

# Gender/women studies in Pakistan.

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Discuss the current status of gender and women studies in Pakistan. Include the development of academic progress, research initiatives, institutional challenges, and societal perceptions.

## ② → Introduction

Gender and Women Studies in Pakistan have evolved from activist-oriented initiatives into an institutionalized academic discipline. While universities now offer structured degree programs and gender discourse has entered mainstream policy debates, the field still struggles with funding constraints, ideological resistance, and limited institutional autonomy. Its status reflects both intellectual advancement and structural fragility.

Women's  
Activism

Academic  
Recognition

Departmental expansion

Research and  
policy linkages

Institutional  
and social  
Resistance.

## ① Academic Institutionalization of Gender/Women Studies.

### 1.1 Early foundations and intellectual cont. 2-

Women Studies in Pakistan emerged during the 1980s, largely influenced by feminist activism and resistance to discriminatory

Jaws. Chauhan Muntaz and Farida Shaheed in Women of Pakistan's Two Steps Forward, One Step Back explain that early scholarship aimed to expose legal and political marginalization of women and challenge male-dominated academic narratives within universities.

## 1.2 → From Women centered to Gender-Relational framework

Over time, the discipline shifted from focusing solely on women to analyzing broader gender relations. Bowles and Renate Klein in Theory of Women Studies discuss the autonomy versus interdependence debate that shaped this transition. Pakistani academia gradually incorporated masculinity, identity politics, and intersectionality.

into curriculum frameworks.

### 1.3, Expansion of academic programs and departments :

Today, major public universities offer BS, MS, and MPhil programs in Gender Studies. Dedicated departments operate in several provinces. However, expansion remains uneven across regions. Institutional recognition exists, but resource allocation, faculty specialization, and research infrastructure remain comparatively weaker than traditional social science disciplines.

## ② Growth of Gender-Focused Research in Pakistan.

### 2.1, Emerging research culture and policy engagement :

Research in Gender Studies has increasingly influenced policy debates on violence, governance, and development. Farzana Bari in *The State of Women Studies in Pakistan* highlights that gender scholarship has shaped discussions on quotas, legal reforms, and political representation. Academic research now contributes directly to legislative and advocacy frameworks.

### 2.2 Multidisciplinary strength of Gender Scholarship :-

Gender Studies in Pakistan is multidisciplinary, integrating sociology, economics, law, and political science.

Judith Lorber in *The Social Construction of Gender* argues that gender operates as a structural system embedded in institutions.

Pakistani scholars increasingly apply

such theoretical lenses to analyze labor markets, education, and governance patterns.

### 2.3, Donor influence and Research dependency. 2

Despite research growth, many gender research initiatives depend heavily on international donor funding. This often aligns research priorities with global agendas rather than indigenous theoretical development. Limited state funding restricts long term research sustainability and weakens the discipline's autonomy within Pakistani academia.

### ③ Institutional and Structural challenges.

### 3.1) Funding constraints and academia marginalization :-

Gender Studies departments frequently receive smaller budgets and fewer faculty positions compared to mainstream disciplines. Rubina Saigol in *The State of the Discipline of Women Studies in Pakistan* argues that marginal funding reflects deeper structural biases within academia hierarchies that privilege traditional knowledge systems over critical gender scholarship.

### 3.2) Ideological resistance and cultural misrepresentation :-

Gender Studies is sometimes portrayed as culturally alien or Western-driven. Nighat Saif Khan in *Locating the Self: Perspectives*

on Women and Multiple Identities  
explains that feminist discourse  
in Pakistan is often politicized  
and misunderstood. Such resistance  
affects student enrollment, curriculum  
debates, and public legitimacy  
of the discipline.

### 3.3, Weak research infrastructure and capacity gaps.

limited access to updated  
academic databases, research grants,  
and international collaboration restricts  
scholarly productivity. Faculty development  
programs remain insufficient. Without  
strengthening research infrastructure,  
the discipline may struggle to  
produce indigenous theoretical  
frameworks capable of shaping  
both local and global gender  
discourses.

## ④ Societal perceptions and transformative potential

### 4.1, Public misconceptions and social stigma

Many segments of society misinterpret Gender Studies as anti-religious or anti-cultural. Margaret Scheeler in Freedom from violence emphasizes that resistance to gender discourse often stems from fear of structural change. In Pakistan, such misconceptions reduce social acceptance and hinder broader engagement with gender scholarship.

### 4.3, Changing youth <sup>attitudes</sup> Activism and Digital activism

Urban youth and civil society actors increasingly engage with

gender issues through digital platforms and public ~~ex~~ campaigns. This growing awareness reflects gradual normalization of gender discourse. Universities now serve as intellectual spaces where students critically debate patriarchy, representation and equality within Pakistani society.

### 4.3, Transformative role in Law and policy reform &

Gender Studies contribute significantly to policy reform, legal advocacy, and governance improvements. Naila Kabeer in *Reversed Realities* argues that empowerment requires structural transformation rather than symbolic inclusion. Pakistani gender scholarship supports reforms related to violence laws, political quotas, and labor protections.

Academic  
Growth

Research  
Expansion

Funding Barriers  
(Scarcity)

Ideological Barriers  
Resistance

Contested but  
Consolidated Discipline.

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### Conclusion

The current status of Gender and Women Studies in Pakistan reflects institutional progress alongside persistent structural challenges.

Academic programs and research initiatives have expanded, yet

funding limitations, ideological resistance, and weak infrastructure constrain full institutional maturity. Strengthening autonomy, research capacity, and public engagement can transform the discipline into a more influential intellectual force.

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