



SCENARIO

SCENARIO

Saara the student journalist

Saara lives in a conservative, deeply religious society, with strict blasphemy laws. She is a journalism student. Through her volunteer work for a progressive student newspaper, she discovered that a professor was demanding sexual favours in exchange for grades. She began documenting students' stories anonymously and managed to interview a staff member at the university's personnel department. Following the interview, word about the coming article began to spread among the staff. Before her article was published, an old post from her Facebook page came to light in which she criticised religious leaders who use religious arguments to justify gender-based violence. This old post together with an accusation that she is an atheist agitator began to be shared among some conservative students at the university. An extremist social media network got hold of the story, shared the accusations and it went viral.

The viral post now included details of the identity and address of Saara's family. Protestors began to gather outside her parents' house and at the University. At the university, a high-profile politician and an extremist preacher held speeches in which they accused her of being an apostate blasphemer and likened her journalism to a disease that is invisibly infecting young people and must be eradicated by whatever means necessary. They accused the University of allowing students to be morally corrupted by allowing the student newspaper to operate independently.

Saara's parents called the police and their religious leader for support. The police came but stood some distance from the house, watching. However, the religious leader gathered a group of other respected local religious leaders who came to talk to the crowds. They attempted to calm the crowds, saying the matter would be fully looked into and that they should not jump to conclusions. The police felt obliged to defend the religious leaders and eventually the crowds dispersed. Her parents were then moved to a safe location by an NGO working on blasphemy issues.

Meanwhile a riot developed at the university and the offices of the student newspaper were burnt down with several people injured. The city police arrested Saara, charging her with blasphemy and disrupting social harmony. Following this, protestors at the university dispersed. The university closed down the student newspaper as its work was leading to public order concerns. No other arrests were made.