

Social and Cultural Interaction Between Central Asia and Pakistan Comprehending Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan and Central Asia: Adopting A Collective Approach to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

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Abstract:

The traditional communities of South Asia and Central Asia have a history of sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and gender inequity. In Pakistan and Central Asian countries, child, early, and forced marriages of girls continue to be prevalent, serving as sources of domestic, gender-based, and intimate partner violence. These societies have a deep-seated history of domestic abuse against women. Despite legislation on domestic violence in most countries of both regions, including Pakistan, these areas exhibit the second highest prevalence rates of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence in the world.

This paper conducts a comparative analysis of gender equality in Pakistan and Central Asian countries, providing a general assessment of the state of gender inequality. It focuses on why women and girls in both regions face more abuse and violence than their male counterparts and explores how policies and programs can be designed and implemented to address these differences. The study evaluates existing policies and programs for gender responsiveness and provides recommendations for gender-sensitive policy and program design.

The aim of the research is to raise awareness of the importance of gender-sensitive communication, challenge unconscious assumptions about gender roles in society, provides common grounds and suggestions to collectively address gender discrimination, create a unified approach to tackling these issues, and promote gender equality and women's empowerment in both regions.

In order to accomplish these goals, the research methodology involved online focus group discussions with women from both regions, conversations with professionals and experts in the field, and a desk-based literature analysis. This study, attempts to highlight possible areas for action, provide a better understanding of present efforts and initiatives, and provide a firmer basis of practical information for future endeavors, which is primarily intended for policymakers and academics.

The findings highlight the need to revise and modernize gender policies to achieve sustainable gender development.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Gender Disparities, Gender Politics, Gender Equality. Central Asia, Pakistan, South Asia

I. Introduction

At present, the issue of gender inequality has firmly entrenched itself in all spheres of human activity, significantly impacting the economy and social development of countries. Modern progressive society continually makes new attempts to establish gender equality to achieve one of the central United Nation Millennium Development Goals (UNMD, 2022). However, the gender situation in many countries remains unstable and marked by increasing violence and discrimination based on gender and abuses of fundamental human rights and freedoms. Inconsistent gender norms, shaped over many years and currently sparking numerous discussions, have come to the forefront, making it a relevant research topic. Despite the active engagement of existing international women's organizations, the issue of gender inequality annually takes the lead in discussions, revealing new consequences requiring solutions, especially pertinent in countries where the dominance of traditions, cultural, and religious dogmas prevails in society (Schlager, 2022).

The problem of gender inequality and violence in Pakistan as well as in Central Asian countries

(CAR), attracts numerous researchers since the situation regarding the observance of fundamental human rights and freedoms without gender discrimination is particularly critical in the region under study. In many CAR (like Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan etc.) and Pakistan, the rights of the female segment of society are still limited by religious or traditional frameworks. Each year, hundreds of women in Pakistan and CAR suffer social and legal injustice because of gender-based discrimination. In Pakistan, girls are deprived of the right to attend schools, while adult women face obstacles to enrolling in universities. Even if they acquire the right to education, they struggle to pursue their professional interests after graduating from university because of the societal hurdles, their gender and sometimes because of traditional and cultural values (Talent, 2022).

This study found it interesting to analyze certain aspects of gender inequality problems in the countries of Central Asia and present a brief analysis of this issue. Despite social, cultural, political, and economic differences between the regions, the 'problem' remains the same. The suicide of young married women, bride kidnappings/forced marriages, early arranged/child marriages, and conservative beliefs (such as the insistence that brides be virgins) are the common issues faced by the women

of both regions (Ismailbekova, 2022). Moreover, Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a persistent issue in many traditional societies, especially in South Asia and Central Asia. Both regions have a long history of domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and forced marriages, which primarily affect women and girls. Despite progressive legislation, the rates of intimate partner violence (IPV) in these regions are among the highest in the world (Sara, and Bekbolotov, 2021). Therefore, this article will provide a quick comparative analysis of the gender situation in the countries of Central Asia and Pakistan. Furthermore, this paper aims to explore the socio-political context of GBV in Pakistan and Central Asia, assess current policies, and propose a collective approach to fostering gender equality and women's empowerment.

II. Research Methodology

In order to accomplish the goals of this study, the primary research methodology involved online focus group discussions with women from both regions, collected various data (primary and secondary) on the state of gender equality in the countries of the Central Asia and Pakistan, conversations with professionals and experts in the field, and a desk-based literature analysis. An overview analysis of the issues in the Central Asian Republics (CAR) and Pakistan was also conducted.

III. Understanding GBV in Pakistan and Central Asia: A Conceptual framework

Gender-based violence (GBV) denotes detrimental actions aimed at persons due to their gender, disproportionately impacting women and girls globally. It includes various forms of violence, such as physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse. A comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding GBV must address the underlying causes, the various forms it takes, and the social, cultural, and structural factors that perpetuate it.

Defining Gender-Based Violence

GBV can be broadly defined as any harmful act inflicted upon an individual due to socially attributed gender differences. This involve intimate partner assault, sexual abuse as a child or marriage before 18, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking. While men can also be victims of GBV, the overwhelming majority of victims are women and girls, reflecting deep-rooted gender inequalities (UN Women 2020).

Theoretical Approaches to Understanding GBV in the Context of Pakistan and Central Asian Countries

In the context of Pakistan and Central Asia, GBV takes various forms, including domestic violence, honor killings, bride kidnapping/forced marriages, and trafficking, which are often perpetuated by socio-cultural norms and power imbalances. This study employs multiple theoretical approaches to explore the dynamics of GBV in these regions, focusing on its origins, manifestations, and perpetuation.

1. Patriarchy and Power Relations

At the core of GBV is the patriarchal system, where men hold more power and influence in leadership, authority, and control. Patriarchy allows for the systematic subjugation and control of women, reinforcing gender hierarchies and justifying violence as a means to maintain this imbalance (Connell, 1987).

In Pakistan and many Central Asian societies, patriarchal norms shape family structures, social institutions, and legal frameworks, which often privilege male authority and reinforce women's subordinate roles. GBV becomes a tool to assert male dominance and control, with violence being seen as acceptable in situations where women defy traditional gender expectations.

For example in Pakistan, 'Honor killings', where women are murdered for perceived transgressions against family honor, are rooted in patriarchal notions of male control over female sexuality and behavior. While in Central Asia 'Bride kidnapping' (in Kyrgyzstan) reflects a similar dynamic, where traditional customs place women in positions of vulnerability, with male control over their autonomy and marriage choices.

By understanding patriarchy as the underlying framework, this study highlights how GBV in both regions stems from a desire to reinforce male control and maintain the patriarchal status quo.

2. Societal, Cultural and Traditional Norms

Traditions and societal standards significantly contribute to the normalization or justification of gender-based violence (GBV). Many societies, including those in Pakistan and Central Asia, have rigid gender roles that place women in subordinate positions, increasing the likelihood of violence against them (Heise,1998). These norms can legitimize the use of violence as a method of discipline, maintaining order in the family, or protecting traditional values.

In the context of Central Asia, Soviet-era gender equality reforms influenced cultural shifts, yet traditional patriarchal norms remain resilient. In Pakistan, cultural and religious interpretations have been used to justify violence against women, often in the name of protecting honor or maintaining male dominance.

Moreover, in Pakistan, practices such as dowry-related violence and forced marriages are perpetuated by socio-cultural beliefs that women are the property of men. Much in the same way, in some rural areas of Central Asia traditional practices like bride abduction are tolerated due to cultural norms that regard them as acceptable forms of courtship.

Understanding GBV through this socio-cultural lens allows us to explore how deeply ingrained beliefs and practices normalize and perpetuate violence against women, making it difficult to challenge or change these behaviors.

3. Ecological Model

The ecological model provides a more holistic approach to understanding GBV by analyzing the interplay between personal, situational, and societal factors (Heise, 1998). This concept asserts that gender-based violence (GBV) arises from a confluence of person, relational, communal, and societal factors rather than a singular cause.

Individual Level: This includes personal history, such as exposure to violence in childhood or harmful gender stereotypes. In Pakistan and Central Asia, many men grow up in environments where violence is normalized, increasing the likelihood of perpetrating violence in adulthood.

Relational Level: At the relational level, family dynamics, economic dependence, and power imbalances between partners often contribute to the likelihood of violence. Women in Pakistan and Central Asia frequently face economic dependence, making it harder for them to leave abusive relationships.

Community Level: Local norms, poverty, unemployment, and lack of access to resources further exacerbate GBV. For instance, rural communities in both regions tend to have stronger patriarchal structures and fewer resources to protect women from violence.

Societal Level: Finally, societal factors such as weak legal protections, discriminatory laws, and limited access to education for women contribute to the perpetuation of GBV. In Pakistan, the lack of enforcement of laws protecting women from violence is a significant barrier. In Central Asia, although laws may exist, traditional practices and lack of implementation hinder their effectiveness.

This model allows the study to explore GBV as a multi-faceted issue, shaped by an interplay of different factors, and provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the various levels of influence that contribute to its perpetuation.

In order to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, this research advocates for a **collective approach** that incorporates multi-level strategies. Efforts should focus not only on legislative reforms but also on addressing deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and strengthening community-level interventions to support survivors and prevent future violence. This requires collaboration between government institutions, civil society, and international organizations working together to challenge patriarchal systems, alter harmful norms, and create safe spaces for women in Pakistan and Central Asia.

IV. Comparative Analysis: Availability of Normative Legal Acts against Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan and Central Asia

With provisions for equality for everyone, liberty from all forms of abuse and prejudice, special protection for women and children, full inclusion of women in every aspect of national life, education, and economic empowerment, among other things, the 1973 Pakistani Constitution enshrines fundamental ideals towards a just society. Unfortunately, there is still a lot of violence against women and girls in both public and private settings. Gender-based violence is a terrible and dire reality in modern-day Pakistan, where it is often uniquely legitimized in the name of culture, tradition, and morality, according to a substantial corpus of national and subnational studies (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973).

Furthermore, in Pakistan, social customs and patriarchal structures reinforce gender inequity and assault against women. According to current research, over 28% of women have experienced some sort of IPV in their lives. The persistence of child, early, and forced marriages further exacerbates the cycle of violence (Smith 2021, 45). Despite the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act of 2012, societal resistance and limited enforcement continue to hinder progress (Khan 2020, 123).

In Pakistan, violence against women and girls manifests in a variety of multifaceted, interconnected, and recurring ways. It can involve physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and economic abuse and exploitation that takes place in both private and public areas and is influenced by situational and sociocultural factors. Women face violence in various forms and settings throughout their lives. Girls frequently face similar sorts of violence.

Pakistan has passed a number of legislation and legislative initiatives to prevent gender discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV) over the years. The following is a full summary of the relevant legislation:

1. The Constitution of Pakistan (1973)

Article 25 of Pakistan's Constitution (1973) outlaws gender discrimination and promotes equality before the law.

Article 34 (Full Participation of Women in National Life): Directs the state to ensure women's full participation in all spheres of life.

2. The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010)

This important piece of legislation seeks to provide a secure place of employment for women. It defines harassment broadly, covering verbal, non-verbal, and physical acts, and provides a framework for the redress of complaints.

Key Provisions:

- Establishment of inquiry committees in workplaces to handle harassment complaints.
- Clear definition of harassment and the establishment of penalties for perpetrators.
- Formation of the Office of the Ombudsman to hear and resolve cases.

3. The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act (2011)

This law addresses acid attacks, which are a form of GBV in Pakistan. It amends the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) to make acid throwing a separate offense.

Key Provisions:

- Punishment for acid attacks with life imprisonment or a fine of up to Rs. 1 million.
- Regulation of the sale and purchase of acid to prevent misuse.

4. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2013)

This law provides protection for women, children, and vulnerable members of the family against domestic violence. It is applicable in Islamabad Capital Territory, Sindh, and Baluchistan, though other provinces have adopted similar laws.

Key Provisions:

- Protection against physical, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse.
- Creation of protection committees and shelters for victims.
- Immediate court orders for protection and prevention of contact between the victim and perpetrator.

5. The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act (2011)

This law criminalizes several harmful traditional practices against women, such as forced marriages, deprivation of inheritance, and practices like “watta satta” (exchange of women between families).

Key Provisions:

- Criminalizes forced marriages, especially those involving minors.
- Imposes punishment for depriving women of their rightful inheritance.
- Imposes fines and imprisonment for harmful customary practices.

6. The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offense of Rape) Act (2016)

This law amends the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) to make rape cases more transparent and to expedite the trial process.

Key Provisions:

- DNA testing is made mandatory in rape investigations.
- Trial proceedings in rape cases must be concluded within three months.
- The identity of rape survivors is to be kept confidential.
- Punishment includes the death penalty or life imprisonment for offenders.

7. The Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act (2021)

This recent law aims to overhaul the process for investigating and prosecuting rape cases, focusing on providing justice for survivors and punishing perpetrators swiftly.

Key Provisions:

- Establishment of special courts for rape cases to ensure a speedy trial.
- Setting up crisis centers for rape survivors to receive medical and legal support.
- Introduction of harsher penalties, including chemical castration for repeat offenders.

8. The Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act (2013)

This law specifically addresses the issue of child marriages, setting the minimum legal age for marriage at 18 years for both boys and girls.

Key Provisions:

Imposes strict penalties, including fines and imprisonment, for those involved in arranging or conducting child marriages.

- Protection of minors from being forced into marriage.

9. The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016)

This comprehensive law is aimed at providing protection and justice for women facing domestic, emotional, psychological, and economic abuse in Punjab.

Key Provisions:

- Establishment of Violence against Women Centers (VAWCs) that provide legal, medical, and counseling support under one roof.
- Introduction of GPS-tracking devices for perpetrators to ensure they do not approach victims.
- Emergency protection orders and residence orders to safeguard the rights of victims.

10. The Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offense of Honour Killing) Act (2016)

This law was passed to address honor killings, a serious issue in Pakistan where victims are often denied justice due to legal loopholes.

Key Provisions:

- Removes the option for families of victims to “forgive” perpetrators in honor killings, making it a punishable crime even if the victim’s family pardons the offender.
- Provides stricter penalties, including mandatory life imprisonment.

11. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2018)

While not focused solely on GBV, this act provides protection for transgender individuals, a vulnerable group that often faces gender-based violence.

Key Provisions:

- Prohibits discrimination in employment, education, and healthcare.
- Establishes the right for transgender people to self-identify.
- Criminalizes violence and harassment against transgender persons.

12. Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (2018)

This law addresses the trafficking of persons, including women and children, for purposes such as forced labor, sexual exploitation, and organ trade.

Key Provisions:

- Defines human trafficking and prescribes severe penalties, including life imprisonment for offenders.

Ensures protection and rehabilitation services for survivors of human trafficking.

Despite these legislative measures, the implementation of these laws remains a challenge. Some of the major issues include weak enforcement, social resistance, lack of awareness, and judicial delays. Pakistan has taken significant steps to combat gender discrimination and GBV through comprehensive legislation. However, there is a need for stronger enforcement mechanisms, increased awareness, and societal shifts to ensure that these laws can effectively protect women and other vulnerable groups from violence and discrimination.

Similarly, Central Asia faces significant challenges in addressing gender-based violence. Cultural traditions in countries like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan often contribute to the marginalization of women. For instance, "bride kidnapping" is still prevalent in rural Kyrgyzstan, reflecting the deep-rooted traditions that compromise women's safety (Rahman 2022, 67). Although all Central Asian states have ratified international conventions aimed at eliminating gender discrimination, implementation remains weak due to socio-cultural barriers (Johnson 2020, 34).

In CAR, representatives of the female gender, being an integral part of modern society, gain education, acquire and develop professional skills, contribute to societal development, hold official positions, and make decisions of national importance. However, this has not always been the case, and regrettably, not all women still have these chances. Unfortunately, violence against women and girls continues to be prevalent throughout Central Asia and around the world. Women and girls account for over 80% of sexual abuse victims in almost every Central Asian country (Nauki & Praktiki, 2022).

A sociological study titled ‘Ensuring equal participation of women in local government’ conducted within one of the UNDP projects showed that 53% of respondents noted the necessity of dedicating themselves to family caring for elderly parents and children. In comparison, 44% of survey participants highlighted the stereotypes of a traditional family, where women are expected to stay at home and manage household chores taking care of children. It is crucial to consider that in Uzbekistan, women’s wages are 35% lower than men’s. During job interviews at major companies, despite experience and knowledge, women may still be denied employment in favor of male applicants. The reasons for this could be the potential maternity leave, children who might get sick, and the most banal reason – the assumption that she might not cope with the responsibilities entrusted to her. Moreover, like in Pakistan, not all husbands are pleased with the career growth of their wives, with many believing that a woman must guard the family hearth rather than pursue a career (Sarsenov, 2011).

Since the legislation and other normative legal documents of Central Asian states enshrine the rights and opportunities for the entire population without gender discrimination, it remains puzzling that women’s rights violations persist. Furthermore, headlines in the press and articles on social media occasionally highlight harsh stories of harassment and violence against girls in public places and workplaces.

The issues of gender policy and the availability of normative legal acts in CAR are shown in Table 1.

Kazakhstan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the National Commission on Family Affairs and Gender Policy under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated February 1, 2006, No. 56. 2. Strategy for Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2016. Approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, dated December 29, 2005, No. 1677.
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	<p>3. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated July 1, 1998, No. 220-I On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women. 4. Kazakhstan 2030 Strategy adopted by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on May 4, 1998.</p> <p>5. National Plan for Gender Equality for 2006-2016, approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on January 16, 2006. 6. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated November 30, 2012, No. 34-V ZRK on Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Guarantees of Women's Rights and Gender Equality.</p> <p>7. Strategy for Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2016-2020, approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on February 18, 2016.</p>
Uzbekistan	<p>1. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures to Support the Actions of the Women's Committee of Uzbekistan was issued on May 25, 2004.</p> <p>2. National mechanisms for promoting gender equality and enhancing the role of women have been improving since 1995. By the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 2, 1995, on Measures to Increase the Role of Women in the State and Public Construction of the Republic of Uzbekistan, a new position of deputy prime minister overseeing family, motherhood, and childhood social protection issues was introduced. Similar roles were established in all regional government structures.</p> <p>3. Action Strategy of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021 and UN Sustainable Development Goals until 2030 (2017). United Nations, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.</p> <p>4. Presidential Decree No. 4235 of March 7, 2019, on Measures to Further Strengthen Labor Rights Guarantees and Support Women's Entrepreneurship."</p>
Tajikistan	<p>1. By the Government Resolution of the Republic of Tajikistan dated May 29, 2010, No. 269, the National Strategy for Activating Women's Roles in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2011–2020 was approved.</p> <p>2. On March 1, 2005, the Law on State Guarantees of Equality of Men and Women and Equal Opportunities for Their Implementation was adopted. It</p>

	<p>proclaims state guarantees to ensure equal opportunities for men and women in public service, socio-economic spheres, exercising electoral rights, etc. 3. The President of the country issued the Decree on Enhancing the Role of Women in Society on December 3, 1999. The decree aims to expand women's representation in leadership positions of state bodies. The country's government, state authorities, and management began appointing women, based on their competence, professional and business qualities, to the management of ministries, state committees, agencies, state-owned enterprises, institutions and organizations, higher educational institutions, country's government, state authorities, and management began appointing women, based on their competence, professional and business qualities, to the management of ministries, state committees, agencies, state-owned enterprises, institutions and organizations, higher educational institutions, and other educational establishments, as well as appointing experienced, competent women-specialists to positions of one of the deputy heads.</p> <p>4. By the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan on Amendments to the Family Code of the Republic of Tajikistan dated July 21, 2010, No. 613, the marriage age was increased from 17 to 18 years. Raising the marriage age aims to ensure girls' rights to education and prepare them for independent life.</p>
Kyrgyzstan	<p>1. THE NATIONAL STRATEGY of the Kyrgyz Republic for Achieving Gender Equality by 2030. http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/159472</p> <p>2. Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated November 19, 2018, No. 537 on Amendments to the Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on the National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for Achieving Gender Equality by 2020 and the National Action Plan for Achieving Gender Equality in the Kyrgyz Republic dated June 27, 2012, No. 443.</p> <p>3. Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated December 31, 2013, No. 527-r (On an interdepartmental commission to assess the effectiveness of legal norms providing for responsibility for violence against women).</p> <p>4. Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated December 31, 2012, No. 872 on the Fourth Periodic Report of the Kyrgyz Republic on implementing the norms of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.</p> <p>5. THE NATIONAL STRATEGY of the Kyrgyz Republic for Achieving Gender Equality by 2020, according to the Resolution of Government for the Kyrgyz Republic dated June 27, 2012, No. 443.</p> <p>6. Since 2020, the Jogorku Kenesh (Supreme Council) has amended the Criminal Procedure Code, alimony law, and guaranteed legal assistance law,</p>

	supported by the UN-EU Initiative, Beacon of Light. Amendments to the Labor Code, Code of Administrative Offenses, and Criminal Code to combat workplace sexual harassment have also been developed. Projects on Amendments to Some Legislative Acts of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Field of Ensuring and Protecting Against Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-based Violence, on Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic, on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, and a draft law combating discrimination are expected to be considered soon.
Turkmenistan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Law of Turkmenistan dated August 18, 2015, No. 264-V on State Guarantees for Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (with amendments and additions as of December 10, 2017). 2. The Constitution of Turkmenistan (new edition) dated September 14, 2016. Article 29: A man and a woman in Turkmenistan have equal rights, freedoms, and opportunities for their implementation. Violation of equality based on gender entails responsibility established by law.

Table 1: Gender Policy and Legislative Acts in Central Asia

On the basis of the table:1, we can conclude that the highest number of laws related to gender policy is in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, while Turkmenistan shows the lowest number.

Both Pakistan and Central Asian countries exhibit stark similarities in the prevalence of gender based violence. The intersection of cultural norms, religion, and politics exacerbates the situation. However, Central Asia's former Soviet influence has led to more structured legal frameworks, albeit poorly enforced. In contrast, Pakistan's legislative progress is relatively recent, and enforcement is often hampered by local resistance (Ahmad and Bekbolotov 2021, 88).

Here is a comparative table (Table 2) analyzing and comparing the legislation enacted to combat gender discrimination and stop gender-based violence (GBV) in Pakistan and Central Asian states.

Category	Pakistan	Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan)
Constitutional Guarantees	Constitution of Pakistan (1973): Articles 25 and 34 ensure equality and full participation of women in national life.	Constitutions of Central Asian States guarantee equality before the law (e.g., Kazakhstan's Constitution, Article 14), but the practical

		implementation varies by country.
Workplace Harassment	Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010): Provides mechanisms to address harassment, including inquiry committees and ombudspersons.	Kazakhstan: Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women (2009) covers workplace harassment. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: Limited workplace harassment protections exist; implementation is weak.
Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2013): Provides protection orders, shelters, and defines various forms of abuse (applicable in Islamabad, Sindh, and Balochistan).	Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Have laws addressing domestic violence (Kazakhstan's Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (2009); Kyrgyzstan's Law on Domestic Violence (2017)). Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: Laws exist but are poorly enforced. Turkmenistan: No specific law.
Child Marriage	Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act (2013): Sets the minimum marriage age at 18 years and imposes penalties for violators.	Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: The legal age for marriage is 18, but enforcement is weak in rural areas. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: Laws exist but child marriages continue in some regions. Turkmenistan: Practices around child marriage are culturally

		ingrained, and laws are not fully enforced.
Honour Killings and Harmful Traditional Practices	Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offense of Honour Killing) Act (2016): Criminalizes honour killings and removes the option of pardon.	Central Asian States: Honour killings are less prevalent than in Pakistan. No specific laws on honour killings, but harmful practices such as bride kidnapping exist in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where legal measures have been introduced but enforcement remains weak.
Rape and Sexual Violence	Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offense of Rape) Act (2016): Mandates DNA testing, confidentiality for survivors, and quick trials. Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act (2021): Establishes special courts and introduces chemical castration for repeat offenders.	Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan: Legal frameworks exist but are inadequately enforced, and social stigma often prevents reporting. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: Rape laws exist but are weakly enforced, with cultural resistance to reporting. Turkmenistan: Little data or legal infrastructure.
Human Trafficking	Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (2018): Criminalizes trafficking and provides penalties and rehabilitation services for survivors.	Uzbekistan and Tajikistan: Known for human trafficking, especially labour trafficking. Some laws exist but are weakly enforced. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: Laws criminalize human trafficking, but enforcement is inconsistent. Turkmenistan: Limited antitrafficking laws and data.
Gender Equality	General laws: The Constitution and various criminal laws aim to promote gender equality, but societal challenges remain.	Central Asian States: Gender equality is enshrined in constitutional and legal frameworks, but patriarchal norms persist across the
		region, limiting effective implementation.
Violence Against Women Centres (VAWCs)	Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016): Introduced specialized centres offering medical, legal, and psychological support under one roof.	Central Asian States: No similar specialized centres on a large scale; support systems are fragmented and poorly funded.
Protection for Transgender Individuals	Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act (2018): Prohibits discrimination and violence against transgender individuals, recognizing their right to self-identify.	Central Asian States: Very limited legal protections for transgender individuals; they face significant societal discrimination and legal gaps.
Cultural Practices and Social Norms	Despite progressive legislation, cultural resistance remains strong, particularly in rural areas where traditional norms often supersede legal protections (e.g., honour killings, domestic violence).	Strong patriarchal norms across the region, where cultural practices (such as bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan and child marriages in Tajikistan) remain prevalent despite legal restrictions.
Challenges in Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak enforcement in rural areas. - Social resistance to reforms. - Lack of awareness of laws among women. - Delays in judicial processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inconsistent enforcement of laws. - Cultural resistance and patriarchal norms. - Limited resources and infrastructure to support survivors.

		- Lack of political will in some cases.
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Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Gender-Based Violence Legislation in Pakistan and Central Asian States

This table highlights the efforts and gaps in legislation related to gender discrimination and GBV in Pakistan and Central Asian countries, providing a comparative overview of the challenges faced in both regions.

Both Pakistan and Central Asian countries have legal frameworks addressing GBV, but enforcement remains weak in both regions. Patriarchal standards present a considerable hurdle to the proper application of these regulations. While Pakistan has more comprehensive laws (e.g., the protection of transgender rights, anti-honour killings, and specific anti-harassment legislation). Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, have legislation addressing domestic violence and workplace harassment, though enforcement remains inconsistent. In both regions, cultural practices often undermine legal protections, and survivors of GBV face significant challenges in accessing justice due to social stigma and legal inefficiencies.

Policy Analysis and Recommendations

As we have already compared and analysed, current gender policies in both regions focus primarily on legal frameworks but fail to address the underlying cultural barriers. To promote gender equality, policies must go beyond legal measures and include educational campaigns, awareness programs, community engagement, and grassroots activism (Bari 2019, 91). Collaborative programs between governments and NGOs have shown promise in reducing GBV but require better coordination and resource allocation (Zahra 2023, 102).

To effectively combat GBV, a multi-layered approach is required. This involves:

Legal Reforms: Legal reforms are critical for protecting victims of violence and holding perpetrators accountable. Domestic violence, sexual harassment, and child marriage laws must be strictly enforced (Heise, 2011).

Public Awareness Campaigns: Changing societal attitudes through awareness campaigns that challenge traditional gender roles and promote gender equality is critical. Education plays a key role in shifting cultural perceptions and reducing the stigma associated with GBV (Abramsky et al. 2011).

Support Services for Survivors: Providing survivors with access to shelters, counselling, healthcare, and legal support is crucial for their recovery and empowerment (World Bank 2019).

International and Regional Cooperation: Addressing GBV requires coordinated efforts across borders. Regional partnerships and international treaties help share best practices, promote accountability, and fund initiatives aimed at reducing GBV (UN Women 2020).

Gender-Sensitive Communication and Policy Design: A key recommendation is adopting gender-sensitive communication strategies in both regions. This involves challenging traditional gender roles and unconscious biases through media, education, and community dialogue. Women and men must be equally involved in discussions to ensure inclusive policymaking that addresses the needs of all genders (Munir 2021, 114).

Conclusion

Gender-based violence in Pakistan and Central Asia is deeply rooted in cultural norms, patriarchal traditions, and insufficient policy enforcement. By adopting a collective approach that focuses on education, grassroots activism, and gender-sensitive communication, both regions can make meaningful progress toward gender equality. Further research and collaboration between policymakers, academics, and NGOs are essential to achieving sustainable gender development.

Following the analysis of content data from electronic resources and interviews, it has been found that today, in the Pakistan, the gender issue is viewed in the context of social contradictions, conditioned by the continuing influence of religious and cultural values. Additionally, gender stereotypes and perceptions concerning the role of women in social, political, economic and security institutions continue to have a pervasive impact on the development of the gender situation in the region. Also, the current state of gender equality in Pakistan remains unstable. There is still a gender gap in all spheres of public activity, with discrimination based on gender and violence against fundamental rights and freedoms of minorities. As a result, the stated issues must be addressed through societal modernization and development, the abolition of gender stereotypes, and a reduction in the impact of social and cultural norms.

Furthermore, the modification of the fundamental principles of gender policy in most countries of the region, with the aim of a comprehensive analysis of the gender situation in Pakistan, holds particular importance. One of the fundamental solutions in addressing gender problems is increasing the representation of women in the political and economic spheres, as well as the adoption of legal norms capable of protecting fundamental rights and meeting the basic needs of the female population. It is necessary to bridge the gender pay gap by providing economic freedom to women and creating new jobs that correspond to the demand for potential employees. Additionally, there is a need to review the Criminal Code and strengthen penalties for domestic violence, physical and sexual harassment, and ultimately eliminate practices related to “crimes of honour” and illegal operations that violate the rights of women and girls.

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