

Empowering Women through Legal Initiatives: A Study of Legal Reforms for Women Empowerment in Pakistan (2005–2024)

Sadaf Ashiq¹, Zahid Yaseen²

¹PhD scholar, Department of Politics & International Relations, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

^{2*} Associate Professor, Department of Politics & International Relation, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

Corresponding author: zahid.yaseen@gcwus.edu.pk

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This article takes a critical look at the process and outcomes of the legal reform process for a woman in Pakistan in the period of 2005-24. It analyses the impact of legislative interferences on the enhancement on women's socio-economic, political and legal status in a conventionally patriarchal society. The analysis is based on the review of legal documents, to include the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010), the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act (2016) and the range of family law reforms, with an assessment on how they have been implemented and how they have supported women's rights and empowerment. Using a mixed-methods methodology, the research combines qualitative data and quantitative data. The findings reveal the areas of both success and ongoing challenges, including inadequate enforcement measures, social and cultural resistance and limited ecological knowledge among women. The analysis points that despite several legal reforms the situation women empowerment is facing multiple issues but "ideally there is need of a combination of policy effort, institutional commitment and public campaign". This work adds to the broader literature on gender justice and the delivery of development benefits through the law by providing policy prescriptions that would help in consolidating the relationship between the law and inclusive development and gender justice in Pakistan.

1. Introduction

The years 2005 to onward are period of transformation in legal standards and frameworks fostering gender equality in Pakistan. Driven by changes in the political context, increased activism of civil society organizations and an international focus on gender equality, Pakistan made a number of legislative and policy changes targeting structural inequalities faced by women. These were not only internal justice and inclusion response mechanisms, but were also informed by global agendas such as the MDGs and the subsequent SDGs-5 in particular goal "Though fundamental rights are ensured in the Constitution of Pakistan to every citizen irrespective of gender, however, the structure of society, implementation-gap and the deep-rooted patriarchal system have remained in the way of exercising those rights by women." In this context, the years in question saw the passage and amendment of a number of legislation dealing with domestic violence, workplace harassment, child marriage, inheritance rights and political participation (Imran & Shahzad, 2019). These legal changes stand as both victories and continuing challenges in the journey to achieving justice around gender.

For the period 2005-23 we offer a critical assessment of legislative and institutional developments with scrutiny of actors—state, judiciary, civil society and international actors—and the process of agenda setting. It also assesses, in practice, the impact of these laws, considering what has worked well, what has not and what needs further reform. By examining the legal journey of women's empowerment during this period, the chapter seeks to dispel simplistic visions of law as the tool for and the locus of struggle for, woman's rights in Pakistan.

1.1 Protection Against Harassment

““Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010”” was one of the major pieces of legislation towards women's empowerment in Pakistan from 2005-2023. This groundbreaking law was born out of increasing awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace, a long-ignored phenomenon. Before this law, sexual harassment victims had virtually no legal recourse and encountered daunting cultural and institutional barriers to justice. The 2010 Act would henceforth define women's legal entitlement to a violence-free and dignified work space and pave the way for in-house mechanisms that could entertain complaints, establish accountability and work towards bringing about behavioral change at the workplace (Imran & Shahzad, 2019).

“Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010”, was enacted by Pakistan's Parliament in the month of March, 2010. The law sought to constitute a legal provision to safeguard women against sexual harassment at all public and private institutions of employment. It was broadly cast, including physical and verbal and non-verbal sexual behavior which creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. Significantly, the law required all entities to have a committee whose job was to respond to complaints of harassment and to adopt a code of conduct in which harassment is explicitly forbidden. Employers had to post this code and train workers on the penalties for breaking it. The Act was characterized by its proactive tone, however, in that it stressed not only the punishment of traffickers but also public

awareness and institutional reform as a form of prevention (Deeba, 2021).

Key to the legislation was the appointment of Ombudspersons at the federal and provincial levels whose main provisions included hearing appeals of internal inquiry committee decisions and the opportunity for fair treatment. These people had de facto judicial power to subpoena witnesses, hear evidence and impose punishment. Their very presence provided an additional layer of checks to avoid bias or inaction at the institutional level and gave women the confidence they could find redress without being entirely swallowed up by the more ponderous and faced with opaque walls of the criminal justice system. The use of ombudspersons made justice accessible for working women by a great measure, particularly in sectors with poor or no internal mechanisms.

However, the Act has been modified over the years to widen its coverage and improve its efficacy. In 2022 the Act was further amended with the Protection of Women against Harassment at the Workplace (Amendment) Act. This amendment expanded the definition of “employee” to include salaried workers, interns, volunteers, daily wagers, domestic workers and freelancers apart from regular workers. It also changed the word “female” to “any person,” to remove a gender-specific component of the law and acknowledge that men and gender minorities can be the victims of harassment. This change reflected a broader and more inclusive (and rights-based) transformation of occupational safety (Ali et al., 2021). Added to that, a 2022 ad had stressed the importance of timely enquiries and decisions, bringing in tighter timeframes to prevent where the complaints related into compromise being resolved being unduly delayed.

Despite these steps forward, the effectiveness of the Act has been inhibited in various ways. Laws are clear, but execution is mixed. A large number of entities do not have any idea about their duties of the statute or intentionally violate provisions. In some these sensitization sessions do not make good inquiry committees or make them in a tokenistic way where its members are not adequately sensitized or aware of the laws at all. The internal investigation, in such instances, can be biased, poorly executed or intimidating for victims, ultimately resulting in harassment cases being underreported. Also, stigma that surrounds speaking out against sexual misbehavior remains a potent reason for many women to stay silent. People who experience it often worry about retaliation, professional consequences or damage to a reputation, particularly in male-dominated fields or in conservative work settings (Ali et al., 2021).

The scrutiny of the 2010 Act and subsequent calls for reform have been led by female-led civil society organizations including women’s rights groups serving as critical watchdogs. Organizations such as Aurat Foundation, Women in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE) and Legal Aid Society have carried out public awareness campaigns, provided legal assistance to complainants and trained inquiry committees on the methodological, procedural and ethical aspects of adjudicating sexual harassment cases. Their participation has been key to addressing institutional and labor rights related information gaps among employees (Yaseen et al., 2019). Another positive is the growing use of digital platforms to file complaints and follow cases. A number of the province’s ombudsperson offices have introduced online complaint mechanisms, to

allow people living in remote areas or people unwilling to take their complaints directly to their employers to seek assistance. But digital literacy and access to internet is still a challenge for our underprivileged communities, especially women in the rural areas of Pakistan. Thus, even as technology provides hope, it is not a substitute for on-the-ground institutional capacity building and legal literacy drives.

Not to mention the media and high-profile cases have long brought workplace harassment to light. A number of high-profile cases, involving celebrities, journalists and professionals in Pakistan, have inspired national conversation and freed more women to speak out. These public moments of reckoning have shown both the law's potency and its limits. On one hand, they have highlighted the need for a legal mechanism to address harassment; on the other, they have made visible the social backlash, online trolling and character assassination that harass victims of harassment into silence. So the law is within a wider sociocultural ecosystem that also needs to change for empowerment to happen (Mesiya, 2020). In a nutshell, the “Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010” and its subsequent amendments, mark an important feat in Pakistan's struggle against sexual harassment in the workplace. The law has prompted awareness-raising, the formalization of remedies and accountability for perpetrators. But until now, it hasn't really lived up to all of its potential, owing to spotty enforcement, a social taboo, and institutional inertia. It is important to strengthen, via better funding, training and outreach to the public, the role of ombudspersons. In the future, it will take a multifaceted approach—legal reform, administrative commitment, educational efforts and cultural change. People like me need to be involved in all this work, if we are ever to ensure that all people are able to work in a condition of dignity, safety and without discrimination and barriers.

2. Laws Related to Domestic Violence

Considered one of the biggest human rights issues, domestic violence affects people irrespective of their gender, age and socio-economic background. As a result of increased awareness and advocacy, different legislative measures have been put in place to prevent and protect domestic violence's victims. With that said, Pakistan is a federation and social protection laws are under the jurisdiction of the provincial governments. Even though there are commonalities in principles such as the definition of the scope, definitions, enforcement mechanisms and institutional arrangements differ significantly across the entire country. The study examines different provinces' legislations on domestic violence, with a more specific focus on Sindh and Punjab, in addition to the challenges facing the effective implementation of the laws (Pakeeza, 2015). The Sindh Assembly enacted the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2013, which was the first complete piece of legislation to combat domestic violence nationally.

The Act relies on a broad definition of domestic violence, covering physical, emotional, psychological, verbal and economic abuse. It also authorizes the court to issue protection and monetary orders, directives to secure residential premises and require the appointment of protection officers. The law is respondent-oriented, acknowledging that the abuse is not merely

physical but also psychosocial and financial. Moreover, it stipulates that the petitions need to be agreed upon within 90 days of filing, ensuring a timely legal cure. Nonetheless, although the legislation is good, the act has limited its reach by neglecting to appoint protection officers promptly and failing to create the needed infrastructure such as choose-in-law homes.

The Punjab Act, which followed Sindh's lead, presented another legislative variant of equal importance. The Act is remarkable for its institutional and structural innovations. It also includes the demand for the setting up of Violence Against Women Centers (VAWCs), that is, one-window centers, with comprehensive package of services that involve legal assistance, police reporting, medical examination, psychological counseling and shelter. The law also includes electronic monitoring of offenders, residency orders and compensation. Unlike Sindh's law, the Act does not define domestic violence as readily nor does it touch directly on such laws as honour killing and the practice of 'swara'. It is, however, limited to women and does try to address the obstacles they encounter when they decide to seek help. It is considered one of the more realistic legislations on the books, largely because of its centralized support model. But even with such promises, critics claim the Act has yet to be carried out adequately across the province. There are only handful of VAWCs ever created and the one at Multan has been the most functional model center. But a combination of lack of funding, lack of political will and push-back from conservative interests has stood in the way of a full-throated commitment to this innovative approach (Ehsan & Khan, 2024).

Balochistan passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2014, through the provincial assembly to counter the increasing incidents of violence in homes. Similar to the Sindh Act, it has an expansive definition of domestic violence and establishes legal remedies in the form of protection orders and financial assistance. Yet the Act has been rarely enforced and enforcement is unknown to police and judicial officers cancer. In a province steeped in tribal customs and entrenched patriarchal culture, domestic violence is frequently seen as socially legitimate and victims are compelled not to report violence. Further, institutional structures like shelters, protection officers and sensitization training for the police is almost absent, which means that the law is more symbolic than effective in most parts (Jabeen, 2019; Maqsood & Younas, 2024).

The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) lagged behind and took a little longer in promulgating laws against domestic violence. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Domestic Violence against Women (Prevention and Protection) Act, was finally passed in 2021 after many delays and controversies. The delay was symptomatic of social and political resistance in the province to accepting domestic violence as a criminal and social problem. References to the KP Act are however... 38 of 2012 The KP Act is, however, only a limited version of the Sindh and Punjab Acts. It concentrates on women as sufferers – an approach that some have criticized for ignoring other groups, such as children, elderly, or men who can also be victims. Furthermore, the Act is silent on the procedural mechanics of enforcement (Sheraz & Shah, 2023). While providing for district level protection committees there is little clarity or evidence of their operation and

functioning. The lack of proper supervision does little to inspire confidence in the legislation's potential efficacy.

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2020, was also passed by the Islamabad Capital Territory to protect the victims of domestic violence through laws in the Islamabad Capital Territory (Jamshaid & Ayyaz, 2022). This legislation was enacted as an important extension of security beyond the provinces. But it met strong resistance from religious groups and conservative politicians, who derided it as “anti-family” and “Western-inspired.” Although the law was eventually passed, this has not translated into action on the ground due to a lack of protection officers and also a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of government administrative technicians.

There is still an absence of functional enforcement bodies in all the provinces. Laws on the books may be comprehensive, but the infrastructure needed to implement them, such as trained personnel, special courts, protection officers, legal aid and counseling, is inadequate or nonexistent. Even in most other provinces, victims must still contend with a maze of daunting and sometimes hostile elements, including police officers who are not trained to deal with issues related to domestic violence, judges who are ignorant or unsympathetic and communities that stigmatize victims. In addition, funding the implementation of such laws is scarce. Without funding, the best law on the books is no more than an empty shell (Asghar, 2024).

A further problem is the differential treatment in the legal definitions and scope in individual provinces, resulting in differences in protection and enforcement. While laws in Sindh and Balochistan also cover a wider range of abuses—such as psychological and economic violence—the laws in Punjab and KP are more limited in coverage. This inconsistency not only confuses but also undermines any national narrative and policy on domestic violence. There is also no federal oversight or consistent provincial laws, yet another obstacle to forming a coordinated approach to the problem.

Cultural and social norms are also a major obstacle to the enforcement of these laws. Domestic violence is often thought to be a private issue rather than a legal one in many parts of Pakistan. Victims, particularly women, are silenced by fear of stigma, retribution or banishment from their family and community. In these cases, in tribal and rural settings, informal justice mechanisms in the shape of jirgas loom, surpassing the formal legal process to settle domestic violence issues through compromise or financial settlement, often sidelining the women. None of these laws are well-known by either the public or law enforcement. Many victims don't realize they have discrimination protections, and those that do often face enormous real life and emotional barriers to the justice system. Police and judicial officers are often not trained to deal with such cases in a sensitive manner and to within the legal parameters laid down in these Acts. Without broad publicity, knowledge of the law or education for officials, the laws are not being maximally leveraged (Zubair et al., 2023).

What remains clear are the short and long term implications of making such a law effective, despite the push to make it work in the provinces that have adopted this instrument. But gaps

between the law and isolation measures pose barriers to protection for some victims on the ground, with inconsistent provincial laws, no enforcement structure and a lack of social acceptance all creating distance between legal protections and safety. For such laws to actually work, however, there has to be consistent effort on harmonizing legal definition and terms, ring-fenced financing for implementation, built-in capacity building for the police and judiciary, sustained confrontation of cultural norms that condone or overlook domestic violence. Only then can Pakistan dream of a society in which domestic abuse victims are not only safeguarded but are also given a chance to recover their lives in dignity.

3. Criminal Law Amendments for Women's Safety

Violence against women is one of the most pervasive and enduring human right violations in Pakistan. From domestic violence to sexual abuse, killings in the name of honor and sexual harassment at work, the female half of the population has for centuries suffered abuses with little legal protection. But in the last 20 years, a series of important legal changes have been made to better protect women and make sure that justice is done in cases of gender based violence. The article undertakes a critical examination of three main legislative reforms in Pakistan that seek to ensure women's safety, namely the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2006, the Anti-Honor Killing Laws 2016 and the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021. It considers also the shift in legal standards differing sanctions and procedural changes each amendment has generated.

3.1 Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2006

The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2006 was a historic step in combating gender based violence and specifically addressing honor killings, rape and sexual assault. Amend1_antihonorkalingaPrior to the legal amendment, often cases involving honor based violence cases went unpunished due to cultural justifications and legal lacunas such as in the case of Qisas and Diyat laws under which the family of the victim often forgave the perpetrator often a kin (Mehdi, 2010; Mehdi & Niazi, 2010).

3.2 Key Provisions

- I. **Incorporation of Honor Killing in the Penal Code:** The amendment arose from defining honor killing as murder and thus, to negate all cultural justifications so as to lessen sentences.
- II. **Amendment in Section 302 (Murder):** The law provided that in cases of murder committed in the name of ghairat (honour), the punitive provisions of the ordinary law in relation to murder would apply and there would be no possibility of Qisas for such killings.
- III. **Definitions of Sexual Violence:** The coerced nature of sexual violence was recognized and the definition of rape in S.375 of the PPC, was expanded to cover a greater number of non-consensual sex acts and coercive situations.
- IV. **Victim's Character to be Inadmissible:** A ban was included against the inquiry into the character or the previous sexual conduct of the victim at trial, so as to ensure that no

secondary victimization occurs against the victim.

The 2006 amendment was a positive change, yet implementation was problematic. Police refusal to open a First Incident Report (FIR), social pressure on victims, and insufficient training of judicial staff at times impeded access to justice. However, it did open the door to additional change and elevated the discussion around gender violence nationally.

3.3 Anti-Honor Killing Laws (2016)

Loopholes in the legal system, especially with regard to forgiveness under Qisas and Diyat, were exploited to avoid punishment, despite the reforms enacted in 2006. The 2016 law was brought in, in an attempt to respond to public anger over notorious honor killings, such as the killing of social media star Qandeel Baloch by her brother (Hadi, 2020; Sartorio, 2017).

3.4 Salient Features

- I. **Compulsory Punishment for Honour Killings:** The most important part of the Anti-Honour Killing Laws (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2016 was that honour killing offenders were no longer able to avoid punishment by receiving “forgiveness” from members of their family. Even if he's pardoned, he still gets life.
- II. **Honor Killing Defined:** “Honor killing means killing of a person as defined in clause 375 of the act on the pretext of defending family honour if such killing is in respect of a female for her character or conduct, or for casting an evil eye, or on any ground of suspicion.”
- III. **Removed Judicial Discretion:** The discretion of the judge to mitigate punishments in honor killings was also removed, making the punishments for such killings more uniform and higher.

And if the 2016 amendment was seen as a significant step toward closing the Diyat loophole? Still, hurdles exist to getting the honor motive before a court. Many offenders still try to conceal their reasons to avoid inclusion in the scope of the honor killing provisions. As well as attitudes to honor and shame in society are forces railing against enforcement of the law.

3.5 Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021

Rape laws in Pakistan have long been denounced as insensitive to victims and tilted in favor of the accused. Issues ranged from the lack of forensic infrastructure to low conviction rates and hostile cross-examinations. Focused on comprehensive criminal justice reform on sexual violence, the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 is to repeal the old Law of Evidence Ordinance, 1984 and provide a new comprehensive evidence law comprising of all the best evidential practices (Sarraz, 2024).

3.6 Major Innovations

- I. **Special Courts:** The Act provided for special courts for trying cases of rape to be concluded within four months.
- II. **Independent Investigation Units:** Police now have to do an investigation into a rape case

either by a trained lady cop or by a particular team for rape case alone in part of knowing the sensitivity and professionalism.

- III. **Rape Crisis Centres and Victim Assistance:** The Act allowed the establishment of rape crisis centers to provide survivors with medical, psychological and legal help.
- IV. **DNA and Forensic:** The law mandated that forensic evidence including DNA evidence must be collected within a specified number of days to help in avoiding a situation of dilly dallying that lead to tampering with evidence.
- V. **Victim Anonymity and Protection:** The name of a girl/ victim is to be protected by not giving it directly or indirectly in the media. Dignity of the victim shall be maintained at all stages in the Court.
- VI. **Chemical Castration Introduced:** The law contained controversial provisions that empowered courts to order chemical castration as a penalty for repeat offenders, only if the convict agrees.

Revolutionary changes have been brought about with Act 2021, in the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences. But the feasibility and the ethical issues of the chemical castration are raised. In addition, it relies on the adequate training of police, forensic labs and supervision of trial courts.

Prominent among the recent criminal law amendments in Pakistan are amendments to the legal definitions of gender-based violence. Rape, which historically has been defined as forced penile-vaginal penetration, now includes a spectrum of non-consensual behavior, including digital and object penetration and non-consensual oral and anal intercourse, conducted under coercion, deceit, or threat. This more expansive definition conforms more closely to international human rights norms and better captures survivors' experiences. 46 Moreover, as noted above they used to lump honor killings into the category of homicide and now set them aside and criminalize them as a murder under the guise of defending family honor. This acknowledgment permits bringing on the acceptance of some form of responsibility and drawing a line over cultural excuses that allowed lighter sentences in the past. The changes have also made legislation more gender inclusive by eliminating derogatory references and by ensuring that legislation is victim-focused. Such definitional shifts represent an essential step toward enabling the law to properly recognize, classify and address violence against women.

3.7 Laws Addressing Economic Empowerment

Economic autonomy is an essential element of gender equality and social justice. In the Pakistan, women access to land, property and the financial resources is traditionally not sufficient and historically they are discriminated against on the basis of socio cultural norms and patriarchal behavior (Jabeen & Jabeen, 2013). Legal reforms and social protection program have been introduced to counter this deficit of provision. The women's economic empowerment has been addressed through three main legislations and policies such as The Enforcement of Women's

Property Rights Act, 2020, Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) and laws advocating for women's inheritance rights in Pakistan (Naseem et al., 2021).

3.7.1 The Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020

The Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act, 2020, is a significant legislative step toward protecting and restoring women's rights to property and inheritance. Passed by the Federal Legislature of Pakistan, this Act is in response to the long-pending problems of women for deprivation of property and assets. It is a significant legal advance in the battle to dismantle structural and family impediments to women's economic freedom (Hussain et al., 2023).

3.7.2 Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)

The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) is Pakistan's flagship unconditional cash transfer program to reduce poverty and income inequality; it was launched in 2008 to combat the economic threat of low-income women. Though initially a matter of voluntary gesture, over the years constitutionally and legislatively fortified it earned a place in Pakistan's economic governance setup.

3.7.3 Legal Framework

BISP instituted through the Presidential Order No. 1 of 2008, subsequently became a part of integrated social protection system with:

- The Ehsaas Policy Framework 2019 Social protection as a constitutional obligation was upheld in the ehsaas policy framework (2019).
- The BISP is part of the PSDP, thus has strong legal and financial status.
- Article 38(d) of the Constitution of Pakistan, which requires the state to secure the provision of the means of subsistence to citizens who cannot earn their livelihood.

3.7.4 Core Components

BISP covers the poorest households, with women as the majority of beneficiaries. Its key components include:

- Unconditional Cash Transfers (UCTs) to women by National Socio-economic Registry (NSER): UCTs are disbursed to women listed on the NSER.
- Waseela-e-Taleem: A conditional cash transfer program for girls schooling.
- Waseela-e-Sehat and Waseela-e-Rozgar- These are programs designed to enhance access to healthcare and vocational training.

3.7.5 Economic Empowerment through BISP

- **Cash Transfers Directly to Women as Heads of Households:** BISP transfers are made in the name of women head of the household, thereby acknowledging females as key decision makers in economic life.

- **Inclusion Finance:** A large number of women have been offered access to banking and mobile financial services due to BISP delivery mechanisms.
- **Empowerment and Dignity:** Women feel empowered and dignified by earning states' support independently from male household members.

Several studies by the World Bank, UNDP and independent researchers have ascertained the positive impact of BISP on women's economic agency:

- Rising domestic consumption, especially for food and healthcare.
- Better education for girls.
- Increased mobility and decision-making power for women in the household.

“But this provides charity,” critics say, using the Arabic term for dowry or charity that the BISP payment promises. “It doesn't change women's status, neither does it constitute a structural approach to longer-term economic empowerment.” Hence, it is suggested that BISP should be linked with employment and enterprises schemes.

4. Legal provisions for women's inheritance rights

Women's rights to inheritance in Pakistan are based upon Islamic laws which provide a precise share of a male relative's property to his female relatives. Daughters, wives, mothers and sisters are all regarded as heirs according to Sharia law. For example, a daughter's share is usually only half the inheritance of a son. These rights also derive from constitutional guarantees—every citizen's right to property is enshrined in Article 23 of the Constitution of Pakistan and Article 25 ensures equality before the law and forbids gender-based discrimination. The same principles are reflected in the statute laws. All Muslims in Pakistan are subject to the West Pakistan Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1962 which requires that when disposing of property in wills certain predefined shares are guaranteed to be allocated to specific family members dealing with inheritance. Furthermore, the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act 2006 also offered crucial legal protections, such as Section 498-A of the Pakistan Penal Code which prohibits the coercive or deceitful deprivation of a woman's inheritance, with punishment up to ten years (Khaleel et al., 2023).

Even though the law is clear, the implementation of inheritance rights in practice is mixed. The harder-to-see rooted causes, described in a piece from 2016 by the journalist Jina Moore, tend to revolve around custom, from right here in the U.S. to around the world, in Spain, Cambodia, India and Iraq, where lands are passed down and traditions show women surrendering their rightful portions in many parts of the country, particularly in rural areas, where women will give up the plots under either duress from male relatives or a desire to avoid dealing with combative, patriarchal inheritance norms. Ignorance of entitlements under law is doubled by procedural complexity and delays of civil litigation which discourage women in their pursuit of intestate claims. Also, allies of powerful family members tamper with land records and other legal documents. The judiciary, it is true, has made some laudable moves, allowing lower courts to

decide that customary law cannot overrule Quranic injunctions, but access to justice is limited for many women (Polok, 2022). Closing this gap requires promotion of legal literacy, computerization of land records to check fraud and strengthening of support institutions like the ombudspersons and community based legal aid. The only way that the inheritance rights of the women can be protected in Pakistan is the enforcement of law and the change of society.

5. Conclusion

The section “History of Legislations System for the Emancipation of Women in Pakistan (2005–2023)” provides an extensive detail of steps taken in the legislative and institutional dimensions for the development of the status of women in Pakistan. And it frames women’s empowerment in the larger context of the sociopolitical and religious structures of Pakistan, where patriarchal and conservative traditions have relegated women. The chapter draws attention to several instances of progressive yet incremental development in the legal terrain under the unending pressure of local campaign for change and global commitments including Come on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 5- Gender Equality. Legal and constitutional guarantees for women’s rights in Pakistan: The chapter opens an inquiry into the self in laws and the constitution of Pakistan that ensure women’s rights in Pakistan. Article 25 of the Constitution ensures equality before the law and non-discrimination, however, the application has not always been consistent. From 2005 to 2023, the state government passed a series of reforms and acts to address legal lacunae and protect women from the violence, discrimination and exclusion from public life.

To begin with, important legislative landmarks are discussed; the Women’s Protection (laws Amendment) Act 2006 which was intended to reform the Hudood Ordinances and safeguards women from false allegations. Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 was a notable step toward making workplaces safer for women. It also made it to some of the provinces and the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Acts were legislated in various provinces as well in line with the devolution post 18th Amendment to the Constitution in 2010.

The chapter also mentions the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2011, The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2016 for honor killings and rape, and the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 with more severe penalties including fast track courts. These trends show an increasing legislative focus on gender-based violence and structural discrimination. It also investigates the function of the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and provincial women’s commissions, highlighting their activities in areas of policy advocacy, legal reform and monitoring. Yet, the chapter argues that implementation remains fragile because of bureaucratic oppositions, lack of political incentivization, minimal public knowledge and cultural resistance, particularly in remote and rural areas.

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