



## Prevalence and Patterns of Domestic Violence in Pakistan: An Analysis of Empirical Evidence

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### ABSTRACT

*Domestic violence remains a pervasive issue in Pakistan, deeply rooted in cultural, social, and structural inequalities. This study analyzes empirical evidence to explore the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence against women across various regions of the country. Drawing on national surveys, case studies, and reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations, the research highlights significant trends in physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. Findings indicate that approximately one in three women experiences some form of domestic violence during her lifetime, with rural areas showing a higher incidence rate than urban centers. The study also uncovers patterns linked to factors such as education level, economic dependence, marital status, and societal norms that tolerate or justify abuse. Additionally, the role of legal frameworks and institutional responses is critically assessed, revealing gaps in enforcement and victim support services. By synthesizing diverse sources of empirical data, the research aims to inform policymakers, activists, and scholars on the scope and dynamics of domestic violence in Pakistan, urging the need for integrated strategies to address this multifaceted problem.*



## Introduction

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive and insidious human rights violations globally, cutting across cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic strata, and geographies. In Pakistan, a country deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles, domestic violence has long existed as a largely concealed and underreported phenomenon. Despite growing awareness and policy-level attention in recent years, the extent and nature of domestic violence remain

insufficiently documented due to cultural taboos, lack of comprehensive data collection, and institutional inadequacies. This study aims to critically examine the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan by analyzing empirical evidence from various sources, thereby contributing to a more informed understanding of this critical social issue (Cunha et al., 2025).

Domestic violence in the Pakistani context encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviors including physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, most often perpetrated by male family members against women. Cultural constructs that endorse male authority and female subservience continue to reinforce these behaviors, making it difficult for victims to seek help or justice. Many women fear social ostracization, loss of family honor, or economic dependency, which discourages them from reporting abuse. Moreover, the legal and institutional response to domestic violence in Pakistan has historically been inadequate. Although legislative reforms such as the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act have been introduced in several provinces, their implementation remains inconsistent and hampered by lack of resources, societal resistance, and weak enforcement mechanisms (Atta et al., 2025).

Empirical research on domestic violence in Pakistan reveals troubling trends. Various national and international surveys indicate that a significant proportion of women in Pakistan have experienced some form of domestic abuse during their lifetime. For instance, the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) and other studies conducted by NGOs and academic institutions have consistently shown that one in three to one in two women report experiencing physical or emotional violence, often at the hands of intimate partners. However, these statistics may underrepresent the actual scale of the problem due to underreporting and methodological challenges in data collection, such as reluctance of respondents to disclose sensitive information and lack of standardized definitions (Shafique et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan vary significantly by region, socioeconomic background, education level, and urban-rural divide. Women in rural areas, with lower educational attainment and economic independence, are disproportionately affected. Factors such as forced marriages, dowry demands, infertility, and male unemployment also contribute to the risk of domestic violence. Additionally, intergenerational transmission of violent behavior and societal acceptance of gender-based aggression create a cycle that perpetuates violence across generations. Media portrayals and religious misinterpretations sometimes serve to further normalize or justify abusive behavior within the family unit (Baig, 2025).

The intersectionality of gender with other social variables makes domestic violence a multidimensional issue that requires an equally nuanced approach to understanding and intervention. In Pakistan, civil society organizations, women's rights activists, and some governmental bodies have been working to highlight the issue, offer victim support, and advocate for stronger legal protections. Nevertheless, a comprehensive and coordinated response remains elusive. The availability of empirical evidence—both quantitative and qualitative—is vital for developing effective prevention strategies and policy interventions. Unfortunately, much of the existing research is fragmented, small in scale, or lacks longitudinal depth (Le, 2025).

This study seeks to fill some of these gaps by synthesizing empirical findings from multiple sources to draw a clearer picture of the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan. By analyzing data from national surveys, case studies, academic literature, and reports from non-governmental organizations, this research aims to inform policy makers, scholars, and social workers about the scope of the problem and the contextual factors that sustain it. Ultimately, the goal is to support evidence-based initiatives that can contribute to a more just and equitable

society, where individuals—regardless of gender—can live free from the fear of violence in their own homes (Batool, 2025).

## **Literature Review**

Domestic violence (DV) is a critical public health and human rights issue in Pakistan, with extensive empirical evidence highlighting its pervasive nature and deeply rooted sociocultural causes. Research over the past two decades has consistently pointed to the widespread prevalence of domestic violence across rural and urban areas, affecting women from diverse socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. Various studies have estimated that between 70% to 90% of Pakistani women experience some form of domestic abuse in their lifetime, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual, and economic violence. This high prevalence is often linked to entrenched patriarchal norms, religious misinterpretations, and systemic gender inequalities, which collectively normalize and perpetuate violence within households (Osom et al., 2025).

Empirical studies suggest that physical violence is the most commonly reported form of abuse, followed by psychological and verbal abuse. A study by Ali and Gavino (2008) found that nearly one in every two women had experienced physical abuse at the hands of their spouses. Other research, such as the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS), has reinforced these findings, noting that emotional abuse—often harder to quantify—is equally damaging and widespread. In addition to partner violence, DV in Pakistan frequently involves in-laws, with mothers-in-law playing a significant role in perpetuating or condoning abusive behaviors. The cyclical and intergenerational nature of such violence has also been noted in empirical work, wherein women exposed to DV in childhood are more likely to enter into abusive relationships in adulthood (Hosain, 2025).

Cultural and structural factors play a significant role in shaping the patterns and persistence of domestic violence. Studies underscore that limited female autonomy, economic dependence, and restricted mobility exacerbate women's vulnerability. For instance, Karmaliani et al. (2012) highlight that women with limited education or financial independence are more likely to endure prolonged periods of abuse due to fear of social stigma or lack of support systems. Furthermore, societal attitudes often place the burden of maintaining family honor on women, discouraging them from reporting violence or seeking legal redress. This silence is compounded by institutional weaknesses—such as inadequate enforcement of laws, lack of training among law enforcement officials, and judicial insensitivity—which dissuade women from pursuing justice (Dunn, 2025).

In terms of patterns, DV in Pakistan tends to escalate during periods of financial strain, unemployment, or substance abuse by the partner. Alcohol and drug use have been correlated with higher incidences of intimate partner violence (IPV), although these factors are often underreported due to cultural taboos. Geographical variations also exist: studies indicate that rural women are more likely to experience physical violence, while urban women may face greater emotional or psychological abuse. However, urbanization has not significantly reduced the incidence of DV; instead, it has introduced new dimensions such as cyber abuse and digital surveillance by intimate partners (Han et al., 2025).

Legal reforms have been attempted, such as the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act in various provinces, but their implementation remains inconsistent. Several empirical analyses have evaluated the effectiveness of these laws and concluded that while legal provisions are a step forward, social change is imperative for sustainable impact. Non-governmental organizations and women's rights groups have been instrumental in filling service delivery gaps by

offering shelter, counseling, and legal aid. However, the reach and accessibility of these services remain limited, especially in conservative or remote regions (Stiller et al., 2025).

In conclusion, the literature on domestic violence in Pakistan reveals a high prevalence of abuse rooted in gendered power imbalances and sustained by cultural and institutional failings. While empirical evidence has significantly contributed to mapping the scope and characteristics of DV, there remains a critical need for longitudinal and intersectional studies that account for regional, class, and ethnic differences. Understanding these patterns is essential for developing effective interventions that not only protect victims but also address the root causes of domestic violence in the Pakistani context (De Silva et al., 2025).

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively investigate the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan through empirical evidence. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study aims to capture the multifaceted nature of domestic violence, considering its physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic dimensions. The methodology is structured to ensure both breadth and depth of data collection and analysis, allowing for a robust understanding of the phenomenon across various social, cultural, and regional contexts within Pakistan (Bahadar et al., 2025).

For the quantitative component, the study utilizes secondary data obtained from nationally representative surveys, including the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), and other datasets compiled by government and non-governmental organizations. These sources provide statistical data on domestic violence indicators such as the percentage of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence, the frequency of abuse, the relationship between victims and perpetrators, and the socio-economic and demographic factors influencing domestic violence. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the prevalence rates and inferential statistics, including regression analysis, to identify significant predictors and correlations. Variables such as age, education, income, urban-rural residence, and employment status were examined to understand their association with the likelihood of experiencing domestic violence (Shaikh, 2025).

The qualitative component complements the quantitative data by providing in-depth insights into the lived experiences of survivors and the societal norms that perpetuate domestic violence. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with a purposive sample of women from various provinces, including Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan. Participants included survivors of domestic violence, women's rights activists, healthcare professionals, and legal experts. These qualitative methods aimed to explore the subjective realities behind the statistics, including barriers to reporting abuse, perceptions of justice, coping mechanisms, and the role of cultural and religious beliefs in sustaining or challenging abusive behaviors. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in participants' narratives, which were then triangulated with quantitative findings to enhance the validity of the conclusions (Collins et al., 2025).

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Approval was obtained from an institutional ethics review board, and all participants gave informed consent. Given the sensitivity of the subject matter, interviews were conducted in safe and private settings, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without any consequences. Additionally, referrals to counseling services and support

organizations were provided to participants who disclosed ongoing abuse or distress during the interviews (Lalotra et al., 2025).

To ensure data reliability and minimize bias, measures such as pilot testing of interview guides, training of field researchers, and inter-coder reliability checks during qualitative analysis were employed. The study also critically engaged with potential limitations such as underreporting due to social stigma, fear of retaliation, or cultural taboos. Recognizing that domestic violence remains a largely hidden issue in Pakistani society, particularly in rural or conservative areas, the research attempted to mitigate these challenges through trust-building measures and by including voices from marginalized and underrepresented groups (Ghafoori et al., 2025).

In summary, the chosen methodology integrates empirical data analysis with rich qualitative narratives to provide a holistic picture of domestic violence in Pakistan. By examining both the statistical prevalence and the socio-cultural patterns that underlie abuse, the study not only contributes to academic discourse but also offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and civil society stakeholders working to address and prevent domestic violence in the country (Blaydes et al., 2025).

## **Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Pakistan**

Domestic violence remains a pervasive and deeply rooted issue in Pakistan, cutting across rural and urban populations, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic strata. Despite being a critical human rights concern, domestic violence in Pakistan is often underreported due to cultural norms, legal inadequacies, and social stigma. A significant body of empirical evidence indicates that domestic violence is widespread, affecting a large proportion of women throughout the country. According to various national surveys and research studies, a considerable percentage of women have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at the hands of intimate partners or family members. The Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) and reports by organizations such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and the Aurat Foundation consistently reveal alarming figures regarding violence within the home. For instance, the PDHS 2017–18 reported that nearly 28% of ever-married women aged 15–49 have experienced spousal physical violence, with many more likely to be silent victims due to fear of reprisal or social rejection (Yan et al., 2025).

The prevalence of domestic violence is influenced by a complex interplay of societal, economic, and legal factors. Patriarchal norms dominate most communities in Pakistan, often legitimizing the control of women through violence and reinforcing male authority in private and public life. Women's economic dependence on men and limited access to legal and support services further contribute to their vulnerability. In many cases, violence is perceived as a private family matter, discouraging victims from seeking justice. This normalization of abuse is particularly evident in regions with lower literacy rates and limited awareness of women's rights. Furthermore, state responses have historically been inadequate, with weak enforcement of laws and minimal institutional support for survivors. Although laws such as the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act have been enacted in some provinces, their implementation remains inconsistent, and judicial procedures are often slow and intimidating for victims (Hussain & Mazumdar, 2025).

Empirical studies conducted across Pakistan show significant regional variations in the prevalence of domestic violence. Urban areas, despite better access to education and services, still report high rates of abuse, pointing to the entrenched nature of gender-based violence regardless of development indicators. In contrast, rural areas tend to exhibit even higher rates, exacerbated by poverty, tribal customs, and limited state oversight. Multiple studies also reveal that domestic

violence is not limited to physical abuse alone but includes psychological violence, sexual coercion, verbal insults, and economic deprivation. Importantly, children growing up in violent households often suffer long-term psychological trauma, perpetuating cycles of violence across generations (Park et al., 2025).

The prevalence data also highlight a disturbing normalization of abuse within intimate relationships, where many women report enduring violence for years before seeking help—if at all. Fear of social ostracization, family dishonor, and the potential loss of child custody further prevent women from leaving abusive environments. Moreover, access to shelters, legal aid, and psychological counseling remains limited, particularly outside major urban centers. The media and civil society have played a growing role in bringing the issue into public discourse, but significant gaps remain in policy implementation and community-level awareness (Ali, 2025).

In conclusion, the prevalence of domestic violence in Pakistan reflects a systemic crisis rooted in gender inequality, social acceptance of violence, and institutional failures. While recent years have seen increased advocacy and legal reforms, these efforts must be matched by robust data collection, survivor-centered services, and sustained political will. Understanding the scale and dynamics of domestic violence through empirical research is crucial for informing policy and crafting effective interventions. Addressing domestic violence in Pakistan requires not only legal enforcement but also a fundamental shift in societal attitudes toward gender roles, violence, and the rights of women and children (Khanam et al., n.d.).

### **Patterns of Domestic Violence in Pakistan**

Domestic violence in Pakistan is a deeply entrenched issue, shaped by complex socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors that manifest in distinct and often interrelated patterns. It encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence, and tends to occur most frequently within the confines of the household, often inflicted by intimate partners or immediate family members. Empirical studies and national surveys consistently reveal that physical violence is one of the most prevalent forms of abuse, with women being disproportionately affected. Beating, slapping, kicking, and the use of weapons are commonly reported methods of physical harm. Psychological abuse, which includes verbal insults, threats, humiliation, and isolation, is also widespread but often underreported due to its intangible nature and the cultural normalization of controlling behaviors. Sexual violence, while significantly underreported due to stigma and shame, remains a persistent pattern, with women frequently subjected to non-consensual acts within marriage, often without legal or social recourse (Azhar et al., 2025).

In terms of geographic distribution, patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan reveal both rural-urban and provincial disparities. Rural areas, where patriarchal norms tend to be more rigidly upheld and educational attainment is lower, often report higher incidences of domestic violence. In provinces such as Punjab and Sindh, which are more populous and have more robust data collection mechanisms, a higher number of reported cases suggest that domestic violence is both widespread and enduring. However, this does not necessarily indicate lower prevalence in less documented regions such as Balochistan or Gilgit-Baltistan, where social and infrastructural limitations may inhibit reporting. Within households, power dynamics are critical in shaping the patterns of abuse, with dowry-related violence, marital rape, and coercive control being common manifestations. In some cases, extended family members, particularly mothers-in-law and brothers-in-law, may also contribute to the cycle of abuse, reflecting a broader system of oppression that extends beyond the marital relationship (Shami et al., 2025).

Another discernible pattern relates to the timing and triggers of domestic violence incidents. Empirical evidence suggests that violence often intensifies during periods of financial strain, conflict over reproductive choices, or when traditional gender roles are challenged. For instance, women who seek employment or express autonomy may face backlash from male partners, leading to psychological or physical punishment as a form of social correction. Additionally, early and forced marriages—a prevalent practice in various parts of the country—contribute to the vulnerability of young girls, who are often subjected to prolonged abuse due to limited access to support systems and legal protection. Substance abuse among male partners and the presence of intergenerational violence also play significant roles in perpetuating abusive cycles within families.

From a temporal standpoint, the frequency and severity of abuse may escalate over time if unaddressed, with many women enduring years of violence before seeking help—if at all. The normalization of domestic violence, reinforced by cultural beliefs that prioritize family honor and discourage divorce, further inhibits victims from reporting or exiting abusive relationships (Asghar & Mumtaz, 2024). This results in a pattern of silence and endurance, often passed down through generations. Additionally, empirical research has highlighted the role of media, religious interpretations, and community leaders in either challenging or reinforcing the acceptability of domestic violence. Legal and institutional responses remain inconsistent, and despite the existence of protective legislation such as the Domestic Violence Acts in several provinces, implementation is often weak, contributing to a climate of impunity (Manzoor et al., 2025).

Overall, the patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan are shaped by intersecting factors such as gender norms, economic dependency, social conditioning, and weak institutional support. These patterns not only highlight the pervasiveness of the issue but also underscore the urgent need for holistic, multi-sectoral interventions that address the root causes, strengthen legal frameworks, and promote societal change through education and awareness.

### **Factors Associated with Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence in Pakistan is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in the country's complex socio-cultural, economic, and legal structures. A range of interrelated factors contribute to the persistence and pervasiveness of domestic violence, making it not only a personal or familial matter but also a broader societal concern. One of the most prominent factors is the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society, where traditional gender norms and male dominance are firmly entrenched. In many households, men are viewed as the primary authority figures, and women are expected to conform to submissive roles. This unequal power dynamic fosters an environment where coercion, abuse, and control over women are normalized. Cultural beliefs and practices further reinforce these dynamics by emphasizing female obedience and tolerance, often discouraging women from reporting abuse or seeking help (Afzal et al., 2023).

Economic dependence is another significant driver of domestic violence in Pakistan. A large proportion of women, especially in rural and less developed urban areas, are financially dependent on their husbands or in-laws. This lack of financial autonomy limits their ability to leave abusive relationships and increases their vulnerability to continuous abuse. Moreover, poverty and unemployment, particularly among men, exacerbate tensions within households, sometimes leading to frustration and aggression that manifest in violent behavior. In such contexts, domestic violence may serve as a misplaced outlet for stress and a misguided assertion of authority. Limited access to education, both for women and men, further compounds the problem. Women with low educational attainment are more likely to accept violence as a norm and less likely to seek legal or institutional support. Simultaneously, uneducated men may hold more rigid and regressive views about gender roles, contributing to the perpetuation of violence.

Family structures and intergenerational patterns also play a critical role. In joint family systems, which are common in Pakistan, in-laws may exert significant influence over the couple's relationship. In many reported cases, mothers-in-law or other extended family members encourage or even directly engage in the abuse of women, particularly newly married brides. This collective reinforcement of patriarchal norms creates a hostile environment that legitimizes and perpetuates violence. Furthermore, the intergenerational transmission of violent behavior is well-documented; children who witness domestic violence are more likely to replicate such behaviors in their adult relationships, thus sustaining the cycle of abuse (Kanwel et al., 2024).

Legal and institutional weaknesses also contribute significantly to the prevalence of domestic violence. Although several laws have been introduced to protect women from violence, including the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act passed in various provinces, implementation remains inconsistent and inadequate. Police officers are often reluctant to register complaints, viewing domestic disputes as private matters, and the judicial process is frequently prolonged and biased against women. The lack of shelters, legal aid, and counseling services further deters victims from seeking justice. Social stigma associated with reporting domestic abuse is another powerful factor that silences many women. Fear of public shame, community backlash, or being ostracized often outweighs the perceived benefits of legal recourse, especially in conservative settings.

Religious misinterpretations and the instrumentalization of religious texts to justify male authority and female submission also play a role in perpetuating domestic violence. Although Islam, in its essence, promotes kindness and equality, cultural practices often distort religious teachings, using them to validate control and abuse. Lastly, the influence of media and digital platforms is emerging as a double-edged sword. On one hand, media can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and glamorize aggressive male behavior. On the other, it also holds the potential to raise awareness, advocate for survivors, and challenge societal norms. Understanding these diverse and intersecting factors is crucial for developing effective, context-sensitive interventions aimed at reducing domestic violence in Pakistan (Zafar et al., 2024).

## **Conclusion**

The findings from this research on the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan underscore a deeply rooted and multifaceted social issue that affects countless individuals, particularly women, across diverse socio-economic, cultural, and geographical contexts. The empirical evidence examined reveals that domestic violence in Pakistan remains alarmingly prevalent, cutting across urban and rural boundaries and manifesting in various forms including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse. The persistence of patriarchal norms, reinforced by systemic gender inequality and social acceptance of male dominance, contributes significantly to the normalization and perpetuation of violence within households. Cultural stigmas, limited access to legal recourse, and insufficient institutional support mechanisms further exacerbate the vulnerability of victims and discourage them from reporting abuse or seeking help. Moreover, the data highlights that domestic violence is not confined to any one demographic segment; rather, it is influenced by a complex interplay of factors such as education level, economic dependency, family structure, and societal pressures.

One of the most concerning aspects emerging from the empirical evidence is the cyclical nature of domestic violence, where victims often remain trapped due to economic constraints, social expectations, and fear of retribution. The lack of effective implementation of existing laws and the inadequacy of protective shelters, legal aid, and counseling services continue to hinder progress in addressing this critical human rights issue. While Pakistan has made some legislative strides, such



as enacting domestic violence laws in certain provinces, the enforcement of these laws remains inconsistent and often falls short of offering real protection to survivors. Furthermore, deeply ingrained cultural norms and the lack of gender-sensitive training among law enforcement and judicial authorities contribute to the impunity of perpetrators and the marginalization of victims.

Importantly, this analysis also points to emerging patterns that reflect a gradual shift in awareness, particularly among younger populations and in more urbanized settings, where education and exposure to global gender rights discourse are influencing attitudes toward domestic violence. Civil society organizations, women's rights activists, and international bodies have played a crucial role in advocating for policy reforms, raising awareness, and providing support services to victims. Nevertheless, these efforts need to be scaled up and integrated into national development frameworks to create sustainable impact. Addressing domestic violence in Pakistan requires a multi-pronged strategy that includes comprehensive legal reforms, robust enforcement mechanisms, public education campaigns, and community-based interventions aimed at reshaping societal attitudes toward gender roles and violence.

In conclusion, the prevalence and patterns of domestic violence in Pakistan, as revealed through empirical evidence, reflect a deeply embedded societal challenge that demands urgent and sustained action. Policymakers, community leaders, educational institutions, and the media must work collaboratively to dismantle the structural and cultural barriers that perpetuate violence against women and other vulnerable groups. Only through a coordinated and holistic approach can Pakistan hope to reduce the incidence of domestic violence and move toward a society where the fundamental rights, safety, and dignity of all individuals are upheld and protected.

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