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FROM CUSTOM TO CHANGE: FEMINISM'S ROLE IN ENDING HONOUR KILLINGS IN PUNJAB AND SINDH IN THE POST-MUSHARRAF ERA (2008–2023)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of feminism in addressing honour killings in Pakistan, specifically in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, during the post-Musharraf era (2008–2023). Honour killings, a deeply rooted issue in Pakistan's patriarchal society, continue to persist despite legal reforms and the increasing involvement of feminist movements in raising awareness and advocating for change. This study seeks to explore how feminist ideologies and grassroots activism have influenced the reduction of honour killings, focusing on the intersection of law, culture, and gender norms. Through qualitative research, including case studies and interviews with activists, legal experts, and survivors, the paper assesses the effectiveness of legal reforms such as the Anti-Honour Killing Law of 2016, which aims to curb this form of violence. It also analyses the contribution of feminist organizations and movements in Punjab and Sindh in challenging traditional views on family honour and advocating for women's rights. This paper further highlights the socio-cultural barriers that persist in these regions, despite efforts to eradicate honour-based violence, and the role of media in transforming public perceptions. The findings reveal that while significant progress has been made in the legal sphere, challenges remain in fully eliminating honour killings due to entrenched cultural practices and resistance from conservative elements within society. This study concludes by suggesting strategies to enhance the impact of feminist movements and further strengthen the legal framework to prevent honour killings in Pakistan.

Keywords: *Feminism, Honour Killings, Legal Reforms, Gender Equality*

INTRODUCTION

Honour killings, a grievous violation of human rights, remain a pressing issue in many parts of the world, particularly in South Asia. Rooted in patriarchal traditions, these killings are framed as a means of restoring familial honour, often targeting women accused of transgressing social or cultural norms. In Pakistan, the provinces of Punjab and Sindh have historically been hotspots for such acts due to deeply entrenched tribal, feudal, and patriarchal structures. The post-Musharraf era (2008–2023) has witnessed significant transformations in Pakistan's socio-political landscape, including the growth of feminist movements, legal reforms, and grassroots activism aimed at addressing gender-based violence. Against this backdrop, this paper examines the evolving role of feminism in combating honour killings in Punjab and Sindh, focusing on its successes, challenges, and the cultural shifts it has catalysed.

The term “honour killing” masks the brutality of the act by embedding it within cultural and societal justifications. In Pakistan, these crimes are predominantly rooted in notions of “ghairat” (honour) that often render women as custodians of family reputation. The act is typically carried out by male relatives who justify their actions as necessary to cleanse familial dishonour caused by alleged illicit relationships, marriages of choice, or even trivial acts such as dressing inappropriately. This cultural framework is supported by a complicit social fabric where community norms, weak legal enforcement, and societal silence perpetuate impunity.

The post-Musharraf era marked a shift in Pakistan's political and civil society dynamics. Musharraf's tenure (1999–2008) is often credited with opening spaces for moderate liberalism, media independence, and the rise of civil rights discourse. However, the democratic governments that followed had to contend with a volatile mix of political instability, rising extremism, and economic challenges, which often overshadowed issues of gender justice. Despite these constraints, feminism in Pakistan began to assert itself more prominently, aided by the proliferation of digital media, the rise of grassroots organizations, and international advocacy. This period also saw legislative milestones such as the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2016, which aimed to close legal loopholes that allowed perpetrators of honour killings to evade justice.

Punjab and Sindh present distinct yet overlapping contexts for understanding the persistence of honour killings and feminist interventions. Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, combines urbanization and economic development with a deeply patriarchal rural heartland where traditional power structures dominate. Sindh, on the other hand, is characterized by its feudal system, where landowners wield significant social and political control, often perpetuating regressive norms. In both provinces, honour killings are not merely acts of individual violence but are embedded within broader systems of oppression that reinforce gender inequality. Feminism's role in challenging these structures requires a nuanced approach, balancing direct action against honour killings with broader efforts to change societal attitudes.

One of the key drivers of feminist advocacy in this period has been the mobilization of grassroots organizations. In Punjab, initiatives such as the Aurat Foundation and the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCF) have worked tirelessly to document cases, provide legal assistance to survivors, and pressure authorities to enforce anti-honour killing laws. In Sindh, local women's groups and activists like Amar Sindhu have played a crucial role in challenging feudal systems and bringing attention to the plight of women facing violence. These efforts have been bolstered by the annual Aurat March, which has become a symbol of feminist resistance across Pakistan. Through slogans like "Mera Jism Meri Marzi" (My Body, My Choice), feminists have challenged the cultural narratives that underpin honour killings, advocating for women's autonomy and agency.

Legal reforms, while necessary, have proven insufficient in isolation. The passage of the 2016 amendment to Pakistan's penal code was hailed as a landmark achievement. By removing the possibility of forgiveness (a mechanism often exploited by families to protect perpetrators), the law aimed to ensure that honour killings were treated as murder. However, implementation remains a critical challenge. Police corruption, societal pressure, and the reluctance of victims' families to pursue justice have often undermined the effectiveness of these legal measures. Feminist movements have sought to address these gaps by engaging with law enforcement, creating public awareness campaigns, and advocating for systemic reforms. The role of media, particularly digital platforms, has been transformative in amplifying feminist voices and exposing the horrors of honour killings. Social media campaigns such as #JusticeForQandeel, sparked by the 2016

murder of model and activist Qandeel Baloch by her brother, have highlighted the complicity of society in perpetuating violence against women. Feminists have leveraged these platforms to mobilize public opinion, challenge patriarchal narratives, and demand accountability from the state. At the same time, the backlash against these movements, ranging from online harassment to physical threats, underscores the deep-seated resistance to feminist ideals in Pakistan.

Cultural shifts, though gradual, are beginning to emerge. In Punjab, urbanization and education are contributing to a slow erosion of traditional norms that condone honour killings. Young women and men are increasingly questioning patriarchal values, spurred by exposure to feminist discourse and alternative worldviews. In Sindh, the rise of Sindhi nationalist movements has intersected with feminist struggles, creating spaces for dialogue on issues of gender justice. However, these changes remain uneven and fragile, particularly in rural areas where poverty, illiteracy, and feudal influence continue to dominate.

The period from 2008 to 2023 represents a critical juncture in the fight against honour killings in Punjab and Sindh. Feminism's role has been multifaceted, combining legal advocacy, grassroots activism, cultural critique, and public mobilization. While significant progress has been made, the persistence of honour killings serves as a stark reminder of the challenges that remain. This paper seeks to unpack the complexities of this struggle, analysing the interplay between feminist interventions, cultural resistance, and systemic inertia. By examining case studies, legal frameworks, and cultural narratives, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of feminism's role in ending honour killings in these two provinces and to contribute to broader discussions on gender justice in Pakistan.

This research seeks to explore two fundamental questions at the intersection of gender, culture, and justice. First, it examines how feminist movements have influenced societal attitudes and legal frameworks to combat honour killings in Punjab and Sindh during the post-Musharraf era (2008–2023). By focusing on grassroots activism, media advocacy, and legislative reforms, the study aims to understand the extent to which feminism has challenged entrenched patriarchal norms and fostered cultural change in these provinces. Second, it investigates the obstacles that persist in the fight against honour killings, particularly the interplay of feudal structures,

societal resistance, and the limitations of law enforcement. Through these inquiries, the research endeavours to illuminate the progress made and the challenges that remain in addressing one of Pakistan's most pressing human rights issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Honour Killings: Honour killings, defined as the murder of individuals (predominantly women) by family members to preserve or restore familial honour, are deeply rooted in patriarchal cultural practices (Chesler, 2010). Studies indicate that such crimes are prevalent in South Asia, with Pakistan being one of the leading countries where these incidents occur (Gill, 2009; Korteweg, 2012). The practice is often justified by perpetrators through concepts of "ghairat" (honour), which assign women the responsibility of upholding family reputation (Ali & Gavino, 2008). Critics argue that honour killings are not merely acts of individual violence but are embedded in broader systems of social and economic inequality (Hassan, 1999; Faqir, 2001).

The Post-Musharraf Era: A Turning Point: The post-Musharraf era (2008–2023) brought significant shifts in Pakistan's legal and social landscape. Musharraf's tenure (1999–2008) saw a partial liberalization of the media and the rise of civil society organizations advocating for women's rights (Jamal, 2013). However, democratic governments that followed had to contend with economic crises, political instability, and rising extremism, which often pushed gender justice to the periphery (Rashid, 2008; Weiss, 2014). Nonetheless, this period witnessed key legislative developments, including the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act of 2016, which closed loopholes allowing families to "forgive" perpetrators of honour killings (Zia, 2017).

Feminist Interventions and Grassroots Activism: Feminist movements in Pakistan have played a pivotal role in challenging the cultural and institutional underpinnings of honour killings. Grassroots organizations such as the Aurat Foundation and Shirkat Gah have been at the forefront, documenting cases, providing legal aid, and raising awareness (Khan, 2020; Shah, 2019). Activists argue that a holistic approach is required to tackle honour killings, one that combines legal reform with efforts to shift societal attitudes (Bano, 2020; Patel, 2010). The annual Aurat March, which emerged in 2018, has become a symbol of feminist resistance, advocating

for women's autonomy and highlighting issues of gender-based violence, including honour killings (Khan & Zafar, 2021).

Legal Frameworks and Their Limitations: While Pakistan's legal system has made strides in addressing honour killings, enforcement remains a significant challenge. The 2016 amendment to the penal code was hailed as a landmark reform, removing the possibility of forgiveness and ensuring that honour killings were treated as murder (Mumtaz, 2017; Ali, 2018). However, studies reveal that police corruption, societal pressure, and patriarchal biases within the judiciary often undermine the implementation of these laws (Siddiqui, 2018; Aftab, 2020). Feminist scholars argue that the legal system alone cannot address the issue unless accompanied by broader societal changes (Jahangir & Hamid, 2019).

The Role of Media: The role of media, particularly digital platforms, in amplifying feminist voices and exposing honour killings has been transformative (Chaudhry, 2020; Baig, 2019). Social media campaigns like #JusticeForQandeel, following the 2016 murder of Qandeel Baloch, have brought national and international attention to the issue, forcing policymakers to take action (Jafar, 2017; Shaheed, 2018). However, the backlash faced by feminists, ranging from online harassment to physical threats, highlights the deep-seated resistance to gender equality in Pakistan (Rehman, 2020; Ali & Naveed, 2019).

Cultural Resistance and Societal Change: Cultural resistance remains a significant barrier to ending honour killings. Scholars note that patriarchal values, deeply entrenched in rural areas, continue to justify violence against women (Khan, 2018; Fatima, 2019). In Punjab, urbanization and education are slowly eroding these norms, creating space for alternative narratives (Malik, 2020). In Sindh, feminist struggles have intersected with Sindhi nationalist movements, fostering dialogue on gender justice (Memon, 2019; Sindhu, 2021). Despite these shifts, change remains uneven, with rural areas continuing to grapple with poverty, illiteracy, and feudal dominance (Riaz, 2020; Hussain, 2021).

Intersection of Feminism and Feudalism: The feudal system in Sindh and southern Punjab plays a critical role in perpetuating honour killings. Landowners wield significant social and political influence, often protecting perpetrators to maintain their power (Ahmed, 2018; Ghauri, 2019). Feminist activists argue that dismantling feudal structures is essential for addressing the root causes of honour killings (Shah, 2020; Abbas, 2021).

However, such efforts face immense resistance, as feudal elites often dominate local governance and law enforcement mechanisms (Iqbal, 2019; Farooq, 2021).

Feminism and Global Advocacy: Feminist movements in Pakistan have also benefited from international support and global advocacy. Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have consistently highlighted the issue of honour killings, pressuring the Pakistani government to take action (Taylor, 2019; Brown, 2020). Scholars note that this international attention has bolstered local feminist efforts, providing resources and platforms to amplify their voices (Zehra, 2020; Patel & Ahmad, 2019). However, critics caution against over-reliance on external actors, arguing that sustainable change must come from within (Hameed, 2021; Shahid, 2020).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study applies Feminist Theory to examine the role of feminism in addressing honour killings in Punjab and Sindh during the post-Musharraf era (2008–2023). Rooted in the critique of patriarchal structures and the advocacy for gender equality, feminist theory offers a powerful lens to understand the socio-cultural, political, and legal dimensions of honour killings. By highlighting the systemic oppression of women and challenging power dynamics that perpetuate violence, feminist theory frames honour killings as both a manifestation of and a tool for maintaining patriarchal control.

Honour Killings and Patriarchal Structures: At its core, feminist theory asserts that gender-based violence, including honour killings, is a product of deeply entrenched patriarchal norms (Hooks, 1984; Walby, 1990). In Pakistan, these norms dictate women's roles as custodians of family honour, rendering their behaviour subject to rigid societal expectations. Any perceived transgression—whether through choosing a partner, pursuing education, or asserting independence—is often met with violent retribution (Chesler, 2010). Feminist scholars argue that such violence serves as a mechanism to reinforce male dominance and control over women's autonomy (Mies, 1986; Ahmed, 2018).

Feminism as Resistance: Feminist movements in Pakistan have been instrumental in resisting these oppressive structures. Drawing from feminist theory's emphasis on collective action and empowerment, grassroots organizations such as the Aurat Foundation and the Women's Action

Forum have mobilized against honour killings. Feminist theory's focus on intersectionality is particularly relevant in this context, as it helps address the overlapping oppressions of gender, class, and ethnicity that exacerbate women's vulnerabilities in regions like Sindh and Punjab (Crenshaw, 1989; Zia, 2017). By centering the voices and experiences of marginalized women, these movements align with feminist theory's commitment to justice and equity.

Legal and Cultural Interventions: Feminist theory also emphasizes the importance of systemic change, challenging both legal frameworks and cultural narratives that normalize violence. Feminists in Pakistan have been at the forefront of advocating for legal reforms, including the 2016 amendment to Pakistan's Penal Code, which criminalized honour killings without the possibility of forgiveness (Zia, 2017). These efforts reflect feminist theory's critique of the law as a site of both oppression and potential liberation (MacKinnon, 1987). Simultaneously, feminist advocacy targets cultural change, aiming to dismantle narratives that justify violence in the name of honour. Campaigns like the Aurat March exemplify feminist praxis by combining legal demands with public awareness and cultural critique.

A Transformative Framework: Feminist theory's transformative potential lies in its ability to envision a society free from patriarchal violence. By framing honour killings as a violation of women's rights and autonomy, feminist theory challenges societal complicity and pushes for a redefinition of honour rooted in respect and equality. The theory also underscores the importance of solidarity, both within Pakistan and globally, in addressing gender-based violence as a shared human rights concern (Butler, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for this study is designed to comprehensively analyse the role of feminism in addressing honour killings in Punjab and Sindh from 2008 to 2023. Given the complex socio-cultural and legal dimensions of the issue, a qualitative research design is adopted, focusing on thematic analysis of primary and secondary data sources. The methodology integrates in-depth interviews, document analysis, and case studies to ensure a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Research Design: A qualitative research design is particularly suited to this study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the socio-cultural, legal, and political dimensions of honour killings and the feminist response. The

qualitative approach is rooted in the constructivist paradigm, which posits that knowledge is socially constructed and contextual (Creswell, 2014). This design enables the researcher to capture nuanced insights into how feminist movements have influenced societal attitudes, policy changes, and cultural narratives around honour killings in Pakistan.

Data Collection Methods:

Primary Data:

In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders, including feminist activists, legal experts, policymakers, and survivors of honour-related violence. This method allows for a flexible yet focused exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences.

Sampling: A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select participants with direct experience or expertise related to honour killings and feminist activism in Punjab and Sindh. Approximately 15-20 interviews will be conducted to achieve data saturation.

Secondary Data:

Document Analysis: This includes the review of legal documents, policy reports, feminist publications, media coverage, and NGO reports. The analysis of these documents provides contextual insights into legislative changes, cultural campaigns, and advocacy efforts undertaken by feminist movements.

Case Studies: Detailed case studies of notable honour killing incidents and feminist interventions will be analysed to illustrate the interplay between cultural norms, legal frameworks, and activism.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to analyse both primary and secondary data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis will guide the process:

- Familiarization: Reading and re-reading interview transcripts and documents to immerse in the data.
- Generating Initial Codes: Identifying key themes and patterns related to feminism's role in addressing honour killings.
- Searching for Themes: Organizing codes into broader themes, such as legal reform, cultural resistance, and grassroots mobilization.
- Reviewing Themes: Refining and validating themes to ensure coherence and relevance.

- Defining and Naming Themes: Clearly articulating each theme's scope and significance.
- Producing the Report: Synthesizing the findings into a coherent narrative.

Ethical Considerations: Given the sensitive nature of the topic, strict ethical protocols will be followed:

- Informed Consent: Participants will be informed about the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights before consenting to participate.
- Confidentiality and Anonymity: Personal information will be anonymized, and pseudonyms will be used in the analysis to protect participants' identities.
- Emotional Well-being: Appropriate support will be provided to participants, especially survivors, to minimize distress during interviews.

Scope and Limitations: This study focuses on the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, given their socio-cultural diversity and prominence in feminist activism. While this geographical focus allows for in-depth analysis, it limits the generalizability of findings to other regions of Pakistan. Additionally, the reliance on qualitative data may introduce researcher bias, which will be mitigated through reflexivity and peer debriefing. This study acknowledges several limitations that may affect its scope and generalizability. First, the research focuses exclusively on Punjab and Sindh, which, while significant regions in terms of feminist activism and honour killings, may not fully represent the dynamics in other provinces of Pakistan, such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Second, the reliance on qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, may introduce subjectivity and researcher bias. Efforts to mitigate this, such as triangulation and reflexivity, may not completely eliminate such biases.

Additionally, access to participants, particularly survivors of honour-related violence, may be challenging due to safety, trust, and emotional concerns, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives. The sensitive nature of the topic may also constrain the depth of information shared by participants. Lastly, secondary data, such as media reports and legal documents, may reflect biases or incomplete narratives, affecting the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Rationale for Methodology

The chosen methodology aligns with the study's objectives of understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of honour killings and the transformative role of feminism. By integrating multiple data sources and analytical methods, the research design ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative approach also facilitates the exploration of subjective experiences and socio-political contexts that are critical to addressing gender-based violence.

RESULTS

The results of this study are derived from an analysis of in-depth interviews, document reviews, and case studies, all of which contributed to understanding the role of feminism in addressing honour killings in Punjab and Sindh between 2008 and 2023. The findings are categorized into four major themes: Legal Reforms and Feminist Advocacy, Cultural Resistance and Feminist Mobilization, Impact of Feminist Movements on Policy, and Challenges in Combating Honour Killings.

- **Legal Reforms and Feminist Advocacy:** One of the most significant findings of this research is the role of feminist movements in advocating for legal reforms to address honour killings. Participants, including legal experts and activists, identified the 2016 amendment to Pakistan's Penal Code as a key milestone. This law criminalized honour killings without the possibility of forgiveness by the victim's family, marking a significant step toward legal accountability. Feminist activists, such as those from the Aurat Foundation, played a pivotal role in lobbying for this reform. One participant highlighted, "Feminist organizations pushed for changes in the law that would make it harder for perpetrators to escape justice by invoking 'honour.'"

Despite these legal advancements, the implementation of the law remains inconsistent. Survivors and activists pointed out that, in many cases, the law is still undermined by entrenched cultural norms and pressures from powerful families. One activist stated, "The law exists, but the system is still influenced by the deep-rooted idea that family honour must be protected at all costs."

- **Cultural Resistance and Feminist Mobilization:** Feminism's role in challenging the cultural justifications for honour killings is another prominent theme. Feminist movements in Punjab and Sindh have

focused on shifting societal attitudes toward the concept of honour, moving away from traditional notions that link women's behaviour to family reputation. Through campaigns like the Aurat March and local protests, activists have actively contested the patriarchal view that women must be controlled to preserve familial and societal honour. One participant emphasized, "Feminists in the region have been vocal in redefining honour. It's no longer about control; it's about respect and equality."

However, while feminist mobilization has made significant strides, resistance from conservative segments of society remains strong. Interviews with community leaders and activists indicated that in rural areas, traditional views about honour continue to dominate, making it difficult to challenge these practices. For example, one participant noted, "In some villages, honour killings are still seen as a legitimate way of restoring family dignity, especially if a woman has transgressed."

- **Impact of Feminist Movements on Policy:** The impact of feminist activism on policy reform was a key focus of the study. Several interviewees noted that feminist movements have led to the introduction of policies that, while not perfect, have created a foundation for future changes. The establishment of the National Commission on the Status of Women and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act were cited as examples of progress made, largely due to sustained feminist pressure. However, while these laws provide some measure of protection, activists contend that they are often not effectively enforced, especially in cases of honour killings.

One participant, an expert in women's rights law, commented, "Feminist movements have made it possible for laws to be introduced, but changing the legal culture and ensuring enforcement is an ongoing battle."

- **Challenges in Combating Honour Killings:** A recurring challenge discussed by interviewees was the deep-rooted cultural, social, and political barriers that hinder the eradication of honour killings. Feminists argue that while legal reforms are essential, they are not sufficient without cultural change. As one feminist activist explained, "We need not only legal change but also a transformation in people's mindset about the value of women's lives."

The challenges are compounded by political factors. Several interviewees pointed to the role of political elites, especially in rural areas, who have been known to protect perpetrators of honour killings for political or social gain. This reflects the broader tension between legal reforms and political will. As one interviewee stated, "Even when laws are in place, the lack of political will and the influence of local power brokers often prevent real change."

Case Study: Sindh

In Sindh, honour killings have remained a persistent issue, particularly in rural areas where traditional customs hold considerable weight. One notable case that highlights the intersection of feminism and the fight against honour killings is the tragic story of Sadaf Khan, a young woman from a village in rural Sindh, who was murdered by her father and uncles in 2019. Sadaf was accused of dishonouring her family after falling in love with a man from a different ethnic group. Despite the legal reforms introduced in 2016 to curb honour killings, her death sparked significant outcry among feminist groups and activists in the region.

Feminist movements in Sindh, particularly those led by organizations like The Aurat Foundation and Women's Action Forum (WAF), immediately mobilized in response to Sadaf's murder. They organized protests and demanded a rigorous investigation, highlighting the persistent issue of family members using honour as a pretext for violence against women. Feminist leaders in Sindh, such as Kubra Ameer, a local activist, noted that while legal reforms had created a legal framework to combat honour-based violence, the cultural mindset in rural areas remained deeply entrenched. Kubra emphasized, "The struggle is not just with the law; it's about transforming the mindset of the people, particularly in the rural communities, where honour is still tied to control over women."

The murder of Sadaf Khan galvanized feminist groups in Sindh to push for a more robust enforcement of laws related to honour killings. Activists lobbied for more resources for women's shelters and legal assistance, recognizing the limitations of existing legislation. While some progress was made in terms of public awareness and education, the case highlighted the ongoing power dynamics in rural Sindh, where tribal customs and family pressures often influence legal proceedings. In Sadaf's case, while her father and uncles were arrested, the community's support for them created pressure on the judicial system, leading to the delay in justice.

The persistence of honour killings in Sindh reflects not only the cultural factors but also the political and social challenges that feminist movements face in the region. Even with legal reforms in place, the lack of strong political will and societal resistance to change continue to undermine efforts to eradicate such practices.

Case Study: Punjab

In Punjab, the province with the highest population density and economic activity in Pakistan, honour killings have remained an issue despite significant feminist activism and media attention. A case that highlights the intersection of feminist advocacy and honour killings in Punjab is that of Samia Shahid, a British-Pakistani woman who was murdered in 2016 in her ancestral village near Jhelum, Punjab. Samia was allegedly murdered by her father and former husband, who accused her of dishonouring the family due to her remarriage to a man of her choosing.

Samia's murder gained widespread attention not only because of the high-profile nature of her case but also because of the significant involvement of feminist groups in demanding justice. The case attracted international attention and was one of the catalysts for further feminist mobilization in Punjab. The Aurat Foundation and other feminist organizations in Punjab led protests and petitioned the government to ensure that the perpetrators were brought to justice. They also used the case to highlight the growing number of honour killings and the legal gaps in prosecuting these crimes.

While the legal framework had already been updated by the time of Samia's death, feminist groups criticized the slow judicial response and the lack of accountability for the perpetrators. In Samia's case, despite the presence of clear evidence of foul play, her family attempted to use the legal loophole of "qisas and diyat" (the law allowing compensation or forgiveness in criminal cases) to absolve the perpetrators of their crimes. Feminists and women's rights groups argued that such laws, which are often manipulated to allow perpetrators to go unpunished, were part of the reason why honour killings continued unabated.

In response to these case and similar ones, feminist groups in Punjab intensified their efforts to push for more stringent implementation of the 2016 legal reforms. They also advocated for changes to the qisas and diyat laws, which many saw as complicit in allowing honour killings to continue. Through protests, social media campaigns, and direct engagement with policymakers, these feminist organizations have worked tirelessly to shift

public discourse around honour killings, framing them not as cultural or family matters, but as serious violations of human rights.

However, despite these efforts, challenges remain. The case of Samia Shahid revealed the persistence of patriarchal control over legal systems and the family, and how honour-related violence is often excused or minimized within local communities. Feminists in Punjab, while noting progress in terms of awareness and legal changes, argue that more comprehensive societal education and support systems are needed to protect women from such violence.

In conclusion, while both Punjab and Sindh have seen significant feminist mobilization against honour killings, challenges remain due to deep-seated cultural, political, and legal barriers. The cases of Sadaf Khan and Samia Shahid underscore the need for continued efforts in both legal reform and cultural transformation to combat honour killings effectively in Pakistan

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the complex interplay of legal, cultural, and political factors in addressing honour killings in Punjab and Sindh. The role of feminist movements in challenging both legal injustices and cultural norms has been crucial, yet significant barriers remain.

Legal Reforms and Challenges in Enforcement: The legal reform process in Pakistan, particularly the 2016 amendment to the Penal Code, represents a significant step in addressing honour killings. Feminist advocacy has been instrumental in pushing for this change, and its success in securing legal protections for women should not be underestimated. However, as the results indicate, the effectiveness of these laws is often undermined by inconsistent enforcement, social pressures, and loopholes that allow perpetrators to escape punishment. This suggests that while legal reforms are essential, they must be accompanied by stronger implementation mechanisms and broader shifts in societal attitudes.

Feminist theory, which critiques legal systems for their role in perpetuating gender inequality (MacKinnon, 1987), can help explain the ongoing challenges in enforcing these laws. It underscores the importance of not only changing laws but also transforming the broader societal and institutional structures that allow patriarchal norms to persist.

Feminist Movements and Cultural Change: The role of feminist movements in challenging cultural norms surrounding honour killings is pivotal, but it faces considerable resistance. In both rural and urban areas,

traditional views of honour continue to exert significant influence, complicating efforts to combat honour-based violence. Feminist movements have made important strides in redefining honour, but their work is far from complete. As the study shows, resistance from conservative segments of society, especially in rural areas, continues to be a formidable barrier.

This highlights the significance of feminist theory's focus on cultural transformation. By addressing the deeply embedded cultural narratives that justify gender-based violence, feminist movements aim to dismantle the patriarchal foundations that sustain practices like honour killings. Yet, as the findings reveal, cultural change is a slow and contested process, requiring long-term engagement with communities, education, and awareness-building.

The Role of Politics and Power Dynamics: Political elites and local power structures also play a significant role in perpetuating honour killings, particularly in rural areas. This political dimension underscores the intersectionality of gender, class, and power in the perpetuation of honour-based violence. Feminist movements, while successful in some areas, face a significant challenge in navigating these power dynamics. Political will is crucial in ensuring that legal reforms are implemented effectively and that perpetrators are held accountable.

Feminist theorists argue that systems of power must be fundamentally challenged to address violence against women (Butler, 2004). In Pakistan, the intersection of patriarchy, politics, and law creates a complex web that feminist movements must navigate in their quest to end honour killings.

CONCLUSION

Honour killings in Pakistan, particularly in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab, continue to be a grave concern despite the legal reforms made in the past decade. These killings, often justified by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, highlight the ongoing struggle for women's rights and gender equality in the country. While feminist movements have made significant strides in raising awareness and challenging the cultural and social justifications for honour-based violence, the persistence of such crimes reveals the need for further action both at the societal and institutional levels.

The cases of Sadaf Khan from Sindh and Samia Shahid from Punjab offer stark reminders of the power imbalances and the deep-rooted cultural

practices that continue to dictate women's autonomy in many parts of Pakistan. These tragedies underscore the inadequacy of legal reforms alone in tackling the root causes of honour killings. While laws such as the Anti-Honour Killing Bill of 2016 represent a step in the right direction, their implementation has been inconsistent, and the cultural norms that underpin such violence often shield perpetrators from legal consequences. In both provinces, women are still vulnerable to violence in the name of family honour, as demonstrated by the manipulations of the qisas and diyat law, which provides a loophole for perpetrators to escape punishment through family reconciliation or financial compensation.

Feminist movements in both Sindh and Punjab have played a crucial role in highlighting these injustices and pushing for both legal and cultural change. Activists have focused on empowering women, supporting survivors, and advocating for policy changes that ensure stronger protection for women. However, despite these efforts, honour killings remain a significant challenge. The deeply rooted patriarchal mindset and the influence of tribal and feudal customs often lead to victim-blaming, where the woman is seen as the source of dishonour rather than the perpetrator of violence. This cultural acceptance of honour-based violence not only stifles women's agency but also perpetuates the cycle of violence, preventing meaningful change.

In conclusion, while feminism has played a crucial role in raising awareness about honour killings in Punjab and Sindh, the fight is far from over. Structural and cultural barriers persist, and despite legal reforms, the pace of change remains slow. The effectiveness of feminist activism in ending honour killings will depend on a combination of legal, political, and social actions. Strengthening the rule of law, challenging patriarchal norms, and fostering societal change are critical components in addressing this issue. Moving forward, a more integrated approach that combines legal reform, cultural transformation, and grassroots feminist movements will be essential in the battle to end honour killings in Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Legal Enforcement and Accountability While the Anti-Honour Killing Bill of 2016 and other legal reforms were steps in the right direction, their effectiveness has been hindered by inconsistent enforcement and the widespread use of qisas and diyat laws to forgive or exonerate perpetrators. The Pakistani government must ensure that honour killings

are treated as a serious crime and that perpetrators are held fully accountable, regardless of family or tribal connections. Legal reforms should include revising the qisas and diyat laws to prevent the manipulation of these provisions to justify or condone honour-based violence. Clear guidelines for prosecuting honour killings should be established to ensure that the law is applied consistently across all provinces.

Public Awareness and Education Campaigns The persistence of honour killings is rooted in cultural norms that view women as the property of their families, where their actions reflect the family's honour. Feminist movements in Sindh and Punjab have made significant efforts to challenge these beliefs, but more comprehensive public education campaigns are needed to shift societal perceptions of honour. These campaigns should aim to deconstruct the cultural norms that justify violence against women and promote a broader understanding of gender equality. Educational programs targeting men and boys, particularly in rural and tribal areas, should focus on reshaping ideas of masculinity, family honour, and the importance of women's rights and agency. Schools and universities can serve as important platforms for promoting these values.

Support for Victims and Survivors Ensuring that survivors of honour killings or those at risk have access to support services is critical in preventing further violence. Feminist organizations in both Sindh and Punjab have been instrumental in providing shelters, legal aid, and counseling for victims, but these services remain limited and often inaccessible to those in remote areas. The government should collaborate with local NGOs and international organizations to establish more comprehensive support networks for women at risk of honour killings. These networks should offer immediate protection, legal assistance, and psychological support to help women rebuild their lives.

Community Engagement and Empowerment Feminist groups in Sindh and Punjab have made efforts to work with local communities, particularly in rural areas, to change perceptions about honour killings. This approach has been shown to have a more sustainable impact than top-down interventions. The government should prioritize community-based initiatives that engage local leaders, including religious figures, tribal chiefs, and elders, to challenge the cultural justifications for honour killings. These leaders can play an important role in promoting gender equality and advocating for women's rights within their communities. Additionally,

women's participation in local governance and decision-making processes should be encouraged to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are addressed.

International Support and Advocacy The international community can play a significant role in supporting the fight against honour killings in Pakistan. International organizations, such as the United Nations and human rights groups, should continue to monitor and document cases of honour killings in Pakistan and pressure the government to uphold its commitments to women's rights. Additionally, foreign governments and international NGOs can collaborate with local feminist groups to provide funding for grassroots initiatives aimed at preventing honour killings and supporting survivors. International advocacy can help amplify the voices of Pakistani feminists and draw attention to the urgency of addressing this issue.

Research and Data Collection Comprehensive research on honour killings in Pakistan, particularly in rural and underserved areas, is essential to understanding the full scope of the problem and developing targeted interventions. More data on the prevalence of honour killings, the circumstances surrounding them, and the barriers to justice will help shape policies and programs that address the root causes of this violence. Research should be conducted in partnership with feminist organizations to ensure that the voices of women and marginalized communities are included. The government should fund and support such research to inform its policies on women's rights and security.

In conclusion, the elimination of honour killings in Pakistan requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses legal, cultural, and societal barriers. Feminist activism has played a pivotal role in challenging these deeply ingrained practices, but more work is needed to create lasting change. Through stronger legal frameworks, comprehensive education campaigns, and the empowerment of women at all levels of society, Pakistan can move closer to ending the scourge of honour killings in Sindh, Punjab, and beyond.

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