Policy Brief # PB-107-2026

March 13th, 2026

Femicide in Pakistan

Hafiza Esha Tu Razia

Research Assistant

Femicide in Pakistan

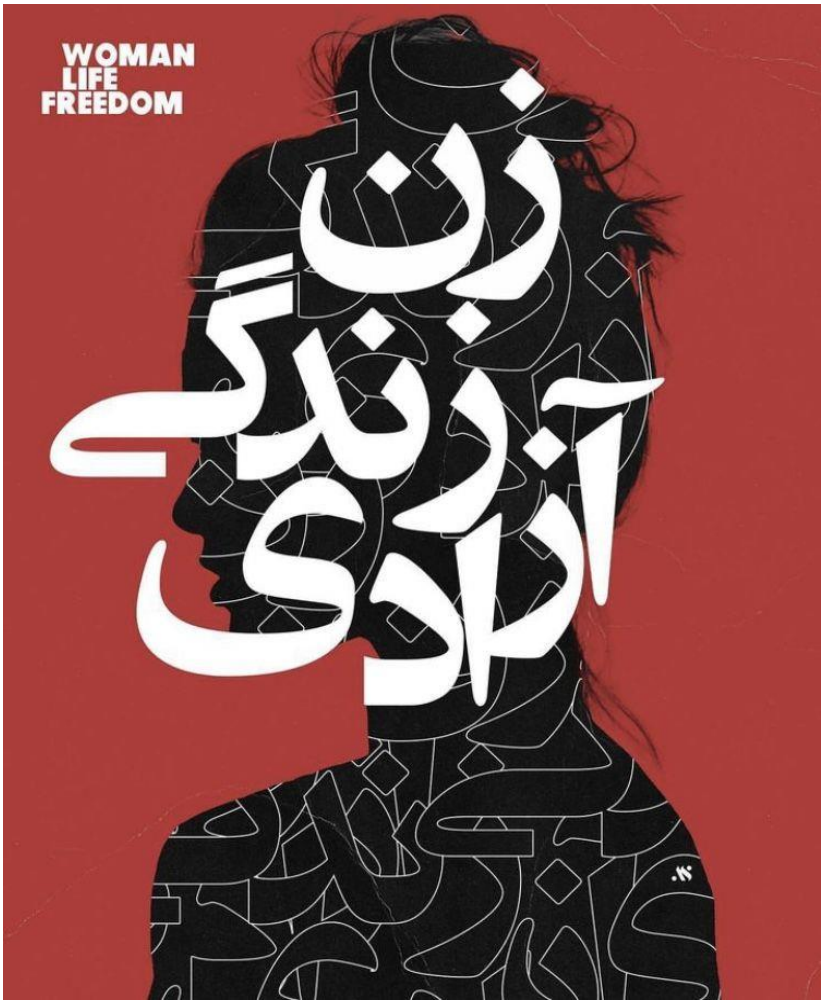
by

Hafiza Esha Tu Razia

This policy brief analyses femicide as an extreme manifestation of gender – based violence. It outlines the prevalence and patterns of such killings in Pakistan, severely effecting women and girls in the society.

Femicide at a glance

- It is recognized as the most extreme form of gender-based violence.
- Over 75,000 women were murdered in Pakistan in four years from 2021 to 2024.
- Most femicide cases are committed by intimate partners or family.
- Existing laws remain poorly enforced with conviction rates below 10%, despite Pakistan's commitments under CEDAW.



Introduction

Women and girls are subjected to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence by non-partners, including people known to them. In the most extreme cases, violence against women can lead to death. Gender-Based Violence (GBV), is a pervasive issue impacting women and girls. Femicide is a global crisis that affects women and girls in every country and territory. Femicide represents the most extreme manifestation of gender-based violence against women and girls. To illustrate Femicide (or feminicide, as it is referred to in some contexts) is defined as an intentional killing with a gender-related motivation. Notably, it is different from homicide, where the motivation may not be gender-related. In many cases, only gender-related killings perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member are counted as femicides—yet we know that gender-related killings take place in many contexts beyond the private sphere. For instance, they can be related to rape or sexual violence by someone unknown to the victim; linked to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation or so-called honor killings; a result of hate crimes related to sexual orientation or gender identity; or connected with armed conflict, gangs, human trafficking, and other forms of organized crime. (UN Women, 2025).

Prevalence & Patterns of Femicide in Pakistan

While Pakistan faces a problem of reliable data on violence against women, the vulnerability of women in Pakistan was spotlighted by some reports. Human Rights Watch (2025) states that violence against women and girls — including rape, murder, acid attacks, and other forms of abuse remain a serious problem throughout Pakistan. This can be observed in the Global Index, according to the Women Peace and Security Index (2025) Pakistan ranks 169 out of 181 countries in women's wellbeing with an index score of 0.462 out of 1. Similarly, Human rights activists estimate that approximately 1,000 to 1,500 women and girls in the country are murdered every year in the name of "honor" (Kolsky and Zia, 2025). Although young men are sometimes targeted for honor killings, the number of women and girls is disproportionately high (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024), often killed by relatives claiming to defend family honor (Reuters, 2025). (figure 1).

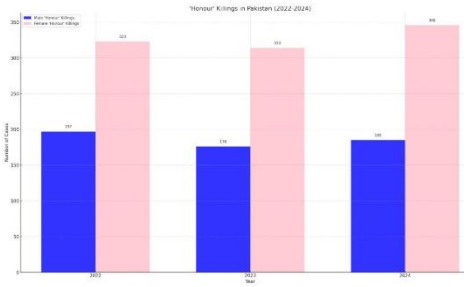


Figure 1 Source: Dawn

These patterns are rooted in honor-based cultural norms, which are common in Pakistan, where a family's honor is strongly affected by the behavior of the women (Campbell et al., 2025) While Pakistan faces a problem of reliable data on violence against women, the vulnerability of women in Pakistan was spotlighted by some reports.

'Honor killings', locally known as 'karokari' are the most common form of femicide in Pakistan. In most cases, these killings are carried out by the intimate partners and family members. This is apparent in the global studies, as the World Health Organization (2021) states that globally, up to 38% of murders of women are committed by their partners. In addition to intimate partner violence, 6% of women worldwide report having experienced sexual assault by someone other than their partner, although data on this is more limited. Intimate partner violence and sexual violence are mostly perpetrated by men against women.

Even after the persistent efforts by the government, the issue persists, and meaningful change was not achieved, as a concerning report by the Sustainable Social Development Organization (2024), reported a total of 32,617 cases of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) were reported in Pakistan in 2024. Of these 574 honor killing cases were reported across the five regions, Punjab reported the highest number of cases (255) with only 2 convictions, followed by the Sindh and KP each reported 134 cases, KP with 2 convictions while Sindh with recorded no conviction, furthermore, Balochistan reported 32 cases of honor killing, with just one conviction and in contrast Islamabad with less population reported the lowest number of cases (22) yet no convictions (Figure.2).

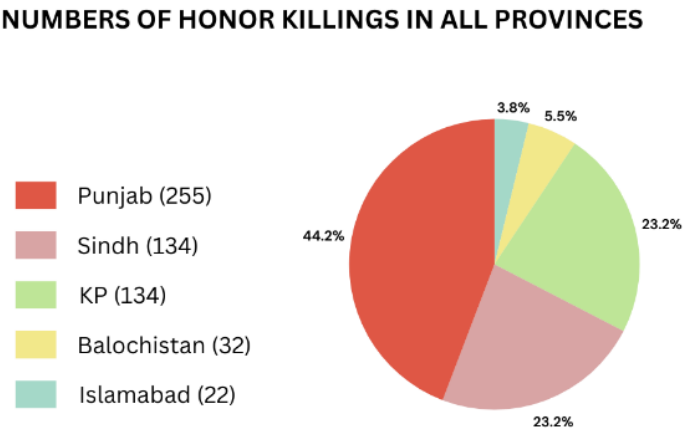


FIGURE.2

The data reveals alarmingly low convictions. Sadly, behind each number, there is a woman or girl whose life has been brutally ended because of male violence, misogyny, and social norms that tolerate and perpetuate violence against women and girls (UN Women, 2025). And it is pertinent to mention that these figures likely represent just a fraction of the true scope of incidents, given the historical underreporting and the prior absence of a dedicated femicide observatory. (Arab News, 2025). Another critical limitation is how femicide is documented. Annual crime statistics predominantly focus on only one form of femicide – Honor Killing, and provide dedicated data meanwhile other forms like Sexual Violence-related femicide, dowry-associated gender-based violence, and femicide linked to inheritance conflicts, often go unreported. Evidence from a study conducted by Nadeem et al., (2021) in Sahiwal at DHQ Teaching Hospital shows, that femicide happens in many other forms not solely honor killing. Furthermore, in 2024 a staggering number of domestic murders was recorded that said to be 1,641 by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2024) during their press release. And there is some other more that framed as suicide – According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (2025) during an HRCP mission to GB (Gilgit Baltistan), suspicions arose that the increase in suicides (involving women) in the province is more likely to be related to honor killings (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). Additionally, most cases from rural areas do not get the attention because of the *Jirga* culture, which still prevails despite criminalizing it. Taken together, figures show an urgent need for efficient and effective action towards the data collection of femicide that will help the decision makers, who will later manifest its way towards the rights and safety for the women and girls in the country.

Despite years of governmental efforts to address gender-based violence, new forms of it have continued to emerge. Technology Facilitated Violence against Women has now started to take place in the online spheres. Global cases reveal alarmingly high rates of online harassment and abuse. There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating how violence in the online space (i.e. coercive control, surveillance, and stalking) may manifest itself offline in various ways, including through physical violence leading to femicide (UN Women, 2025). In recent years, women and girls have been victims of this technology-facilitated violence, as many murders targeting the content-creators reported, raises a concern that women and girls are not safe in their homes and as well as in the online spheres.

Despite being one of the most studied forms of violence against women in Pakistan, honor killings still lack centralized data and reliable national data on gender-related homicide in Pakistan and the available numbers are skewed down by low rates of reporting and prosecution. (Kolsky and Zia, 2025). It is not easy to estimate the weight of this critical gender problem because of all these factors like under-reporting, categorizing murder as suicide, lack of epidemiological studies in the culture and environment, lack of a community development system, and awareness between the public regarding the matter. This is to say that these figures highlight a persistent implementation gap and low conviction rates, underscoring systemic weaknesses in accountability for honor-based femicide.

Contributing Factors

Legal System: Due to a long history of delayed cases and in most victim blaming by the police, people refrain from reporting. Many reports indicate the same as NCHR (2023) reveals that it took approximately 17 months to start a trial of a single case and many were simply dismissed by the police claiming it was a "private matter". Which is clearly depicted by the Gender Mapping SSDO Report (2024) Showing staggering numbers of cases yet convictions are as low as 10%. (figure.3)

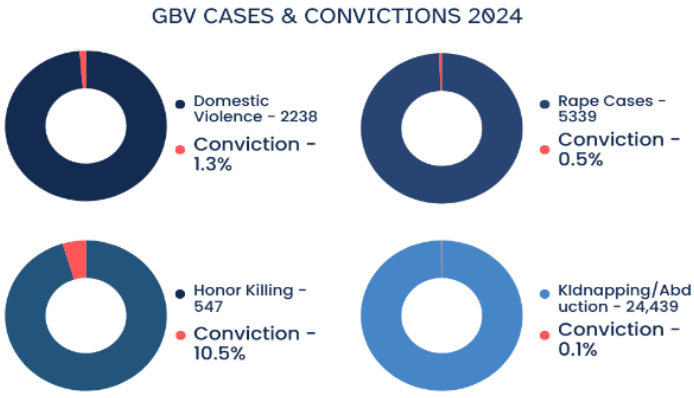


FIGURE. 3

This is a significant factor that contributes to the gender-based violence, which, when it escalates can lead to femicide. Moreover, untrained police officers are handling such sensitive cases and the police force contains a mere 1.5% women, making it difficult for women to have access to justice. Consequently, less than 40 per cent of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort, and the majority of the women who do

seek help look to family and friends and very few seek support from formal institutions, such as police and health services. (UN Women, 2025)

Education & Lack of Awareness: Education does a lot in shaping mindset, educated women are more likely to end violence than women who are not educated. A policy brief by HRCP (2023) aligns with it, according to the Domestic Health Survey women with a higher education are much more likely to seek help to end violence (46%) than women with no education (25%). In addition, most people including women, and even women who are suffering from domestic violence, are not aware of the fact that domestic violence – physical or sexual - is not acceptable and Victims may not be aware of their rights and protections against abusers or may even see themselves at fault. Other than these many internal factors also contributes in influencing the decision of reporting as Madhani et, al. (n.d.) mentions that women cited social stigmatizing, they mention fear of the escalation of violence, and notably only 0.4 respondents considered sexual violence to be violence against women. This lack of awareness makes it difficult to address and prevent domestic violence.

Jirga Culture: Under-reporting from the rural areas is mostly because of the jirgas, – an informal or anti-state judicial system (Mustaq et al.,) – Despite the criminalization of honour killings and the prohibition of jirga-based practices under Section 310-A of the Pakistan Penal Code, a significant implementation gap persists. In many areas, jirgas continue to operate informally, often concealing honour killings under the guise of customary dispute resolution. And then people from the areas where jirgas are practiced may resist reporting to the police or take the matter to the court claiming the dispute has already been resolved by the traditional court. Thus, many honor killings go unreported.

Crises and Disasters: Violence against women is more likely to increase during times of crises, which also leads to higher rates of femicide. As reported by the Un Women (2024) these killings can follow a culmination of ongoing domestic violence: 37 per cent of women were killed by their intimate partner after the victim had reported previous sexual, physical or psychological violence by her partner Evidently, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (2023) stated that disaster situations tend to increase the risk of depression, aggression and episodes of violent behavior in people. This shows a country could experience a rise in cases of domestic abuse as a result of

the Covid-19 and similar epidemics/disasters. Given that, in 2020, Pakistan, experienced a rise in the cases of violence against women in the first six months during the pandemic, and in contrast double the number in the last six months. Similarly, situations like inflation, unemployment, and floods can increase in frequency.

Cultural and Religious beliefs: Social norms and structural oppression have forced women to keep quiet about violence for too long (Anmol, 2022). Furthermore, some religious beliefs in Pakistan are interpreted to support the notion that men are superior to women. This can lead to domestic violence being justified as a means of enforcing these beliefs (NCHR, 2023).

Recommendations

Registry for Femicide: Pakistan needs a comprehensive National Femicide and Gender-Based Violence Registry that brings together information from police stations, hospitals, courts, and women's shelters into one system. This registry should use consistent reporting methods across all provinces so that cases are documented in the same way everywhere, while ensuring that everyone involved from police officers to healthcare workers receives proper training on how to use it. While data recording alone cannot prevent the problem, it is crucial for understanding the severity of the situation and informing policy responses.

Establishment of Femicide Observatory: In addition to this, the establishment of a national Gender-Based Violence Observatory is recommended, functioning as an independent, multi-stakeholder oversight body responsible for monitoring case handling, identifying systemic failures, and analyzing trends using data from a dedicated femicide and GBV registry. The observatory should work in coordination with specially trained police units, health services, and legal actors, while ensuring strict confidentiality of victim identities through legally mandated data protection measures. Such an approach would reduce case dismissal, improve institutional accountability, and encourage reporting by minimizing risks of retaliation and social stigmatization.

Reform of the Qisas and Diyat Law: The Application of Qisas and Diyat law provide the impunity to the offenders of femicide by forgiveness from the legal heirs. Such laws create loopholes that provides offenders a clear path to evade the

accountability and also undermines future preventions efforts. The application of these laws needs to be addressed, and state should intervene in such cases.

Structural Reforms by Educating: While educational interventions cannot replace criminal accountability, they serve as an essential long-term preventive strategy by challenging harmful norms, increasing rights awareness, and encouraging reporting by victims and bystanders. Accordingly, the following public education initiatives are proposed as complementary measures alongside legal and institutional reforms.

- **Digital Public Service Messaging:** Development and dissemination of short public service videos on widely used social media platforms to communicate the criminal nature of femicide, women's legal rights, and available reporting and helpline mechanisms.
- **Programs in pre-university Institutes:** Initiative-based educational sessions are conducted periodically in secondary and higher secondary schools by trained professionals, focusing on basic legal literacy, recognition of gender-based violence, and the unacceptability of it under Pakistani law. Rather than relying on passive instructions, these programs should employ engaging and inclusive formats.
- **University-Level Educational Engagement:** Annual or biannual seminars, webinars, or workshops in universities to educate students on femicide, gender-based violence, and legal rights, targeting long-term cultural change among future professionals and civic leaders.

Conclusion

To create a violence-free society, Pakistan needs a multifaceted approach that includes strong legal frameworks, effective implementation, societal change, and continuous support for survivors. Femicide, as the most extreme form of gender-based violence, remains underreported and inadequately addressed due to data gaps, weak accountability, and entrenched social norms. Strengthening centralized data systems, improving institutional responses, and increasing public awareness are essential to inform policy decisions and ensure meaningful protection for women and girls.

Bibliography

UN Women, (2025). *Five Essential Facts to Know about Femicide*. Retrieved from: https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/five-essential-facts-to-know-about-femicide#:~:text=Femicide:%20definition%20and%20causes,violence%2C%20harmful%20practices%20and%20trafficking

Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. (2025). *Women, Peace and Security Index*. Georgetown University. https://giwps.georgetown.edu/the-index/

WORLDS of Economic and Social Affairs. (2020). *The world's women 2020: Trends and statistics*. United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/desa/world%E2%80%99s-women-2020

Human Rights Watch. (2025). Pakistan. In World Report 2025. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2025/country-chapters/pakistan

Falak, N. (2022). *Causes and effect of domestic violence against women: An Analytical Study*, *4* (2), 632. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367108056_Causes_and_Effect_of_Domestic_Violence_against_Women_in_Pakistan_An_Analytical_Study

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2024). *General country of origin information report on Pakistan*. Government of the Netherlands. https://www.government.nl

World Health Organization. (2021). Violence Against Women. https://www.who.int/es/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women

Kolsky, E., & Zia, A. (2025). *Gendered Legacies of Empire: Law and Feminicide in Postcolonial Pakistan*. *26*(2). Johns Hopkins University Press. https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/1/article/968703

Sustainable Social development organization. (n.d.). *Alarming rise in cases of violence against women*. Retrieved from: https://ssdo.org.pk/media/alarming-rise-in-cases-of-violence-against-women

Campbell, O. L. K., Pracha, M., & Mace, R. (2025). *Skewed sex ratios and violence against women in Pakistan*. *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 7, Article e18. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12344599/

Un Women. (2024). *Femicides in 2023: Global estimates of intimate partner/family member femicides*. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/femicides-in-2023-global-estimates-of-intimate-partner-family-member-femicides-en.pdf

Saleem, N., Ishaq, N., & Hannan, A. M. (2024). *Representation of Femicide in National and International Dailies: A Case Study of Pakistan*. *4*(1). https://doi.org/10.32350/mcr.41.03

Mustaq, A. Q., Yaqoob, U., & Javaid, M. U. (2020). *Role of Jirga in Pakhtoon Society an Analysis with Special Reference to Justice Dispensation*. https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/HistoryPStudies/PDF-FILES/2-v29_2_16.pdf

National Commission for Human Rights. (2023). *DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY BRIEF*. https://www.nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Domestic-Violence-Policy-Brief.pdf

Sustainable Social development organization. (2024). *SSDO Report 2024: ender Based Violence Surges in Pakistan with Dismissal Conviction Rate*. *https://www.ssdo.org.pk/media/ssdo-report-2024-gender-based-violence-surges-in-pakistan-with-dismal-conviction-rates*