

## **Vigilantism and the Police: Assessing the Perception of Pakistani Women about the Gender Related Ineffectiveness of the Police and the Preference for Vigilante Acts in Lahore**

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### **Abstract**

The ineffectiveness of the police is considered one of the leading factors in promoting vigilante acts in Pakistan. Due to the gender specific approach of the male-dominated police in Pakistan, women often remain reluctant to go to a police station to report their complaints. However, there is a paucity of empirical research in Pakistan highlighting gender biased issues related to the perceived ineffectiveness of and structural problems within the police and their correlation to vigilante acts. By surveying a sample of 200 women in households in Lahore (Pakistan), this research was conducted to assess the perception among Pakistani women regarding police ineffectiveness and the preference for vigilante acts. Based on the opinion of Pakistani women, this research revealed that the gender specific ineffectiveness of the police contributes more to promoting support for vigilante acts than does police structural inadequacy.

**Keywords:** Law Enforcement; Vigilantism; Pakistan; Lahore; Women in Policing

### **Society and Vigilantism**

In modern societies, the state has the core responsibility to provide the citizens with a peaceful and secure living environment. This is attained by the development of certain laws which provide direction to the criminal justice system in maintaining law and order. For this purpose, the state authorizes itself to use violence when and where it is deemed necessary for the preservation and enforcement of law (Sarat and Kearns, 1992). This right is given by the social contract, which makes it necessary for the people to give up their rights to use force or violence for personal benefits and grants it entirely to the state. As a result, only the state can employ force or violence as is deemed necessary (Imam, 2011). The laws developed and implemented by the state are assumed to provide the platforms to handle conflicts and disputes between the people and play its role in developing a less violent society (Cooney, 1997).

In order to implement state laws and protect citizens from crimes, the police are being recognized as the first responders in all civil societies (Fasihuddin, 2010). Since the police are assumed to “*be the top player in crime-control and the establishment of law and order*” (Asad, 2009), it is expected that the police be the most accessible, interactive and dynamic organization of any society. As the representative of the state, they are legitimate users of the force in maintaining law and order. In developed countries, special attention has been given in transforming police to make this institution more effective and

productive for their people. However, it has been the performance of the police in developing countries that has created criticism and debate over the years in their ability to maintain law and order (Quah, 1999).

People normally do want to see a formal reaction from the authorities, particularly the police, when someone breaks the law (Tylor and Smith, 1995). They expect from the police to take severe action against the criminal according to the criminal justice system and protect them from the violation of state laws. The inefficiency of the police in protecting their citizens contributes to the erosion of trust in this institution. This ultimately may lead to vigilantism in those societies. Tankebe (2009) discussed the role of police trustworthiness in promoting vigilantism and support for vigilante acts. Goldstein (2008) also explored the role that the public's dissatisfaction of the police has played in causing vigilante acts and vigilantism in the society.

### **Policing in Pakistan**

The current police structure of Pakistan has originated from the colonial criminal justice system, developed in 1861 during the British rule in India. This structure is rigid and is hierarchical and vertical in nature and based on a command and control system (Fasihuddin, 2010). Suddle (2003) discussed the philosophy of developing this structure at that time.

..... the police organization in 1861 was to create an instrument in the hands of the – colonial –government for keeping the natives on a tight leash, not a politically neutral outfit for fair and just enforcement of law. Police was designed to be a public-frightening organization, not a public-friendly agency. Service to the people was not an objective of this design (Suddle, 2003, pp-94).

This inherited structure is still functional but some attempts have been made (e.g. The Police Order 2002) to transform this organization as into a public friendly agency. There is a common saying in Pakistan that “*stays away from police friendship as well as police enmity*” (Mohammad and Conway, 2005). This highlights the people's level of trust in this organization. This is due to poor infrastructure. The police have aptly been described as ill-equipped, poorly trained, deeply politicized, and chronically corrupt.

Police conduct toward ordinary citizens is viewed as being mostly abusive. Especially in the “Thana” (police station), the way the police have behaved in documenting crime reports, abuses they have made during

interrogations in police cells, corruption during investigation, and political interference have eroded the public trust in the effectiveness of this organization (Abbas, 2009). This environment is also not gender friendly as many cases have not been reported due to the maltreatment of women in police stations. Rashid (2002) describe this situation in such words:

The general public considers the current police system in Pakistan to be grossly inefficient, unskilled and corrupt. The police in Pakistan tend to be predominantly male, underpaid, understaffed and undertrained. Domestic violence, including honor killing of girls and women, is often ignored by police officers and treated as a 'domestic' to be resolved within the family or community. Even when women are seriously injured by their husband or families, police often discourage them from registering complaints.

Women complainants have not been facilitated by the patriarchal police structure. To address this issue, Woman Model Police Stations have been developed but have failed to increase the credibility and trust of the masses. Consequently people in most cases try to keep women away from criminal justice matters, which has contributed to the erosion of trust by women in the police (Jalil, 2011).

### **Emergence of Vigilante Acts in Pakistan**

In recent times, many vigilante acts have been observed in Pakistan. One explicit example of this trend was a lynching incident in Karachi. On May 14, 2008, three bandits were set on fire by a violent mob on Nishtar Road in Karachi. Two of the suspects died at the spot and one expired at the hospital. Similarly, on August 15, 2010, two brothers were brutally killed in Sialkot by an angry mob that has considered them to be robbers. Even some officials of the public service agencies (e.g. police, rescue, etc.) were also present at the scene but they failed to stop this wicked act of violence. This phenomenon has increased throughout society and it would appear that people tend to take revenge themselves rather than report the cases to the police (Jamal, 2012).

The very existence of vigilantism begs questions about the performance of the state and its institutions (Black, 1983; Spencer, 2008). Pakistan is being categorized as a country where people do not consider state institutions related

to legal and administrative work as credible arbiters in conflict resolution (Asif, Raza, and Waheed, 2011). In a recently conducted survey, 18% of the people responded that they would avenge themselves if they would be attacked by someone (Gilani Research Foundation, 2011). Saeed (2009) discussed the role of perceived ineffectiveness as the cause of promoting violence, particularly in youth. Asif et al (2011) also reported that people did not trust law enforcement agencies, especially the police, and favored the vigilante acts that had recently occurred. Similar findings were also reported by Ahmad (2012) who investigated perceived inefficiency of state institutions, particularly law enforcement agencies such as the police, as the major cause of supporting vigilante acts in Pakistan.

Pakistani women, neglected by the criminal justice system most of the time, also support vigilante acts. Asif et al (2011) found in their study that vigilante acts were highly favored by female students than by male students. This shows that women have more reservations about the performance of police than men do. In order to understand this rising phenomenon more deeply, there is a need to conduct research on gender based issues which hinders police performance and erode women's trust in the police.

### **The Study of Female Confidence in the Police**

The current study aims to investigate the perception of women about the ineffectiveness, particularly gender specific, of the police and to examine its relationship with vigilante acts.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Lahore, the capital of Punjab province and the second largest city of Pakistan. By using a social survey research methodology, 200 women were interviewed from three different towns of Lahore. A structured questionnaire was developed and a four point Likert scale used to record the responses of the survey participants. The questionnaire had two parts. The first part included the statements about the ineffectiveness of police in Pakistan. There were two identified and specific types of ineffectiveness: gender specific ineffectiveness and structural inadequacy. For exploring gender specific ineffectiveness, gender based issues were highlighted, e.g., absence of a female constable (i.e. police officer) to deal with (or report) a gender based issue and maltreatment of women in police stations. As it relates to structural inadequacy, structural issues were addressed, e.g., corruption, political interference, lack of proper training, and the lack of the latest weapons and equipment. To understand the perception of the sampled population to vigilante acts, a number of questions were designed and posed.

### **Findings**

This section presents the information collected from survey responses. The data was analyzed by using SPSS version 17.0 and is presented below.

## Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. This study includes representatives from various age groups. The majority of the respondents (55%) belong to the middle age group, i.e. 20-50 years. In the surveyed sample, 30% of the respondents had reported their age as between 0-25 years. This study also contained the perspective of older women as 15% of the respondents reported their age as being above 50.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Variables	Respondents N (%)
Age	
0—25	60 (30)
26—50	110(55)
Above 50	30 (15)
Monthly Family Income	
0—25,000	84 (42)
25, 001—50,000	80 (40)
Above 50,000	36 (18)

Table 1 also examined information on the monthly family income of the respondents. The majority (42%) of the respondents belonged in the lower class of society and reported their monthly family income between 0-25,000 rupees. Similarly 40% of the respondents belonged to the middle class of society as they responded that their monthly family income was between 25,001-50,000 rupees, while 36% of the respondents reported that their monthly family income was above 50, 000 rupees.

### The Perceived Gender Specific Ineffectiveness of the Police

This ineffectiveness refers to the inability of the police to provide gender specific services to female citizens. For example, this would involve the availability of a woman police officer at the police station if any female resident wanted to report her case to the police. Similarly male police officers had not been trained to address gender specific crimes, e.g. domestic violence, forced marriage, and sexual abuse. Table 2 depicts the information of the perceived gender based ineffectiveness of the police.

**Table 2: Gender specific perceived ineffectiveness of the police**

	Response			Ex T
	Not at All	Hardly True	Moderately True	

	<b>Item</b>	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
	I am certain that							
1	In the police station, a female police officer is not available to report the case.	0	0	8	4	32	16	180
2	Male police officers do not properly behave with woman complainants.	6	3	22	11	46	23	126
3	Male police are not trained to handle gender specific crimes (e.g. domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment).	60	30	24	12	28	14	88
4	Male police officers are used to refer woman complainants to dispute resolution through the community and family	80	40	16	8	30	15	74

As explained above, the availability of female police officer to report any crime is one the leading factors in developing gender based ineffectiveness of the police among women. This seems true as 80% of the survey participants responded to this statement as being accurate. The second factor in developing gender based inefficiency of the police was the behavior of male police officers toward female complainants. The majority of the respondents (63%) of the total surveyed perceived that male police officers did not behave properly when they interacted with women.

In modern societies, training has been provided to police personnel on to handle various crimes. However in Pakistan, there is no evidence that police officers have been trained to handle gender specific crimes. This is the third factor in establishing the gender based inefficiency of the police when interacting with women. Table 2 shows that the majority of the respondents (44%) of the total surveyed believed that male police officers did not behave properly with female complainants.

In Pakistan, it has been noted that many male police officers do not document the cases of gender based crimes, e.g. domestic violence and sexual harassment. This is one of the major factors in developing the perception of gender based ineffectiveness of the police among women residents. The table above shows that the majority of the respondents also believe that male police personnel routinely refer female complainants for dispute resolution through community options or through the family.

### The Structural Specific Perceived Inadequacy of the Police

Pakistani Police has been recognized as the most corrupt institution of the state (Transparency International, 2011). There are various factors contributing to these perceptions. These factors are shown below table 3.

**Table 3: Structural specific perceived inadequacy of the police**

Item	Response							
	Not at All		Hardly True		Moderately True		Ex T	
	F	%	F	%	F	%		F
1 I am certain that Police officers are addicted to bribery.	2	1	16	8	24	12	158	
2 Police are not trained according to the current security situation.	54	27	22	11	36	18	88	
3 Investigative officers do not interrogate the case objectively.	0	0	10	5	32	16	158	
4 Police are used to change the facts due to political inference.	4	8	24	12	50	25	118	
5 Police officers do not have the latest equipment and weapons.	60	30	24	12	30	15	86	

Common people could not imagine that they can report a case to the police without having to pay a bribe. Electronic media has covered this issue occasionally in their reports. This is one of the leading factors that has affected the public's perception of the inefficiency of the police. Table 3 illustrates that 80% of the women believed that police officers are addicted to bribery. The security situation is the leading challenge which Pakistan is facing today. This is because of the lack of proper training to address today's security challenges (Abbas, 2009). Ahmad (2012) found that this factor is the major contributor in developing the public perception of the inefficiency of the police. Table 3 depicts that the majority of respondents (44%) believed that the police were not trained according to the realities of today's security situation.

Interrogation in the current police structure is viewed as a subjective matter of police officers who are often suspected of changing facts as they wish. This factor also contributes in developing the public perception of the inefficiency of the police. Table 3 shows that more than half of the respondents believed that police officers did not conduct the case investigation objectively.

Moreover, police officers were used to changing the facts due to political inference. The Pakistani police structure does not fulfill the demands of the modern policing. Police officers have outdated equipment and weapons. This is one of those factors that supports the people's perception about the ineffectiveness of the police. Table 3 highlights that 43% of the respondents of those surveyed believed that the police did not have the latest equipment and weapons.

### Police Ineffectiveness and Vigilante Acts

As discussed in the above section, the perceived ineffectiveness of the police is one of the major factors in promoting vigilante acts among the masses. To know about the attitude of women towards vigilante acts, three statements were asked to obtain their point of view in the questionnaire as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Support for vigilante acts among women**

Item	Response							
	Not at All		Hardly True		Moderately True		Ex T	
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I am certain that								
1 Killing of Sialkot Boys at the road by the people was right.	68	34	22	11	10	05	100	
2 Bandits, caught in Faisalabad, were appropriately beaten by the masses.	40	20	14	07	34	17	112	
3 If I catch any bandit or killer, I will avenge myself rather giving him/her to the police.	12	06	18	09	28	14	142	

Table 4 depicts that the majority (50%) of the respondents surveyed were in favor of the killing of the Sialkot boys on the streets by the people. However, 34% of the respondents did not believe that this was an appropriate action. Similarly, their perspectives were also recorded about the incident in Faisalabad where bandits were brutally beaten by the people. The majority of the women also believed that this action was appropriate. When questioned if they were in a similar situation and if they were to catch a bandit or killer, they would avenge themselves rather than give the suspect to the police, almost two-thirds of the survey participants noted that they would avenge themselves. This reveals that women also have the tendency to support vigilante acts in the similar manner as observed in men.

Moreover, in order to examine the relationship of gender based ineffectiveness and structural inadequacy of the police and favor for vigilante acts, Pearson r correlation was calculated as shown in Table 5.

**Table 5: Association between Ineffectiveness and structural problems and Vigilante Acts**

Perceived Gender Based Ineffectiveness of the Police	Pearson Correlation	.778**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	200
Perceived Structural Inadequacy of the Police	Pearson Correlation	.649**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	200

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows that the perceived ineffectiveness of the police is positively associated with the preference of women to support vigilante acts. However, the perceived gender based ineffectiveness of the police was more associated with the preference for vigilante acts than was the perceived structural inadequacy of the police. Thus, it is concluded that the gender based ineffectiveness of the police contributes more than perceived police structural inadequacy among women who support vigilantism.

### Conclusion

In the Pakistani context, this study is the pioneering effort in understanding the perceptions of the ineffectiveness of the police in relation to gender. The above findings revealed that women believe that the police in Pakistan are part of a corrupt and dysfunctional organization in the context of gender related issues. Police personnel have not been properly trained to address the current security challenges. The lack of the latest equipment and weapons is perceived as a significant factor in supporting this police ineffectiveness. Political inference into law enforcement and criminal justice matters has also contributed to the development of this perception as it relates to female confidence and trust in the police.

As it relates to gender specific police ineffectiveness, female respondents believed that the absence of a female police officer to report their complaint to was the leading factor in their lack of trust. The behavior of male police officers with female complainants also contributed to supporting the women's poor perception of police competence. Pakistani police personnel have not been trained to handle gender specific crimes and commonly refer these complaints for dispute resolution through the community or family. Furthermore, this study showed that the perceived ineffectiveness of the police

is positively associated with support for vigilante acts. In particular, the gender specific perceived ineffectiveness of the police contributed more to the support for vigilante acts than did police structural inadequacy.

Since this research was conducted only in Lahore using a sample of 200 women, the findings of this study should be interpreted cautiously. Future research should attempt to include female samples from across all the provinces in Pakistan in an effort to examine the perception of women about police ineffectiveness and vigilantism throughout Pakistan. More importantly, there is a potential need for law enforcement administrators in Pakistan to review policy and procedural mandates within the context of the empowerment of women and also to address gender specific issues related to females in an effort to improve their trust in criminal justice and law enforcement agencies in Pakistan.

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