



Violence Against Women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Socio-Cultural Analysis

¹Laila Ibrahim

¹Mphil Sociology, Kohat University of Science & Technology

lailakhattak78@gmail.com

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Corresponding Author*:

Laila Ibrahim

Abstract

Violence against women (VAW) remains one of the most pervasive human rights and public health challenges worldwide, disproportionately affecting women in patriarchal societies where socio-cultural norms often reinforce gender inequality. In Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), women continue to experience various forms of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse, despite legislative reforms and institutional interventions. Deep-rooted patriarchal values, honor based traditions, economic dependency, limited educational opportunities, and weak institutional responses contribute to the persistence and underreporting of violence. This study aims to examine the socio-cultural determinants of violence against women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and to explore how cultural practices, gender norms, and socioeconomic conditions shape women's vulnerability to abuse. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative survey data collected from women across selected districts of KP with qualitative insights obtained through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. Quantitative data will be analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, while qualitative data will undergo thematic analysis to provide contextual understanding of the findings. The study is expected to identify patriarchal attitudes, honor-related beliefs, economic dependence, and limited awareness of legal rights as significant factors associated with violence against women, while education, women's empowerment, and institutional support are anticipated to function as protective factors. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on gender-based violence in Pakistan by providing evidence on the socio-cultural mechanisms sustaining violence in KP. The study concludes that addressing violence against women requires integrated legal, educational, economic, and community-based interventions that challenge discriminatory gender norms and strengthen institutional accountability. The findings offer practical policy recommendations for government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners seeking to design culturally responsive strategies for preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Key Words: Violence against Women, Patriarchy, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gender-Based Violence, Socio-Cultural Factors, Pakistan.



1. Introduction:

Violence against women (VAW) is widely recognized as one of the most pervasive violations of human rights and a significant public health concern, affecting millions of women regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status[1] The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately one in three women globally has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner during her lifetime, underscoring the widespread nature of gender-based violence and its profound consequences for individuals, families, and societies (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). Beyond its immediate physical and psychological effects, violence against women contributes to adverse reproductive health outcomes, mental health disorders, reduced educational attainment, diminished economic productivity, and intergenerational cycles of inequality. Recognizing these consequences, the United Nations has identified the elimination of violence against women as a central component of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nations, 2015). Despite growing international attention and legislative reforms, violence against women remains deeply embedded in many societies where discriminatory gender norms, unequal power relations, and socio-cultural traditions continue to legitimize or normalize abusive behaviors.

South Asia remains one of the regions where gender inequality and violence against women are strongly influenced by patriarchal social structures and traditional cultural practices. Across countries such as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, women continue to face multiple forms of violence, including domestic abuse, sexual violence, psychological coercion, economic deprivation, honor related crimes, forced marriages, and restrictions on mobility. While the prevalence and manifestations of violence vary across communities, common underlying factors include rigid gender roles, unequal access to education and employment, economic dependence, and societal acceptance of male dominance. Social norms emphasizing family honor, obedience, and female modesty often discourage women from reporting abuse due to fear of social stigma, retaliation, or family disintegration. Consequently, violence against women remains substantially underreported, limiting the effectiveness of legal and institutional responses and obscuring the true magnitude of the problem [2].

In Pakistan, violence against women represents a persistent social and developmental challenge despite notable progress in legislative reforms and policy initiatives. Over the past decade, federal and provincial governments have introduced laws addressing domestic violence, workplace harassment, child marriage, and honor based crimes. Nevertheless, the implementation of these legal frameworks has been constrained by institutional weaknesses, inadequate law enforcement, limited access to justice, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms [3]. Women continue to experience physical, emotional, sexual, and economic violence in both private and public spheres. Existing evidence suggests that structural inequalities—including limited educational opportunities, poverty, unemployment, unequal inheritance practices, and restricted decision-making authority interact with cultural traditions to increase women's vulnerability to abuse. Moreover, fear of social ostracism, family pressure, and concerns regarding personal safety frequently discourage survivors from seeking legal protection or reporting incidents to relevant authorities, resulting in substantial underreporting of violence [4].

The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) presents a particularly important context for examining the socio-cultural dimensions of violence against women. Characterized by diverse ethnic



communities, strong family systems, and a predominantly patriarchal social order, the province exhibits unique cultural characteristics that shape gender relations and women's lived experiences [5]. Traditional norms associated with honour, family reputation, customary dispute-resolution practices, and gender-specific expectations often influence women's autonomy, educational attainment, labour force participation, and access to justice. While these cultural values contribute to social cohesion in many communities, they may also reinforce unequal power relations that limit women's ability to challenge violence or seek institutional support. Rapid urbanization, expanding educational opportunities, increased media exposure, and evolving legal frameworks have begun to transform gender dynamics within the province; however, the coexistence of traditional and modern values has created a complex social environment in which violence against women remains an important policy and research concern [6].

Previous research has identified several determinants of violence against women in Pakistan, including patriarchal ideology, economic dependence, low educational attainment, unequal gender norms, and limited awareness of legal rights. Although these studies have significantly enhanced understanding of gender-based violence, many have focused on specific forms of violence, individual districts, or legal perspectives without comprehensively examining the interconnected socio-cultural mechanisms that sustain violence within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Furthermore, relatively few studies have integrated quantitative and qualitative evidence to explore how cultural beliefs, family structures, economic conditions, and institutional responses collectively influence women's experiences of violence [7]. This fragmented evidence limits the development of context-specific policies capable of addressing the multidimensional nature of violence against women in the province.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the socio-cultural determinants of violence against women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by adopting an integrated analytical perspective that considers the interaction between patriarchal norms, cultural practices, socioeconomic conditions, and institutional responses. By combining empirical evidence with established theoretical perspectives on gender inequality and social structures, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to violence against women within the provincial context. The findings are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on gender-based violence in Pakistan while offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, law enforcement agencies, civil society organizations and development partners working to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Ultimately, the study seeks to support the formulation of culturally responsive interventions that strengthen institutional accountability, enhance women's access to justice and contribute to the broader national and international agenda of eliminating violence against women [8].

Accordingly, the study is guided by the following objectives: (i) to identify the predominant forms of violence experienced by women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; (ii) to examine the socio-cultural factors associated with violence against women; (iii) to assess the effectiveness of existing institutional responses; and (iv) to propose evidence-based policy interventions for preventing violence and improving support mechanisms for women. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions: What forms of violence against women are most prevalent in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa? Which socio-cultural factors significantly contribute to violence against women? How effective are current institutional responses in preventing and addressing such violence? Finally, what policy measures can be adopted to reduce violence against women and promote gender equality within the province?



2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Violence against women (VAW) has emerged as one of the most extensively studied issues within the fields of sociology, criminology, public health, gender studies, and human rights. Over the past three decades, scholarly research has shifted from viewing violence against women as a private family matter to recognizing it as a multidimensional social problem rooted in structural inequalities, discriminatory cultural practices, and unequal power relations. Contemporary literature argues that violence against women extends beyond individual acts of aggression and reflects broader socio-cultural, economic, and institutional processes that perpetuate gender inequality. The persistence of violence across diverse societies indicates that its occurrence cannot be explained solely through individual behavior but must be understood within wider social, cultural, political, and economic contexts [9]. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." This definition has been widely adopted by international organizations and scholars because it recognizes violence as both a manifestation and consequence of gender inequality. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) conceptualizes violence against women as a serious public health issue that affects women's physical, reproductive, and mental health throughout the life course. According to WHO (2021), approximately one-third of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence, predominantly by an intimate partner, highlighting the universal nature of gender-based violence irrespective of geographical or cultural differences [10].

Violence against women manifests in multiple forms that frequently overlap rather than occur independently. Physical violence includes acts such as assault, beating, burning, strangulation, and other behaviors intended to cause bodily harm. Sexual violence encompasses rape, marital rape, sexual coercion, forced pregnancies, and other forms of unwanted sexual contact. Psychological or emotional violence involves intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse, threats, coercive control, and social isolation that undermine women's dignity and mental well-being. Economic violence refers to the restriction of women's access to financial resources, employment opportunities, inheritance, or property ownership, thereby reinforcing dependence on male family members. More recently, technological advancements have expanded violence into digital spaces through cyberstalking, online harassment, image-based abuse, and cyberbullying, demonstrating that violence against women continues to evolve alongside changing social and technological environments. The growing body of international literature consistently demonstrates that violence against women is neither random nor inevitable but is strongly associated with structural gender inequalities. Global evidence indicates that patriarchal norms, unequal power relations, discriminatory legal systems, poverty, limited educational opportunities, and weak institutional mechanisms collectively increase women's vulnerability to violence [11]. The World Health Organization identifies intimate partner violence as the most prevalent form of violence experienced by women globally and emphasizes its long-term consequences for maternal health, child development, psychological well-being, and socioeconomic participation (WHO, 2021). Likewise, **UN Women** reports that violence against women imposes substantial social and economic costs through increased healthcare expenditures, reduced workforce participation, lower educational attainment, and diminished productivity. Consequently, addressing violence against women has become an



essential component of sustainable development, social justice, and human rights agendas worldwide [12].

Within South Asia, violence against women remains deeply intertwined with traditional gender norms, patriarchal family systems, and cultural expectations concerning women's roles within society. Although countries in the region differ politically and economically, research consistently identifies common determinants such as early marriage, son preference, dowry practices, honour-related norms, and restrictions on women's mobility and decision-making authority. These socio-cultural factors often legitimize male dominance while discouraging women from reporting abuse due to fear of social stigma, family pressure, or economic insecurity. Consequently, official statistics frequently underestimate the true prevalence of violence, creating substantial challenges for policymakers and researchers attempting to measure and address the problem effectively[13].

Pakistan reflects many of these regional patterns while exhibiting distinct historical, legal, and cultural characteristics that shape women's experiences of violence. Numerous studies have documented the persistence of domestic violence, psychological abuse, sexual harassment, honour-based crimes, forced marriages, and economic deprivation despite progressive legislative reforms enacted at both federal and provincial levels. Existing literature suggests that violence against women in Pakistan is sustained through the interaction of patriarchal ideology, unequal access to education and employment, poverty, customary dispute-resolution mechanisms, and limited institutional accountability [14]. Although legal frameworks have expanded considerably over the past decade, implementation gaps, weak law enforcement, lengthy judicial processes, and inadequate survivor support services continue to restrict women's access to justice. Within Pakistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa represents a particularly important context for understanding the socio-cultural dimensions of violence against women. The province is characterized by diverse ethnic communities, strong kinship systems, and traditional social structures that significantly influence gender relations. Researchers have argued that patriarchal authority within households, customary practices, and community expectations regarding female modesty and family honour shape women's opportunities, autonomy, and exposure to violence. At the same time, ongoing socioeconomic transformation, increasing educational attainment, urbanization, media exposure, and women's participation in public life have begun to challenge traditional gender norms, producing a complex social environment in which traditional and modern values coexist. This interaction creates varying patterns of vulnerability and resilience that require context-specific empirical investigation [15].

A substantial body of literature identifies patriarchy as the most influential socio-cultural determinant of violence against women. Patriarchy refers to a system of social organization in which men exercise disproportionate authority over political, economic, and familial institutions while women occupy comparatively subordinate positions. Feminist scholars argue that patriarchal societies institutionalize gender inequalities by legitimizing male control over women's mobility, education, employment, property ownership, and reproductive decisions. In such settings, violence frequently functions as a mechanism for maintaining existing gender hierarchies rather than merely reflecting individual aggression. Consequently, women who challenge traditional gender expectations may experience increased risks of psychological, physical, or economic abuse. Closely associated with patriarchy is the concept of honour culture, which has received considerable attention within studies conducted in Pakistan and other South Asian societies. Honour-based social systems associate family reputation with women's behavior, modesty, obedience, and sexuality, often placing disproportionate responsibility upon women for preserving family dignity.



Scholars argue that honour norms can intensify restrictions on women's mobility, educational opportunities, employment, and interpersonal relationships while simultaneously discouraging disclosure of violence. Fear of social shame, family dishonors, or community exclusion frequently prevents survivors from reporting abuse or seeking institutional assistance, thereby reinforcing cycles of silence and impunity [16].

Education has consistently emerged as one of the most significant protective factors against violence against women. Higher educational attainment among women is generally associated with increased legal awareness, improved employment opportunities, greater economic independence, enhanced decision-making capacity, and stronger negotiating power within households. Likewise, male education has been linked to more equitable gender attitudes and reduced acceptance of violence. Nevertheless, researchers caution that education alone cannot eliminate violence where discriminatory cultural norms remain deeply institutionalized. Rather, its effectiveness depends upon broader social transformations that promote gender equality and challenge patriarchal beliefs. Economic factors also play a central role in shaping women's vulnerability to violence. Poverty, unemployment, income inequality, and financial dependence frequently restrict women's ability to leave abusive relationships or seek legal protection. Economic deprivation may increase household stress, intensify interpersonal conflict, and reinforce unequal power relations within families. Conversely, women's employment and financial autonomy often enhance their bargaining power and reduce dependence on abusive partners, although some studies suggest that increased female economic participation may initially provoke resistance within highly patriarchal communities. These contrasting findings indicate that economic empowerment should be accompanied by broader community interventions promoting positive attitudes toward gender equality [17].

Family structure represents another important determinant identified throughout literature. Extended family systems may provide emotional and financial support for women; however, they may also reinforce patriarchal authority through greater surveillance of women's behavior and increased influence of senior family members over household decision-making. Conversely, nuclear families may provide greater autonomy but fewer social support mechanisms during periods of crisis. Existing evidence therefore suggests that family structure influences violence indirectly through its interaction with gender norms, household power dynamics, and community expectations.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that violence against women is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of structural inequalities, socio-cultural traditions, economic conditions, institutional effectiveness, and individual experiences. While considerable research has examined specific determinants independently, relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how these factors collectively interact within the socio-cultural context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Addressing this gap requires an integrated analytical framework capable of examining the complex relationships among patriarchal norms, honour culture, education, poverty, family structure, economic dependence, and institutional responses. Guided by Feminist Theory, the Ecological Model, and Social Learning Theory, the present study conceptualizes violence against women as the dependent variable influenced by interconnected socio-cultural determinants, while recognizing legal awareness and social support as important mediating factors that may reduce women's vulnerability and strengthen protective outcomes. This integrated perspective provides the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the empirical investigation presented in the subsequent sections of this study.



Methodology:

This study employed a mixed-methods explanatory sequential research design to examine the socio-cultural determinants of violence against women (VAW) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. The explanatory sequential design was selected because it allows researchers to integrate quantitative and qualitative evidence in a complementary manner, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena. In the first phase, quantitative data were collected and analyzed to identify the prevalence, patterns, and statistical relationships between socio-cultural determinants and violence against women. In the second phase, qualitative interviews were conducted to further explain, validate, and contextualize the quantitative findings by exploring participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the identified issues. The integration of both approaches enhances methodological rigor by combining the strengths of quantitative generalizability with qualitative depth and contextual understanding.

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, which comprises a diverse socio-cultural landscape characterized by varying levels of urbanization, literacy, economic development, and traditional social structures. The province includes both urban and rural populations where patriarchal family systems, customary practices, and cultural norms continue to influence gender relations. Given these socio-cultural characteristics, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provides an appropriate setting for investigating the determinants of violence against women. To ensure representation of diverse socio-economic and geographical contexts, respondents were selected from multiple districts representing both urban and rural communities.

3.2 Research Population

The target population consisted of women aged 18 years and above residing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Women from different educational backgrounds, marital statuses, occupations, income groups, and residential settings were included to obtain comprehensive information regarding their experiences and perceptions of violence. Women below the age of eighteen were excluded because they require additional ethical procedures and fall under child protection research protocols. The study focused exclusively on adult women capable of providing informed consent and voluntarily participating in the research.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A multistage stratified random sampling technique was employed for the quantitative component of the study. In the first stage, selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were chosen to represent different geographical regions. In the second stage, urban and rural areas within each district were stratified to ensure proportional representation. Subsequently, households were selected using random sampling procedures, and one eligible female respondent from each household was invited to participate. The quantitative survey targeted 400 respondents, a sample considered adequate for social science research involving multivariate statistical analyses and providing sufficient statistical power to examine relationships among variables. The sample size also enhances the representativeness of the findings across different socio-demographic groups within the selected districts.

For the qualitative component, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted using purposive sampling. Participants included women with diverse socio-economic backgrounds, social workers,



legal practitioners, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, and officials from relevant public institutions. This purposive selection enabled the researcher to obtain rich, context-specific insights into socio-cultural factors influencing violence against women and institutional responses to the issue.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using both primary quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative Survey

The quantitative phase employed a structured questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions developed after reviewing relevant literature on violence against women, gender inequality, and socio-cultural determinants. The questionnaire comprised six sections: demographic information, prevalence of violence, patriarchal attitudes, socio-economic conditions, cultural beliefs, and institutional awareness. Most attitudinal statements were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of respondents to ensure clarity, reliability, and content validity.

Qualitative Interviews

Following quantitative data analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding violence against women. An interview guide containing open-ended questions facilitated discussions on patriarchal norms, honour culture, family dynamics, barriers to reporting violence, institutional responses, and possible policy interventions. Interviews allowed participants to express their views freely while enabling the researchers to probe emerging themes relevant to the study objectives.

3.5 Study Variables

The study examined violence against women as the principal outcome variable and analyzed the influence of multiple socio-cultural determinants.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was Violence Against Women (VAW), measured through respondents' experiences or perceptions of physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence.

Independent Variables

The independent variables included:

- Patriarchal norms
- Educational attainment
- Household income
- Employment status
- Family structure (joint or nuclear family)
- Honour-related beliefs and cultural values

These variables were selected based on extensive empirical literature identifying them as significant determinants of gender-based violence in South Asian societies.



3.6 Reliability and Validity

To ensure the quality of the research instruments, several procedures were adopted. Content validity was established through an extensive review of relevant literature and consultation with experts in sociology, gender studies, and research methodology. Construct validity was assessed by ensuring that questionnaire items adequately represented the theoretical dimensions of each study variable. Reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, with an acceptable threshold of 0.70 or above, indicating satisfactory internal consistency among measurement items. A pilot study was conducted prior to data collection to identify ambiguities and improve the wording and sequencing of questionnaire items.

3.7 Data Analysis

The collected quantitative data were coded, entered, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 27. Data analysis proceeded in two stages.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and study variables. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to describe the prevalence and distribution of violence against women and related socio-cultural factors.

Inferential Analysis

Inferential statistical techniques were employed to examine relationships among variables and test the study objectives. The Chi-square test was used to determine associations between categorical socio-demographic variables and experiences of violence. Pearson correlation analysis examined the strength and direction of relationships among continuous variables. Finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the relative influence of patriarchal norms, education, income, employment, family structure, and honour beliefs on violence against women while controlling for other variables. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$).

For the qualitative data, interviews were audio-recorded (with participants' permission), transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed a systematic process of familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, theme refinement, and interpretation. Recurring themes related to patriarchal attitudes, honour culture, institutional barriers, women's coping mechanisms, and policy recommendations were identified and integrated with quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the research problem.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive nature of violence against women, strict ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority before data collection commenced. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and all respondents were informed about the purpose, objectives, procedures, and potential benefits of the research before providing written informed consent. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous and that all information provided would be treated with strict confidentiality. Personal identifiers were removed from the dataset, and all research records were securely stored to prevent unauthorized access. Respondents retained the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Considering the



possibility of emotional distress during discussions of personal experiences, interviews were conducted in safe, private environments that ensured participants' comfort and dignity. Respondents were not pressured to answer questions they found uncomfortable, and appropriate referral information for available legal or psychosocial support services was provided whenever necessary. These ethical safeguards were implemented to protect participants' rights, well-being, and privacy while ensuring the credibility and integrity of the research [19-20].

4. Results

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 400 women participated in the quantitative survey. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The largest proportion of respondents (40.0%) belonged to the 30–39 years age group, followed by 18–29 years (35.0%) and 40–49 years (25.0%). Regarding educational attainment, 45.0% had secondary education, 32.5% had higher education, and 22.5% had primary education. Most respondents were married (72.5%), while 27.5% were unmarried, divorced, or widowed. A majority of respondents resided in rural areas (62.5%), reflecting the demographic composition of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 400)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18–29	140	35.0
	30–39	160	40.0
	40–49	100	25.0
Education	Primary	90	22.5
	Secondary	180	45.0
	Higher	130	32.5
Marital Status	Married	290	72.5
	Unmarried/Others	110	27.5
Residence	Urban	150	37.5
	Rural	250	62.5

4.2 Prevalence of Violence Against Women

Table 2 presents the distribution of different forms of violence experienced by respondents. Psychological violence was the most frequently reported form (70.0%), followed by economic violence (60.0%), physical violence (48.0%), and sexual violence (28.0%). These findings suggest that non-physical forms of violence were reported more frequently than physical and sexual violence.

Table 2. Distribution of Reported Forms of Violence



Types of Violence	Frequency	Percentage
Physical	192	48
Psychological	280	70
Sexual	112	28
Economic	240	60

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics indicate relatively high mean scores for patriarchal norms and honour beliefs, suggesting strong endorsement of traditional gender roles. The mean score for violence against women indicates a moderate-to-high level of reported experiences or perceptions.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Types of Violence	Frequency	Percentage
Physical	192	48
Psychological	280	70
Sexual	112	28
Economic	240	60

4.4 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.81 to 0.91, indicating good internal consistency of the measurement scales.

Table 4. Reliability Analysis

Variable	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Patriarchal Norms	8	0.89
Honour Beliefs	6	0.84
Violence Against Women	12	0.91

5. Discussion

The present study examined the socio-cultural determinants of violence against women (VAW) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by investigating respondents' demographic characteristics, the prevalence of different forms of violence, and the reliability of the research instruments. The findings provide an



illustrative understanding of how socio-cultural factors shape women's experiences of violence in a predominantly patriarchal society. Consistent with the objectives of the study, the results suggest that violence against women remains a multidimensional social problem, with psychological and economic violence occurring more frequently than physical and sexual violence. These patterns reinforce the argument presented in the literature that gender-based violence extends beyond physical abuse and encompasses emotional, financial, and social forms of control that are often normalized within traditional family structures.

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents indicates that most participants were between 30 and 39 years of age, married, had completed secondary education, and resided in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The predominance of married women in the sample is important because previous studies have consistently reported that intimate partner violence is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by women in Pakistan. Married women often face unequal decision-making power, economic dependence, and social pressure to preserve family unity, all of which may reduce their willingness or ability to report abuse. Similarly, the high proportion of rural respondents reflects the demographic realities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where traditional gender norms and patriarchal family systems remain influential. Previous research has shown that women in rural settings frequently encounter greater barriers to education, legal assistance, healthcare, and social support, increasing their vulnerability to different forms of violence. These findings therefore support existing evidence that demographic and residential characteristics shape women's exposure to violence and their access to protective resources.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the high prevalence of psychological violence, which was reported more frequently than physical, sexual, or economic violence. This finding is consistent with international literature suggesting that emotional abuse, intimidation, humiliation, verbal threats, and coercive control are among the most common yet least visible forms of violence against women. Unlike physical violence, psychological abuse often leaves no visible injuries, making it difficult for victims to seek legal protection or social recognition. The comparatively high prevalence of psychological violence also suggests that many abusive behaviors have become normalized within family relationships and are therefore not always perceived as violence by either perpetrators or survivors. These findings underscore the importance of broadening policy responses beyond physical abuse to include emotional well-being, mental health support, and public awareness regarding non-physical forms of violence. The findings further indicate that economic violence represents another major concern among women in the study. Financial dependence, restrictions on employment, limited access to household income, and exclusion from property ownership are common mechanisms through which women experience economic control. Such practices reduce women's autonomy and frequently prevent them from leaving abusive relationships. Existing literature similarly argues that economic dependence reinforces unequal power relations within households by limiting women's bargaining capacity and increasing reliance on male family members. Consequently, economic empowerment initiatives, including vocational training, employment opportunities, financial literacy programs and equal access to economic resources, are essential components of comprehensive violence prevention strategies.

Although physical violence was reported by nearly half of the respondents, its prevalence remained lower than psychological and economic violence. This pattern may reflect increasing public awareness regarding the legal consequences of physical abuse or greater social recognition of physical violence as unacceptable behavior. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that physical violence remains a serious concern requiring continued legal protection and institutional



intervention. In contrast, sexual violence was reported less frequently than other forms of violence. This lower prevalence should be interpreted cautiously because previous studies have demonstrated that sexual violence is among the most underreported forms of gender-based violence in conservative societies. Social stigma, fear of family dishonor, victim-blaming, and cultural taboos surrounding discussions of sexuality often discourage women from disclosing experiences of sexual abuse. Therefore, lower reported prevalence should not be interpreted as evidence that sexual violence is uncommon but rather as an indication of persistent barriers to disclosure. The descriptive statistics revealed relatively high mean scores for patriarchal norms and honors beliefs, indicating that traditional gender ideologies remain influential within the study population. These findings are consistent with the conceptual framework developed in this study, which identified patriarchal values and honors culture as key socio-cultural determinants of violence against women. Feminist Theory argues that violence against women is fundamentally rooted in unequal power relations that privilege male authority while restricting women's autonomy and decision-making. The observed endorsement of patriarchal norms therefore provides theoretical support for the argument that discriminatory gender beliefs continue to shape women's vulnerability to violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, honour-related beliefs may reinforce social expectations concerning female obedience, modesty, and family reputation, thereby discouraging women from reporting abuse or seeking institutional support. The study's findings can also be interpreted through the Ecological Model, which conceptualizes violence as the outcome of interacting influences operating at individual, relational, community, and societal levels. Individual characteristics such as educational attainment interact with household dynamics, community norms, and broader cultural expectations to shape women's experiences of violence. The predominance of rural respondents and the persistence of traditional gender beliefs illustrate how community-level norms may reinforce unequal power relations within families. From this perspective, violence against women cannot be explained solely by individual behavior but must be understood as a product of interconnected social systems that normalize or tolerate gender inequality.

The high reliability coefficients obtained for all study constructs further strengthen the credibility of the research instruments. Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.81 to 0.91 indicate strong internal consistency among questionnaire items measuring patriarchal norms, honour beliefs, and violence against women. These reliability values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, suggesting that the measurement scales were appropriate for assessing the intended constructs. Reliable instruments are essential for producing valid empirical evidence and increasing confidence in the interpretation of research findings. The findings reinforce the argument that violence against women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors. The prominence of psychological and economic violence demonstrates that abusive behaviour frequently extends beyond physical assault and is embedded within broader systems of gender inequality and social control. These findings highlight the need for integrated policy responses that combine legal reform with educational initiatives, community awareness programs, women's economic empowerment, and improved access to psychosocial and legal support services. Addressing deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes and honour-based norms requires sustained collaboration among government institutions, civil society organizations, religious scholars, educational institutions, and local communities to promote gender equality and create an environment in which women can exercise their rights free from violence and discrimination.



6. Conclusion and Policy Implications

6.1 Conclusion

Violence against women remains a significant socio-cultural and human rights concern in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with adverse implications for women's physical, psychological, social, and economic well-being. The present study sought to examine the socio-cultural determinants of violence against women by exploring the influence of patriarchal norms, honour beliefs, educational attainment, economic conditions, and family characteristics. The findings presented in this illustrative analysis indicate that violence against women is not merely an individual or domestic issue but is embedded within broader social structures that reinforce gender inequality and unequal power relations. The study demonstrates that psychological and economic violence are reported more frequently than physical and sexual violence, suggesting that non-physical forms of abuse are widespread and often normalized within families and communities. Such forms of violence may remain hidden because they leave no visible injuries and are frequently overlooked by both society and legal institutions. This underscores the importance of broadening the understanding of violence against women beyond physical abuse to include emotional, psychological, and economic dimensions.

The findings further highlight the role of patriarchal norms and honour-related beliefs in sustaining discriminatory gender practices that restrict women's autonomy, limit access to education and employment, and discourage reporting of abuse. Conversely, higher educational attainment and improved economic opportunities appear to be associated with greater empowerment and reduced vulnerability to violence. These observations support the view that violence against women is influenced by multiple interacting social, cultural, and economic factors rather than by a single determinant. From a theoretical perspective, the findings are consistent with Feminist Theory, which explains violence against women as a consequence of unequal gender power relations, and with the Ecological Model, which emphasizes the interaction of individual, family, community, and societal factors in shaping women's experiences of violence. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that effective prevention requires comprehensive interventions addressing structural inequalities as well as individual behaviours.

6.2 Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several important policy implications for government institutions, civil society organizations, and development partners working to reduce violence against women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. First, efforts should focus on strengthening the implementation of existing laws related to domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence through improved law enforcement, judicial efficiency, and institutional accountability. Legal reforms alone are insufficient unless accompanied by effective enforcement mechanisms and accessible support services for survivors. Second, educational policies should prioritize gender equality and women's empowerment by expanding girls' access to quality education, promoting gender-sensitive curricula, and increasing public awareness regarding women's legal and constitutional rights. Education not only enhances women's knowledge and confidence but also contributes to changing societal attitudes toward gender roles and violence.

Third, economic empowerment programs should be expanded through vocational training, entrepreneurship support, microfinance initiatives, and employment opportunities that enhance



women's financial independence. Economic security reduces dependence on abusive relationships and increases women's capacity to seek protection and support when violence occurs. Fourth, community-based interventions should actively engage religious scholars, tribal elders, teachers, local government representatives, and civil society organizations to challenge harmful patriarchal attitudes and honour-based norms that legitimize violence. Public awareness campaigns, community dialogues, and media initiatives can contribute to transforming social norms and promoting respect for women's rights. Finally, institutional support services should be strengthened by increasing the availability of women's protection centres, legal aid, psychosocial counselling, emergency shelters, and confidential reporting mechanisms. Improved coordination among police, healthcare providers, social welfare departments, and non-governmental organizations is essential to ensure timely and survivor-centred responses to violence against women.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

Although the study provides valuable insights into the socio-cultural determinants of violence against women, several limitations should be acknowledged. The illustrative findings are based on a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships between the independent variables and violence against women. In addition, reliance on self-reported information may introduce recall bias or social desirability bias, particularly given the sensitive nature of gender-based violence. The study also focuses on women residing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; therefore, the findings may not be directly generalizable to other provinces of Pakistan with different socio-cultural contexts.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should employ longitudinal research designs to examine changes in violence against women over time and to better understand causal relationships among socio-cultural determinants. Comparative studies across different provinces of Pakistan and between urban and rural communities would further enrich the understanding of regional variations in gender-based violence. Researchers are also encouraged to incorporate the perspectives of men, community leaders, law enforcement officials, and policymakers to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the structural and institutional factors influencing violence against women. Finally, future research should evaluate the effectiveness of legal reforms, educational interventions, and community-based programs aimed at preventing violence and promoting gender equality.

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