

Problems Faced by Women in Police Stations: Need for Police Reforms in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research paper manifests the challenges faced by the women in Pakistan approaching the police stations. The paper provides holistic overview of the barriers to justice for women and elaborates the problems women face in pursuing their issues in the police stations. A quantitative study was conducted with 43 women who visited 18 different police stations for reporting some crime or initiating a First Investigation Report (FIR). The study findings revealed that majority of the respondents faced a dissuading attitude of police while reporting the crime or lodging FIR. The study concluded that a major behavioural change is required to make the police system effective so that the complainants should not hesitate to report their incidents to the police. The study recommends the need for capacity building of police employees, behavioural change, gender-sensitive trainings and use of modern equipment and information and communication technologies (ICT). The improvement in working conditions and changed organizational culture would facilitate in creating a department that will be respected by the masses.

Keywords

Police, Women Problems, First Investigation Report, Dissuading Attitude, Behavioural Change, Gender-sensitive Trainings.

Introduction

In Pakistan, women face major challenges in accessing justice (Zaman & Zia, 2012). This has a long historical background and even recent efforts to mend the idiocies of past are affected by these deep rooted hitches. The women's circumscribed access to justice is not only due to archaic laws; rather it has resulted from multifarious socio-economic, politico-cultural and legal convolutions (Hassan & Azman, 2014) and glitches which can only be comprehended and amended with inter-disciplinary analysis of the prevailing legal system. Besides these, the most significant impeding factors are police behaviour, police station culture and discrimination which the women face; restraint them to visit police stations for reporting any incidence and seeking remedy (Lowenstein, 2014).

Pakistan has signed and ratified majority of the international covenants and declarations, such as, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Slavery

Convention of 1926 as amended, Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery, Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic of Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). On the other hand, the empowerment process of women, initiated during Musharraf's regime in Pakistan, is still in process. After the declaration of laws of Zia's regime, like *Hudood* Ordinance (Noreen & Mussarat, 2013), the movement of women's empowerment and equality of rights started in Pakistan and governments promulgated laws specifically for women to control and diminish discrimination against women in the country. Although, the process of execution and monitoring of different human rights and available legal provisions in their real sense still has a long way to go in Pakistan, but at least now some laws, such as Women Protection Act 2006, Protection from Harassment of women at the Work Place 2010; are available to protect the women rights and their legal status.

Despite of all these efforts, majority of women in Pakistan are unable to seek legal protection due to the insufficient legal provisions and the behaviour of law enforcement agencies, significantly police, which is at the fore front of the legal system; becomes a major impediment in claiming and acquiring legal rights. This study highlights the behavioural and attitudinal barriers which discourage and dissuade women from going to any police station and initiating their reports for legal remedy. This paper pursues to provide an overview of problems faced by the women in accessing the justice through police. It aims to examine intrinsic institutional, socio-cultural and legal problems experienced by women who come in contact with police at different points. A quantitative study was conducted with 43 women who visited 18 different police stations for reporting some crime and initiating a First Investigation Report (FIR). The study findings revealed that majority of the respondents faced a discouraging attitude of police while reporting the crime or lodging an FIR. The study concluded that a major behavioural change is required to make the police system effective so that the complainants should not hesitate to report their incidents to the police. The recommendations of the study elaborate the need for massive reforms to create a paradigm shift in police culture in Pakistan.

Literature Review

United Nations, since its inception, has taken the issue of women rights earnestly. According to Thomsen (2010), United Nations Charter explicitly specifies equality in rights for women and men. In different countries, the movement for the protection of women rights was initiated at different times. The suffrage movement of women was the initial one which demanded legal protection. After getting the suffrage right, the women started demanding civil rights. Immediately after independence, Pakistan became the member of United Nations. Since then, Pakistan

has signed many international covenants and human rights declarations regarding the protection of human and women rights (Hassan, 2014). The international commitments, such as, CEDAW, UDHR, ICSPCA, ICEAFRD, etc., paved the way for protection of women rights and their empowerment in Pakistan.

Besides these international commitments, due to different movements of the civil society and active role of NGOs, which are working for women rights and their empowerment, numerous enactments, like, Women Protection Act 2006, Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2011, Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2012, etc., have been promulgated to ensure the protection of women rights and to achieve the goal of women empowerment (Noreen & Mussarat, 2013).

Despite the availability of these legislations for the protection of women rights, the women are hesitant to register their grievances due to social desirability, family pressures and most importantly, the way they are treated at police stations. Still, the dearth of assurance on justice dispensation system and police behavior acts as major hindrance in seeking legal remedy (Awan, 2011), which is an explicit contradiction of the spirit of international and local legal provisions.

Human Rights Watch's Annual Report, 2013 elaborated that there are laws which prohibit discernment on the basis of gender, but, the women in Pakistan continuously face discrimination in property & family law and in the justice system (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Violence against women, acid attacks, rape, domestic violence, forced marriage and honour killings remained a severe problem in Pakistan (HRW, 2014).

In Pakistan, women are unreasonably exposed to inequality and prejudice while pursuing assistance from law implementation agencies; specifically at local police stations. Due to patriarchal system culture in Pakistan, women are violence sufferers in both; the public and private and spheres. Women, as complainants, also endure a form of violence in their interactions with police. This "system based violence" is exhibited in the form of inconsiderateness prevailing within the judicial system for female plaintiffs, delay in action, slackness in retorting and absolute denial to recognize the incident of violence. The police's behavior towards women manifests the overall attitude of Pakistan's socio-cultural setup, which is determined on refuting the actuality of violence and referring women in the supervision of a male custodian back in their homes. For seeking justice, the woman has to register a First Information Report (FIR) in the police station. Before registering her FIR, the complainant is straight away beheld as suspect, as socially it is assumed that no decent woman can visit a police station for any purpose. If she launches a complaint against a family member, the police will not pay any attention and put it aside considering a private matter to be decided within her home. Enticement, coercion, and pressurizing tactics all are used to falsify or discourage FIR registration (Asia Society, 2012).

Due to socio-cultural discriminatory attitudes, the victim women are stigmatized and often blamed rather than supported. They are being considered as false complainants. Resultantly, in Pakistan, complaint registering by women is discouraged and latitude is wide spread (AHRC, 2012).

Concomitantly, in Pakistan, women constitute less than one percent (0.86%) of the whole police force only. In Lahore city, not a single policewoman is head out of 89 police stations (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2013). In Punjab province, there were only three women police stations. Besides, women police officers are rarely seen on the streets (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2014).

According to Aurat Foundation (2012), out of a total of 7516 cases of violence against women only 4133 (55%) FIRs were registered with police. 13% FIRs (977 cases) remained unregistered and for remaining 32% (2404 cases) there was no information about the FIR status.

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Pakistan (IRBC) (2013) reported that, in Pakistan, government provides no protection to the women who face domestic violence. According to Human Rights Report (2012) by the AHRC, although the Parliament in Pakistan has enacted numerous laws related to women's rights, no significant change has been observed in the status of women as the implementation of laws remains a major issue. The domestic violence is considered an internal matter which provides shelter to the offenders. Even reports reveal that women in custody or during interrogation were raped by the police officers.

Women, who reported mistreatment and violence, faced stern issues. Police was hesitant to proceed in violence cases considering them as internal household problems. Besides registering cases, police normally retorted by encouraging the victim and the accused to resolve the issue among themselves. Police generally send the battered female to her offender family. Being threatened by social stigmatization and police behaviour, women did not pursue their cases (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

It is extremely difficult to register your grievance at a police station as police do not consider domestic violence sufferer earnestly; rather the police believe that men have the right to beat their wives (IRBC, 2013).

According to Valerie Khan, chairperson of the Acid Survivor's Foundation, a strenuous effort is required to avert high acquittal rates (The Express Tribune, 2012). In 2012, the Foundation recorded 150 acid attack cases, out of these only 49 were conveyed to the police. The police's indifference to gender-based violence deters women from registering complaints in the police stations and permits numerous wrongdoers to depart scot free (Inter Press Service, 2013).

Besides all, the Police Order 2002, which is currently being followed by the police, has a specific section “Attitude and Responsibilities of Police towards the Public”, which says: “It shall be the duty of every police officer to: (a) Behave with the members of the public with due decorum and courtesy;(b) Promote amity;(c) Guide and assist members of the public, particularly the poor, disabled or physically weak and children who are either lost or find themselves helpless on the streets or other public places; and(d) Aid individuals who are in danger of physical harm, particularly women and children” (Shabbir, 2014).

In 2013, at least 1600 women were killed in the name of honour and for other reasons in Pakistan. 2133 women were tortured while 887 faced torture by police. 370 women were raped, 185 incidents of gang-rape were reported, 406 were forcefully married and 608 women were abducted (Awan, 2014). According to Awan (2014), majority of women who faced such situations were unable to get their cases registered due to inappropriate behavior of police. The women who faced anguish in marriage were hesitant to register criminal cases and were only insisting for divorce. Pakistan, as a country, cannot develop till this majority of the population (51%) is not given its rights and due respect.

In Sindh Province in Pakistan, 421 incidents of violence against women were recorded (Bhagwandas, 2014). According to Aurat Foundation (2014), 534 girls and women were involved but only 66 cases/FIRs were registered. A poorly-worded FIR also damages trial cases hindering their access to effective remedies. Mostly police is not informed regarding such happenings, while those which are reported, police did not put them in their records. Even if, few cases are registered, investigations are not conducted properly and the case is ultimately shelved.

Mahnaz Rehman, CEO Aurat Foundation stressed the need for implementation of laws promulgated by the government for protection of women rights and strained for gender-sensitive trainings of law-enforcement, judicial and police officers for the effective implementation of the laws and international conventions signed by the country as in appropriate judicial practices and policing has denied suitable justice and protection to women victims (Aurat Foundation, 2014).

The police department does not enjoy a good reputation in masses in Pakistan and the basic reason for this is the debauched behavior of the police. Specifically, their behavior with women is discriminatory, biased and irrational. Whether innocent or guilty, the police treat them alike (Aziz, 2014).

Methodology

The primary data was collected through random sampling technique using a structured interview schedule. The respondents of the study were the women who visited the police stations for reporting a crime or initiating an FIR. The data was

collected from 18 police stations of Lahore city. The collected data was analyzed through SPSS-20. The descriptive statistics were used to show the results. The limitation of the study was due to the fact that women who came to the police stations were themselves hesitant to talk about the incidents which they have undergone or came there to report, but on assurance from the researcher regarding confidentiality and anonymity, the respondents consented to answer the questions.

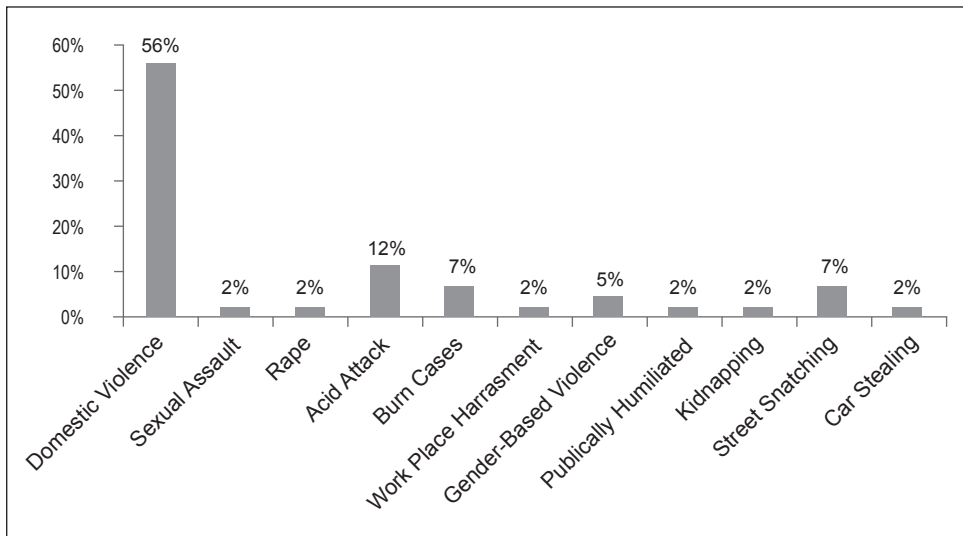
Results

The Table 1 given below shows the demographic profile of the respondents. Majority of the respondents (85%) were less than thirty years of age which depicts that women at younger age were more vulnerable to crimes in comparison to the middle aged women. The Table also reveals that the 33% of the respondents were uneducated and 37% were educated till primary level only. The educational qualifications of 26% of the respondents were matriculation. These figures depict that the respondents were less educated and majority (79%) belonged to low income families. 86% of the respondents were married and 64% were from the rural background. All of these figures reflect a typical socio-cultural setup of the society that women with low education level, having rural background, low family income and in young age were more prone to crimes.

Items	Frequency
Age (years)	
18 - 24	19 (44%)
25 - 31	17 (41%)
32 - 38	4 (9%)
Above 38	3 (6%)
Educational Qualification	
No Education	14 (33%)
Primary	16 (37%)
Matriculation	11 (26%)
FA / F.Sc.	1 (2%)
BA / B.Sc.	1 (2%)
Household Income (Pak Rs)	
Up to 5,000	14 (32%)
6,000 - 10,000	20 (47%)
11,000 - 15,000	6 (14%)
16,000 - 20,000	2 (5%)
Above 20,000	1 (2%)
Marital Status	
Married	37 (86%)
Un-married	2 (5%)
Divorced / Separated / Widow	4 (9%)
Living Background	
Rural	28 (64%)
Urban	15 (36%)

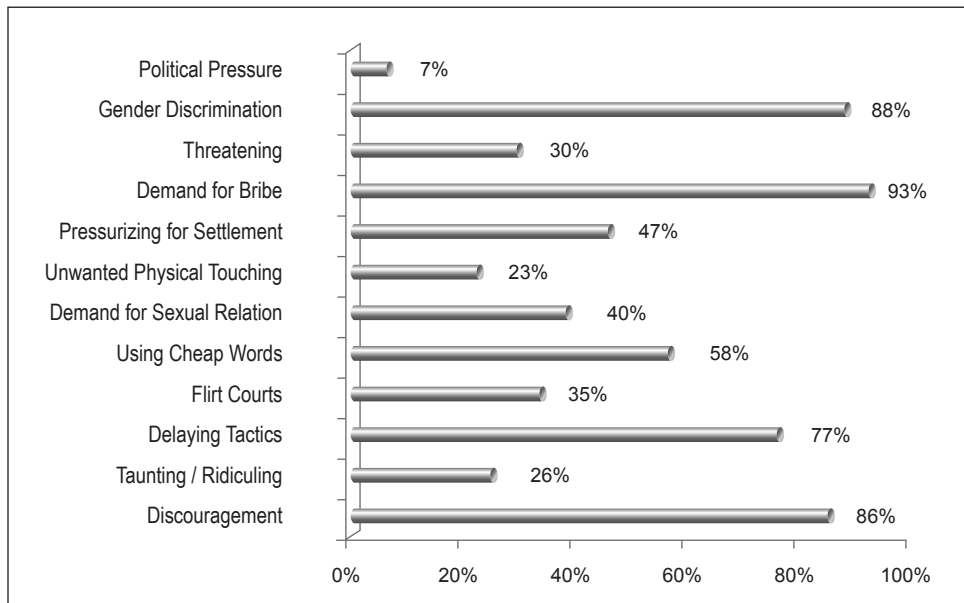
The Figure 1 shows the types of cases which were reported by women in the police stations. The majority of the cases reported by the women were of domestic violence (56%). The second most prominent category was of acid attacks (12%). The remaining reported cases included burn cases (7%), street snatching (7%), gender-based violence (5%) and others. These results also depict patriarchal system of the society where men or male members of the family consider it a prerogative that they can physically assault their women. Although, majority of the cases are not reported in the police stations due to social desirability, but the findings of the study reveal that the most prominently reported cases in police stations were of domestic violence.

Figure 1: Types of Cases Reported by Women



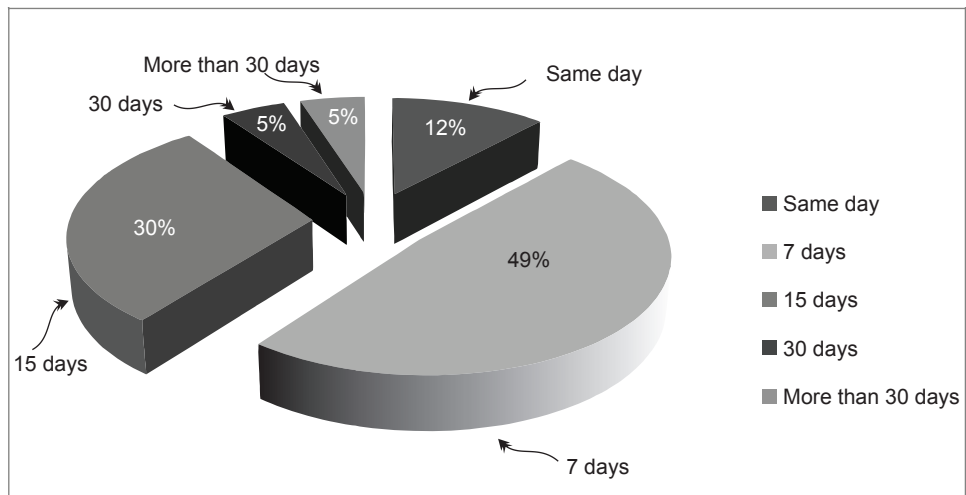
When the women were asked about the treatment which they were given by the police personnel while getting their cases registered or initiating an FIR, the majority of the respondents were asked for bribe and were, otherwise, discouraged to register their cases (Figure 2). Besides taunting and ridiculing; usage of cheap words, threatening, unwanted physical touching and above all demand for sexual relation, were the types of heinous treatments which they got in the police stations. 88% of the respondents claimed that they were mistreated because they were females and gender discrimination was obvious from the attitude of the dealing police officers.

Figure 2: Treatment of Police with Women



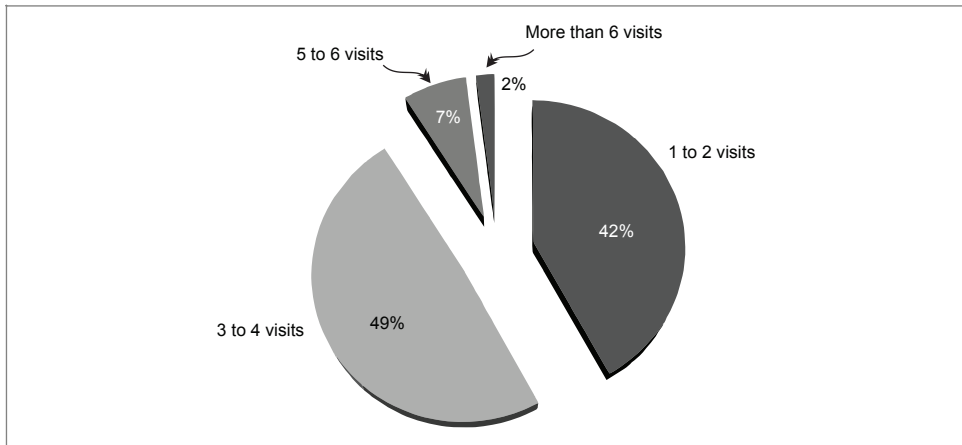
The study found that in majority of the cases reported by the women, police took seven to fifteen days for registering the FIR (Figure 3). Only 12% of the respondents were able to get their FIRs registered on the same day when they visited police stations. In 5% of the cases, the police took more than 30 days to register a case. These findings depict a very grave picture and reflect explicit reluctance on the part of police station's staff for registering FIR on the cases reported by women.

Figure 3: No. of Days Taken by Police to Register FIR



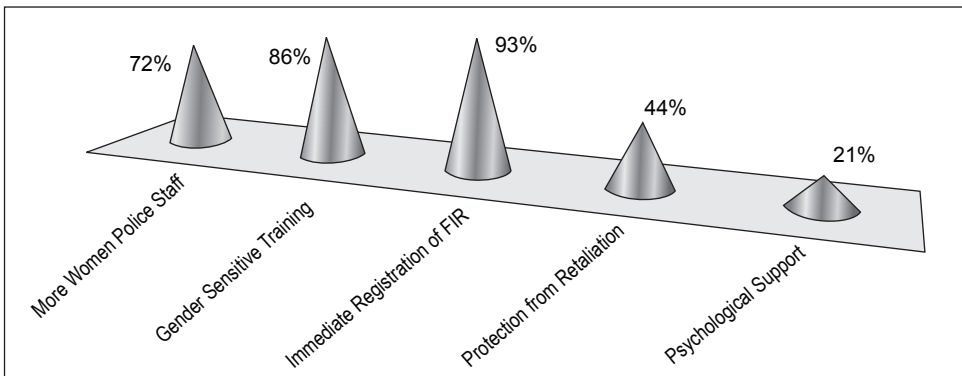
The Figure 4 given below elaborates the number of visits which were paid by the complainant to get the FIR registered in the police station. The majority of the respondents were able to get their FIRs in 2 to 4 visits. But 7% and 2% of the respondents reported that they were able to get the FIR registered in 5 to 6 visits or more than 6 visits, respectively. These findings exhibit the hesitation and dissuading attitude of the police.

Figure 4: Frequency of Visits for Registration of FIR



Majority of the women respondents recommended that their shall be a smooth system for registering FIR and police staff shall be given gender-sensitive trainings to ensure appropriate treatment of women complainants, who visit police stations for lodging a complaint or registering a case. The respondents also stressed the need for hiring more women staff at the police stations, as they feel that then they will be heard objectively.

Figure 5: Recommendations for Improvement in Police Department



Discussion

Going to a police station, for women, is still considered a serious taboo and a social stigma, not a respectable and honourable way of dealing the issues, rather it is considered a last resort to tackle the situation.

Very small percentage of women police officers are found in police stations. Victims are often dealt, heard and their cases are often registered in an open place in the presence of other people. Due to numerous social problems, violence against women in Pakistan is least reported. In a society where it is not welcomed and liked to disclose what has happened to a women publically, the majority of the cases are not reported.

Role of police in maintaining rule of law in the country has been very critical due to several reasons, like, lack of training, not equipped with modern and latest technologies in terms of knowledge as well as weapons, status quo as horror, rude, aggressive, irrational stereotype police character, instead of being aware with social and psychological consciousness to meet the changing needs of the society, lack of strict accountability to execute honesty, transparency and commitment in police institution to win the confidence of the public, more involvement of the country police in providing security and protocol to the VIPs instead of providing protection to the general public, backward working mechanism of police and outdated set of rules and operating procedure of investigation; have turned the public opinion against the police in the country.

The situation becomes worst with respect to women. The socio-cultural setting of the country provides social acceptance to the violence against women. Particularly, sex crimes and domestic violence are least reported, and if reported, police behaviour becomes a major barrier to justice for women. The moral order of the police is grounded in patriarchal values which have heavily influenced police station culture, in which credibility of women victims is suspected, disbelieved and they are not treated with dignity and prestige. Police tries to force women to compromise, surrender, tolerate, forget or settlement through frightening them from the humiliation they will face after filing the FIR and from the expenditures during prosecution. The situation becomes worst if the offender is a family member in case sexual assault, rape, domestic violence; and if a women takes some decision on her own for her life and approaches police station, she is harassed by the family and the police both. She is not provided with any security. Very few shelter homes are available in the country. For a woman to seek refuge in a shelter home is considered a taboo. She is socially stigmatized as a “runaway woman” from home and is labeled as “bad character woman” who has violated the respectable norms of the society. In other words, to “raise the voice” against the crime and to “say no” to violence is considered a deviant behaviour instead of committing a crime.

Mostly, crimes against women are not reported due to low credibility, inefficiency and high rate of corruption in the police stations. According to the research findings, most of the women reported that police is always reluctant to file the case. The delaying tactics are commonly used by the police for the registration of the FIR. The police usually demand money otherwise case is not moved forward.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the women in Pakistan face numerous barriers in accessing justice. The law enforcement agency, the police, becomes a major impediment in getting justice. The discriminatory attitude of the police staff towards women and the prevailing corruption in the police department, have severely distorted their image, which requires major reforms to make it an efficient and effective department of the country. Generally, people hesitate in reporting crimes to the police as they perceive that they will not be able to get any assistance from police, rather the masses believe that police have the knowledge of the criminals in their area, but due to corruption, the police do not take any action against the criminals. The women face a double jeopardy; on one side, they do not report crimes, like domestic violence, due to socio-cultural impediments, and on the other side, if they dare to report them, the police's attitude becomes a major obstacle for them in accessing justice in Pakistan.

Recommendations& Policy Implications

On the basis of study findings and in the light of subsequent discussion, some recommendations are:

- The government should allocate more resources for capacity building of police employees, behavioural change, awareness, modern equipment, information and communication technologies (ICT) and improvement of interrogation skills. The government should also emphasize on R&D to enhance the capabilities of police and for improved results.
- The government should develop “One Stop Relief Centers” for women victims to provide relief facilities, like doctor, psychologist, police officer and lawyer; under one roof.
- The government should develop a mechanism for strict implementation of international covenants and declarations signed and ratified by the government and national laws promulgated for protection of women rights.
- The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working for human rights should be promoted, thus forming a vestibule for womens' rights.

- Currently, less than one percent (0.86%) women are employed in police. A quota should be fixed to increase women employment at police stations. This will encourage women to join the police force. However, equally important are more female-friendly laws and gender-sensitized law implementation personnel in police force.
- To ensure accountability at all levels of the police force, an independent police complaint authority should be established. This oversight institution should work independently and CSOs, NGOs and media can play an active role in guaranteeing their independence. A Police Ombudsman can also be appointed for reparation of the problems maltreated by police officials.
- Trainings and syllabi in the police academies should be refurbished, keeping in mind the needs of women, to eliminate gender bias and dissuade police officers from making their own opinions and verdicts a priori to interrogating a case.
- The police department should function as a community service provider.
- More women police stations should be established as women feel comfortable in lodging their complaints in front of females, rather than male police officers.

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