



Domestic Violence as a Criminal Offense: Assessing the Effectiveness of Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is a pervasive social and legal problem in Pakistan that undermines the fundamental rights, dignity, security, and equality of individuals, particularly women and children. Despite its widespread occurrence, domestic violence has historically been addressed through fragmented legal and social mechanisms, often limiting effective protection and accountability. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 represents an important legislative effort to provide victims with legal remedies, protection orders, residence orders, and other forms of institutional support. This research critically examines the effectiveness of the Act in treating domestic violence as a criminal and legally actionable form of abuse. Using a qualitative doctrinal approach, the study analyzes the statutory framework, judicial interpretation, enforcement mechanisms, procedural safeguards, and practical challenges associated with implementation. It evaluates whether the Act adequately addresses different forms of domestic violence and provides accessible and effective remedies to victims. The study finds that although the legislation establishes a significant legal framework for protection and prevention, gaps in enforcement, institutional capacity, victim awareness, procedural implementation, and coordination among relevant authorities weaken its practical effectiveness. The research recommends stronger enforcement mechanisms, institutional reforms, legal awareness, victim-support services, and improved judicial implementation to ensure meaningful protection against domestic violence.



1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Domestic violence is a serious legal, social, and human rights concern in Pakistan that affects the dignity, security, equality, and fundamental rights of individuals within family and domestic

relationships. It may take the form of physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or economic abuse and can have lasting consequences for victims and their families. Historically, violence occurring within households has often been treated as a private family matter rather than as conduct requiring effective legal intervention. Social stigma, economic dependence, fear of retaliation, family pressure, lack of awareness, and limited access to justice can further discourage victims from reporting abuse or seeking legal remedies (Zarling & Russell, 2022). In this context, the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 represents an important legislative development intended to prevent domestic violence and provide legal protection and relief to victims. The Act establishes mechanisms including protection orders and residence-related remedies and seeks to provide an institutional response to domestic abuse. However, the existence of legislation does not automatically ensure effective implementation. The effectiveness of the Act depends upon the clarity of its provisions, accessibility of remedies, institutional enforcement, judicial interpretation, and the ability of relevant authorities to respond promptly and effectively. Therefore, examining domestic violence as a criminal and legally actionable form of conduct is essential for determining whether the existing framework provides meaningful protection and accountability (Barbin et al., 2024).

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it critically evaluates the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 within Pakistan's legal framework. Domestic violence frequently occurs in circumstances where victims face substantial social, economic, and familial barriers to seeking justice. A specialized legal framework is therefore important not only for punishing abusive conduct but also for preventing further violence and providing effective protection and relief. The study examines whether the Act adequately addresses different forms of domestic violence and whether its protective and enforcement mechanisms are sufficiently effective in practice (Petersson & Thunberg, 2022). It also highlights legislative ambiguities, institutional weaknesses, procedural difficulties, and gaps between legal protection and actual enforcement. The research is particularly relevant for policymakers, legislators, judges, lawyers, law-enforcement authorities, and organizations concerned with human rights and victim protection. By identifying weaknesses within the existing framework, the study may contribute to legal and institutional reforms aimed at improving accountability, strengthening victim protection, increasing access to justice, and developing a more effective criminal justice response to domestic violence (Welsh, 2023).

1.3 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the legal and conceptual framework governing domestic violence in Pakistan.
- ii. To analyze the key provisions and protective mechanisms of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010.
- iii. To assess the effectiveness of the Act in preventing domestic violence and protecting victims.
- iv. To identify legislative, procedural, and institutional gaps affecting the implementation of the Act.
- v. To propose legal and institutional reforms for strengthening the prevention, protection, and accountability mechanisms relating to domestic violence.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What is the legal and conceptual framework governing domestic violence in Pakistan?
- ii. What are the major provisions and protective mechanisms established under the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010?
- iii. To what extent has the Act been effective in preventing domestic violence and protecting victims?
- iv. What legislative, procedural, and institutional gaps hinder the effective implementation of the Act?
- v. What legal and institutional reforms can strengthen the prevention, protection, and accountability mechanisms concerning domestic violence?

1.5 Research Gap

Existing legal scholarship has examined domestic violence primarily from the perspectives of women's rights, social attitudes, human rights, and legislative protection. However, comparatively limited doctrinal research critically assesses the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 as a comprehensive criminal justice mechanism. In particular, insufficient attention has been given to the relationship between statutory protections, enforcement mechanisms, judicial implementation, procedural barriers, and victim protection. This study addresses this gap by systematically evaluating the Act and identifying areas requiring legal and institutional reform.

1.6 Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research methodology with a doctrinal legal research approach. The study relies exclusively on secondary sources to critically examine the legal framework governing domestic violence in Pakistan and the effectiveness of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010. The principal sources include the Constitution of Pakistan, relevant federal and provincial legislation, judicial decisions, reported case law, legal commentaries, academic books, peer-reviewed research articles, scholarly journals, government publications, official reports, policy documents, and relevant international legal instruments and standards. The research applies analytical and interpretive methods to examine statutory provisions, judicial approaches, legal principles, and institutional mechanisms relating to domestic violence. Relevant literature is reviewed thematically to identify recurring legal and practical issues, while comparative and contextual analysis is used where appropriate to assess the adequacy of the Pakistani framework. No primary data, interviews, questionnaires, surveys, or fieldwork are employed. The doctrinal approach enables the study to identify inconsistencies, legal gaps, enforcement challenges, and weaknesses within the existing framework and to formulate recommendations for strengthening the legal protection and accountability mechanisms concerning domestic violence.

2. Conceptual and Legal Framework of Domestic Violence

2.1 Concept, Meaning and Forms

Domestic violence refers to a pattern of abusive conduct occurring within a domestic, familial, or intimate relationship and may involve physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, or economic harm. It is not limited to isolated acts of physical assault; rather, it may include conduct intended to intimidate, control, humiliate, threaten, or deprive a person of basic rights and resources. Physical

violence includes beating, hitting, kicking, causing bodily injury, or other forms of physical assault (Exposito-Alvarez et al., 2023). Psychological and emotional violence may involve threats, intimidation, humiliation, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation, or controlling behaviour. Sexual violence includes forced or non-consensual sexual conduct, while economic abuse may involve withholding financial resources, preventing employment, or controlling access to property and income. The broader understanding of domestic violence is important because many forms of abuse remain invisible when legal protection is restricted to physical injury. In Pakistan, domestic violence must therefore be understood as a serious violation of personal dignity, security, equality, and autonomy requiring effective legal and institutional intervention (M. D. Saxton et al., 2022).

2.2 Criminal Justice and Human Rights Dimensions

Domestic violence has both criminal justice and human rights dimensions. From a criminal justice perspective, violence within the household cannot be treated solely as a private dispute because abusive conduct may constitute serious violations of bodily integrity, liberty, dignity, and personal security. An effective criminal justice response requires mechanisms for reporting abuse, investigation, prosecution, judicial determination, protection of victims, and accountability of perpetrators. At the same time, the human rights dimension emphasizes the State's responsibility to protect individuals from violence and discrimination. Domestic violence can interfere with fundamental rights including the right to life, dignity, equality, security, and freedom from cruel or degrading treatment. Victims may also face barriers to justice because of financial dependence, social stigma, family pressure, fear of retaliation, or lack of awareness (Holmes et al., 2022). Consequently, an effective legal framework must combine punishment with prevention and victim protection. Protection orders, residence remedies, legal assistance, shelters, rehabilitation, and accessible judicial procedures are therefore important components of a comprehensive response.

2.3 International Legal Framework

The international legal framework provides important principles for addressing domestic violence as a human rights concern. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes principles of equality, dignity, liberty, and security that are relevant to protection from domestic abuse. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights reinforces rights relating to life, liberty, security, equality, and freedom from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is particularly significant because it requires States to address discrimination against women and has been interpreted to encompass gender-based violence (Richards et al., 2022). The Convention on the Rights of the Child also provides protection against physical and mental violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation affecting children. International standards consequently encourage States to adopt legislation, institutional mechanisms, preventive measures, effective remedies, and appropriate support services. These standards provide a useful benchmark for evaluating Pakistan's domestic violence framework and determining whether national legislation provides adequate protection, accountability, and access to justice (Bijlsma et al., 2022).

2.4 Constitutional and Legislative Framework in Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan provides an important foundation for protection against domestic violence through its guarantees of fundamental rights. The constitutional principles concerning equality before law, protection of life and liberty, inviolability of dignity, and protection of women and children establish a legal basis for State intervention against violence within domestic relationships. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 represents a significant legislative development by establishing specific mechanisms for preventing domestic violence and

protecting affected persons. The legislation recognizes different forms of domestic abuse and provides remedies such as protection orders and residence-related relief (Niolon et al., 2023). In addition to the specialized domestic violence framework, general criminal law provisions may apply to conduct involving assault, hurt, intimidation, harassment, sexual violence, or other unlawful acts. Provincial legislation and institutional mechanisms may further supplement the legal response. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this framework depends substantially upon implementation. Legislative protection can remain inadequate where victims face procedural obstacles, institutional weaknesses, delayed proceedings, insufficient awareness, or ineffective enforcement. The constitutional and statutory framework should therefore be assessed not merely by the existence of legal provisions but by their practical capacity to prevent violence, protect victims, and ensure meaningful accountability (Cunha et al., 2023).

3. Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010

3.1 Legislative Background and Objectives

The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 represents an important legislative effort to address domestic violence through a specialized legal framework in Pakistan. Before the development of specific domestic violence legislation, victims generally had to rely upon general criminal law provisions and other legal remedies that were not specifically designed to address the distinctive nature of abuse occurring within domestic relationships. The introduction of specialized legislation reflected growing recognition that domestic violence is not merely a private or family matter but a serious legal issue requiring preventive, protective, and remedial measures. The principal objective of the Act is to provide protection to persons exposed to domestic violence and to establish mechanisms for preventing its recurrence. It seeks to provide victims with accessible legal remedies while creating responsibilities for relevant authorities to respond to complaints (Ahmad et al., 2024). The legislation is particularly significant because domestic abuse may involve continuing patterns of coercion and control rather than a single incident. Therefore, an effective legal response requires mechanisms capable of preventing further harm while ensuring accountability. The Act can consequently be viewed as an attempt to move the legal system from a purely reactive approach toward a more comprehensive framework combining prevention, protection, relief, and enforcement (Asghar et al., 2024).

3.2 Definition and Scope

A major strength of specialized domestic violence legislation is its recognition that abuse may occur in several forms. Domestic violence is not confined to physical assault but may include physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse, as well as intimidation, harassment, threats, and controlling conduct. This broader approach is important because victims can suffer serious harm without necessarily sustaining visible physical injuries. Psychological and emotional abuse, for example, may involve humiliation, threats, isolation, or persistent intimidation, while economic abuse may deprive a victim of financial independence and essential resources. The scope of the Act is therefore significant in determining who may seek protection and what conduct may attract legal intervention (Shami, Khaled, et al., 2024). By addressing violence within domestic relationships, the legislation recognizes the particular vulnerability of individuals who may remain in continuous contact with an alleged perpetrator. The broad conceptualization of abuse also reflects the understanding that domestic violence is frequently characterized by unequal power relationships and repeated conduct. However, the practical value of these definitions depends upon their interpretation and application by courts and enforcement institutions. Clear identification of abusive conduct, proper documentation of complaints, and

sensitive assessment of evidence remain essential for ensuring that the statutory scope translates into effective protection (Azhar et al., 2024).

3.3 Protection Mechanisms and Remedies

The Act provides a range of protective mechanisms intended to safeguard victims from continuing or potential violence. One of the most important remedies is the protection order, through which the court may impose restrictions designed to prevent the alleged perpetrator from committing further acts of violence, threatening the victim, communicating improperly, or engaging in conduct that places the victim at risk. Residence-related protection is also important because domestic violence frequently occurs in the shared household, creating a difficult situation for victims who may have nowhere else to live. Legal remedies concerning residence can therefore help prevent victims from being deprived of their home merely because they seek protection from abuse (Shami, Ashraf, et al., 2024). The framework also emphasizes relief and assistance rather than relying exclusively upon punishment after violence has occurred. Effective protection requires accessible complaint procedures, timely judicial consideration, legal assistance, medical and psychological support, and appropriate institutional coordination. The protective mechanisms established under the Act are particularly important for vulnerable victims who may lack financial resources or social support. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these remedies ultimately depends upon whether protection orders are promptly issued, understood by victims and authorities, and effectively enforced when violated (Shami, Asghar, et al., 2024).

3.4 Criminal Liability and Enforcement

The effectiveness of domestic violence legislation cannot be assessed solely by the existence of protective provisions; enforcement and accountability are equally important. Domestic violence may involve conduct that attracts criminal liability under applicable criminal law, while violations of statutory protection orders or other legal requirements may generate additional legal consequences. A credible enforcement framework requires effective complaint registration, impartial investigation, appropriate prosecution, timely judicial proceedings, and enforcement of court orders. In practice, several factors can weaken enforcement, including underreporting, social stigma, family pressure, fear of retaliation, lack of awareness, economic dependence, institutional limitations, and delays in judicial proceedings (Manzoor et al., 2024). Victims may also withdraw complaints because of reconciliation pressures or concerns about family consequences. These challenges demonstrate that criminal liability must operate alongside preventive and protective measures. Police officers, prosecutors, courts, and social welfare institutions must have adequate awareness and capacity to respond sensitively and consistently to domestic violence cases. Judicial enforcement is particularly important because a protection order that is not effectively implemented may provide little practical security to a victim. Therefore, the overall effectiveness of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 depends upon the interaction between substantive legal provisions, procedural mechanisms, institutional capacity, judicial responsiveness, and actual enforcement. The Act provides an important foundation, but its objectives can only be achieved through consistent implementation and meaningful accountability (Ashraf et al., 2024).

4. Effectiveness of the Act

4.1 Assessment of Criminalization

The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 represents an important attempt to transform domestic violence from a private family concern into a matter requiring legal and

institutional intervention. Its significance lies in recognizing that violence occurring within domestic relationships can seriously affect bodily integrity, dignity, security, and fundamental rights. The Act provides a specialized framework through which victims can seek protection and relief rather than depending exclusively upon general criminal law. Its broader understanding of domestic violence also allows legal intervention in circumstances involving physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. From a criminal justice perspective, however, the effectiveness of criminalization depends upon more than declaring abusive conduct unlawful. Criminalization must be supported by effective complaint mechanisms, investigation, prosecution, judicial remedies, and enforcement (Zafar et al., 2024). The Act therefore has considerable normative value because it communicates that domestic violence is unacceptable and that the State has a responsibility to protect victims. Nevertheless, weaknesses in implementation can reduce the deterrent effect of criminalization. Where perpetrators believe that complaints are unlikely to result in meaningful consequences, the existence of legislation may have limited preventive impact. Thus, the Act's criminal justice significance must be assessed by examining whether its legal protections actually produce accountability and reduce the recurrence of domestic violence (STRAND, 2024).

4.2 Institutional and Enforcement Challenges

Institutional capacity is a central factor determining the effectiveness of domestic violence legislation. The implementation of the Act requires coordinated action by courts, police, prosecutors, legal aid institutions, social welfare departments, shelters, medical professionals, and other relevant authorities. Inadequate coordination between these institutions can result in delays, duplication of responsibilities, or failure to provide comprehensive assistance to victims. Law-enforcement personnel may also lack specialized training concerning the nature of domestic violence, particularly psychological, emotional, and economic abuse. Such limitations can result in complaints being treated as ordinary family disputes rather than serious violations requiring legal intervention. Judicial delays and procedural difficulties may further weaken the effectiveness of protective remedies (M. Saxton et al., 2024). A protection order is meaningful only when it is issued promptly and effectively enforced. Similarly, legal sanctions cannot achieve deterrence if investigations are weak or proceedings remain unresolved for extended periods. Limited institutional resources, insufficient specialized personnel, inadequate victim-support services, and inconsistent enforcement may therefore create significant obstacles. Strengthening institutional capacity requires specialized training, clear procedures, effective coordination, adequate resources, monitoring mechanisms, and accountability for failures to implement statutory protections.

4.3 Barriers to Reporting and Access to Justice

One of the most significant limitations on the effectiveness of the Act is the difficulty victims may face in reporting domestic violence and accessing legal remedies. Domestic violence frequently occurs in relationships characterized by emotional dependence, economic inequality, and unequal power. Victims may fear retaliation, abandonment, financial insecurity, social stigma, or pressure from relatives if they report an abusive family member. Cultural expectations concerning family reputation and preservation of the household may further discourage legal action. Lack of awareness about available remedies is another important barrier, particularly for individuals with limited education or restricted access to legal information. Even when victims are aware of their rights, the cost of legal proceedings, transportation, documentation, and representation may discourage them from pursuing a case. The absence or limited availability of accessible support services can further increase vulnerability (Campbell et al., 2024). Effective access to justice therefore requires more than formally available legal remedies. Victims must be able to approach

authorities safely, receive respectful treatment, obtain legal assistance, and secure timely protection. Public legal awareness, affordable legal aid, confidential complaint mechanisms, victim-support services, and accessible judicial procedures are consequently essential to transforming statutory rights into practical remedies.

4.4 Gap between Law and Practice

A significant distinction exists between the formal protection provided by legislation and the practical experience of victims. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 establishes an important legal framework, but legislation alone cannot eliminate domestic violence or guarantee effective protection. The gap between law and practice may emerge when statutory provisions are not consistently implemented by law-enforcement authorities, courts, or other institutions. Protective orders may lose their effectiveness if violations are not promptly addressed, while criminal accountability may remain limited where victims withdraw complaints or investigations are inadequate. Social attitudes can also undermine legal provisions by encouraging reconciliation even where continued contact places victims at risk (Nuroniya et al., 2024). Furthermore, the effectiveness of legislation may vary according to geographical location, institutional resources, socioeconomic circumstances, and access to legal assistance. This demonstrates that legal reform must be accompanied by institutional and social reforms. The Act should therefore be evaluated not simply on the basis of its wording but according to whether its objectives are achieved in practice. Bridging the gap requires stronger enforcement, judicial responsiveness, specialized training, victim-centered procedures, public awareness, effective monitoring, and adequate support services. Ultimately, the Act provides a necessary legal foundation, but its effectiveness as a criminal justice instrument depends upon the ability and willingness of institutions to translate statutory protections into timely, accessible, and enforceable remedies (Stjernqvist & Strand, 2024).

5. Judicial Response and Critical Evaluation

5.1 Judicial Interpretation

Judicial interpretation plays a central role in determining the practical meaning and effectiveness of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010. Since domestic violence can take diverse forms, courts are required to interpret statutory provisions in a manner that recognizes not only physical abuse but also psychological, emotional, sexual, and economic forms of violence. Judicial interpretation is particularly important where legislative language is broad or where procedural questions arise concerning protection orders, residence rights, evidence, and enforcement. Courts can strengthen the protective purpose of the legislation by adopting a victim-sensitive and rights-based interpretation that recognizes the unequal power relationships frequently present in domestic settings. At the same time, judicial interpretation must remain consistent with principles of due process, fairness, and the rights of all parties (Ross, 2024). The courts' approach can therefore determine whether the Act operates as an effective instrument of protection or remains largely symbolic. Consistent interpretation is also necessary to avoid differences in the treatment of similar cases. Where courts interpret and apply the legislation consistently, victims and legal practitioners can better understand available remedies and perpetrators are more likely to recognize the consequences of abusive conduct.

5.2 Role of Courts

Courts occupy a crucial position in the implementation of domestic violence legislation because they provide the principal forum for determining claims, granting protective remedies, and

ensuring compliance with legal obligations. Their role extends beyond simply adjudicating disputes between parties. Courts can provide timely protection to victims through appropriate orders and can ensure that violations of those orders receive effective legal consequences. Judicial proceedings should also be conducted in a manner that protects victims from unnecessary intimidation, humiliation, or repeated exposure to abusive circumstances. Timeliness is particularly important because delayed protection may expose victims to continuing violence and may undermine confidence in the justice system (Begum, 2024). Courts can further contribute to the effectiveness of the Act by interpreting its provisions consistently with constitutional guarantees of dignity, equality, life, and liberty. Judicial institutions also have an important role in identifying weaknesses in enforcement and ensuring that relevant authorities comply with statutory duties. However, courts cannot independently resolve all institutional and social barriers associated with domestic violence. Effective judicial protection requires cooperation from police, prosecutors, legal-aid institutions, social welfare authorities, and other relevant agencies. The courts' contribution is therefore most effective when supported by a coordinated institutional framework.

5.3 Deficiencies in the Legal Framework

Although the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 provides an important specialized framework, several deficiencies can affect its effectiveness. One significant concern is the gap between protective objectives and practical enforcement. A legal remedy has limited value if victims cannot obtain it quickly or if orders are not effectively implemented. Procedural complexity, delays, inadequate institutional coordination, and insufficient awareness among enforcement personnel may weaken the operation of the Act. Another concern relates to the difficulty of proving forms of abuse that do not produce visible physical injuries (UKPENE, 2024). Psychological, emotional, and economic violence may be difficult to document and establish through conventional evidentiary approaches. Victims may also face difficulties in accessing legal assistance and institutional support. The effectiveness of the framework can further be affected by social pressure to reconcile domestic disputes rather than pursue legal remedies. In addition, differences in institutional capacity and implementation may create unequal access to protection. These deficiencies demonstrate that legislative recognition of domestic violence must be accompanied by clear procedures, effective enforcement mechanisms, adequate victim-support services, specialized training, and continuous institutional monitoring. Without such measures, statutory rights may remain difficult to exercise in practice.

5.4 Critical Assessment of Effectiveness

A critical assessment of the Act indicates that it represents a significant step toward recognizing domestic violence as a matter of public legal concern, but its effectiveness cannot be measured solely by its legislative existence. Its strengths include the recognition of domestic violence as a distinct legal problem, the availability of protective remedies, and the possibility of judicial intervention to prevent continuing abuse. Nevertheless, practical effectiveness is weakened when victims encounter barriers in reporting, accessing courts, obtaining timely protection, or enforcing judicial orders (Bettinson, 2022). The Act's deterrent value also depends upon the certainty and consistency of consequences for abusive conduct. Where institutional weaknesses, social pressures, or procedural delays prevent effective enforcement, criminalization may have limited practical impact. The legislation should therefore be evaluated through both normative and implementation-based criteria. Normatively, it provides an important foundation for protecting dignity, equality, security, and bodily integrity. Practically, however, its objectives require stronger enforcement institutions, victim-centered procedures, accessible legal assistance, judicial consistency, public awareness, and effective coordination between relevant authorities. A

comprehensive approach should also recognize that punishment alone cannot eliminate domestic violence; prevention, protection, rehabilitation, and social awareness are equally important. Overall, the Act constitutes an important legal development, but its full potential can only be achieved by narrowing the gap between statutory protection and actual implementation and by ensuring that victims receive timely, accessible, and enforceable remedies (Nasyi'ah et al., 2024).

6. Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Major Findings

The research finds that domestic violence remains a significant legal and social problem in Pakistan despite the development of a specialized statutory framework. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 represents an important legislative step because it recognizes domestic violence as conduct requiring legal intervention rather than treating it exclusively as a private family matter. The Act provides mechanisms for protection and relief and recognizes different forms of abuse, including physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, and economic violence. However, the study finds that the existence of legislation alone has not been sufficient to ensure effective prevention and protection. A substantial gap remains between statutory rights and their practical implementation. Victims may encounter social stigma, family pressure, economic dependence, fear of retaliation, lack of legal awareness, and difficulties in accessing justice. Institutional weaknesses, procedural delays, inadequate coordination between relevant authorities, and inconsistent enforcement further reduce the practical effectiveness of available remedies. The study also finds that the effectiveness of criminalization depends upon the certainty of enforcement and accountability. Where abusive conduct does not result in timely and meaningful legal consequences, the deterrent value of the law is weakened. Judicial institutions therefore have an important role in interpreting the legislation consistently and ensuring that protective remedies are meaningful, timely, and accessible.

6.2 Legal and Institutional Recommendations

The existing legal framework should be strengthened through clearer procedures, effective enforcement mechanisms, and improved coordination among institutions responsible for addressing domestic violence. Relevant authorities should ensure that complaints are registered promptly and that victims are not discouraged from pursuing lawful remedies through informal pressure or unnecessary procedural obstacles. Courts should adopt timely and victim-sensitive procedures for dealing with domestic violence matters, particularly where there is a continuing risk of violence. Effective enforcement of protection and residence orders should receive particular attention because an order that is not implemented cannot provide meaningful protection. Law-enforcement officers, prosecutors, judicial officers, and other relevant personnel should receive specialized training regarding the different forms of domestic violence and the particular vulnerabilities of victims. Institutional mechanisms should also be strengthened to provide legal assistance, medical support, psychological counseling, temporary shelter, and rehabilitation services. The government should establish effective monitoring mechanisms to evaluate implementation and identify institutional failures. Improved coordination between police, courts, prosecution services, social welfare departments, legal-aid institutions, and shelters is necessary to create a comprehensive response. These reforms would help transform the statutory framework from a formal legal instrument into an effective system of protection and accountability.

6.3 Policy Measures

Legal reform should be supported by broader policy measures addressing the social and economic conditions that contribute to underreporting and continued victimization. Public awareness campaigns should educate individuals about domestic violence, available legal remedies, protection mechanisms, and the importance of reporting abuse. Such campaigns should particularly target communities where social stigma and misconceptions discourage victims from seeking assistance. Legal literacy programs can empower vulnerable persons to understand their rights and available remedies. Government institutions should also develop accessible support services, including confidential reporting mechanisms, legal-aid facilities, shelters, counseling services, and emergency assistance. Policies should encourage cooperation between government institutions and civil society organizations working for victim protection. Data collection and reporting mechanisms should also be improved so that policymakers can evaluate the frequency, nature, and outcomes of domestic violence cases and design evidence-based interventions. Educational institutions and community organizations can contribute by promoting awareness of equality, dignity, non-violence, and respectful family relationships. Long-term policy should therefore combine legal enforcement with prevention, education, economic empowerment, institutional capacity-building, and victim support. A coordinated national approach would make it possible to address both the immediate consequences and underlying social factors associated with domestic violence.

6.4 Conclusion

Domestic violence constitutes a serious violation of dignity, security, equality, and fundamental rights and requires a comprehensive criminal justice and human rights response. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 has established an important legal foundation by recognizing domestic violence as a matter requiring prevention, protection, and legal intervention. Nevertheless, this study concludes that the effectiveness of the Act is constrained by weaknesses in implementation, institutional capacity, access to justice, public awareness, and enforcement. The central challenge is therefore not simply the absence of legal provisions but the continuing gap between the rights established by law and the protection available in practice. Strengthening the effectiveness of the Act requires consistent judicial interpretation, prompt enforcement, specialized institutional capacity, accessible legal assistance, effective victim-support services, and stronger accountability mechanisms. At the same time, legal measures must be supported by public awareness and policies addressing social and economic barriers that prevent victims from seeking justice. Domestic violence should consequently be approached as a continuing public concern rather than merely a private family dispute. If the statutory framework is implemented through coordinated institutional action and supported by appropriate legal and policy reforms, Pakistan can move toward a more effective system that prevents domestic violence, protects victims, ensures accountability, and promotes the constitutional values of dignity, equality, and justice.

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