

From Policy to Practice: Evaluating the Implementation Gap in the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016)

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author explores the implementation gap of the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act (PPWVA, 2016) by looking at the institutional mechanisms that the act created and how it has been hindered as well as the implications that the act may have to the safety of women in Punjab. It answers three questions which include how institutions established in response to the Act operate, the main barriers to enforcement, and the reforms needed to enhance performance. The study applies the qualitative content-analysis design to study those secondary sources that have been purposely selected, i.e., the full text of the PPWVA, the official sources like SSDO (2024), and the scholarly review and the case of Noor Mukadam to exemplify these. The review was conducted by a document-analysis protocol/case-study frame. The results indicate that there is a large gap between the institutional provisions of the Act and its implementation. The PPWVA is based on the envision of Violence Against Women Centres (VAWCs), District Protection Committee, and Women Protection Officer, however, there are two active VAWCs and very few active district protection committees. The paper suggests the expansion and proper resourcing of VAWCs.



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Introduction

In 2016, the Punjab Provincial Assembly enacted the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act (PPWVA), the first provincial act that focused on the protection of women. The Act came up due to the alarming increase in violence against women in the province (Maryam, 2021). Its main goal was creating institutions to help victims of all kinds of violence as well as allow strict actions in the legal sphere against the perpetrators. The law required the establishment of Violence Against Women Centers (VAWCs) to make protection orders and bring in coordination between agencies to establish equitable and effective legal proceedings (Siddiquei, 2016). In a 2018 survey by Thomson Reuters Foundation, the PPWVA was said to have been a bold legal and administrative effort in reforming a nation that has often been the most dangerous place on the planet as a woman. The promise of the law has not been fulfilled in practice, however, much of it. The PPWVA has experienced considerable implementation challenges despite being well-documented, such as bureaucratic inertia, perceived by cultures, and systematic under-resourcing of protection centers (Khan, 2018).

Key Terms Operational Definitions

The Act specifically describes several significant terms to make the understanding of the Act clear. As an illustration, the definition of aggrieved person incorporates any woman who has fallen victim to any kind of violence involving more than just physical violence; it encompasses psychological and economic among other extensions of sexual violence. The term domestic violence is an expression used to refer to the violence carried out in a domestic environment or locality by an individual with whom the victim has or had any type relationship whether a marriage or any other close affiliation. A wide definition of the word house, is any domestic house irrespective of the legal ownership.

Key Provisions of PPWVA

One of the main aspects of the PPWVA is the fact that it provides the immediate judicial

intervention. An authorized representative of a woman, a woman herself, or a Women Protection Officer, may refer and complain to the Family Court in which a victim or the person who committed the offense lives or lived, or lived together last. The Court has to establish the initial hearing within seven days after it receives the complaint and finalizes the case in ninety days or so the case can be settled before any more damage is caused. In order to protect victims against direct threats, the Act allows courts to make a number of orders:

Interim Orders: They are issued at any point in case evidence indicates that there is about to be an imminent risk of violence.

Protection Orders: Prohibit communication and approach of the defendant towards the victim and can force the defendant to leave the common home and give up the firearms.

Residence Orders: Assure the victim of a right to stay at home or get a new place, based on financial situations.

Monetary Orders: The defendant is required to pay damages to the economy and medical expenses among others.

The PPWVA develops an institutional framework of protecting women, such as Protection Centers and rehabilitation Shelter Homes, where women can report to police, have medical examinations, legal assistance, counselling, and rehabilitation. These centers come under District Women Protection Committees headed by the Deputy Commissioner where District Women Protection Officers and Women Protection Officers are the ones who coordinate rescue operations, legal processes, and coordination with the law enforcers. Though the Act provides penalties (including up to six months' absence or fines to hinder the protection officers), it does not formulate more new criminal offences of domestic and sexual violence that are also encompassed by the current laws. The issue of gender-based violence in Punjab is still not eradicated: according to the PDHS (2017/18), every 28% of women have experienced physical and 6% sexual violence, and these numbers are probably even greater. This

was fueled by chronic domestic abuse, rape, harassment, and honor killings coupled with a slow and skewed justice process which encouraged the development of the PPWVA to offer an integrated legal, medical, psychological and shelter support. Although supported by the rights groups, the Act was, nevertheless, strongly opposed by conservative and religious actors, especially the Council of Islamic Ideology, whose opposition shifted the environment in which the implementation could not be effective.

Significance of the Study

The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016) has significant implementation challenges. There are 36 District Protection Committees which are not active, but Violence Against Women Centers are available to all, only in Multan and Lahore (Ahmad, 2023). Inadequate liaison between police, courts and welfare departments enhances enforcement further with intermittent funding. The experience of social stigma, the fear of retaliation, and the lack of trust in institutions discourage women seeking help, which introduces a wide gap in the implementation of the law and practice (UN Women, 2021). The Act lacks the strength of administrative weaknesses and structural cultural barriers as evidenced by widely analyzed qualitative policy reports, commentary on the law, and high-profile cases (Ahmad, 2023). This is the example of how these systemic failures could manifest themselves: despite the widespread attention and her privileged position, Noor Mukadam was not prevented by the system (Maryam, 2021). It was almost four years later that her family was able to obtain justice as the court sentenced Zahir Jaffer to death (Mehtab, 2025).

Case Study: The Noor Mukadam Murder Tragedy

The institutional frailties of the PPWVA became crucially revealed when a young woman, Noor Mukadam, who was the daughter of a prominent family and the murder victim in 2021. The case caused mass outrage among people, and thousands of individuals asked for law to be taken

in no time on social media (Abbasi, 2022). Being under severe pressure, the authorities rushed the investigation process and transferred the case to the special court (Abbasi, 2022; Maryam, 2021). Nevertheless, the observers mentioned that such speed was mainly attributed to the social position of Noor and the presence of high media coverage; nevertheless, the initial data gathering and management of the crime scene was postponed (Abbasi, 2022). Others such as the parents of the killer and other employees were found not guilty (Hashim, 2022), which shows the impact power can have on the legal process. The case of Noor illustrates the gap that has always existed in the implementation: what the PPWVA had envisioned as timely police response, coordinated support, and penalties never intended, had to have extraordinary public pressure to begin working, and was not perfect yet. On 20 May 2025, the Supreme Court reinstated the death sentence of the killer, four years later, which highlights the fact that ordinary women, who do not have such a well-known name, have even more obstacles to justice (Abbasi, 2025).

Objectives of the Study

This research paper will aim at achieving two key objectives,

- 1-To evaluate the structural weaknesses and practical issues of the implementation of the PPWVA
- 2-To determine the practical implications of the issues with a specific case study of the murder of Noor Mukadam.

Research Questions

The research questions that would guide this paper are:

1. What organizations are being created by PPWVA to safeguard women and how they are functioning practically on the ground?
2. Which are the main obstacles to successful implementation of the act and how these shortcomings manifest themselves in practice?
3. What policy and institutional changes can successfully close the implementation gap of

the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016) so as to prosecute the victims of violence obtained timely and equitable justice?

This report is structured in the following way. After this introduction, the literature review provides an overview of the academic, legal, and policy discourse of the PPWVA based on the writings of Ahmad (2023), Cheema (2016), Khan (2018), Ehsan and Khan (2024), Siddiqi (2016), and others. In the findings section, the key themes and gaps are mentioned, such as institutional failure, societal suspicion, societal backlash, and judicial slowness. The recommendations specify practical measures that can be taken by the policymakers and civil society organizations as well as the institutional actors in order to close the implementation gap, such as, improved funding, inter-agency training, public awareness campaigns, and enhanced judicial accountability. Lastly, the conclusion brings the insights of the study together with a call to action way forward.

This is a report of critique and reflection. It tries to emphasize on what has been wrong in the policy to practice transfer of the act, as well as to illuminate on a way forward, where PPWVA is in place and practice to extend all their potential to offer a safer space to the women of the society where they are conscious of their protective rights and can access them.

Literature Review

In 2016, the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (PPWVA) was met with massive publicity as it was a breakthrough in legal provisions due to the initiation of the first provincial statute to deal with domestic and gender-based violence in Punjab, Pakistan. The Act brought a significant change in terms of initiating significant reforms, such as Violence Against Women Centers (VAWCs), protection orders, and electronic monitoring of abusers. Although the law was designed progressively, its application has been of a symbolic nature with more than enough loopholes between the legal commitments of the law and its application. These are inadequacies that are indicative of more

structural, institutional and cultural obstacles within the Pakistani society that have not enabled the Act to have the desired effect.

Ahmad (2023) also offers an in-depth examination of the legal structure of the PPWVA and the issues that it has weakened. He praises the model of integrated support provided by the Act, especially VAWCs, as these are able to provide survivors with legal, medical, and psychological support along with safe shelter under police supervision. He, however, highlights the absence of bureaucratic support and lack of political will, which undermined greatly the ability of such centers. Even though the Act predicted province-wide VAWCs, as of 2023 only one center in Multan was operational with another one planned in Lahore in February 2025. This low access curtailed the access of women in the remote or rural districts (Ahmad, 2023).

A legal commentary by Cheema (2016) in *Courting the Law* brings to the fore a high degree of socio-political outrage that followed shortly after introduction of the law. Punjab religious groups and conservative political players condemned the Act on anti-Islamic and family intrusion grounds. State institutions were highly affected by this ideological opposition that led to delays in budgetary allocation, lesser cooperation between the agencies in the administration and a lack of willingness to enforce the law among the law enforcement agencies. Cheema (2016) believes that in the absence of a wider societal acceptance, religious alignment, and the lack of a powerful communication strategy adopted by the government, the Act is prone to poor implementation and selective enforcement.

In an article published by the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Khan (2018) interpreted the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (PPWVA) of 2016 in the framework of the international dialogue about the use of institutions to address gender-based violence. She claimed that despite the fact that the Act had come with robust structural machineries and innovative modern institutional attributes to protect women, it failed to do so due to lack of capacity to achieve

good outcomes through poor inter-agency coordination. The lack of effective communication between the health department, police and the judicial system including district and family courts often hampered with the provision of services in time. The integrated service delivery model in Women Protection Centers developed by the PPWVA was the main innovation that was undermined due to the administrative dispute and poor professional training. Khan (2018) also emphasized that it was a necessary factor that the local governments were empowered and sufficiently resourced to make meaningful implementation.

In the Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies, Ehsan and Khan (2024) felt the same and stated that the complex legal framework of the PPWVA was not able to defeat the conservative patriarchal principles, the lack of state capacity and the lack of bureaucratic commitment in the long term. Their interviews with social workers, officials, and survivors showed a severe lack of correlation between the promises in legislation and the reality that women were living. Numerous survivors knew nothing about the law, trusted it not, or were afraid to approach lest they were retaliated by the police (because of inaction or corruption). They made the conclusion that the acceptance of PPWVA depended on legal literacy and sensitization on a community level.

Ehsan and Khan (2024) authored another article in the Punjab Journal in the evaluation of the judicial response to the Act. Even though the PPWVA presented interventions like protection and residence orders, the courts were not able to handle them effectively due to slowness in the process, backlog in the cases and lack of gender sensitivity among the judges to handle them. Most lawyers were still not well versed with the contents of the Act but they instead went back to the general laws such as the Pakistan Penal Code that weakened the expert solutions that the PPWVA was meant to offer.

Another point highlighted by Ehsan and Khan (2024) is the socio-political background that influenced the practical implications of the Act.

Women were usually discouraged by strong societal and family pressures to report abuse. They mentioned the honor killing of Qandeel Baloch -born March 1, 1990, an aspiring model and actress- who was killed, in 2016, by her brother although she publicly said that she feared to get killed. Although her case was visible on a national level, it did not cause systemic change, which proves that even well-established principles of patriarchy can restrain the work of legal mechanisms more than legislative loopholes can.

A psychological journal author, Niaz (2003), provided valuable information concerning the mental health effects of the survivors of domestic violence and suggested trauma-sensitive legal framework. In her work, she demonstrated that women who experienced long-term abuse have developed serious mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, bipolar disorder, imposter syndrome, OCD, and PTSD. About the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (PPWVA), Niaz held that legal systems that do not have an inbuilt psychosocial support (e.g. part of the Violence Against Women Centers) deal a further blow to survivors instead of recovery. Her results highlighted the necessity to holistically implement the Act in which psychological care should be considered a primary form of help to the survivors.

A review of the policy conducted by Siddiqi (2016) at the Shaikh Ahmad Hassan School of Law, LUMS, supported the issues on the structural and functional inadequacies of the PPWVA. In as much as the Act was progressive as it was drafted, the review revealed that it did not have effective monitoring mechanisms and evaluation strategies. There was no publicly available information in important indicators like the cases brought before the Act, the results of police investigations, judicial results, or the feedback of the survivors of Violence Against Women Centers. Siddiquei (2016) cautioned that in the absence of transparency and data-driven controls, the Act would become a mere formality, alternatively, a formalism that lacked practical value.

The additional evidence was the UN Women and National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) report *More than Shelter: Needs Assessment of Dar-ul-Amans and Shelters in Pakistan* (2023). According to the study, seven Dar-ul-Amans and two Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women's Crisis Centers were assessed among the Pakistani population in 2018/2019 (and updated in 2023). These state-run shelters, it discovered, were grossly under-funded with some of the basic needs being legal assistance, counselling and vocation training. Poor living conditions and the infrastructural problems worsened their intention, as well as the environments that were more of a detention center. The lack of systematic complaint mechanisms and rehabilitative programs contributed to the acuteness of the systematic changes that would ensure that these shelters can be used by women to be truly armored and empowered in the case of domestic and gender-based violence (UNW & NCHR, 2023).

According to the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2017/18, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Pakistan has indicated that gender-based violence (GBV) is at a high rate with 28 percent of women aged 15-49 years reporting physical violence and 6 percent reporting sexual violence. Despite the range of pro-women laws enacted to combat domestic violence, rape and child marriage, the problem of implementation is low because of the strong patriarchal norms, socio-cultural restrictions as well as lack of institutional support to enforce the laws. In reaction to this, UNFPA has been working on the infrastructure, institutional capacity building, evidence-based policymaking, and responsible media reporting to bridge the gap between the law and actual protection of women. They are holistic, which is why their focus is on the need to change society so that they could solve the problem of GBV in Pakistan (UNFPA Pakistan).

The Punjab government declared the opening of 36 centers of protecting women in this wider scope, which is a first step in a country that is regarded as one of the most unsafe places in this world. These centres were meant to offer medical, psychosocial and legal help to victims of gender-

based violence. Then, journalists went to the first functional center in Multan, in south Punjab, to review its operation and services (Lavoie, Wahlah, and Siddiqui, 2017).

PPWVA, an act of protection of women against violence dating back to 2016, was one of the most important laws that allowed women to acquire formal protection against gender-based violence, and the high-profile cases that included the murder of Noor Mukadam in 2021 were critically tested. The case revealed fundamental structural weaknesses within the criminal justice system of Pakistan and also indicated the ongoing implementation problems concerning the PPWVA. According to Abbasi (2022), the brutal death of Noor in a wealthy neighborhood of Islamabad highlighted grave enforcement weaknesses, indicating how the weakness of institutional capacity to perform its duties, procedural loopholes and social privilege can affect the course of law. Timely protection, victim safety and institutional responsiveness are key principles in both provincial and federal legal systems although the PPWVA only applies to Punjab and not federal capital.

In their study, Asad and Azeem (2021) highlighted the numerous significant investigation flaws such as slowness in collecting evidence and the inability to preserve the crime scene, which might have undermined the case altogether and are indicative of underlying inefficiencies in enforcing the legislation on the protection of women. Although the PPWVA projected an idea of coordinated and immediate response via Violence against Women Centers (VAWCs), as seen in the case of Noor, the involved coordinated response is yet to be completely achieved in reality. The ruling by the Islamabad High Court, which affirmed the death sentence imposed on Zahir Jaffer (The Friday Times, 2023), was perceived to be a rare justice agency to hold a serial killer responsible who has frequently gotten away with gender-based violence crimes. However, after the high pressure of the population and active media promotion, it was only four years later that the Supreme Court of Pakistan decided in favor of the sentence (Mehtab, 2025). This case of Noor ended up

contributing to the implementation gap between policy and practice in that laws such as the PPWVA are in fact there, but are selectively applied and much more inaccessible to women without social or familial pressure.

To conclude, the Noor Mukadam case was an eloquent example of the delays and institutional inefficiencies within the bureaucratic and administrative structures in Pakistan- which issues are essentially the same in terms of implementing the PPWVA. The case highlighted the sheer importance of real structural changes, capacity building on institutions, and uniform implementation to adequately address the issue of women being victimized.

On the whole, as highlighted in the literature, despite this significant step being taken in institutionalizing women protection, the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act has faced institutional incompetence, cultural opposition, lack of inter-agency coordination and outreach to the populace. The law is there, yet it cannot work, as long as people are not aware of it, it lacks strong political will and proper institutional capacity to work. Closing this policy/practice gap thus involves not just legal changes but wholesome cultural, bureaucratic and judicial changeover.

Research Methodology

Nature of the Study

The research takes a qualitative content analysis method to analyze the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016 (PPWVA) in terms of its institutional mechanisms and their efficiency in action.

The data collection and analysis

The study examines the legal stipulations of the Act such as the functions of Violence against Women Centers (VAWCs) and Protection Committees and Protection Officers to understand which the provisions of the research are missing in their application by the study and utilizes the secondary sources of information. The secondary data will consist of the full text of the PPWVA, the official reports, case study, and the academic

literature to evaluate the implementation of these provisions.

Case Study

One case study of Noor Mukadam is then employed to discuss actual failures in the law performance with an emphasis on institutional inefficiency and delay in the procedures when addressing domestic violence. The critical analysis of the discrepancy between the policy intent and outcome of the Act will be presented that will shed some light on the causes of its poor effectiveness.

Limitation of Study

The study will not be involved in dealing with primary data like interviews or surveys, but it will concentrate on the available literature and case studies to come to conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

The moral aspect is also followed when dealing with sensitive information, particularly when the topic of violence against women is addressed, and their approach to it is to be respectful and delicate towards the matter.

Findings and Recommendations

Findings

The case study of Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016 (PPWVA) demonstrates that there are a number of significant gaps and failures in its execution, even though the provision is a well-developed framework of legislation that should ensure that women are not subjected to violence.

The suggestion is that the institutional mechanisms and implementation play a key role in preventing and managing diabetes within the community.

Institutional Mechanisms and Implementation:

The proposal is that the institutional mechanisms and implementation are critical in preventing and managing diabetes in the community.

The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (31 clauses) (2016) provides the structure of

protection system, which comprises of District Women Protection Officers (DWPO), Women Protection Officer (WPO), District Women Protection Committee (DWPC), Violence against women centers (VAWC), Shelter homes, Women Volunteers and Non-Governmental Organizations, the Punjab Women helpline (1043), women safety app, District Coordination officer, family courts, and the police. Nevertheless, the evidence reveals that such mechanisms do not have adequate resources and thus these capabilities are not sufficient to deliver timely medical, psychological, and legal services to survivors. Poor coordination between agencies and lack of proper staff training, also poses a challenge to the proper functioning of these centers and the majority of the victims lack the immediate help they need due to the challenge.

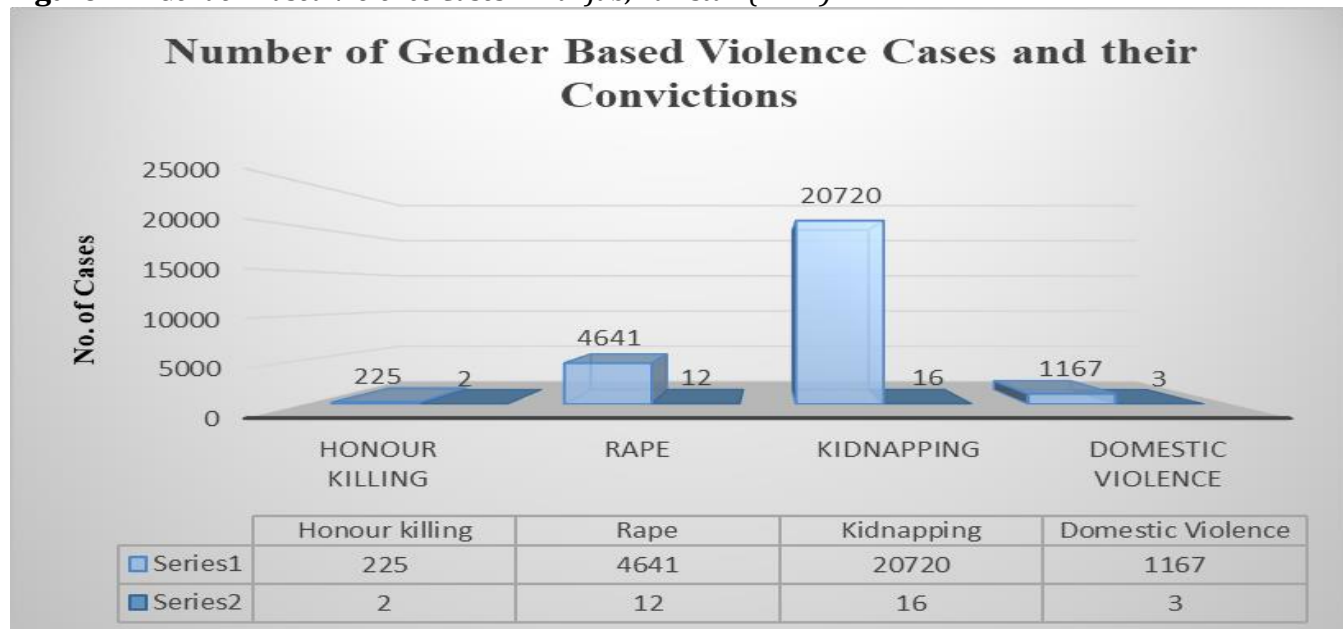
The organizational weaknesses and gaps in resources can be identified through institutional weaknesses and gaps.

Analysis of the PPWVA reveals that it has a distinct gap between policy and practice. Despite the establishment of the structures, including Violence against Women Centers (VAWCs), shelter homes, and special committees that are intended to provide integrated legal, medical, and psychological services, they are not functioning properly. Despite the mandate of VAWCs during

all of Punjab, as Ahmad (2021) observes only the center in Multan was completely operational by 2023. Similarly, out of existing 35 Dar-ul-Amans, where most survivors are unable to access them, only 4.7% of the women aged 15 to 64 had ever visited a police station or a women center (Ahmad, 2021). District protection committees are merely on paper and any technological solution like GPS tracking anklelets had been discarded, as a result of cultural backlash, and failure to invest (Ahmad, 2021). In general, the institutional structure of the PPWVA is greatly under-resourced, whereby support centres are operating in two large cities rather than across the whole province.

The extent of the issue can be additionally explained by Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) report Mapping Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Pakistan 2024. Punjab had 26,753 GBV cases, with 225 honor killings of which there were 12 convictions, 4,641 rape cases of 12 convictions, 20,720 kidnapping and abduction cases of 16 convictions and 1,167 domestic violence cases with 3 convictions. According to Syed Kausar Abbas who is the executive director of SSDO, the report has been informed by data collected by provincial police departments with the help of the Right of Access to Information (RTI) laws.

Figure 4.1: Gender-Based Violence Cases in Punjab, Pakistan (2024).



Note. Data is adapted from the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) report, Mapping Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Pakistan 2024 (SSDO, 2024). Data was obtained via RTI requests sent to provincial police departments. Graph created by the author.

Lack of Awareness and Trust:

A similar observation is that a high number of women are either unaware of the legislation that caters to the needs of women against violence or lack confidence in the system. It is revealed that the majority of victims do not know the procedures and protection orders of the Act or the support centers (Maryam, 2021). Even the people who are aware of the law will always hesitate to apply the law because they are afraid of being punished, humiliated or bribes over the police and judicial services. Such distrust has a solid foundation: in Pakistan, less than 3 percent of rape and sexual assault are prosecuted (Maryam, 2021). This has made the guarantees under the Act just on paper as most women never get to formal institutions but make use of informal networks to assist them.

The social pressure and the political opposition are among the aspects that must be considered regarding the state of the issue

Societal Pressure and Political Opposition

The paper reveals that the Act has been faced with cultural and ideological resistance ever since its inception. Shortly after the enactment, other religions leaders and conservative politicians called the law anti-family or anti-Islam, which slowed down budgetary approvals and undermined political backing (Ehsan & Khan, 2024). The entrenched patriarchal beliefs also do not encourage women to report abuse because of the fear of being stigmatized (Maryam, 2021). Such an attitude affects the institutions, too: police and court officials are not usually gender-sensitive trained, and treat domestic violence as a personal issue, utilizing the general law of assault rather than the Act (Ahmad, 2023). Enforcement is also distorted by power and class dynamics because

rich or powerful men often get away with it by using social and political connections, and poor victims often have little protection (Hashim, 2022).

Legal and enforcement issues:

The effectiveness of the Act is weak even in situations where the gender-based violence cases are taken to the courts due to systemic delays and gaps in procedures. It is found that protection orders and speedy trial are not frequently used because the courts are still at a backlog and most judges, prosecutors, and lawyers still use general Pakistan Penal Code rather than specialized procedures of the Act (Ehsan and Khan, 2024). Consequently, cases have been taking years and people who are victims do not get justice on time. The high-profile cases are only processed in a hurry when the public and political pressure are high, like in the case of the Noor Mukadam, where the top officials intervened, and the case proceeded at a blistering pace, not the same can be said of the ordinary victims (Abbasi, 2022). More generally, even the Supreme Court has observed that thousands of convicts have to wait as long as ten years before being able to appeal (Naseer, 2022). These court setbacks make the promises of rapid protection and implementation of the Act in order to be unfulfilled.

Empirical Data of Reported Rape Cases and conviction:

In Punjab, the SSDO report, Mapping Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Pakistan 2024 reports a rise of cases of GBV reported, which increased to 6,624 in 2023 out of 2,669 in 2014, but the real number is probably higher since it was underreported. There is also higher reporting by national data following the Punjab Protection of Women Against Violence Act (2016). In Punjab, 128 rape cases were registered in 2022, which increased threefold to 10,201 in 2023 and domestic violence cases were 1,167 (The News International). These trends point out that there has been a major increasing trend of reported incidents throughout the decade.

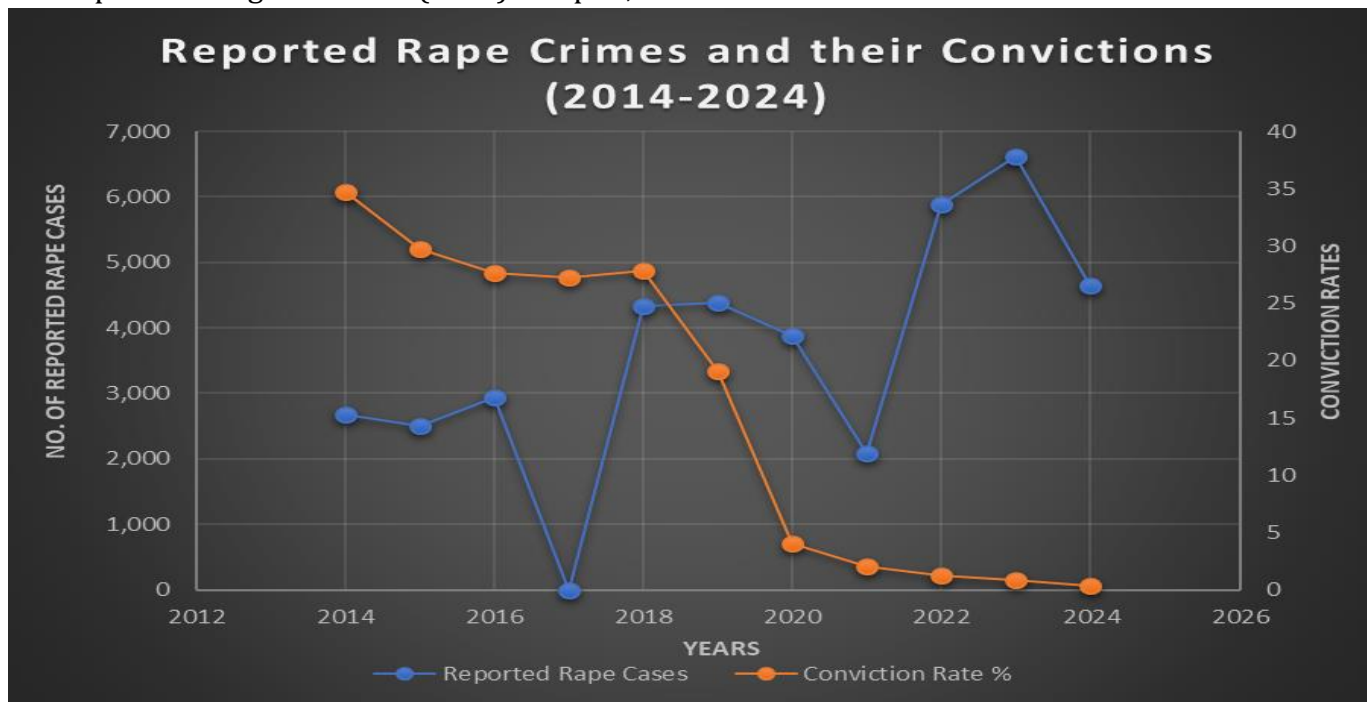
Table 4.1: Domestic Violence and Rape Cases in Punjab, Pakistan (2014–2024)

Year	Reported Rape Cases	Conviction Rate %
2014	2,669	34.74
2015	2,509	29.72
2016	2,938	27.60
2017	1,365 (Jan- Jun)	27.21
2018	4,326	27.80
2019	4,377	unavailable
2020	3,887	4.01
2021	2,078	unavailable
2022	5,890	1.26
2023	6,624	unavailable
2024	4,641	0.4

Table 4.1. Trends in Domestic Violence and Rape Cases in Punjab, Pakistan (2014–2024).

Note. Data for domestic violence cases in Punjab were adapted from the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) report,

Mapping Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Pakistan 2024 (SSDO, 2024), and supplementary information on rape cases was retrieved from The News International. Table was created by the author.

**Figure 4.2. Trends in Domestic Violence and Rape Cases in Punjab, Pakistan (2014–2023).**

Note. Data for domestic violence cases in Punjab were adapted from the Sustainable Social

Development Organization (SSDO) report, Mapping Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Pakistan 2024 (SSDO, 2024), and supplementary information on rape cases was retrieved from The

News International. Graph was created by the author.

Recommendations

The research report will be prepared based on the analysis provided above and will give the evidence-based measures in order to reduce the implementation gap of the PPWVA in Punjab. This advice revolves around effective institutional changes, capacity building and social participation based on my results (e.g. inactive committees, low awareness, entrenched bias).

What Needs to Change?

It is revealed in the discussion that legal reforms do not work without institutional preparedness and transformation of the society. An effective implementation of the PPWVA would be more effective with greater institutional capacity, compulsory gender-sensitivity training, frequent checks on enforcement and more general public legal education particularly among women.

The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (2016) is an important advancement in legislation, but its effect is still minimal because of inadequate institutions, the unwillingness of the culture, lack of political will, and inequality in its application. The Noor Mukadam case is a tragic example of what failure at the system level can have. To take the PPWVA beyond paying lip service to the goals of the organization, it must be reinforced by substantive institutional change, civil education, and social change on a larger scale so it can actually safeguard and deliver justice to the women of Punjab and elsewhere.

Strengthen Institutional Framework and Resources:

Empower and man institutional organs:

The PPWVA needs protection committees and centers of Violence against Women in every District in Punjab, but currently only two centers (Multan and Lahore) are operating. Every DPC must be well manned with special secretariats and at least a trained Women Protection Officer per police station. VAWCs should be constructed and brought into operation on time and at least

one center per division provided to make sure that the rural population can access it. Implementation should be done by a central unit of PPWVA in the Punjab government which should also take regular DPC meetings and monitor service delivery.

Secure sustainable funding:

Inconsistent deficits in funding are a setback. The budget of Punjab must have a special Violence against Women Protection Fund to provide staffs of helpline, stipends to victims, funds to transport them to shelters, and maintain centers.

Enhance capacity of coordination across agencies:

Since the model of PPWVA is a one-stop service, there is a need to coordinate police, health, social welfare, and judiciary. The agencies in each district are to be connected by liaison cells or a joint District Task Force. Well defined guidelines should ensure that every woman who reports violence at a police station or even a hospital does not fail to get details on shelters, law process and counselling.

Strengthen monitoring:

The provincial government is supposed to publish a PPWVA report on an annual basis that shows complaints, protection orders, prosecutions, convictions, and activity of the district level committee. Independent audits can be facilitated by civil society organizations and districts that have demonstrated a consistent poor performance should receive specific scrutiny.

Professional Training and Capacity Building:

The academic studies in Applied Science are not adequately equipped to accommodate the new technologies in the educational sector.

Sensitization of officials on gender:

In Pakistan, police, doctors, prosecutors and judges are not usually trained in dealing with gender-based violence leading to ineffective work by the responding agencies in terms of being survivor-centered. It should be introduced with mandatory and regular workshops on procedures

at PPWVA, trauma-informed care, evidence handling and the right of the victims. The training of the judicial system is particularly required because partiality e.g. moral interrogation like that observed in the Noor Mukadam case compromises an impartial decision making.

Protect Women Expansion Officers (WPOs):

In spite of the fact that the PPWVA requires the presence of one WPO per police station, there are a lot of stations that do not have the required WPO. WPOs should be appointed by the Punjab government on full time basis, preferably, women and their performance should be evaluated on a regular basis and at all police stations.

Enhance police and medical guidelines:

Forensic kits and clear procedures should be put in place in all the major hospitals and police stations. The police officers should be taught how to preserve evidence and how to file domestic violence FIRs properly to ensure that a case will run well within the justice system.

Public Awareness and Community Participation:

Mass awareness campaigns:

Lack of awareness among the populace on the legal protection is also a significant obstacle to successful implementation. The government of Punjab via the Social Welfare and Health Departments, is supposed to organize multimedia campaigns regarding the rights of women, the PPWVA helpline (1043), and the available shelters or crisis centers. The level of knowledge among the population can be extended with the help of television and social media.

Involve community/religious leaders:

As a conservative element within the society called the Act Anti-Islamic, religious approval is essential. To establish the legitimacy of the Act, the government must hold interfaith discussions and engage respected ulema who believe that women deserve to be safe.

Partner with NGOs and media:

The civil society organizations are to be funded or

should be officially partnered to facilitate the grassroots outreach. VAWCs may coordinate with other organizations to provide a legal clinic locally, such as the Aurat Foundation or War Against Rape. Sensitization through media should prompt the media to avoid victim-blaming as well as incorporate information on helpline when there is a case of gender-related violence coverage.

Legal and Judicial Reforms:

Survivor-friendly and speedy courts:

Despite the legislation permitting protection and residence orders, delays in the court system tend to traumatize the victims. The fast-track sessions of the court in case of PPWVA should be introduced in Punjab with strict schedule, i.e. first hearing can be conducted within two weeks after FIR and decision can be passed within three months. The Noor Mukadam case proved that justice can only flow under severe pressure on the part of the masses indicating the necessity of institutionalized speed as opposed to exceptional intervention.

Enforce accountability:

There should be severe punishments to officials that hinder or disregard PPWVA processes. There are departmental investigations or fines that ought to be implemented due to failure to help the DPCs or to give protection orders. Victims reporting unregistered FIRs should have a complaint system and periodic audits of police stations and courts should be implemented to provide accountability and transparency.

Institutions: Evaluation:

Information gathering and feedback:

Punjab needs to demand all districts to provide quarterly reports on PPWVA that outline the number of calls to the helpline, protection orders issued and the response of the total number of victims. These reports can be reviewed by the civil society to propose a way of improvement.

Long-term social reform:

The enduring investment in the economic empowerment of women and community training

should be made, in order to decrease the reliance on abusive families and change the negative cultural standards.

In order to make the PPWVA effective, Punjab needs to align legal reforms with actual implementation; sufficient funding, training staff, awareness among the population and good accountability. These are practical, feasible steps, which directly seal the gaps found in this research and key steps towards real protection of women.

Conclusion

As the analysis indicates, the promise of the PPWVA has not been fulfilled to a major extent. Despite the fact that the Act was a significant step of legislation, there is a significant difference between the vision of the Act and its practical implementation. Legislation is not enough to break down social, cultural and institutional barriers and each postponement in implementation leaves many women unprotected. The human price is high: even those who reach out to get assistance are either ignored, or delayed, or even rejected by the very institutions which are intended to take care of them. Even progressive laws cannot work without proper enforcement, proper resources, and overall reform of the society. To bridge this gap, it will be necessary to resort to changing ingrained patriarchal views, investing in functional protection centers, and enhancing inter-agency coordination and ensuring accountability on all levels. Funding, staffing, and monitoring should be given priority by the policymakers, whereas the police and judicial officials should not take the Act lightly and should be trained to act. Civil society, media and communities should keep fighting for victims and demanding transparency. The safety and dignity of women lies in the need to change this law on paper to practice. The PPWVA promise can only be achieved through prolonged and concerted efforts that will bring Pakistan nearer to the constitutional promise of equality.

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