

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peacebuilding Processes in Punjab, Pakistan

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This study explored the reasons for the exclusion of women from peacebuilding initiatives in Punjab, Pakistan, despite international frameworks advocating for their inclusion (UNSCR, 1325). While women bear more burden of conflict, they are often excluded from decision-making processes that shape their post-conflict reality. The research used qualitative methods to identify and analyze factors contributing to this exclusion. Five women peace activists were purposefully selected from different regions of Punjab based on their experience and contributions. Open-ended interviews were conducted. The Results Showed women's marginalization, focusing on societal and institutional barriers, cultural norms, and power dynamics. This research sheds light on the complex reasons behind women's exclusion in Punjab's peacebuilding processes. By understanding these barriers, policymakers and civil society actors can develop strategies to promote women's meaningful participation in shaping a more peaceful future. The study concludes that women must sit at the peace table in the peacebuilding process, which leads to a peace-sustainable society.

Keys Words: Peace Building, Women Exclusion, Decision-making, Societal and Institutional Barriers, Cultural Norms, Power Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

Peace-building is a complex process aimed at fostering stability and reconciliation in post-conflict societies. It remains a critical global concern, integral to the success of these endeavors is the inclusion of diverse perspectives, ensuring that the voices of all community members are heard (Faster Capital, 2023). The importance of including women in peacebuilding processes is underscored by international frameworks such as UNSCR 1325.

Despite these frameworks advocating for women's participation, the ground reality often falls short of these ideals. Women, despite being disproportionately affected by conflict, find themselves excluded from decision-making roles in the very processes designed to shape their post-conflict reality. This research highlights the need for reforms in various domains to ensure women's rights are realized according to the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Cheema et al., 2020).

In the context of Punjab, Pakistan, the exclusion of women in peacebuilding processes can be attributed to several factors, including patriarchal ideologies, conservative religious beliefs, lack of recognition and inclusion of women's lived experiences and needs, limited representation in decision-making processes, and a high prevalence of gender-based violence and harassment

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan (Ahmad & Aman, 2021). The rationale for this research stems from the recognition that the exclusion of women in peacebuilding processes is not merely an issue of representation but a fundamental impediment to the efficacy and sustainability of peace efforts. Understanding the nuanced challenges faced by women in the context of Pakistani society is imperative for developing targeted interventions that address the root causes of their exclusion.

District Peace Committees

The District Peace Committees in Pakistan face significant challenges in ensuring the effective participation and inclusion of women (Ahmad & Aman, 2021). These challenges include patriarchal norms and attitudes that limit women's involvement in decision-making processes, lack of awareness and sensitivity towards gender issues within the committees, and the limited representation of women in key positions within the committees (Baba et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is a need for reforms within the committees to address these challenges and create a more inclusive and gender-responsive environment.

Formation of DPCs are typically formed under the umbrella of the government, with representation from various stakeholders at the district level. Membership often includes representatives from law enforcement agencies, local government officials, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and other relevant stakeholders. The specific composition may vary by

district, and efforts are made to ensure diversity and inclusivity. DPCs work towards resolving conflicts at the district level through dialogue and mediation. They are involved in peacebuilding initiatives, fostering harmony and understanding among diverse communities. However, as per notification, fewer women members are involved in DPCs. The exclusion of women from peacebuilding processes in Punjab, Pakistan can be attributed to multiple factors. Some of these factors include patriarchal norms and attitudes that limit women's participation and representation, the enlisting of support from family and clan members within the communities, and the dominant influence of religious and cultural ideologies that reinforce gender inequality (Ahmad & Aman, 2021).

The absence of women members in the District Peace Committee in Punjab raises significant concerns about the inclusivity and representation within critical decision-making bodies. This issue not only reflects a gender disparity but also raises questions about the effectiveness of the committee in addressing diverse perspectives and needs within the community. The exclusion of women from such a committee denies them a direct role in shaping peace initiatives and policies at the local level. This gender gap may contribute to overlooking key issues that disproportionately affect women and may hinder the committee's ability to formulate comprehensive strategies that account for the varied experiences of the population. Addressing this imbalance is essential not only for the principles of gender equality but also for ensuring that the District Peace

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan

Committee is truly representative of the community it serves, fostering a more inclusive and effective approach to peacebuilding. The present study also shows that raising awareness of the importance of women in peacebuilding can have a transformative effect on the attitudes of society towards gender roles. Understanding the challenges faced by women in the context of Pakistani society is imperative for developing targeted interventions that address the root causes of their exclusion.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the cultural dynamics and norms that influence the roles assigned to women in peacebuilding processes
2. To examine societal and institutional barriers that contribute to the marginalization of women in the context of peacebuilding.
3. To identify and analyze the factors contributing to the exclusion of women from peace-building processes in Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. What are the factors to be contributing to the exclusion of women in peacebuilding efforts?
2. How do societal and cultural dynamics influence the exclusion of women from peacebuilding processes?
3. What are the institutional barriers hindering women's participation in peace-building?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature on gender and peacebuilding provides valuable insights into global trends, yet there is a distinct need for a focused examination of the Pakistani context. Previous studies (Enloe, 2000 True, 2012) emphasize the transformative potential of women's involvement in peacebuilding, highlighting their unique contributions to conflict resolution and community resilience. However, a critical gap persists in understanding why, despite these acknowledged benefits, women in Pakistan continue to be marginalized in peacebuilding efforts.

Cultural and Societal Factors

Research emphasizes the role of deeply ingrained cultural norms and societal expectations in perpetuating the exclusion of women from peacebuilding processes (True, 2012 & Rai, 2008). In Pakistan, traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures often limit women's public participation, hindering their involvement in decision-making regarding peace and conflict resolution (Jahan, 2013). The societal perception of women as passive victims rather than active agents in peace processes further contributes to their exclusion (Hassan, 2016).

Institutional Barriers

Institutional structures and policies play a pivotal role in either promoting or hindering women's participation in peacebuilding. Existing literature suggests that institutional biases and the lack of gender-responsive

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan
policies contribute significantly to the exclusion of women (Swaner, 2015 & Gupta, 2014). In Pakistan, the absence of a comprehensive gender-sensitive framework within peacebuilding institutions acts as a barrier to women's meaningful inclusion (Mustafa, 2017).

Security and Conflict Dynamics

The security environment and ongoing conflict dynamics also shape the exclusion of women from peacebuilding efforts. Research highlights how women are often marginalized in situations of conflict, and their exclusion from peace talks further perpetuates post-conflict instability (Bartoli, 2017). In Pakistan, the prevalence of armed conflict in certain regions exacerbates the challenges faced by women in participating actively in peace processes (Shirazi, 2011).

Capacity Building and Education

The literature underscores the importance of education and capacity building in overcoming barriers to women's participation in peacebuilding (Arat, 2018 & Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). In Pakistan, limited access to education and training for women acts as a significant hurdle, preventing them from acquiring the skills necessary for active engagement in peace initiatives (Azam, 2019).

Fair Representation Act 2014

The Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act 2014 stands as a landmark achievement in Pakistani legislation promoting gender equality in governance. Enacted to empower women and ensure their participation in

decision-making, the Act amends existing laws in Punjab province. Notably, it mandates a minimum of 33% women in the decision-making bodies of various public bodies (The Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act 2014, 2014). While the Act itself doesn't provide an exhaustive list, a Schedule attached details the specific laws amended, impacting at least 66 public bodies (Punjab Commission on Women's website, n.d.). This initiative has been lauded for its groundbreaking approach to increasing women's representation in public sector leadership positions (Punjab Commission on Women's website, n.d.). But this act excludes the peacekeeping committees and the exclusion of women.

Research Gap

The existing literature underscores the nature of the exclusion of women in peacebuilding processes in Pakistan, weaving together cultural, institutional, and socio-economic factors. These insights provide a solid foundation for this research aimed at understanding and dismantling the barriers that hinder women from contributing meaningfully to peace and stability in the region.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in feminist theory, which examines gender inequalities and advocates for women's rights and gender justice. The framework helps analyze how patriarchal structures and cultural norms continue the exclusion of women from peacebuilding processes

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan (Butler, 1990).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Researchers used qualitative research methods to provide a comprehensive understanding. The sample size was five activists through purposive sampling technique, Two from central Punjab (district Lahore), One from Southern Punjab (Multan), and Two from North Punjab (Rawalpindi). Researchers specifically chose these women based on their experience, the scope of their work, and their contributions to their communities. Using open-ended questions, the interviews explored reasons for the exclusion of women in the peacebuilding process in Punjab. To protect the women's identities, all interviews were confidential and conducted according to their convenience, either in person or online. The data was then transcribed to do a thematic analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was done to identify and analyze patterns within the data. The process involved different stages, familiarization with Data by transcribing interviews and reading through the data multiple times, then generating initial codes by Identifying significant phrases and concepts, Searching for Themes by grouping codes into broader themes that capture the data, after reviewing themes to refine it to ensure the accuracy of the data, then the researcher defining and naming themes and its sub-themes. The results provide valuable insights into the exclusion of women from peacebuilding processes in

Punjab. The themes identified highlight the systemic and multifaceted nature of this exclusion.

Traditional Gender Roles

It is observed that the participants of this research have the opinion that traditional and socio-cultural sets of beliefs and norms about gender roles often assign women to domestic activities and limit their participation in public and political spheres. This traditional mindset can lead to the exclusion of women from decision-making processes related to peacebuilding. Women have limited opportunities because some places do not give women the chance to go to school or get certain jobs, which means they can't join peacekeeping missions. People might think women are not as good as men at certain jobs, like being in the military or keeping the peace, just because they're women. In some cultures, it is not seen as "normal" or acceptable for women to be in roles like soldiers or peacekeepers. So, women might not even think about doing those jobs. There is a lack of representation of women in peacekeeping processes if there are not many women in important roles in the military or peacekeeping, other women might not see those jobs as options for them. So, there is gender-based discrimination which makes it difficult for women to join peacekeeping missions. One participant said, *"Women are expected to stay at home and take care of the family, not to participate in peace negotiations."*

Stereotypes and Prejudices

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan

Respondents of this research explained that stereotypes and prejudices about women's capabilities, roles, and expertise may contribute to their exclusion from peacebuilding efforts. Perceptions that women are not as knowledgeable or capable in matters of conflict resolution can hinder their inclusion. Those Stereotypes often suggest that certain roles or jobs are more suitable for men than women. In the context of peacekeeping, this can lead to the assumption that men are better suited for combat or leadership positions, while women are seen as more appropriate for supporting roles. Stereotypes about women's vulnerability or weakness may raise concerns about their safety and ability to handle the risks associated with peacekeeping duties, particularly in conflict zones. Another participant shared, "*People often think that women are too emotional and not fit for decision-making roles in peacebuilding.*"

As a result, decision-makers may be hesitant to deploy women in peacekeeping missions, even if they are fully capable and willing to serve. Prejudices based on gender may lead to the belief that women are less capable than men in this field, such as physical strength, decision-making, or handling stressful situations. These reasons can result in women being underestimated or undervalued in peacekeeping contexts, despite their skills and qualifications. When there are few visible examples of women succeeding in peacekeeping or security roles, it can perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce the idea that these positions are not suitable or attainable for women. This lack of representation can discourage women from

pursuing careers in peacekeeping and limit their opportunities for advancement in the field. Stereotypes about women's capabilities also emerged as a significant barrier.

Power Dynamics

Peacekeeping processes have mostly male leadership structures, with men holding key decision-making positions. This imbalance in power dynamics can perpetuate a culture where male perspectives and priorities are prioritized, making it difficult for women to have their voices heard and their interests represented. Gendered hierarchies within peacekeeping institutions can create barriers to women's advancement and inclusion. Women may face discrimination and stereotyping based on their gender, limiting their opportunities for leadership and decision-making roles within peacekeeping initiatives. A participant explained, "*Men hold most of the power in these organizations, and women's voices are often sidelined.*" According to the participant's opinion, Cultural norms and structural barriers within peacekeeping organizations may reinforce existing power imbalances and contribute to the exclusion of women. This can include discriminatory practices, lack of support for work-life balance, and limited opportunities for professional development and advancement for women in peacekeeping roles. Power dynamics often resist change, particularly when it challenges existing structures of privilege and authority. Efforts to promote gender

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan

equality and increase women's participation in peacekeeping may face resistance from those who benefit from the existing structure, further disseminating the exclusion of women from decision-making processes.

Security Concerns

According to the respondent's view, "*There are serious security risks for women in these areas, and this discourages their participation*".

Peacekeeping missions often involve working in challenging and sometimes dangerous environments, including areas affected by armed conflict or instability. Concerns about the physical safety of women, including the risk of gender-based violence and harassment, may lead decision-makers to be hesitant to deploy women in such contexts. In conflict-affected regions, security concerns may be used as a justification for excluding women from certain roles. Some peacekeeping roles require security clearance and access to sensitive information or areas, which may be more difficult for women to obtain due to discriminatory practices or biases. Concerns about women's ability to meet security requirements and access restricted areas may result in their exclusion from certain peacekeeping roles.

Institutional barriers

Peacebuilding institutions may have policies and practices that unintentionally favor men or perpetuate gender biases. For example, recruitment and promotion processes may be biased towards traditional male-dominated fields,

making it difficult for women to enter or advance in these institutions. Peacebuilding programs and strategies may not adequately consider the specific needs, perspectives, and contributions of women. Without a gender-sensitive approach, women's voices and experiences may be marginalized or overlooked in peacebuilding processes.

Respondents further explained that Women may face challenges in accessing the resources, training, funding, and networking opportunities necessary to participate fully in peacebuilding initiatives. Institutional barriers, such as discriminatory practices or lack of support for women's leadership development, can hinder women's ability to engage effectively in peacebuilding activities. Women are often underrepresented in decision-making bodies and leadership positions within peacebuilding institutions. This lack of representation can result in women's priorities and perspectives being marginalized or ignored in the design and implementation of peacebuilding programs. Participants identified institutional barriers as a major hindrance. *"The policies and practices in place are not supportive of women's participation. There's a need for more gender-sensitive approaches"*.

DISCUSSION

In peacebuilding efforts, institutional barriers often hinder the meaningful inclusion of women, spreading gender inequalities and limiting the effectiveness of peacebuilding initiatives (Swaner, 2015 & Gupta, 2014). Gender discrimination in policies and practices can

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan

support men and marginalize women, while a lack of gender-sensitive approaches may overlook women's needs and contributions (Mustafa, 2017). Women often face limited access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making roles within peacebuilding institutions, further exacerbating their exclusion. Cultural norms and structural barriers reinforce gender inequalities, restricting women's participation and agency in peacebuilding processes. Additionally, inadequate protection and support mechanisms leave women vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination, discouraging their engagement in peacebuilding activities. Addressing these institutional barriers requires systemic changes, including the adoption of gender-sensitive policies, the promotion of women's leadership, and the creation of supportive environments that empower women to contribute effectively to peacebuilding efforts. By dismantling these barriers, peacebuilding initiatives can become more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable, ultimately leading to more equitable and effective outcomes for peace and stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some recommendations to address the exclusion of women in peacebuilding processes in Punjab, Pakistan:

Awareness Campaigns and Capacity Building

Launch targeted awareness campaigns to educate communities about the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding. Develop and deliver

capacity-building programs to equip women with the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively participate in peacebuilding efforts. These programs could cover topics like negotiation, conflict resolution, mediation, and advocacy.

Addressing Societal and Cultural Barriers

Partner with religious leaders and community influencers to challenge traditional gender roles that limit women's participation in public spheres. Support initiatives that promote gender equality and women's empowerment within communities.

Institutional Reforms

Advocate for policy changes that ensure women's representation in peacebuilding committees and decision-making bodies. Work with government agencies to develop clear guidelines and quotas for women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives. Provide logistical and financial support to women peacebuilders, allowing them to participate effectively.

Security Measures

Conduct security assessments to identify and address potential risks faced by women peacebuilders, particularly in conflict zones. Develop and implement security protocols to ensure the safety of women engaged in peacebuilding activities.

Monitoring and Evaluation

A Study on Reasons for Exclusion of Women in Peace building Processes in Punjab, Pakistan

Establish mechanisms to monitor progress on women's inclusion in peacebuilding processes. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of implemented strategies and make adjustments as needed. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, civil society organizations, and community leaders can create a more inclusive environment for women's participation in peacebuilding processes in Punjab, Pakistan. This can ultimately lead to more sustainable peace and a fairer society for all.

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