



RESEARCH PAPER

Unveiling Gender Disparities in Pakistan: Challenges, Progress, and Policy Implications for Achieving SDG 5

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ABSTRACT

Gender disparities have been a challenging issue in achieving SDG 5 for Pakistan. This research study is an attempt to explicitly reveal and conceal the understanding of gender disparities and women's empowerment in Pakistan. This analyses gender disparities in Pakistan, focusing on the challenges, progress, and policy implications for achieving SDG 5. This qualitative interpretative research study uses exploratory and descriptive research techniques and implies the theoretical frameworks of feminist theory, intersectionality, and social capital theory. This highlights key challenges, including cultural norms, barriers to education and economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and limited healthcare access. Pakistan has made progress in promoting gender equality despite multifaceted challenges. This study recommends addressing socio-cultural barriers, enhancing women's political participation, empowering women economically, promoting education for girls, enhancing healthcare services, and strengthening legal and policy frameworks to achieve SDG 5 in Pakistan.

KEYWORDS Feminist Theory, Gender Equality, SDG 5, Women's Empowerment

Introduction

Gender disparity refers to statistical gaps between males and females in any society (UNICEF, 2017). These gaps and differences reflect an inequality in myriad spheres of social life. According to the United Nations (UN), equality between men and women is a fundamental human right and a critical driver of sustainable development. There are 17 Sustainable Development goals known as SDGs, hence, this paper discusses SDG 5 whose aim is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. In 1979, Pakistan signed CEDAW (Choudhary, 2019). Gender disparities or inequalities remain pervasive, particularly in third-world countries especially Pakistan despite global commitments. Therefore, this research seeks to reveal the gender disparities in Pakistan by investigating the challenges faced by SDG 5 as well as what progress has been made on the issue and elaborate on the policy implications for achieving SDG 5. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impediments to gender equality and offer evidence-based recommendations for policy interventions by exploring the myriad dimensions of gender inequality in Pakistan.

Many factors lead a society to gender inequality. The complex phenomenon between cultural norms and socio-economic expectations shapes gender discrimination in any society (Ahmed, et. al. 2015; Firdoos & Naz, 2023). Therefore, this paper argues that gender disparities persist due to a complex interplay of economic, social, and cultural factors in Pakistan. These disparities manifest in various aspects of women's lives, including limited access to economic opportunities, education, healthcare, and protection from gender-based violence. Some improvements have been made in certain areas to mitigate the gap between men and women but significant challenges remain. In Pakistan, targeted policy measures have been taken to achieve SDG 5 and implemented interventions to promote gender

equality and women's empowerment, despite all of this, gender disparity remains a glaring issue because statistical gaps have not been improved.

Sub-continent has a long history of gender inequalities. Therefore, Pakistan has grappled with gender disparities rooted in cultural, historical, and socio-economic factors since 1947. Historically, Pakistani society has relegated women to subordinate roles, patriarchy dominant structure of the society provides limited access to education, employment, and political participation to women. According to Mumtaz and Shaheed, religious interpretations intertwining into cultural practices has further entrenched gender inequalities, making it challenging to implement progressive changes (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). Cultural norms and traditions often dictate the roles and responsibilities of women, perpetuating gender stereotypes and reinforcing discriminatory practices. Meanwhile, Pakistan's socio-economic landscape shows significant gender disparities. World Economic Forum report on Global Gender Gap Report 2021 underscores severe inequalities in Pakistan such as economic participation, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment, ranks 153 out of 156 countries (Forum, 2021).

The socio-cultural norms deeply rooted in traditional values influenced the behavior of the individuals. Education empowers humans through knowledge and skills. The trend of women's education is not up to expectations. Pakistan is not a heaven for girls and females because the gender gap in literacy rates remains substantial despite many efforts to improve female education. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics report, women's literacy rate is 46% as compared to 71% for men (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The reasons for illiteracy are multifaced more dominantly, socio-cultural barriers, lack of awareness, patriarchal household system, early marriages, and economic limitations (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Ahmad, 2018). These are the barriers, particularly in rural areas, that are contributing to low female enrollment and high dropouts (Khan, 2007). This educational factor leads to less women's participation in economic activities. Pakistani women's economic participation in or labor force is significantly lower than men's. According to World Bank Pakistan's labor force participation rate is 22% for women and 68% for men (World Bank, 2021). The barriers that women face for economic participation are such as gender-based discrimination, low-paying jobs, lower wages as compared to men, limited social protection, and lack of facilities like health, childcare, and transportation (Kazi & Sathar, 2000).

There is a transparent gender gap in women's political participation. There are fewer electable women in Pakistan which makes women's representation in decision-making bodies and political legislation very low. However, Pakistan's national and provincial assemblies have reserved seats for women and increased their presence in the parliament or political sphere. This presence does not influence political decisions because low number of participants. The barriers to political participation are as mentioned above socio-cultural, violence against women, and patriarchal and structural attitudes that hinder women's political participation (Critelli, 2010). More, women face gender disparities in healthcare facilities. According to UNICEF, Pakistan has a higher maternal mortality rate than the global average which is 186 deaths per 100,000 live births. Women do not have access to hospitals, nutrition, and health care due to inadequate infrastructure, sociocultural stereotypes, and limited access to reproductive health services, all these barriers contribute to poor health outcomes for women (Habib., 2021).

According to the Constitution of Pakistan 1973, every citizen of the state is equal before the law and the state guarantees the safety of the citizen. Therefore, it guarantees gender equality, prohibits gender discrimination, and offers equal opportunities to men and women (Government of Pakistan, 1973). Pakistan's policymakers have taken several legislative and policy initiatives to promote women's rights and address gender disparities such as:

- The Women Protection Act 2006,

- The Protection against Harassment of Women Act 2010,
- The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act (2011), and
- The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act (2012).

These acts aim to protect women from all types of discrimination, The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) provides financial assistance to women from low-income households, aiming to improve their socio-economic status (Cheema et al., 2014). Aslam mentions that an increase in female enrollment in primary and secondary education, particularly in urban areas, reflects positive trends towards closing the gender gap in education (Aslam, 2009). There have been notable achievements in advancing gender equality in Pakistan despite persistent challenges. According to Critelli, the increased representation of women in political assemblies has provided a platform for advocating women's rights and influencing policy decisions due to reserved seats (Critelli, 2010). Hameed argues that the initiatives promoting skill development and women's entrepreneurship have empowered women economically, contributing to economic growth and poverty reduction (Hameed, 2020).

This research study is an attempt to explicitly reveal and conceal the understanding of gender disparities and women's empowerment as well as seeks to provide insights and recommendations for policymakers to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in Pakistan. This research analyzes the progress made by stakeholders and feminist groups, challenges in achieving SDG 5, and suggests policy measures to achieve Gender equality. Therefore, this research paper answers the Questions. How does Pakistan promote gender equality to achieve SDG 5? How does Pakistan address the challenges contributing to gender disparities? What are the policy implications for achieving SDG 5? The research objective of this research is to identify the cultural, social, and economic factors contributing to gender disparities in Pakistan, to assess the progress made in promoting women's education, economic empowerment, healthcare access, and gender-based violence prevention initiatives, and to explore the policy implications of addressing gender disparities in Pakistan and achieving SDG 5.

Literature Review

The status of women has been a potential issue, especially in developing countries. A Woman faces educational, economic, employment, participation, and social issues as well as violence and discrimination. United Nations SDGs describe gender equality as a cornerstone of sustainable development and social justice. SDG 5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. This paper is an attempt to sanely understand the issue and provide policy suggestions to empower women. This section discusses the literature review examining the gender disparities from multifaced dimensions such as social, cultural, economic, historical, and policy contexts. Pasha argues that education has a positive impact on increasing women's empowerment (Pasha, 2023). Mujahid agreed that women's empowerment is directly associated with gender equality (Mujahid et al., 2023)

According to Akhtar and Ishaq unequal distribution of resources, limited access to education, and gender segregation hinder women's equality and empowerment (Akhtar & Ishaq, 2023). Pakistani society structure is patriarchal, male-dominant, and based on male superior norms. Therefore, Patriarchy has deep social-cultural and historical roots significantly influencing gender roles and disparities. According to Mumtaz and Shaheed, religious beliefs and cultural practices together have cemented gender inequality, making subordination of women's status. They provide an inclusive investigation of the historical evolution of women's status in Pakistan (Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). There are multifaced indicators of gender disparity in Pakistan. According to Aslam, Pakistani women stand behind men in the education sector. Women's literacy rate is very low compared to men's. Therefore, education is a critical area where gender disparities are evident in Pakistan

(Aslam, 2009). He argues that gender disparity in education raises questions for civil society and governments. Pakistan has low enrollment and a high dropout rate of girls from school. Women became dependent on men because they did not have skills, and fewer employment opportunities, and their status remained vulnerable. According to the World Bank, in Pakistan, the labor force participation rate for women is 22% and for men is 68% (World Bank, 2021). Women in the labor force receive low wages, and limited facilities as compared to men and face gender discrimination. Kazi highlights women receive no childcare as well as a transportation facility. Hameed argues that promoting women's entrepreneurship and skill development is critical to enhancing economic empowerment (Hameed, 2020).

UNICEF reports mentioned that Pakistan has a higher maternal mortality rate, lack of healthcare facilities, and nutritional status. As per the report, Pakistan's maternal mortality rate is 186/100000 live births (UNICEF, 2019). Pakistani women have limited access to reproductive health services and impoverished infrastructure regarding health facilities (Habib et al., 2021). He also mentions that these gaps highlight the need for correction and intervention to improve women's healthcare services.

Azeema Begum argues that females in Pakistan are treated as minorities due to the patriarchal and imbalanced social structure. It is imperative to ensure effective policies and laws to protect women despite increase in the reserved seats (Begum, 2023). Funk and Mueller also mention that women's political participation is a prerequisite for gender equality and gender equity (Funk & Mueller, 2018). The role of women has not been significant in political activities despite the 49% population of the country consists of females (OSCE, 2014). Sharif and Hina contend that females in Pakistan have less active decision-making because stakeholders hold the arena and do not give any chance to increase their participation (Sharif & Hina, 2018). Dar and Shairgojri also point out that the inclusion of women's experiences and voices in decision-making is crucial for peace, women empowerment, and gender equality (Dar & Shairgojri, 2022).

Numerous factors lead to gender disparity such as patriarchal norms and cultural values that restrict females' roles in public affairs participation. Khan mentioned that feminist groups and women-representative bodies need to react to all as an attempt to change social, cultural, and political behavior toward gender equality. This resistance will be opposed by conservative chunks of society because they believe that women's primary role fits in the home and they see them as caretakers and homemakers (Khan, 2007). Sathar turned the wheel by arguing that women's economic disparities lead to other disparities, limiting their access to employment, education, and better healthcare facilities. Kazi argues that the government needs to take countermeasures to address these inequalities, by initiating gender-sensitive economic policies and programs, aimed at promoting women's empowerment (Kazi and Sathar, 2000). Zakar sanely gave way to achieving SDG 5 by strengthening institutional mechanisms and ensuring effective implementation of gender-related policies are crucial for achieving SDG 5 (Zakar et al., 2016). Effective policy formation to reduce gender disparity is the prerequisite for women's empowerment (Nawaz & Aslam, 2021).

Pakistan has the highest rate of GBV and gender discrimination. Gender-based violence is also the result of gender disparities, societal values, and the conservative behavior of the patriarchal system. To counter the GBV, policymakers must broaden their areas of gender sensitivity, and initiate the equal participation act for women (Rana, 2022). To achieve SDG 5 in Pakistan, there are several measures and insights given by scholars such as promoting women's education, empowering women in the labor force, involving them in the decision-making process, comprehensive measures to address violence against women including legal reforms, capacity building for law enforcement agencies, and provision of support services such as shelters, counseling, and legal aid (Fikree and Bhatti, 1999). The coming section discusses the research methodology in detail.

Material and Methods

This is qualitative interpretive research. The research design of this thesis is a case study. The theoretical nature of this study is influenced by Feminism's frameworks which require literature investigation. However, this study uses the exploratory and descriptive research approach, which implies the theoretical framework of Feminist Theory, Intersectionality, and Social Capital Theory to furnish this research study to show quality as well as validity.

The data sources are based on unstructured interviews, available literature, and discourses. Accurate and systematic data collection is also a necessary qualification for conducting research in social science. Data collection allows collecting information that researchers want to collect about their study objectives. In this regard, the data collection instruments are secondary sources and primary sources. Primary sources are unstructured interviews, Twitter data, research reports, articles, article reviews, observations, World Bank reports, websites, movies, documentaries, academic papers, governmental documents, original reports, government policy papers, speeches, etc. Secondary sources are books, newspapers, dissertations, and book reviews. This research study analytically investigates these data sources. Unstructured elite interviews conducted by the representatives of the different groups of women to understand their conception and perception as well as provide insights about progress and policy recommendations to achieve SDG 5, also, highlight myriad impediments in the way of women's empowerment. The qualitative interpretative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of personal experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward gender disparities. Quantitative data is sourced from various national and international databases. Key sources include the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS): Offers detailed information on health and demographic indicators, including maternal health, reproductive health, and gender-based violence (National Institute of Population Studies, 2018). World Economic Forum and World Bank Reports: Provide data on global gender gaps and labor force participation, offering comparative insights (World Bank, 2021; World Economic Forum, 2021). The coming section discusses the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

Gender equality has been a crystal-clear issue in Pakistani society. Gender disparities in Pakistan are a perplexing and complex issue and understanding these variations requires a far-reaching hypothetical system that consolidates different points of view on orientation imbalance and women's empowerment. This section discusses three theories as a theoretical framework to investigate gender disparities in Pakistan.

Feminist Theory

Feminism theory focuses on women's political, economic, social, and cultural rights and seeks to achieve gender equality. Bell Hooks defines Feminism as a struggle against oppression and sexist exploitation (Hooks, 2000). Therefore, this paper going to discuss Feminist theory to theorize the gender disparities and inequalities in Pakistani society. The feminist theory hypothesis is integral to understanding gender differences as it evaluates the male-centric designs that sustain orientation imbalance. This section discusses the various strands of feminist theory including liberal, radical, social, and postcolonial feminism, each offering remarkable insights of knowledge into the nature and reasons for gender disparity. Liberal feminists seek to achieve uniformity and rights through lawful and strategic changes that guarantee equivalent privileges and potentially open doors for ladies (Tong, 2009). This viewpoint is pertinent to look at the authoritative and strategy structure pointed toward advancing gender equality in Pakistan.

The second school of feminist theory is radical feminism emphasizes the need to destroy male-centric/ patriarchal frameworks and systematic woes that mistreat ladies (MacKinnon, 1989). Radicals believe that patriarchy is the main reason for women’s oppression and inequality. The radical feminism approach is valid for analyzing gender disparity in Pakistan because it has a long history of patriarchy and women’s oppression. This approach highlights the barriers that curb women’s empowerment in Pakistan. The third theory is Socialist feminism which talks about the division of class in society and argues that patriarchy and capitalism both interact to exploit women (Hartmann, 1979). This viewpoint is especially important for understanding the financial components of gender gaps in Pakistan. The fourth strand of feminist theory is Postcolonial feminism which critically investigates the universalizing inclinations of Western women’s rights and stresses the significance of contextualizing gender and feminist issues by understanding historical, social, and socio-political settings and contexts (Mohanty, 1988). This approach is vital for understanding gender inequalities given its exceptional social and historical setting in Pakistan.

These strands of feminist theory provide a comprehensive framework, a cornerstone, to examine and investigate the multifaced dimensions of gender disparity in Pakistan. Liberals seek to achieve gender equality by compelling the legislators to issue a decree or law for women’s empowerment. Radicals blame the patriarchy and male dominance for their oppression and exploitation and believe that these norms are perpetuated through cultural practices, religious interpretations, and social institutions, which feminist theory critiques and seeks to transform. These values are deeply inserted into Pakistani society are hurdles and impediments to gender equality (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987). Pakistan has taken several measures to address gender inequality and for the safety of women’s and women’s empowerment. These legislative and policy reforms:

Criminal Law-2004	Women Protection Act 2006
Sexual and harassment act 2010	Anti-women Practices Prevention 2011
Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2011	Domestic Violence Act 2012

All these legislative efforts are to prevent GBV violence, secure women’s rights, and enhance gender equality in Pakistan.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the second framework to investigate and discuss the multifaced social identities that intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege such as race, gender, and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 1991). Like feminist theory, intersectionality contests the single-axis way of dealing with investigating social disparities and underlines the significance of thinking about different components of identities. In Pakistan, given the diverse and intersecting social identities, intersectionality is significant for analyzing gender disparities. Pakistani women experience multiple forms of oppression and discrimination based on their class, gender, and ethnicity According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Pakistani rural women face significant challenges in every field such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities as compared to urban women (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Furthermore, Pakistani women from impoverished ethnic groups experience intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender and ethnicity such as Pashtun and Baloch (Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987). Therefore, intersectionality spread light on the importance of multiple dimensions in analyzing the gender disparity in Pakistan.

Social Capital Theory

According to Berkman & Glass, it is a theory of social cohesion (Berkman & Glass, 2000). It emphasizes on groups formation and coalitions that inherent values of universal

action. In this paper, this theory examines the role of groups collaborations and social networks that facilitate collective action to achieve positive social outcomes. According to Putnam, Social capital theory is a theory of social network formation for collective outcomes that benefited the interacting parties (Putnam, 1995). He gave two insights of collaboration, first is connection within the same group known as bonding social capital, and second, is collaboration between different groups known as bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). In nutshell, this theory argues that collaboration and bonding actuate the community engagement which then helps in promoting social cohesion and collective agreed outcomes. This cohesion unites the community and enhances everyone's access to equal resources opportunities to contribute in community. Hawe and Shell conclude that it is not "one thing" but it is relational that have various effects (Hawe & Shiell, 2000). Fukuyama describes it as a "set of informal values that encourage the individuals to participate and act together to achieve shared objectives (Fukuyama, 1999). Therefore, by analyzing this theory, this paper reveals the role of social networks and community engagement in promoting gender equality in Pakistan. Zakir emphasizes the integration and unity of women into a single social network and community organizations that can play a crucial role in empowering women and addressing gender disparities (Zakar, 2016). A community small and self-help groups of women provide a standpoint to the women for addressing their problems, challenges, and resources and promoting their rights collectively.

Integrating Theoretical Perspectives

It is imperative to integrate perceptions and insights from these frameworks, feminist theory, intersectionality, and social capital theory, to completely investigate and address the gender disparities in Pakistan. The above-discussed theories individually, provide a unique lens to see gender issues, mentioning the cause of gender disparities and theorizing the strategies for promoting gender equality and women empowerment. As mentioned above, feminist theory challenges the patriarchy, and male dominance, criticizing the cultural norms that perpetuate gender disparity. Intersectionality significantly highlights the importance of considering women's intersecting social identities and experiences. In Pakistan, these frameworks assist in finding how patriarchy interacts with other forms of social gaps. Feminist groups also have differences of opinion. In Pakistan, there are mainly three types of feminist groups, Islamic, Radical, and Liberal. Therefore, this framework highlights the role of social networks and community engagements in achieving gender equality, leading to SDG 5.

Gender Disparities and Women Empowerment in Pakistan

Gender disparity taints the nation's reputation in the world arena, negatively impacting Pakistan's international standing and competitiveness. Aneela and Farah argue that extreme poverty and socio-economic factors have a role in shaping the gender disparities in Pakistan. these disparities are the potent hurdles in women's empowerment. In Pakistan, Women's problems are not limited to some but an ongoing phenomenon. From health education to employment to participation, from politics to decision-making, everywhere, women in Pakistan have to be dependent, and face a patriarchal system to convey their voices and share experiences. This inequality is a challenge impacting various facets of society. Gender disparity affects women's decisions and participation. Gender discrimination in Pakistan remains a significant challenge, impacting various facets of society. According to the Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM), data highlights the disparities between men and women given in the table:

Table 1
Gender disparity indicators: Pakistan

Indicator	Total %	Male %	Female %
Literacy Rate	60%	69%	51%
Health Facilities	70%	65%	55%

Economic Participation	45%	70%	39%
Unemployment Rate	6%	5%	7%
Average Income/M	44000	27000	17000
GBV	30%	10%	50%

The percentage describes the gender gap in Pakistan. It has shown that there is a major gap that leads to women's exploitation and GBV in Pakistan. Like other South Asian countries, Pakistan is comparatively lagging in women's participation.

World Bank and World Economic Forum Report data also mentioned the differences between men and women:

Table 2
Global Gender Gaps- Comparative Insights with Pakistan

Indicator	Global Average %	South Asia Average %	Pakistan %
Economic Participation	57	38	32
Education	95	88	65
Health and Survival	96	94	90
Political Empowerment	24	15	10
Labor Force	76	75	29
Literacy Rate	82	60	50

The above-mentioned data indicates that Pakistan is the worst country for women because in every field their existence is much lower as compared to men. Women do not make decisions freely and do not participate in public affairs, if they do, the patriarchal and socio-cultural structure of the society opposes them, resulting in women's rights violation.

Barriers affecting women's empowerment in Pakistan

- Educational Barriers
- Employment barriers
- Access and control over poverty
- Patriarchy
- Gender-based violence
- Harassment

SDG 5 which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls necessitates the implementation of effective policies Such as:

- Raising awareness about GBV to protect women
- Political empowerment to achieve gender equality in politics
- Scholarships and incentives for women in education to achieve equality
- Health awareness and facilities to overcome health issues
- Promoting economic participation
- Legal and Institutional reforms to achieve SDG 5
- Women's skills entrepreneur training
- Promote unity between feminist groups
- Increase reserved seats and introduce leadership programs to achieve SDG 5 in Pakistan.

Elite Interviews and Discussion

The research paper "Unveiling Gender Disparities in Pakistan: Challenges, Progress, and Policy Implications for Achieving SDG 5" explores the multifaceted nature of gender

disparities in Pakistan, analyzing qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. This section discusses the opinions and experiences collected through interviews with women from different groups. The population of interviewees consists of women from feminist groups including policymakers, gender experts, NGO representatives, and women from diverse backgrounds as well as women who are studying higher education in Pakistani. Parliamentarians sanely agreed with the factual data that women in Pakistan lack in every field of social life. They envisaged that women's participation in the public sphere is not as eminent as it has to be because of the absence of policy regarding women. Secondly, the absence of women's voices in parliament as well as in the political arena is the dire reason behind women's impoverishment. The political sphere is also devoid of women's roles and experiences which makes them unprivileged. These factors lead the society to gender disparity which in circumstances later became the impediment in the way of implementing SDG 5 in Pakistan. The absence of a national-level model and platform for women leaves them in a paradox, this dilemma later turns into a perilous situation for feminist activities. Policymakers also highlighted that most NGOs, feminist groups, as well as female stakeholders are working day and night to achieve SDG 5 in Pakistan, as they mentioned that many provisions and recommendations have been forwarded for women's safety and their role in society-building to the legislators of the country. The students of gender studies targeted the modus-operandi of patriarchal hegemony of the system where women do not find a spot to compete with the males and do not even give them a space to talk, this worst situation is grim because women have no platform to convey their issues and problems. Subjugating the patriarchal system undermines women's issues and participation. Most interestingly, feminists from different schools of thought point out the discontent between feminist groups, like liberal, secular, radical, and Islamic feminists. This paper also contends that the differences among feminist groups are the main hurdle in the way of SDG 5 in Pakistan. Politics among feminist groups is creating trouble rather than solving their issues. Meanwhile, women have to unite with each other to achieve their goals and to defeat this nefarious dubious system. This unity paves the way for achieving the SGD5 in Pakistan. This discussion analyzes various challenges such as societal and cultural values shaping gender roles, limiting women's participation in educational activities, and giving fewer employment opportunities. This research concludes that there is a dire need to address women's issues to achieve SDG 5 in Pakistan. The inclusion of women's voices and experiences in decision-making can easily defeat the socio-cultural barriers that fend women to participate in education, employment, and healthcare facilities. On the contrary, women from rural areas face extreme gender discrimination as compared to urban women, living in misery, and experiencing violence and exploitation, because these barriers are deeply pervasive in rural areas that provide zero opportunities to women.

Conclusion

This article investigates gender disparity and women's empowerment in Pakistan highlighting the barriers to achieving SDG 5 in Pakistan. Socio-cultural norms are deeply pervasive in Pakistani society and are the main cause of gender inequality. The findings underscore the need for multi-sectoral approaches to address the root causes of gender disparities and promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Pakistan. Pakistan stakeholders, policymakers, and legislators need to prioritize gender equality by increasing women's participation in education, economic opportunities, and healthcare facilities, and initiate laws and acts to prevent women from violence, harassment, and discrimination. Policymakers and feminist groups can work together to advance gender equality and build a more inclusive society for women in Pakistan. These institutional and legal changes and initiatives guarantee women's empowerment in Pakistan and later or sooner achieve the UN SDG 5.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that there is a need to address socio-cultural barriers, enhance women's political participation, empower women economically, promote education for girls, enhance healthcare services, and strengthen legal and policy frameworks to achieve SDG 5 in Pakistan.

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