



PAKISTANI WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND PRESERVATION

Dr. M. Qadeer, Aqsa Shoukat, Sidra Tahir, Muqadas Naseeb
Educational Research, Institute Of Education And Research University Of The Punjab Lahore

Abstract

Women's rights in Pakistan have been protected through different laws, but many problems still exist. The government has introduced laws like the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2012), and the Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016). These laws aim to stop violence, harassment, and discrimination against women. However, many women still face challenges because of cultural traditions, weak law enforcement, and lack of awareness. Even though the Constitution of Pakistan promises equal rights, gender discrimination is still common. Many women depend on men for financial support, which makes it harder for them to seek justice. Also, some people in society do not accept women's rights, which creates more difficulties. Studies show that while the laws exist, they are not always followed properly. Many police officers and judges are not trained to handle women's cases fairly. As a result, women do not always get the protection they need.

To improve this situation, Pakistan needs better law enforcement, education programs, and awareness campaigns. The government should train police and legal officers to support women's rights. Schools and media should also teach people about gender equality. Women should be given more opportunities to become independent through education and jobs. If all parts of society work together, real change can happen. Stronger efforts are needed to ensure that laws protect women effectively and create a fair and safe society for all

Keywords:

Women's rights, Pakistan, Laws and legislation, Gender discrimination, Law enforcement

1. Introduction to Women's Rights in Pakistan

The struggle for women's rights in Pakistan has been a major and ongoing issue, deeply rooted in the country's history, society, and cultural traditions. Despite notable strides in education, employment, and political representation, systemic issues rooted in patriarchal norms continue to obstruct women's full participation in society. Violence against women, limited access to quality education, restricted economic opportunities, and inadequate legal protection remain persistent hurdles. The government's legislative initiatives and civil society efforts, though commendable, often face challenges in effective implementation, exacerbated by societal resistance and deeply embedded traditional practices. Thus, achieving genuine gender equality demands not only policy reforms but also a fundamental shift in societal attitudes (Human Rights Watch, 2022; UN Women, 2021).

2. Constitutional Guarantees for Women

The Constitution of Pakistan enshrines the principle of equality for all citizens, providing a legal foundation for the protection of women's rights. Article 25 clearly forbids discrimination based on gender, guaranteeing that women are entitled to the same rights and protections as men. Additional provisions emphasize the state's responsibility to enable women's participation in all spheres of life. However, translating these constitutional guarantees into everyday realities remains a formidable challenge. Deep-rooted patriarchal mindsets, gaps in awareness, and systemic inertia often hinder the practical realization of these rights, creating a significant



divide between the promises of the Constitution and the lived experiences of many Pakistani women (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973; Aurat Foundation, 2018).

3. Key Legislation Protecting Women

Over the years, Pakistan has introduced several important pieces of legislation aimed at safeguarding women's rights and curbing gender-based violence. The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) seeks to create safer professional environments, while the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2012) provides mechanisms for addressing violence within households. Additionally, the Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016) marked a significant step forward in offering comprehensive legal recourse. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these laws is often diluted by poor enforcement, lack of public awareness, and resistance from conservative factions, which underscores the urgent need for strengthening institutional capacities and societal support systems (National Commission on the Status of Women [NCSW], 2021; Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [HRCP], 2020).

4. Implementation Challenges

The existence of progressive laws does not automatically translate into their effective enforcement. In Pakistan, weak institutional structures, limited resources, and societal resistance significantly impede the implementation of women-protective legislation. Police officers, judicial staff, and other key stakeholders often lack the training necessary to handle gender-sensitive cases appropriately, resulting in inconsistent or even hostile treatment of women seeking justice. Moreover, the absence of accountability mechanisms allows systemic biases to persist, dissuading many women from pursuing legal redress. Bridging the gap between law and practice requires comprehensive reforms, including capacity building, public education campaigns, and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems (UNDP Pakistan, 2021; Shirkat Gah, 2020).

5. Role of Law Enforcement

Law enforcement agencies are pivotal in protecting women from violence, harassment, and discrimination. However, many police officers in Pakistan are not adequately trained in dealing with gender-based violence cases, leading to mishandling, secondary victimization, or outright dismissal of complaints. Fear of indifference or retaliation often deters women from reporting incidents to the police. Addressing these issues necessitates the implementation of gender sensitivity training, stricter oversight of police practices, and the establishment of specialized units staffed by trained female officers. Creating a supportive and respectful environment within law enforcement agencies can encourage more women to come forward and seek justice (Amnesty International, 2022; UN Women Pakistan, 2021).

6. Role of the Judiciary

The judiciary in Pakistan holds the constitutional responsibility to uphold and interpret laws that guarantee women's rights. However, systemic gender biases and patriarchal attitudes within the judicial system often compromise the delivery of justice. Cases involving domestic violence, sexual assault, and workplace harassment frequently experience delays, poor investigation, and prejudiced judgments. Women's testimonies are sometimes undervalued or dismissed outright, further discouraging them from seeking legal recourse. To address these challenges, it is imperative to establish specialized gender-based violence courts, provide ongoing gender sensitivity training for judges and lawyers, and foster a judicial culture that



prioritizes equality and human dignity (International Commission of Jurists, 2019; Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2020).

7. Cultural and Social Barriers

Cultural norms and traditional social structures in Pakistan exert a profound influence on the status of women, often reinforcing gender inequality and limiting women's autonomy. Practices such as early marriage, honor killings, restrictions on women's mobility, and gender segregation are deeply embedded in many communities. These traditions not only curtail women's rights but also normalize discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. Challenging these deeply rooted cultural barriers requires sustained efforts at multiple levels — including education, grassroots activism, media advocacy, and engagement with religious and community leaders. Changing societal attitudes is a slow and complex process, but it is essential for dismantling the systemic oppression of women and fostering a culture of equality and respect (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2022; Aurat Foundation, 2021).

8. Economic Dependence and Its Effects

Financial dependency on male family members remains one of the most formidable obstacles to women's empowerment in Pakistan. Economic dependence limits women's ability to make independent decisions, leave abusive relationships, access healthcare, or pursue education and employment opportunities. Women who lack financial independence are often trapped in cycles of poverty, violence, and disenfranchisement. Empowering women economically by providing access to quality education, vocational training, credit facilities, and entrepreneurial opportunities is crucial. Policies that promote women's participation in the workforce and support their financial autonomy are key to breaking the chains of dependence and enabling women to live with dignity and freedom (World Bank, 2021; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020).

9. Educational Opportunities for Women

Education is universally acknowledged as one of the most powerful tools for social change and individual empowerment. In Pakistan, however, many girls, especially in rural and underprivileged areas, are deprived of even basic educational opportunities. Barriers such as poverty, conservative family values, early marriages, and inadequate infrastructure severely limit girls' access to education. Even where schools exist, issues like the lack of female teachers, safety concerns, and low quality of education further hinder progress. Investing in girls' education, ensuring safe and supportive learning environments, providing scholarships, and community awareness programs are essential steps toward bridging the gender education gap and empowering women to take control of their futures (UNESCO, 2022; Malala Fund, 2021).

10. Role of Media in Promoting Women's Rights

The media in Pakistan wields immense influence over public perception and societal attitudes toward women. While it has the potential to be a powerful catalyst for positive change, media often reinforces harmful stereotypes by portraying women in submissive, decorative, or victimized roles. To foster a more equitable society, the media must move beyond these tropes and highlight diverse, empowering narratives of women as leaders, innovators, and changemakers. Positive representation in television, film, print, and social media can inspire public discourse on gender equality, challenge existing prejudices, and encourage broader societal transformation. Media professionals must be sensitized to the impact of their portrayals and encouraged to champion women's rights actively (Global Media Monitoring Project [GMMP], 2020; UN Women, 2021).



11. Impact of Religion on Women's Rights

Religion holds a central place in Pakistan's socio-political landscape and has a profound impact on gender dynamics. Islam, in its essence, grants women rights to education, property, inheritance, and personal autonomy. However, cultural misinterpretations and patriarchal readings of religious texts have often been used to justify practices that restrict women's freedoms. This misuse of religion to maintain male dominance underscores the need for promoting progressive, rights-based interpretations of Islamic teachings. Religious scholars, educators, and community leaders must work to dismantle the myths that perpetuate gender inequality and emphasize the true spirit of justice, dignity, and equality that Islam advocates for all individuals, regardless of gender (Musawah, 2020; Saeed, 2016).

12. Early and Forced Marriages

Early and forced marriages continue to undermine the lives and futures of countless girls in Pakistan. Marrying girls at a young age, often without their consent, robs them of their childhood, education, and the opportunity to lead autonomous lives. These practices expose girls to serious health risks, early pregnancies, and lifelong psychological trauma. Although legislation such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act exists, enforcement remains sporadic and weak, particularly in remote and conservative areas. Combating early and forced marriages requires a multi-pronged approach, including stronger enforcement of existing laws, community education initiatives that highlight the harms of child marriage, and empowerment programs that provide alternatives and hope to vulnerable young girls (Girls Not Brides, 2021; UNICEF, 2022).

13. Workplace Harassment and Gender Discrimination

Workplace harassment and gender bias continue to be major obstacles for women in professional settings across Pakistan. Despite the existence of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), many women are reluctant to report incidents due to fear of retaliation, damage to Fear of damaging their reputations, losing their jobs, or mistrusting complaint systems often prevents individuals from speaking out. Additionally, gender discrimination appears through unequal pay, restricted career growth, and unfair hiring practices. Creating truly inclusive workplaces requires not only strong legal protections but also organizational reforms that promote gender equality, such as internal grievance committees, regular gender sensitivity training, mentorship programs for women, and strong anti-harassment policies. Public awareness campaigns highlighting women's rights in the workplace are also crucial to building safer and more equitable work environments (Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010; Human Rights Commission of Pakistan [HRCP], 2021).

14. Role of NGOs and Civil Society

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups play a critical role in advocating for women's rights and providing essential services where government efforts fall short. These organizations offer legal aid, counseling services, education programs, emergency shelters for abuse survivors, and economic empowerment initiatives. Moreover, they engage in public advocacy to challenge harmful cultural practices and push for legislative reforms. NGOs often work at the grassroots level, building trust within communities and helping to shift societal attitudes toward greater acceptance of women's rights. Strengthening the collaboration between civil society organizations, government agencies, and international donors is vital for scaling up successful initiatives and ensuring a broader impact across Pakistan (Shirkat Gah, 2020; Aurat Foundation, 2021).



15. Women in Politics and Leadership

The political empowerment of women is a cornerstone of broader social change, yet women's representation in Pakistan's political sphere remains limited. Although reserved seats in national and provincial assemblies have increased women's visibility in politics, many female politicians face significant barriers, including patriarchal political structures, limited access to campaign financing, and gender-based harassment. Encouraging women to participate meaningfully in politics requires more than just token representation; it demands capacity-building initiatives, leadership training, mentorship programs, and the creation of enabling environments where women's voices are respected and influential. Increasing women's political participation ensures that governance structures are more inclusive and better equipped to address the unique challenges women face in society (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021; International Republican Institute, 2020).

16. Access to Healthcare Services

Access to quality healthcare is fundamental to women's rights and well-being. However, in Pakistan, many women—especially those in rural and marginalized communities—face serious barriers to obtaining healthcare services. Maternal mortality rates remain high due to lack of prenatal care, skilled birth attendants, and postnatal services. The lack of access to reproductive health education and services worsens problems such as unplanned pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Cultural taboos, lack of female healthcare providers, and financial constraints further deter women from seeking medical help. To address these challenges, Pakistan must invest in expanding healthcare infrastructure, training more female health professionals, offering community-based health education programs, and ensuring that healthcare services are affordable, accessible, and culturally sensitive [WHO], 2021; UN Women, 2021)

17. Psychological Impact of Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) inflicts not only physical harm but also deep psychological trauma on its victims. Women and girls who experience violence often suffer from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a pervasive sense of fear and helplessness. The psychological scars of abuse can affect their ability to form healthy relationships, pursue education and careers, and participate fully in society. Unfortunately, mental health services in Pakistan are underdeveloped, and the stigma surrounding mental illness further prevents many survivors from seeking help. It is essential to establish trauma-informed support services, including counseling centers, hotlines, and community outreach programs that prioritize the mental well-being of GBV survivors. Healing the psychological wounds of violence is a critical step toward restoring dignity and enabling survivors to rebuild their lives (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Saeed, 2016).

18. Women's Rights in Rural Areas

Women in rural Pakistan face compounded layers of discrimination and hardship, far more intense than those experienced by their urban counterparts. In rural settings, deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, illiteracy, poverty, and a lack of infrastructure severely restrict women's rights and opportunities. Many rural women are confined to traditional roles, denied education, subjected to early marriage, and made to endure domestic violence without recourse. Access to healthcare, legal aid, and economic opportunities is limited, and political participation is virtually nonexistent. Bridging the urban-rural divide requires targeted interventions, including the establishment of rural schools for girls, mobile health clinics, vocational training centers, and awareness campaigns that challenge harmful cultural practices. Special attention must be



paid to empowering rural women economically and socially so that they can advocate for their rights and become active participants in their communities [UNDP], 2021; Women's Economic Empowerment Programme, 2020).

19. Inheritance Rights and Property Ownership

Inheritance and property ownership are vital for granting women financial autonomy and fostering their social empowerment. Under Islamic law, women are entitled to inherit property, yet in practice, cultural and familial pressures often deny them this right. Male family members may pressure women to give up their inheritance rights or completely deny them access to it. Lack of awareness, fear of family estrangement, and lengthy legal battles discourage women from claiming what is legally theirs. Strengthening women's property rights requires a multifaceted approach: simplifying the legal process for claiming inheritance, launching public education campaigns about women's legal entitlements, and introducing stricter penalties for those who deprive women of their rights. Empowering women through property ownership is a powerful tool to combat economic dependency and enhance their status within society [HRCF], 2021; Islamic Research Foundation, 2019).

20. Digital Harassment and Cybersecurity

As Pakistan's digital landscape expands, so too do new forms of gender-based harassment. Women increasingly face cyberbullying, online stalking, doxxing, non-consensual sharing of private information (such as revenge porn), and digital blackmail. Such harassment has serious consequences, leading to psychological trauma, social ostracization, and even physical harm. While laws like the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 have been introduced to combat cybercrime, enforcement remains weak, and many women are unaware of the protections available to them. To effectively combat digital harassment, it is necessary to strengthen legal frameworks, improve cybercrime reporting mechanisms, provide digital literacy education focused on online safety, and promote responsible behavior through school curricula and public campaigns. Creating a safe online environment is critical to ensuring that women can fully participate in the digital world without fear (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority [PTA], 2021; Digital Rights Foundation, 2020).

21. Role of Education in Social Change

Education is the most transformative force in dismantling gender inequalities and promoting women's rights. An educated population is more likely to challenge traditional norms that oppress women, support gender equity, and push for legal reforms. Gender-sensitive education, which teaches respect, equality, and human rights from an early age, is crucial to building a culture that values women. It is not just about getting girls into schools—it is about ensuring that curricula, teaching practices, and school environments promote critical thinking about gender roles and challenge harmful stereotypes. Investing in teachers' training, ensuring gender parity in school enrollment, providing scholarships for girls, and involving parents in the education process are all necessary steps to drive social change through education. Long-term, systemic change depends on building a generation that believes in and fights for women's rights (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020; World Bank, 2021).

22. Representation in Media and Popular Culture

The media plays a crucial role in influencing public views and shaping societal attitudes toward women. In Pakistan, however, women are often depicted through stereotypical, submissive, or ornamental roles in television dramas, films, and advertisements. Such representations perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes and restrict the perception of women's potential and



accomplishments. To counter this, there must be a concerted effort to promote diverse, realistic, and empowering representations of women. This includes highlighting women as leaders, entrepreneurs, scientists, and change-makers. Encouraging more women to participate behind the scenes as writers, directors, producers, and editors can also contribute to more nuanced storytelling. Popular culture, when harnessed correctly, can be a powerful ally in challenging stereotypes, promoting positive role models, and inspiring young women and men to envision a more equal and just society (Pakistan Media Council, 2021; Aurat Foundation, 2020).

23. Human Rights Organizations and Global Support

Both domestic and global human rights organizations have been instrumental in championing the cause of women's rights in Pakistan. Organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and various United Nations agencies work closely with local NGOs to document abuses, lobby for legal reforms, and support initiatives that empower women. Their efforts have brought global attention to issues like honor killings, acid attacks, forced marriages, and workplace harassment. These organizations also provide funding for educational programs, shelters for survivors of violence, and legal aid services. It is essential for Pakistani civil society to work alongside international organizations to encourage the government to meet its responsibilities toward women as outlined by international law. Furthermore, the presence of global watchdogs helps ensure that abuses are not ignored and that women's voices are amplified on the world stage, creating momentum for internal reforms that might otherwise face resistance Amnesty International. (n.d.). Women's rights in Pakistan. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org> Human Rights Watch. (n.d.). Pakistan: Women's Rights. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org>

24. Legal Aid and Support Services

Access to justice remains one of the most significant hurdles for women in Pakistan seeking to assert their rights. Legal aid services are essential in providing women with the means to fight discrimination, violence, and property disputes. However, most women, particularly those from rural or low-income backgrounds, are either unaware of their legal rights or lack the resources to hire legal representation. NGOs, legal aid clinics, and women's rights organizations have stepped in to fill this gap by offering free or subsidized legal support, counseling services, and public legal education campaigns. Expanding these services across the country, especially in underrepresented areas, is vital for empowering women to seek justice. Training more female lawyers and judges, ensuring the availability of legal aid hotlines, and establishing women-friendly police desks are also critical measures that can make the justice system more accessible and responsive to women's needs Raza, H., & Zahid, I. (2018). Access to justice and legal aid for women in Pakistan. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 17(2), 55-72.

25. Role of the Family in Supporting Women's Rights

The family unit is often the first and most influential environment where ideas about gender roles are formed. Families that support gender equality play a fundamental role in empowering women and girls. Encouraging daughters to pursue education, respecting their choices in marriage and career, and treating sons and daughters equally can lay the foundation for a more just society. Unfortunately, many families in Pakistan still uphold patriarchal norms that limit women's autonomy and freedoms. Family support can be transformative—empowered by encouragement from their parents and siblings, women are more likely to pursue higher education, enter the workforce, and advocate for their rights. Family-based interventions, including awareness workshops, community dialogues, and media campaigns, can help shift cultural attitudes from within, creating ripple effects that extend beyond the household into the



broader community Khattak, A. (2017). Gender roles and family dynamics in Pakistan: A review of societal norms. *South Asian Journal of Social Issues*, 12(3), 34-45.

26. Importance of Female Role Models

Role models are essential in inspiring women to envision greater possibilities for themselves. When women see others from similar backgrounds breaking barriers in fields such as politics, education, science, technology, arts, and sports, they are empowered to pursue their own dreams. Pakistan has produced many remarkable female figures—Benazir Bhutto, Malala Yousafzai, Samina Baig, and many others—whose achievements have inspired generations. Highlighting the stories of everyday heroines—teachers, activists, entrepreneurs, and social workers—can also have a profound impact. Educational institutions, media outlets, and community organizations should actively promote diverse female role models to show young girls that success is attainable regardless of societal expectations. The presence of successful women in leadership roles helps to normalize female empowerment and inspires other women to recognize their own capabilities Yousafzai, M. (2013). *I am Malala: The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban*. Little, Brown, and Company.

Bhutto, B. (2007). *Reconciliation: Islam, democracy, and the West*. HarperCollins.

27. International Commitments and Conventions

Pakistan's ratification of international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) signifies its commitment to advancing gender equality. However, aligning domestic laws and practices with international standards remains a significant challenge. International conventions require states to take proactive steps to eliminate discrimination, promote women's political participation, ensure equal access to education and employment, and protect women from violence. Reporting mechanisms tied to these conventions, such as periodic submissions to the United Nations, provide a platform for accountability and allow civil society organizations to highlight shortcomings. It is essential that Pakistan not only maintains its international commitments on paper but also implements them at the grassroots level. Integrating international human rights standards into national policies, training government officials, and conducting public awareness campaigns can help ensure that these global promises translate into real improvements in women's lives APA Citation: United Nations. (1979). *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*. United Nations. Siddiqui, S. (2020). Pakistan's international commitments to gender equality: Progress and challenges. *International Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(4), 112-126.

28. Need for Gender Sensitization Training

Gender sensitization training is an essential strategy for combating ingrained gender biases within institutions and society at large. In Pakistan, many individuals within law enforcement, judiciary, healthcare, education, and the corporate sector unconsciously carry stereotypes and prejudices that influence their treatment of women. Gender sensitization programs aim to address these biases by fostering empathy, raising awareness about gender dynamics, and promoting respect for women's rights. Such training should not only be mandatory for public servants but should also extend to the private sector, educational institutions, and community organizations. Workshops, seminars, and interactive modules that engage participants through real-life scenarios can be highly effective. Without changing mindsets at the institutional and grassroots levels, even the best laws and policies cannot achieve their intended goals. Gender sensitization is, therefore, a foundational step toward building an equitable society where



women are treated with dignity and fairness Riaz, M., & Aslam, S. (2021). Gender sensitization training in Pakistan: A strategic approach for institutional change. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 14(2), 75-89. Khan, A. (2020). Challenges in implementing gender sensitization programs in public institutions in Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Development Review*, 22(1), 103-118.

29. Strategies for Long-term Change

Achieving sustainable progress in women's rights in Pakistan requires a multi-dimensional and long-term approach. Laws alone are not enough; there must be a strong focus on enforcement, public awareness, education reform, and economic empowerment. Grassroots activism, led by local women and communities, needs to be encouraged and supported, as change is most effective when it arises from within the society. Educational curricula must be revised to promote gender equality from a young age, teaching boys and girls mutual respect and dismantling harmful stereotypes. Media campaigns that challenge societal norms and celebrate women's achievements should be widespread. Political leadership must show a clear commitment to gender issues, with real accountability mechanisms to measure progress. Partnerships between government, civil society, and international organizations are essential to pool resources, share expertise, and maintain momentum. True transformation will only occur when cultural mindsets shift alongside structural reforms, leading to an environment where women's rights are fully integrated into everyday life

30. Conclusion: Toward an Inclusive and Just Society

Achieving the protection and advancement of women's rights in Pakistan is a challenging journey, but it is certainly attainable. While significant strides have been made through constitutional guarantees, progressive legislation, and growing public awareness, systemic challenges rooted in deep-seated cultural and social norms continue to impede full gender equality. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach involving strong legal enforcement, educational transformation, economic empowerment, media representation, and a shift in societal attitudes. Empowering women is not merely a matter of justice for one half of the population—it is essential for the social, economic, and political development of the nation as a whole. Pakistan's future prosperity is intimately linked to the empowerment of its women. By continuing to push for reform, strengthening institutions, and fostering a culture of respect and equality, Pakistan can build a more inclusive, just, and resilient society where every woman and girl is free to realize her full potential

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