatima Razzaq, AGHS staff members Robina Shaheen, Qamar Ramay and Rahat Gull, and HRCF staff member Halima Azhar. The mission's terms of reference were to:

- Investigate the facts and circumstances that led to the alleged incident and establish whether it occurred.
- Assess the role of the police and/or any relevant government authority in investigating the alleged incident free of external pressure or influence, and the extent to which the college staff and administration cooperated in the investigation.
- Determine if any incidents of harassment and/or sexual abuse of any kind had been reported by students in the past against the alleged perpetrator(s) or any other staff member at the college.
- Establish whether there was any formal and effective mechanism in place to address such complaints at the college and whether any concrete steps had been taken to ensure the security of female students on campus in response to such complaints, if any.
- Ascertain whether the alleged victim and her family had been intimidated, threatened, pressured or influenced in any way before or after the alleged incident.
- Assess the use of force by the police during the student-led protests against the alleged incident.

Visit to site of alleged incident (Punjab Group of Colleges, Campus 10)

On 17 October, the mission visited the site of the alleged incident. Police anti-riot personnel, a prisoner van and other police personnel were present at the site and refused to let the team enter the campus; they also refused to give any on-the-record statements regarding the incident. The campus was closed and there were no protestors outside at the time to whom the team could speak.

Meetings with respondents

Although the mission had formally requested a meeting with the police, the DIG Operations was unreachable. The AIG also refused to meet the mission, stating that the matter had already been addressed by the DIG and chief minister through their press conferences.

Interview with reporter covering the protests

Following their unsuccessful visit to Campus 10, the mission interviewed Laiba Zainab, a reporter with digital media platform Nukta, who had reported on the protests. Zainab felt that the protests had been sparked by the spate of social media posts and organized through broadcast channels on social media. She said that the students she had spoken to on 14 October claimed they had heard an ambulance on campus on 10 October. When they asked the administration what had happened, they received no response. According to Zainab, suspicion mounted as some students reported on 11 October that the campus security staff had been changed and that some teachers had instructed students to avoid going alone to drink water or to use the restroom.

Although most students claimed that the college principal had forcibly deleted 'video evidence' (of a student being carried to the ambulance they had heard) and destroyed people's phones, Zainab said she had been unable to trace the student in question—she could not track either a name or a

college section. Moreover, the allegation that the principal had deleted any video evidence was limited to hearsay. She added that most of the students she had spoken to earlier now wished to remain anonymous, following the state’s antagonistic response to the protests. Zainab confirmed, however, that the police and college security personnel had used disproportionate force against the protestors, leaving many students injured. She also pointed to the contradiction between the statement made by the minister for higher and school education, Rana Sikandar Hayat, on 14 October, and those made by the police on 15 October and by the chief minister, Maryam Nawaz, on 16 October—particularly regarding the CCTV footage.



Main entrance to Campus 10 blocked by anti-riot police on 17 October

Conversation with the mother of the alleged victim

By about 15 October, the alleged victim had been named on social media as ‘B’.¹⁰ Although the mission considered visiting her, B’s family refused. Her mother told the mission that they were ‘tired of people visiting our house and neighbourhood. Please do not come here.’ She said that her daughter had been wrongfully identified as the victim, even though the reason for her absence from the college was a back injury that she had sustained on 2 October after a fall down the stairs at home. B was taken to General Hospital and then to Sharif Hospital to be treated.

‘We are all so upset and distraught. My daughter has suffered a lot because of this. I don’t know what to do now. I have five daughters, and this negative media attention has ruined our reputation and family image,’ said the mother, adding that she would ‘take action’ against all those involved. ‘I want justice for my daughter now against everyone who circulated this rumour. I said the same to Maryam Nawaz and she will do something,’ she told the mission. She then told the team she would consider their request to visit, but subsequently declined.

¹⁰ Although she was publicly identified, HRCF feels it is unethical in the circumstances to give her full name in this report and has therefore anonymized her.

A social media analysis indicates that pictures of B were circulated with headlines such as ‘Rest in peace’ while her medical reports were made public. The fact that both reports are dated 2 and 3 October—and thus do not coincide with the period during which allegations of rape were made—makes it unlikely that she was the victim. It remains unclear as to why and how her name surfaced as the alleged victim in the first instance.



Graffiti pertaining to the alleged incident on a wall adjacent to Campus 10

Meeting with Punjab Group of Colleges representative

Although the mission attempted to contact students who claimed to have taken part in the protest, no student was willing to speak to the team. Nor was the mission able to contact any college faculty members. However, the team interviewed Agha Tahir Ijaz, the director of the Punjab Group of Colleges, who had released a video statement on 15 October denying that a rape had occurred at Campus 10.

When asked why and how the 14 October protests had started, he explained that the students of Campus 10 had initially protested on the college premises, believing that the administration had detained the alleged victim. Consequently, all the rooms were opened for students to inspect. Soon after, students began to gather outside the college, including some from other Punjab Group campuses. As the situation worsened, the college administration decided to close the gates for the protection of female students onsite.

Ijaz said that the protesting students had claimed the incident occurred in the basement, which he deemed impossible because it was an open parking area equipped with CCTV cameras. People frequently came and went, he added, making it unlikely that such an incident could have occurred.

He explained the college administration's initial response to the allegations, saying that the security guard accused of the alleged offence was on leave at the time. On 13 October, the police had directed the principal to ask the security guard to return. He was arrested en route to Lahore. However, no FIR had been filed against him.



When asked why the college administration did not take its students into confidence immediately after the rumour of the rape emerged, the director said (visibly distressed): 'Initially, we believed the incident had in fact taken place if they [the students] were saying so. We also have children after all.' Once the allegations were made public on social media, the college administration reviewed the CCTV footage to confirm what had happened and issued a statement on 15 October, he said. Ijaz also claimed that the police had taken the footage with them to ensure no evidence was tampered with.

He admitted that the situation could have been handled better but said that it had been necessary to 'maintain discipline' with regard to the administration's attempts to quell the protests. No students had been suspended following the protests, he claimed, and the institution had a committee in place to address complaints of harassment (although this could not be confirmed by the mission). He felt, therefore, that the protests had been 'unnecessary'.

Ijaz told the mission that B, the alleged victim, had been on leave since 3 October due to a back injury. A fellow student had named her the victim, but her family had come forward publicly to deny any such allegations.

Mission observations

Reluctance of respondents to engage with the mission. The refusal of students, the police and the alleged victim's family to speak to the mission makes it difficult to provide a holistic picture of what happened. The mission feels that the Punjab government's announcement that it would take strict action against people who had spread any misinformation likely accounts for students' reluctance to speak to HRCF.

Contradictions and ambiguity in official statements. What is evident, however, is that the contradiction between the statements issued by the minister for higher and school education, Rana Sikandar Hayat, who initially endorsed students' claims, and those issued subsequently by the police and chief minister, denying the allegations, exacerbated the situation. The delay in issuing a statement on the part of the college administration and reports that the college had been 'de-notified' by the education department lent further credence to students' allegations.¹¹

Use of force against protesting students. The situation deteriorated when students were threatened and subjected to police violence, despite being minors: media reports indicate that at least 28 protestors were beaten and injured. At least a dozen students were arrested from outside Campus 10 and other campuses in Lahore. Aurat March volunteers and lawyers helped parents locate their children in the lockups. Speaking to the mission, Fatima Jan, a lawyer who helped trace the students, said that they had been detained in the Gulberg, Model Town and Icchra police stations, although the police had claimed that no FIR was registered against any student.

Online spaces, influencers and ethics. The mission notes the hyper-engagement of online spaces with the alleged incident. An analysis of social media accounts, broadcast channels and groups by the mission points to evidence of other parties who attempted to hijack the students' narrative and use it to amplify their own outreach on social media. A lawyer-turned-influencer, for example, appears to have successfully misled some student groups into believing that their protests would convince the courts to order the police to produce the 'victim'. Other accounts, some led by influencers associated with the PTI, used the opportunity to disparage the Punjab government. The significant use of AI-based content raises concerns of ethical use and lack of fact-checking. Finally, the mission notes with concern the lack of ethics around the use and dissemination of images of a female student, B, without her consent. In another case, images of a girl injured during

¹¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1865270>



the protests and then treated at a hospital were circulated on social media accounts without her consent.

Conclusion and recommendations

In the absence of forensic evidence and credible testimonies, the mission cannot conclusively establish whether the alleged rape occurred. However, students' response underlines their serious dissatisfaction with the state of security on campuses, perceived frequency of sexual harassment and victim blaming, seeming lack of motivation on the part of campus administrations to address this issue, and pervading mistrust of the police and college administration (which, many students believed, had operated in cahoots to cover up an offence). Indeed, the intensity of students' ire should not be discounted solely because of the apparent role of misinformation. That said, the damage wrought by pervasive misinformation is grounds for strong, regular public campaigns on digital literacy and fact-checking.

Regrettably, the case may have far-reaching consequences for victims of sexual violence in general. The breaches of privacy by the media, social media users and the police could well deter such victims from coming forward. Moreover, the case may even influence public opinion pertaining to victims of sexual violence, with some quarters misusing the case to suggest that instances of sexual violence are exaggerated—which is unlikely to be the case.

The mission makes the following recommendations:

1. A forensic investigation of the CCTV footage collected on Campus 10 over the first two weeks of October should be conducted and the results made publicly available.
2. The police must be held accountable for resorting to violence against student protesters and for detaining the accused (Campus 10 security guard) in the absence of an FIR against him.
3. Concerns of harassment and sexual violence on campus must always be taken seriously. All educational institutions must ensure that effective anti-harassment committees (comprising at least 50 percent women) are functional on campus and easily accessible by students, whose right to confidentiality must be respected at all times.
4. Students should be allowed to institute and operate student councils that provide an opportunity for them to express their concerns to college administrations.
5. The government should include digital rights, digital safety, misinformation, disinformation and fact-checking in school and college curricula to increase digital literacy among students.
6. Legal instruments such as the Punjab Defamation Act 2024 and Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 should be used with restraint, especially against students and minors.
7. The government should ensure transparency in FIA proceedings and ensure that the case is not used to settle political scores.

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