Relationship between Legal Awareness and Attitude towards Gender Based Violence among Educated Women Living in Punjab, Pakistan

Dr. Qaisar Khalid Mahmood[1]

[1,] Assistant Professor Department of Gender Studies University of the Punjab, Lahore Qaisar.dgs@pu.edu.pk

Abstract

The Global Gender Gap Index places Pakistan 142nd out of 146 in terms of providing equal opportunities to both genders in 2022. Pakistani women and girls are more vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence (GBV) as compared to other developing and developed countries. The federal government of Pakistan and the provincial governments have passed various pro-women laws to provide legal protection to GBV victims and their families. Thus, there is an urgent need to educate women and girls about their legal rights as a proactive measure to counter GBV in Pakistani society. This study aims to examine the relationship between legal awareness and attitudes toward GBV among educated women living in Punjab, Pakistan. This study was quantitative in nature. The researcher used a cross-sectional survey method to collect the data from the respondents. The researcher collected data from 785 young, educated women living in Lahore. Respondents were female students and young married working women. Legal awareness was measured using a six-item Likert scale. The researcher measured attitudes towards GBV using two constructs: attitudes towards domestic violence and attitudes towards other forms of GBV. Findings indicate that the scales used for legal awareness and attitudes towards GBV were reliable and valid. Legal awareness played a significant role in predicting attitudes toward domestic violence ($\beta = .61$, $R = .37$, $p < .05$) and also explained attitudes toward other forms of GBV ($\beta = .39$, $R = .15$, $p < .05$). This study concluded that educated women with an understanding of their legal rights demonstrate increased agency in contesting societal norms that sustain violence. Therefore, there is urgent need to improve legal literacy among women, especially in settings where gender-based violence is more prevalent.

Keywords: Gender Based Violence, Legal Awareness, Women, Pakistan

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on their gender, particularly against women, and is one of the most widespread human rights violations worldwide. Acts of GBV include, inter alia, sexual violence and harassment, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, e.g., forced marriage, 'honor' killings, and other discriminatory practices based on gender (European Commission, 2024). The cycle of GBV is self-perpetuating. It starts out with gender inequality, progresses to social isolation, and results in violence against women. Even though ending GBV is part of one of the sustainable development goals, more than one in three women and girls worldwide, ages 15 to 49, experienced physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime (World Bank, 2019). The situation is quite adverse in developing countries like Pakistan, where 32% of women have faced some form of gender-based violence in

---

their lifetime (UNFPA Pakistan, 2024). In 2022, Pakistan was placed 142nd out of 146 in terms of providing equal opportunities to both genders in the Global Gender Gap Index (UN Women Pakistan, 2023). On one side, women face discrimination in equal opportunities for education, employment, and health care, and on the other side, they face violence. Another report ranked Pakistan 158th out of 170 in the Georgetown Institute's Women, Peace, and Security Index (GIWPS, 2024). A similar situation is echoed in a Reuters Foundation report as well, which places Pakistan as the sixth most dangerous country for women overall and the fifth worst in terms of domestic violence practices (Reuters, 2018). These statistics, though, do not completely describe the severity of the situation. Around 63,000 cases of gender-based violence (GBV) were reported in Pakistan over the past three years (Abbas, 2023). One in two Pakistani women who have been the victim of violence never sought assistance or disclosed what they had gone through (Ullah, 2022). Thus, Pakistani women and girls are more vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence as compared to other developing and developed countries. Numerous factors contribute to GBV in Pakistan, making it difficult to pinpoint just one or two causes. Patriarchal values (Hadi, 2017), poverty (Khan, 2020), lack of education (Tahir et al., 2021), women's underrepresentation in politics (Rozina et al., 2012), lack of empowerment, high crime rates, and inadequate legal protection are just a few of the factors (Khan, 2020). In recent years, various pro-women laws have been passed at the national and provincial levels to provide legal protection to the victims of GBV and their families (National Commission on the Status of Women, 2023).

This includes;
1. Anti-rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021,
2. The Enforcement of Women's Property Rights (Amendment) Act, 2021,
3. The Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act, 2020,
4. The Zainab Alert, Recovery, and Response Act, 2020,
5. Anti-rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021
6. Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, 2018
7. Transgender Persons (Protection and Rights) Act 2018
8. Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act, 2011 (Offences of Acid Throwing)
9. Criminal Law (Third Amendment) Act, 2011 (of offences against women)
10. Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act, 2016 (Criminalizing CSA)

The vast majority of the population is unaware of these laws. Due to strong patriarchal values, police officers and judges often fail to investigate and hear cases on their merits, preventing people from reporting and pursuing them. Furthermore, pursuing the cases in court is both costly and time-consuming. Knowing this, various projects have been implemented to build the capacity of judges, police officers, lawyers, and civil society members to implement existing GBV laws. Workshops were held to teach participants how to effectively respond to victims of GBV. However, the situation will not improve unless women's awareness of their legal rights improves. As a result, there is an urgent need to educate women and girls about their legal rights as a proactive measure to counter GBV in Pakistani society.

Literature Review
Legal awareness, also known as legal literacy, is the empowerment of individuals regarding legal issues (Damayanti, Khairunisa & Fajriani, 2024). It can foster a clearer understanding of the public's rights and obligations to help them get better information, exercise their rights, and fulfill their duties more successfully. Consequently, it promotes legal culture awareness, participation in the formation of laws, and the rule of law. Legal awareness is essential for people to actively

participate in society, enabling them to contribute meaningfully. If they are now aware of their legal rights, it can lead them to feel "intimidated and alienated" from the law (Freudenberg, 2017). For a nation to progress towards becoming a developed country, it is essential for its citizens to possess legal awareness. A lack of legal awareness in a country can led to a significant increase in criminal activities (Kuncorowati, 2009). Previous research emphasizes that legal literacy is appropriate for two groups: marginalized and discriminated members of society. Pakistani women are the marginalized group of the male-dominated society. In that scenario, they can utilize their knowledge of legal procedures to respond to any act of GBV. Studies indicate that women who understand their legal rights are more inclined to take action against those who abuse them. Ullah (2022) indicates that women in Pakistan who possess knowledge of GBV laws are more empowered to report incidents and pursue legal action. This understanding not only supports specific cases but also plays a role in contributing to broader change in society by questioning the acceptance of violence against women. Ramachandran et al. (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of a legal awareness initiative in Uganda. The results indicated that women who underwent legal education possessed a greater understanding of their rights and the legal procedures for addressing gender-based violence. This enhanced understanding resulted in increased rates of reporting gender-based violence and pursuing legal protection. A study was conducted in India to investigate the influence of legal awareness on the empowerment of women in India. Findings indicated that higher levels of education, income, and professional involvement are favorably associated with legal knowledge among women. Furthermore, it revealed an inverse correlation between legal awareness and victimization, indicating that informed women are less prone to experiencing violence. This study highlights the significance of legal knowledge in enabling women to confront sexual abuse and assault (Guru, 2025). Every aspect of sustainable development is influenced by gender-based violence. Consequently, each development initiative presents an opportunity to tackle the underlying factors of violence and transform detrimental social norms that not only place women at a greater risk of violence but also hinder progress (Stevenson, Zimmerman & Antoni, 2023). This underscores the necessity for Pakistan to eradicate gender-based violence to advance its developmental agenda. To successfully address GBV in Pakistan, enhanced collaboration among the public, private, and civil society sectors is essential (Samo, 2023).

Methodology
Study Design
This study was quantitative in nature. The researcher used cross sectional survey method to collect the data from the respondents. This study conducted in Punjab, Pakistan. Punjab is the most populous province in Pakistan. All those women and girls who are between the age of 20 to 60 years. The data was collected from 785 young educated women residing in Lahore. Respondents were law and social science (gender studies, sociology and social work) students and young married working women of these disciplines. The respondents were informed about the objectives of the study and the anonymity of the data. The respondents were not being offered any incentive to participate in this study. The respondents were asked to provide consent before providing the answers to the questionnaire.

Measures
Legal Awareness
This variable refers to an individual's understanding of legal rights, obligations, and procedures. It assesses people's knowledge of the laws that regulate their society and their ability to work through the legal system. Legal literacy includes understanding fundamental legal principles, recognizing when legal assistance is required, and the ability to interact with legal institutions

when needed. High legal literacy is frequently associated with enhanced empowerment, improved access to justice, and superior protection of individual rights. This variable was measured on six items Likert Scale. These items were developed on the knowledge about pro women laws. These items are;

1. To what extent are you aware that women have specific inheritance rights under Islamic law in Pakistan?
2. To what extent are you aware that there is a specific law in Pakistan that provides protection against domestic violence?
3. To what extent are you aware of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010?
4. To what extent are you aware of the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011?
5. To what extent are you aware of the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2011?
6. To what extent are you aware of The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 amended in 2015?

Attitude towards Various forms of GBV
This variable is measured with two constructs, attitude towards domestic violence and attitude towards other forms of gender-based violence. This variable measures an individual's attitudes, views, and tolerance for domestic violence, encompassing physical, emotional, and psychological abuse within a domestic environment. It assesses the degree to which individuals perceive domestic violence as acceptable or unacceptable, together with their awareness of its repercussions. Perspectives on domestic violence may vary from endorsement or rationalization of the act to unequivocal denunciation. Changes in these attitudes are frequently shaped by cultural, societal, and legal variables, and they are essential in the prevention and intervention of domestic violence incidents. Six measures were created to assess attitudes regarding domestic violence.

1. Victims of domestic violence can not to blamed for their partner's abusive behavior.
2. A husband cannot hit his wife under any circumstances.
3. Women who report domestic violence should be believed and supported by the authorities.
4. It is essential for communities to provide resources and safe spaces for victims of domestic violence.
5. Domestic violence is never acceptable under any circumstances.
6. Women should be aware of the laws that protect them from domestic and other forms of violence.

The attitude towards gender-based violence is intended to assess societal perceptions and attitudes regarding GBV within the Pakistani context. Gender-based violence denotes hurtful actions aimed at persons due to their gender. It includes various forms of abuse, such as honor-based violence, work harassment, cyber violence, and societal discrimination. This scale evaluates the degree to which individuals accept, tolerate, or reject these practices. Following five items were used to measure this variable.

1. Honor killings are not justified if a woman marries at her own.
2. Sexual harassment at workplace is not acceptable.
3. It is not right to impose restrictions on women's mobility to ensure their safety.

4. Sharing private information or photos of women online without their consent is a criminal offense.
5. Complaints of gender-based harassment at work are not exaggerated by women to gain attention or sympathy.

Findings

Table 1 presents the results of the inter-item correlation matrix for legal awareness. The results show a significant correlation between all items. The highest correlation (r = .731) was reported between items 1 and 3. The lowest correlation (r = .476) was reported between items 2 and 6.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis (Inter-Item Correlation Matrix) for legal awareness

	LL1	LL2	LL3	LL4	LL5	LL6
LL1	1.000	.565	.731	.565	.521	.520
LL2	-	1.000	.513	.487	.519	.474
LL3	-	-	1.000	.611	.521	.523
LL4	-	-	-	1.000	.534	.558
LL5	-	-	-	-	1.000	.520
LL6	-	-	-	-	-	1.000

Table 2 depicts the results of factor analysis for legal awareness. Findings indicate that this scale was highly reliable. The value of Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.877) was above the acceptable range (α > 0.70). The highest factor loading was reported for item 1 (.833), and the lowest factor loading was reported for item 2 (.747). Factor loadings for all items were above .70, indicating the validity of the scale. This scale explained 62 percent of the variance of the construct.

Table 2: Reliability analysis (Factor analysis) of legal literacy

Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Scale Mean	Eigen Value	Total Variance Explained
LL1	.833	0.877	19.30	3.727	62.118
LL2	.747				
LL3	.832				
LL4	.796				
LL5	.760				
LL6	.756				

The results of the inter-item correlation matrix for attitudes toward various forms of gender-based violence are presented in Table 3. The findings indicate that the items are interconnected and consistent. The majority of the items exhibited notable yet moderate to weak associations. Items 2 and 3 demonstrated the strongest correlation (r = .511). Items 4 and 6 exhibited the weakest correlation (r = .259).

Table 3: Reliability Analysis (Inter-Item Correlation Matrix) for attitude towards domestic violence

Items	DV1	DV2	DV3	DV4	DV5	DV6
DV1	1.000	.425	.390	.329	.262	.302
DV2	-	1.000	.511	.369	.361	.310

DV3	-	-	1.000	.467	.425	.388
DV4	-	-	-	1.000	.356	.259
DV5	-	-	-	-	1.000	.488
DV6	-	-	-	-	-	1.000

Table 4 describes the results of the factor analysis of attitudes toward domestic violence. Findings show that this scale was reliable. The value of Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.782) was above the acceptable range (α > 0.70). The highest factor loading was reported for item 3 (.781), and the lowest factor loading was reported for item 1 (.640). Factor loadings for all items were above .60, indicating the validity of the scale. This scale explained 48 percent of the variance of the construct.

Table 4: Reliability analysis (Factor analysis) of attitude towards domestic violence

Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Scale Mean	Eigen Value	Total Variance Explained
DV1	.640	0.782	20.91	2.893	48.211
DV2	.724				
DV3	.781				
DV4	.665				
DV5	.695				
DV6	.651				

Table 5 presents the findings from the inter-item correlation matrix regarding attitudes toward different forms of gender-based violence. The findings indicate that the items are interrelated and coherent. Most items exhibited significant, albeit moderate to weak, relationships. Items 4 and 5 exhibited the highest correlation, with a coefficient of r = .583. Items 2 and 6 exhibited the lowest correlation, with a coefficient of r = .322.

Table 5: Reliability Analysis (Inter-Item Correlation Matrix) for attitude towards other forms of gender-based violence

	OF1	OF2	OF3	OF4	OF5	OF6
OFV1	1.000	.486	.461	.411	.347	.304
OFV2	-	1.000	.587	.376	.394	.322
OFV3	-	-	1.000	.495	.457	.388
OFV4	-	-	-	1.000	.583	.423
OFV5	-	-	-	-	1.000	.490
OFV5	-	-	-	-	-	1.000

The results of the factor analysis regarding attitudes toward different forms of gender-based violence are presented in Table 6. The results indicate that this scale demonstrated reliability. The value of Cronbach's alpha (α = 0.882) exceeded the acceptable threshold (α > 0.70). The highest factor loading was observed for item 3 (.785), while the lowest factor loading was noted for item 5 (.658). The factor loadings for all items exceeded .60, demonstrating the scale's validity. This scale accounted for 53 percent of the variance of the construct.

Table 6: Reliability analysis (Factor analysis) of attitude towards other forms of gender-based violence

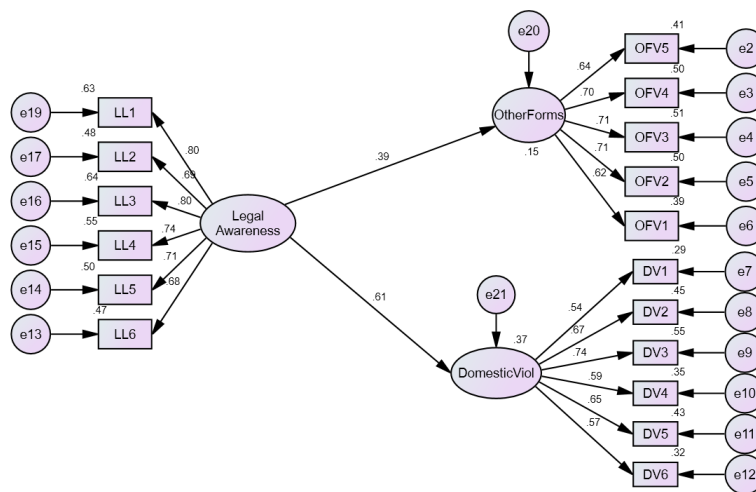| Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Scale Mean	Eigen Value	Total Explained	Variance
OFV1	.681	0.882	22.07	3.185	53.086	
OFV2	.726					
OFV3	.785					
OFV4	.759					
OFV5	.754					
OFV5	.658					

Figure 1: Relationship between legal awareness and attitudes towards gender-based violence

The results of the path analysis indicate that the fit indices fall within an acceptable range [χ^2=758.3, p>0.05; GFI=0.994; AGFI=0.938; TLI=0.907; CFI=0.985]. Figure 1 illustrates that legal awareness played a significant role in predicting attitudes toward domestic violence (β = .61, R = .37, p < .05). Legal awareness also explained attitudes toward various forms of gender-based violence (β = .39, R = .15, p < .05).

Conclusion

The research indicates that legal awareness correlates with proactive and unforgiving attitude towards gender-based violence. Educated women with an understanding of their legal rights demonstrate increased agency in contesting societal norms that sustain violence. This corresponds with prior studies suggesting that knowledge of legal rights enhances empowerment, allowing women to identify and combat gender-based violence. Thus, legal awareness serves as an essential measure, not only for personal safeguarding but also for communal campaigning against gender-based violence. This study highlights the urgent need for legislative measures to improve legal literacy among women, especially in settings where gender-based violence is more prevalent. Governmental and non-governmental organizations should prioritize projects that share legal rights and resource information in ways that are easy to understand and respect different cultures. Furthermore, we must make the legal system more accessible and less daunting for survivors of gender-based violence, ensuring that increased awareness leads to tangible changes.

References

Abbas, Z. (2023.). Around 63,000 GBV cases reported in past 3 years: NCHR. DAWN.COM. Retrieved from https://www.dawn.com/news/1741020

Damayanti, S., & Khairunisa, W. (2024). Building Legal Awareness of Citizens Through Civic Participation Competence in Civic Education. Abjad Journal of Humanities & Education, 2(2), 91-99.

European Commission (2024). What is gender-based violence? Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en.

GIWPS (2024). Country Profile- Pakistan. Retrieved from https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/pakistan/.

Guru, P. (2015). Legal Awareness—Hubris for Women to Combat Violence. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 03(09), 223–231. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2015.39030.

Freudenberg, B. (2017). Beyond lawyers: legal literacy for the future. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2780195

Hadi, A. (2019). Patriarchy and gender-based violence in Pakistan. European Journal of Social Science Education and Research, 6(1), 113-125.

Karmaliani, R., Pasha, A., Hirani, , S., Somani, , R., Hirani, , S., Asad, N., ... & McFarlane, , FAAN, J. (2012). Violence against women in Pakistan: contributing factors and new interventions. Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 33(12), 820-826.

Khan, U. (2020). Gender-Based Violence in Pakistan-a Critical Analysis (Master's thesis, Harvard University).

Kuncorowati, P. W. (2009). Menurunnya tingkat kesadaran hukum masyarakat di Indonesia. Jurnal Civics: Media Kajian Kewarganegaraan, 6(1).

National Commission on the Status of Women. (2023.). National Commission on the Status of Women. https://ncsw.gov.pk/Detail/OWYxM2U1MWYtZDZhNS00YTA3LWIwOTItNzBhMmZlMDIxNzlj#:~:text=List%20of%20Federal%20and%20Provincial,of%20Corporal%20Punishment%20Act%2C%202021.

Ramachandran, R., Namatovu, S., Atwine, D., Tumuhairwe, J., Nyakato, V. N., Kemigisha, E., & Ivanova, O. (2024). Repeat adolescent pregnancies in Southwestern Uganda: A cross-sectional study. Women's Health, 20, 17455057241302449.

Reuters (June 26, 2018). Factbox: Which Are the World's 10 Most Dangerous Countries for Women? Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-dangerous-poll-factbox-idUSKBN1JM01Z.

Samo, S. H. (2023, April 6). Strategies to eliminate violence against women. The Authentic Post. Retrieved from https://theauthenticpost.com/strategies-to-eliminate-violence-against-women/

Stevenson, J., Zimerman, J., & Antoni, D. (2023). Three ways to end gender-based violence. United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved from https://www.undp.org/blog/three-ways-end-gender-based-violence

Tahir, M., Rafiq, A., Yousufi, M., & Sheikh, M. K. (2021). Eradicating gender-based violence against female-intimate partner in Pakistan: A theoretical framework from Islamic philosophy. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 10(1).

UN Women Pakistan (2023). National Report on The Status of Women in Pakistan, 2023 A Summary. Retrieved from https://pakistan.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/summary_-nrsw-inl_final.pdf.

UNFPA Pakistan (2024). Gender-based violence. Retrieved from https://pakistan.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-based-violence-6

Ullah, M. S. (2022, December 5). A continuum of gender based violence. The Express Tribune. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2389500/a-continuum-of-gender-based-violence.

World Bank (2019). Gender-Based Violence (Violence Against Women and Girls). Retrieved from https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls.