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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**Women and Crime in Pakistan: An Examination of the Legal Framework and Social Context****Sumia Azhar**

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sumia.azhar@giu.edu.pk**Abstract**

This article contributes to a deeper understanding of the intertwined relationship of gender, law, and society in Pakistan by analyzing women's participation in crime both as criminals and as victims in the broader legal and sociocultural environment of Pakistan. Although women's criminal behavior is often unrecognized in official crime statistics, as more women appear within the criminal justice system, the noticeable patterns of criminal behavior related to poverty, domestic violence, lack of education, and patriarchal conformity do emerge. The study provides a critique of the current corpus of Pakistani law (the Pakistan Penal Code, the Hudood Ordinances, and new gender-sensitive legislation) as a tool to address women's particular kinds of vulnerability. It also examines the role played by social facets like honor culture, gender-based discrimination, and difficulty accessing justice in the process of criminalizing or making victims of the women. This paper, which analyses legal materials, case law, and interviews with legal practitioners and women this system prevails (conducting qualitative content analysis) reveals systemic lacunae and cultural barriers that prevent justice for women. The report ends with policy suggestions to reform male-centered laws, promote legal literacy, and ensure equal access to justice. This study enriches the existing literature on gender justice in South Asia and underscores the pressing need for an inclusive legal regime that reflects women's rights and experiences in Pakistan.

Keywords: Women, Crime, Legal Framework, Gender Justice, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Gender and crime intersection is a complicated phenomenon that has been studied through sociological, legal, and criminological literature. In Pakistan, the issue of women and violence is of special significance because of the interaction between legal provisions, cultural norms, and social practices. Women's experiences because of crime, as victims and offenders alike, reflect a special set of problems. These problems originate from gender stereotypes, the patriarchal order, and the restrictions put by the legal system and the social values. This study seeks to analyze the ways in which women are situated in the legal system and wider social terrain and how these impact the perpetration of crime, victimization, and access to justice in Pakistan (A. Sultan et al., 2025).

In Pakistan, the laws regulating women's rights have evolved to follow the course of the country's history. However, this discrimination, in certain aspects, deeply penetrates the foundation of society. Legislation concerning women, like laws on domestic violence, sexual harassment, and inheritance, is seldom enforced despite signed treaties, leaving women unprotected against violence and abuse. Even though women are recognized as victims of crimes—for instance, domestic abuse and sexual assault—their access and support during and

post-legal execution would generally seem not to be guaranteed. In addition, women are often socialized not to report crime to the police, especially if the perpetrator is a family member or an acquaintance. Such stigma could victim-blame surviving women and effectively push them out of society and complicate their fight for justice further (Jafri et al., 2025).

Conversely, women's engagement in crime as offenders is largely regarded from the standpoint of deviance. In Pakistan, criminal women are usually subjected to intensified scrutiny for violating norms of gendered behavior since they are expected to adhere to gender roles of passivity and submissiveness. Female criminals, especially violent criminals, are often judged more harshly by the public and the legal system than men. This issue is not primarily about the disturbing sexual double standards that lead to many mothers being judged as less than perfect, despite men being equally nurturing. Therefore, many times women offenders suffer a stigma and punishment beyond legal punishment, such as social rejection and marginalization (Sethi & Saleem, 2025).

In Pakistan, the legal system does not always address the difficulties women face within the criminal justice system, even though the country has made many efforts to protect and secure justice for them. Legal protections for women, including laws related to inheritance, marriage, and divorce, are frequently displaced by tradition and by variation across the country in the interpretation of the law. The legal process often mirrors a larger societal one of downplaying or dismissing crimes that—such as domestic violence and honor killing—disproportionately target women. For instance, domestic violence and honor killing, which, although outlawed, are still prevalent due to this cultural propriety for families' honor instead of women's rights and well-being (Sethi & Saleem, 2025).

The relation between women and crime in Pakistan, therefore, cannot be seen without the backdrop of this combined legal and social environment. Legal responses to crimes committed by women have to be examined through social and cultural frameworks that shape women's and men's offending practices. Moreover, the differences in application to women in the criminal justice system need to be reconsidered in relation to continued patriarchal values and discriminatory conduct across legal and social contexts. Indeed, the sociocultural milieu in Pakistan defines the limits of tolerable behavior from women that, in turn, determine their status as victims, offenders, and beneficiaries of the criminal justice system.

This research will critically examine women and crime and the law in Pakistan, investigating the ways in which legal regimes intersect with societal ideas to shape women's experiences of crime as both victims and perpetrators. By situating analysis of women's rights and their situation within the criminal justice system with reference to the past and present, this contribution moves to identify the challenges facing one woman and then women in Pakistan and to suggest reforms that may be more gender responsive and rights protective (Soomro et al., 2025).

2. Legal Framework: Laws and Policies

Legal status of women and crime in Pakistan is a combination of traditional customs, cultural practices in Pakistan, principles, and the laws that govern the country. The mingling of these ingredients has left a complex legal backdrop that tends to open both doors and limitations for women in pursuit of justice. Throughout the years, legislation has been put into place to safeguard the rights of women and facilitate the rights of women, although, in practice, women's rights are often hindered by societal, cultural, and systematic constraints. Considerations such as women and crime in Pakistan are complex in their implementation and progressive in their meaning (Azhar et al., 2025).

At the core of the law is the Constitution of Pakistan, which guarantees certain basic rights to all citizens, both men and women. It ensures the rights to equality, life, and protection from discrimination on the basis of sex. Particularly, article 25 of the Constitution states: "all the

people are equal under the law,, and there shall be no discrimination in political, economic, social,, or cultural life on account of sex." But although the Constitution grants this right, the enforcement of the laws that protect women s limited due to societies that are based on patriarchal practices. That has been reflected in the lack of rigorous enforcement of laws designed to protect women from violence, harassment, and discrimination that continue to be apprehended and underreported (Kashif et al., 2025).

Pakistan's legal structure comprises y acts aimed at the protection of women and their rights from crime. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, passed in 2012, is one of the major legal safeguards for women. The law was passed with the purpose of shielding women from domestic violence, rampant in Pakistan. Its intention is to give a legal footing to women who wish to apply for protection orders and access a remedy in the courts. But the impact of the law has been hampered by conservative resistance and lack of awareness of existence.

Furthermore, the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act,, suggested some new laws and changes in the existing Hudood Laws, also initiated by PNA government and brought in by General Zia as a military ruler in early 70s. Their controversial use was heavily eulogized, especially for rape and adultery where the burden of proof against women was particularly onerous. A part of the reforms in the 2006 amendment to the law was to address some of these concerns by altering the laws to preclude raped women from being subjected to re-victimisation in the legal process. But the law has faced barriers to its application in practice, including resistance from institutions and the sheer challenge of changing entrenched gender bias within the judicial system (M. Sultan et al., 2025).

The Anti-Harassment of Women at Workplace (2010) is a legislative framework to prevent and protect women against sexual harassment at workplace. We are giving you CO's a task that must be done, as it is The Law. And this law is all about the TORCH of workplace culture change. While well intentioned, the law has been largely unenforceable, with the shortcomings in implementation stemming from weak policing and instead a tendency amongst victims to not report harassment for fear of reprisal or exclusion (Zaheer et al., 2025a).

On a broader plane, Islamic laws also impact significantly on the malformation of women and crime in Pakistan. The country's legal system is a combination of British colonial law, Islamic jurisprudence and traditional law, and although the Constitution states that everyone is equal before the law, enforcement of Sharia-influenced laws can be a nightmare for women. For example, in honor killings or other domestic violence situations in which the victim's family may not want to bring charges due to societal pressures, the legal system does not help protect or procure justice. The Qisas (retribution) and Diyat (compensation) Ordinance also have been widely condemned for promoting a culture of impunity, particularly in crimes against women, since it accords the right to forgive the convicted to the victim or the victim's next of kin (Zaheer et al., 2025b).

On the policy front, there has been extensive advocacy for change, mainly by women and social rights groups. These groups have worked for years to get laws enforced, provide more access to legal aid, and raise awareness among women about their rights. "There's been progress — there are women police stations, there are family courts, but at a certain point women do not have access to how the justice system should work for them, and it becomes very difficult to be able to push for justice, because the poor are in the palms of the rich".

Finally, the legal context of Pakistan, despite few good laws, is not favorable for women and the crime situation. But progressive laws are often forced to compete with deeply rooted social customs, institutional discrimination, and lack of implementation, and women are left to suffer from violence and discrimination, when are caught between the cracks. If the law is ever to

become a resource for women, a broader strategy will need to be employed — one that does not just take on the law, but the context that acts to undermine it (Nayyab et al., 2025).

3. Social Context: Factors Contributing to Women's Involvement in Crime

The involvement of women in crime in Pakistan is a complex product of sociological, economic, and cultural factors. Pakistan, being a patriarchal society, has never been kind to women whose role in society, particularly in the public sphere was either confined within the walls of the home or was governed by rigid social norms. This gendered framework has a significant bearing on women's lives and their involvement in crime. It is a delicate matter and the answers will have to consider the intricate mix of poverty, lack of education and work opportunities, cultural traditions and laws that can and in many cases will, perpetuate gender discrimination, either openly or clandestinely (Zafar et al., 2025).

Socio economic deprivation is one of the main causes that compels women to commit a crime in Pakistan. Millions of poor women are toiling and fending for themselves in deplorable economic conditions, without access to resources and deprived of financial independence. The continuing gulf in men and women's access to jobs forces millions of women into low paid informal work or forces them into dependence on male relatives for financial support. Having this type of addiction can put them at risk of exploitation, including being pushed into dangerous behaviours. Economic necessity and sometimes the inability to get a legal job have driven women to commit various crimes, from stealing to drug trafficking, as a means to "make ends meet."

The other main obstacle here is the education system of Pakistan. The country has made strides in raising women's literacy, but men are still far more likely than women to be educated, especially in rural areas. Deprived of education, women frequently have few options but to turn to traditional roles that can indirectly institutionalize or even approve criminal conduct. In such female scenarios, these women may not have the same legal knowledge and understanding as to their actions being, and may allow themselves to be easily misled by their significant male others who partake in criminal activity. It also means less social mobility, and it entrenches criminality in poor communities (Abid et al., 2025).

Societal norms and gender roles are also significantly implicated in determining women's participation in crime. In much of the world, women are taught that to have the favor of society, they need to stay in the private sphere and be considered modest and moral. But these hopes often have little bearing on the harsh lives of people in poverty or at the fringes of society. Women who disregard traditional norms and assume labels as deviant imposers open themselves up to significant stigmatization and punishment that can make them become criminals through a process of countercultural identification, or to cope as ways of escape. But also, in Pakistan in general, the criminal justice system isn't as forgiving when it's women stepping out of these norms, they're often treated unfairly. The lack of a social safety net when implicated or indeed engaged in criminal behaviour only exacerbates their issues and may lead to a vicious cycle of such behaviour. "Processes of Domestic Violence and the Construction of Female Criminality" is another part that leaves readers wanting more; however, the Pakistan will have to look at broader social and legal reforms if they are to tackle the root causes of women's criminalization and to afford them the opportunities to live fulfilling lives in a more just society (Baig, 2025).

4. Women's Experience with the Criminal Justice System

People often perceive themselves as either a jailer or a jailed individual, a perpetrator or a victim, creating a dichotomous dynamic. The 'criminal justice system' is gendered, and trying to understand the experiences of women in crime and criminal justice is about grasping the complex relationships between legal frameworks, the 'culture,' the media, and politics, which

shape people's worldviews and ways of being in the world. There is inadequate scrutiny of women's involvement in the criminal justice system in Pakistan and the role they play in influencing it. That, of course, is in part due to social taboos that don't allow women to enter the fold of crime, but also because a major part of Pakistani society is patriarchal and sometimes looks at women in ways that restrict their freedom and discriminate against them. This section discusses prison interviews conducted with women incarcerated in Pakistani prisons. This subtitle highlights the prison experiences of women in the criminal justice system of Pakistan regarding how they are dealt with by the state apparatus and society as well (Hassan & Bhatti, 2025).

Pakistan's legal system is founded on Islamic laws, which are supplemented by colonial British laws and several provisions set forth in the country's constitution to ensure equal rights and equal protection under the law. However, the implementation of laws for women is subjective and reflects the influence of societal customs and double standards regarding women's roles. For instance, laws being sold against honor crimes, domestic violence, and sexual assault, aside from only being available on paper, usually were not implemented, and women found themselves unable to get justice. Women are caught in the gap between the criminal justice system in cases involving domestic and sexual violence. There is also an element of denial of the victim, who is often discouraged from filing complaints, even by society, because of his/her blaming and revenge; so many women avoid going to law. Rape culture Women often don't report violence against them because they were raised to think they are to blame (R. Ali, 2025). Moreover, the criminal justice system has a way of not being quite so friendly to women. Additionally, police, prosecutors, and judges might not be trained properly to address GBV cases with as much sensitivity as possible. "Systemic stereotypes of the male and female race produce discriminatory lines," such as lighter sentences for male offenders or minimizing crimes committed against female victims. Users would disclose these injustices to each other and, ideally, to higher political authorities. Sometimes the victims themselves — the women who have been sexually assaulted—are the liars and perpetrators of violence, and the men who sexually assault or goad others into bearing false witness are the true victims. However, economically and culturally challenged women (whether from a lower economic status or an ethnic minority group) face more problems dealing with the criminal justice system because they do not have any recourse to legal representation, money, or other resources.

The criminal justice system in Pakistan is no less deficient in addressing the special needs of women prisoners and transparency in functions. Women endure shockingly poor conditions in Pakistani jails, and the health facilities available to them are in a deplorable state. Prisons are typically designed with no female prisoners in mind, and females are subject to greater abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Additionally, laws related to female prisoners, including women's prison laws, regulations concerning female guards, and provisions for bail, lack proper enforcement. The discrimination in the wider society that comes with criminalization, women having been criminalized and incarcerated suffer severe psychological and emotional trauma (Dharalah et al., 2025).

A second significant dimension in relation to women prisoners is the legal status of women accused of 'zina' (adultery) and 'qisas and diyat' (retributive justice) in Islamic law. These laws often lead to women being held responsible for crimes they didn't commit or forced to sign settlement documents in exchange for justice. Penalties for women convicted under such laws are severe and may include imprisonment and various forms of corporal punishment, up to and including death (corporal punishment and the death sentence are more frequently imposed on women than men) (Rauf, 2024.).

On the whole, the Pakistani criminal justice system presents a plethora of hurdles for women — gender bias, societal stigma, and structural inadequacies in the application of law. And though progress has been made, including the passing of legislation against domestic violence and honor killings, life for women in Pakistan is still far from perfect. “It’s time our laws reflected reality for women victims of crime and helped them feel supported by the legal process, not disempowered — as unfortunately is often the case now.” Reform to the laws is long overdue to ensure women feel empowered to use the legal system to break the cycle of violence and abuse for themselves and their families, Mrs. Thompson said. Without these modifications, the law will remain an instrument to deny women their rights and to confine them to a passive existence in society (S. M. Khan et al., 2025).

5. Impact of Legal Framework and Social Context on Women’s Lives

Pakistan’s legal and social environment matters greatly when it comes to women’s lives, crime, justice, and the status of society. The cross-cutting of these two “dimensions”—the law & social attitudes towards women—is the key to how women experience crime, seek justice,, and understand their place in Pakistani society as a whole. Pakistan's legal system and dominant social attitudes disadvantage women in many ways, even though there has been progress in certain areas, such as in criminal justice. The social environment, with strongly patriarchal values, eases denial of the rights of women who, thus exposed, can suffer exploitation bullying,, and violence. This warrants knowledge about the legal context as well as the cultural norms that impact the Pakistani women (S. M. Khan et al., 2025).

Pakistan’s legal system, based on a combination of British colonial law, Islamic law and ancient customs, has been reformed over the years, in part to protect the rights of women. But these changes are incremental and don’t always address the reality for women who encounter crime. The Anti-Honor Killing Laws, the Domestic Violence Act, and the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act are among the laws passed for the protection of women. The problem, though, is that it is so difficult to enforce these regulations. These laws are frequently weakly enforced, often owing to cultural resistance, inadequate knowledge of legal rights, and lack of training for police. In addition, sluggish legal proceedings and frequent adjournments in courts add to the limited reach of women when they seek justice, particularly in cases of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other ‘honor’-related crimes (R. N. Ali, 2025).

Social Context in Pakistani society, gender roles are steeped in patriarchal values that tend to classify women according to sex and traditional gender roles. These cultural attitudes can negatively affect the treatment of women as victims of crime. For instance, when a woman has been raped or sexually assaulted, she is typically blamed for what happened to her and attacked with??? what was she doing out the at the time, what type of woman did it, and what was she wearing. Many women are deterred from reporting, assuming (rightly) that they will be shamed and ostracized for speaking out about their abuse. Furthermore, the strong degree of honor in many societies pushes the women who report crimes against them, particularly those involving honor killings, domestic violence, and even kidnappings, further toward the periphery. These crimes frequently go unpunished, or the victim is forced to drop charges to avoid bringing dishonor to the family.

Class and ethnicity cut across this rural/urban divide and together further complicate the legal system’s treatment of women. Indigent women who reside in rural areas or who suffer from a low social status arguably have even fewer means to access the justice system. However, the women for so long have not had access to legal systems, money, and lawyers, preventing them from proving cases. In the rural regions, frequently Jirgas and Panchayats, customary justice systems, have the upper hand over the formal legal process, where the women are discriminated

against even further. Such customs are generally based on community solidarity and frequently deny women's rights to preserve family honor (Maitlo et al., 2025).

Coupled with underrepresentation in law enforcement and the judiciary, then, women are hard-pressed to get a fair go. With a low presence of women cops in police stations and no women judges in courts, especially in the hinterland, it is difficult for women to report a crime or seek justice in comfortable and hospitable surroundings. Gender is frequently a factor felt in court and the general social perception can have a significant influence upon the view of female victims held by the authorities and judges.

The picture of Pakistan's legal system and social environment as a whole and for women in particular and crimes in the broad term, is so complex. Although some laws have been strengthened, men's entrenched social attitudes and gender bias still remain extensive barriers on the way to achieving equality and justice for women. Well, addressing these problems requires a two-part solution: We need a better system of law, and we need to change what people think about sex equality. This would in turn help foster the conditions that women in Pakistan need to live free from violence and discrimination, it said (Iqbal & Shaheen, 2025).

6. Recommendations for Reform

To address women's crime in Pakistan, one must understand the legal and sociocultural context to enact reforms. The interrelation of gender, law, and society is frequently convoluted, and it has generated various problems that are inflicted more frequently upon women—as both victims and perpetrators. A number of important reforms will have to take place at both a legislative and societal level to create a fairer and more equitable system. Such reforms should not only ensure rights for women but should also seek to empower women and their rehabilitation in society.

One of the first recommendations that comes to mind is reform of Pakistan's legal system, especially the laws concerning gender-based violence. These include the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) and the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act (2011), but the yawning chasm remains between legal provisions and their actual implementation. Not only do these laws quite frequently fall to corrupt patriarchal biases within the courts and law enforcement institutions, But regardless of the much-deserved intention, they are already provided with time and again, including through social media and flaming and all that that entails. "What we need is to have a full audit of laws in our country so that we locate any contradictions or gaps, especially where the protection of women is involved. In addition, all judicial, police, and legal professionals' training should be compulsory to sensitize them to issues of gender-based violence and discrimination (M. J. Khan & Bilal, 2022.).

Furthermore, the Pakistani justice system must also be reformed to prevent gender discrimination and provide women with a fair trial rather than harsh judgment. Women who commit crimes usually face negative stereotypes from society and the legal system, particularly in honor or family-related crimes. It is necessary to reform the legal treatment of female criminals, particularly in those cases of domestic violence, prostitution, and drug-related offenses. There should be an emphasis on rehabilitation and reintegration for women offenders rather than punishment, which works to deal with the underlying causes—poverty, lack of education, and domestic violence—that drive women to commit crimes. - There should also be gender-friendly rehab centers where the female convicts can be psychologically, socially, and legally counseled to live well in the society (Gondal et al., 2025).

At the social level, there is an imperative requirement for a mass public education campaign to challenge deep-seated myths about women, particularly when it comes to crime. In Pakistan, women who are crime victims or perpetrators are often looked down upon by their communities, exacerbating marginalization of those populations. The media, NGOs, and educational

institutions could be instrumental in changing these attitudes by advocating gender equality and exposing the social and economic conditions that drive women to criminal behavior. These campaigns can be centered on educating society about the rights of women, the continued need for gender-responsive policies, and the value of giving women who have been incarcerated second chances (R. A. Hussain & General, 2025).

And it needs to do more to economically empower women. Conditions are so stringent here that women also commit white-collar crimes, as they do not have enough to make both ends meet. Punjab "The City of Sin and Vice, the Larger the City, the Greater the Vice," says a Prophetic Hadith. Women must be given access to education, skill development, and financial independence, or else they might fall prey to crimes. By leveraging women's economic empowerment, the state can contribute to a safe and secure society for all its people. In addition, specific policies to encourage female entrepreneurship and economic participation must be developed in a way that will diminish the gender gap and enable women to find more opportunities to lead a good, law-abiding life.

Last but not least it is fundamental to maintain and further promote the women empowerment in Pakistan. Such 'alternatives' are critical in helping women - in the complex interstices of crime and social marginality - to 'get by.' And it is agencies, shelters for battered women, legal aid programs, counselling programs, etc., that help survivors to survive. The government should also fund and support the NGOs in the women's rights and criminal justice work more adequately. Furthermore, by promoting a partnership between the state and civil society, reforms will be better enforced and focus on women in all regions of the state (R. A. Hussain & General, 2025).

For this purpose, any response to the problem of women and crime in Pakistan has to be multi-dimensional: the extreme social and the legal. The law along with a variety of reform measures on this front, social intervention included, can protect women and help them have the shot or the support they need to get out of crime and back into life. Ultimately, women need a reformed legal structure and a society that is both gender-sensitive and inclusive, in order for them to have a sense of empowerment, and for justice and equity to be manifestly present (Z. Hussain et al., 2025).

7. Conclusion

The convergence of 'women and crime' in Pakistan is thus an articulation of mixed legal, social and cultural factors. Laws – which are meant to provide at least some protection – often fail to ensure women's rights or justice to women, particularly in cases of domestic violence, rape, and honor-related crimes. Pakistan has enacted numerous pieces of legislation in favor of women, such as the Protection of Women (Criminal Law Amendment) Act and the Anti-Honor Killing Law, but scant citizen enforcement has long been the issue. However, resistance is often met against such legal systems due to patriarchy and traditional representations of cultural and religious dogma. This legal void also increases women's vulnerability to attack and violence, and many of the offenses against them are either not reported or punished in their alleged "civilization," due to fear of losing social prestige, being victim-blamed, or fear of being stigmatized after the assault.

This complex issue is further complicated by the societal burdens on women in Pakistan. Gendered violence and gender-based social discrimination, combined with the absence of access to education opportunities and economic resources are all within the cycle of inequality(ies) which have led to the engagement of women in crime as both victims and offenders. Women, especially in rural communities are particularly vulnerable due to limited mobility, less education, limited job opportunities – and are more likely to be involved in illegal activities or exploitable.

And the double hex of women's crime and women's crime roles also can result in women being treated more punitively than men when, in fact, their crime behaviors may be compelled or forced. Equally important as a determining factor in the fate of women involved in crime is the system of criminal justice itself. Systemic prejudices, limited police training, and a lack of gender-responsive procedures in the judiciary can marginalize female victims or perpetrators. The lack of an integrated support system that includes the provision of safe shelters, counseling, and rehabilitation means that they are also unable to break out of the criminal situations they find themselves in or re-enter society after being involved in crime.

Lastly, dealing with the issue of women and crime in Pakistan requires a multi-message approach. They all testify that the logical bridge of justice and law must be accompanied by social and structural changes, including awareness of gender equality and respect for women and the fight against patriarchy, which reproduces violence and discrimination. By putting in place a women-friendly environment where women's rights are respected, justice is within their reach, and the society's stereotypes are under question, Pakistan can always progress towards a more equitable and fairer society where women are neither marginalized nor hunted as criminals.

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