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Addressing Violence Against Women: Impact of Education and Culture in Lahore, Pakistan

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Abstract

This study explores the interplay between education and cultural factors in shaping the prevalence and response to violence against women in Lahore, Pakistan. Despite increasing awareness, violence against women remains a significant issue in the region, influenced by both educational levels and cultural norms. The cross-sectional survey method was used to collect data and the sample size was 384 houses. SPSS was used to interpret the data. The findings showed a significant relationship between factors, such as low educational attainment and cultural/community norms and violence against women. These observations have important ramifications for legislators. This study contributes valuable knowledge that informs both academic discourse and practical interventions, ultimately aiding in the development of more effective strategies to combat violence against women in Lahore and other similar places.

Keywords: education, culture, norms, violence, women

Introduction

Historically, women have been treated often as possessions of men, giving men the power to commit violence against them. Various factors in different regions have contributed to women's unequal status (Pakeeza & Bushra, 2022). According to the recent data from the World Health Organization (WHO), one in three women faces physical and sexual violence, yet only 40% of these incidents are reported or there are active efforts to seek assistance (Hussain et al., 2024). The United Nations reports that violence against women (VAW) can manifest even before birth through practices such as gender-based abortions. Throughout their lives, women face numerous forms of discrimination, restricted access to education and healthcare, and experience physical, emotional, and sexual abuse from intimate partners. This cycle of abuse continues at different stages of life, sometimes escalating to extreme outcomes including homicide and forced

suicide, even in older age (Costinot, 2023). Patriarchal traditions have significantly impacted the Muslim society in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, contributing to gender asymmetry and partiality against women (Pakeeza & Bushra, 2022). In Pakistan, the pervasive patriarchal framework and deeply ingrained cultural, traditional, and social elements result in widespread violence against women (Babar & Burtch, 2020).

Ancient customs in the Indo-Pak region are linked to patriarchy. Strongly rooted cultural and societal conventions cause Pakistani women, especially in rural areas, to experience unfair treatment, negatively impacting both their personal advancement and community development (Pakeeza & Bushra, 2022). The substantial differences between Pakistan's poor, middle, and upper social classes result in varied lifestyles (Şahin, 2020). The affluent live opulent lives influenced by western norms, while the middle class, primarily the working class, seeks better employment, educational opportunities, and living conditions. The lower classes struggle to meet basic needs, lacking access to proper shelter, clothing, and food, often living in temporary housing and relying on leftovers and used clothing. The middle class occasionally treats members of the working class like exhibits in a zoo (Phoenix, 2022).

Less than half of Pakistan's population has access to quality education (Singh, 2020). Feudal lords in Pakistan's Sindh region oppose women's education, fearing that it would lead women to reject their cultural heritage (Kuortti, 2020). Pakistan's laws follow Islamic principles, although other religions and traditions have also influenced the country's culture, making it not wholly Islamic. Tribal practices such as watta-satta, wani, and honor killings, ingrained in tribal culture, often precede Islamic teachings (Pakeeza & Bushra, 2022). Direct violence occurs when a relative kills a woman out of suspicion or for another reason. When several men continue this pattern, structural violence results. Without community intervention, this behavior becomes the source of cultural violence against women when it is entrenched in the society (Babar & Burtch, 2020).

The dowry system in Pakistan often gives rise to yet another type of violence against women, often leading to a horrifying end known as bride burning (Babar & Burtch, 2020). Numerous brides, unable to stand the cruelty, choose to commit suicide or end up being burned alive by their in-laws. The dowry system is widespread in both rural regions and urban neighborhoods. Families of the groom frequently request large dowries,

believing they are entitled to a return on their son's investment. This pursuit of social status by requesting larger dowries is a prevalent trend that cuts across social classes. In contrast, Islam regards dowry as a woman's right, obligating the husband to provide his bride with a dowry. Although husbands are frequently seen as the perpetrators of domestic violence, other women, notably mothers-in-law, can contribute to this problem by escalating tensions within families (Niaz, 2021).

Women in Pakistan are always subject to male dominance in the society and frequently submit to judgments made by men in the family, tribe, community, and society. Due to their emotional and financial dependency on men, regardless of their roles as mothers, wives, sisters, or daughters, women are often seen as burden in the Pakistani society. Women are occasionally traded to settle disputes in rural areas of Pakistan, causing people to question their worth and often leading fathers to neglect their female children's education (Singh, 2020). According to UNESCO's research, only 40,000 of Pakistan's 163,000 schools are specifically designed to educate girls. Working women in Pakistan frequently encounter societal bias, as their independence challenges the traditional notions of virtue.

Working women in Pakistan face substantial hurdles, including transportation difficulties, inadequate work and health amenities, unfair compensation despite extra effort, and frequent harassment from male colleagues. Pakistan's economy is hindered by a prevalent belief among women that earning is primarily the domain of men, leading to a considerable portion of the population relying solely on their male counterparts for financial sustenance. Kuortti (2020) emphasizes that when men provide for women and give them the necessities of life at home, regardless of whether these orders originate from husbands, fathers, or brothers, they frequently condition them to comply and carry them out. As episodes of violence against women occur within their purview, law enforcement's failure to offer protection and security that spans gender, color, ethnicity, and religion has a negative influence on their credibility (Asif, 2021).

The current study looks into the causes of violence against women in Lahore, Pakistan, highlighting the fact that gender equality is crucial for social justice and economic advancement, in addition to being a fundamental human right (United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2024). Numerous women and girls are impacted by violence against women and girls (VAWG), which is a serious human rights violation on a global scale (Sanchez et al., 2023). This study focuses on how low levels of education and cultural/community norms affect the frequency of violent crimes. By examining the interaction between inadequate education and prevailing cultural norms, it aims to elucidate how these factors collectively shape the scope and nature of violence in various socioeconomic contexts.

Research Questions

This investigation explores the following research questions.

RQ1: What is the connection between illiteracy and violence against women?

RQ2: What is the connection between cultural/community norms and violence against women?

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

RO1: To examine the connection between illiteracy and violence against women.

RO2: To examine the connection between violence against women and cultural/community norms.

Significance of Study

Violence against women affects almost one in three women globally and remains a significant social concern. These women are frequently the victims of sexual or physical abuse, usually by close companions. According to Siddiqui et al. (2021), control, power dynamics, and male dominance all play a significant role in this violence. Women's advancement in the workforce and in school is hampered by the culture that supports male domination, which leads to various types of violence to uphold male supremacy (Niaz, 2021). Gender-biased acts that cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm to women of all ages are classified as forms of violence under the Declaration on the Eradication of Violence Against Women. This includes threats, manipulation, and unjustified restrictions on personal autonomy, whether in private or public settings (Beijing Conference). Sexual violence is often used to deter women from

participating in public activities, making the environment outside the home unsafe for them (Terry, 2023).

Literature Review

Violence has been used historically to control women and maintain their subordinate position. Browne (1994) notes that a narrower interpretation of violence might define it as the criminal use of physical strength. Gender-based violence includes a wide range of expressions, often showing distinct patterns linked to specific communities, cultures, regions, and historical eras. However, gender-based violence is a pervasive issue, embedded in the fabric of culture, social interactions, and economic and political power structures. This often results in women being relegated to roles of economic and emotional dependence and treated as possessions protected by specific male figures (Frude, 2022). In societies with gender-based power structures dominated by ruling classes, violence against women can be inadvertently legitimized (Tomes, 2021).

Historical evidence shows the ongoing plight of women subjected to violence (Frude, 2022). The issue gained prominence in public discourse largely due to feminist movements that facilitated collective action against its prevalence (Freeman, 2021). Recognized as a subject necessitating further research, domestic violence has been acknowledged as a significant issue, particularly in densely populated areas (Smith, 2021). Assessing the true scope of violence against women is challenging and it is often considered one of the best-concealed aspects of criminal activity (Polites & Mulcahy, 2023). Police statistics inherently remain incomplete, covering only a fraction of actual victims. These statistics are often just the visible portion of the problem, with some cases, such as those involving refugee women, highlighting limited access to support materials relative to the broader scale of the issue.

Gender-based violence comprises any action, inaction, or behavior that causes direct or indirect physical, sexual, or psychological suffering through tactics such as deceit or coercion and targets women with the intention or effect of punishment, humiliation, or perpetuating gender stereotypes, while stripping them of dignity, self-determination, integrity, security, and self-respect (Lewis & Meredith, 2024). According to the "Pan American Treaty," any structure that upholds gender-based inequality can be considered as a form of violence. The UNESCO project in Pakistan focused

on women and violence, highlighting that violence is often used to establish dominance and control, driven by the desire to demonstrate power or counteract the feelings of powerlessness. In hierarchical social structures, the victimization of subordinate groups is inevitable, achieved through subtle pressure, ideological influence, socialization mechanisms, and overt force (Lewis et al., 2021).

The UN Draft Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which was released in September 1992, postulated a broad definition of violence against women. Any gender-based violence that causes physical, psychological, or sexual injury or the willful denial of freedom falls under this criterion. The mistreatment of women, regardless of its context and manifestation, is best understood through a gender-focused perspective, recognizing that such mistreatment is partly rooted in the subordinate status of women within the society.

Education remains a crucial concern throughout an individual's life, significantly impacting childhood development by reducing poverty risks, delaying marriage, and facilitating labor market entry. However, discriminatory social norms such as early marriages and domestic responsibilities contribute to gender disparity in education across different countries. In families where education is not prioritized, girls often face early marriages. Studies show that among girls under 18 who married, 16% dropped out of school, compared to 36% of their unmarried peers. In 2012, in West Asia and South Asia, for every 100 boys enrolled in secondary education, there were only 84 to 93 girls (Chidi, 2021).

In the context of violence against women, husbands' or partners' educational attainment is a major factor. Higher education serves as a protective factor against men who abuse their wives, whereas those with little or no education are more prone to do so. Factors contributing to women's heightened risk of violence include men's low education levels, experiences of childhood violence, acceptance of abuse, and previous encounters with various forms of abuse (Brishty, 2023). Women's socioeconomic dependence on men increases their vulnerability to intimate partner violence (Peart et al., 2021). Financial dependence often confines women to abusive relationships due to a lack of resources for leaving.

In cultures where violence is normalized, power imbalances—such as differences in earnings, education, and decision-making authority—are

more likely to result in violence. These dynamics are assessed using indicators such as assets, employment, education, and household decision-making authority (Peart et al., 2021). Situations where men have higher education, earn more, and control household decisions are more prone to abuse, primarily due to women's reliance on their partners (Kan et al., 2021). According to studies conducted in Egypt and the United States, women who are less educated than their partners are more likely to experience intimate partner violence (Singh & Babbar, 2022). Conversely, women with higher education and financial independence are less likely to experience abuse. Women's submission to husbands, particularly when aligned with societal expectations, also correlates with an elevated likelihood of abuse (Zhang et al., 2024).

The interplay between gender and other inequalities highlights that girls in impoverished areas often face limited school enrollment due to micro- and macro-level norms. Macro-level factors, such as job availability, impact female labor force participation and underscore the importance of women's education (Verick, 2022). At the micro-level, barriers to girls' education include limited household income, religious considerations, geographical inaccessibility, reinforcement of traditional gender roles, a shortage of female educators, and political disinterest, particularly in countries like Pakistan (Jamal et al., 2020). Families with a lower educational background significantly reduce the potential for girls to receive an education, with substantial implications for their future empowerment. In economically disadvantaged countries, the returns in terms of annual earnings per unit of education are higher for women than men (Patrinos, 2021).

Cultural groups and societies have differing views regarding violence against women, both inside and between particular nations. This diversity is particularly evident in patriarchal societies such as that of Pakistan, where prevails the notion that "sons possess economic, social, or religious value, while daughters are often perceived as an economic burden." Male dominance frequently contributes to instances of domestic violence, with men holding central decision-making roles within families and society, thereby increasing the likelihood of violence against women. In Pakistan, women are often excluded from decision-making processes and are seen as socially and financially dependent on men, leading to feelings of insecurity and inadequacy when male counterparts are absent. Consequently, male

dominance is a notable predictor of violence against women in the country (Khaliqjan et al., 2021).

Research in Australia showed that individuals born in non-English-speaking countries have less favorable views on domestic violence, as compared to those born in Australia or other western nations. Additionally, among individuals aged 12–20, those with Middle Eastern or Asian backgrounds are more likely to endorse violence from both genders (Wilson et al., 2023). Similarly, studies in North America documented variations in attitudes towards violence against women based on ethnic background. Asian students at a university in Texas, for instance, were more likely than Caucasian students to think that women should stop rape, link sex to rape, and hold victims accountable for rape. This discrepancy can be a result of Asian cultural traditions that value modesty in women and tend to keep sexual matters personal (Kang et al., 2021).

Further research shows significant disparities among various Asian ethnic groups. A study conducted in the US found that respondents with Southeast Asian origin exhibited stronger support for violence and male privilege as compared to their East Asian counterparts, suggesting the influence of specific cultural frameworks and immigration patterns (Payne, 2020). Variations in social status and educational attainment, which might influence the perceptions of rape victims, are also reflected in disparities in attitudes across different ethnic groups (Nagel & Xu, 2022).

Divergent attitudes towards violence against women are evident across various countries, with studies highlighting the significant role of cultural contexts in shaping these attitudes. For instance, ideas about marriage and a woman's social standing are entwined with the conception of rape in Beirut, Lebanon, making these women more susceptible to sexual exploitation (Wehbi & Nogy, 2022). In Palestine, reactions to female rape victims are hampered by the importance placed on family reputation and female purity, which exacerbates the victimization of these victims (Gordon, 2023). It is possible to twist the ideas of feminine modesty, virginity, and masculine "honor" to justify and condone violence against women. Men's violence against their women partners is more accepted in "honor cultures" that have deeply rooted gender views, masculine dominance, strong family values, and conventions surrounding female virtue and male sexual freedom. These cultures also tend to find violent reactions to infidelity more acceptable (Vandello et al., 2024).

Figure 1

Research Framework
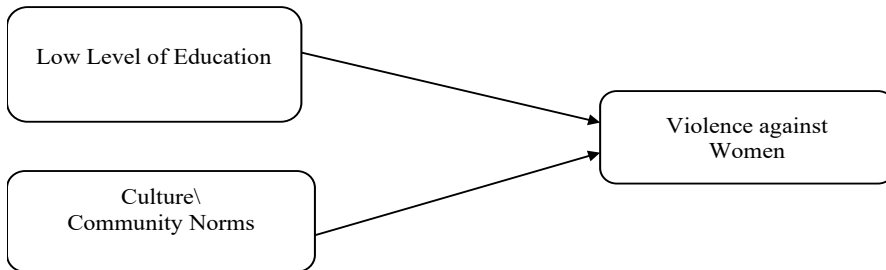
Research Methodology

The current study focused on Pakistani women residing in Lahore as the target demographic. According to the data from Population of Lahore, Pakistan, the estimated female population in Lahore is approximately 5.3 million. The unit of analysis for this research were individual women living in Lahore. A sample size of 384 women was determined for this study based on statistical power analysis to ensure the representativeness of the sample and the reliability of results. The sample was selected using the stratified random sampling method to ensure diversity across different socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels.

Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire designed to capture various dimensions of the study, including experiences of violence, educational background, and cultural attitudes. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale to measure the respondents' perceptions and experiences, providing a quantifiable means to assess the frequency and intensity of different outcomes. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), a comprehensive statistical software package.

Results and Discussion

Violence emerges as a significant means and mechanism employed to subjugate women, historically utilized to control them and sustain their subordinate position. Violence which is gender-based encompasses a spectrum of expressions, often exhibiting distinct patterns linked to communities, cultures, regions, and historical eras. Nonetheless, gender violence permeates all societies; it's an inherent structural occurrence

intricately woven into the fabric of culture, social interactions, economic and political authority. Abundant historical evidence illustrates the ongoing plight of women subjected to violence against women (Dobash & Dobash, 1984; Martin, 2014) Nonetheless, the matter gained prominence in public discourse mainly due to the efforts of robust feminist movements, which facilitated collective actions opposed the prevalence of it (Borkowski et al., 2023; Freeman 1979). Later on, which was recognized as a subject necessitating further extensive research, domestic violence has been acknowledged, especially in this populated world (Smith, 1989). Any action, inaction, or behavior that causes direct or indirect physical, sexual, or psychological suffering, through tactics like deceit, coercion, or others, and that mainly hits on women with intentions or effect of discourage, punishment, humiliating, or perpetuating gender stereotypes, thereby stripping her of dignity, self-determination, integrity, security, self-respect, or her essential human nature (Lewis, 1989).

As per the one of report from Pakistan the UNESCO project which is mainly on women and violence. Moreover, violence serves as a tool of coercive which is used to establish dominance and exert control over others. According to various studies, among girls under 18 who married, 16% had dropped out of school, whereas their unmarried counterparts accounted for 36% within the same age group. High-quality early education plays a pivotal role in childhood, fostering an environment that reduces the risk of poverty later in life, delays marriages, and ensures entry into the labor market. The education level of husbands/partners plays a evident and important character in the context of abuse or violence against women. Husbands or partners with limited or no education are more inclined to perpetrate violence against their wives, while higher education tends to function as a protective factor. The concept of male dominance frequently serves as a contributing factor to instances of domestic violence. The degree of authority allocated to decision-making further accentuates the dominance of men within both the family unit and the broader societal context, subsequently escalating the likelihood of violence against women. Women are frequently excluded from participation in decision-making processes and are viewed as socially and financially reliant on men. For numerous women, the absence of male counterparts leads to feelings of insecurity, inadequacy, and ineffectiveness. For instance, discrepancies in attitudes towards rape victims between White and African American individuals

diminished when accounting for differences in socioeconomic status and education (Nagel et al., 2005).

Response rate

A total of 384 houses in Lahore were the focus of the study's in-house data gathering. The response rate was computed by dividing the total number of participants with the sample size, in accordance with Hamilton et al.'s (2009) methodology. All 384 circulated surveys were returned. However, only 363 questionnaires were considered valid, yielding a valid response rate of 93%. There were no concerns about unreturned surveys as the researcher had direct contact with the respondents. Despite careful examination of each questionnaire by the respondents, 21 surveys were found to have missing responses during data entry and were, therefore, deemed unusable.

Cronbach's Alpha

The questionnaire's validity and reliability were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. This statistical metric warrants the consistency and authenticity of the instrument and aids to identify possible problems during the initial data collection phase. The questionnaire was first administered to a small sample of 363 households, representing the characteristics of the target population, in order to calculate Cronbach's alpha. To evaluate the questions' clarity and understandability, the participants were prompted to clarify their answers and were urged to answer honestly. Higher values of Cronbach's alpha, which range from 0 to 1, denote increased reliability. While there is debate over the exact threshold for acceptable reliability, values between 0.5 and 0.6 are sometimes considered acceptable (Lee, 2000). It remains clear that most reliability coefficients are over 0.5, demonstrating the dependability of the constructions. However, the construct of CN (0.736) exhibits the lowest degree of dependability.

Table 1
Reliability Coefficient

Serial No	Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Items
1	Violence against women	0.744	7
2	Low level of Education	0.738	6
3	Culture/Community Norms	0.736	5

Descriptive Statistics

After data collection, the collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to get an overview of the data set. The sample consisting of respondents from public organizations was determined using descriptive tests.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Demography	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	105	28.9
	Female	258	71.1
Age	18-25	102	28.1
	26-33	134	36.9
	34-41	70	19.3
	41 and above	56	15.4
Income	20k-30k	95	26.2
	30k-40k	143	39.4
	40k-50k	69	19.0
	above 50	56	15.4
Qualification	Bachelors	259	71.3
	Masters and above	104	28.7

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis was carried out to describe the primary features of the dataset. Mean and standard deviation, as described by Sekaran and Bougie (2010), were used to provide an overview of the respondents' responses. The results revealed that the averages of all the factors fall within the range 1.711-3.5112. These values not only remain within an acceptable spectrum but also surpass the mean value. The standard deviation scores are distributed from 0.4540 to 0.64117, which comfortably align with acceptable bounds. It is evident that every factor demonstrates a satisfactory and rational level of application.

Table 3

Descriptive Analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
VAW	363	1	5	3.430	0.468
LE	363	1	5	3.687	0.597
CN	363	1	5	3.511	0.641

The mean value is above 3.40 of all variables whereas standard deviation is above 0.460 as shown in table above.

Table 4

Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	SE	R^2 Change	F Change	df1	df2	p
.203	.051	.025	.462479	.051	2.563	6	356	.019

The *R* square value is 0.051 and adjusted *R* square value is 0.025 as shown in table. The significant *F* change is 0.019.

Table 5

Regression Coefficients

Model	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	2.637	.230		11.449	.000
LE	.051	.041	.066	1.246	.214
CN	.110	.038	.151	2.878	.004
Gender	.066	.054	.064	1.236	.217
Age of Head	.045	.024	.098	1.874	.062
Income	-.003	.027	-.006	-.110	.913
Qualification	.009	.061	.008	.144	.886

The *B* value is 2.637 and std. error is 2.30. The *t* value is 11.449 and significance is 0.00 which is approved.

The study tested two primary hypotheses regarding the impact of education and cultural norms on violence against women in Lahore.

H1: The hypothesis posited that a low level of education does not have a significant impact on violence against women. The results indicated that the relationship between education level and violence against women is not statistically significant. Specifically, the regression coefficient (B) is 0.051, with a t-value of 1.246 and a significance level (Sig2) of 0.214. These findings suggest that, contrary to the hypothesis, low level of education does not significantly affect the incidence of violence against women in the studied population.

H2: The hypothesis proposed that there is a significant relationship between cultural and community norms and violence against women. The analysis revealed a significant relationship, with a regression coefficient (*B*)

of 0.110, a *t*-value of 2.878, and a significance level (*p*) of 0.004. This result supports the hypothesis, indicating that cultural and community norms do have a significant impact on the prevalence of violence against women. The statistical significance of these findings underscores the influential role of cultural factors in shaping the experiences of violence.

Conclusion

This study explored the significant impact of culture and community norms on the prevalence of violence against women in Lahore, Pakistan. Using a questionnaire survey and quantitative methods of data analysis, the study highlighted how cultural and societal norms contribute to this issue. The key findings indicate that certain cultural expectations, such as women's roles in childcare and household chores, hinder their academic and professional advancement and sanction violence against those who reject gender norms. This cultural context limits women's participation in decision-making processes. Additionally, the study found that education alone does not significantly influence the occurrence of violence against women. Acts of violence are committed by individuals of all education levels, suggesting that education alone does not ensure respect for women's rights. The study underscores the necessity of changing cultural and community norms to reduce violence, emphasizing the need for behavioral and attitudinal changes. It also points to the potential for societal change to deter violence against women by promoting gender equality, equitable access to education, and employment opportunities. Challenging harmful cultural practices and raising awareness about women's rights are essential steps. The study concludes that policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize addressing cultural and communal norms to reduce violence against women, ultimately contributing to the country's development and prosperity.

Future Recommendations

The primary responsibility lies with the Government of Pakistan (Federal and Provincial), healthcare institutions, educational bodies, NGO's and a central committee of religious leaders and scholars.

- Ensure that high-quality educational programs are accessible to both women and men across all societies and cultures, promoting equal educational opportunities.

- Increase employment opportunities and political participation for women, ensuring their safety and security. Implement equitable recruitment practices and allocate resources for women's development.

- Implement mandatory domestic violence screening programs in all healthcare facilities in Pakistan. These programs should provide emergency treatments, follow-up rehabilitative measures, and preventive education for healthcare professionals. Establish crisis centers for women experiencing violence, located in primary healthcare settings and staffed by specialized professionals.

- Engage both men and women in awareness programs facilitated by nurses, doctors, and psychologists within governmental and non-governmental organizations or NGOs. Use both direct (individual teaching, counseling, group instruction) and indirect methods (media campaigns, pamphlets, role plays, dramas, talk shows) to disseminate information.

- At the federal level, establish religious definitions that ensure women's fundamental rights, including their autonomy and freedom. Form a central committee of religious leaders and scholars to delineate women's rights based on religious principles, while taking into account diverse ethnic and minority groups' inputs.

- Ensure equitable access for women to political opportunities by providing comprehensive training programs to enhance their political capabilities.

Conflict of Interest

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

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