



# Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan - a Critical Analysis

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Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis

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A Thesis in the Field of International Relations  
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## Abstract

Over the past 70-plus years since its independence, Pakistan has struggled to identify the right focus and invest resources to improve its people's lives. One particular challenge, among a broad array of problems, is gender-based violence. While this problem is a global menace and has some common socioeconomic root causes, each country has its own unique challenges.

Pakistan has a high incidence of gender-based violence not only due to poverty, lack of education, and lack of awareness but also because of severe shortcomings in the drive to improve women's lives. Measures taken by civil society and non-governmental organizations are often frowned upon as representing liberal and/or anti-Islamic values. Thus the society-level support needed for the success of remedial programs is often quite weak.

This thesis explores possible reasons for gender-based violence. It underscores efforts already taken in Pakistan, tempered by the realization that these efforts are far from sufficient. The thesis also explores unique actions being taken elsewhere in the world that could be applied in Pakistan.

The research found two key areas that have a significant impact on the fight against gender-based violence in Pakistan. First is the need to channel international concern toward clear and results-oriented political pressure on the Pakistani government to identify and manage state-level challenges and bring them into order. The second need is to engage clergy and Islamic scholars to recognize their clear accountability for moving public opinion against all forms of gender-based violence within a supportive Islamic narrative.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
Glossary of Acronyms .....	vii
Chapter I. Introduction.....	1
Chapter II. A Brief History of Pakistan.....	3
Chapter III. Defining Gender-Based Violence .....	6
Causes and Risk Factors .....	7
Types and Forms of GBV .....	9
Cultural Differences.....	11
Economic Issues.....	13
A Global Phenomenon.....	14
Prevalence and Frequency in Pakistan.....	15
Chapter IV. An Examination of Solutions.....	20
Solutions Already Proposed in Pakistan.....	21
Individual Awareness and Education.....	22
Influencing Social Norms .....	24
Supporting Survivors .....	25
Public Policy Against GBV .....	26
Economic Empowerment.....	28
Legal Protection.....	29
Social Media .....	32

Chapter V.	Global Case Studies .....	35
	Malawi: Eliminating Child Marriages .....	35
	Burundi: Community support .....	36
	Brazil: Football Tournaments .....	37
	Brazil: Police Stations Staffed by Women.....	38
	Senegal: Female Genital Mutilation .....	39
Chapter VI.	The Way Forward .....	41
	Converging Global Influence to Local Focus.....	41
	Availability of Statistical Data.....	42
	Effects of International Pressure .....	43
	Engaging the clergy .....	45
Chapter VII.	Conclusion .....	51
References	.....	53

## List of Tables

Table 1. Acts and Laws in Support of Women.....	31
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## Glossary of Acronyms

CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
ENGAGE	Enabling Girls to Advance Gender Equity
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FIR	First Information Report
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GEN	Girls Empowerment Network
GPEI	Global Polio Eradication Initiative
ICRW	International Center for Research on Women
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter Services Intelligence
ISPR	Inter Services Public Relations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
RTE	Right to Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNPF	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization



## Chapter I

### Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a violation of human rights. Nearly six of ten women around the world suffer some kind of violence in their lifetime, whether physical or sexual (UN Women, 2019b). Although countries have been encouraged by international and regional legal entities to take steps to fight the problem, GBV continues to occur worldwide in many forms, ranging from domestic violence and sexual abuse, to more severe forms such as honor killings, acid attacks, and other forms of femicide. The global prevalence of GBV indicates that the issue is yet to fully be tackled, which has far-reaching consequences. Studies reveal that GBV leads to physical injuries, disability, and death, and victims also suffer mental and psychological disorders. According to a World Bank study (Nata Duvvury, 2013), some women fear GBV more than war or cancer.

In addition to being a violation of human rights, GBV impacts productivity as well as human capital and economic growth of societies (UN Women, 2019a). An increasing number of countries have attempted to form national plans of actions and legislation to address the issue of GBV, yet in some nations gaps remain. One such country is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

In 2011, more than 8,500 cases of violence were reported nationwide, of which a substantial number included rape and acid attacks (Hadi, 2014). Beginning in late 2011, attacks associated with acid recently caught the attention of the media and people throughout Pakistan when the “Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Bill” was

unanimously passed by the Pakistan Senate. This monumental bill, which recommended 14 years to life imprisonment for perpetrators of this crime, was followed by another historic bill, the “Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill,” which focused on women-specific issues (Government of Punjab, 2011).

These efforts by national authorities indicate the possibility of a changing status for women in Pakistan. Still, gender-based violence continues in the country, endangering the lives of many Pakistani women. There is a social as well as economic fallout as well, which raises its ugly head in various forms and shapes. In the context of GBV as a global phenomenon, this thesis discuss and explore possible solutions with a special focus on women in Pakistan.

## Chapter II

### A Brief History of Pakistan

Pakistan has had a tumultuous past since its partition from Bangladesh in 1971. A major war with India occurred in 1971; issues cropped up again with Kashmir on the eastern border; and a fiasco with Bangladesh all forced Pakistan to focus on external issues as a nation (International Commission of Jurists, 1972). However, the 1970s were a decade of reconciliation with the partition. A new constitution was rolled out, and the political fabric was coming to terms with the new executive structure (Choudhury, 1974).

In the 1980s, Pakistan fought a “hot” war while enduring amidst a cold war. Because it shares a border with Afghanistan, Pakistan suddenly found itself on the frontline. During that same period, Islamization of the state, mostly for political reasons, sought to stoke religion as a potent force enabling the nation to rally against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This meant that Pakistan’s western border also become an issue as Afghanistan was colloquially labeled the “fifth province of Pakistan” (in addition to the other four provinces that make up the country’s geographical area).

This was a time when the state was intensely externally focused. The country spent the whole of the 1980s under direct military rule. Further, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) arm of the military was the strongest institution, with its tentacles reaching all the way to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the east, and to India and Sri Lanka in the west (Sirrs, 2016, pp. 125, 148). With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1988, the focus shifted toward fixing problems and governance issues with Afghanistan.

The 1990s experienced the strong emergence of the Taliban, a militia of amateurs brought up and trained in Pakistan. Now Pakistan had a new job: to settle Afghanistan. In 1999, the nation tested its nuclear arsenal with the result that the world imposed sanctions against Pakistan for not agreeing to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) (Sirrs, 2016, p. 175).

Following the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 in the U.S., the “War on Terror” began, and Pakistan was once again embroiled in the Afghan war. The intervention of the U.S. and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) on the Afghan side, and a similar intervention by Pakistan on the Pakistani side of the border, shifted the bloodshed toward Pakistan (Sirrs, 2016, p. 264). Between 2003 and 2015, there were some 65,000 casualties as a result of gun and bomb attacks (Crawford, 2018). The Pakistan Army conducted major war-like operations in the country’s rural and urban landscapes. With the Taliban almost ready to sign a deal with the U.S. on the Afghan side in 2019, and Kashmir talks also strongly visible in the shorter horizon, for the first time in many years, Pakistan has an opportunity to focus on its own internal issues that have gone unchecked and unattended.

The military, often purported to be the real ruling class in the country, is increasingly focused on internal matters of the country—a pivotal indicator of the direction the country has taken. The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), the communications and media wing of the military, is often viewed as more important than the ISI, which is the Pakistani equivalent of the CIA. The ISPR was set up in 1949 with a colonel and a junior to mid-level officer as its Director General. Today the same entity has a two-star general as its chief (Adache, 2014). Following a recent International

Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, a new economic council has evolved in which one of the members is Chief of the Army.

Today Pakistan is focused on areas such as per capita financial inclusion, internal revenue generation, elimination of polio, rights of religious minorities, realignment and resizing of the over-arching military, and gender issues (*Karachi Tribune* , 2019). For example, it is only now, after 90 years, that Pakistan is making child marriage a priority, seeking to amend the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929, by, among other things, changing the minimum age to marry to 18 (Wasim, 2019a). Forced marriage for girls less than 18 is one type of indirect violence against women and a major constituent of gender-based violence in Pakistan. Due to the recent focus on internal issues, GBV and women rights have taken center stage in Pakistan's sociopolitical discourse.

## Chapter III

### Defining Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence has become one of the most commonly discussed issues of the present time. When it comes to understanding the causes of GBV, its impact and solutions, it is important to understand what the term means. Gender-based violence is an umbrella term that refers to many types of violence that affect women. There are several ways to define it.

The term “gender-based violence” was first officially defined by the United Nations as any act that “results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”<sup>1</sup> (Parveen, 2011). This definition is all-encompassing in its description of the types of gender-based violence (physical, sexual and psychological) while also including both private and public spheres of life. Private acts of violence, such as marital rape, is often not considered as “harmful” or “serious” as other acts of violence because they occur behind closed doors (Gelles, 1977). This definition specifies that acts of violence that take place in private also fall under the category of GBV.

According to the UNHCR, the term “sexual and gender-based violence” also distinguishes individuals based on their gender from other types of violence. It includes violent acts such as honor killings, rape, physical and mental torture, mutilation, sexual

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Resolution 48/104, A Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

slavery, forced impregnation, and murder. According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the term “gender-based” offers a new context for understanding abuse against women and girls as it reflects the “unequal power relationship between women and men in society” (Parveen, 2011, p. 12). Moreover, since the term gender-based violence is often used as a synonym for violence against women, this research uses both terms interchangeably.

### Causes and Risk Factors

Gender-based violence has common causes across societies. Analyzing the causes from different researchers’ lens reveals similar conclusions. Victoria Rumbold, a consultant to an African Population Council, highlights some of the general causes of GBV and sexual abuse in her work. She recaps certain factors, identified by the World Health Organization (WHO):

- traditional gender norms that support male superiority and entitlement
- social norms that tolerate or justify violence against women
- weak community sanctions against perpetrators
- poverty
- high levels of crime and conflict in society more generally" (Rumbold, 2008, p. 9).

Gender-based violence is common because of the perceived vulnerability of women for a myriad of cultural, social, and religious reasons. As can be seen in a report by Goldsmith and Beresford (2018), the reasons vary from war and civil unrest to a weak and/or fractured legal system. Other reasons include poverty and restrictions on women’s

freedom due to religious values and norms (Goldsmith and Beresford, 2018). Their study also points to war and its subsequent exploitation of women in war zones such as Syria and Somalia. These areas are prone to lawlessness, and criminal gangs exploit every opportunity to traffick women and young girls into child marriages, slavery and slave trading, and bonded labor.

The absence of a functioning legal system is another factor that strongly correlates with the prevalence of GBV. For instance, rape often goes unreported because the local culture views it as taboo and there is no trust of the local justice system. This in turn gives offenders more confidence to repeat the crime. Some people do not get caught for such violence against women even though their identity is known, because they are influential people, or the legal system is weak, or the crime is not considered a crime socially and hence is ignored. A case in point is South Africa, where less than 15% of those accused of rape are brought to trial; less than 5% of the rapists who are tried are convicted (Nagtegaal, 2019).

Another reason why women may be victimized is economic instability in the local society, causing women to be exploited for sex and forced into work they do not consent to. Families in Bulgaria have moved to Greece to work as bonded labor because even that meager sum of money is enough to avoid abject poverty which might have led the women into prostitution. A third reason is the incidence of broken families. Young girls who have run away from home for a variety of reasons are much more vulnerable. Research showed that daughters were seven times more vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence when they live in a broken family (Wilson, 2001).



Some societies have high prevalence of GBV due to curbs based on religious or social grounds. In their case study of Karachi, Pakistan, Rabbani (2008) emphasizes the social causes of domestic violence, asserting that social factors associated with this form of violence stem from “economic backwardness, insufficient protection by laws, a patriarchal society and the low social status of women” (p. 416). Countries like Saudi Arabia are continually in the news for not allowing women to drive or to travel without a male family member accompanying them. In areas of the South Asia and Pakistan, women are discouraged from obtaining education or having a job. Although religion is normally labeled as the reason for this, in most cases it is the social interpretation of religion that leads to such practices. Female genital mutilation (FGM) in North Africa is a similar case.

### Types and Forms of GBV

While keeping in mind the universal and economic context of GBV, we must also recognize the vastness of the topic. GBV includes battering or beating, marital rape, forced abortions, forced births, harassment due to issues of dowry, sexual violence, sexual abuse of female children in their own house, workforce harassment, trafficking, female genital mutilation, and forced marriage. All of this is generally perpetrated by their male partners or male members of the extended family. In most cases, men use their physical power on the women around them (Sell, 2010). All these issues affect women’s physical, mental, and emotional health (Shrier, 1990). While both genders can be a target of GBV, it is women who are more affected and viewed as the target (Merry, 2009). The term GBV is more generally used in the context of violence against women because most

research considers women as being the weaker sex, and they are more often discriminated against (United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) , 2019).

Victims face both short- and long-term effects on their health and the ability to live and earn their self-respect (Green, 2018). The universality of the issue can also be explained by the fact that GBV exists in offices and homes, in public and private places; it is an issue that is experienced by women from all walks of life. A study by Thomas (2015) found that violence against women existed in almost all educational institutes around the world.

Further, reports and findings presented by the organization UN Women state that approximately one of every three students age 11 to 15 years has suffered from bullying at school by their peers. Boys are more likely to experience physical bullying, while girls were subjected to psychological and emotional bullying. The report defines “psychological bullying” by stating that the girls were ignored, they felt left out, and they were mentally harassed. GBV in school hinders the right to education for all children and youth, including girls (UNESCO, 2018). Females studying in universities also face violence, including sexual assault on campus. UN Women reported in their 2018 survey, which surveyed 27 U.S. universities, that 23% of the women surveyed reported sexual misconduct and sexual assault.

Sexual harassment is the most common form of GBV worldwide. Sexual harassment is unwelcome and offensive conduct of a sexual nature that can make people feel humiliated, intimidated, or uncomfortable. Several research studies have focused on sexual harassment and GBV in the workplace, especially when it is a violation of workers’ rights and may affect them psychologically. Sexual harassment creates a climate

of fear inside the workplace and may cause physical and mental ill health; workers may have to apply for sick leave or be obliged to leave their jobs so they do not have to bear continuous teasing and unwanted sexual advances. The United Nations concluded that GBV in workplaces is increasing, regardless of strict policies that have been implemented. Four of ten women in the survey were harassed in one form or another at their workplace (UN Women, 2018).

In addition to GBV in private companies and organizations, there is also distinct GBV and discrimination against women in government sectors around the world. Some 83% of female parliamentarians from 39 countries who took part in a study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union said they experienced psychological violence including offensive remarks, sexist or insulting comments, threats made for their gender, or gestures and images of sexual nature. Forty-four percent of the women had also been threatened with rape, death, and sexual assault (UN Women, 2018).

The increase in GBV also occurs because of the growing use of technology and social media. Cyber harassment has increased rapidly in recent years, with thousands of women affected by cyber bullying and online verbal sexual harassment. According to the Government of Canada, for instance, cyber bullying and online sexual exploitation, particularly sexting, is dramatically increasing as people rely on technology more than ever before (Government of Canada, 2016).

### Cultural Differences

Although gender-based violence is a universal problem, it is still important to note that like every other social phenomenon, this issue is also influenced and affected by

culture, religion, and social conditions. Religions found around the world view women differently; thus, one religion such as Islam gives women the right to inherit property (Quran 4:7). However, in the Hebrew culture, this was not possible unless their father has no sons (Bible, Numbers 27:1-11). Clearly, countering GBV needs to happen along religious, cultural, and social lines so that change is willingly accepted by everyone.

However, guiding people about the realities of GBV requires a full knowledge of cultural, social, and geographical contexts; without such knowledge, people will reject notions of change or refuse to participate in efforts to end GBV. An example of this can be found in the traditions of the Israeli religious community where only men are admitted to the court of Israel. Men are not only considered to be superior to women, but the Jewish religion differentiates between the two sexes based on circumcision. According to Genesis 17:10, women are not included in the religious community because they are not circumcised. In addition, menstruating women are denied entry into holy places such as temples. After the birth of a child, mothers are also not allowed to enter the temple for several days (Mananzan, 1998). In such cases, any effort to end discrimination is wasted if the rigid traditions of society are enforced.

It is important to understand that although solutions are necessary, there is no universal approach to gender-based violence. This is because appropriate actions need to be taken, and these actions must be culturally and socially acceptable. An understanding of behaviors and attitudes are required at every stage of intervention including design, development, and implementation of policies and efforts that will end GBV.

Another example is countries where marital rape is not recognized as a serious crime. In Tanzania, marital rape can only be reported to the court if the couple is

separated (Stefiszyn, 2008). In such circumstances, where there are cultural differences between cities in one country, it is important to keep in mind that actions to alleviate GBV can only be implemented when adequate awareness of the issue is raised. Without ensuring that people realize the seriousness of marital rape, it is impossible for those working against GBV to bring about a change in local and national laws.

Thus, it is clear that cultural differences are a crucial component of alleviating GBV. If in one part of the world marital rape is a serious offence, and in another part of the world that is not the case, then any viable solution needs to factor in cultural and religious norms. Any solution without these considerations are bound to fail.

#### Economic Issues

For Pakistan and for the world at large, there are urgent reasons why GBV needs immediate attention. It is not only a human rights issue, but research suggests it is also an economic drain. A World Bank study on GBV suggests that domestic violence has a significant influence on a country's GDP (Nata Duvvury, 2013). Perhaps this is why the WHO concluded that if countries fail to recognize the seriousness of GBV, it will impact poverty rates, and targets related to eradicating poverty will be compromised (WHO, 2005).

GBV impacts economic productivity, the economic growth of societies, and the human capital of countries (UN Women, 2018). Farzana Bari (2011) explains that GBV undermines the ability of victims to participate in the social, economic, and political sphere. Indeed, GBV is a major hurdle to development in the case of Pakistan. GBV has also been called a public health issue, with research indicating a causal relationship

between abuse and the health of women. The outcomes of GBV result in increased social and economic costs not only for the victims but also for society (Bari, 2011, p. 6). The impact of GBV is far-reaching, which is why an increasing number of countries have developed national plans of action and developed legislation to address the ongoing issue. However, gaps remain when it comes to eradicating and abolishing the ills and consequences of GBV because it is mostly hidden, rarely talked about, and the perpetrators are not brought to justice. This can be said even for countries where there are strict laws about GBV – acts of violence continue unaddressed and underreported.

#### A Global Phenomenon

Abuse of women's rights and violence against women is not just a threat to Pakistani society; it is a global crisis. Around the world, nearly six out of ten women suffer from some kind of violence in their lifetime—physical or sexual (UN Women, 2018). According to the European Union, one in three women have experienced physical and sexual violence, one in two has experienced sexual harassment, one in twenty have been raped (European Union, 2014). Studies such as the Thompson Reuters Foundation Annual Poll for 2018 (Goldsmith, 2018) shows that the ten most dangerous countries in the world for women come from Asia, Africa, and North America. More specifically, the U.S. is ranked as the third-worst country for rape and sixth-worst for nonsexual violence.

One of every three women are affected by GBV globally. Although the international and regional legal instruments and other law-enforcement bodies have encouraged countries to take steps to fight the problem, it still exists. It is a worldwide problem that takes many forms ranging from sexual abuse to domestic violence. It

includes harsh forms of violence such as honor killings, dowry killings, acid attacks, female genital mutilation, and femicide. The global prevalence of GBV indicates that the issue is yet to be fully undertaken; it remains an issue that has far-reaching consequences. Studies have revealed that GBV leads to physical injuries, disability and even death, while victims also suffer from mental and psychological disorders as a result of it. Some women fear GBV more than other risk factors such as war and cancer. In addition, GBV accounts for as many deaths and poor health in women as cancer does. GBV causes more poor health than malaria and traffic accidents combined (Venice, 2002). As alarming as it may sound, GBV is as fatal as cancer and as dangerous as traffic accidents.

The United Nations has tried repeatedly to deal with the issue of GBV, which is one reason why the issue is legitimized, because all member states recognize it as a global, large-scale human rights problem, as well as a public health issue because GBV can lead to high rates of mortality, several health problems, and even suicide.

#### Prevalence and Frequency in Pakistan

Gender-based violence is widely prevalent in Pakistan. According to 2009 data collected by the Aurat Foundation, cases of GBV increased when compared to the previous year: an increase of 13% in the total number of cases, from 7,571 in 2008 to 8,548 in 2009. Punjab, the most highly populated province in Pakistan, topped the list with 5,772 cases reported. Sindh was second with 1,762 cases, followed by Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (655 cases) and Baluchistan (237 cases), while Islamabad reported 172 cases (Parveen, 2011, p. 5).

The same report claims that GBV is grossly under-reported in Pakistan, particularly in the conflict-ridden provinces of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, although no formal studies have been undertaken in this area. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan found similar claims in its 2012 study, which stated that a number of cases remain unreported due to cultural pressures (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2012).

In the Aurat Foundation's 2014 report, Violence Against Women Annual Report, there is a year-by-year comparison of cases of violence against women in Pakistan, including a breakdown of kidnapping/abduction, rape/gang rape, "honor" killing, domestic violence, sexual assault, acid throwing, and burning. The comparison, covering the period 2008 to 2014, shows a stable trend of 8,300 cases yearly in Pakistan with no dramatic increase or decrease (Hadi, 2014).

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan has the sixth-largest population in the world (US Census Bureau, 2019), and it is ranked 150 out of 189 based on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)<sup>2</sup> (UNDP, 2018). Keeping these statistics in mind, it is not wrong to say that Pakistan has a long way to go when it comes to countering gender-based violence. However, recent developments have shown that the country is starting to raise awareness about the issue and bringing about needed social change.

To understand GBV in Pakistan, one also needs to understand the social and cultural context of the country. Pakistan is an Islamic republic, which means constitutionally it debates (albeit superficially and more as part of populist politics) within the influence of Islam when considering gender-related law. There have been

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<sup>2</sup> The Gender Empowerment Measure measures inequalities between men's and women's opportunities in a country. It covers inequalities in three areas: political participation and decision making, economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources. (Source: Wikipedia)



several attempts by extremists to malign the religion and justify their wrongdoings in the name of Islam. Currently, however, NGOs are working to raise awareness about the issue and asking people to rethink their traditional and conventional beliefs related to religion. An example is the issue of inheritance by women. Islam promotes the idea of inheritance by females, but cultural norms in parts of the country suggest otherwise. Most tribal heads deny this right when it comes to their daughters and sisters. According to a survey conducted in Punjab, in 1,000 rural households where 36% of women had property rights, only 9% had control over their property (Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, 2016). This is one example where religion advocates a right to women, but the cultural norm is diametrically the opposite.

One also needs to consider recent cases and statistics of GBV in Pakistan. The most common types of violence against Pakistani women include but are not limited to, acid throwing, kidnapping, sexual violence, burning, physical assault, trafficking, and forced prostitution. A *New York Times* article revealed that men favor acid-throwing over other forms of violence since the substance itself is widely available. Even worse, although this form of violence attacks a victim physically and mentally, it does not take their life, in most cases, thus leaving the survivor able to continue performing household work like cooking, hauling water, and caring for children (Walsh, 2012).

Multiple laws have been passed in Pakistan in recent history to protect women from various forms of GBV. Such efforts by the national authorities gave some hope of the changing status of women in Pakistan. It also showed that growing attention is being paid to the issues facing Pakistani women. However, legislative changes are largely symbolic, presenting the view that the country is taking the issue of GBV seriously.

Despite these efforts, GBV continues to rise in the country, and continuous efforts are being made to deal with all forms of GBV.

Domestic violence is also increasing at an alarming rate. This type of violence relates especially to family violence or abuse that takes place within the household. Most literature sources on the topic agree that perpetrators of domestic violence are usually women's husbands and in-laws—although in some cases, the victims' brothers and fathers were also responsible. Pushing, slapping, punching, kicking, suffocating, or hitting with an object, are all forms of domestic violence (Samuels, 2017). Parveen points out that cases of acid-throwing were also on the rise (Parveen, 2011, p. 4).

Sexual harassment of women occurs on the streets and in workplaces throughout Pakistan (Semiotics, 2012). The study confirmed that victims of this form of violence are usually women while the offenders are mostly men. Sexual abuse and harassment takes place in all age, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Non-verbal forms such as whistling, standing close, staring, or winking, are also considered harassment when done in the public sphere, and this form of harassment is quite common in all Pakistan provinces (Semiotics, 2012, p. 13).

Extensive research has been conducted about honor killings. Honor killings, early marriages (known as *watta satta*, a Pakistani tribal tradition of exchanging brides between two families), and denial of property rights are prevalent practices that result in gender-based violence (Imtiaz, 2012). These practices are deeply embedded in the cultural framework of the country, with thousands of people justifying acts such as these to be “normal” because they have been going on for such a long time. Family disputes and poverty are also major causes of gender-based violence viewed as customary

practice. Moreover, the strong influence of local communities and families make it difficult to question customary practices that exist in a region (Imtiaz, 2012).

Research has found that GBV in Pakistan is a combination of several factors thus making it impossible to clearly suggest one or two reasons related to the issue. Some of the factors include poverty, low education, low participation of women in the political sphere, low empowerment of women, high levels of crime and insufficient protection by laws (Rabbani, 2008, p. 416).

Violence against women in Pakistan is prevalent because of misguided and misinterpreted local teaching regarding culture and religion. Religious and cultural values are often used as a means of controlling women in the family. Such control by men over women has brought up many issues related with GBV such as domestic violence, sexual violence, and traditional harmful practices which include dowry, genital mutilation.

## Chapter IV

### An Examination of Solutions

The “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women” was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993. Article 4(e) articulates that states should

consider the possibility of developing national plans of action to promote the protection of women against any form of violence, or to include provisions for that purpose in plans already existing, taking into account, as appropriate, such cooperation as can be provided by non-governmental organizations, particularly those concerned with the issue of violence against women.

Thus, all members of the United Nations have sufficient reason to work on solving the issues of gender-based violence in their respective countries.

As a prominent member of the United Nations, Pakistan has demonstrated a sense of urgency when it comes to dealing with gender-based violence. However, an important fact that needs to be considered before solutions can be implemented in Pakistan is this: dealing with the problem of GBV involves deep and reforming social change which targets rigid cultural and patriarchal social norms, as discussed earlier.

It should be remembered that no one solution can work in isolation; rather, all levels of society need to come together to deal with the problems of GBV. Working with individuals, families, couples, communities, and state machinery, using a combination of techniques that could prevent GBV, is a response that will enable the country to successfully deal with the issue. Members of all these communities need to be kept in mind even if they reject or condone reforms related to gender-based violence. The

collective involvement of governments, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and even the international community is necessary in some cases. This includes engaging boys and men, girls and women, religious leaders, traditional leaders, government officials, and civil society leaders, to identify and challenge the underlying norms, customs, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions linked to violence. Working at every level will not only help to work on this problem in a more holistic way, but it will also make possible some initiatives that organizations and groups cannot undertake independently.

One of the main problems in Pakistan is that civil society organizations work in isolation and compete with one another rather than cooperate, largely because they seek the attention of donors. Likewise, NGOs usually do not reveal their donors, nor do they reveal information based on funding. The ensuing confusion results in projects that are considered only as short-term interventions run by inefficient management teams that mismanage funds; the fact is that most civil organizations want to work independently. In addition, donor requests and their wishes are sometimes considered more important than the problem itself (CARE International, 2013).

#### Solutions Already Proposed in Pakistan

Working collectively with the community is an important part of changing the narrative related to GBV because communities do not exist in isolation. They are comprised of different groups of people that need to be considered. Below are some of the key actions and approaches Pakistan has explored or already undertaken to reduce gender-based violence.

## Individual Awareness and Education

It is critical to acknowledge that change starts at the grass-root level and is essential to creating a revived dialogue about GBV in Pakistan. This will help bring about substantial change in the form of actions taken to counter violence against women. Such a strategy can include offering workshops to community members, raising awareness about important social issues related to GBV such as prevention of domestic violence, the need to report cases of harassment, and reproductive health issues. This will not only help alter the values and cultural expectations of both the genders but will also open doors to dialogue and subsequent action taken to deal with GBV in the country.

A change in people's attitudes and thoughts is the first step toward a change in behavior of the masses. Education is an important medium of socialization and enables the wide-ranging training in a subtle but necessary way. There are several ways education can be used to deal with the problem of gender-based violence. Significant work has been done in Pakistan regarding the education of women. There is an increase in the number of girls and young women going to schools and colleges, respectively, but sending boys to school is still much preferred over sending girls (Aslam, 2007). In a country where education for females is culturally looked down upon, this reported increase is a shift in the right direction.

Under its constitutional obligations under Article 25A, the Government of Pakistan is committed to education for girls, recognizing that education is one of the long-term solutions available for dealing with discrimination, GBV and other social issues in the country (RTE, 2017). For this policy to be successful, actions need to be taken around educating girls in a manner that ensures that girls of school age are sent to

educational institutions and that they remain there during their study. Through various organs such as provincial and local governments, the State should make sure that this is made possible.

In an interview with H. Hashmi (2019), I learned that two prominent members of the Youth Assembly for Human Rights in Pakistan suggested that significant work is being done in small cities to increase awareness amongst families that girls should be allowed to pursue education. Youth Assembly for Human Rights conducted awareness programs for the students from 13 to 16 years of age, guiding them on how to react to gender-based violations. The program also taught self-defense exercises to the enrolled females.

The group found that one of the key challenges encouraging people to accept and become convinced of their rights. According to the group's experience, women are still unaware of their legal rights. For instance, they are still unaware that as a result of the 2006 Women's Protection Bill, the police cannot stop and demand a woman's marital relation documents when she is travelling with a man, unless the police have a court orders. Similarly, people are still unaware that under the 2010 provincial Bill of Under-Age Marriage, anyone caught marrying a woman less than 18 years old can be arrested (Hashmi interview, 2019). The Women's Circle (*Shirkat Gah*) organization notes that most women are not aware of another law which states that if she is raped, she does not need to go to a police station but can directly go to the district magistrate to initiate legal proceedings (M. Altaf interview, 2019).

More can be done in Pakistan when it comes to the education of women. Various techniques for making education a way to promote ideas against GBV can be adopted to

spread awareness of the issue. Teachers' training should be conducted keeping in mind that they will be promoting change in the long run. Thus they need to be trained in a way that helps them learn how to raise awareness about gender roles and acceptable and unacceptable behavior. School curricula can be revised to include gender-sensitive material that promotes ideas of equality and discourages discrimination, harassment, and violence. These curricula can be made compulsory in all educational institutions. Moreover, educational institutes can set up systems to support children who have been harassed and abused, seeking to cater to their needs and respond to them in a knowledgeable manner that might help prevent the effects and consequences of abuse. In addition to counseling these children, partnering with legal teams to help them fight their abusers is another important way of combating GBV. A zero-tolerance approach against abusers and perpetrators of violence can be adopted and promoted so that children understand the need to take public action against offenders.

### Influencing Social Norms

Challenging the social norms that perpetuate acts of violence is necessary in order to bring about substantial change in the country. Thinking beyond traditional and cultural notions of violence and discrimination will enable each community to become prepared to act against such violence. Working with both genders is equally important because it is likely that men and boys will challenge any suggested changes to discriminatory gender norms that might make the situation easier for women. At the same time, working with women will help them increase their own knowledge of their rights and reduce their vulnerability to violence. Activists and community leaders are aware that significant



work has happened over the past few decades in Pakistan that is targeting social change and helping to eliminate GBV.

In other interviews with participants in this study, I found that another key emphasis is on the importance of working in the community instead of just focusing on GBV victims. In my interview with H. Hashmi (2019), I learned that in cities of interior Sindh Province, especially through the Youth Assembly for Human Rights in Pakistan, efforts are being made to raise social support and awareness by giving lessons to men on the importance of education and empowerment of women. Other members of Youth Assembly of Human Rights emphasized that elimination of GBV in Pakistani society is a transformation process. They emphasized that education and addressing the issue in the community is important for changing the mindset toward GBV (Hashmi, 2019).

The Women's Circle also makes sure to involve the community because they believe family involvement is very important. This NGO believes that everyone should work collectively with communities to effectively combat GBV. Even when making laws to help prevent GBV, the Women's Circle believes that all communities should be included as each one has different values (Altaf, 2019). Anwar Jaffery of the Movement of Women (*Tehrik e Niswan*), has similar views on the importance of engaging the community as a preventive and systemic measure to address GBV (Jaffery interview, 2019).

### Supporting Survivors

The key to enabling an effective system that can respond to survivors of gender-based violence is essential to reducing the rates of GBV in the country. Multiple sectors

need to be involved in making this process easy, so survivors do not feel ashamed or singled out, but instead feel they are part of the community. An example is survivors of domestic violence who should be supported by collective action such as building safe houses for them. Watch groups can also help them feel secure. The legal system, medical services, police, social groups, and other services all need to work together to ensure that survivors are protected and looked after to reduce the rates of recurring GBV because of their vulnerability. The Aurat Foundation has done extensive work in this regard in Pakistan (Hashmi, 2019).

#### Public Policy Against Gender-Based Violence

Changes in the laws and policies of Pakistan are necessary in order to deal with gender-based violence. It is essential to create, revise, and implement these laws and new ones. Bearing in mind international agreements (the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and Security Council Resolution 1325), Pakistan needs to ensure that its legal system proceeds according to the international standards promoted by human rights organizations. To this end, approaches such as public mobilization, lobbying, and raising awareness about GBV issues should be put in place, thereby transforming policies that can bring about substantial change at all levels of society.

Reform of the laws and policies of Pakistan also includes change at the political level, where an increased participation by women can help bring about change (Bauer, 2012). When women become politically aware and politically active, their issues will be brought to the forefront. In 2008, the appointment of Fehmida Mirza as Pakistan's first female speaker of the National Assembly was a historic moment for the country as it

paved the way for several important legislative changes that resulted in a decrease in GBV. When I interviewed Dr. Mirza, she identified a number of successful legislative changes that are pro-women: “The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act,” and the “Acid and Burn Crime Act” (Mirza interview, 2019).

Examples of change are needed at all levels of the state. One is the move by the provincial government in Punjab to establish the first Center for addressing violence against women. This was not just a huge change in the region; it also became a national topic of discussion as being the first of its kind. The Center makes it possible for women to register a First Information Report (FIR) of violence. In the past, this was difficult but now it was being encouraged. This was a crucial step to ensure that violence is addressed legally through the justice system. In addition, the Center also made it possible for women to be linked with other organizations that enabled them to review economic and social help. The Punjab province has also established women desks at almost every police station, highlighting the shift from being a male-dominated society to one that is working actively to assist women with their needs. The government of Punjab also plans to provide housing facilities to women and survivors of GBV. These types of efforts need to be taken at other provincial levels as well in order to respond to survivors of GBV.

Moreover, apart from policy changes to help survivors, actions to prevent GBV were also taken by the province. Anonymous hotlines were established so women could easily register a complaint and report incidents of gender-based violence. A smartphone application was also designed to help women report incidents of violence and harassment. Such changes show the importance of speaking up about the need for policy

changes, which in turn will make it easier for the country to take actions directed toward reducing GBV in Pakistan (D'Lima, 2017).

### Economic Empowerment

Research has shown that women who are financially sound and economically empowered are better at speaking up against harassment and violence as compared to those who are not financially strong (Dalal, 2011). Such findings present important lessons in support of economic empowerment of women as a method to prevent GBV. Economic empowerment not only makes women confident but enables them to take control of their lives, thus lessening their chances of being victims of harassment and discrimination (Srivastava, 2009). Moreover, it has been proven that lessening economic dependence on men helps women to leave toxic environments where they are discriminated against and made subjects of violence. Madiha Altaf from the Women's Circle endorses this viewpoint and believes that the chances of GBV decreases as women become more financially independent (Altaf, 2019).

Thus the country should concentrate on improving conditions where women can explore their economic talents and be supported financially and socially. This can be done through providing job opportunities and economic aid for women so they can set up their own entrepreneurial ventures. Training programs can be arranged to help women learn about the basics of entrepreneurship and the management of finances. Moreover, awareness can be raised about issues such as the right to inherit property so that women can speak about these issues.

However, it is essential to understand that improving the financial position of women in a country like Pakistan can also have dire consequences because of the power shift in households, and the potential negative effect on the ego of men who are culturally taught to be leaders of a patriarchal society. Thus, along with improving the economic conditions of women, the views of men need to be addressed, and ideas of equal economic opportunities need to be promoted. Youth Assembly for Human Rights echoes this factor and points out that the textile and pharma industries, which are heavily biased to hire only female workforce, adversely affect the economic relationships within Pakistani urban society (Hashmi, 2019).

Another factor is the reduction of the gender wage gap, which should be dealt with at all levels of society. Even if women become financially strong, they are still discriminated against for jobs and are paid a lower wage than men. This contributes to gender inequality, which weakens the position of the woman and increases the possibility of violence against her.

### Legal Protection

Pakistan has had a vibrant history when it comes to laws related to women. Not only did Pakistan become the first Muslim-majority country in the world to have an elected female head of state, but also one of the first to have an elected speaker of Parliament. According to Dr. Mirza, laws in general consider gender-based violence a crime. As a result, today in Pakistani, GBV is not a private affair between two individuals but a crime against the state. This is, in itself, a great success story for Pakistan (Mirza, 2019).

Zia ul Haq, a military dictator who played the Islam card to initiate and support an Afghan jihad against the Soviets in the 1980s, has been widely criticized for wrongly introducing laws in name of Islam which are in fact against women rights. The Hudood Ordinance, as the legislation was collectively named, provided legal space for the abuse of women, including rape. Although the Parliament took important steps in 2006 and later in 2010 and 2016, to legally re-address the definitions of “rape” and “adultery,” thereby bringing the focus back to critical issues of honor killings and other anti-women practices, still much more needs to be done (Mirza, 2019). The Federal and Provincial Legislatures of Pakistan have passed numerous acts to address the issue of gender-based violence, many of which are outlined in Table 1 below.

On the other hand, the provincial legislatures have passed laws regarding domestic violence, forced marriages, harassment at workplace and acid prevention. These are significant developments along judicial and legislative lines, which serve as examples for the future of GBV in the country:

1. In 2000, the National Commission on the Status of Women was established as a follow-up to the Beijing process.
2. In 2006, a Gender Crime Cell was established within the National Police Bureau. Its three main functions include: data collection of cases related to GBV, advising victims on legislation, and investigating cases.
3. In 2012, the Women Development Department was formed, with responsibilities for making policies that support women and advocates for their rights.
4. In 2009, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill was passed, which substitutes section 508 of the Pakistani Penal Code 1860 with more effective and accountable text (Parveen, 2011).

Table 1. Acts and Laws in Support of Women

Name of Act or Law	Date enacted	Reason for Passage
The Code of Criminal Procedure Amendment Act	1994	Opened the door for female judges in the civil courts of Pakistan.
Pakistan Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code	2004	Both were amended, and <i>karo kari</i> (honor killing) now penalized as murder.
The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act	2006	redefined rape, criminalized abduction, and prostitution; it also amended the Hudood Ordinance by adding safeguards to protect women.
The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act	2010	Prohibited forced marriage
The Anti-Women Practices Bill	2012	Prohibited forced marriage
The Acid and Burn Crime Prevention Bill	2010; amended 2014 and 2018	Defined and penalized acid and burn crimes against women
The National Commission on Status of Women Act	2012	Made the Commission autonomous; empowered it to collect data regarding GBV cases in Pakistan to assist the government in addressing GBV
The Criminal Law (Offences Relating to Rape) Act	2016, amendment	Offenses relating to rape
The Criminal Law (Offences in the Name or on Pretext of Honor) Act	2016, amendment	Offenses in the name of or on the pretext of honor
The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act	2018, amendment	Amendment to fund supporting women

Source: thesis author.

A key challenge to finding legal solutions to GBV is the implementation of laws and access to legal protection. Inexpensive legal protection should be offered to survivors

of GBV so that women are protected. In Pakistan, it is extremely expensive to pursue a legal case as well as very time-consuming. A serious re-examination of the judiciary is a dire and immediate need, which will help protect women's rights. In addition, government intervention is important to regulate GBV issues by placing strict punishments on perpetrators of violence.

### Social Media

In recent years, the importance of social media is often highlighted as the world witnessed several online movements that had a great impact on people's lives. In Pakistan, the growing use of devices, technologies, the internet, and social media has made it possible to heighten awareness of GBV through these social media. Prominent examples of youth-led movements were publicized online and gathered considerable support from the national and international community. It is not too much to say that such movements may not be solutions for change, but they have initiated dialogues and conversations within Pakistan about important issues that were avoided earlier.

A prominent example of one such thought-changing movement was the Aurat March, which took place in 2019 and had a national impact. It was not only supported and promoted by females but also by males, suggesting there is a small but growing involvement of both the genders willing to deal with the issue of GBV.

Another example is Girls At Dhabhas, a popular social media movement led by young, urban Pakistani women who want to start a conversation about gender equality. The campaign held its breath when young women went to male-dominated roadside eateries (*dhabhas*) and tea stalls where they posted pictures of themselves and affirmed



their right to partake in the public space on equal footing with men. This may not be the solution that will end GBV, but it is certainly the start of a conversation against male dominance in public spaces.

According to Anwar Jaffery, a prominent member of the NGO known as Movement of Women (*Tehrik-i-Niswan*), social media is an important tool when it comes to the dealing with GBV because it helps not only to spread awareness, but it also connects the people of Pakistan to other people around the world. This connection is important for Pakistan as it helps people to learn from other countries by causing a gradual increase in the shared sense of responsibility amongst the citizens of Pakistan (Jaffery, 2019).

However, at this point, it is important to note that statistics do not suggest great improvement in the declining number of cases of violence against women. In fact, it is alarming to note that despite efforts to decrease gender-based violence, reports suggest there may be a decrease in overall rates of improvement or a period of stagnation appears in an analysis of data over the years. One example is the 2014 report published by Aurat Foundation, which suggested that when cases of violence against women were compared from 2008 to 2014, it was alarming to note that 2014 actually saw the highest number of cases as compared to previous years (Hadi, 2014). It is necessary to understand that these rates may not necessarily mean there is an increase in overall GBV in Pakistan; rather, it may point to the fact that cases are now more frequently being reported because of overall improvements in awareness and willingness to report. One might also consider that although there may not seem to be improvements in the rate of GBV, it must be said that at least cases are now being reported more frequently, and Pakistan is making efforts

to reduce the number of cases every year. According to Dr. Mirza in my interview with her, violence against women is becoming part of the mainstream debate in Pakistan as the biggest achievement of the collective work of the legislative and the civil society over the last two decades (Mirza, 2019).

The same can also be concluded from a report published by the Government of Pakistan (2016) which highlighted that when 2010 and 2011 were compared, 2011 recorded a rise in crimes reported against women, perhaps because of the awareness that women were developing with regard to reporting incidents of violence against them (Tabassum, 2016). However, it is important to note that the same report highlights a significant drop in crime rates the following year, 2012, which points to the fact that the country is making sincere efforts to deal with gender-based violence.

Jaffery, too, believes that social media is a strong weapon in the fight against GBV because it connects peoples from different regions of the world and creates a sense of responsibility and awareness in society (Jaffery, 2019). However, Altaf believes part of the problem is access to social media. Even today, with Pakistanis having a smartphone penetration rate of 32.43% (far higher than India or Bangladesh) (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, 2019), there are access limitations to social media among women living in rural areas of Pakistan (Altaf, 2019).

## Chapter V

### Global Case Studies

Gender-based violence is a universal problem which almost all countries of the world aim to reduce and eventually eliminate. As a global menace, there is considerable action being taken in many regions to deal with the problem and reduce it worldwide. Many countries with high rates of violence against women have successfully managed to reduce the rate of GBV over the years. However, it remains an issue, as women are discriminated against and harmed in multiple ways.

The initiatives taken to deal with this problem can be seen in many forms. Some are legal in nature, some aim to alter growing rates of GBV by education and spreading awareness through the media.

A number of countries have undertaken initiatives to deal with this problem; many have developed policies and laws to deal with the growing issue of GBV—all with the goal of developing models of action that aim to reduce the problem of violence against women. In this chapter, I present five case studies of efforts taken by countries to deal with the issue of gender-based violence.

#### Malawi: Local Leadership Engagement to Eliminate Child Marriage

A prominent case study related to eradicating child marriage in Malawi demonstrates the power of working with local leaders, youth, and the community to bring about positive change related to reducing GBV. Child marriages are considered acts of

violence because forcing a child who is not of legal age to marry someone older than her is harassment. Rise Up is an initiative taken by Deliver For Good in partnership with the Girls Empowerment Network (GEN), the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It helps deal with the problem of child marriages by advocating for laws and policies that protect the rights of the girls, improve their opportunity to receive a good education, and encourage gender equity in their communities. Enabling Girls to Advance Gender Equity (ENGAGE) was the broader name of this initiative and it began to train more than 200 girls in skills such as advocacy, public speaking, and leadership. The training enabled the girls to mobilize their communities as they convinced their peers plus 60 chiefs to pass laws raising the minimum marriage age to 21 (Dunning, 2016).

After many years of advocacy, in 2015 Malawi passed the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Bill, which prohibits child marriage countrywide and increases the national age of marriage to 18 years. In April 2017, President Peter Mutharika signed a constitutional amendment into law that made marriage before age 18 punishable and illegal, providing increased protection to Malawian girls (Girls Not Brides, 2017).

Burundi: Counselors Supporting Women Survivors  
in Partnership with Local Organizations

CARE Burundi established a network of community support to enable GBV survivors access services quickly and efficiently. The network includes trained legal assistants, counselors, and elected leaders supported by community activists. These

activists play a leadership role in their local area and are recognized for providing direct legal, medical, and emotional support to GBV survivors.

As part of the program, health care workers are provided with sensitivity training for treating survivors. Most of the program's counselors are female, which has greatly encouraged female victims to come forward since most women, when asked, prefer to discuss their abuse with another woman.

Effective referral systems are in place to allow GBV survivors to receive emergency medical care, including post-exposure prophylaxis within 72 hours to prevent HIV infection. CARE research with Ministry of Health staff has confirmed that the project has been effective in strengthening the technical capacity of health centers to provide safe medical and emotional support to women survivors in line with the national protocol. Women now feel more informed of their rights and have better information about where to access support services (CARE International, 2013).

#### Brazil: Football Tournament

In Brazil, a local initiative targeted adult men who participated in a football tournament, aiming to raise awareness about the issue of domestic violence. This meant distributing material related to the issue, and conducting group sessions that raised awareness of the issue. General discussions about gender-based violence took place, all focused on increasing the men's knowledge and awareness regarding issues of domestic violence, marital rape, and gender-based violence. Videos focused on GBV were also shown as another way to engage the men. The team in charge hoped to improve the men's willingness to denounce GBV in their communities.

At the end of the process, it was found that fewer men thought a woman deserved to be beaten, and more men believed that if violence occurs in a relationship, counseling was needed along with discussions with third parties and the couple's own efforts to end the violence. It was interesting to learn that men who were part of this initiative also reported being more considerate of women's rights; they also believed that touching women without their consent was wrong (Promundo Global, 2012).

### Brazil: Police Stations Staffed by Women

In Brazil, one approach to supporting and motivating survivors of sexual violence involved improving the quality of police stations staffed by women officers. Such stations give women the opportunity to open up about the violence they have suffered, and allow them to report crimes more often than at stations run by men (Walsh, 2016). In Latin America, police stations run by women are common: as of 2016, there were 500 such stations. This shows the country's desire to take initiatives for dealing with survivors.

One problem emerged, however: the quality of these women police stations was not up to the professional level. That meant the quality of these police stations needed to improve in order to serve women and children with a higher degree of gender responsiveness. A close link was developed with women rights organizations that can guide and teach the staff about how to be more open and approachable to women needing assistance (UN Women, 2018).

This case study demonstrates the importance of being supportive and considerate toward survivors of gender-based violence. It also serves as a reminder that after-care of

violence against women is as important as preventing it in the first place. This is because the greater the protection and support offered to survivors, the less the perpetrators of violence against women will be spared.

### Senegal: Female Genital Mutilation

The fundamental driver of this GBV is marriage. Families performed female genital mutilation (FGM) on their own daughters because they feared that a prospective groom would not accept the daughter unless they did this procedure. One of the key solutions to this problem that is unique to Africa, North Africa, and parts of the Middle East is to create community “pledge associations” where families ensure that they will not demand FGM nor will they inflict FGM. With a pledge association, the groom’s family pledges that they will not mandate FGM for the bride; this means other families can have some comfort knowing that there are families that do not expect such a requirement for their brides-to-be. In turn, the groom’s family also secures an FGM-free life for their daughters (Mackie, 2000).

Africa has also dealt with this menace through other supporting actions such as raising awareness of the medical implications of FGM, thereby discouraging girls and women from undergoing the process if they know how detrimental it can be for their health. Second, some societies in Africa have tried to financially resettle people who are associated with FGM as an occupation. Third, African society has tried to address the root cause of FGM; if FGM is viewed as an initiation rite for women, societies have tried to find alternate initiation rites or inform people that FGM is not to be associated with initiation rites. A combination of these efforts, culminating with propaganda and shaming

of practice publicly, has led to a reduction in FGM. Several parallels can be drawn between the success story of reducing FGM and the practice of foot-binding in China (Mackie, 2000).



## Chapter VI

### The Way Forward

Available data shows that the incidence of violence against women has not decreased (Hadi, 2014). Participants in the interviews I conducted spoke of common challenges when combating gender-based violence in Pakistan. Something different needs to be done if there is going to be a decrease in GBV in Pakistan.

#### Converging Global Influence to Local Focus

To understand exactly needs to change, we need to understand the root cause of the current challenges. As an example, consider the legislative progress of Pakistan. As pointed out by Dr. Fehmida Mirza, Pakistan has made great progress in legislating women-focused laws (Mirza, 2019). Pakistan has also progressed significantly in repealing laws that were anti-women or had loopholes that encouraged violence against women.

One example already mentioned is the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006, which repealed many of the restrictions brought on by the Hudood Ordinance of 1979 (The Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006). It is no coincidence that the Women Economic Forum as well as UN Women both identify legislation of laws to protect women as a unique and called-out indicator in their statistical reports that index gender equality across the world. On all such scorecards, Pakistan is shown as deep green.

Many kinds of laws supporting women have been made in the recent past (UN Women, 2016). It is, therefore, not surprising that women have abortion rights by law in Pakistan (World Economic Forum, 2018) but not in Panama (World Economic Forum, 2018), or for that matter not even in some parts of the developed world. Making laws has been a lower-hanging fruit that helped Pakistan turn itself green in global scorecards (Pacific, 2019) – even though there was less focus on proper implementation of such laws. That is why civil society, working collectively at the grass-roots level, believes that implementation of laws remains a huge challenge in efforts to reduce GBV. It is surprising that there is little push from the international community to implement such laws.

#### Availability of Statistical Data

Statistical data for violence against women in Pakistan is difficult to find, whether from international bodies such as the United Nations or from the Government of Pakistan (UN Women, 2016). There is no mention of Pakistan in *Violence Against Women Prevalence Data: Surveys by Country*, last published in 2012 (UN Women, 2012). The only available data right now is from the Aurat Foundation or the Women Foundation. Although these data are sponsored by USAID, it is not endorsed by it. In fact, data relating to violence against women is not available after 2014 except from private and non-endorsed agencies.

Similarly, there have been no publications specifically on violence against women in Pakistan since 2005 (UN Women, 2016). In the case of UN Women, a review of official data shows that UN Women mostly focuses on reproductive health, economic

participation, and population control in Pakistan (UN Women, 2019). Not only is this startling but it has a direct impact on how local leadership prioritizes the topic of GBV among myriad other social issues. The pressure and involvement of the international community is key to driving action in Pakistan.

This can be better understood by analyzing the attention given to polio vaccination by the Government of Pakistan. An analysis of events reflects the global attention Pakistan receives regarding polio and the effectiveness with which the state machinery functions in response to international pressure. For instance, Bill Gates wrote a letter to Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Dated August 16, 2019, the letter conveys Gates' concern about the rising number of polio cases (*News*, 2019). Within five days, the government brought all stakeholders together under one roof, including representatives of provinces, and national and international experts, to ensure a singular and cohesive effort to undertake "an independent management review," as suggested by in Gates' letter (Junaidi, 2019b).

#### Effects of International Pressure

Another example of the significant role of international pressure on politics and state priorities of Pakistan is the nomination and appointment of an ex-United Nations staffer who was with the United Nations for eight years in a senior position (*Express Tribune*, 2018). Following his appointment, and despite departmental and ministerial politics, the appointee has held his position since that time. In March 2019, the Federal Minister for National Health Services sent a summary to the prime minister to dismiss Babar bin Atta, the Prime Minister's focal person on polio eradication on the grounds of

incompetence (Junaidi, 2019c). However, by April 18 the minister himself was pushed out (Wasim, 2019b). Not only did the United Nations staffer hold his ground, but within a month he acquired the additional portfolio of Advisor to the Prime Minister on Tobacco Control in May 2019 (*The Nation*, 2019). This illustrates that even in a government mired by bureaucratic red tape and a fragmented and divided power structure, a person who is known to be competent by people in the international community is provided with support from the government establishment (Baloch, 2019).

Another interesting feature of this case is the designation “Focal Person.” There is no office in the entire Pakistani government with such a name. The title of this influential position comes from a Standard Operating Procedure in the Geneva-based Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) (Standard Operating Procedures, 2019), a combined initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US CDC, UNICEF, and the Gates Foundation. The SOP states on page 59 that the Focal Person on Polio can only be appointed by the respective state after the agreement of WHO and UNICEF country offices.

A third example of the power of international pressure to ensure ownership from multiple stakeholders in fight against polio is effective partnership with the media. Until recently, there was a huge amount of anti-vaccination content on Facebook that was hindering the vaccination drive and community ownership of this important activity. The Pakistani government put pressure on Facebook to delete all such content. However, in March 2019, Facebook declined that request, giving no reason for their decision (Digital Rights Monitor Pakistan (2019). With pressure from the Focal Person on Polio, Babar bin Atta, along with WHO and the Gates Foundation, Facebook finally agreed to take down

all such content by August 28, 2019 (Junaidi, 2019a). In the fight against GBV, most NGOs complained of a lack of media support. Yet here we see a collaborative success story with regard to tackling the polio virus.

The success of the polio case study has some relevance to finding success with addressing GBV in Pakistan. First, the GBV movement needs global influencers like politicians and big businesses to drive the fight against GBV as a top priority for the Pakistan government. This will help overcome the red tape and bureaucratic hurdles in the executive structure. Second, the global community should demand capable leadership who are specifically responsible for tackling GBV with clear goals, funding (both from government and abroad), and influence to push the agenda through. With the right capability and leadership, in partnership with other influencers of society, the media will not be a challenge even if it is international.

### Engaging the Clergy

The polio case study illustrates how international pressure made resolution of this issue a top priority for the government, and how the government in turn made it a priority for other opinion leaders in the country. Therefore, the clergy in Pakistan should also take a leading role in shaping the narrative on any issue. In the case of polio vaccination campaigns the biggest challenge facing Islamic clergy comes from the common social understanding that a polio vaccine is *haram*, or Islamically unlawful (Dawn.com, 2015). In response, the government asked the clerics to give all-out support and endorsement to the anti-polio campaign. Maulana Sami ul Haq, dubbed “the father of the Taliban” (Jibran Ahmed, 2018) and a strong opponent of polio campaigns in the past, gave his

approval of support in 2013 to the vaccination program (BBC News, 2013). Such endorsements are crucial for promoting any activity in Pakistani society that is being looked down upon as religious controversy or taboo (Dawn.com, 2019).

It is clear from the Sami ul Haq example that the current leadership, both in Pakistan as well as within the international community, clearly understands the pivotal role the clergy plays in convincing people toward a particular action at the community level. All the people I interviewed identified religion and religious misconceptions as a major challenge in their fight against GBV.

Many forms of GBV exist in the first place because of some perceived association with a tenet of Islam. Islam is a strong topic of discussion and a moral compass for most people of Pakistan. According to a 2013 PEW research study, 84% of respondents said they would support the implementation of *sharia* law in their country—one of the highest figures among all countries surveyed (PEW Forum, 2013). Islam must be considered in any solution packaged for the Pakistani populace. Due to the unchanging nature of its source (i.e., the Quran), Islam is also difficult to change over time (Piser, 2018). Therefore, when addressing any social problem, the only option is the use of the Islamic clergy to interpret the injunctions of Islam.

The Afghan *jihad* is a classic example of this phenomenon at play on a massive scale. The Afghan *jihad* was fueled and fanned by the Pakistani clergy (Roy, 2002). Even the name *Taliban* literally means “group of students” in the local language. The Taliban were originally students from Pakistani seminaries that were run by religious clergy. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the support of the United States against the Soviets was interpreted as a holy war. Individuals such as Maulana Sami ul Haq were

pivotal in setting up an entire generation of seminary students who went to fight in the Afghan War (Roy, 2002).

In the aftermath of 9/11, the fundamental element that helped people disown the jihadist fighters was not the abandonment of jihad itself. Indeed, that would have been anti-Islamic and would not have gained traction in local communities. Instead, parallel Islam-related debates were initiated that diverted attention from jihad. For example, one confusion that was leveraged was whether the armed men, who came from other areas to fight in Pakistani tribal areas, were Muslim or non-Muslim. For perspective, male circumcision is a common practice among Muslims but is not practiced in Sikh and Hindu communities. News, propaganda, and the pulpit were used to stir a heated controversy on why some of the dead bodies of self-proclaimed *jihadi* fighters were uncircumcised—a tangible fact that raised questions about whether these fighters were Muslim. The confusion and propaganda raised by media on this disassociation of terrorists from Islam is what enabled communities to stand up against such fighters (Hoodbhoy, 2016).

Another example is dress code restrictions for Pakistani women. The topic of a public dress code for women is a deeply emotional and personal topic for mainstream Pakistanis, and the debate is difficult to win if questions are raised that challenge the tenets of Islam. Instead, it is the traditional clergy, the so-called “Conservative Traditionalists” (as a RAND corporation report categorizes them), who bring up individualism and personal choice within Islam, that has helped reduce social limitations on women’s dress code over the past two decades (Benard 2003).

The successful repeal of the Hudood Ordinance in 1989, a bill closely associated with Islamic penal law by the Women Protection Bill of 2006, is a classic and relevant case study of GBV. The text of the Women Protection Bill states that it is being introduced to support the proper implementation of Islam and is not against Islam. The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act of 2006 states:

Any offence not mentioned in the Qur'an and Sunnah or for which punishment is not stated therein is (known as) *Ta'zir* which is a subject of State legislation. It is for the State to define such offenses and to fix punishment for them. The exercise of such authority by the State is in consonance with Islamic norms. Accordingly, all these offences have been removed from the two Hudood Ordinances. (Protection of Women (Criminal Laws Amendment) Act, 2006)

Had the amendment been portrayed as anti-Islamic it would have been impossible to pass this law.

Population control is another topic that requires endorsement by the clergy. In Pakistan, the clergy is already engaged in making contraceptives more acceptable to the population. The prime minister recently hosted a conference of clergy in Islamabad on the topic of population control (*News*, 2018b).

Perhaps the most glaring and actionable case that should be discussed is female genital mutilation. FGM is not practiced by most Muslim communities. However, the Dawoodi Bohra community, with a global following of more than 2.5 million people, ardently practices this abhorrent tradition (Chohan, 2011). Dawoodi Bohra communities can be found in India, Pakistan, Egypt, and Yemen. It is distinct from mainstream Muslim communities in that it allows the current spiritual leader to be the final authority regarding any topic related to religion. This means a religious verdict or declaration by



the spiritual leader has priority over any injunctions laid out in traditional texts. This gives the leaders unprecedented flexibility to handle a wide range of challenges in today's world. This kind of flexibility is similar to what the Christian clergy enjoys, where edicts can be passed that endorse a new interpretation of religion. Thus, for the Dawoodi Bohra community, the issue of FGM is ultimately a matter decided by their supreme leader, Syedna Saifuddin (Chandran, 2017). The challenge lies in engaging the Dawoodi Bohra clergy to denounce FGM. Despite considerable noise emanating from the Bohra community, especially from Bohra women, nothing will change unless the clerical leader is engaged on this issue.

Driving the right narrative and drawing adequate support from the community in tackling GBV is only possible by putting responsibility on the clergy with a clear accountability model. This is what worked in the case of polio, in stoking *jihad* in the Afghan War, and criticizing *jihad* from within Islam in the aftermath of 9/11. It was the traditional clergy who played a significant role in enabling change in women's dress code by justifying individualism from Islam. It was the clergy that helped the masses digest reforms for women under the Women Protection Bill of 2006 during the Musharraf era, and it is again the clergy who are brought forward and made to share the stage with the Pakistani premier to justify population control through an Islamic lens.

If the clergy has cited Islam in all these areas, there is no reason why the clergy cannot support and endorse the end of FGM in the Dawoodi Bohra Community. In fact, the clergy can play an even broader role in GBV in justifying the fight against it on a community level across the nation, drawing justification and explanation from within

Islam and such sermons, talks and debates broadcasted and shared over mass and social media.

## Chapter VII

### Conclusion

Gender-based violence is a challenge in Pakistan as well as for humanity at large. While I have explored multiple reasons and causes for GBV similar across geographies, the socio-political dynamics of Pakistan demand a unique solution in order to effectively work against this challenge.

Pakistan has done considerable work to legislate laws to protect women. It has also done some work in the areas of education, social engagement, protecting and supporting the victims, financially enabling women, and making it easier for them to work and earn a living. But significant improvement and progress is still needed. The key challenges faced in executing on all these avenues, as cited by each of the people I interviewed, revealed the following:

- lack of social support due to religious misconceptions
- lack of funding
- lack of coordination with other social influencers such as the media
- lack of effective implementation of laws
- lack of initiative
- ownership of this issue at large on the part of the government.

Analyzing some unique solutions that were identified globally reveals ideas such as having police stations staffed solely by women; social engagement via sports; engaging families to form groups that shun FGM both for the daughter as well as the bride.

Some of these solutions are already being tried in Pakistan, such as women cricket matches in support of fighting GBV (*News*, 2018a). Others, such as a community drive to highlight the issue of FGM, cannot be fully applied because FGM is not an issue in most of Pakistan, and because its proponents strongly associate it with a religious edict.

Focusing on two areas can radically improve the fight against GBV:

1. Better engagement on the topic of GBV by the international community, in the same way there has been focused attention on the program to eliminate polio in Pakistan. The polio example details how the challenges hindering execution—low government focus and initiative, bureaucratic red tape, little coordination with media, and funding—can be eliminated by taking the actions illustrated in the polio campaign.
2. Active engagement from the clergy, with clear expectations and accountability. The examples from the Afghan war, the war on terror following 9/11, and population control all prove that a partnership with the clergy has yielded results in past and will be an effective action to deal with all social and religious confusions and misconceptions that limit community support in the fight against GBV.

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