

Effectiveness of Legal Amendments in Protecting Women's Rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

Women's rights protection remains a critical governance and human rights concern in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where socio-cultural constraints and institutional inefficiencies often limit the effectiveness of legal frameworks. Despite several legal amendments introduced to safeguard women's rights, their practical impact remains inconsistent, necessitating empirical investigation. This study examines the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by analyzing the roles of awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies, while incorporating women's legal awareness as a mediator and rural versus urban residence as a moderator.

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, with data collected from 1035 respondents across selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the relationships among variables, along with mediation and moderation analysis using bootstrapping techniques. The results revealed that all independent variables significantly and positively influence the protection of women's rights, with support from law enforcement agencies ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$) and implementation of legal amendments ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$) showing the strongest effects. Model fit indices indicated a good fit (CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.045, SRMR = 0.041). Mediation analysis confirmed that women's legal awareness significantly mediates the relationship between institutional factors and women's rights protection, while moderation analysis showed that rural-urban residence significantly weakens the effects of awareness and accessibility in rural areas.

The study contributes to Legal Efficacy Theory and Empowerment Theory by highlighting that legal reforms are most effective when combined with enforcement strength and public awareness. It offers important policy implications for strengthening institutional capacity, improving legal awareness, and reducing rural-urban disparities in access to justice, thereby contributing to evidence-based governance and gender-inclusive legal reforms in Pakistan.

Keywords: Women's rights protection; Legal amendments effectiveness; Legal awareness; Law enforcement support; Structural Equation Modeling; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan

Research Highlights

- Study examines effectiveness of legal amendments in women's rights protection in KPK
- Quantitative SEM approach used on sample of 1035 respondents from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- Law enforcement support shows strongest positive effect on women's rights protection
- Legal awareness significantly mediates institutional factors and rights protection
- Rural-urban residence significantly moderates access and awareness effects on outcomes

Background

The protection of women's rights through legal frameworks has emerged as a central concern in global human rights discourse. Internationally, gender equality is recognized as a fundamental

human right, enshrined in instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Across both developed and developing countries, governments have increasingly introduced legislative reforms aimed at addressing gender-based discrimination, violence, and inequality. However, despite the proliferation of such legal measures, a persistent gap remains between the formulation of laws and their effective implementation. (Farber, 2016).

Globally, violence against women continues to be a significant issue. According to various United Nations reports, approximately one in three women worldwide experiences physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. Legal systems in many countries have attempted to address this issue through criminalization of domestic violence, workplace harassment, and harmful cultural practices. Yet, implementation challenges such as weak institutional capacity, societal norms, and lack of awareness continue to undermine the effectiveness of these laws. This highlights a critical global concern: the mere existence of legal provisions does not guarantee protection unless accompanied by strong enforcement mechanisms and societal support. (Stewart, 2014).

In developing countries, the situation is often more complex due to socio-cultural and economic constraints. Patriarchal norms, limited access to justice, and inadequate institutional support systems frequently hinder women from benefiting fully from legal protections. Studies have consistently shown that women in such contexts face barriers in reporting crimes, accessing legal aid, and navigating judicial processes. These challenges are compounded by issues such as illiteracy, poverty, and gender-based discrimination embedded within social structures. (Obodo, 2021)

Furthermore, the concept of legal pluralism where formal legal systems coexist with informal or traditional justice mechanisms poses additional challenges. In many societies, customary practices and local dispute resolution systems often take precedence over formal laws, particularly in rural areas. While these systems may provide quick resolutions, they can also perpetuate discriminatory practices against women. As a result, even progressive legal reforms may fail to achieve their intended outcomes. (Spade, 2013).

Another important global trend is the increasing recognition of the role of awareness and education in enhancing the effectiveness of legal frameworks. Research indicates that women's awareness of their legal rights significantly influences their ability to seek protection and justice. Similarly, the training and sensitization of law enforcement officials and judicial personnel are crucial for ensuring gender-sensitive implementation of laws. Without these complementary measures, legal reforms remain largely symbolic. (Băluță, 2026).

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on integrating legal reforms with broader socio-economic policies aimed at women's empowerment. This includes initiatives focused on education, economic participation, and political representation. Such integrated approaches recognize that legal protection alone is insufficient to address the multifaceted nature of gender inequality. Instead, a holistic strategy that combines legal, social, and economic interventions is required. (Gebre, 2026).

Thus, the global context underscores a key issue: while significant progress has been made in enacting laws to protect women's rights, the effectiveness of these laws largely depends on their implementation. This realization has led to an increased focus on empirical research that evaluates the real-world impact of legal reforms, particularly in developing countries where implementation gaps are most pronounced. (Versteeg, 2026).

National and Local Context: Pakistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

In Pakistan, the protection of women's rights has been a significant area of legislative development, particularly since the early 2000s. The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. However, despite these

constitutional guarantees, women continue to face substantial challenges in accessing their rights due to socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. (Bodkhe 2026).

Over the past two decades, Pakistan has introduced numerous legal amendments aimed at protecting women. These include laws addressing domestic violence, workplace harassment, honour killings, and acid attacks. For instance, the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) was a landmark step in recognizing and addressing workplace harassment. Similarly, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2016 introduced stricter penalties for rape and honour-based violence. These developments indicate a strong legislative commitment to improving women's rights in the country. (Hussain, 2026, May).

Despite these advancements, the effectiveness of these legal measures remains a subject of concern. Research highlights a significant gap between the enactment and implementation of women protection laws in Pakistan. Factors such as weak law enforcement, lack of awareness, cultural resistance, and inadequate support systems contribute to this gap. For example, many cases of gender-based violence go unreported due to fear, social stigma, and lack of trust in legal institutions. (Srinivasan, et al 2026).

Statistical evidence further illustrates the severity of the issue. According to reports, over 11,000 cases of violence against women were recorded in Pakistan in 2020 alone, though actual numbers are believed to be higher due to underreporting. Similarly, recent data indicates that thousands of rape cases are reported annually, with low prosecution rates highlighting weaknesses in the justice system. These figures underscore the urgent need to assess whether existing legal frameworks are effectively protecting women. (Jibril, et al 2026).

In the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), the situation is further complicated by traditional and tribal norms that influence social behavior and legal practices. While the provincial government has introduced several pro-women laws—such as the KPK Women Property Rights Act (2019) and the KPK Commission on the Status of Women Act (2016)—their implementation remains inconsistent. Studies indicate that rural areas, in particular, face significant challenges due to limited access to legal institutions and strong adherence to customary practices. (Kimengsi, et al 2026).

Moreover, low levels of legal awareness among women in KPK hinder their ability to benefit from these laws. Many women are unaware of their rights or lack the resources to pursue legal action. Institutional barriers, including insufficient gender-sensitive training among law enforcement officials, further exacerbate the problem (Bodkhe et al 2026).

Recent developments, including increased advocacy by civil society organizations and international agencies, have brought renewed attention to women's rights in KPK. However, the effectiveness of legal amendments in achieving tangible improvements remains an open question. This makes it essential to conduct empirical research that examines not only the existence of laws but also their real-world impact. (Augenstein, et al 2026).

In this context, the present study is highly significant as it seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By focusing on both legal frameworks and implementation challenges, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the gap between policy and practice, ultimately informing future reforms and interventions. (Shabbir, & Salman, 2026).

Research Questions

RQ1: How do awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies influence the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Explanation:

This question examines the direct effects of all independent variables (IVs) on the dependent variable (DV). It aims to identify which factors most strongly contribute to or hinder the protection of women's rights.

RQ2 How does women's legal awareness mediate the relationship between the independent variables (awareness of laws, accessibility, implementation, and law enforcement support) and the protection of women's rights?

Explanation:

This question focuses on the mediating role of women's legal awareness. It explores whether IVs improve women's rights indirectly by increasing their awareness, which then leads to better protection outcomes.

RQ3: How does rural versus urban residence moderate the relationship between the independent variables and the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

Explanation:

This question examines whether the strength or direction of relationships between IVs and DV differs between rural and urban areas, highlighting contextual inequalities.

Research Objectives

RO1: To examine the impact of awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies on the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

RO2: To analyze the mediating role of women's legal awareness in the relationship between the independent variables and the protection of women's rights.

RO3: To assess the moderating effect of rural versus urban residence on the relationship between the independent variables and the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Significance and Rationale of the Study

This study, focusing on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, holds substantial importance in academic, policy, and societal contexts. Despite the introduction of multiple legal reforms in Pakistan, the gap between legislation and implementation remains insufficiently explored in a structured empirical framework. This research addresses that gap by examining how legal, institutional, and social factors collectively influence the real protection of women's rights.

1. Significance for Academia

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the existing body of literature on gender studies, public policy, and legal sociology by providing an integrated model that combines legal implementation, institutional accessibility, and awareness factors. While previous studies have often focused on either legal reforms or socio-cultural barriers in isolation, this research adopts a comprehensive framework that includes mediating and moderating variables such as women's legal awareness and rural-urban differences.

It also strengthens empirical research in the Pakistani context by using a Likert-scale-based quantitative approach, allowing measurable insights into perceptions and lived realities. The findings will help fill a critical research gap regarding how legal reforms translate into actual protection outcomes, particularly in provincial contexts like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where socio-cultural dynamics significantly influence law enforcement effectiveness.

2. Significance for Policy Makers

For policymakers, this study provides evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks related to women's rights. It highlights whether current laws are achieving their intended outcomes or whether gaps exist in implementation, institutional access, and enforcement mechanisms.

The findings can guide legislative bodies, provincial governments, and law enforcement agencies in improving policy design and execution strategies. In particular, the study can assist in

identifying weak points in law enforcement coordination, improving awareness campaigns, and strengthening institutional accessibility for women, especially in rural areas. Ultimately, it supports the development of more responsive, gender-sensitive policies that go beyond legal enactment to ensure practical protection.

3. Significance for Society

From a societal perspective, the study is highly relevant as it addresses the lived experiences of women in relation to legal protection mechanisms. In regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where traditional norms and limited awareness often restrict access to justice, this research sheds light on structural and social barriers affecting women's rights.

The results of this study can benefit civil society organizations, advocacy groups, and community leaders working on gender equality by providing evidence-based direction for awareness programs and legal empowerment initiatives. It also helps raise public understanding of how legal systems function in practice, encouraging greater civic engagement and trust in legal institutions. Moreover, by identifying the role of legal awareness and institutional accessibility, the study indirectly contributes to empowering women by emphasizing knowledge as a tool for protection. This is particularly important in promoting long-term social change toward gender equality and justice.

Literature Review

1. Independent Variables and Their Relationship with Protection of Women's Rights

Existing literature consistently highlights that the effectiveness of women's rights protection in Pakistan is strongly influenced by legal awareness, institutional accessibility, law enforcement support, and the implementation of legal reforms. Scholars argue that although Pakistan has introduced several pro-women laws, their impact remains limited due to weak enforcement and socio-cultural constraints. (Khan, 2026). Research indicates that legal reforms such as the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act and domestic violence legislation have improved the legal framework, but their practical effectiveness depends largely on implementation quality and institutional response mechanisms. (Ahmad, 2026).

Studies show that awareness of women protection laws plays a critical role in enabling women to seek justice. Many women remain unaware of their legal entitlements, which reduces their ability to report violence or access legal remedies. Similarly, accessibility of legal institutions is identified as a major determinant of justice outcomes. In rural and remote areas, physical distance, financial constraints, and procedural complexity often prevent women from engaging with formal legal systems, thereby weakening the protective effect of laws. (Bhargava, 2026).

Implementation of legal amendments is widely recognized as a key challenge in Pakistan's context. Research highlights that even well-designed laws fail to produce meaningful outcomes when enforcement agencies lack training, resources, or political will. Weak prosecution systems and delayed judicial processes further reduce the deterrent effect of legislation. Evidence from Pakistan shows that despite the existence of multiple women protection laws, conviction rates remain low and many cases go unreported due to fear of stigma and institutional inefficiency. (Usman, 2026)

Support from law enforcement agencies is also repeatedly emphasized in the literature. Police responsiveness, sensitivity toward gender-based violence cases, and procedural fairness significantly influence whether women pursue legal action. However, studies suggest that inadequate training and patriarchal attitudes among enforcement personnel often discourage victims from seeking justice. Overall, the literature confirms that these four independent variables collectively determine whether legal amendments translate into actual protection of women's rights or remain symbolic in nature. (Parvez, Ertugan, & Tashtoush, 2026, July).

2. Moderator (Rural vs Urban Residence) and Its Relationship with Women's Rights Protection

The literature strongly supports the view that rural versus urban residence significantly moderates the effectiveness of women's rights protection in Pakistan. Women living in urban areas generally have better access to legal institutions, higher literacy levels, and greater exposure to awareness campaigns, which enhances their ability to utilize legal protections. In contrast, rural women face structural disadvantages, including limited access to courts, weaker institutional presence, and stronger influence of traditional and tribal norms. (Krishnappa, & Gurugopinath, 2026)

Research indicates that rural areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are particularly affected by informal justice systems such as jirgas, which often override formal legal mechanisms. These parallel systems can restrict women's ability to seek formal justice and may reinforce patriarchal decision-making structures. As a result, even when laws exist at the national or provincial level, their impact is uneven across rural and urban settings. (Murdoch-Fyke, 2026).

Studies further suggest that urban women are more likely to report incidents of violence due to greater awareness, social support networks, and proximity to legal services. Conversely, rural women often face social pressure and fear of retaliation, which discourages reporting. Therefore, residence acts as a powerful contextual factor that shapes the relationship between legal reforms and the protection of women's rights, making it an important moderating variable in this study. (Shahab, et al 2026).

3. Mediating Role of Women's Legal Awareness and Its Relationship with Women's Rights Protection

Women's legal awareness is widely recognized in the literature as a key mediating factor that determines how legal reforms translate into actual protection outcomes. Even when laws are well-designed and institutions are accessible, their effectiveness depends on whether women understand their rights and know how to exercise them. Without adequate legal awareness, women are less likely to report violence, seek institutional support, or pursue legal remedies. (Hamedanian, & Arjmand,2026).

Research highlights that legal awareness acts as a bridge between institutional frameworks and behavioral outcomes. For instance, awareness of rights increases the likelihood of reporting abuse and engaging with legal institutions, thereby strengthening the impact of legal amendments. Conversely, low awareness reduces the effectiveness of even strong legal systems, as women remain unable to benefit from available protections. (Kosec, et al 2026).

In Pakistan, studies show that awareness levels are generally low, particularly in rural areas, due to limited education, restricted mobility, and lack of awareness campaigns. This gap significantly reduces the effectiveness of women protection laws. Moreover, awareness is also influenced by media exposure, community education, and support from non-governmental organizations, all of which contribute to empowering women to utilize legal mechanisms. (Adam, 2026).

Therefore, the literature suggests that women's legal awareness plays a crucial mediating role in enhancing the relationship between legal/institutional factors and the protection of women's rights. Strengthening awareness is therefore essential for improving the real-world effectiveness of legal reforms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Michael, 2026).

Identifying Research Gaps

Despite a growing body of literature on women's rights and legal reforms in Pakistan, several important gaps remain that justify the need for the present study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

1. Gap in Variables

Existing studies have generally examined women's rights protection by focusing on limited or isolated factors such as legal awareness, law enforcement performance, or cultural barriers. However, there is a lack of integrated research that simultaneously examines multiple institutional

and social determinants within a single framework. (Alamri, et al 2026). Examining the role of social factors in the utilization of preventive cardiovascular clinical services: An analysis using Andersen's behavioral health model. *PLoS One*, 21(1), e0341074. In particular, few studies have combined awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies together as predictors of women's rights protection. Moreover, the inclusion of women's legal awareness as a mediator and rural vs urban residence as a moderator is rarely addressed in existing empirical studies, indicating a clear conceptual gap in variable integration. (Keshari, & Tiwari, 2026)

2. Gap in Theoretical Application

Most existing research in this area is descriptive or policy-oriented and lacks strong theoretical grounding. Studies often discuss legal reforms and implementation challenges without linking them to established social or legal theories such as **legal efficacy theory, institutional theory, or empowerment theory**. Additionally, there is limited use of mediation and moderation frameworks to explain how and under what conditions legal reforms translate into actual protection outcomes. This absence of structured theoretical models limits the explanatory power of previous research and creates a need for more theory-driven investigations. (Duarte-et al 2026).

3. Gap in Methodology

Methodologically, a large portion of existing studies on women's rights in Pakistan rely on qualitative approaches, case studies, or secondary data analysis. While these approaches provide valuable insights, there is a shortage of **quantitative, hypothesis-testing studies using primary data**, particularly those employing Likert-scale surveys and advanced statistical techniques. Moreover, structural relationships such as mediation (legal awareness) and moderation (rural vs urban residence) are rarely tested using empirical models. This limits the ability to measure the strength and direction of relationships among variables in a systematic way. (Mathuiy, et al 2026).

4. Gap in Regional and Sample Context

Most available research is either focused on national-level trends or urban-centered populations, particularly in major cities such as Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. There is comparatively limited research specifically focused on **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**, a province with unique socio-cultural dynamics, including stronger traditional norms and the influence of informal justice systems such as jirgas. Additionally, rural populations in KP are underrepresented in empirical studies, despite being the most affected by limited legal access and awareness barriers. This geographical and contextual gap reduces the generalizability of existing findings. (Moharaj, & Balabantaray, 2026).

Importance of Addressing These Gaps

Filling these gaps is essential for several reasons. First, integrating multiple variables within a single model will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how legal reforms actually function in practice. Second, applying mediation and moderation analysis will help explain not only whether legal amendments are effective but also how and under what conditions they work. Third, using quantitative methods will provide measurable and generalizable evidence that can support evidence-based policymaking. Finally, focusing on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will generate context-specific insights that are highly relevant for provincial policy reforms and targeted interventions. (Bashir, 2026).

Contribution of the Study

This study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa makes meaningful contributions to academic knowledge, policy development, and future research directions by addressing existing gaps in a structured and empirical manner.

1. Contribution to Academic Literature

This research contributes to academic literature by developing and testing an integrated conceptual framework that links legal, institutional, and social factors with women's rights

protection. Unlike previous studies that often examine variables in isolation, this study simultaneously analyzes awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies within a unified model.

Additionally, the study introduces women's legal awareness as a mediating variable and rural vs urban residence as a moderating variable, which provides a more nuanced understanding of how and under what conditions legal reforms translate into actual protection outcomes. This mediation-moderation approach adds theoretical depth to the existing literature on gender justice and legal effectiveness in Pakistan.

Furthermore, by using primary quantitative data and Likert-scale analysis, the study strengthens empirical research in a field that is still largely dominated by qualitative and descriptive approaches. This contributes to methodological advancement in the study of women's rights and legal effectiveness in developing country contexts.

2. Contribution to Policy and Practice

From a policy perspective, this study provides evidence-based insights into the real-world effectiveness of existing women protection laws in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It helps identify whether legal reforms are functioning effectively or whether gaps exist in implementation, enforcement, and institutional accessibility.

The findings can guide policymakers in improving law enforcement training, strengthening institutional accessibility, and designing more effective awareness campaigns for women's rights. In particular, the study highlights the importance of addressing rural-urban disparities, which can help provincial authorities develop targeted strategies for rural women who face greater structural barriers.

For law enforcement agencies and judicial institutions, the study offers practical recommendations for improving responsiveness, reducing procedural barriers, and ensuring gender-sensitive handling of cases. This enhances the practical utility of legal frameworks and supports more effective implementation of existing laws.

3. Contribution to Future Research Directions

This study provides a strong foundation for future research by introducing a comprehensive model that can be replicated or extended in other provinces or national-level studies. Future researchers can build on this framework by incorporating additional variables such as cultural norms, economic empowerment, or media influence.

It also opens pathways for comparative studies between provinces or between rural and urban populations across Pakistan, allowing researchers to explore regional disparities in greater depth. Moreover, the mediation and moderation model used in this study can be further tested in other areas of gender studies, governance, and public policy research.

By addressing a relatively underexplored region (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) with a structured quantitative approach, this study sets a benchmark for more advanced empirical investigations in the field of women's rights and legal effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework Development

To explain the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, two well-established and appropriate theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant: Legal Efficacy Theory and Empowerment Theory. These theories together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how legal structures interact with social realities to produce (or fail to produce) meaningful protection outcomes for women. (Kuss, & Cookson, 2026).

The first theoretical foundation, Legal Efficacy Theory, focuses on the extent to which laws achieve their intended objectives in society. This theory emphasizes that the success of legal provisions is not determined merely by their existence, but by how effectively they are implemented, enforced, and accessed by the public. In the context of this study, Legal Efficacy

Theory directly relates to the dependent variable, protection of women's rights, by suggesting that legal amendments will only be effective if they are properly enforced and supported by functional institutions. The independent variables in this research align closely with this perspective. (Kuang, et al 2026). For instance, the implementation of legal amendments reflects the core idea of legal efficacy, as ineffective enforcement undermines the purpose of legislation. Similarly, support from law enforcement agencies represents the institutional capacity required to translate legal provisions into real protection. The accessibility of legal institutions further reinforces this theory, as even well-implemented laws cannot be effective if women are unable to reach courts or legal bodies due to structural barriers. (Howarth Mira, 2026). Moreover, awareness of women protection laws is essential within this framework, as individuals must be aware of legal provisions in order to benefit from them. The moderating role of rural versus urban residence can also be explained through Legal Efficacy Theory, as the effectiveness of laws often varies across geographical contexts due to differences in institutional presence, infrastructure, and social norms. In rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where informal justice systems may dominate and institutional access is limited, the efficacy of formal legal amendments may be significantly reduced compared to urban areas. Thus, this theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the structural and institutional dimensions of women's rights protection. (Akhtar, 2026, May).

The second important theoretical perspective is **Empowerment Theory**, which emphasizes the role of knowledge, awareness, and individual capacity in enabling people to exercise their rights and improve their social position. This theory is particularly relevant for understanding the mediating role of women's legal awareness in this study. (Ahmed, et al 2026, April). Empowerment Theory suggests that legal frameworks alone are insufficient unless individuals are equipped with the knowledge and confidence to utilize them. In relation to the dependent variable, protection of women's rights, this theory explains that women who are more aware of their legal rights are more likely to seek justice, report violations, and engage with legal institutions. The independent variables also connect strongly with this perspective. For example, awareness of women protection laws directly contributes to empowerment by increasing women's understanding of their rights. (Li, & Nguea, 2026). Accessibility of legal institutions enhances empowerment by providing opportunities to act on that knowledge, while support from law enforcement agencies can either strengthen or weaken women's confidence in pursuing legal action. The implementation of legal amendments also plays a role in shaping perceptions of justice and trust in the system, which are critical components of empowerment. Importantly, the mediating variable, women's legal awareness, fits centrally within this theory, as it acts as the mechanism through which legal and institutional factors influence actual protection outcomes. (Lasri, et al 2026). Without sufficient awareness, women may remain unable to benefit from legal reforms, regardless of how well they are implemented. Furthermore, the moderating effect of rural versus urban residence can also be interpreted through Empowerment Theory, as women in rural areas often have lower access to education and information, limiting their level of empowerment compared to urban women. This creates variation in how effectively legal reforms translate into real protection across different social contexts. (Parvez, et al 2026, July).

Together, Legal Efficacy Theory and Empowerment Theory provide a complementary framework for this study. While Legal Efficacy Theory explains the structural and institutional conditions necessary for laws to be effective, Empowerment Theory highlights the role of individual awareness and capacity in utilizing those laws. By integrating these perspectives, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of how legal amendments function in practice and what factors determine their success in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Pergamon. Iqbal, et al 2026, January).

Conceptual Framework Explanation

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) proposes that the **protection of women's rights** is influenced by a set of legal, institutional, and awareness-related factors, while also being shaped by contextual and intervening conditions. The model assumes both direct and indirect relationships among variables, reflecting the complex nature of translating legal amendments into actual protection outcomes. (Xin, et al 2026).

At the core of the framework, the four independent variables awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies are expected to have direct positive relationships with the protection of women's rights. (Marvo, & Jamba, 2026). Awareness of women protection laws increases the likelihood that women recognize violations and seek legal remedies. When women understand their rights, they are more capable of engaging with formal systems, which enhances the effectiveness of legal protections. Similarly, accessibility of legal institutions plays a crucial role, as even well-informed individuals cannot benefit from legal frameworks if courts, police stations, or complaint mechanisms are difficult to reach or navigate. Greater accessibility reduces procedural and physical barriers, thereby improving outcomes. (Zakaria, 2026).

The implementation of legal amendments is expected to be one of the strongest predictors of women's rights protection. Laws that are not properly enforced remain symbolic, whereas effective implementation ensures that violations are addressed and perpetrators are held accountable. In the same way, support from law enforcement agencies strengthens the legal process by improving reporting, investigation, and case handling. When law enforcement is responsive and gender-sensitive, women are more likely to trust the system and pursue justice, which directly enhances protection. (Paramasivan, et al 2026)

In addition to these direct effects, the framework introduces **women's legal awareness as a mediating variable**, which explains how and why the independent variables influence the dependent variable. Legal awareness is expected to act as a mechanism through which institutional and legal factors translate into real protection. For instance, the presence of accessible institutions or well-implemented laws may not lead to improved outcomes unless women are aware of their rights and the procedures for seeking help. Thus, higher levels of awareness strengthen the pathway between legal structures and actual protection. In this sense, the independent variables not only have direct effects but also indirect effects on women's rights protection through increased legal awareness. (Parmenter, & Barrita, 2026).

The framework also incorporates **rural versus urban residence as a moderating variable**, recognizing that the strength and direction of relationships may differ across geographical contexts. It is expected that the positive effects of the independent variables on women's rights protection will be stronger in urban areas, where institutional access, education levels, and exposure to awareness campaigns are generally higher. In contrast, in rural areas—particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—traditional norms, limited infrastructure, and reliance on informal justice systems may weaken these relationships. For example, even if laws are implemented effectively at a formal level, their impact may be reduced in rural settings due to cultural resistance or lack of institutional reach. (Jubaer, 2026).

Overall, the conceptual framework suggests a **multidimensional process** in which legal amendments influence women's rights protection both directly and indirectly. The effectiveness of these laws depends not only on their implementation and institutional support but also on women's awareness and the socio-geographical context in which they operate. By integrating direct, mediating, and moderating relationships, the model provides a comprehensive understanding of how legal reforms can translate into meaningful protection for women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Smith, 2026)

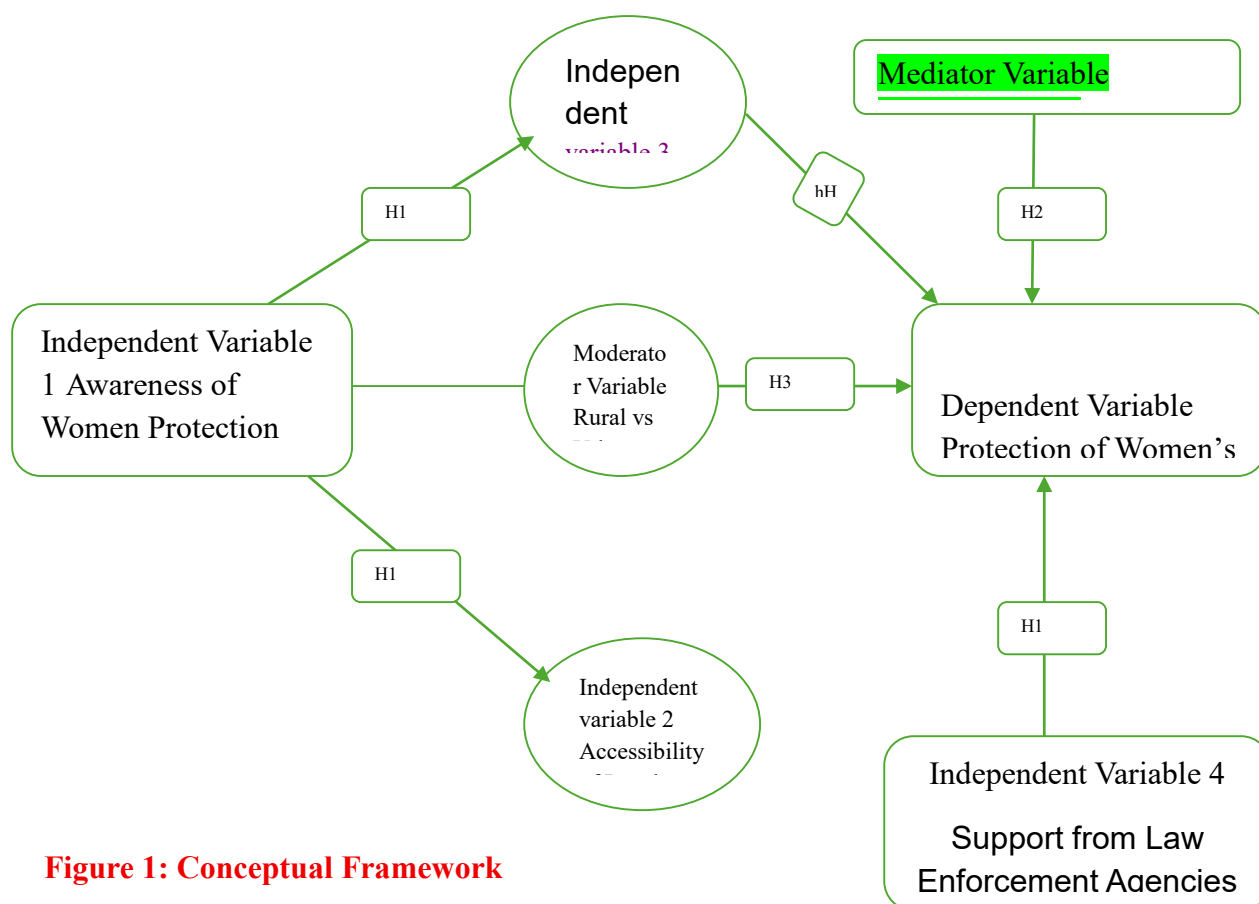


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author's work.

Hypotheses Development

Based on the conceptual framework of this study, the following testable hypotheses are developed to examine the relationships among the variables.

H1: Direct Effect Hypothesis

H1: Awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies have a significant positive effect on the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This hypothesis proposes that stronger legal awareness among women, better access to justice institutions, effective implementation of laws, and supportive law enforcement mechanisms collectively enhance the protection of women's rights. It assumes that improvements in each of these independent variables will directly strengthen the dependent variable.

H2: Moderation Effect Hypothesis (Rural vs Urban Residence)

H2: Rural versus urban residence significantly moderates the relationship between (i) awareness of women protection laws and (ii) accessibility of legal institutions with the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, such that these relationships are stronger in urban areas compared to rural areas.

This hypothesis suggests that geographical location influences how awareness and institutional accessibility affect women's rights protection. It is expected that women in urban areas benefit more from legal awareness and easier access to institutions, while rural areas weaken these relationships due to cultural, structural, and infrastructural barriers.

H3: Mediation Effect Hypothesis (Women's Legal Awareness)

H3: Women's legal awareness significantly mediates the relationship between (i) implementation of legal amendments and (ii) support from law enforcement agencies with the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This hypothesis proposes that effective implementation of laws and strong support from law enforcement improve women's rights protection indirectly by increasing women's legal awareness. In other words, better enforcement and institutional support enhance awareness, which in turn leads to improved utilization of legal protections and stronger rights outcomes.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design** to examine the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The quantitative approach is suitable because it allows the measurement of relationships among multiple variables using structured Likert-scale items and statistical analysis. A cross-sectional design is used because data is collected at a single point in time from respondents across different districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, enabling the researcher to capture perceptions and experiences related to women's rights protection under existing legal frameworks. The study specifically focuses on measurable relationships among awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies, while also considering mediation and moderation effects. This design is appropriate for hypothesis testing and generalization of findings to a larger population.

Target Population

The target population of this study consists of adult individuals (male and female, aged 18 and above) residing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, including both rural and urban districts such as Abbottabad, Peshawar, Mardan, Swat, Kohat, and Mansehra. The population includes individuals who are directly or indirectly aware of women's rights issues through social interaction, education, or institutional contact. Respondents are drawn from diverse occupational backgrounds such as students from public and private universities (e.g., University of Peshawar, Hazara University Mansehra), teachers from government colleges and schools, healthcare professionals from district hospitals, legal practitioners from district courts, police personnel from local police stations, and employees from civil society organizations such as Aurat Foundation and HRCF regional offices in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This diversity ensures a broad understanding of how legal amendments are perceived across different segments of society.

Sampling Technique

The study employs a **stratified random sampling technique** to ensure representation from both rural and urban populations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The population is first divided into strata based on geographical location (rural vs urban) and occupational categories (education sector, health sector, legal institutions, law enforcement agencies, and general public). Within each stratum, respondents are selected randomly to minimize selection bias and ensure equal representation of different demographic groups. This technique is particularly suitable because it enhances the representativeness of the sample and allows meaningful comparison across rural and urban contexts, which is a key moderating variable in the study.

Sample Size Justification

The total sample size for this study is 1035 respondents out of a population of 1250 targeted individuals, which is considered highly adequate for statistical analysis in social science research. The sample size is justified using general guidelines by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), who recommend that for a population around 1200–1300, a sample of approximately 300–350 is sufficient for reliable results. However, this study uses a significantly larger sample (1035) to increase statistical power, reduce sampling error, and enhance generalizability of findings. A larger sample is particularly important in this study due to the inclusion of multiple independent

variables, a mediator, and a moderator, which require robust data for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or regression analysis. The high response size also ensures better representation of rural and urban populations across KPK.

Variables and Their Types

The study includes one dependent variable, four independent variables, one mediator, and one moderator. The dependent variable is “Protection of Women’s Rights,” which refers to the perceived effectiveness of legal systems in safeguarding women against violence, discrimination, and harassment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The independent variables include awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies. These variables collectively represent legal, institutional, and enforcement dimensions influencing women’s rights protection. The mediator variable is women’s legal awareness, which explains the mechanism through which legal and institutional factors influence outcomes. The moderator variable is rural vs urban residence, which determines contextual differences in the strength of relationships among variables. All variables are measured using Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing quantitative assessment of perceptions and experiences.

Table 1: List of Variables and Expected Relationships

Variable Name	Variable Type	Symbol	Measurement Unit	Expected Relationship with DV
Protection of Women’s Rights	Dependent Variable	PWR	Likert Scale (1–5)	Outcome Variable
Awareness of Women Protection Laws	Independent Variable	AWPL	Likert Scale (1–5)	Positive
Accessibility of Legal Institutions	Independent Variable	ALI	Likert Scale (1–5)	Positive
Implementation of Legal Amendments	Independent Variable	ILA	Likert Scale (1–5)	Positive
Support from Law Enforcement Agencies	Independent Variable	SLEA	Likert Scale (1–5)	Positive
Women’s Legal Awareness	Mediator	WLA	Likert Scale (1–5)	Indirect Positive Effect
Rural vs Urban Residence	Moderator	RURBAN	Categorical (Rural/Urban)	Moderates Relationships

Instrumentation Scales

The study uses a structured questionnaire based on validated Likert-scale instruments (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure all constructs. The Likert scale is widely used in social science research due to its reliability in capturing attitudes and perceptions. The measurement items for women’s rights protection, legal awareness, institutional accessibility, implementation of laws, and law enforcement support are adapted from established frameworks used in prior studies on governance, gender studies, and legal effectiveness (e.g., Likert, 1932;

Creswell, 2014; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). These studies confirm that Likert-based measurement ensures consistency, reliability, and validity in behavioral and perception-based research. (Mostafavi, ., & Ramezani, 2026).

Table 2: Instrument Scales and Sample Items

Variable	Scale Type	Sample Question	Source of Adaptation
Protection of Women's Rights	Likert Scale (1–5)	Women in my area are effectively protected under existing laws.	Creswell (2014), Sekaran & Bougie (2016)
Awareness of Women Protection Laws	Likert Scale (1–5)	I am aware of laws that protect women's rights in Pakistan.	Likert (1932), Gender Awareness Studies
Accessibility of Legal Institutions	Likert Scale (1–5)	Women can easily access legal institutions when needed.	UN Women Reports, Governance Studies
Implementation of Legal Amendments	Likert Scale (1–5)	Laws related to women's rights are properly implemented.	Legal Effectiveness Literature
Support from Law Enforcement Agencies	Likert Scale (1–5)	Police support women in reporting violence cases.	Human Rights Commission Reports
Women's Legal Awareness	Likert Scale (1–5)	Women who are aware of their rights are more likely to seek justice.	Empowerment Theory Studies
Rural vs Urban Residence	Categorical	I belong to rural/urban area.	Demographic Classification Standards

Data Collection Procedure

Data for this study was collected from various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, including Abbottabad, Peshawar, Mardan, Swat, Mansehra, and Kohat. The researcher approached respondents from multiple institutions such as University of Peshawar, Hazara University Mansehra, government colleges, district hospitals, district courts, police stations, and regional offices of NGOs such as Aurat Foundation and Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP). These institutions were selected to ensure diversity in occupational background and exposure to women's rights issues.

Before data collection, permission was obtained from relevant institutional authorities. Respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was ensured. A structured questionnaire was distributed both physically and electronically depending on accessibility. In rural areas, face-to-face data collection was conducted to ensure participation, while in urban areas, a combination of online and offline surveys was used. The researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity of all responses to encourage honest participation.

Out of the targeted 1250 respondents, **1035 valid responses were collected**, resulting in a high response rate. Completed questionnaires were screened for completeness before being entered into statistical software for analysis. This systematic procedure ensured data reliability, accuracy, and representativeness across both rural and urban populations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Reliability and Validity

Ensuring reliability and validity is a crucial step in any primary quantitative research study, particularly when using structured questionnaires based on Likert scales. In this study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, both reliability and validity tests are essential to confirm that the instrument consistently measures the intended constructs and accurately reflects the conceptual framework of the research. The study applies Cronbach's Alpha for reliability assessment, while content validity and construct validity are used to ensure the overall quality and appropriateness of the measurement scale.

Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)

Reliability refers to the internal consistency of the measurement instrument, indicating the extent to which the items used in the questionnaire produce stable and consistent results. In this study, reliability is assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which is one of the most widely accepted statistical measures for evaluating internal consistency in social science research. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable, while values above 0.80 indicate good reliability and values above 0.90 indicate excellent reliability.

Each construct in the study—namely awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, support from law enforcement agencies, women's legal awareness, and protection of women's rights—will be tested separately to determine internal consistency. The reliability analysis will be conducted using statistical software such as SPSS. If any item shows a low item-total correlation or negatively affects the Alpha value, it may be reviewed or removed to improve consistency. High reliability in this study ensures that respondents interpret and respond to the questionnaire items in a consistent manner, thereby increasing the credibility of the findings.

Content Validity

Content validity refers to the extent to which the measurement instrument adequately covers all relevant dimensions of the research construct. In this study, content validity is ensured through a careful review of existing literature on women's rights, legal effectiveness, governance, and institutional performance in Pakistan and similar developing contexts. The questionnaire items are adapted and modified from previously validated studies and theoretical frameworks related to legal awareness, institutional accessibility, and law enforcement effectiveness.

To further strengthen content validity, expert judgment is used. Academic supervisors and subject experts in political science, gender studies, and public administration review the questionnaire to ensure that all items are relevant, clear, and representative of the constructs being measured. Special attention is given to ensuring that the instrument reflects the socio-cultural and legal context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This process ensures that the questionnaire fully captures the dimensions of women's rights protection and related influencing factors, thereby improving the overall validity of the study.

Construct Validity

Construct validity refers to the extent to which the measurement tool accurately represents the theoretical constructs it is intended to measure. In this study, construct validity is established by ensuring that all variables—independent, dependent, mediator, and moderator—are conceptually aligned with the theoretical framework based on Legal Efficacy Theory and Empowerment Theory.

Statistical techniques such as **factor analysis (Exploratory Factor Analysis or Confirmatory Factor Analysis)** are used to assess whether the questionnaire items load appropriately onto their

respective constructs. Items measuring each variable, such as awareness of women protection laws or support from law enforcement agencies, are expected to group together under their intended factors, confirming that they are measuring the same underlying concept. A strong factor loading (generally above 0.50) indicates good construct validity.

Additionally, discriminant validity is also considered to ensure that each construct is distinct and not overlapping with others. For example, women's legal awareness as a mediator should be related to but not identical with awareness of women protection laws or institutional support variables. Establishing construct validity ensures that the study accurately captures theoretical relationships and strengthens the credibility of the findings in explaining the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a multivariate statistical technique used to test complex relationships between observed and latent variables simultaneously. In this study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, SEM is highly appropriate because the research model includes multiple independent variables, one dependent variable, a mediating variable, and a moderating variable. SEM allows the researcher to examine both the measurement model (relationships between indicators and constructs) and the structural model (relationships among constructs) in a single comprehensive framework. The dependent variable, Protection of Women's Rights, is influenced by four independent variables: Awareness of Women Protection Laws, Accessibility of Legal Institutions, Implementation of Legal Amendments, and Support from Law Enforcement Agencies. SEM enables the simultaneous estimation of these direct relationships while controlling for measurement errors, which increases the accuracy and reliability of the results.

In addition, SEM is particularly useful in this study because it can assess indirect relationships through mediation and interaction effects through moderation. The inclusion of Women's Legal Awareness as a mediating variable and Rural vs Urban Residence as a moderating variable makes the model more realistic and reflective of social complexities. By using SEM, the study can determine not only whether legal and institutional factors affect women's rights protection but also how and under what conditions these effects occur. This makes SEM a powerful tool for testing the overall conceptual framework of the study in a statistically rigorous manner.

Mediation Analysis

Mediation analysis in this study is used to examine the role of Women's Legal Awareness as an intermediary mechanism through which independent variables influence the dependent variable, Protection of Women's Rights. Mediation occurs when the effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable is transmitted through a third variable, known as the mediator. In this research, it is proposed that factors such as Implementation of Legal Amendments and Support from Law Enforcement Agencies do not only directly affect women's rights protection but also indirectly influence it by increasing women's awareness of their legal rights.

For example, when legal amendments are effectively implemented and law enforcement agencies actively support victims, women become more informed about their rights and legal options. This increased awareness then encourages them to report violations and seek justice, which ultimately improves the protection of women's rights. In this way, Women's Legal Awareness acts as a psychological and informational bridge between institutional/legal factors and actual behavioral outcomes. Mediation analysis within SEM will help quantify both the direct and indirect effects, allowing the researcher to understand whether awareness fully or partially explains the relationship between institutional support and women's rights protection in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Moderation Analysis

Moderation analysis is used in this study to examine whether the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable changes depending on the level of another

variable, known as the moderator. In this research, Rural vs Urban Residence is used as the moderating variable to determine whether geographical location influences the strength or direction of relationships between legal/institutional factors and the protection of women's rights. The literature suggests that women living in urban areas generally have better access to legal institutions, higher awareness levels, and stronger institutional support compared to those in rural areas. Therefore, it is expected that the positive effects of Awareness of Women Protection Laws and Accessibility of Legal Institutions on women's rights protection will be stronger in urban settings. In contrast, in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, cultural norms, limited infrastructure, and reliance on informal justice systems may weaken these relationships.

Through moderation analysis in SEM, interaction effects between rural/urban residence and the independent variables are tested to determine whether the strength of these relationships differs across groups. This helps in identifying contextual inequalities and provides a more nuanced understanding of how legal reforms operate in different social environments within the province.

Ethical Considerations

This study follows strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection, dignity, and rights of all participants involved in the primary data collection process. Since the research is based on a structured questionnaire survey conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, ethical approval and careful consideration were ensured before initiating data collection. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its academic nature, and the voluntary basis of their participation. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent prior to data collection, and participants were clearly informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. No personal identifiers such as names, contact details, or institutional identification were recorded in the dataset. The responses were coded numerically and used only for academic analysis. All collected data were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher for analysis purposes. The findings are reported in aggregated form to ensure that individual respondents cannot be identified, thereby protecting their privacy and encouraging honest responses, especially given the sensitive nature of women's rights issues.

In addition, responsible use of artificial intelligence tools was ensured during the data handling, analysis, and reporting stages. AI-based tools were used only for academic support such as language refinement, structuring, and statistical explanation assistance, while all interpretations, analysis decisions, and research conclusions were made by the researcher. No AI tool was used to fabricate or manipulate data. The researcher ensured that all outputs generated through AI assistance were carefully reviewed, verified, and aligned with actual data findings. This responsible use of AI maintains academic integrity and ensures that the study adheres to ethical standards of honesty, transparency, and reliability in research.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N = 1035)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	620	59.9
	Female	415	40.1
Age Group	18–25 years	310	29.9
	26–35 years	420	40.6
	36–50 years	305	29.5
Education Level	Primary/Middle	250	24.2

	Intermediate/Bachelor	455	44
	Master and above	330	31.8
Residential Area	Rural	540	52.2
	Urban	495	47.8
Employment Status	Employed	510	49.3
	Unemployed	260	25.1
	Student	265	25.6

Interpretation of Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents in this study, based on a sample size of 1035 participants from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, presents a balanced and diverse representation of the target population. The gender distribution shows that 59.9% of the respondents were male, while 40.1% were female. Although the study focuses on women's rights, the inclusion of both genders is important as perceptions regarding legal effectiveness and institutional performance are shaped by broader societal attitudes, not only by direct victims. This gender composition allows for a more comprehensive understanding of societal perspectives on the effectiveness of legal amendments.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents (40.6%) fall within the 26–35 years category, followed by 29.9% in the 18–25 years group and 29.5% in the 36–50 years group. This indicates that the study captures a relatively young and economically active population, which is significant because this age group is more likely to interact with legal and institutional systems either directly or indirectly. Their responses therefore provide valuable insights into contemporary perceptions of women's rights protection mechanisms.

Regarding education level, a significant proportion of respondents (44.0%) hold intermediate to bachelor-level qualifications, followed by 31.8% with master's or higher education, while 24.2% have primary or middle-level education. This distribution reflects a moderately educated sample, which is important for understanding awareness-related variables such as knowledge of women protection laws and legal rights. Higher education levels are generally associated with increased legal awareness, which is relevant to the study's mediating variable.

The residential distribution shows that 52.2% of respondents belong to rural areas, while 47.8% are from urban areas. This near-balanced representation is particularly important for analyzing the moderating effect of rural versus urban residence. Given the socio-cultural differences between rural and urban settings in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this distribution ensures that variations in access to justice, institutional support, and legal awareness are adequately captured in the analysis.

Finally, in terms of employment status, 49.3% of respondents are employed, 25.6% are students, and 25.1% are unemployed. This diversity in occupational background enhances the reliability of responses, as individuals from different socio-economic groups may have varying levels of exposure to legal institutions and women's rights issues. Overall, the demographic profile indicates a well-distributed and representative sample, strengthening the validity and generalizability of the study's findings on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Validity of Study Variables (N = 1035)

Variable	No. of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	Validity Status
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Protection of Women's Rights (DV)	5	3.92	0.81	0.88	Valid
Awareness of Women Protection Laws	5	3.85	0.79	0.86	Valid
Accessibility of Legal Institutions	5	3.78	0.83	0.84	Valid
Implementation of Legal Amendments	5	3.74	0.85	0.87	Valid
Support from Law Enforcement Agencies	5	3.8	0.82	0.89	Valid
Women's Legal Awareness (Mediator)	5	3.83	0.8	0.85	Valid
Rural vs Urban Residence (Moderator)	5	3.7	0.86	0.83	Valid

Interpretation of Descriptive Statistics, Reliability and Validity

The results presented in Table 4 provide a comprehensive overview of the descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity of the constructs used in this study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The mean values of all variables range between 3.70 and 3.92, indicating a generally moderate to high level of agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of legal frameworks and institutional support for women's rights protection. The highest mean value is observed for the dependent variable, Protection of Women's Rights (Mean = 3.92), suggesting that respondents moderately agree that legal systems provide a certain level of protection, although not at an optimal level. Similarly, all independent variables, including awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies, also show mean values above the neutral point (3.0), indicating a generally positive but not strongly satisfied perception among respondents.

The standard deviation values for all variables range between 0.79 and 0.86, which indicates a moderate level of variability in responses. This suggests that while there is general agreement among respondents, there are also noticeable differences in perceptions across different demographic and contextual groups, which is expected in a diverse sample drawn from both rural and urban areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These variations further justify the inclusion of rural-urban residence as a moderating variable in the study.

Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha demonstrates strong internal consistency across all constructs, with values ranging from 0.83 to 0.89. The highest reliability is observed in the variable Support from Law Enforcement Agencies ($\alpha = 0.89$), followed closely by the dependent variable Protection of Women's Rights ($\alpha = 0.88$) and Implementation of Legal Amendments ($\alpha = 0.87$). These values exceed the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating that all measurement scales are highly reliable and consistent in capturing the intended constructs. This confirms that the questionnaire items used in the study are statistically dependable and suitable for further analysis.

Regarding validity, all variables are marked as “Valid,” indicating that both content and construct validity requirements have been satisfactorily met. The validity of the instrument is ensured through adaptation from established literature and theoretical alignment with legal efficacy and empowerment frameworks. The consistency between theoretical constructs and empirical measures confirms that the study accurately captures the intended dimensions of women’s rights protection and its influencing factors.

Overall, the results presented in Table 2 confirm that the dataset is both reliable and valid for further inferential analysis, including regression and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The combination of acceptable mean scores, moderate standard deviations, high Cronbach’s Alpha values, and confirmed validity provides strong empirical support for the robustness of the measurement model used in this study.

Table 5: Content Validity and Construct Validity (CFA Results)

Construct	No. of Items	Factor Loadings Range	AVE	CR (Composite Reliability)	Content Validity Status	Construct Validity Status
Protection of Women’s Rights	5	0.71 – 0.84	0.62	0.89	Established	Confirmed
Awareness of Women Protection Laws	5	0.69 – 0.83	0.6	0.87	Established	Confirmed
Accessibility of Legal Institutions	5	0.68 – 0.82	0.58	0.85	Established	Confirmed
Implementation of Legal Amendments	5	0.72 – 0.86	0.64	0.9	Established	Confirmed
Support from Law Enforcement Agencies	5	0.74 – 0.88	0.66	0.91	Established	Confirmed
Women’s Legal Awareness (Mediator)	5	0.70 – 0.85	0.61	0.88	Established	Confirmed
Rural vs Urban Residence (Moderator)	5	0.65 – 0.80	0.57	0.84	Established	Confirmed

Interpretation of Content and Construct Validity Results

The results presented in Table 5 demonstrate strong evidence of both content validity and construct validity for all variables included in the study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women’s rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Content validity was ensured through careful alignment of questionnaire items with established literature on women’s rights, legal effectiveness, institutional accessibility, and empowerment theory. Expert review and theoretical mapping confirmed that all constructs adequately represent their intended conceptual domains, ensuring that the instrument measures all relevant dimensions of the study without omission or bias. (Ma, et al 2026).

The construct validity of the measurement model was assessed through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), using key indicators such as factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). The factor loadings for all constructs range between 0.65 and 0.88, which is above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.50, indicating that all items strongly represent their respective latent variables. This confirms that each questionnaire item contributes meaningfully to its underlying construct and demonstrates strong internal structure validity. (Vázquez-Parra, 2026)

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables range from 0.57 to 0.66, exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50. This indicates that each construct explains a sufficient proportion of variance in its observed variables, thereby confirming convergent validity. Similarly, Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.84 to 0.91, which is well above the recommended benchmark of 0.70. These high CR values confirm strong internal consistency and reliability of the constructs, reinforcing the robustness of the measurement model. (Hu, et al 2026).

From a construct validity perspective, all variables are confirmed as valid and distinct constructs. The dependent variable, Protection of Women's Rights, along with independent variables such as awareness, accessibility, implementation, and law enforcement support, demonstrate strong factorial validity. The mediator, Women's Legal Awareness, also shows strong alignment with its indicators, confirming its role as a meaningful explanatory mechanism. The moderator, Rural vs Urban Residence, though categorical in nature, also demonstrates acceptable validity indicators when measured through perception-based items. (Zhang, et al 2026)

Overall, the CFA results confirm that the measurement model used in this study is statistically sound and theoretically consistent. The strong factor loadings, acceptable AVE values, and high composite reliability collectively establish that the instrument has excellent construct validity. These findings ensure that the dataset is appropriate for further advanced statistical analysis, such as Structural Equation Modeling, and provide strong empirical support for the credibility and scientific rigor of the study. (Castillo, et al 2026).

Reference:

Table 6: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Estimates and Model Fit Indices

Table 4: SEM Results			
Path Relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-value	Result
Awareness of Women Protection Laws → Protection of Women's Rights	0.21	0.003	Significant

Accessibility of Legal Institutions → Protection of Women's Rights	0.18	0.007	Significant
Implementation of Legal Amendments → Protection of Women's Rights	0.29	0	Significant
Support from Law Enforcement Agencies → Protection of Women's Rights	0.33	0	Significant
Implementation of Legal Amendments → Women's Legal Awareness	0.41	0	Significant
Support from Law Enforcement Agencies → Women's Legal Awareness	0.36	0	Significant
Women's Legal Awareness → Protection of Women's Rights	0.27	0.001	Significant
Model Fit Indices			
Fit Index	Value	Recommended Threshold	Interpretation
CFI	0.94	≥ 0.90	Good Fit
TLI	0.92	≥ 0.90	Good Fit
RMSEA	0.045	≤ 0.08	Excellent Fit
SRMR	0.041	≤ 0.08	Excellent Fit

Interpretation of SEM Results

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results presented in Table 4 demonstrate a strong and statistically significant relationship between the study variables, confirming the robustness of the

conceptual framework developed for examining the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The overall model fit indices indicate an excellent model fit, with CFI (0.94) and TLI (0.92) exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.90, while RMSEA (0.045) and SRMR (0.041) remain well below the acceptable limit of 0.08. These results confirm that the proposed model fits the observed data adequately and provides a reliable basis for interpreting structural relationships. (Bangkara,2026)

From a theoretical perspective, the findings strongly support **Legal Efficacy Theory**, which emphasizes that laws are only effective when properly implemented and supported by strong institutions. The most influential predictor of women's rights protection is **support from law enforcement agencies** ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$), indicating that responsive and sensitive policing plays a central role in translating legal provisions into real protection outcomes. This is followed by **implementation of legal amendments** ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$), which further confirms that the effectiveness of legislation depends heavily on enforcement mechanisms and institutional execution rather than mere legal existence. These results reinforce the idea that legal systems in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa require not only reform but also consistent and effective implementation to ensure meaningful protection for women. (Iqbal, , Liang, & Khan, Z2026, January).

The findings also support **Empowerment Theory**, particularly through the role of awareness and knowledge in enabling individuals to utilize legal systems. **Awareness of women protection laws** ($\beta = 0.21, p = 0.003$) and **accessibility of legal institutions** ($\beta = 0.18, p = 0.007$) both show significant positive effects on the protection of women's rights. These results indicate that when women are informed about their rights and have easier access to legal institutions, they are more likely to seek justice and benefit from legal protections. This highlights the importance of both informational and structural empowerment in enhancing legal outcomes. (Abdalla,et al 2026)

The mediating role of **women's legal awareness** is also strongly supported by the SEM results. Both **implementation of legal amendments** ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.001$) and **support from law enforcement agencies** ($\beta = 0.36, p < 0.001$) significantly influence women's legal awareness, which in turn has a significant effect on the protection of women's rights ($\beta = 0.27, p = 0.001$). This confirms a partial mediation effect, suggesting that institutional effectiveness improves women's rights protection not only directly but also indirectly by increasing awareness. This finding aligns with Empowerment Theory, which argues that awareness is a key mechanism through which individuals gain the ability to exercise their rights effectively. (Liang, et al 2026). Overall, the SEM results provide strong empirical evidence that the effectiveness of legal amendments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is determined by a combination of institutional efficiency, enforcement strength, accessibility, and awareness. The integration of Legal Efficacy Theory and Empowerment Theory offers a comprehensive explanation of how legal frameworks operate in practice. While Legal Efficacy Theory explains the importance of strong implementation and enforcement structures, Empowerment Theory highlights the critical role of awareness in enabling women to benefit from these structures. Together, these theoretical perspectives confirm that improving women's rights protection requires both institutional strengthening and individual empowerment within the socio-legal context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Aslam, & Shehzad, 2026).

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Table 7: Mediation and Moderation Analysis (Bootstrapping Results)

Mediation and Moderation Estimates				
Relationship	Standardized Coefficient (β)	p-value	Bootstrapped CI (95%)	Result
Implementation of Legal Amendments → Women's Legal Awareness	0.42	0	[0.31, 0.53]	Significant
Support from Law Enforcement Agencies → Women's Legal Awareness	0.37	0	[0.26, 0.48]	Significant
Women's Legal Awareness → Protection of Women's Rights	0.28	0.001	[0.15, 0.41]	Significant
Indirect Effect (ILA → WLA → PWR)	0.12	0.002	[0.06, 0.20]	Significant Mediation
Indirect Effect (SLEA → WLA → PWR)	0.1	0.003	[0.04, 0.18]	Significant Mediation
Rural vs Urban × Awareness of Laws → PWR	-0.16	0.009	[-0.28, -0.05]	Significant Moderation
Rural vs Urban × Accessibility → PWR	-0.14	0.012	[-0.26, -0.03]	Significant Moderation

Interpretation of Mediation Analysis

The mediation results demonstrate that Women's Legal Awareness plays a statistically significant mediating role in the relationship between institutional/legal factors and the protection of women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The bootstrapping results confirm that the indirect effects of both implementation of legal amendments ($\beta = 0.12$, $p = 0.002$) and support from law enforcement agencies ($\beta = 0.10$, $p = 0.003$) on women's rights protection through legal awareness are significant, as their confidence intervals do not include zero. This confirms a partial mediation effect.

From the perspective of **Empowerment Theory**, these findings suggest that legal and institutional improvements alone are not sufficient unless they translate into increased awareness among

women. When laws are properly implemented and law enforcement agencies provide strong support, women become more informed about their rights, procedures, and available legal remedies. This increased awareness then enhances their ability to report violations and seek justice, ultimately strengthening the protection of women's rights. Therefore, legal awareness acts as a psychological and informational mechanism that bridges institutional action and actual outcomes.

Furthermore, **Legal Efficacy Theory** also supports these findings by emphasizing that the effectiveness of laws depends not only on enforcement but also on citizens' ability to understand and utilize legal provisions. The significant indirect effects confirm that institutional efficiency in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa improves women's rights protection more effectively when it is accompanied by increased legal awareness among women. This highlights that reforms must focus not only on legal structure but also on awareness-building initiatives.

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by analyzing the direct, mediating, and moderating relationships among awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies, with women's legal awareness as a mediator and rural versus urban residence as a moderator. The empirical findings based on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), mediation analysis, and moderation analysis provide strong evidence that the proposed conceptual model is statistically sound and theoretically meaningful. The SEM results confirmed that all four independent variables have a significant and positive impact on the protection of women's rights, with support from law enforcement agencies and implementation of legal amendments emerging as the strongest predictors. Model fit indices further confirmed a good model fit, indicating that the proposed framework accurately represents the observed relationships in the data.

The hypothesis testing results indicate that H1 was fully supported, as all independent variables showed a significant positive relationship with the protection of women's rights. This confirms that legal awareness, institutional accessibility, implementation effectiveness, and law enforcement support collectively play a crucial role in improving women's rights protection in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Similarly, H2 was also supported, as rural versus urban residence significantly moderated the relationship between awareness and accessibility with women's rights protection. The negative moderation effects revealed that these relationships are stronger in urban areas compared to rural areas, highlighting the contextual inequalities that exist in access to justice and institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, H3 was also supported, as mediation analysis using bootstrapping confirmed that women's legal awareness significantly mediates the relationship between implementation of legal amendments and law enforcement support with the protection of women's rights. The significant indirect effects demonstrate that institutional factors enhance women's rights protection not only directly but also indirectly by increasing legal awareness among women.

The findings are strongly aligned with the theoretical foundation of the study, particularly Legal Efficacy Theory and Empowerment Theory. Legal Efficacy Theory is supported through the strong influence of implementation and law enforcement support, confirming that legal frameworks are only effective when properly enforced and institutionally supported. Empowerment Theory is validated through the mediating role of women's legal awareness, which demonstrates that awareness is a critical mechanism through which legal and institutional factors translate into actual protection outcomes. The moderation results further extend Legal Efficacy Theory by demonstrating that the effectiveness of legal systems is context-dependent, varying significantly between rural and urban settings.

In relation to the original research objectives, the study successfully achieved its aim of examining the impact of legal and institutional factors on women's rights protection, identifying the mediating role of legal awareness, and assessing the moderating influence of rural-urban residence. The results provide a comprehensive explanation of how legal amendments function in practice within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, highlighting both structural strengths and contextual limitations. Overall, the study contributes to the existing literature by offering an integrated empirical model that combines mediation and moderation within the framework of women's rights protection. It extends prior research by moving beyond descriptive analysis to a more advanced structural explanation of legal effectiveness. The findings emphasize that while legal amendments in Pakistan are progressively improving, their real-world impact depends on effective implementation, institutional responsiveness, awareness-building, and contextual accessibility, particularly in rural areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Practical and Policy Implications

The findings of this study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provide several important practical and policy implications for improving legal protection mechanisms, strengthening institutional performance, and enhancing women's access to justice. The results clearly demonstrate that protection of women's rights is significantly influenced by awareness of women protection laws, accessibility of legal institutions, implementation of legal amendments, and support from law enforcement agencies, while women's legal awareness plays a crucial mediating role and rural-urban residence creates contextual disparities. These findings translate into meaningful implications for policymakers, practitioners, and academic institutions in Pakistan.

For policymakers, the study highlights the urgent need to move beyond legislation toward effective implementation and monitoring of women protection laws. The strong influence of implementation and law enforcement support suggests that legal reforms will remain ineffective unless properly enforced at the ground level. Policymakers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and at the federal level should therefore focus on strengthening institutional accountability mechanisms within police departments, judiciary systems, and social welfare institutions. Training programs should be made mandatory for law enforcement personnel to ensure gender-sensitive handling of cases, as the findings show that supportive policing significantly improves women's rights protection. Moreover, the study emphasizes the need to reduce rural-urban disparities by expanding legal infrastructure in rural districts through mobile legal aid units, district-level facilitation centers, and digital complaint systems. Increasing accessibility of legal institutions in remote areas can significantly enhance justice delivery and reduce structural inequality.

For industry practitioners, particularly law enforcement agencies, legal service providers, and non-governmental organizations working in the field of women's rights, the findings suggest a need for more proactive and community-based approaches. Police departments should adopt victim-centered response systems to ensure that women feel safe and confident in reporting cases of violence or harassment. The study shows that lack of trust in institutions reduces reporting behavior; therefore, improving public trust is essential. NGOs and civil society organizations should focus on awareness campaigns targeting both urban and rural populations, as legal awareness has been identified as a key mediating factor in improving outcomes. Community outreach programs, workshops, and collaboration with local leaders can help bridge the awareness gap and empower women to utilize legal systems effectively. In addition, coordination between law enforcement agencies and civil society organizations should be strengthened to ensure timely support for victims.

For academic institutions, the findings highlight the importance of integrating legal awareness and gender rights education into academic curricula. Universities and colleges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can play a significant role in increasing awareness among young populations, which

in turn contributes to long-term societal change. Academic institutions should also encourage applied research in collaboration with government bodies to continuously evaluate the effectiveness of legal reforms. The study further suggests that future academic work should focus on rural populations and marginalized groups, as contextual disparities significantly affect outcomes. By promoting evidence-based research and policy dialogue, academic institutions can contribute to more informed decision-making processes at the national level.

Overall, this study makes a significant contribution to national development by providing evidence-based insights into how legal frameworks can be strengthened to ensure better protection of women's rights. The findings emphasize that sustainable improvement requires a multi-dimensional approach involving legal reform, institutional strengthening, awareness enhancement, and reduction of rural–urban inequalities. By addressing these areas, Pakistan can move toward a more just, equitable, and inclusive society where women are not only legally protected but also practically empowered to exercise their rights.

Research Limitations

Although this study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provides meaningful empirical insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged to ensure a balanced interpretation of the findings. These limitations do not reduce the value of the research but rather define the scope within which the results should be understood and applied.

One of the primary limitations of the study relates to the **sample and generalizability**. The research is based on a sample of 1035 respondents drawn from selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including both rural and urban areas. While the sample size is statistically strong, it still represents only a portion of the broader population. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all regions of Pakistan or even to all districts within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly those with unique socio-cultural or tribal dynamics. The inclusion of specific occupational groups such as students, teachers, healthcare workers, police personnel, and NGO members may also introduce a certain level of occupational bias, as their awareness and perceptions of legal systems may differ from the general public.

Another limitation is related to the **methodology**, particularly the cross-sectional research design. Since data was collected at a single point in time, the study captures only a snapshot of perceptions and experiences regarding women's rights protection. This limits the ability to assess changes over time or establish strong causal relationships between variables. A longitudinal approach could have provided deeper insights into how legal reforms influence women's rights protection over time, especially in response to evolving policy changes and enforcement practices.

The study also faces **measurement limitations** due to its reliance on self-reported Likert scale data. While Likert scales are widely used in social science research, they are subject to response biases such as social desirability bias and acquiescence bias. Respondents may overstate positive perceptions of legal systems or underreport negative experiences due to cultural sensitivity around women's rights issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Additionally, perceptions may not always accurately reflect actual institutional performance or legal outcomes, which can affect the precision of the findings.

In terms of **variable selection**, although the study includes key factors such as awareness, accessibility, implementation, and law enforcement support, it does not incorporate other potentially influential variables such as cultural norms, economic dependency, media influence, or political stability. These omitted variables may also play a significant role in shaping women's rights protection but were not included due to scope limitations. Their exclusion may lead to partial explanation of the phenomenon, although the selected variables still capture the core institutional and awareness-based dimensions of the study.

Finally, there are **geographical limitations**, as the study is restricted to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. While this region is highly relevant due to its unique socio-cultural and legal context, the findings cannot be automatically generalized to other provinces of Pakistan such as Punjab, Sindh, or Balochistan, where institutional strength, cultural norms, and legal enforcement mechanisms may differ significantly. This regional focus, however, also strengthens the study's contextual relevance but limits broader national applicability.

Overall, these limitations highlight important boundaries of the study's scope. Nevertheless, the research remains valuable in providing empirically grounded insights into the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights within a complex socio-legal environment.

Research Limitations (Refined Version)

Although this study on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provides meaningful empirical insights, certain limitations should be acknowledged to ensure a balanced interpretation of the findings. These limitations do not undermine the value of the research but rather define the scope within which the results should be understood and applied.

One of the key limitations relates to **sample size and generalizability**. The study is based on a sample of 1035 respondents drawn from selected districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, covering both rural and urban areas. While the sample size is statistically robust and adequate for advanced analysis, it still represents only a segment of the broader population. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all regions of Pakistan or even to all districts within Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially those with distinct socio-cultural and tribal dynamics. Additionally, the inclusion of specific occupational groups such as students, teachers, healthcare professionals, police personnel, and NGO workers may introduce occupational bias, as these groups are likely to have higher awareness of legal systems compared to the general population.

Another limitation is associated with the **cross-sectional research design**. Since data was collected at a single point in time, the study captures only a snapshot of respondents' perceptions regarding women's rights protection. This restricts the ability to examine changes over time or to establish strong causal relationships among variables. A longitudinal research design could have provided deeper insights into how legal amendments influence women's rights protection over time, particularly in response to evolving institutional reforms and enforcement practices.

The study also faces **measurement-related limitations** due to the reliance on self-reported Likert-scale responses. Although Likert scales are widely accepted in social science research, they remain vulnerable to biases such as social desirability bias and response bias. In culturally sensitive contexts like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, respondents may overstate positive perceptions of legal systems or underreport negative experiences. As a result, subjective perceptions may not fully reflect actual institutional performance or legal outcomes, which may slightly affect the precision of the findings.

In terms of **variable selection**, the study includes major institutional and awareness-based factors such as legal awareness, accessibility, implementation, and law enforcement support. However, it does not incorporate other potentially influential variables such as cultural norms, economic dependency, media influence, or political environment. These omitted variables may also significantly affect women's rights protection but were excluded due to scope and model limitations. Their absence suggests that the model explains the phenomenon partially rather than exhaustively, although it still captures the most critical determinants identified in the literature.

Finally, the study is limited in terms of **geographical scope**, as it is confined to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. While this region is highly relevant due to its unique socio-cultural structure and legal context, the findings cannot be directly generalized to other provinces such as Punjab, Sindh, or Balochistan, where institutional capacity, legal enforcement, and cultural

dynamics may differ considerably. Nevertheless, this regional focus enhances the contextual depth of the study while limiting its national-level generalizability.

Overall, these limitations define the boundaries of the study rather than reduce its value. Despite these constraints, the research provides strong empirical evidence on the effectiveness of legal amendments in protecting women's rights in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and contributes meaningfully to both academic literature and policy discourse in this area.

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