

Pakistani Women have the Same Chances as Men

1. Introduction

Thesis Statement:

It is not scientific proof of gender equality that is required, but general acceptance that women are at least the equals of men or better (Stephen Hawking).

2. How Pakistani Women have the same Chances as men

3. Pakistani women face social injustice, impeding their equal opportunities with men.

- Educational opportunities are not equal.
- They fail to get health facilities which they deserve.
- Gender-Based violence and cultural norms (stereotypes).
- Women are victims of economic exploitation.
- lesser participation in legal and political representation.

4. Pakistani women enjoy comparable opportunities to men

- Access to education is improved through successful government institutions.

Pakistan Women have the same chances as Men

- b. Free healthcare checkups and awareness campaigns are being provided to women.
- c. Various initiatives and organizations work to protect and support women.
- d. Job opportunities and wage parity aligns more with skill and qualification.
- e. Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights for women, participation in politics have been increased.

5. Gender Equality in Pakistan faces persistent challenges despite notable progress.

- a. Educating sons over daughters is a priority.
- b. Societal expectations and gender norms restrict women to seek medical help.
- c. Women face fear of family pressure and lack of resources that hinder women from realizing their rights.

"Pakistani women are the backbone of society," said the great Pakistani lawyer and human rights activist Asma Jahangir. Women in Pakistan have proved their capability of achieving anything men can. Whether it is in the field of Education, Technology, Politics, and the Judiciary. Indeed, Pakistani women have the same chances as men but the social constraints still hinder women's empowerment in Pakistan, which must be addressed with a holistic approach. As a matter of fact, women are builders of society. When women are empowered, the entire society benefits. As said by Stephen Hawking, it's not about proving scientifically that men and women are equal. It's more about agreeing that women are as capable as men. Women in Pakistan can certainly be equals in the socio-economic and political domains. But the road to this equality has its obstacles and challenges. However, these challenges can be addressed through strong and

bold measures.

Pakistan being the fifth most populous country worldwide with population of approximately 22.7m (49.2% female and 50.8% male), the majority is below age 30, around 64% of the total population is of youth.

Despite all this, Pakistan has been ranked as the second-worst country in terms of **gender parity**, placed 145 out of 146 states, in the ~~World~~ Global Gender: Gap Report, 2022.

Although it ~~was~~ a women who laid the foundation of modern civilization and modern agriculture ~~which~~ later on gave birth to modern industrialization, as said by **Will Durant** in his book, 'The Greatest Mind and Ideas', yet her socio-economic and political status is far below than men in Pakistan.

One of the major social injustice the Pakistani women face is the lesser educational opportunities. The lack of knowledge make them

inferior to men in many possible ways. The first most priority of any human being is to have all the knowledge to enhance the mental capabilities which not only helps in the development of one's physical condition but also grooms the mind. Unfortunately, Pakistani women lack access to education. They do not have the same chances as men. The adult female literacy was estimated 46% in 2019, while for men it was 69%. The literacy rate of women is extremely low because of the cultural and social taboos (Mahwish Rabia, Female Education in Pakistan).

In addition to lesser educational opportunities, women also fail to get proper healthcare facilities on time due to which they suffer for lifelong. The neglected medical care not only affect their lives but also the whole family get affected.

Plus, the women living in rural areas lack to get good medication because of poverty and feasibility. According to a report of **World Bank**, Pakistan has only spent 0.5% of GDP on health for last ten years, while **WHO** benchmark of health expenditure is at least 6% of the GDP. The ignorance and lack of resources collectively results in the poor condition of women which impacts their growth to be low as compared to men in the same society.

Along with the compromised health facilities, women face extreme violence in the name of deep-rooted cultural and traditional norms. The **Stereotypes** and gender-based violence against women has suppressed their voice and ability to stand for themselves. They are forced to follow the customs and traditions as to be fit in

the society. A criteria is to be fulfilled for a woman to live. They have to satisfy other's expectations throughout their lives. ~~In the~~ ~~the~~ ~~early~~ 2023, nearly **32%** women in Pakistan suffered cruelty. **(UNFP)** Whether it is in the name of honour killing, rejecting a proposal, asking for equal rights or freedom. Hence, the lives of women in Pakistan are at stake because of their inferior and unrecognized roles in our society.

Not only Pakistan women are victims of domestic violence but also they are the victims of **economic exploitation**. The wages gap, difference in nature of jobs, the discrimination on the basis of gender etc. women face all these on their daily basis. In our society, women are hired moreoverly according to their appearance. Women are considered as a 'commodity' or as an 'economic tool'.

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According to the survey of Gallup, in October 2023, Nearly 70% females graduates in engineering are unemployed.

The data shows the clear inequality between men and women. Even for the same work done by men and women, the latter gets lesser wage as well as no appreciation because of the gender inequality.

With the lack of equal wages and opportunities in job market, women also have very less participation in legal and political representation.

There are very few women in the parliament who have won the elections on their own or party tickets. The limited political role of women legislatures did not open space for them to stand for the women, to be the voice of all women and to address their problems.

This unfair disadvantage have serious short- and long-term

consequences which we are already witnessing. The gender disparity clearly restricts women to contribute and participate as equals.

However, many believe that Pakistani women have the same chances as men. As now women can get access to education similar to men. Over the years, the government has taken initiatives to promote girls' education. Initiatives such as the Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Youth Development Program and the "Girls' Stipend Program" have provided financial incentives for families to send their daughters to school.

As a result, more women are pursuing higher education and professional degrees. This is empowering women to compete with men in a diverse range of fields and sectors.

The lack of medical assistance and necessary health care facilities, due to which

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women have suffered. Government programs have been providing free healthcare checkups and awareness campaigns for such women to benefit from, for their overall well-being. Such as the introduction of **e-health services** through personal identification cards. The **Sehat Sahulat Program**, ~~2017~~ considered one of the biggest achievements by Pakistan's healthcare system. This initiative has decreased the burden of healthcare expenses and increased access to healthcare services.

When it comes to the **Gender Based** violence, to hinder that various programmes and organizations are working in order to protect and support women. There are number of NGOs working with women to protect and promote their human rights.

Bedari is an NGO working for the **rights of women** and children since 1992.

This helps women to empower themselves and encourages

them for a new healthy start. In terms of not having some opportunities in the job market and not getting equal pays, Pakistan has enhanced the female labour force participation as Punjab Government has introduced special allocation budget for women empowerment, not only that but also the Government has launched the Youth Business Loan Scheme, 50% loans reserved for females. According to a report by International Labour Organization, the number of women in the workplace has increased by 50% since 2000.

To sum up, Pakistan has witnessed a positive growth in terms of skilled workforce by providing equal chances to men and women.

As far as the lesser participation of women in legal and political representation, the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, guarantees equal rights to men and women. For women's representation, there would be

33% representation of women in all public-sector boards (Fair Practices Act 2014, Punjab). Moreover, the number of women in the National Assembly has increased from 12% in 2000 to 16% in 2022. In short, women in Pakistan have the contribution in field of politics and in public administration by acquiring same chances as men.

However, despite notable progress, Gender equality in Pakistan is a myth. Even if the education is now equally accessible for both men and women still in Pakistani society educating sons over daughters is a priority as women are considered a temporary person living with family in context of sooner or later they will get married and move to other's house but son is like head of house and his education is far more important than the daughter. A survey by Gallup showed

that **63%** of public believe educating sons is more important. This indifference in preferring son's education deprives daughters to have the education and to get independent. This limits their chances to lead a successful life just because of the gender inequality.

Another **social injustice** faced by women that they fail to get proper medical care even if the government is providing **free checkups** and awareness campaigns, the societal expectations and restrictions on women don't let them seek medical help such as a male doctor, even if it's for a general checkup plus the lack of awareness about delaying the checkup until it gets worst specifically in rural areas. The issues of women's health remains the same which not only affects their physical health but also disturbs them mentally. Hence gender norms

restricts women. The HIV cases in Pakistan in women has raised from 9000 in 2010 to 49,000 in 2022 (UNAIDS).

If some believe that Gender based violence and domestic violence can be controlled with the NGOs or other programmes, they cannot ignore the fact that the brutal customs and traditions has confined the role of women within the four walls. Women donot have a voice of their own. The patriarchal society of Pakistan makes women so numb that they donot even know what their rights are, they get so used to it that they make it a part of their lives. This is a biggest barrier in the way of gender equality as women fear to speak for their own right. The pressure from family or intimate partners, hinder them from their equal rights.

Likewise, the lesser job opportunities for women although there are different programs launched and loans reserved for women but the implementation never took place which makes the injustice still happen. Women are associated with family and care-giver, all the responsibilities of a house is basically on the shoulders of women and considering this women are less suitable than men because they cannot balance work and home whereas men is free from all house cores he will be more beneficial. That's the mindset of our society which bounds the women, pushing them to subservient roles.

In this way, women's economic empowerment gets limited. Similarly, the gender gap due to which women tend to earn less than men for some work. The gender pay gap in Pakistan is **34%**. (ILO Global Wage Report, 2022/23).

As far as the political and legal representation and participation of women is concerned, there is no doubt that there are reserved seats for women and government has announced 33% representation but the **glass ceiling for women in political leadership** can be seen with bare eye as women's ability to engage political system is very limited and controlled. It is difficult for women to rise when there is such limited access which eventually suppresses them. This gender inequality place them at an unfair disadvantage throughout their lives. Hence, it leads to gender disparity.

To pen it off, women and men can have the same opportunities in practical when equality and balance is achieved. The societal mindset needs to change as behind every successful woman is a man who

supports her in achieving her dreams. Pakistani society, by recognizing and addressing these challenges, can move toward a more equitable future where both women and men have equal chances to thrive and contribute to the nation's growth and prosperity.

"No Nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you."

(M. Ali Jinnah)