

## **Role of Young Women in Peace Building and Violence Prevention in Pakistan: A Literature Review**

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*Empowering young women as agents of peacebuilding and violence prevention is a crucial step toward achieving sustainable peace and gender equality. This review is aimed to understand the role of young women in peacebuilding and violence prevention in Pakistan. This review paper explored the transformative role that young women can play in conflict resolution, community building, and violence prevention to equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and platforms. Despite their potential, young women often face systematic barriers such as gender discrimination, limited access to education, and social marginalization, restricting their full participation in peace processes. This review also discussed strategies for creating an inclusive environment that promotes young women's leadership in peacebuilding, including policy recommendations and community-based initiatives. By investing in the empowerment of young women, societies can strap their unique perspectives and abilities to foster long-lasting peace and prevent cycles of violence, ultimately*

*contributing to more stout and equitable communities.*

**Key Words:** *Peacebuilding, Violence Prevention, Gender Equality, Pakistan*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

“Peacebuilding” is the process of eliminating violent and traumatizing conflicts by justly providing resources for personal survival while promoting social justice. It’s necessary to avoid conflicting situations which are deadly or traumatic activities occurring between organized groups of people, communities, tribes, and countries. Women have been very important in keeping the peace around the world. The participation of women has been very important in promoting lasting peace on a local and worldwide level. People worldwide are becoming increasingly aware of women’s importance in achieving and maintaining peace. When the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 (UNSCR, 1325) in 2000, it made it clear that women must be fully and equally involved in all efforts to keep and support peace and security (United Nations, 2000). Since UNSCR 1325 and later decisions, women have had to be involved in peace talks, girls and women have had to be protected from gender-based violence during wars, and gender perspectives have had to be included in efforts to build peace.

The Global state of violence prevention and peacebuilding worldwide in 2023 is a complicated and dynamic environment. The UN Peacebuilding Fund is experiencing financial deficiencies despite continuous efforts in various conflict-affected countries, as the

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demand for peacebuilding projects continues to outpace the available resources. As an example, in 2023, the Fund granted nearly \$200 million for projects in 36 countries, with a focus on important issues including the reintegration of ex-combatants, election violence prevention, and transitional justice.

The integration of gender equality and youth empowerment has been a success of these initiatives, particularly in areas like the Central African Republic, Guinea, and Colombia, where targeted efforts have demonstrated measurable benefits in lowering community tensions and building trust between various groups. Despite these achievements, there are still difficulties, especially in maintaining long-term violence prevention programs. The core causes of violence, which frequently include intricate social structures and the need for persistent political and social will, must be addressed through an evidence-based approach to effective prevention. Unfortunately, many solutions are hampered by funding irregularities and short timetables, which reduces their effectiveness and erodes confidence in preventative measures (United Nations, 2000).

Furthermore, there is a rising focus on "localization" in peacebuilding, which refers to modifying solutions to fit the unique requirements and environments of regional populations. The efficacy and viability of programs aimed at preventing violence are becoming more and more dependent on this strategy. The implementation of localized solutions might present certain challenges, too, as they necessitate close

collaboration among many parties and the abandonment of conventional, top-down approaches to peacebuilding.

The stability and cohesion of communities rely heavily on the practice of peacebuilding and the prevention of conflicts. Young women are an essential yet underutilized demographic in several activities in many nations, including Pakistan. Promoting the active involvement of young women in violence prevention and peacebuilding not only promotes gender equality but also enhances the overall success of these initiatives. It examines the context, significance, and challenges of empowering young women in Pakistan, who play a crucial role in peacebuilding and violence prevention (UN Women, 2022).

### **An Overview of Pakistan**

Pakistan has the sixth-largest absolute number of child brides in the world, with nearly 19 million. Poverty and regressive social conventions force millions of girls into early marriage each year. In addition to limiting their voice and decision-making, these norms also contribute to a low level of health and well-being, a lack of knowledge about their rights, and rendering them vulnerable to violence. Gender disparities persist at every level, and women's literacy rate is still only 49%. At the primary level, the net enrolment rate (NER) for females is a mere 56%, rising to 29% at the middle level and 19% at the matric level. The economic requirements of young women are being severely neglected, as 55% of them are presently not engaged in employment, education, or

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training. The education level has significantly improved; however, educational facilities are not adequately equipped to provide a quality education and a conducive learning environment for all students, particularly females (National Status on Women of Pakistan, 2023).

Pakistan a developing country, also presents multiple challenges for women and their participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Women in Pakistan, who constitute nearly half the country's population, have been experiencing disparities in all aspects of life, including health, education, employment, political participation, decision-making, economic opportunities, asset and property ownership, and more. Their mobility and access to scholastic and economic opportunities are still being restricted by numerous structural and sociocultural barriers. The obstacles are profound and are even more deeply ingrained in rural and remote regions (National Status on Women of Pakistan, 2023). In general, women's accomplishments are often forgotten in many areas of life. Women's involvement in creating peace and resolving conflicts has been observed to make peace processes last longer and cover more areas (UN Women, 2022). In Pakistan, women have done a lot to promote peace and security, especially during the country's long fight against terrorism and extremism (Khan, 2017). Even though

women in Pakistan make important accomplishments, they have a hard time taking part in building peace and making decisions. Pakistan is also experiencing issues in keeping the peace and stopping

bloodshed. Traditionally, attempts to build peace have been led from the top down. However, a new study shows that young women can make a huge difference in making society more peaceful (UN Women, 2022). Therefore, it is important to understand the role of young women in making peace. Further, literature is scarce regarding young women's participation in peacebuilding and violence prevention in Eastern and Islamic societies like Pakistan; however, longstanding literature is available in Western settings. Hence, bridging the gap, this review paper aims to understand the role of young women in peacebuilding and violence prevention in Pakistan to bridge the gap in existing literature.

### **Theoretical Foundation – Feminist Approach**

Feminist theory Wollstonecraft (1792) offers a strong framework for comprehending the vital role that young women play in promoting peace and preventing violence, especially when viewed through the lenses of intersectionality and transformative justice. This idea highlights the significance of opposing patriarchal systems, appreciating the special role played by young women, and advancing gender equality as necessary elements of long-term peace.

Feminist philosophy also highlights how crucial it is to acknowledge young women's agency. In the past, young women have typically been seen as victims in conflict circumstances, and their contributions to peace processes have frequently been downplayed or overlooked. Feminist theory, on the other hand, refutes

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this idea by emphasizing the vital and active roles that young women play in preventing violence and promoting peace.

The argument is that in these processes, young women ought to have the authority to lead and make decisions. Young women who are empowered become active agents of change rather than passive beneficiaries of peacebuilding activities. This is achieved by giving them the tools, training, and opportunities necessary to participate effectively in peace initiatives.

The criticism of patriarchy, a system in which men rule and wield power in a variety of areas of life, such as politics, economics, and social conventions, is a fundamental component of feminist philosophy. According to feminist philosophy, the only way to build lasting peace is to destroy the patriarchal systems that support violence and gender inequality. This entails fighting against social norms that keep young women out of leadership positions and promoting their participation in peace processes. Feminist theory aims to establish a more just and equal society, which is necessary for long-lasting peace by addressing the underlying causes of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Feminist philosophy promotes a transformative approach to justice that addresses the larger societal inequities that fuel conflict rather than only punishing violent offenders. The main goals of transformative justice are interpersonal restoration, healing, and systemic changes that stop violence in the future. This strategy entails helping to change the social norms that permit acts

of violence against women, in addition to pursuing justice for any acts of violence they may have personally witnessed. This entails advancing gender equality, opposing discriminatory behaviors, and fighting for laws that enable young women to fully engage in society.

The significance of community and collective action in peacebuilding is also emphasized by feminist philosophy. Using their voices and organizing abilities to effect change in their communities, young women are frequently the innovators of grassroots movements for social justice and peace. By promoting the acknowledgment and amplification of young women's contributions to peace, feminist peacebuilding aids in these aspires. By empowering young women to collaborate and confront the underlying causes of violence and conflict in their communities, this collaborative method promotes solidarity.

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

This review employs a secondary analysis of existing research articles. Based on review objectives, key search terms were developed for searching relevant articles regarding the role of young women in Peacebuilding and violence prevention in Pakistan. These included “Peacebuilding and young women in Pakistan”, “Violence Prevention and young women in Pakistan”, “young women participation in peacebuilding initiative in Pakistan”, “women empowerment and Peace in Pakistan”, and “socio-cultural barriers Faced by Women in Peacebuilding in Pakistan”. These search terms were



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applied in Google Scholar and a total of 25 articles were shortlisted and included in this review paper, which is considered sufficient for review (Baker, 2000).

It is pertinent to mention here that these articles were searched during May and June 2024 by two researchers, who completed article shortlisting and securitizing in July 2024. All articles were rigorously evaluated and synthesized. Emerging themes and sub-themes were identified to present the review findings.

### **KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The following section presented the themes/sub-themes based on review findings:

#### **Significance of Peacebuilding for Pakistani Society**

The review findings revealed that peacebuilding is critical in establishing and maintaining long-term peace in societies like Pakistan, due to several factors, as follows:

##### **Protection from Gender-Based Violence**

When gender-based violence occurs during or after conflicts, young women are frequently disproportionately affected. Peacebuilding initiatives that prioritize eradicating violence, advancing gender parity, and guaranteeing everyone's security can aid in shielding young women from mistreatment, exploitation, and intimidation.

##### **Empowerment and Inclusion**

Initiatives for peacebuilding frequently incorporate elements designed to guarantee women's participation in decision-making and to empower them. In Pakistan, young women could be excluded or ostracized, which is

vital. By involving them in peace processes, their needs and viewpoints are taken into consideration, resulting in a more all-encompassing and long-lasting peace.

### **Access to Education and Economic Opportunities**

Access to economic and educational possibilities is hampered by conflict, which can have long-term effects on the lives of young women. Rebuilding schools, generating jobs, and offering vocational training in Pakistan are very important components of peacebuilding initiatives that empower young women to shape their own destinies and make valuable contributions to their communities.

### **Promoting Gender Equality**

In order to help young women, reach their full potential in both their personal and societal life, peacebuilding can assist in removing obstacles that stand in the way of their gender equality. The Pakistani government has taken step to increase gender equality by reserving parliament seats for women.

### **Mental Health and Trauma Recovery**

Conflict-affected young women may suffer from severe psychological damage. They can recover and start afresh with the aid of trauma recovery programs and mental health care provided by peacebuilding. Their ability to actively engage in society and their general well-being depends on this.

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### **Role Models and Leadership Opportunities**

Pakistan provides leadership opportunities for young women. Peacebuilding gives young women the chance to assume leadership positions and set an example for their communities. This could serve as an example for other young girls and women, inspiring a new wave of leaders dedicated to equality and peace.

### **Building Resilient Communities**

In societies, young women are an integral part of the social fabric. They help create more resilient, peaceful societies where future generations can flourish by participating in peacebuilding. Their participation ensures that peacebuilding initiatives are grounded in the needs and realities of every member of the community.

### **Preventing Future Conflicts**

Societies can address issues that specifically concern young women, like education, healthcare, and security, by involving them in peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is an investment in long-term stability because of this proactive strategy, which helps to avert the circumstances that could result in future wars.

### ***Inadequate Family support***

In Pakistan, generally, peacebuilding tactics are more likely to discourage violence by fostering tolerance and respect among diverse groups (Zia & Wagner, 2015). Understanding this helps promote principles of peaceful coexistence and respect for basic human rights, which in

turn reduces disputes in the here and now and strengthens social stability in the long run. A report on Women and Peacebuilding in Pakistan's North West (Crisis Asian Report, 2022) highlighted how women's roles in building peace in Pakistan's tribal areas have changed since the 2018 constitutional change that combined the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province. In the past, customary law (reward) and tribe meetings (jirgas) in these areas put women down and often allowed very bad gender-based abuse to happen. When Islamist militancy first started to grow, some women supported the militants as an escape from tribal abuse.

However, this support faded as it became clear that the militants were abusing women. Even though militancy and counter-insurgency operations were hard, women fought back against both militant and tribal abuse by building peace at the local level and calling for political changes. New law rights were added by the merger, but they are still not being enforced equally, and old ways of doing things are still being used. The study stresses that everyone needs to work together to make sure that women have access to justice, economic empowerment, and political involvement so that they can fully reach their full potential as peacebuilders in the area.

Further, O'Reilly (2016) explored that excluding woman is a significant cause of state failure and war. Even though there are more calls for more open ways to

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solve conflicts in the 21st century, things don't change quickly. From 1992 to 2011, only 2% of judges and 9% of speakers who were women took part in official peace talks.

### ***Role of Community in Awareness-Raising***

The local context of Lahore is characterized by a scarcity of research on the role of young women in promoting harmony and preventing violence. Ali (2018) conducted research on the perspectives and experiences of young women, despite their strong determination and willingness to support peace-promoting projects, the study demonstrated that young women encounter a variety of obstacles, including restricted employment access, societal prejudice against women's activism, and limited educational opportunities.

It is exceedingly challenging to attract young women in Lahore to join in peacebuilding projects due to the significant cultural and socioeconomic barriers that exist in the city. There are several areas in which cultural and gender norms may make it difficult for women to fully participate in public life. One of these areas is the promotion of peace. It has been suggested by Shaheed (2010) that in certain societies, women's participation in peacebuilding efforts are impeded. This is because women's responsibilities inside the family are given higher priority than their participation in public activities.

### ***Socio-cultural Barriers***

Socio-cultural barriers substantially impede the

involvement of young women in peacebuilding initiatives. In numerous countries, women's participation in public affairs is restricted, and their influence in decision-making processes is undermined by gender norms and customs. The presence of these barriers is particularly apparent in Pakistan due to patriarchal structures that prioritize male authority and restrict women's autonomy in terms of decision-making and mobility.

The justification for this familial control frequently originates from factors such as honor and reputation, which are intricately linked to the conduct of women in South Asian civilizations (Shaheed, 2010). Consequently, young women may be subjected to substantial pressure to adhere to traditional gender roles, which restricts their capacity to participate in peacebuilding initiatives.

A review, to investigate the influence of cultural and societal norms on the involvement of young women in peacebuilding initiatives in Punjab. The research indicates that the agency and autonomy of young women are frequently restricted by traditional gender norms and expectations, which impede their active participation in peacebuilding initiatives. The most recent study on women's empowerment in Pakistan concentrated on a variety of factors, such as education, political participation, economic involvement, and violence (Hussain & Malik, 2020).

When it comes to peacebuilding, young women face significant obstacles because of privacy and security concerns. Assaults and harassment based on gender are

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common in Pakistan, making it dangerous for women to participate in public life young women may be hesitant to participate in peacebuilding efforts because of concerns about sexual harassment, assault, and societal shame (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

There is a substantial impact from budgetary limitations as well. The transportation, training, and material expenses that come with participation in peacebuilding activities are beyond reach of many young women since they hail from low-income families (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Zia (2009) notes that these difficulties are made worse because institutions, such as local organizations, do not promote young women's participation in peacebuilding efforts.

Women frequently report experiencing emotions of uneasiness in public places, which are characterized by the risk of being harassed verbally as well as physically because of their gender. It is because of the fear that is induced by this intimidation that young females are unable to participate in meetings, seminars, or other activities that are aimed at promoting peace in community settings. According to (Khan, 2016), the scrutiny and potential harmful repercussions that women may face from society for deviating from established standards increase their reluctance to participate in public life. This has a multiplicative effect on their reluctance to participate. Constructing safe venues and executing precautionary measures is vital to enable young women to participate in peacebuilding activities. This is necessary to address concerns regarding information security.

Furthermore, due to fear of personal security, many young women do not participate in peacebuilding events held in open areas (Sathar & Kazi, 2000). Another barrier is the lack of local organizations that encourage young women to participate in peacebuilding. Ensuring young women have institutional support, resources, and encouragement to participate in these activities is crucial if we want them to happen. Their efforts will continue to be disjointed and useless until they receive this support (Zia, 2009).

### ***Limited Education Opportunities***

The review result determined that persistent bias and distance from school were the primary factors contributing to the gender disparity in Pakistani higher education. No text is supplied. Particularly in countries marked by interfaith complications, such as Pakistan, peace education is essential for cultivating cooperation and understanding among diverse populations. The Centre for Dialogue and Action conducted a study that examined the impact of peace education activities on interfaith relations and emphasized the importance of accepting and respecting alternative beliefs. Additionally, it underscores the critical importance of peace education in the development of tolerance, the resolution of conflicts, and the promotion of constructive relationships among diverse social groups. This research illustrates the significant influence of peace education on the attitudes and behaviors of students toward peacebuilding, the promotion of cultural comprehension, and the cultivation



## Role of Young Women in Peace Building and Violence Prevention in Pakistan of interfaith harmony.

Young women's participation in peacebuilding is impeded by structural obstacles, including limited access to resources, training, and institutional support. Actively participating in the peacebuilding process necessitates access to education. Nevertheless, Pakistan continues to experience gender disparities in education, as evidenced by the high attrition rates and the limited opportunities for females to pursue higher education. By opening doors to greater economic and social independence for women, education has the potential to alter the nation's social fabric. Education empowers women, allowing them to take part in development-promoting social businesses and make better life decisions. To gain agency and lessen Respondents to the Bates (2004) found that respondents in his survey reasonably encouraged their daughters to pursue higher education in light of the dangers of marital abuse.

The empowerment of women and their capacity to triumph over any type of violence, including domestic abuse, depends on their access to quality education. It was underlined in the study that Khan and Ahmed (2019) said that education can enable young women to actively participate in peacebuilding efforts in Punjab. The findings of the study highlighted the need to ensure that young women have access to education and training programs of the highest possible quality. Being able to successfully participate in peacebuilding activities and acquire the essential skills and knowledge will be made possible for them as a result of this.

Another reviewed article highlighted the significance of peacebuilding for teenagers, especially in school settings. It looked at how well secondary school teachers used peacebuilding tactics. Researchers concluded that schools should reconsider their policies and curriculum to better support students' initiatives to promote peace. Peace education materials, including lectures and presentations, should supplement instructors' participation in continuing professional development programs. Furthermore, the article proposes enhancing the social studies curriculum with peace-building activities, creating a calm school environment, and modifying educational regulations to include peace-building tactics (Khan, et al., 2021).

To encourage young women to take part in peacebuilding efforts, education is crucial. There are large gender gaps in Pakistan when it comes to enrollment and retention rates, thus not everyone has equal access to high-quality education (Aslam, 2009). Comprehensive training in peace education and conflict prevention may be challenging for educational institutions to deliver due to curriculum and resource limitations (Mumtaz, 2006). It is crucial to improve educational opportunities for young women so they may acquire the skills and information needed to participate effectively in peacebuilding initiatives.

### ***Policy and Institutional support***

Several suggested strategies have been offered to increase

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the influence and involvement of young women in promoting peace and preventing violence. The strategies encompass the implementation of training programs that prioritize gender sensitivity, the creation of safe and supportive conditions for public participation, and the promotion of mentoring and the engagement of role models in peacebuilding projects (UN Women, 2015). Furthermore, it is crucial to implement legislative measures that specifically target and eliminate obstacles firmly embedded in society systems and promote equitable opportunities for women. These interventions are crucial for establishing an environment that enables young women to actively participate in building peace (Hudson et al., 2012).

The 2018 Punjab Peace and Reconciliation Commission (PRC) report gave an overview of the historical background of the Punjab conflict. It emphasized the need for specific measures to address the root causes of violence. The report recommended that educational campaigns be undertaken in addition to capacity-building programs to enhance peace-building understanding among different communities within the area. Similarly, sexual assault cases, harassment, and inadequate personal safety have been highlighted by (Sathar & Haque, 2000); World Bank, 2007 & UNESCO, 2010).

The Biden-Harris Administration has put front and center its commitment to advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda on the occasion of NATO's 75th Anniversary Summit. It resonates with how essential

women's involvement is in securing nations' stability. That commitment expresses itself in some notable moves that underline the efforts taken up through the adoption of the revised NATO WPS strategy on tackling new security threats, besides putting considerable commitments into servicing Ukrainian women and launching the Women LEAD project to strengthen women's leadership worldwide. These activities form part of a more comprehensive policy aimed at introducing the concept of gender equality as an integral part of national and international security frameworks for furthering democracy and ensuring sustainable peace. The strategy is commensurate with broader initiatives and tends to strengthen gender equality as a precondition for lasting national and international security (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

The current research on empowering young women in Lahore, Pakistan, for violence prevention and peacebuilding emphasizes the need to remove institutional obstacles and provide young women with the essential tools and assistance to actively engage in peacebuilding endeavors. To increase the involvement of young women in peacebuilding activities and foster long-lasting peace in the area, it is imperative to do further study to explore effective tactics and interventions.

### ***Safety concerns***

When it comes to peacebuilding, young women face significant obstacles because of privacy and security

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concerns. Assaults and harassment based on gender are common in Pakistan, making it dangerous for women to participate in public life (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Budgetary limitations have a substantial impact as well. The transportation, training, and material expenses that come with participation in peacebuilding activities are beyond reach for many young women since they hail from low-income families (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Zia (2009) notes that these difficulties are made worse because institutions, such as local organizations, do not promote young women's participation in peacebuilding efforts.

Women frequently report experiencing emotions of uneasiness in public places, which are characterized by the risk of being harassed verbally as well as physically because of their gender. It is because of the fear that is induced by this intimidation that young females are unable to participate in meetings, seminars, or other activities that are aimed at promoting peace in community settings. According to (Khan,2016), the scrutiny and potential bad repercussions that women may face from society for deviating from established standards increase their reluctance to participate in public life. This has a multiplicative effect on their reluctance to participate. It is vital to construct safe venues and execute precautionary measures to enable young women to participate in peacebuilding activities. This is necessary to address concerns regarding information security.

### ***Limited Political participation***

Women's political participation in Pakistan is limited by socio-cultural and financial variables. There are however still few women as compared to men who get into politics to facilitate other women's access to necessary avenues for empowering themselves politically (True et al., 2014). Furthermore, for fear of personal security, many people do not participate in peacebuilding events held in the open (Sathar & Kazi, 2000). Another barrier is the lack of local organizations that encourage young women to participate in peacebuilding. Ensuring young women have institutional support, resources, and encouragement to participate in these activities is crucial if we want them to happen. Their efforts will continue to be disjointed and useless until they receive this support (Zia, 2009).

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, young women play a critical role in violence prevention and peacebuilding, offering unique perspectives and creative solutions essential for sustainable peace. By actively challenging prevailing gender norms, they guarantee that peace initiatives are more inclusive and representative. Young women contribute to the decrease of violence and the reinforcement of social ties by engaging in conversations, advocating, and community-based projects. Giving them resources, leadership opportunities, and educational support improves their capacity to effect significant change. Young women are important contributors to

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peace initiatives, shaping and gaining from the process while building healthier, more resilient communities. Achieving long-lasting peace and averting more violence requires amplifying their voices and participation.

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