

An Overview of Gender Based Violence in Pakistan

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Women in Pakistan are facing formidable challenges in their efforts to achieve gender parity and are still addressing GBV (hereafter referred to as GBV) in their country, with particular problems posed by elements among customary norms and practices e.g. exchange marriages, marriage with Holy Quran¹, Karo Kari², [Vani](#)³, Sawara⁴, Honor kill-

¹ It was an old tradition but still applied to some rural parts of our society that people use to announce that we have married our daughter/sister with the holy Quran, meaning thereby that if they do not want to give/transfer inherited property to their daughter/sister at the time of her marriage then they announce the same and that girl could not marry for all her life time.

In Pakistan, an act is taking place in certain provinces that deprives a Muslim woman of her social rights. This act is the so-called marriage to the Quran, a practice that is widespread in the Sindh province in the south of the country. In this type of marriage, young girls are asked to dedicate themselves to memorizing the Holy Quran. Their families then hold a ceremony to marry the girl to the holy book. A girl places her hand on the Quran and takes an oath that she is married to it until death.

The trend is more notable amongst the rich and feudal families in Sindh. It was first devised to deny women their rights of inheritance and out of fear of property being passed on to outsiders through the daughters or sisters [i.e., their spouses or children].

² The term Karo Kari is commonly used as a synonym to honor killing, especially in the Sindh region of Pakistan.

³ [Vani \(custom\) Wikipedia](#)

⁴ Sawara is a custom where girls, often minors, are given in marriage or servitude to an aggrieved family as compensation to end disputes, often murder.

ing etc. They mainly encounter violence by being forced into marriage, forced conversions, through public place/workplace sexual harassment, domestic violence and by honor killings.

Illegal trade of women and girls for the purpose of exploitation, including sexual exploitation and forced labor is also common in the country. Women in Pakistan are mostly trafficked to Gulf countries by making false promises of better job opportunities, where they are subjected to sexual abuse. Poverty, illiteracy, patriarchal system, and lack of awareness about basic legal rights are the root causes of GBV in Pakistan.

A few of the most recently reported incidents of GBV in Pakistan are as follows:

- On 29th March 2024, Man killed his [wife](#)⁵ for refusing to allow second marriage.
- On 26th February, 2024 a woman faced harassment for wearing [attire](#)⁶ with Arabic prints. Police intervened to rescue her from the mob.
- The night between 17th and 18th March 2024, the [victim](#)⁷, was subjected to incest by her brother and father. According to the initial report it is told that she had become pregnant, and they planned to kill her.
- On 25th February, 2024 a 12-year-old [housemaid was tortured](#)⁸ to death.
- On 29th November, 2023 a man [killed](#)⁹ his teenage daughter on instructions from family elders because she had appeared in a picture on social media.
- On 27th September 2023, Kidnapped woman killed after [rape](#)¹⁰ in Punjab.

⁵ [Man kills wife for refusing to allow second marriage](#)

⁶ [Police rescue woman surrounded by mob in Lahore over blasphemy allegations](#)

⁷ [‘Women aren’t safe anywhere’: Video of man murdering sister in Toba Tek Singh enrages internet](#)

⁸ [12-year-old housemaid tortured to death in Faisalabad](#)

⁹ [Pakistani father, three relatives held for ‘honour killing’-police](#)

¹⁰ [Kidnapped woman killed after rape in Punjab](#)

- In March 2023, a Christian widow raped and killed in Lahore for refusing to convert.

Despite constitutional protections and international commitments, evidence suggests that GBV persists in various forms across the country. Shockingly, Pakistan ranks poorly on international indices, such as being the sixth most dangerous state for women overall and the fifth worst for domestic violence, according to a 2022 report by the Reuters Foundation.

The National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR) released a [policy brief](#)¹¹ on March 8, 2023, reporting approximately 63,000 cases of gender-based violence (GBV) in Pakistan over a three-year period. Of particular concern is the surge in GBV that began in the first half of 2020, when a lockdown was implemented to mitigate the spread of Covid-19. While approximately 4,000 cases of GBV were reported in the first six months after the lockdown was put in place, the following two and a half years saw an average of 10,500 cases of GBV per six months. This rapid increase in GBV highlights the strong correlation between increased family time due to the lockdown and worsening domestic violence incidents.

80 percent of these cases were related to domestic violence, while some 47 percent pertained to domestic rape, wherein married women experienced sexual abuse. The data was based on reported cases; the actual number is feared to be much higher.

Between 70% and 90% of married women have experienced abuse/domestic violence from their spouses at any time in their lives according to a survey on 1,000 women in Punjab, Pakistan. Violence by spouses and other male relatives against women is the most widespread form of violence in Pakistan. Early child marriage is one of the main reasons of violence by spouses. Because minor girls are not mature enough to take the responsibility of the marital life and their spouses and other relatives apply violence on them and being tender in age they cannot fight against the inhumane acts. Violence is not just restricted to physical means but psychological, verbal, financial domains as well. There are a few causes that lead to such horrendous acts. The foremost being the fact that Pakistan observes a patriarchal system where male dominance is widely seen.

¹¹ [DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY BRIEF p.7](#)

The recently published Punjab Gender [Parity](#)¹² Report 2022 exposes the alarming frequency of incidents of violence against women. The report highlights incidents of violence against women in Punjab alone. However, other regions in the country are also contending with similar cases of violence against women. According to [data](#)¹³ gathered from the Office of the Inspector General of Punjab Police in the year 2022, as many as 34,854 cases of violence against women were reported in Punjab, with kidnapping being the most common crime. Also, 1,024 women were murdered during the year. Of the women murdered, 395 lost their lives in incidents of domestic violence, 176 in the name of [honor](#)¹⁴ and 453 due to other motives. Of all GBV cases reported in Punjab, only 4% resulted in convictions, while 96% ended in acquittals. Although there are no specific figures to determine the rate of conviction and acquittals in other provinces of Pakistan.

For achieving a violence free society where all genders and especially women have protection from violence, abuse, discrimination and exploitation, Government of Pakistan, NGO's and advocacy groups are working together and in a result of their efforts there are a few good federal and provincial pro-women [legislations](#)¹⁵ are made and also strong institutions came into force for their implementation.

One good example of the legal developments in Punjab-Pakistan is the implementation of The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence (Amended) Act 2022 (PPWAV Act 2022) which aims to protect women from domestic, sexual, psychological and economic abuse, stalking and cyber-crimes, perpetrated by their husband(s), sibling(s), adopted children, relatives and domestic employers. The District Women Protection Centers in Punjab-Pakistan established under Punjab [Women](#)¹⁶ Protection Authority after the said amendment in PPWAV Act 2022 are serving the GBV survivors under one roof i.e., provision of first aid, post-trauma rehabilitation, police reporting, FIR lodging, prosecution, medical examination, and forensics.

The [Protection](#)¹⁷ against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Act, 2022, is also a very good legislation. It expands the definition of workplaces to encompass both formal and informal workplaces. The new legislation specifically includes domestic workers, who are often at greater risk of workplace violence and harassment. This law includes an expanded definition of harassment that includes “discrimination on the basis of gender, which may or may not be sexual in nature.”

¹² [Research and Publication](#)

¹³ [Punjab Records 10,365 Cases Of Violence Against Women In Just Four Months](#)

¹⁴ [HONOUR KILLING REPORTED CASES \(2011-2022\)](#)

¹⁵ [List of Federal and Provincial Pro-Women Laws](#)

¹⁶ [Aiming to Achieve Violence Free Society for Women](#)

¹⁷ [The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace](#)

The data of the complaints received so far against harassment is given in their detailed [report](#)¹⁸.

The [Transgender](#)¹⁹ Persons (protection of rights) act 2018 is passed by the national assembly of Pakistan to protect them from harassment and discrimination, to provide relief and rehabilitation of rights and for their welfare. The section 13(1) of [Anti-Rape](#)²⁰ (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021, thereof expressly prohibits two-finger virginity testing for the medico-legal examination of a survivor of the GBV. On-camera proceedings in GBV courts are also taking place so that the GBV survivor can talk about the incident respectfully.

Pakistan has moved away from being gender insensitive to being somewhat gender sensitive in their formal system after the recent positive legal developments. Pakistani women are slowly and gradually knowing about their rights, fighting for them and raising their voices too. But there is still a long way to go and there is an urgent need for concerted effort to address and eradicate GBV in Pakistan.



About the Author:

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¹⁸ [OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON GOVERNMENT OF THE PUNJAB](#)

¹⁹ [The Transgender Persons \(protection of rights\) act 2018](#)

²⁰ [The section 13\(1\) of Anti-Rape \(Investigation and Trial\) Act 2021](#)

Legal awareness session with GBV Survivors.



Men are also sensitized about women rights, legal punishments about denial of rights and guided to treat women equally in their families.



Transgender is discussing problems regarding identity registration with the National Database and Registration Authority during a session of transgender rights in Pakistan.



An awareness session with women regarding public place harassment and workplace harassment.



Awareness session with college students regarding family laws and constitutional basic fundamental rights.



Thank you for reading. Any comments and suggestions are welcome.

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