

Gender-Based Violence and Society.

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~~Analyzing the root causes of gender-based violence~~

Examine the societal, cultural, and economic implications of gender-based violence in Pakistan.

Highlight how these factors influence women's safety, participation in public life, and empowerment.

(1)

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Pakistan represents a profound social problem with far-reaching societal, cultural, and economic consequences. It undermines women's safety, restricts their participation in public life, and obstructs national development. Examining the societal implications of GBV reveals how patriarchal norms, economic constraints, and institutional weaknesses collectively limit women's empowerment in Pakistan.

Patriarchal norms
and gender
inequality

Normalization of
violence against
women

Restriction on
women's mobility
and participation

Societal and
economic consequences

(2) Societal implications of
Gender violence

2.1 Fear and restriction
of mobility

Gender-based violence significantly affects women's sense of security in both private and public spaces. Fears of harassment, assault, or honor-based violence often force women to limit their mobility and participation in social activities. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) - State of Human Rights in Pakistan reports, harassment and violence in public spaces remain widespread, discouraging women from traveling independently or accessing educational and employment opportunities.

2.2 Psychological trauma and social isolation

Victims of GBV frequently experience severe psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and loss of

self-confidence, social stigma and
victim-blaming attitudes often isolate
survivors from their communities - Judith
Lober in The Social Construction of
Gender explains that societies structure
around gender hierarchy often silence
victims of violence reinforcing their
marginalization and perpetuating systemic
inequality.

2.3 Intergenerational Impact on Families

Gender violence also has long-term
impacts on family structures and
child development. Children raised in
environments where violence against women
is normalized may internalize
aggressive behavior or develop
psychological distress. Research cited
Avant Foundation reports indicates
that exposure to domestic violence

increases the likelihood of future cycles of abuse within families, perpetuating gender inequality across generations.

③ Cultural factors reinforcing violence

3.1, Honor and Patriarchal Control

Cultural notions of honor play a powerful role in sustaining gender violence in Pakistan. Women are often viewed as symbols of family reputation, and any perceived violation of social norms may trigger violent responses. According to IHRCP reports, hundreds of honor-related killings occur annually in Pakistan. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* argues

that patriarchal societies control women's bodies and behavior to maintain male authority.

3.2, Traditional Gender Roles and Expectations 2

Deeply entrenched gender roles also contribute to the persistence of violence. Women are frequently expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities and obedience, while men occupy positions of authority in public life. Sylvia Walby in Theorizing Patriarchy explains that patriarchal systems operate through institutions such as family, culture, and the state, reinforcing unequal power relations that enable violence.

3.3, Cultural Silence and Victim Blaming 2

Social attitudes that blame victims rather than perpetrators discourage women from reporting violence. Families may pressure survivors to remain silent to avoid social stigma. High-profile cases such as the Motorway rape case (2010) demonstrate how public discourse sometimes shifts blame toward victims rather than addressing systemic failures in law enforcement and social attitudes.

3.4, Informal Justice Systems

Traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms such as tribal councils or jirgas often handle cases of violence through informal settlements. Practices like Vani or Swara, where girls are given in marriage to resolve disputes, illustrate how customary systems

perpetuate structural violence. Khawar Muneer and Farida Shaheed in *Women of Pakistan: Two Steps Forward, One Step Back* argue that such systems reinforce patriarchal authority and undermine women's legal rights.

④ Economic consequences of GBV.

4.1) Reduced female labor participation

Gender-based violence significantly affects women's participation in the workforce.

Fear of harassment or assault discourages many women from seeking employment or continuing education.

According to World Bank gender statistics for Pakistan, female labor force participation remains among the

lowest in South Asia, partly due to safety concerns and social restrictions.

9.2 Economic dependency and vulnerability

When women are economically dependent on male family members, they often lack the resources needed to escape abusive environments. Economic vulnerability forces many survivors to remain in violent relationships.

Amartya Sen in *Development as Freedom* emphasizes that economic empowerment is essential for expanding individual freedom and protecting women from exploitation.

Gender violence and harassment Reduced education and employment opportunities

Economic dependency on male relatives. Limited empowerment and autonomy.

⑤ Impact on Public Participation

5.1, Barriers to Political Participation

Gender violence also discourages women from engaging in political and civic activities. Women candidates and activists often face harassment, threats, and character assassination campaigns.

HRCR reports highlight that intimidation during elections can discourage women from contesting political positions or participating in public decision-making processes.

5.2, Obstacles to Educational Advancement

Fear of violence can also restrict girls' access to education, particularly

in rural areas. Families may withdraw daughters from schools due to safety concerns during travel or fear of harassment. This educational deprivation perpetuates gender inequality and reduces women's future opportunities for leadership and economic independence.

5.3 Impact on social development

The persistence of GBV undermines broader social development goals by restricting half of the population from contributing fully to society. Martha Nussbaum in Women and Human Development argues that societies cannot achieve progress without ensuring women's basic capabilities, including bodily integrity, security, and equal participation in social life.

6) GBU and Women's empowerment

6.1 Weak institutional protection

Despite legal frameworks addressing gender violence, institutional weaknesses often prevent effective protection.

Survivors may face insensitive treatment from police officers or lengthy judicial procedures. Rubina Saigol in *The State of the Discipline of Women Studies in Pakistan* notes that institutional barriers discourage victims from seeking justice and reinforce structural inequality.

6.2 Role of civil society and advocacy

Civil society organizations and women's

rights movements play a vital role in challenging gender violence and promoting empowerment. Advocacy by groups such as the Aurat foundation and campaigns highlighting cases like Mulhataran Mai have increased public awareness and pressured authorities to strengthen legal protections for women.

6.3, Pathways toward empowerment

Addressing gender violence requires comprehensive strategies combining legal enforcement, social awareness, and economic empowerment. Expanding education for girls, strengthening protection mechanisms, and promoting gender-sensitive media narratives can gradually transform societal attitudes. These initiatives create conditions that ~~can~~ enable women to participate

confidently in public life and
exercise their rights.

legal protection
and enforcement

Educator and
economic opportunities

Cultural transformation
and awareness

Greater safety and
empowerment for
women

(7)

Conclusion

Gender-based violence in Pakistan has profound societal, cultural, and economic implications that limit women's safety

participation, and empowerment. Patriarchal norms, economic dependency, and institutional weaknesses collectively sustain this problem. Combating GBV therefore requires coordinated efforts involving legal reforms, cultural ~~stigmatization~~ transformation, and economic empowerment initiatives to ensure women can participate fully and safely in Pakistani society.

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