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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN: CULTURAL, LEGAL, AND POLICY RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pressing issue in Pakistan, deeply rooted in institutions, laws, and culture. Despite legislative efforts, honor killings, domestic abuse, and other forms of GBV continue to pose significant challenges. This paper seeks to examine Pakistan's approach to GBV from cultural, legal, and governmental standpoints, and provide recommendations for improvement. The research employs a mixed-methods strategy, incorporating qualitative interviews with 20 women from different regions (Sindh, KPK, Punjab, and Balochistan) and secondary data analysis from national databases, government records, and NGO reports. It sheds light on cultural norms that tolerate violence, underreporting of GBV, and inadequate law enforcement. It underscores the importance of comprehensive legislative changes, improved enforcement strategies, and community-based initiatives to support victims and combat GBV. The findings indicate a gap between legislative advancements and enforcement deficiencies, as well as existing cultural barriers inhibiting justice. The study suggests dismantling entrenched structures that perpetuate violence against women, reassessing current laws, and addressing discriminatory attitudes. This

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information is intended to assist scholars, activists, and policymakers in creating a fairer and more just society.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Legal Reforms

INTRODUCTION

GBV, additionally referred to as gender-primarily based violence, is a commonplace hassle in Pakistan, because of cultural norms, structures of patriarchy, and structural inequities. notwithstanding the appearance of legislative structures and insurance tasks centered on tackling this problem, gender-based violence remains an extremely good obstacle. In line with the worldwide economic speak board, Pakistan ranks zero.33 amongst worldwide places with terrible efforts to combat violence in opposition to women or gender-based overall violence. america's normal usual performance in the 2020 Gender Parity document is inadequate, evident in its rating of 151 out of 153 in the most modern-day gender index (Achakzai, 2019). studies imply that ninety percent of Pakistani women have encountered sexual violence sooner or later in their lives (Kazi, 2017), and there are warning signs that the real number of violent incidents is probably underreported. In Pakistan's predominantly male-dominated society, violence in opposition to women, particularly in instances of home abuse, is regularly no longer recognized as a violent act, fundamental to underreporting. studies confirm that violence in the direction of girls in Pakistan is commonplace and has long been a societal and public coverage issue, mainly impacting ladies and ladies.. Data indicates that law enforcement agencies have faced challenges in addressing crimes against women due to gender bias. This study highlights the importance of addressing discriminatory and gender-biased attitudes and reassessing existing laws. It is essential to dismantle traditional tribal institutions and cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women.

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution, which is outlined in Articles 8–28 and 29–40, respectively, protects human rights through the Principles of Policy and Fundamental Rights. Human rights observance in Pakistan has been accorded the proper priority by the government, which is guided by its vision for 2025 and its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN about vulnerable groups of society. Pakistan has passed laws to shield women against acid assaults, forced marriages, sexual harassment, denial of inheritance, and "honor killings" at both the federal and provincial levels. The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) underwent various revisions in 2004. The National Commission on the Status of Women was established by the Federal Government under the National Commission on the Status of Women Act 2012 in addition to pertinent federal laws. Its

purpose is to oversee and assist in the implementation of laws for the safety of women. All Pakistani residents, irrespective of gender, are guaranteed identical rights below the u. s. a .'s constitution. Article 34 requires the state to guarantee girls's complete involvement in all aspects of lifestyles, while Article 25 ensures equality before the law. but, societal and cultural conventions regularly make it hard to put those constitutional principles into exercise. In Pakistan's criminal history, the Safety of

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women (Criminal Legal Guidelines Amendment) Act, of 2006, which sought to regulate legal guidelines that discriminated against girls, became a landmark achievement. It tackled topics like pressured marriages, honor killings, and the exploitation of women, making these transgressions illegal. but even after it became surpassed, there's nevertheless a loss of enforcement and a continual obstruction of justice via cultural obstacles. To further gender equality and ladies's empowerment in Pakistan, the country wide policy for improvement and Empowerment of women become developed in 2002. The strategy positioned a strong emphasis on the need to deal with gender-based violence (GBV) by way of manner of public attention campaigns, legislative modifications, and victim support applications. The countrywide coverage for development and Empowerment of ladies (2002) states that although the policy has little impact in rural and conservative areas, its implementation has been unequal regardless of its dreams. The intention of the domestic Violence (Prevention and safety) Act of 2012 is to defend women against all varieties of home abuse, including monetary, emotional, psychological, and physical assault. The Act mandates the status quo of protection committees and shelters for victims. notwithstanding these measures, women are often discouraged from searching for assistance because of a lack of information and the social stigma attached to reporting domestic abuse (domestic Violence (Prevention and protection Act, 2012).

OBJECTIVE:

To examine Pakistan's cultural, governmental, and policy reactions to gender-based violence (GBV)

To make recommendations for community-based initiatives, legislative changes, and policy enhancements to strengthen victim protection and lower GBV in Pakistan

SIGNIFICANCE

The examined article "Gender-precise Aggression in Pakistan: lifestyle, regulation, and Policy Reaction" is important thanks to the compelling want to deal with the difficulty, which has had a substantial impact on the lives of marginalized individuals, particularly girls, at numerous factors in history. Gender-primarily based violence is firmly hooked up in society and conventional patriarchal standards, causing serious bodily and intellectual trauma while also keeping gender inequality with the aid of suppressing sufferers and denying them admission to the felony gadget. regardless of the passage of a law like as the Safety of Women's Rights Act and the Residence Rule Act, Pakistan keeps to battle with issues of legitimacy and misuse, specifically when conventional practices meet with current guidelines. To devise effective interventions to safeguard victims, address societal issues, and foster a more just and fair society, researchers, policymakers, and activists need to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural, legal, and policy aspects surrounding this issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Since most women suffer from gender-based violence during wars only for being "women or feminine," the UN claims that the terms violence against women (VAW) and gender- based violence (GBV) are interchangeable. Domestic violence is the most

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common type of highly gendered insecurity that women face daily. This contentious term describes a pervasive, well-discussed, and frequently disregarded kind of violence against women. There has been a noticeable rise in the number of reported cases of violence against women in COVID-19. Pakistani media reported a rise in cases after the closure in April 2020. Officials have reported an "over 25 percent escalation in domestic violence cases against women"; in the Punjab province alone, there were over 3,217 cases in the most recent quarter. Among the various forms of gender-based violence, such as "physical, emotional, and sexual violence," "marital control," and "karo kari," domestic violence is the most common. According to the women's rights organization Aurat Foundation, between 70% and 90% of Pakistani women claim to have suffered domestic violence at some point in their lives (Aurat Foundation, 2015). By the end of

2019, 108 women have been killed for the sake of honor, or Karo Kari, according to police records (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2020). Although there has always been violence against women in Pakistani society, this increase in violence is not a recent occurrence. It often remains unreported and unnoticed due to Pakistan's patriarchal society and sociocultural backdrop. For example, reports have indicated a significant increase in VAW cases from 2008 to 2014. The data indicates that the number of VAW occurrences increased by 28% between 2013 and 2014. The number of instances varied from 2008 to 2012; in 2011, there were 8,539 more cases than in 2012, but in 2012, only 7,516 cases were reported (Aurat Foundation, 2015). The legal systems' perspective of the Upper Sindhi custom of karo kari is one of various perspectives on this practice. She draws attention to how modern law implements outdated practices. Shah looks at the Sindh Frontier Regulation of 1872, as well as passages from Qisas and Diyat legislation that have been included in the Pakistan Penal Code. He also reviews various legal cases, press reports, and police activities from the perspective of the law (Shah, 2016). She thinks that because relatives have a significant amount of legal authority, the authority of the judicial system is decreased (Shah, 2016). It is typical for offenders to be freed from custody during legal procedures. Shah observes that "the low number of convictions is itself a product of the law and is not due to problems in the law" (Shah, 2016). She argues that there are legal gaps that allow these kinds of crimes because the killings take place within the family and are committed by spouses or men connected to the husbands. Shah concludes that the family's legal strength enables them to pardon offenders (Shah, 2016). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out in Punjab by Tarar et al. (2017) to look into cases of direct, indirect, and cultural violence against women. The main conclusion drawn by Tarar et al. (2017) is that most events remain unreported due to the perception that they are "private matters." The authors also emphasize the importance of family honor over case reporting and the existence of gender prejudice in the criminal justice system. Tarar et al.'s unique accounts of victims being raped and tortured at police stations (Tarar et al., 2017) exacerbate the victims' reluctance to talk up. a few of the worldwide conventions and legal guidelines they take a look at are the Hudood Ordinance of 1979, the safety of women (criminal laws change)

Act2006, the criminal regulation (amendment) Act 2010 on sexual harassment, the Guardians and Wards Act 1890, and the safety against Sexual Harassment at place of

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business Act 2009

The Pakistani authorities have spoken back to GBV in recent years with an expansion of techniques, along with the status quo of groups dedicated to defensive women's rights and legislative projects. organizations consisting of the Countrywide Commission on the Repute of Girls (NCSW) and the Punjab Commission on the Reputation of Ladies (PCSW) are examples of those that monitor and promote gender equality (Samiuddin & Durrani, 2020). essential milestones inside the records of policy are the Safety Towards Harassment of Women at the Place of Business Act 2010 and the Anti-Rape Ordinance 2020. those legislative moves are seeking to make sure that individuals who conduct violent crimes are held responsible and to improve the protection of girls' surroundings. however, the effectiveness of those laws is now and again hampered by a loss of funding, a lackluster enforcement system, and the long-lasting social norms that condone gender-based total violence (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Pakistani gender-based violence is a complicated issue that calls for all-encompassing solutions that recollect its coverage, cultural, and legal aspects. The literature on the problem emphasizes this. there is nonetheless extra to be performed to make sure that these measures are efficiently implemented and that social evaluations around GBV are transformed, even though the felony and coverage panorama has significantly improved. best via steady efforts from several sectors will Pakistan be able to make meaningful progress within the battle in opposition to gender- primarily based violence.

METHODOLOGY

A multimodal strategy incorporating qualitative as well as quantitative techniques is required to examine gender-based assault (GBV) in Pakistan, with a focus on cultural, legal, and legislative solutions.

Research Design

The study took a blended strategy studies method, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to gain insight into both men's and women's experiences as well as broader cultural patterns in Pakistan, resulting in a thorough knowledge of gender-based violence. The technique involved conducting high-intensity interviews and analyzing existing statistics to determine the superiority of gender-based total violence, identifying patterns and links, and assessing the success of policy and penal actions. the primary goal of the research is to analyze the different forms and tiers of gender-based violence. To collect statistics on violence in opposition to women, the researchers performed in-depth, open-ended interviews with 20 ladies through the use of purposive sampling. finding girls willing to proportion their reviews of violence became challenging. Researchers additionally sought preliminary data and conclusions from reviews and case studies by collaborating with civil society organizations already running on gender-based violence. To conduct informal interviews, researchers sought permission from women, ensuring that their identities and details, including their names, remained confidential. The women who participated in the study were from Balochistan, Punjab, KPK, and Sindh. Among them, 15 women had to discontinue their education after completing the tenth grade

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due to marriage, while two dropped out of elementary school and three completed their educations up to the fifth grade. Fourteen of the women were married within and outside of their caste or clan, with some having arranged marriages while others chose to marry for love or through a matchmaker. Furthermore, four divorced women were living with their parents. In addition to the in-depth interviews, random sampling was also used to collect secondary data, and statistical analysis of data from government reports, NGO research, and national databases was conducted.

Population and Sampling Techniques

The study's target audience consists of women from a variety of Pakistani regions where non- governmental organizations actively promote and defend human rights across the country. Through the use of deliberate sampling, people with relevant experiences and knowledge of GBV in Pakistan were chosen. Among the victims, twenty ladies were selected from across Pakistan who were severely attacked.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Statistical Analysis:

Table 1: Cultural, legal, and policy aspects of violence against women in Pakistan

Aspect	Details
Cultural Context	
Prevalence of Violence	28% of young women have experienced physical violence in their lives. -6% have been assaulted sexually. 34% of married women report suffering domestic abuse.
Societal Norms	- Patriarchal society raises deteriorating norms and gender labels. - Limits women's movement and access to resources.
Child Marriage	- 18% of girls aged 20-24 were married before age 18. - 3.6% were married before age 15.
Legal Framework	
Legislative Measures	Although there are laws against "honor" crimes, domestic abuse, and sexual harassment, they are not strictly enforced.

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GBV Courts	women's police stations and specialized GBV courts have been established, enforcement issues still exist.
Policy Responses	
Government Projects	- National Plan of Action for gender equality. - Establishment of the National Gender Data Portal for data collection.
UNFPA's Role	Assists in building institutional capabilities to stop and address gender- based violence. Emphasize the development of capability and policy advocacy.

The table offers an inclusive assessment of gender-based total violence (GBV) in Pakistan, inclusive of details on how coverage, legal, and cultural elements affect the difficulty. It addresses the effect of cultural norms that perpetuate patriarchal beliefs and restrict ladies' rights, shedding mild on the superiority of violence. The facts indicate that 28% of girls among the while of 15 forty-nine have encountered physical abuse, even as 6% had been sufferers of sexual violence. The desk outlines the existing felony framework, spotting the inadequacies in enforcing laws towards domestic violence and "honor" crimes. It also discusses the established order of ladies' police stations and committed GBV courts geared toward enhancing prison remedies. The government's policy tasks, along with the countrywide course of action for gender equality and the national Gender Data Portal, also are highlighted. The desk emphasizes the effect of statistics gaps on powerful policymaking and recognizes the guidance of the United Countries Populace Fund (UNFPA) in these efforts. overall, it efficiently captures the complex dynamics surrounding gender-based total violence (GBV) in Pakistan, emphasizing the progress made and the continuing hurdles that demand attention.

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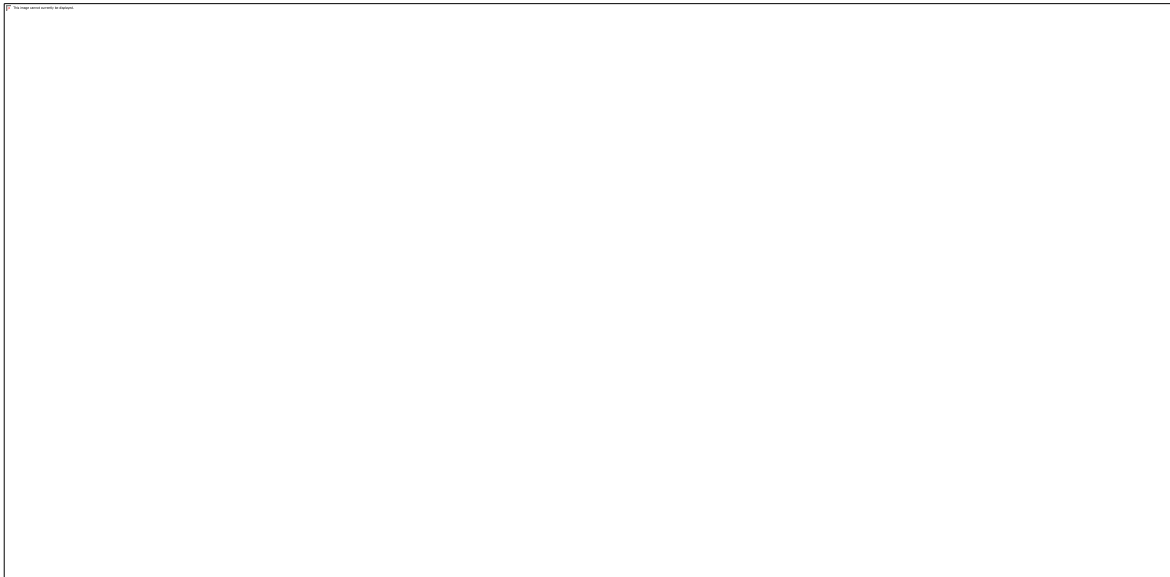


Figure 1: A bar graph depicts the incidence of assault and marriage to children amongst women in Pakistan.

Table 2: secondary data on gender-based violence (GBV) in Pakistan sourced from NGOs and government platforms:

	Details	source
Total		The
Reported	2023: Approx. 25,935	News
GBV Cases	cases.	
(2022-2024)	2022: 63,367 cases.	
Types of	domestic violence, honor killings,	Aurat Foundation,
GBV	forced marriages, acid attacks, and workplace harassment.	Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)
Regional	Punjab: Highest cases, followed by	HRCP, Punjab

Distribution

Legal and Policy Interventions

Most Common Crimes

Impact on Women

Sindh, KPK, Balochistan, and Islamabad

Punjab accounts for over 85% of total cases.

Although numerous regulations in Pakistan combat GBV, enforcement is still lax.

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There is inadequate implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, of 2012.

Kidnapping, rape, domestic violence, acid attacks, and honor killings.

Physical, psychological, and emotional harm; limited access to justice; societal stigmatization

Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW)

Ministry of Human Rights, Aurat Foundation

Ministry of Human Rights, NGOs like WAR (War Against Rape)

NGOs like Rozan, Human Rights Watch

NGO

Involvement

NGOs are essential for lobbying, legal support, and providing refuge for survivors; notable ones are WAR, Rozan, and Aurat Foundation.

Aurat Foundation, WAR, Rozan

In 2023, there were around 25,935 reported cases, while over 63,000 cases were documented in 2022, signaling ongoing concern about the high number of GBV infections. Initial findings for 2024 suggest that the situation remains troubling. GBV in Pakistan covers various forms of abuse, including honor killings, forced marriages, acid attacks, domestic violence, and workplace harassment, as reported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Aurat Foundation and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). Punjab accounts for over 85% of cases in the country, with Sindh, Balochistan, Islamabad, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) following. Despite strong legislation like the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2012, many crimes go unreported due to social stigma and legal barriers. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Rozan, WAR (War Against Rape), and the Aurat Foundation are at the forefront of aiding, legal support, and refuge to survivors.

Qualitative Analysis:

Table 3: analysis of interview data on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) based on the responses from 20 women in Pakistan

Theme	Key Findings	Key Insights
Upbringing	Backgrounds are varied with different educational levels. The majority finished their schooling, while a few left early. Married range from being divorced, and entering arranged marriages, to choosing their partners.	The high prevalence of sexual assault based on gender in Pakistan suggests deeply established social and cultural values that support assault on women, irrespective of educational achievement or

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		marital status.
Experience with Violence	Physical abuse, psychic trauma, sexual assault, and controlling behaviors were all instances of violence. - Violence typically begins shortly after marriage. - Most of the offenders were in-laws or spouses.	Domestic violence is common in Pakistan, especially when conducted by close relatives, showing the hierarchical structures that dominate many homes and demonstrating a lack of assistance for victims.
Impact of Violence	significant influences on bodily as well as intellectual health, resulting in anxiety and sadness. Alteration of activities, impacting social and professional ties. - A sense of loneliness and strained ties to daily family.	GBV has crippling repercussions on women's health and wellbeing that go beyond the immediate physical suffering social isolation worsens these impacts, lowering women's general standard of life and ability to fully engage in society.
Legal and Social Support	I question the efficacy of legislative safeguards against gender-based violence. In light of the threat of punishment, disclosing an attack is sometimes the only way to proceed. Legal action frequently produced insufficient and delayed replies.	The difference between the presence and execution of legal frameworks impedes justice, and public distrust of legal institutions emphasizes the need for reforms that render the process more adaptable and accessible.

CONCLUSION

To tackle the intricate problem of violence against women in Pakistan, there is a need for a comprehensive strategy that encompasses constitutional, sociological, and administrative aspects. Despite significant improvements in legislation and procedures, further action is necessary to support law enforcement, safeguard victims, and shape public perception. working collectively with governments, NGOs, and nearby groups is crucial for eradicating gender-based violence and fostering a more equitable and strong society. Pakistan faces an enormous undertaking regarding violence against girls and women, exacerbated by numerous political, felony, and cultural effects. Acts of honor-

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based violence, home abuse, and sexual harassment stem from entrenched patriarchal values and inflexible societal norms that regularly cause harmful attitudes and behaviors toward women. Despite having laws consisting of the Domestic Violence Act and the Protection Against Harassment of Girls at the Place of Job Act in location, the inconsistent enforcement of those provisions is due to societal attitudes and insufficient implementation mechanisms. Despite developments in policymaking, there are nevertheless inefficiencies in defensive sufferers and insufficient punishment for perpetrators. The convergence of cultural biases and deficiencies in the justice machine highlights the importance of a holistic response that consists of public training, substantial legislative reforms, and the breakdown of institutional practices that perpetuate violence. To effectively cope with gender-based violence, Pakistan needs a complete approach that considers cultural, felony, and governmental factors. To manage cultural attitudes, effective enforcement, and public consciousness activities are required, as is the strengthening of prison systems. It's far vital to bolster survivors' assistance networks, which consist of on-web page online jails and healthcare picks. selling gender equality in companies may additionally result in cultural norms that abhor violence. To make Pakistan's surroundings safer and fairer for women, civil society, governments, and grassroots groups have to collaborate.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Provide specialized schooling for regulation enforcement and judicial personnel on coping with GBV instances professionally and sensitively.

Establish processes to ensure consistency and fairness in the dealing with and investigation of GBV cases.

Initiate countrywide focus campaigns to teach the public approximately GBV, its impact, and the rights of survivors.

Include gender equality and anti-violence schooling into college curriculums to task and exchange cultural ideals.

Interact with nearby and non-secular governments in advocating for gender equality and denouncing GBV.

Aid community-primarily based applications focused on stopping violence and supporting survivors.

Beautify GBV statistics collection to gain a better knowledge of its incidence and effect.

Encourage studies on powerful remedies and legislative measures to cope with GBV.

Foster collaboration among worldwide agencies, NGOs, and authority groups to supply a unified reaction to GBV.

Expand a comprehensive countrywide movement plan outlining sources, roles, and obligations for addressing GBV.

Positioned into effect safeguards to ensure the safety and privateness of survivors at some stage in prison court cases

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