

# [Violence women pakistan](https://assignbuster.com/violence-women-pakistan/)

Media briefing: Violence against women in Pakistan

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“ The government of Pakistan vigorously condemns the practice of

so-called honour killings. Such acts do not find a place in our

religion or law. Killing in the name of honour is murder and

will be treated as such.” General Pervez Musharraf, April 2000

Introduction

Women in Pakistan are severely disadvantaged and discriminated

against. Violence against women in the home and community as well

as in the custody of law enforcement officials is on the rise.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) found that in 2000

a woman was raped every two hours, and that hundreds were victims

of “ honour” killings, domestic violence, burnings and murder.

While a few positive changes have taken place over the

last couple of years, the government is still failing to protect

women from these abuses.

Many cases receive media attention and the involvement of

human rights organizations, but they are quickly forgotten.

Other women suffer abuses in silence for years, die violent

deaths and get buried in unmarked graves.

Women’s awareness of their rights has increased thanks to

the work of Pakistani women’s rights groups. However most women

remain ignorant of even their most basic rights. A newspaper

survey in 2000 reported that almost 90% of women did not realise

that they had any rights at all.

In its fifth report on women in Pakistan, Amnesty

International summarizes the current government’s commitments to

uphold women’s rights, describes cases of abuses in the

community, in the home and in custody and the failure of the

criminal justice system. The report also sets out

recommendations.

Family and community

Domestic violence, which includes physical abuse, rape, acid

throwing, burning and killing, is widespread in Pakistan. Few

women would complain under legal provisions relating to physical

injury. For those who do take the step, police and the judiciary

usually dismiss their complaints and send them back to their

abusive husbands.

Very poor women, women from religious minorities and

women bonded labourers are particularly vulnerable to violence in

the community and home.

According to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences,

over 90% of married women report being kicked, slapped, beaten or

sexually abused when husbands were dissatisfied by their cooking

or cleaning, or when the women had ‘ failed’ to bear a child or

had given birth to a girl instead of a boy. Another organization

stated that one woman is murdered and one woman is kidnapped in

Pakistan every day.

? The case of Shukria

On 22 October 2001, Sharif in village Goharpur, Sheikhupura

district, Punjab province, tied his wife Shukria’s wrists and

ankles with rope, poured kerosene over her and with the help of

his mother and sister set her on fire. The couple had been

married for ten years. As they remained childless, Sharif wanted

to marry another woman but Shukria did not agree to this.

Neighbours tried to rescue Shukria but she died shortly

afterwards in hospital.

Women continue to die painful deaths in so-called “ stove

burn” accidents in the kitchen. The HRCP estimates that less that

20% of deaths lead to arrests and most suspects are released

within days.

Acid-throwing is on the increase. Acid burns do not

usually kill but result in hideous disfiguration and suffering,

destruction of self-esteem, and confine women to the home. The

government has done little to restrict the sale of acid or to

punish those who use it to injure women.

Forced marriage of young girls continues to be reported

despite a legal minimum age of 16. While slavery is illegal in

Pakistan, girls and women continue to be traded to settle debts

or conflicts. In Sukkur in 2000, a six-year-old girl was married

to a 60-year-old man when her family was unable to repay a debt.

According to newspaper reports the marriage was consummated and

the little girl screamed loudly for hours after the rape.

A form of forced marriage specific to the interior of

Sindh province is the “ marriage” of girls and women to the

Qur’an. This keeps the woman’s share of property in the family

as she will have no children to pass it on to. Human rights

organizations report that there are currently over 5000 women

married to the Qur’an in Sindh.

Pakistan is both a country of origin and a transit

country for the trafficking of women for domestic labour, forced

marriage and prostitution. This form of slavery is organized by

crime networks that span South Asia.

The open sale of girls and women in markets is reported

in underdeveloped areas such as parts of Balochistan.

Some women, both local and trafficked, are killed if they

refuse to earn money in prostitution. Some are forced into

prostitution by their husbands. Journalist Sufi Mohammad Khan

from Badin, Sindh, was killed on 2 May 2001 after reporting

extensively about trafficking in drugs and women in the

Tharparkar area of Sindh which happened with the connivance of

apathetic authorities. He reported that some 70 women have been

kidnapped in Sindh and Punjab, detained by the Arbab feudal

family and forced into prostitution. The journalist was bribed

and threatened by members of the family.

“ Honour” killings

“ Honour” killings are carried out by men who assume that their

wives, daughters or sisters have in some way contravened norms

relating to the behaviour of women which reflect on and damage a

man’s “ honour”. Often the grounds for such assumptions can be

very flimsy and amount to nothing more than a suspicion about a

woman’s fidelity. Men are also known to have felt shamed if

“ their” women seek divorce or become the victims of rape.

The exact number of “ honour” killings is impossible to

ascertain as many go unreported. Media and human rights

organizations estimate that three women are murdered each day.

In 2000, the HRCP recorded over 1000 “ honour” killings in Punjab

alone. Prosecution of “ honour” killings is lax and only a few

men have been convicted.

In the higher levels of government and the judiciary,

“ honour” killings are recognised as a serious problem. The

government of Pakistan has condemned “ honour” killings as murder

and a seminar in Karachi in April 2001 looked at problems of

redress in “ honour” crime cases. However no action has followed

and “ honour” killings continue to be reported daily.

— In December 2000, three brothers overpowered their

sister-in-law, Anila, sprinkled kerosene on her clothes and set

her on fire in a village near Sukkur when they suspected her of

infidelity. Her father rescued her and took her to hospital

where, with 85% burns, she died.

— In early 2001, Mir Afzal cut off the nose of his wife Amroz

Khatoon in Karachi as he suspected her of infidelity. He then

attempted to kill her but neighbours alerted by the noise

interceded. Police arrested the man and his accomplices but Amroz

Khatoon has received threats to her life if she pursues her

complaint.

— In March 2001, a 60-year-old widow, Hidayat Khatoon, and

55-year-old Baksh Ali were killed by the widow’s son in Chandan

village, district Sukkur. When the son surrendered to police, he

said that he had been teased by villagers over his mother’s

alleged affair and had therefore killed both.

— In July 2001, 16-year-old Shoukat Labano in Sukkur district,

shot dead his mother Rahima (33) when he suspected her of an

affair.

Increasingly “ honour” killings involve not only the woman

but several other family members. In November 2000, Mohammed

Umar Magsi killed his 11-year-old daughter with an axe because he

suspected her of having an affair. When his wife and younger

daughter tried to intervene, he killed them as well. On 8 January

2001, Riaz Ahmed axed to death his wife, three daughters and two

sons, because he suspected his wife of adultery. On 16 January

2002, Jamal threw hand grenades into his father-in-law’s house

when his wife refused to return to him, killing five of her

relatives and injuring eight.

The HRCP has observed that increasingly young boys are

forced to attack or kill sisters who are opposed to a forced

marriage. Afterwards the boys are formally pardoned by their

fathers which allows them to go free.

The emergence of “ fake honour” killings is a worrying new

trend. There is a pattern of men accusing their wives of being

dishonourable with wealthy men purely for financial gain. The

wife is declared “ kari” (black woman, one who brings shame) and

is killed. The suspected man is made to pay off the husband and

he is “ pardoned”.

In a few cases, women have begun to resist violence in

the name of “ honour”. A young woman escaped death when she

fought her husband. The local landlord held a jirga (tribal

council) which established her innocence and asked the husband to

apologise and take her back.

Women who marry men of their own choice are often seen to

damage their family’s “ honour”; they are frequently detained by

their parents, forcibly married to someone else, threatened,

humiliated, assaulted or killed. If a couple marry in court

against the will of their parents, and the parents challenge the

union, they can be charged with “ illicit” sexual relations under

the Zina Ordinance (which prohibits sex outside marriage).

Newly-weds are advised to have their marriage confirmed by a

magistrate and seek shelter with friends for some time. In many

cases families accept the fact of marriage but sometimes their

sense of shame is not appeased. Robina and Khushi Mohammad were

killed in May 2000 by Robina’s uncle and two brothers over two

years after their wedding — they had been in hiding but had

finally returned to the husband’s home.

Custodial violence

Physical abuse of women in custody continues to be rife in

Pakistan. Despite promises of police reform, police continue to

use torture to intimidate, harass and humiliate detainees to

extract money or information. Women are subjected to

gender-specific abuses including sexual harassment, public

undressing and parading, and rape. Conditions of detention for

women are also of grave concern.

State inaction

In April 2000, President Musharraf made a range of commitments to

protect women’s rights. Since then, there have been many

positive signals and pronouncements but little effective change.

The authorities are often aware of a series of abuses and

do not intervene. Some officials prevent women from accessing

the criminal justice system and seeking redress.

Some court judgments over the past year-and-a-half have

adequately protected women’s rights while others have treated

women as a man’s property. This inconsistency indicates that the

law is not being equally applied and the gender bias of

individual judges is determining whether a woman is protected or

not.

Police confronted with complaints of domestic violence

are known to refuse to register the complaint, to humiliate the

victim or to have advised the battered woman to return home. Even

the staff of state women’s shelters frequently advise women to

accept reconciliation and return home.

Conviction rates for rape are very low. Police rarely

respond adequately as they side with local people with influence

who are involved in the crime. Women frequently don’t seek

redress out of shame but also because of the possibility of being

accused of Zina if they cannot establish absence of consent.

Recommendations

Amnesty International’s report makes recommendations which are

well within the powers of the Government of Pakistan to implement

and do not require a huge investment of resources. They do

require political will and the determination that violence

against women is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue.

However, underlying the abuses suffered by women is a

discrimination perpetuated by society as a whole. In this

regard, everyone has a role to play ? government, political

parties, religious groups, all elements of civil society and

individuals. Everyone has a responsibility to commit themselves

to the equality of all human beings, irrespective of gender.

The recommendations include:

— The government should clearly and publicly condemn all acts of

violence against women. It should develop policies and

disseminate materials to promote women’s safety in the home and

community and in detention.

— The government should prohibit all acts of violence against

women and establish legal protection. It should review existing

laws, including the Zina law and the qisas and diyat law.

— Investigate all allegations of violence against women and

prosecute and punish those found to be responsible.

For a copy of the report please visit Report:

www. web. amnesty. org/ai. nsf/index/asa330062002