

# Exploring The Effects of Character Assassination Among Females

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**Abstracts:** Introduction: Character assassination is a deliberate effort to damage an individual's reputation or credibility, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal attacks. This study explores the effects of the normalization of character assassination among females on the initiation of future relationships. Objectives: The primary objective is to investigate the role of character assassination in shaping future relationships among young females in Pakistan's twin cities. Methods: A qualitative approach was employed, using purposive sampling to select six female participants aged 20-25 years. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis with the aid of QSR Nvivo 10 software. Results: The analysis identified several themes: demographics, causes, consequences, methods, and coping mechanisms. Participants reported that character assassination often begins in childhood, leading to trust issues, insecurities, and reluctance to form new relationships. Humor and sarcasm were commonly used as methods of character assassination, often normalized through media and social media. Coping mechanisms included habitual acceptance and engagement with fictional narratives. Conclusion: The study highlights the pervasive impact of character assassination on young females' interpersonal relationships and self-perception. It underscores the need for societal change to promote healthier communication practices and mitigate the detrimental effects of character assassination.

**Keywords:** Character Assassination, Future Relationships, Qualitative Study, Thematic Analysis, Social Media, Coping Mechanisms.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Character assassination is an intentional and sustained effort to harm the reputation or credibility of an individual (Icks & Shiraev, 2014). It is done so in a way that the standing and believability of an individual is threatened. Character assassination refers to both the process (e.g., a smear campaign) and the outcome of the process (e.g., damaged reputation) (Icks & Shiraev, 2014). To simplify, this construct includes two phenomenon slanderous attack followed by damaged reputation. *ad hominem* or personal attack, frequently the immediate defensive response to any new and powerfully upsetting argument on a controversial and polarized issue, especially when interests are threatened, and emotions are running high on the issue (Walton, 1998). Character assassination consists of variety of possible attacks in the form of verbal and non-verbal assaults including spoken insults, rumors, campaign ads, pamphlets, cartoons, and tweets (Icks & Shiraev, 2014).

Persuasive attack is another term used to refer character assassination (Benoit & Stein, 2021). The discussion of attack itself serves a valuable function in communication (Benoit & Stein, 2021). Icks and Shiraev (2014) argue that "in every corner of history, we find people of all ranks, occupations, and persuasions attempting to damage or destroy the reputations of their opponents in order to win political battles, discredit unwelcome news, or settle personal scores" (p. 3). In other words, throughout history we can track individuals of all positions, occupations and influences trying to harm or annihilate the status of their rivals to win fights, dishonor news that is not their cup of tea or punish someone for something wrong they did in the past that cannot be forgiven.

This research aims to inquire the impact of normalization of character assassination among females that may provide insight on initiation of their future relationships.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The applied social theory of character assassination has been defined it as a cross-cultural phenomenon used as social influence, coercion, and propaganda. It is used to foster online misinformation, and negative political campaigns to gain public distrust in democratic institutions (Samoilenko, 2021).

Character assassination techniques utilized in phase four of a typical workplace psychopath five phase model to maintain agenda (Babiak & Hare, 2007). Social structures and narrative injuries were created through character attacks represented by the Tetris Model of Character Assassination (carpgmu2019, 2018).

In 2014, formed the research lab for Character Assassination and Reputation Politics (CARP) on the focus of historical character attacks on rulers and religious figures by Martijn Icks and Eric Shiraev explained the political science model (Shiraev et al., 2021).

In the 2018 Brett Kavanaugh Supreme Court confirmation hearing based on the Senate Democrats and Christine Blasey Ford's strategies upon persuasive attacks, the article represented accused character assassination formed audience unfavorable conclusion regarding the accused (Benoit & Stein, 2021).

The Bullying Pulpit study based on the character attacks on political speech impact at a university concluded speakers' character attacks usage then identification strategies getting negative reactions (Schumacher-Rutherford & Muddiman, 2021).

Low-power groups' inferior positions elaborating on elite dominance and the consequence of the targeted population's symbolic invisibility caused by systemic character assassination of government-sponsored (Rothbart, 2021). Character assassination discusses ideological struggles and power strategies for subversion and domination (Samoilenko, 2021).

The oppressive nature and social order impact was comprehended by the public shaming exploration of the Soviet Union. The research highlighted liberal democracies modern moral campaigns' usage of similar assassination tactics (Stephenson, 2021).

The stigma communication and character assassination concluding self-acceptance, a strong identity, and a sense of purpose encourage resilience against character assassination (Smith & Eberly, 2021).

### Rationale

Character assassination is a planned, persistent effort to harm someone's credibility or reputation (Icks & Shiraev, 2014). Character assassination consists of character attacks in the form of verbal and non-verbal assaults including spoken insults, rumors, campaign ads, pamphlets, cartoons, and tweets. It consists of vocal and non-verbal attacks on a person's persona, such as verbal insults, gossips, spreading wrong information, tweets etc. (Samoilenko, S. A., 2016). Based on previous research, the overall relationship between these variables is lacking as there is limited research conducted regarding these variables. Our study aims to find the relationship between these variables and how they influence the female population in our society. The present study aims to focus on the effects of normalization of the relationship of character assassination on initiation of future relationships. The study focuses on the females in Pakistan, specifically in twin cities.

### Research Question

How does normalization of character assassination among females impact the initiation of future relationships?

### Conceptual definitions

Character assassination is a planned, persistent effort to harm someone's credibility or reputation (Icks & Shiraev, 2014). Character assassination consists of character attacks in the form of verbal and non-verbal assaults including spoken insults, rumors, campaign ads, pamphlets, cartoons, and tweets. It consists of vocal and non-verbal attacks on a person's persona, such as verbal insults, gossips, spreading wrong information, tweets etc. (Samoilenko, S. A., 2016).

### **3. Method**

#### **Objectives**

To investigate the role of character assassination on initiating future relationships among females

#### **Research Design**

In the present research, non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the research. The aim of the study was to examine the impact of normalization of character assassination on the initiation of future relationships among females. Sample was collected through one on one in-depth interview in which questions designed related to the study were asked by the participants, the data collected was than transcribed and analyzed using content analysis method.

#### **Sample Characteristics**

The sample of 6 participants (F=6) was taken with age ranging between 20-25 years, females and was approached using purposive sampling. The sample was collected from various colleges and universities of twin cities (Rawalpindi and Islamabad) in Pakistan till data saturated.

#### **Inclusion Criteria**

The participant's age ranging between 20-25 years who verbally gave consent for participation in research was included.

#### **Exclusion Criteria**

The participant ranging below 20 and above 25 years was excluded. The male participants and female participants who denied verbal consent were excluded from the research.

#### **Proposed Analysis**

In the current study, semi structured interviews were constructed on the basis of the interview guidelines (Christensen et al., 2015). The data was collected till saturation was achieved. After data collection, the data was transcribed and cleaned using QSR Nvivo 10 application. The themes were formed and at the end of analysis themes will be formed using thematic analysis guidelines (Byrne, 2021).

#### **Ethical Guidelines**

All the ethical considerations of the research according to the British Psychological Society and in America by the American Psychological Association were fulfilled in the conducted study (APA,2022). All ethical interview guidelines were followed during questionnaire formation. Verbal consent of each participant was taken before conducting interview with briefing of protection of participant confidentiality and right of withdrawal during interview. No deception was used, and participants were debriefed about the study after conducting the interview.

4. RESULTS

**Table 1 Theme and subthemes generation from the verbatim**

Theme	Subthemes	Verbatim
Demographics	Age (20-25)	I am an unmarried 25-year-old girl.
	Gender	My name is M and I am a female currently I am doing my BS in hospitality management
	Marital status	Currently my age is 20, and I am single.
	Family system	I live in a nuclear family and growing up my family was financially stable and we had a good family environment. Since childhood I have been living in an extended family, so the living situation was very chaotic.
Character assassination causes	Experienced from childhood	I faced character assassination in my adulthood so as I'm growing moving forward in my life it is affecting me in a way that I've stopped trusting people, have strong believe that not everyone is your loved ones or loves you in any part of our life they'll betray you.
	Personal gain	People might use character assassination to make themselves look better in front of others by putting down someone else. By making someone else look bad, they hope to make themselves seem more important or respectable by comparison. It is a way to boost their own image at the expense of someone else's reputation.
Character assassination consequences	Physical effects	In my teenage people used to make fun of my teeth and for their satisfaction I went for braces and now when I'm an adult people make fun of my lips.
	Personality effected	A very big change occurred in my personality. I became rude and blunt.
	Psychological effect	Character assassination can create trust issues and insecurities, making it harder to initiate new relationships. The fear of being judged or attacked by others can prevent me from putting yourself out there and being vulnerable with new people
	Social effect	I have started to stop trusting on everyone, I stopped opening myself to others and I have stopped doing gatherings with those people with whom I get an instinct that they will character assassinate me
Character assassination ways	Emotional effect	Feeling the sting of character assassination in past relationships can make me wary of opening up to new connections. The fear of being hurt again may cause me to hesitate or hold back from forming new relationships.
	Routine effect	I refrained from doing some things, thinking it would assess my character. Late night walking on roads because it would show that maybe I'm prostitute (according to how normal people asses).
	Humor	I've used in humors scenarios e.g. when I'm with my friend and we see people we'll laugh secretly on them.
Coping with character assassination	Sarcasm	Definitely nowadays people rant out their heart content by using sarcasm and pass their own judgements and opinions on people. This thing is practiced a lot
	Habitual	It's Like we've all fallen into this weird habit of tearing each other down without really thinking about it. But deep down, we know it's not right. It's become this messed- up norm that we should probably try to break free from
Coping with character assassination	Fictional work	Well fictional work has played a major role in normalizing assassination. Fictional stories like TV shows or books sometimes make it seem okay to ruin someone's reputation by saying bad things about them. When we see characters, we like doing this, it can make us think it's not a big deal in real life.
	Social media usage	The media has a very important role in normalizing character assassination in our society. Especially our dramas where they portray women getting abused by a male member of a family daily. Even though they show that working women are willingly involved in inappropriate relationships or are harassed by the hero this kind of drama representation contributes to the negative building of the society.

This research reveals multifaceted themes that shed light on character assassination. The participants shared their experiences and the pervasive influence of character assassination on their lives. These insights are grouped into themes of demographics, causes, consequences, methods, and coping mechanisms.

The demographic data reveals, these young women, primarily students and single, living in various family setups have encountered character assassination. These experiences ranged from those within nuclear families where stability and support were present to those within extended families where chaos prevailed. These circumstances provided a context for understanding how character assassination infiltrates different living environments and impacts individuals' development and social interaction.

The participants explained that character assassination has roots in both the societal and personal spheres. One vital factor they originate was self-interest, where publics use it as an opportunity to type themselves look good by disapproving others. It was observed that this practice constant into maturity, having begun as early as childhood. Their daily routines, social contacts, psychological health, physical draw, and emotional condition were all impacted by the upshots. For instance, continual criticism led to abrupt and abrasive behavior, and physical attractiveness mocking culminated in the need for braces. The inability to establish new relationships was impeded by the fear of being evaluated, indicating a significant impact on social trust and involvement.

The methods through which character assassination is carried involves humor and sarcasm which have become normalized in everyday interactions. It was noted that such behavior has been perpetuated by media and fictional work which ultimately contributes to acceptance of these practices. Coping mechanisms varied from habitual acceptance of this norm to seeking comfort in fictional narratives and social media which also reinforces this behavior.

**Table 2 Rating of theme and subthemes**

Theme	Subthemes	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Demographics	Age (20-25)	5	5	5
	Gender (females)	5	5	5
	Marital status	5	5	5
	Family system	5	4	5
Character assassination causes	Experienced from childhood	5	4	5
	Personal gain	5	5	5
Character assassination consequences	Physical effects	5	5	4
	Personality effected	5	5	5
	Psychological effect	4.5	5	4
	Social effect	5	5	5
	Emotional effect	5	4	4
Character assassination ways	Routine effect	5	5	5
	Humor	5	5	5
	Sarcasm	5	5	5
Coping with character assassination	Habitual	5	5	5
	Fictional work	5	5	4
	Social media usage	5	5	4

The rating of themes and subthemes by three different raters offerings a detailed appraisal of various characteristics interrelated to demographics, character assassination sources and imports, and coping mechanisms. For the demographics theme, all raters reliably rated the subthemes of age (20-25) and gender (females) with a perfect score of 5. Marital status also customary unanimous scores of 5, representative strong agreement. Though, the family procedure subtheme displayed a slight variation, with Rater 2 giving a score of 4, while Raters 1 and 3 rated it 5. In the theme of character assassination roots, the subtheme of practices from childhood was rated 5 by Raters 1 and 3, but Rater 2 gave it a 4, suggesting a minor difference in perceived importance or power. The subtheme of special gain was unvaryingly rated with a perfect score of 5 by all raters. For the penalties of character assassination, the subthemes showed more distinction. Physical effects were rated 5 by Raters 1 and 2, but Rater 3 rated it 4. Similarly, the psychological effect was rated 4.5 by Rater 1, 5 by Rater 2, and 4 by Rater 3, indicating some differences in perception. Personality effects and social effects were consistently rated 5 across all raters. Open effect showed more difference, with Rater 1 giving a 5, and Raters 2 and 3 giving 4. The repetitive result was regularly rated 5 by all raters. In the theme of character assassination ways, both subthemes of humor and cynicism received perfect scores of 5 from all raters, showing strong consensus. Finally, in the theme of coping with character elimination, the subtheme of habitual coping was uniformly rated 5. Fictional work and social media usage, however, showed some variation with Raters 1 and 2 giving them 5, while Rater 3 gave them a 4, indicating slight alterations in perceived effectiveness or relevance. Overall, the ratings climax both areas of strong agreement and minor differences among the raters in evaluating the subthemes.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study examines how character assassination has become more public place and how it affects young girls' result to start socializing in the future. Key takeout from the meetings were character assassination's causes, effects, and systems, as well as coping mechanisms planned to counter its negative things on the lives of those complex.

The applicants, who are mostly young, single women in their 20s and 30s, have a significant impression on the involvements of character assassination because they are inclined, and because of social density and gendered norms, they are more likely to be showing to it, which affects how they perceive themselves and relate with others. Character assassination frequently begins in youthful, according to the study's findings. Keller (2017) found that parents' negative attitudes and actions can have a big impression on kids' dealings and perceptions, which can cause trust matters and worries in kids from an early age. Another important reason is self-interest, which reflects ordered and competitive social buildings and involves advancing one's own public status by disparaging others (Naidu, 2022).

Character assassination has become accepted as a "messed-up norm," according to members, who also acknowledge the role that untrue media and social media have had in this acceptability. Social media makes it possible for rumors, ambiguous information, and pained remarks about specific people to spread quickly, greatly affecting public opinion. People can use this platform to influence public estimation, which is a powerful tool that can be used to destroy someone's status. Social media's reach, speed, anonymity, and aptitude to shape public estimation have made it a dangerous forum for defamation that has a profound impact on many people's lives (FasterCapital, 2024).

Overall, the study emphasizes how character assassination has a common and negative effect on young women's personal dynamics and capacity to form relationships, importance the necessity of cultural reform and the elevation of healthy announcement techniques.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study emphasizes how humor, irony, and media symbol have controlled character assassination and highlights its greatly detrimental effects on young girls' trust, self-esteem, and bulk to build new dealings. These results reveal the grave need for social change to care polite message, create efficient treatments to counter the

widespread problem of charm assassination, and create a more optimistic and healthy atmosphere for young women.

The small sample size may limit the generalizability and applicability to a broader population of females of unlike age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts.

This study examines how women's insights of themselves are exaggerated by the institutionalization of character assassination. It exposes how women affect this phenomenon and the resulting effects on their sense of self-worth, level of self-confidence in other people, and capacity to build new associates. An understanding of the cultural norms and beliefs that contribute to the normalization of character assassination is providing by the research's inclusion of a cultural length, which was carried out in twin cities in Pakistan. This can help with quick treatments tailored to particular cultural frameworks and cross-cultural sympathetic. Through this study, policies can be implied to prevent cyber intimidation, toxic culture in workplace and rule of social media. An insight to these devices can enlighten guidelines directed to withstand online pestering and promote respectful communication.

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