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Women's Access to Justice in Pakistan: Challenges and Policy Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

Access to justice is defined as people's ability to access judicial institutions. Women suffer more when accessing these institutions. In Pakistan, women's rights remain a critical issue of gender equality. This study analyzes Pakistan's efforts in promoting and implementing its constitutional and international human rights obligations. This study reveals that laws exist on paper to promote women's rights, but their implementation is hindered by multifaceted barriers. This qualitative research study adopts a critical discourse analysis approach to analyze Pakistan's efforts in promoting women's access to justice and feminist legal theory as a theoretical framework. This research argues that women continue to encounter various barriers in accessing and effectively utilizing justice mechanisms despite contemporary constitutional and legislative reforms in Pakistan. The findings reveal that patriarchy, poverty, gender inequality, economic interdependence, gender stereotypes, judicial delays, and gender bias continue to restrict women's effective access to justice. It suggests that improving women's legal status and access to justice requires an integrated approach combining effective implementation of existing laws, legal literacy, women's empowerment, and institutional accountability. This underscores the importance of an integrated approach to effectively address the issue. Pakistan can become a more equitable society where women's rights are fully realized and protected by addressing socio-cultural norms, gender inequality, and inadequate implementation issues.

Keywords: *Women's Rights, Human Rights, Patriarchy, Gender Inequality, Gender Stereotype, Gender Bias, Pakistan, Socio-cultural Norms, Women's Empowerment.*

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Introduction

Constitution of Pakistan 1973 gives women equal rights as men. Pakistan is also a signatory to international human rights treaties, which compel

Pakistan to promote, protect, and implement human rights frameworks according to international standards. Women's rights have been a central point of national security in Pakistan. Women continue to face substantial barriers in accessing justice in



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Pakistan. Justice is considered a foundation of the rule of law and a basic principle of democratic governance. This paper seeks to analyze Pakistan's legal framework to understand the status of women in accessing justice. Access to justice enables individuals to enforce their legal rights and obtain fair remedies through legal institutions. This research argues that women continue to experience patriarchy, socio-cultural inequalities, discrimination, gender bias, and family pressure in accessing judicial institutions despite having constitutional rights of equality and safety. These substantial barriers, such as patriarchal attitudes, gender inequality, illiteracy, economic dependency, and gender stereotypes, prevent women from asserting their legal rights.

Access to justice ensures a fair, effective, affordable, and responsive justice system. It enhances women's ability to achieve justice and equality (Javed & Prawiromaruto, 2025). The deep-rooted structural, institutional, and cultural barriers hinder women's ability to seek legal protection in Pakistan. Subsequently, this study attempts to highlight the flaws in the judicial system and barriers in the implementation of women's laws in Pakistan. Women's equal access to justice requires judicial institutions to operate in a gender-sensitive manner (Women, 2018). Equal distribution of justice demands that legal activities must operate in a free and fair environment in the absence of prejudice and discrimination.

Barberet defines women's access to justice as enabling women to obtain timely, affordable, and effective treatment from judicial institutions. This approach includes women's access to policies, courts, legal representation, and judicial institutions (Barberet, 2014). However, Pakistan has introduced several laws to protect women against discrimination, Gender Based Violence (GBV), and women's empowerment. The implementation of these laws encounters socio-cultural barriers that hinder their effectiveness. This research argues that judicial delays, gender bias, and weak enforcement mechanisms are the main reasons for the inconsistent implementation of these laws (Sarwar & Farid, 2024).

Significantly, Pakistan introduced various laws to protect women, such as the Domestic Violence Act, Women Protection Act, and Protection of Women at the Workplace from Harassment. These

undertakings reflect Pakistan's commitments to promote women's rights and gender equality. Liberal feminist groups conduct women's rights awareness campaigns and empower them to resist oppression and discrimination (Sarwar & Huma, 2021). Pakistan has made progress by introducing legal frameworks for the protection of women, but the implementation gap remains deep-rooted. Therefore, Pakistani feminists resist these barriers that restrict them from achieving equality and justice. These reforms are the result of feminist struggle in Pakistan.

Most significantly, many provisions of Pakistan's Constitution 1973 establish equality as a constitutional principle. Constitutional provisions collectively create the legal foundation for gender equality and women's empowerment. Apart from the Constitution, Pakistan has enacted important legislation to strengthen the legal protection of women, such as family laws, labour laws, and inheritance laws.

Pakistan's legal system designed to protect women has failed to achieve its intended goals. Poor implementation of laws and inadequate institutional will prevent women from obtaining fully and systematically legal status (Gondal, 2024). Akhtar reveals that despite significant legislative developments, women continue to face obstacles when seeking justice (Akhtar, 2026). Judicial delays, insufficient victim support, shortage of female police, and inconsistent implementation are the main challenges to Pakistan's judicial system (Sarwar & Farid, 2024). Victims of harassment, domestic violence, forced marriage, and sexual assault encounter social pressure, family stigma, and lengthy judicial proceedings (Ali, 2025). Therefore, this fear discourages many women from pursuing judicial institutions, resulting in extensive underreporting of GBV (HRCP, 2025). In Pakistan, women from rural and remote areas experience even more extreme drawbacks due to geographical location, illiteracy, economic dependency, and poverty. Therefore, they depend on informal dispute resolution such as panchayats and jirgas, which often conflict with constitutional provisions.

This study aims to bridge the gaps between legislative frameworks and practical solutions for women's rights in Pakistan, ensuring they can fully enjoy their human rights. Pakistan is also bound by numerous international legal obligations that

require the elimination of discrimination against women and require it to ensure equality and remove barriers that prevent women from accessing justice. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was ratified by Pakistan in 1996 (Aziz & Sarwar, 2024). United Nations Sustainable Development Goal SDG-5 seeks to achieve gender equality, while SDG-16 aims to promote equal access to justice for all (Sarwar & Farid, 2024). Likewise, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has emphasized that states must ensure accessible, gender-sensitive and affordable justice systems (CEDAW Committee, 2015).

The persistence of patriarchal social structures continues to affect women's ability to exercise their legal rights effectively. In Pakistan, women have experienced discrimination in education, marriage, inheritance, employment, property rights, political participation, and divorce. More evidently, cultural and social norms emphasize male supremacy and authority that discourage women from asserting their legal and constitutional rights (Zia, 2009; Sarwar & Huma, 2021; Latif, 2025). Pakistan's Supreme Court has contributed to women's legal empowerment through constitutional interpretation and public interest litigation. The superior judiciary's decisions have reinforced constitutional guarantees of equality and protection against violence. However, judicial activism alone cannot compensate for deficiencies in legal aid and enforcement.

This study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of legal institutions and propose policy measures and solutions to improve women's rights and access to justice in Pakistan. Therefore, the main argument of this research is that legislative reforms are contemporary achievements, but meaningful results require effective implementation. Social transformation and legal awareness are the prerequisites for women's empowerment and gender equality. The coordination between government and legal institutions minimizes the effect of substantial barriers. Otherwise, without addressing these barriers, legal reforms alone cannot guarantee women's equality and access to justice. It is essential to understand the gap between the implementation of laws and women's experiences for developing effective reforms and policy recommendations. The study critically analyzes constitutional articles, laws, and women's

experiences for suitable findings and results.

Research Objectives

The research objectives of this study are:

- To examine the constitutional and statutory framework governing women's access to justice in Pakistan.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the judiciary, police, prosecution services, legal aid institutions, and human rights organizations.
- To identify legal, institutional, economic, and socio-cultural barriers that prevent women from accessing justice.
- To propose legal and policy recommendations for improving women's access to justice in Pakistan.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are the major barriers that prevent women from accessing justice in Pakistan?
2. To what extent does Pakistan understand its obligations under CEDAW and human rights organizations?

Research Methodology

The study 'women's access to Justice in Pakistan' is a qualitative research study that adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology and draws on feminist legal theory to address the issue. The doctrinal approach analyzes primary and secondary sources by applying descriptive, analytical, and comparative methods.

Literature Review

In Pakistan, the struggle for women's rights has a complex history. Despite constitutional guarantees, women continue to face obstacles and segregation in equal opportunities. Access to justice is a basic human right and an essential element of sustainable development and the rule of law. The existing literature and feminist scholars have highlighted women's rights struggles in Pakistan, delivering fundamental analysis to overcome the violation. Ahmad and Bhatti explain that Pakistan's laws and bills aimed to ensure women's safety face barriers such as political intrigues, patriarchal mindset, corruption, and socio-cultural stereotypes (Ahmad & Bhatti, 2023). According to UNDP, access to justice ensures that every individual can freely

claim and protect rights through impartial and accountable justice institutions (UNDP, 2022). Malik and Azam argue that Pakistan has failed to uphold CEDAW obligations due to significant gaps in compliance and enforcement (Malik & Azam, 2023).

Asghar & Hussain suggest a multifaceted approach including legal reforms and political commitment that bridge the gap between the law and its spirit (Asghar & Hussain, 2022). Cappelletti and Garth's introduced the three waves of access to justice reform. Their first wave emphasizes legal aid for individuals. The second wave focuses on collective representation and public litigation. The third wave advocates institutional reforms designed to make the justice system more effective and responsive (Cappelletti & Garth, 1978). However, legal empowerment is crucial because impoverished communities often lack knowledge and economic resources to utilize legal institutions (Golub, 2003). Golub's legal empowerment approach advocates legal literacy, women's participation, and accountability of legal institutions for improving access to justice (Golub, 2003),

Amartya Sen contends that justice should be evaluated by individuals' actual capabilities to exercise their rights rather than solely by the formal existence of legal institutions (Sen, 2009). Women often experience gender-specific barriers rooted in uneven and discriminatory power relations. Consequently, poverty, male dominance, and limited state capacity further constrained women's access to justice. Rawls claims that actual access to justice depends upon removing socio-cultural stereotypes, economic, and institutional barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized groups of society (Rawls, 1971). These perspectives are actually relevant to Pakistan because women from rural and remote areas rely on customary legal mechanisms that may conflict with constitutional provisions (Sarwar et al., 2022). These women face greater obstacles in accessing justice and legal participation.

From a feminist point of view, feminist legal theory is a theoretical framework for understanding women's unequal access to justice. This critical framework analyzes how legal systems maintain gender inequalities and male domination. Feminist legal theory critiques traditional legal systems that privilege male experience while undermining

women's perspectives. Therefore, this framework exposes gender bias in legal doctrines and advocates legal reforms to protect marginalized groups (Weisberg, 1993; Fineman, 2005). Fineman contends that institutions should provide responsive mechanisms that address structural inequalities affecting vulnerable populations, particularly women (Fineman, 2008).

According to Levit & Verchick, feminist legal theory shares two things: first is an observation, and the second is aspiration. She argues that feminists recognize that men shaped the world. Therefore, men possess a larger share in power and privilege. Feminists reveal that all the existing laws were written by men, ignoring the experiences of women (Levit & Verchick, 2016). Laws often appear gender-neutral but, in practice, reinforce inequalities because they are developed and implemented within male-dominated institutions (MacKinnon, 1989; Aziz & Sarwar, 2024). In Pakistan's case, legal systems must recognize gender-based discrimination as a structural phenomenon requiring affirmative institutional responses. Feminist scholars focus on achieving gender equality through legal reform and argue that discriminatory laws and policies should be abolished and replaced with legislation guaranteeing equal rights in social and political affairs (Tong & Botts, 2018). According to Mohanty, women in developing countries experience distinct historical realities that require context-specific analysis (Mohanty, 1988). Women's experiences cannot be understood solely through gender because various forms of discrimination interact simultaneously.

Feminism's intersectionality framework provides insights for understanding the diversity of women's experiences within Pakistan's legal system. Intersectionality theory claims that social identities like race, gender, color, and class overlap to create a unique combination of inequality and discrimination. Crenshaw reveals that women experience multiple disadvantages based on class, religion, identity, and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 1989). This literature review suggests that legal reforms must be based on local religious interpretations, socio-economic conditions, and customs in Pakistan rather than relying on Western judicial models (Sarwar et al., 2022). It also emphasizes that new legal and political reforms must include women's voices and lived experiences (Sarwar &

Huma, 2021). Pakistani scholar Farzana Bari emphasizes that women's legal empowerment requires not only legislative reform but also broader social transformation addressing gender stereotypes and unequal power relations (Bari, 2010). Scholars argue that although these reforms uplifted women's status and empowered them. However, the weak and inconsistent implementation fails to influence legal practices effectively. Therefore, these reforms fail to address complex interactions between government legal programs and legal institutions (Shaheed, 2010; Sarwar & Farid, 2024). The factors include male dominance, gender bias, and a lack of courage that prevent women from sharing experiences.

Feminist legal theory and the intersectionality framework provide insights into understanding these barriers and offer policy measures to protect women's rights in Pakistan. Both frameworks insist that policymakers and legal lawmakers must integrate women's voices and lived experiences into reforms rather than segregate them. The inclusion of women in policy developments in Pakistan will be considered as women's legal empowerment.

International Human Rights Framework and Pakistan

International Human Rights Organizations provide an imperative framework for evaluating whether women are obtaining equal, effective, and non-discriminatory remedies. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) advocate women's empowerment and equal participation with men in public and private affairs. SDG-5 and SDG-16 connect gender equality and access to justice with sustainable development (Sarwar & Farid, 2024). More, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the principal treaty specifically addressing women's segregation and subjugation. However, Pakistan has made significant progress in incorporating international human rights principles into domestic legislation and policy. CEDAW concerns the realization of human rights and requires States to eliminate both direct and indirect discrimination. The following section discusses International Human Rights Frameworks and their impacts in Pakistan.

Women's Rights in Pakistan and Provisions of CEDAW

CEDAW is the most significant international treaty concerned with eliminating discrimination against women. It is also known as the bill of rights for women. Pakistan acceded to CEDAW on 12 March 1996. This treaty emphasizes that states parties adopt appropriate measures to mitigate discrimination against women in political, socio-cultural, and civil fields (UN Women, 1979). It binds states to ensure women's access in public and private spheres. Here are some articles of CEDAW (Masitoh & Pramesti, 2020; Gultom et al., 2025):

- Article 1 of CEDAW defines discrimination against women.
- Article 2 requires States Parties to condemn discrimination against women and pursue appropriate measures to eliminate it.
- Article 15 is particularly significant for women's access to justice because it requires States Parties to accord women equality with men before the law.
- Article 16 of CEDAW addresses discrimination against women in marriage and family relations. It requires equality between women and men in family matters.

General Recommendation No.33 of CEDAW

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33 is one of the most important international standards for the present research because it specifically addresses women's access to justice (CEDAW Committee, 2015).

The Committee identifies six interrelated components of access to justice:

- 1. Justiciability**
- 2. Availability**
- 3. Accessibility**
- 4. Good quality**
- 5. Provision of remedies**
- 6. Accountability of justice systems**

This framework provides an exceptionally useful benchmark for evaluating Pakistan's justice system.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, established a comprehensive international

policy framework for advancing women’s rights. This Beijing framework identified several critical areas concerning women, including violence against women, education, economic inequality, political participation, institutional mechanisms, and human rights (Declaration, 1995). Beijing framework emphasizes that women’s human rights cannot be fully realized without removing discriminatory laws and practices and ensuring access to legal remedies. The Beijing framework provides an additional policy benchmark for evaluating gender-related legislation and institutional reforms for Pakistan.

Sustainable Development Goals SDGs-5

The Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 transformed gender equality into a central component of the global development agenda. **SDG 5** seeks to “achieve gender equality and empower

all women and girls (Sarwar & Farid, 2024). SDG 5 includes targets concerning discrimination, violence against women, harmful practices, unpaid care work, political participation, economic rights, and access to resources.

Sustainable Development Goals SDGs-16

The goal seeks to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (Singh & Singh, 2024). SDG-16 reduces all forms of violence and ensures justice for all. It aims to reduce corruption and ensure public access to information. Gender equality requires effective justice institutions, while justice institutions cannot be fully inclusive if they fail to address gender-based barriers. Therefore, SDG-5 and SDG-16 both are interconnected.

Table 1: *International Standards VS Pakistan’s Domestic Law*

International Standards	Pakistan’s Domestic Law
CEDAW Article 2	Constitutional and statutory anti-discrimination framework
CEDAW Article 15	Equality before law
CEDAW Article 16	Family-law protections
SDG 5	Gender equality and women’s empowerment
SDG 16	Access to justice and effective institutions

However, Pakistan has a vital foundation for protecting women’s rights. But the main challenge remains implementation. There is a huge gap between theory and practice. Theoretically, laws and frameworks exist, but physically it is not evident in social and legal implementation in Pakistan.

Constitutional Provisions of women’s rights

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, provides the fundamental legal foundation for equality, dignity, liberty, and access to justice. Constitutional articles are discussed below (Pak. Const., 1973)

• **Article 25: Equality before Law**

Article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the law. This is the principal

constitutional provision concerning equality provides that all citizens are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection of the law. Article 25 prohibits every form of discrimination based on sex.

• **Article 9: Right to life**

This article protects life and liberty according to law and provides additional protection to women.

• **Article 14: Liberty and dignity**

This article ensures protection of dignity, particularly important in cases involving GBV.

• **Article 10A: Right to a fair trial and due process**

This provision guarantees the right to a fair trial and due process for the determination of civil rights and obligations and in criminal proceedings.

- **Article 34: Participation of women in national life**

It directs the state to ensure the full participation of women in national life. This article recognizes women as equal to men and reflects that women should not be excluded from political, administrative, economic, or institutional decision-making.

- **Article 35: Protection of family, mother and child**

This article ensures protection of family, marriage, mother, and the child.

- **Article 37: Promotion of social justice**

Article 37 encompasses the State's responsibility to promote social justice, eliminate social evils, and ensure inexpensive and expeditious justice. It also emphasizes inexpensive and expeditious justice.

Legal Reforms in Pakistan

Pakistan's legal reforms concerning women's rights are (Sarwar & Farid, 202; Aziz & Sarwar, 2024):

1. Muslim Family Law Ordinance 1961
2. Protection of Women Act 2006
3. Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010
4. Acid Control and Acid Prevention Act, 2011
5. Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011
6. Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the Name or Pretext of Honor) Act, 2016
7. Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021
8. Domestic Violence Act, 2026

These legal reforms aim to ensure women's safety and protection in Pakistan. But the implementation of these laws remains a big problem and faces significant implementation challenges due to systemic, cultural, and institutional barriers. This implementation gap restricts women's access to justice in Pakistan.

Women's rights and gender discrimination in Pakistan

Pakistani women face different types of discrimination and violations of their rights despite having robust constitutional rights and legal reforms. Gender based violence (GBV) is the most serious violation of women's rights in Pakistan. Every day, thousands of women continue to

experience various forms of GBV (Human Rights Watch, 2024):

- Domestic violence
- Deprivation of inheritance
- Harassment at workplace and home
- Honour-based violence
- Sexual assault
- Child marriages
- Forced marriages

These incidents remain unreported due to victims' fear of social stigma and family pressure. Cheema highlights that women's inheritance rights have also received considerable scholarly attention, but women voluntarily relinquish inheritance under family pressure (Cheema, 2019). However, inheritance disputes illustrate the gap between legal entitlement and weak implementation, discouraging women from asserting their property rights (Ahmad & Bhatti, 2023; Gondal & Hatta, 2024).

Discussion and Analysis

Critical Analysis of Pakistan's Compliance

Women's rights are also human rights. In male-dominant societies, women are considered minor subjects. To protect women from violence and inequality, international treaties and laws provide a comprehensive framework. CEDAW requires Pakistan to fulfill obligations to eliminate discrimination and ensure women's effective legal protection. United Nations SDGs also reinforce these obligations. Apart from these, Pakistan's Constitution and legal frameworks also provide foundations for gender empowerment and protection of human rights. Pakistan's commitments to national and international obligations demonstrate significant progress in recognizing women's rights. Pakistan has concluded many legal reforms and enacted various laws addressing violence and discrimination against women. Significantly, justice and gender equality are included within national and international development programs at the policy level. Many NGOs are working to protect women from discrimination, highlight the violence, and attempt to promote women's empowerment and gender equality. But the principal challenge for Pakistan is to transform these commitments and laws into institutional practices. Scholars contend that legislative reforms are not enough to protect

women's rights because, on paper, they exist but are absent in real practice, and fail to deliver full results. Therefore, feminist groups, government, and legal institutions must work together to implement these frameworks. All these together confront these issues for meaningful improvements for women's access to justice.

Women's Access to Justice: Barriers and Challenges

As discussed, Pakistan's Constitution and legal frameworks offer foundations for protecting women's rights and gender equality. Despite these guarantees, women still encounter inequality and discrimination in Pakistan due to weak and ineffective implementation. This inconsistent implementation encounters substantial challenges and fails to protect women. The main barriers that restrict women's access to justice in Pakistan are as follows:

1. Patriarchy
2. Gendered power relations
3. Gender bias
4. Gender inequality
5. Lack of legal awareness
6. Economic barriers
7. Geographical barriers
8. Family pressure
9. Gender stereotypes
10. Limited female representation
11. Judicial delays
12. Institutional discrimination
13. Social Stigma and Secondary Victimization

These barriers are interconnected rather than isolated. In Pakistan, patriarchal norms prevent reporting. Poverty restricts access to lawyers, family pressure isolates the issue, judicial delays restrict women's reporting, and lack of education reduces legal awareness. A major issue is institutional discrimination that discourages women from pursuing cases even after they enter the judicial system. Gender bias and stereotypes discourage women from sharing experiences that limit their potential and undermine women's access to justice.

Pathways to women's rights and gender equality in Pakistan

This research offers five interconnected dimensions to achieve women's access to justice.

1. **Legal Accessibility:** Women must possess legal rights. These rights ensure judicial remedies.
2. **Institutional Accessibility:** Legal institutions must be available. The courts, police, and legal aid organizations must be responsive.
3. **Economic Accessibility:** Women must have access to economic opportunities to afford legal services.
4. **Socio-Cultural Accessibility:** Socio-cultural barriers restrict women from pursuing legal assistance. Therefore, women must be able to pursue justice without family pressure, violence, and discriminatory social norms
5. **Substantive Justice:** Judicial trials must be fair and honest. Judicial delays are evident in many societies. Legal institutions must produce effective remedies rather than allowing women to initiate proceedings. This ensures the legal system helps people.

This pathway offers a viable framework and ensures gender equality. It emphasizes justiciability, availability, accessibility, quality, remedies, and accountability that is closely related to CEDAW General Recommendation No. 33. These reforms can only become effective when women know their rights and can obtain legal assistance. Awareness of rights is the prerequisite for achieving rights. Therefore, NGOs government must conduct public awareness seminars and educate individuals about their rights and duties.

Findings and Policy Implications

As discussed above, Pakistan has introduced laws and established specialized courts to promote women's rights. In recent years, Pakistan has established GBV courts and Anti-Rape Crisis Cells that indicate important successes. Despite these developments, various barriers remain, and women continue to struggle and experience discrimination and social stigma. The above-discussed barriers are deep-rooted and have solid foundations in Pakistan's social and legal system. This research suggests policy measures to remove and address these barriers:

1. Strengthening gender-sensitive policing
2. Expanding female police services
3. Improving legal aid
4. Reducing judicial delays
5. Strengthening victim protection
6. Improving data systems
7. Expanding legal literacy
8. Institutional accountability

These policy measures will reduce women's rights exploitation and ensure an equitable society where

women will experience better interaction. Access to justice is a multidimensional concept that entails legal awareness, fairness, safety, affordability, and effective legal representation. Women's access to justice can only be possible when Pakistan's legal institutions adopt fairness and produce timely adjudication. State institutions must implement laws and constitutional provisions to achieve human rights. Full implementation of these rights can ensure protection and safety.

The assessment of Pakistan's justice framework:

Table 2: Dimension vs Assessment

Dimension	Assessment
Constitutional	Strong
Legislative framework	Relatively comprehensive
Specialized institutions	Improving
Legal awareness	Insufficient
Legal aid	Uneven
Judicial efficiency	Major challenge
Enforcement	Uneven
Social acceptance	Major challenge

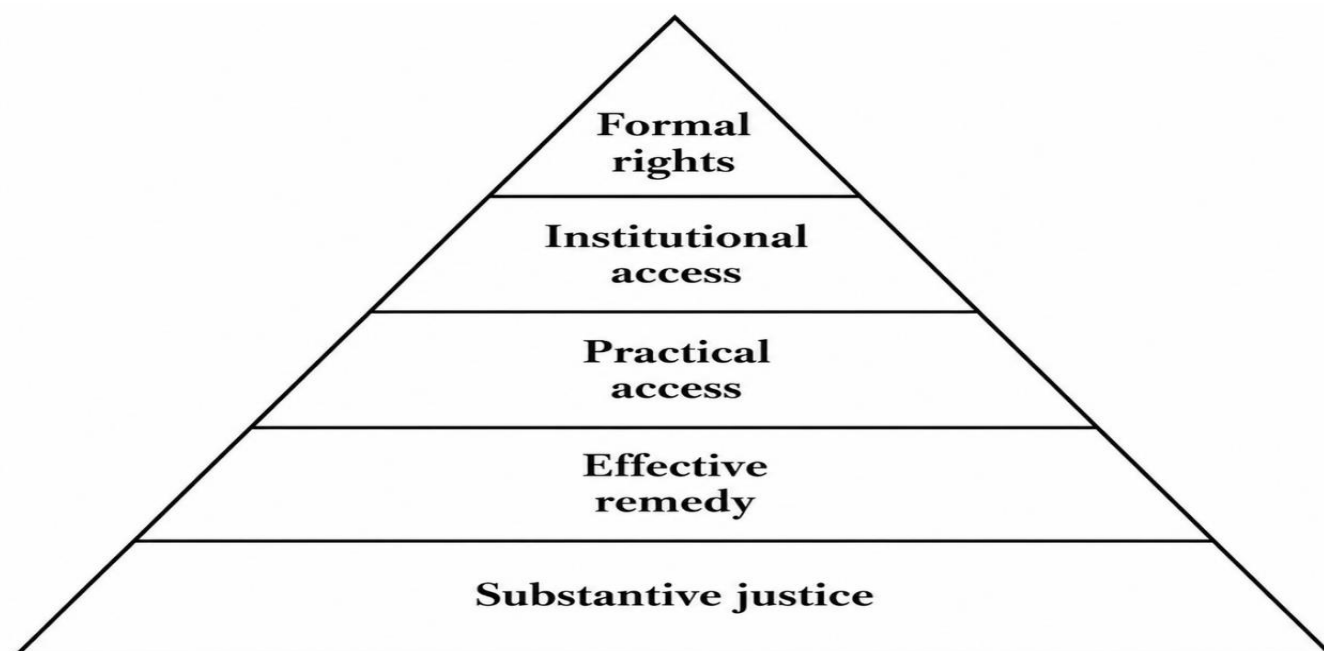
Pakistan possesses a substantial constitutional and statutory framework protecting women's rights. Strong guarantees exist on paper but are weakened in practice. Patriarchal norms and poor enforcement make implementation uneven. The following barriers override formal legal rights:

- patriarchy;
- family pressure;
- economic dependency;
- poverty;
- weak institution
- lack of coordination
- customary systems
- limited legal awareness;
- geographical isolation;
- institutional gender bias;
- judicial delays;
- inadequate legal aid;
- stigma;
- fear of retaliation

The effectiveness of legal institutions in Pakistan has been a critical issue. The implementation of legal verdicts and legislative reforms has been ineffective. Women experience difficulties and harassment in public/private life despite having rights and legal institutions. The mentioned factors discourage reporting of violations and lead to avoidance of the formal legal system, even when remedies are available. The fear of retaliation from family and society is also a challenge in Pakistan. Feminist legal theory also contends that gendered power relations influence the operation of law and social norms. Pakistani women experience bias in legal trials. Therefore, women's legal involvement cannot be understood solely through neutral rules; effective outcomes reflect the actual status of women. This paper contends that substantive equality requires institutional and social transformation to legal equality. Pakistani feminist groups are educating individuals, empowering them, and seeking to mitigate socio-cultural stereotypes and gendered bias. However, this study finds that women's access to justice in Pakistan is neither completely absent nor fully realized.

Pakistan's timely intervention through legislative reforms is clearly evident in promoting justice and

equality.



In a nutshell, Pakistan has made significant progress relating to human rights in constitutional and timely legal reforms. Human and women's rights have been defined in doctrines. However, the implementation challenge remains a main issue in achieving equality and well-being of the individuals. The issue is not whether women have rights, but the issue is whether women have the institutional support, capacity, and social freedom to exercise those rights. The mentioned barriers do not permit women to have the freedom and capacity to exercise given rights in Pakistan. This analysis provides insights to understand gender justice in Pakistan and highlights the facts.

Conclusion

Pakistan has made significant progress in promoting human rights by adopting CEDAW and SDGs frameworks to promote justice and equality. These affiliations bound Pakistan to protect human rights and implement legal frameworks. Women's access to justice is an essential component of gender equality. Pakistan's legislative reforms to protect women's rights are commendable in this regard. The practical implementation of these rights remains uncertain. There is a huge gap in the implementation of these reforms in Pakistan due to multifaceted barriers. Feminist legal theory argues that legal systems maintain gender inequalities and operate within social structures characterized by

unequal gender relations. Apart from this, patriarchy, family pressure, weak institutions, forced marriages, lack of awareness, and gender inequality are the major barriers in women's access to justice. This research concludes that women's access to justice has been a practical issue. It cannot be measured merely by the existence of laws. Therefore, meaningful access requires multi-layered institutional reforms and full implementation of laws. In Pakistan, the main challenge is not the absence of laws but the implementation. Laws and reforms can exist on paper while women continue to experience:

- violence;
- discrimination;
- property deprivation;
- harassment;
- forced marriage;
- intimidation; and
- institutional exclusion.

Consequently, future gender-justice policies should prioritize enforcement, monitoring, institutional capacity, and accountability. In Pakistan, the government, feminist groups, and human rights organizations need to initiate community-level awareness campaigns to dismantle patriarchy and socio-cultural stereotypes. This unsettling dilemma

requires multi-layered reforms and impartial justice in Pakistan.
judicial institutions to promote women's access to

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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