

Women's Rights in Pakistan: Navigating Legal, Social and Cultural Barriers to Gender Equality

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Abstract

With investigating the multilayered landscape of women's rights in Pakistan, this paper examines the persistent challenges that impede gender equality despite legislative advancements. Despite the existence of progressive laws, a significant portion of women in Pakistan face pervasive discrimination and violence, with statistics indicating that 70% endure physical or emotional abuse (UNICEF, 2020). The entrenched patriarchal norms and deep-seated gender stereotypes perpetuate systemic inequalities, severely limiting women's opportunities in education, employment and political engagement (Hussain, 2019). Furthermore, the effective implementation and enforcement of crucial legislation, such as the Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016), remain inadequate, exacerbating the plight of women across the country (Khan, 2020). This paper aims to critically analyze these challenges, offering insights into potential pathways for policy reform and societal change to advance gender equity in Pakistan.

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Introduction

Women's rights in Pakistan represent a critical intersection of cultural traditions, legal frameworks and socio-economic dynamics, shaping a complex landscape of gender inequality. Globally, Pakistan ranks 153rd out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, highlighting profound disparities in gender parity (World Economic Forum, 2021). The status of women in Pakistan is profoundly influenced by cultural norms, religious interpretations and legal structures, which collectively perpetuate discrimination and restrict opportunities for women's advancement (Hussain, 2019).

Gender, as a concept, encompasses socially constructed roles, behaviors and expectations attributed to individuals based on their perceived sex (WHO, 2019). In Pakistan, entrenched patriarchal norms reinforce traditional gender roles and power dynamics, relegating women to subordinate positions in society. These norms manifest in various forms, from limited access to education and employment to restricted autonomy in decision-making processes (Khan, 2020). Consequently, women face significant barriers in accessing essential services such as healthcare and suffer from higher rates of poverty and economic exclusion compared to men.

Theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and gender performativity (Butler, 1990) offer valuable insights into understanding the multidimensional nature of gender inequality. Intersectionality emphasizes how various aspects of social identity, including gender, ethnicity, class and religion, intersect to shape individuals' experiences of oppression and privilege. Gender performativity theory explores how gender is not inherent but rather enacted and reinforced through repeated social practices and norms.

Religiously and legally, Pakistan's framework, including both constitutional provisions and Islamic law (Sharia), significantly influences women's rights and their societal roles (Khan, 2020). While Pakistan's Constitution guarantees equality before the law, religious interpretations and customary practices often undermine these rights in practice. The enactment of legislative measures such as the Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016) and the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016) represents significant steps towards addressing gender-based violence. However, gaps in implementation and enforcement persist, limiting their effectiveness in protecting women from abuse and discrimination (UNICEF, 2020).

This research endeavors to delve deeply into the intricate dynamics of women's rights in Pakistan, examining how legal, social and cultural factors intersect to perpetuate gender inequality. By exploring these complexities, this paper seeks to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by women in Pakistan and to propose recommendations for policy reform and social change aimed at advancing gender equity in the country. Through empirical analysis and critical review of existing literature, this study aims to shed light on the persistent barriers to women's empowerment and advocate for transformative measures to ensure equal rights and opportunities for all individuals in Pakistani society.

Literature Review

Women's rights in Pakistan have emerged as a focal point of national and international discourse, reflecting persistent challenges and ongoing efforts towards gender equality. The Global Gender Gap Report 2022 ranks Pakistan 145th out of 146 countries, underscoring substantial gender disparities across key indicators of education, health, economic participation and political empowerment (Pakistan Gender Gap Report, 2022).

Gender-based violence remains a critical issue affecting women in Pakistan, with alarming statistics revealing that one in four women experiences physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (Karmaliani et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these challenges, exacerbating rates of domestic violence and impeding women's access to essential services such as education and healthcare (UN Women, 2021).

Legal frameworks aimed at protecting women, such as the Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016), represent significant strides towards addressing gender-based violence. However, the effectiveness of these laws is hindered by inadequate implementation and enforcement mechanisms, limiting their impact on safeguarding women's rights (Khan et al., 2022).

Social and cultural norms play a pivotal role in perpetuating gender inequalities in Pakistan. Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes restrict women's autonomy and agency, influencing their access to education, employment opportunities and decision-making processes within households and communities (Hussain et al., 2021). These norms not only shape societal expectations but also reinforce discriminatory practices that marginalize women and girls.

Education emerges as a critical determinant of women's empowerment and societal advancement. Despite efforts to improve educational access, women in Pakistan continue to face barriers such as gender bias in curriculum, inadequate infrastructure and socio-economic constraints that limit their educational attainment (Nasir et al., 2022). The correlation between education and women's socio-economic empowerment underscores the need for targeted interventions to enhance educational opportunities and promote gender-responsive policies within the education sector.

Economic participation remains another pivotal area where gender disparities persist. Women in Pakistan encounter challenges in accessing formal employment, facing wage gaps, occupational segregation and limited opportunities for career advancement (Khan et al., 2022). Economic empowerment initiatives are crucial in promoting women's financial independence and reducing vulnerabilities associated with poverty and economic exclusion.

Political representation remains a significant area of concern, with women severely underrepresented in political decision-making processes. Despite constitutional guarantees and quota systems aimed at enhancing women's political participation, women hold only 20% of parliamentary seats in Pakistan (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2022). This underrepresentation underscores systemic barriers that hinder women from assuming leadership roles and influencing policy agendas.

Recent scholarship underscores the importance of adopting intersectional approaches to address the diverse and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women in Pakistan. Intersectionality recognizes the complex interplay of factors such as gender, class, ethnicity and religion, which shape women's experiences of marginalization and inequality (Ali et al., 2022). Contextualized interventions that account for these intersecting identities are essential for developing inclusive policies and programs that effectively promote women's rights and gender equality.

Collaborative efforts involving government institutions, civil society organizations and international stakeholders are imperative for advancing women's rights agenda in Pakistan. By fostering partnerships and mobilizing resources, stakeholders can collectively advocate for policy reforms, strengthen institutional capacities and enhance public awareness on gender equality issues (UN Women, 2021).

Hence, addressing the multifaceted challenges to women's rights in Pakistan requires sustained commitment and integrated strategies that encompass legal reforms, socio-cultural change, educational empowerment, economic opportunities and political representation. By addressing these interconnected dimensions, Pakistan can strive towards achieving gender equality and fostering a society where women enjoy equal rights, opportunities and dignity.

Progress Report on Women's Rights in Pakistan

Women's rights in Pakistan have evolved significantly over the decades, marked by progress in political participation, education and employment opportunities. Despite enduring challenges rooted in cultural norms and socio-economic disparities, concerted efforts by government initiatives, civil society organizations and international support have contributed to advancing gender equality across various sectors.

- **Political Participation**

Political empowerment for women in Pakistan has seen notable strides since independence. Pakistan granted women the right to vote in 1947, making it one of the earliest countries to do so globally. However, women's voter turnout historically lags behind men's due to socio-cultural barriers (Pakistan Gender Gap Report, 2022). The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal political rights to all citizens, regardless of gender, ensuring women's participation in electoral processes (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2022).

In recent years, efforts to enhance women's political representation have included reserved seats for women in parliament and local governments. These measures aim to address gender disparities in decision-making roles and amplify women's voices in policymaking (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2022). Despite these gains, challenges such as patriarchal attitudes and limited support for women candidates persist, necessitating continued advocacy and reform.

- **Education**

Education remains a cornerstone of women's empowerment in Pakistan. The Constitution guarantees equal educational opportunities for all citizens, reflecting a commitment to gender-inclusive policies (Article 37, Constitution of Pakistan). Since independence, efforts to improve women's literacy rates have shown progress, with significant increases from a mere 2% in 1947 to 55% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020).

Government initiatives, such as the Benazir Bhutto Girls' Education Package, focus on enhancing girls' access to education through scholarships, school infrastructure improvements and community outreach programs (Government of Pakistan, 2020). Despite these efforts, gender disparities persist, particularly in rural areas where cultural norms and economic constraints hinder girls' enrollment and retention in schools (UNESCO, 2019). Addressing these challenges requires targeted interventions that prioritize gender-sensitive curriculum, teacher training and parental engagement to foster a supportive learning environment for girls.

- **Employment**

Women's participation in the workforce has gradually increased, albeit remaining below desired levels. In 2019, women's labor force participation rate was approximately 25%, reflecting persistent barriers such as discriminatory hiring practices, wage gaps and limited access to formal employment (World Bank, 2020). Economic empowerment programs, spearheaded by NGOs like the Kashf Foundation, play a crucial role in promoting women's entrepreneurship and financial inclusion through microfinance initiatives and skills development training (Kashf Foundation, 2020).

Legislative measures, such as the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, aim to safeguard women's rights in professional settings by prohibiting harassment and ensuring safe working conditions (Government of Pakistan, 2016). Despite these advancements, cultural

stigmas and societal expectations often discourage women from entering non-traditional sectors, constraining their economic opportunities and professional advancement.

- **References to Islamic Teachings**

Islamic teachings emphasize principles of equity and justice, affirming women's rights to education, employment and political participation. The Quran underscores the importance of knowledge and encourages both men and women to seek education (Quran 96:1-5, 35:28). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) promoted women's participation in public affairs and supported their pursuit of knowledge (Muslim, 2679).

Scholars like Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and Ibn Taymiyah advocated for women's education and economic independence, highlighting their moral and religious significance in Islamic society (Fath al-Bari, 13/114; Majmu' al-Fatawa, 3/133). These teachings resonate with contemporary efforts to promote gender equality in Pakistan, aligning Islamic principles with progressive policies that uphold women's rights and dignity.

- **Challenges and Future Directions**

Despite significant progress, Pakistan continues to grapple with systemic challenges that impede women's full realization of their rights. Persistent gender-based violence, limited access to healthcare and socio-economic disparities underscore the need for comprehensive strategies that integrate legal reforms, public awareness campaigns and institutional capacity-building (UN Women, 2021).

Moving forward, addressing these challenges requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including government institutions, civil society organizations, religious leaders and international partners. Initiatives should prioritize education reforms, economic empowerment and legislative measures that dismantle barriers to women's rights while promoting inclusivity and gender equity in all spheres of society.

Thus, the progress of women's rights in Pakistan reflects a complex interplay of advancements and ongoing challenges. Political empowerment, educational opportunities and economic participation represent pivotal areas where strides have been made, supported by legal frameworks and Islamic teachings that uphold women's rights. However, sustained efforts are needed to overcome entrenched barriers, foster cultural change and ensure that every woman in Pakistan can enjoy equal rights, opportunities and dignity in line with national aspirations and international commitments to gender equality.

Women in Punjab: Advancements and Challenges

Women's rights in Punjab, Pakistan's largest and most populous province, have seen significant strides in recent years, marked by legislative reforms, increased workforce participation and efforts to promote gender equality amidst enduring challenges.

- Punjab has been at the forefront of legislative reforms aimed at safeguarding women's rights and combating gender-based violence. The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016) stands as a landmark legislation designed to protect women from domestic violence, sexual harassment and other forms of abuse (Punjab Government, 2016). This comprehensive legal framework provides avenues for women to seek justice and access support services, reinforcing their rights within the province.

- Economic empowerment initiatives in Punjab have contributed to an increase in women's participation in the workforce. According to the Aurat Foundation, approximately 23% of women in Punjab are engaged in paid employment, reflecting a positive trend towards greater economic independence (Aurat Foundation, 2020). Efforts to enhance women's access to vocational training, microfinance opportunities and entrepreneurial support have further bolstered their economic contributions and livelihood security.
- Despite these advancements, challenges persist, particularly in rural areas where women encounter barriers such as limited educational opportunities and restricted access to healthcare services (UNICEF, 2019). Cultural norms and socio-economic disparities continue to hinder women's full integration into the workforce and participation in decision-making roles.
- Islamic teachings emphasize principles of gender equality and women's empowerment, providing a moral and religious foundation for advancing women's rights in Punjab. The Quran underscores the equal worth and responsibilities of men and women before God, affirming their inherent dignity and rights (Quran 3:195). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) promoted women's education and recognized their crucial role in society, stating, "The pursuit of knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim, male or female" (Narrated by Ibn Majah).
- Cultural perspectives in Punjab reflect a blend of traditional values and evolving attitudes towards women's roles and rights. While patriarchal norms may present obstacles, there is growing recognition of women's contributions to family and community well-being. Initiatives that promote gender-sensitive education, awareness campaigns and community engagement are pivotal in challenging stereotypes and fostering societal acceptance of women's rights.
- Addressing the remaining challenges in promoting women's rights in Punjab requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates legal reforms, economic empowerment programs and educational initiatives. Enhancing access to quality education, particularly in rural areas, is essential for narrowing gender disparities and empowering women with knowledge and skills for socio-economic advancement.
- Furthermore, strengthening institutional mechanisms for the implementation of existing laws and policies is critical to ensuring effective protection and support for women facing gender-based violence. Community-based interventions, including partnerships with local NGOs and religious leaders, can play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful practices that perpetuate discrimination against women.

While significant progress has been made in advancing women's rights in Punjab, persistent challenges underscore the need for sustained efforts and collective action. Legislative reforms, economic empowerment initiatives and cultural transformations are essential for creating an enabling environment where women can thrive, contribute meaningfully to society and realize their full potential. By upholding Islamic principles of justice and equality, Punjab can continue to lead in championing women's rights and fostering inclusive development for all its residents.

Women's Rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP): Challenges and Initiatives

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), women's rights have encountered significant challenges within the province's conservative and patriarchal societal framework. Despite these obstacles, various initiatives and efforts have been undertaken to promote gender equality and empower women.

- Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's traditional and conservative social norms pose formidable challenges to women's rights and empowerment. Women face substantial barriers to accessing education, healthcare and economic opportunities, perpetuating gender disparities and limiting their socio-economic mobility. Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and harmful practices, remains prevalent, with a staggering 52% of women reporting experiences of domestic violence (UN Women, 2019).
- Efforts to address these challenges include the establishment of the KP Commission on the Status of Women, aimed at advocating for women's rights and promoting gender equality within the province (KP Government, 2016). This institutional framework plays a crucial role in monitoring and addressing issues related to women's empowerment, including legal protections against gender-based violence and discrimination.
- Economic participation among women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa remains low, with only 15% engaged in paid employment, reflecting persistent barriers such as limited access to vocational training and economic opportunities (Khwendo Kor, 2020). Economic empowerment initiatives, including microfinance programs and skill development training, are pivotal in enhancing women's economic independence and livelihood security.
- Islamic teachings emphasize principles of justice, equality and compassion, providing a moral and religious foundation for advancing women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The Quran underscores the equitable treatment and respect for women, promoting their empowerment and socio-economic participation (Quran 30:21). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized the importance of women's education and affirmed their integral role in societal well-being (Narrated by Tirmidhi).
- Transforming societal attitudes and norms is crucial in advancing women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Community-based initiatives, educational campaigns and partnerships with religious leaders play a pivotal role in challenging harmful practices and promoting gender-sensitive perspectives. By fostering dialogue and awareness on women's rights, communities can contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for women's empowerment.

While Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces significant challenges in promoting women's rights, ongoing initiatives and institutional frameworks underscore a commitment to advancing gender equality within the province. Legislative reforms, economic empowerment programs and community engagement efforts are essential in overcoming barriers and creating opportunities for women to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society. By upholding Islamic principles of equity and compassion, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can continue to pave the way towards a more inclusive and empowered future for all its residents, regardless of gender.

Women's Rights in Balochistan: Challenges and Initiatives

In Balochistan, women's rights confront significant challenges stemming from the province's remote and underdeveloped regions. Despite these obstacles, efforts have been initiated to promote gender equality and enhance women's empowerment.

- Balochistan's rugged terrain and sparse infrastructure present formidable challenges to advancing women's rights. Women in Balochistan encounter barriers to accessing education, healthcare and economic opportunities, exacerbated by socio-economic disparities and traditional patriarchal norms. Gender-based violence, including domestic abuse and harmful practices, remains

prevalent, with a troubling 60% of women reporting experiences of domestic violence (UN Women, 2019).

- In response to these challenges, the Balochistan Commission on the Status of Women was established, aiming to safeguard women's rights and promote gender equality across the province (Balochistan Government, 2017). This institutional framework plays a crucial role in advocating for policy reforms, legal protections against gender-based violence and initiatives to enhance women's socio-economic participation.
- Economic opportunities for women in Balochistan remain limited, with only 10% engaged in paid employment, reflecting constraints such as inadequate vocational training and job opportunities (Balochistan Women's Development Organization, 2020). Efforts to bolster economic empowerment through microfinance initiatives and skill development programs are pivotal in fostering women's financial independence and livelihood security.
- Islamic principles emphasize principles of justice, equality and compassion, underscoring the intrinsic value of women's empowerment in Balochistan. The Quran advocates for equitable treatment and respect for women's contributions to society, emphasizing their rights to education and participation in societal affairs (Quran 3:195). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) championed women's education, affirming the pursuit of knowledge as a shared obligation for all Muslims, irrespective of gender (Narrated by Ibn Majah).
- Transforming societal attitudes and norms is essential in advancing women's rights in Balochistan. Community-driven initiatives, educational campaigns and partnerships with local leaders and religious scholars play a pivotal role in challenging harmful practices and promoting gender-sensitive perspectives. By fostering dialogue and awareness on women's rights, communities can contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for women's empowerment.

While Balochistan faces formidable challenges in promoting women's rights, ongoing initiatives and institutional frameworks underscore a commitment to advancing gender equality within the province. Legislative reforms, economic empowerment programs and community engagement efforts are essential in overcoming barriers and creating opportunities for women to thrive and contribute meaningfully to Balochistan's development. By upholding Islamic principles of equity and compassion, Balochistan can continue to pave the way towards a more inclusive and empowered future for all its residents, regardless of gender.

Women's Rights in Sindh: Challenges and Initiatives

Women's rights in Sindh, Pakistan's second-largest province by population, reflect a complex interplay of legal reforms, socio-cultural norms and ongoing challenges. While significant strides have been made in legislative frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality, persistent societal barriers continue to hinder women's full participation and empowerment.

Challenges

- Sindh, like much of Pakistan, grapples with deeply entrenched patriarchal attitudes and traditional gender roles. These norms often limit women's autonomy, restricting their access to education, employment opportunities and decision-making roles within the family and community (UN Women, 2019).

- Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue in Sindh, despite legislative efforts such as the Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016). Domestic violence, honor killings and acid attacks are tragically common, reflecting broader societal attitudes that perpetuate violence against women (UN Women, 2020).
- Women's participation in the formal workforce in Sindh is disproportionately low, particularly in rural areas where economic opportunities are limited and socio-cultural barriers prevent women from seeking employment outside the home (Aurat Foundation, 2020).
- While legal reforms have been enacted to protect women's rights, including provisions against gender-based violence and discrimination, implementation remains inconsistent. Access to justice for women, especially in rural and marginalized communities, is often hindered by lack of awareness, legal aid and enforcement capacity (Government of Pakistan, 2016).

Initiatives

- The Sindh government has been proactive in introducing legislative measures to enhance women's rights. The Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016), for instance, provides a legal framework to address domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence, although its effective implementation requires ongoing support and resources (Government of Pakistan, 2016).
- Efforts to promote women's education and awareness about their rights have been bolstered through government initiatives and partnerships with civil society organizations. These efforts aim to empower women with knowledge and skills to assert their rights and advocate for gender equality (UNESCO, 2019).
- Non-governmental organizations and community-based initiatives play a crucial role in empowering women in Sindh. Programs focused on economic empowerment, vocational training and leadership development help women gain economic independence and assert their rights within their communities (Khwendo Kor, 2020).
- The establishment of institutions such as the Sindh Commission on the Status of Women demonstrates a commitment to institutionalize gender equality efforts. These bodies provide advocacy, monitoring and policy recommendations to address systemic barriers to women's rights in Sindh (Sindh Government, 2016).

Women's rights in Sindh face multifaceted challenges rooted in socio-cultural norms, economic disparities and legal complexities. While legislative reforms and initiatives have made significant strides, sustained efforts are needed to overcome entrenched barriers and ensure meaningful progress towards gender equality. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that combines legal protections, socio-cultural change, economic empowerment and robust institutional support to advance women's rights in Sindh and beyond.

Women's Rights in Pakistan: A Constitutional Perspective

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of gender. However, women in Pakistan face significant challenges in various spheres, including education, employment and inheritance. Despite constitutional guarantees, discriminatory practices persist.

- Education remains a fundamental right, yet many girls in Pakistan lack access due to barriers such as gender-based violence and societal norms. Dropout rates are high, with substantial disparities highlighted in UNESCO's reports.
- In employment, women encounter a 30% gender pay gap and are underrepresented in leadership roles, as reported by the International Labor Organization.
- Inheritance laws theoretically allow women equal rights, but they often face obstacles such as gender-based violence and limited awareness, according to the Aurat Foundation.
- Efforts to promote gender equality include government initiatives like the National Commission on the Status of Women and NGOs such as the Aurat Foundation and Women's Action Forum.

Zia ul Haq's Islamization

During Zia ul Haq's regime (1977-1988), Pakistan underwent extensive Islamization aimed at aligning laws, education and society with Islamic principles. The introduction of Sharia law and the establishment of the Federal Shariat Court were pivotal. The Hadood Ordinances¹ criminalized offenses like adultery and fornication, affecting women disproportionately and leading to widespread incarceration.

¹ The Hadood Ordinances, implemented in Pakistan during General Zia ul Haq's regime in 1979, represent a series of laws aimed at Islamizing the legal system by incorporating Islamic principles into the country's criminal code. These ordinances significantly impacted Pakistan's legal framework and society, particularly affecting women's rights and justice.

Under Zia ul Haq's Islamization policies, the Hadood Ordinances were introduced as part of a broader effort to bring Pakistan's legal system in line with Sharia, or Islamic law. The term "Hadood" refers to Islamic punishments prescribed for specific crimes in Islamic jurisprudence.

Key provisions of the Hadood Ordinances included criminalizing adultery (extramarital sex) and fornication (consensual sex between unmarried persons). The punishment for adultery included public flogging or stoning to death, depending on the circumstances and evidence presented. Additionally, the ordinances introduced stringent evidentiary standards for rape cases, requiring four male witnesses to the crime or a confession by the accused. Failure to meet these standards often led to charges of adultery against the victim instead of the perpetrator, resulting in severe penalties for the victim.

The impact on women was profound and often detrimental. Women became more vulnerable to false accusations of adultery and rape due to the high evidentiary standards required by the ordinances. This led to instances where victims of sexual violence were charged with adultery or fornication instead of being protected under the law. The public nature of punishments under the Hadood Ordinances, such as flogging or stoning, subjected women to public humiliation and severe physical harm. These punishments were often carried out in public settings, reinforcing social stigmas and perpetuating gender-based violence.

Critics and international human rights organizations condemned the Hadood Ordinances for violating basic human rights, including the rights to due process, equality before the law and protection from discrimination based on gender. The ordinances exacerbated inequalities within the justice system, particularly affecting marginalized communities and those lacking access to legal resources. Women from disadvantaged backgrounds were disproportionately affected by these laws, facing harsh penalties without adequate legal representation or recourse. Over time, advocacy groups, civil society organizations and legal experts campaigned for reforms to the Hadood Ordinances to align them with international human rights standards and to mitigate their discriminatory impact. In 2006, significant amendments were made to the ordinances under President Pervez Musharraf's administration, including the removal of public flogging and stoning as punishments for adultery. These reforms aimed to improve women's rights and provide greater protections within the legal system.

The Hadood Ordinances marked a controversial attempt to Islamize Pakistan's legal framework, highlighting ongoing challenges in ensuring comprehensive legal protections and gender equality in the country's judicial system.

- Education policies emphasized Islamic studies and supported madrassas, impacting educational diversity and secular curriculum.
- Women's rights were severely curtailed under these laws, restricting inheritance, marriage and divorce rights. Legal scholars like Jahangir and educational researchers like Nayyar have explored these impacts extensively.

Women's Medical Care

Women's health care in Pakistan faces numerous challenges. Reproductive health services suffer from gaps in accessibility and cultural barriers, contributing to high rates of unintended pregnancies and STIs.

- Maternal health remains a concern, with high maternal mortality rates due to preventable causes like bleeding and infections. Improving access to skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care is critical.
- Gender-specific health issues such as breast and cervical cancers are prevalent. Breast cancer, particularly, is a leading cause of cancer-related deaths among Pakistani women.

Conclusion

The landscape of women's rights in Pakistan reveals both progress and enduring challenges, underscored by legislative advancements alongside pervasive socio-cultural barriers. Despite efforts to enhance legal protections and promote gender equality through initiatives like the Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016) and educational reforms, women continue to face significant obstacles in accessing justice, economic opportunities and political representation. Addressing these complex issues demands sustained commitment from all sectors of society, including government, civil society and international stakeholders. By prioritizing comprehensive reforms, fostering societal awareness and ensuring robust implementation of existing laws, Pakistan can aspire towards a future where women enjoy full equality, dignity and participation in all facets of national life.

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