

## Gender Inequality In Pakistan:

Gender Inequality remains one of Pakistan's most pressing challenges, affecting millions across social, economic and political spheres. Despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights, deep-seated cultural norms, economic disparities, and political exclusion continue to restrict opportunities for women. While progress has been made in certain areas, gender-based discrimination persists, reinforcing structural inequalities that limit women's participation in all walks of life. From restrictive societal norms and lack of access to education to economic exclusion and political marginalization, the issue of gender inequality in Pakistan

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has far-reaching consequences. One of the most significant contributors to gender inequality in Pakistan is the persistence of Patriarchy and cultural norms that restrict women's freedom and reinforce traditional gender roles. Deeply ingrained societal attitudes often dictate that women should remain confined to domestic responsibilities, limiting their autonomy and decision-making power. In rural areas, such restrictions are even more pronounced, where conservative values discourage women's mobility and economic participation. According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP, 2023), these rigid societal expectations create barriers that prevent women from

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accessing education, employment, and leadership opportunities.

Education remains a major battleground in the fight against gender inequality. Girls in Pakistan face numerous obstacles in accessing quality education, including societal resistance, financial constraints, and inadequate infrastructure. Many families prioritize boys' education, viewing girls' schooling as unnecessary or secondary to household responsibilities.

According to UNESCO (2022), the literacy rate among women in Pakistan is significantly lower than that of men, with disparities among girls increasing due to early marriages and social pressures.

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without proper education, women remain trapped in cycles of dependency and limited economic opportunities, further perpetuating inequality.

Gender-based violence is another alarming manifestation of gender inequality in Pakistan.

Women face high levels of domestic violence, honor killings, forced marriages, and workplace harassment, making personal security a constant concern. The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2018) reported that nearly 34% of married women have experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives. Honor killings, a practice in which women are murdered by family members for perceived transgressions, continue.

despite legal prohibition. Weak law enforcement, cultural acceptance of such crimes, and victims' reluctance to report abuse due to fear of social stigma further exacerbate the issue.

Health and reproductive rights also highlight the stark gender disparities in Pakistan. Limited access to maternal healthcare, contraceptives, and reproductive education disproportionately affects women, particularly in rural areas. Many women lack autonomy over their reproductive choices, leading to high rates of maternal mortality and unintended pregnancies. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) has highlighted

that poor healthcare infrastructure and gender-based discrimination in medical services contribute to preventable deaths among women, emphasising the urgent need for improved healthcare policies.

The economic sphere reflects another dimension of gender inequality in Pakistan, where women face systemic discrimination in employment, wage disparities, and limited access to financial resources. Despite their potential contribution to the economy, women remain underrepresented in the workforce.

According to the World Economic Forum (2023), Pakistan ranks among the lowest in global gender parity indices, with

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female labour force participation at only 92%. cultural restrictions, workplace harassment, and limited maternity benefits further discourage women from seeking employment, reinforcing their economic dependency.

Even when women enter the workforce, they often face wage discrimination and a lack of leadership opportunities. men overwhelmingly dominate decision-making positions, while women are concentrated in low paying, informal sectors.

The Pakistan Economic Survey (2022) revealed that women earn 34% less than men on average. When performing similar roles. This wage gap not only reflects economic injustice but also diminishes women's

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financial independence and bargaining power in society. Access to financial resources remain another major hurdle for women in Pakistan. Traditional banking systems, lack of financial literacy, and social norms often prevent women from owning assets or obtaining business loans. The World Bank (2021) found that women in Pakistan are far less likely than men to have bank accounts or receive formal credit, further restricting their economic mobility. Without financial independence,

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, women remain dependent on male family members, limiting their ability to break free from oppressive circumstances.

Additionally, the burden of unpaid care work falls disproportionately on women, further reinforce economic inequality. Women are expected to perform household chores, childcare, and elder care without recognition or compensation.

The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) reports that Pakistani women spend nearly ten times more hours on unpaid domestic work than men, significantly reducing their time for education, employment, or personal development. This unrecognized labor not only limits women's

opportunities but also contributes to national economic inefficiencies.

Beyond economic barriers, women's political participation remains severely restricted in Pakistan, reflecting another dimension of gender inequality.

Women continue to face exclusion from leadership roles and decision-making positions at both local and national levels. While legal frameworks ensure gender representation, cultural and institutional barriers prevent meaningful participation. According to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP, 2023), women hold less than 20% seats of Parliament.

seats, far below international standards. Many female politicians face harassment, threats, and social pressure, discouraging

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them from active political engagement. Moreover, despite existing legal protections, gender equality laws and policies in Pakistan suffer from weak implementation. While Pakistan has ratified international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 2022, enforcement remains inadequate. Laws related to workplace harassment, inheritance rights, and gender-based violence are often ignored or poorly enforced due to patriarchal attitudes within the judicial system. Without proper legal accountability, gender inequality persists unchecked. Social biases also discourage women from pursuing

leadership roles, reinforcing the perception that politics is a male-dominated sphere. Women face significant resistance from political parties, voters, and even their own families when seeking leadership positions.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021) was highlighted how norms discourage female political empowerment, leaving governance structures overwhelmingly male-dominated. As a result, women's perspectives and interests remain underrepresented in policy-making.

Another major barrier to gender equality in Pakistan is women's limited electoral participation. Many women, particularly in conservative areas, are prevented from voting due to family pressures,

Societal norms, or even direct bans imposed by local elders.

The Awar Foundation (2020) reported that in some constituencies, women's voter turnout is deliberately suppressed, undermining democratic representation and reinforcing gender-based exclusion. Without political participation, women lack the ability to influence laws and policies that affect their lives.

Addressing gender inequality in Pakistan requires comprehensive legal, social, and economic reforms to create an environment that fosters gender parity. Strengthening laws and policies is the first step toward eliminating systemic discrimination. Enforcing gender equality

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legislation, improving judicial accountability, and ensuring workplace protections can help bridge the gender gap. According to the CEDAW Report (2022), countries that implement strong legal frameworks experience higher gender parity across all sectors.

Education plays a crucial role in dismantling gender stereotypes and empowering women. Integrating gender-sensitive curricula in schools, promoting female education, and challenging societal biases through awareness campaigns can create long-term change. The UNESCO (2023) report emphasizes that countries with high female literacy rates experience lower gender-based violence and better economic participation. Ensuring

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accessible education for all girls will contribute to a more equitable society.

Expanding economic opportunities for women is another crucial step. Providing skill training, increasing job access, and promoting female entrepreneurship can help break the cycle of economic dependency.

The World Bank (2022) suggests that improving women's access to financial resources significantly boosts and improving national GDP and reduces poverty.

By fostering an inclusive economy, Pakistan can unlock the potential of millions of women.

Lastly, gender inequality in Pakistan remains a deeply rooted issue with far-reaching social, economic and political

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representation due to entrenched Patriarchal norms and systemic barriers. Economic marginalization, wage disparities, and lack of financial independence further exacerbate the issue, while weak enforcement of gender equality laws and cultural biases continue to restrict women's rights. However, meaningful progress can be achieved through stronger legal frameworks, gender-sensitive education, and improved economic opportunities for women. Promoting women's leadership, expanding access to financial resources, and ensuring equal representation in governance can drive long-term change. Moreover, shifting societal attitudes through awareness campaigns and inclusive policies is essential for dismantling

discriminatory structures. Gender equality is not just a moral imperative but a prerequisite for national progress, as no country can achieve sustainable development while half of its population remains disadvantaged. By ensuring equal opportunities, legal protections, and social empowerment, Pakistan can move toward a more just, inclusive, and prosperous future where gender not determine one's rights, opportunities, or success.

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