

Women’s Access to Justice: Ending Violence against Women

Entrenched social biases, discriminatory legislation, and often unresponsive state institutions and law enforcement agencies undermine women’s safety and security and their political, social, and economic status in Pakistan. Access to justice and services for women in all provinces is hampered due to, among others: limited capacity of police and prosecutors to investigate and prosecute crimes against women, biases by judges, no access to transport, and inadequate educational and financial means, and a general lack of knowledge about options, services and remedies. In addition, provisions of penal codes at the federal and provincial levels on rape, adultery, sexual violence committed in marriage (not a crime in Pakistan), and “honor killings” display an unambiguous discrimination against women.

Several efforts have been made towards increasing access to justice and services for women, for instance, by creating easier reporting and service provision of survivors of violence both of domestic violence and violence outside of the home, and by the ratification of women-friendly laws. The Government of Pakistan has also ratified the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Constitution of Pakistan also guarantees equal rights for the women. Yet, Pakistan ranks on 144 in a list of 145 countriesⁱ with dire need for gender-responsive approach to ensure women are supported through the entire process, from being a survivor of Violence against Women (VAW) to becoming an independent and equal citizen.

Further to causal and effect relation and fragile governance structures with regards to VAW, another worth attention aspect is lack of data on Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Pakistan. It has not been an area which has been explored or prioritized by the formal and informal institutions; whereas, the importance of data collection on VAWG has been emphasized by academia, government institutions and civil society in recent past. This issue has been raised by the Committee in its Concluding Observations on the Government of Pakistan’s First, Second and Third Combined Periodic Report to the CEDAW Committee in 2007 and also by Election Commission of Pakistan in 2013. Thus, this joint venture of UN Women Pakistan and SDPI will act a platform in gathering and presenting evidence on VAW essential for the advocacy from a broad multidisciplinary perspective.

In this background, the panel invites from Pakistan and other South Asian countries case studies and relevant policy recommendations for countering violence against women in various forms as discussed above.

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¹ World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2015