

# GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN PUNJAB



## POLICY BRIEF

PUNJAB COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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### Introduction

Prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) is a human rights concern globally and nationally due to the associated human, social and economic costs. The persistence of gender-based violence in Pakistan has far reaching effects on the survivors and their families, particularly young children. The threat and the perpetration of violence inhibits women's access to resources and opportunities, participation in social, political and economic life, with consequences for community and national development. Despite policy and legislative measures and interventions to address the issue by the federal and provincial Governments, the increase in reported cases points to the need for more concerted and targeted actions to reduce gender-based violence. To this end Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) included a module on violence against women in its survey "Economic and Social Well-being of Women" (ESW), that in conjunction with the other survey questions, provides information on the prevalence of violence against women in Punjab, and how it intersects with other dimensions of a woman's life. The survey results indicate that approximately 38% women have experienced spousal violence in their lifetime and 35% women reported experiencing physical, sexual, or psychological over their lifetime at the hands of spouses and others. The most prevalent form of violence reported in the survey is psychological and physical violence. This brief also discusses the physical, psychological, emotional and social costs incurred by survivors of violence, and the risk factors for increased violence against women, based on the survey data.

### Violence against Women in Pakistan

Violence against women in South Asia, including Pakistan, renders women vulnerable to different types of violence

### Key Messages

- 12% women in Punjab have experienced non-spousal violence of a physical or sexual nature over their lifetime.
- 11% ever-married women in Punjab have experienced spousal abuse in the past 12 months and 38% have experienced it over their life time.
- The intergenerational effects of domestic violence are severe as perpetrators of spousal abuse are likely to have witnessed their fathers beat their mothers; and survivors of domestic abuse report similar abuse perpetrated by their fathers.
- Awareness of laws and redressal mechanisms for GBV is low among women.
- Freedom from violence through enhanced state prevention, protection, prosecution and redress mechanisms are needed.
- Effective collaboration between provincial and district governments is needed to implement laws to address violence against women.
- Focus on engaging men and young boys for behavioral change. Start early, with changes in curricula, and extend reach of messages employing all media forms.

throughout their life cycle. Women are vulnerable to domestic abuse, child marriage and infanticide inside their homes, and at risk of sexual abuse, kidnapping, trafficking and acid attacks outside their homes (PGPR 2018).<sup>1</sup> Nearly 39% of ever-married women experienced physical and emotional spousal abuse during their marriage while 33% women had experienced it in the past 12 months (PDHS 2012).

Estimates of VAW are higher based on cases of violence against women in the four provinces as reported by the media (Aurat Foundation, 2014).<sup>2</sup> Punjab police records indicate 7678 VAW cases in 2017, an 18% increase in VAW cases reported since 2015. The 24-hour helpline service set up by Punjab Police, received 15,698 complaints of domestic violence, 4063 complaints of harassment, 192 rape complaints, and 40 calls reporting cases of child molestation.<sup>3</sup>

## Social and Gendered Dynamics of VAW

The ecosystem that enables VAW includes household and community norms and attitudes rooted in discriminatory gender norms, lack of laws or inadequate implementation, lack or ineffectiveness of reporting and redressal mechanisms, and adequate or effective services for survivors of VAW. The presence of poverty, illiteracy, male unemployment, household corporal punishment, coupled with community and societal tolerance of VAW, and weak social or legal sanctions are cited as risk factors for domestic and spousal violence (WHO 2010).<sup>4</sup> Child marriage, restrictions on social and economic participation of women and prevalent forms of masculinities (*aggressive, dominating men, risk taking*) can fuel VAW (World Bank 2014).<sup>5</sup>

## Child Marriage and Early Child Bearing

The age of marriage in Pakistan has been rising steadily with more women getting married in their early twenties (PDHS 2012).

50% of women in the age group 20-24 years were married (ESW 2018). Of these 4% were married before age 15, and 15% before age 18 (Fig 1).

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (VAW) defines violence against women as:

*"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life"*

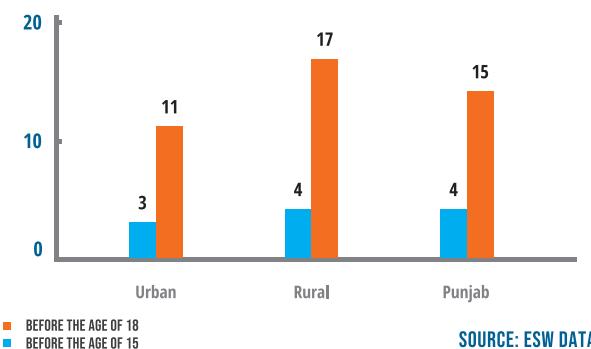
(United Nations, 1993)

Early marriage deprives girls of education opportunities and predisposes them to teen childbearing as well as domestic and spousal violence (Ali & Gavino, 2008).

Among the women who experienced physical and sexual abuse in the 20-24 age group, almost 24% women were married before age of 18 and 8% were married before age 15 (ESW 2018).

Child marriage leads to early childbearing and a prolonged reproductive period, resulting in higher number of childbirths per woman, and increases the risk of mortality and morbidity for both infants and mothers. In Punjab, nearly 14% of ever-married women in the 20-24 years age group have given birth to a child before the age of 18.

**FIG1: CHILD MARRIAGE (%)**

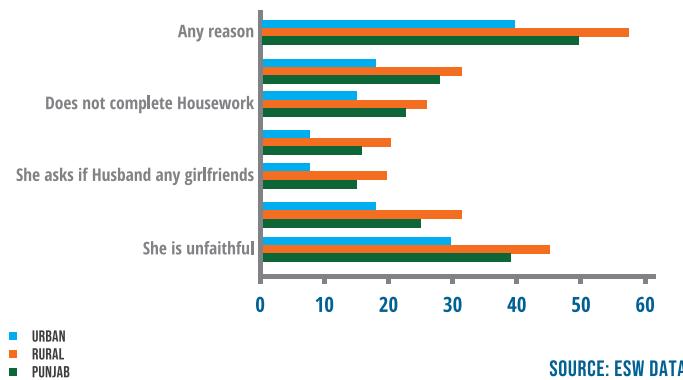


While rural areas are observed to have higher rates of early childbearing (15%), women belonging to the poorest households are more likely to have a child before 18 years (25%) compared to those in the upper quintiles (6%). These figures are similar to that of PDHS 2017 that records 8% of women (ages 15-19) to have begun child bearing, 13% at age 18.

## Attitudes towards VAW

Social norms are internalized by women so that they justify wife beating for reasons ranging from neglecting children to not doing housework to the satisfaction of the husband (Fig.2).

**FIG 2: WOMEN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS WIFE BEATING (%)**



This internalization implies that there is a high tolerance for VAW with 60% women justifying spousal physical violence for any one of the reasons noted, and 27-32% for lapses in household responsibilities such as not completing housework or not taking care of children.

## Domestic Violence

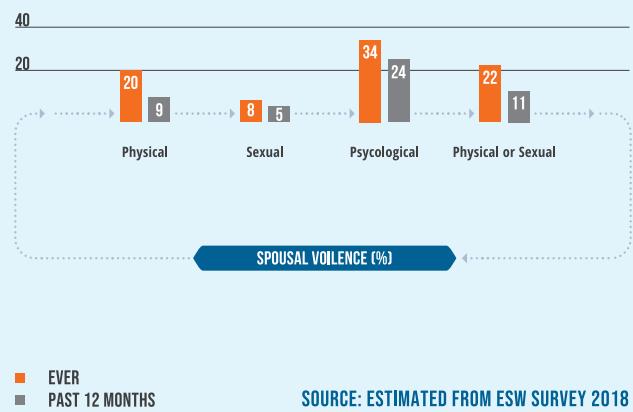
### Spousal Violence

Women in South Asia are also susceptible to high rates of physical and emotional spousal abuse.

DHS data from the countries in the region records unacceptably high levels of domestic violence, particularly in Bangladesh and India, and Pakistan ranks in eleventh place in the list of countries with the highest prevalence rates of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>

Approximately 22% of ever-married women in Punjab reported psychological, sexual, and physical abuse from husbands over their lifetime and 11% experienced it in the past 12 months (Fig.3).

**FIG 3: LIFETIME AND RECENT EXPERIENCE OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE (%)**



34% women have experienced psychological violence by spouse during their lifetime and approximately 24% women have experienced it in the past 12 months. Nearly 20% ever-married women have been physically abused by their husbands in their lifetime and 9% reported to have experienced the abuse in the past 12 months.

### Risk Factors

A multivariate analysis to determine the drivers of gender-based violence in Punjab based on the ESW data reveals the factors that significantly increase the risk of women experiencing violence at the individual, spousal, household and community level. Physical violence declines with an increase in age of husband and wife, with women's age being more significant.

Younger women are more susceptible to domestic abuse. Physical violence experienced in the past 12 months is observed to decline with husband and wife's educational attainment; however, education has no effect on sexual violence. Employed husbands are less likely to be the perpetrators of physical violence compared to husbands who are out of labor force. Employed women, however, are more likely to experience physical and sexual violence at the hands of their spouses in comparison to women who are economically inactive, possibly because the shift in the traditional gender roles is viewed as a threat to men's dominance and decision-making power in the household. However, when the woman and her husband are both employed there is less violence compared with households where the woman is not employed. Women with less decision-making such as in family planning are more likely to experience physical and sexual spousal abuse.

Women whose spouses witness family violence as children are more prone to be perpetrators of physical and sexual violence, testifying to the intergenerational effects of domestic violence.

## Violence by Family Members and Others

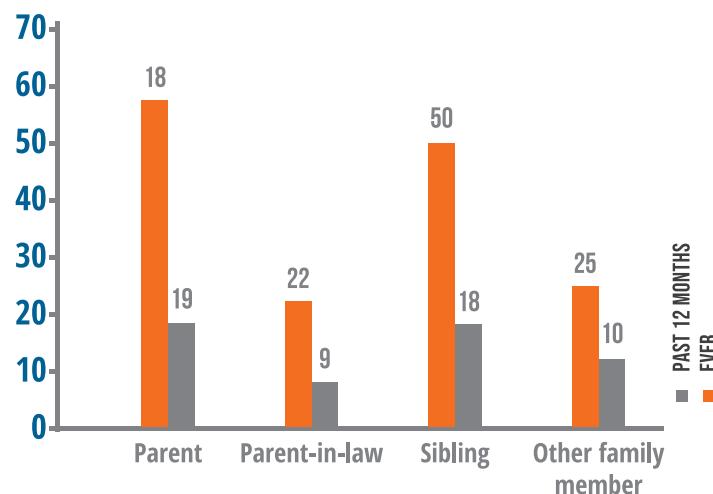
Apart from the abuse that ever-married women experience at the hands of their spouses, women in Punjab also suffer violence at the hands of family members, often at the hands of mothers and step-mothers (PDHS 2012).

Women experience physical and sexual violence in their homes or at the homes of relations. Among the 12% women who have experienced physical or sexual abuse during their lifetime, 11% reported non-spousal physical abuse and 1% women experienced non-spousal sexual abuse during their lifetime. Perpetrators of physical violence are most likely to be parents (58%), siblings (50%), or parents-in-laws (Fig. 4a). Perpetrators of sexual abuse are likely to be complete strangers

This means they have to give up better job opportunities that do not provide transport – or they may not find a job at all.<sup>17 18</sup> Thirty-four percent of 15-64 aged female respondents in the 2018 PCSW survey cited transport as a barrier to work.

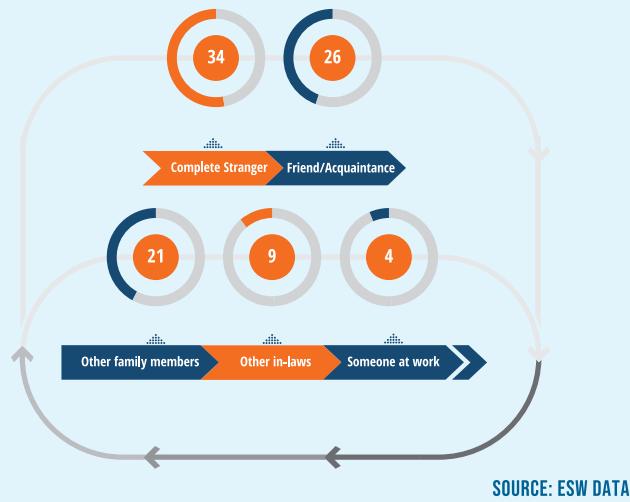
Lack of women's participation in trainings also adversely impacts their engagement in the formal sector. Employers find that female employees lack the skills appropriate for employment opportunities in the formal sector and proper training can help women learn valuable life skills and expand their capabilities. However, constraints to mobility hinder women from attending trainings. PCSW survey finds that 98% of women interviewed had never attended trainings and out of these 28,422 women, 7% reported lack of transport as a barrier to attending trainings.

**FIG 4a: PHYSICAL VIOLENCE BY FAMILY (%)**



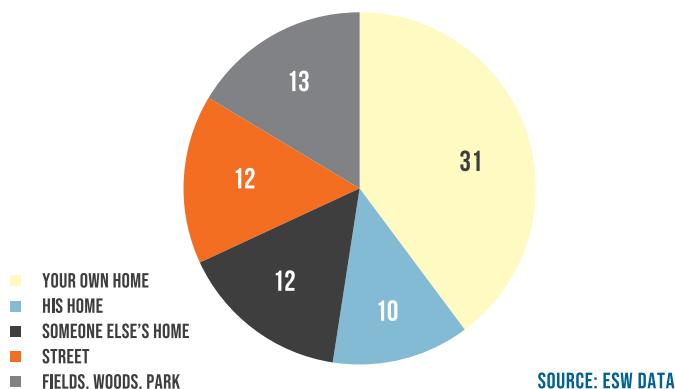
or friends and acquaintances. Among those reporting non-spousal sexual abuse in the past 12 months, 34% were assaulted by strangers, 21% by family members and 9% by in-laws (Fig. 4b). Women are at risk of violence within their homes as well as in public spaces.

**FIG 4b: SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY PERPETRATORS (%)**



The site of sexual violence is often their own homes, with 31% women reporting it as the place where their most recent experience of sexual violence took place. Another 25% women reported public spaces including streets and parks as the site of sexual violence (Fig.5).

**FIG 5: SITE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE MOST RECENT EXPERIENCE (%)**



## Risk Factors for Non-Spousal Violence

A woman's age, marital and employment status, acceptance of gender-based violence, and experience of domestic violence by father, are all significant risk factors for experiencing physical violence perpetrated by members of the family other than the spouse. Younger women are more likely to experience physical violence, mostly from parents and siblings, which tends

to decline with age and marital status. Women with higher education, and women in the better off households are less likely to experience VAW, thus leading to the positive association between poverty of experience of VAW. However, employed women report more physical violence from family members and non-family members. Women who justify wife beating are more vulnerable to non-spousal physical abuse and women who have witnessed their mothers being beaten by their fathers, are more likely to face physical abuse at the hands of their family and non-family members.

Proximity to natal family and frequency of contact with family members reduces the likelihood of physical abuse. Similarly, being in regular contact with friends/neighbors or sharing personal problems with friends can also make women less susceptible to non-spousal physical abuse. Active engagement in political activities and community infrastructures is observed to decrease the likelihood of experiencing violence.

## Eliminating Violence Against Women

In recent years, the Government of Pakistan has introduced legislative amendments, enacted new laws, and initiated investments in preventing violence against women and providing services to survivors of VAW. In 2006 the Protection of Women Act (Criminal Laws Amendment) was introduced that distinguished between rape and adultery (an anomaly created by the Hudood Ordinance in the 1980s), Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2011, the Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2010, Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010, and the Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the name or pretext of Honour) Act of 2016 to tackle gender-based crimes in the country and to ensure that the perpetrators of violence against women are punished (Rashid, 2018). Similar legislation was adopted by the provinces, with Punjab going a step further to adopt the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016, that aims to protect and empower women in Punjab.

Women Protection Authority Act 2017 has also been approved to ensure the implementation of measures proposed under Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act.

Besides the legislative actions, the provincial government has also shown commitment in addressing gender-based violence. The Women's Development Department registers complaints from women and works with the relevant departments to ensure that justice is served. The PCSW has a helpline that provides legal assistance in addition to counseling.

The Darul Aman's (one in each district of Punjab run by the Social Welfare Dept.) and the crisis centers, a Violence against Women Center was established in Multan in 2017 as a one-stop center where women file complaints against the perpetrators of violence and receive necessary support. Police staff has been provided training to help survivors and additional women police recruited to enable women to register their complaints; all the data on violence against women is computerized and regularly monitored. Free Legal Aid Centers are operational in 36 districts of Punjab, though the number of women who get help is very low. There have been initiatives to modify secondary school textbooks to gender sensitize and educate students (Quresh & Lima, 2017).

However, legislative and policy progress has been undermined by implementation gaps and lack of awareness on the part of both the law enforcement and the public. The legislation does not provide for financial compensation for victims; conviction of perpetrators is hindered by the forgiveness of perpetrators by victim's families, and the power of informal tribal courts to resolve family disputes (Rashid, 2018).

## Coping with the Experience of Violence

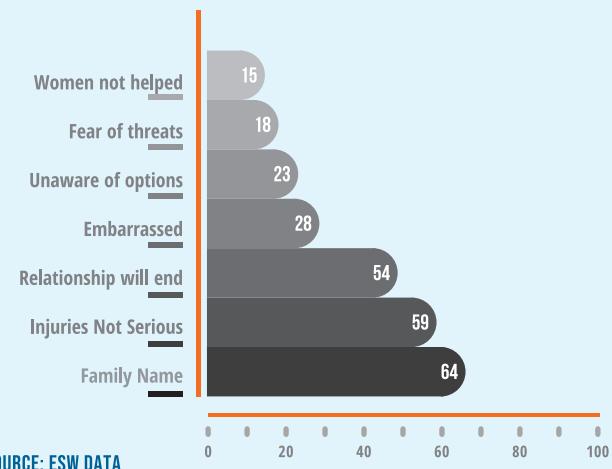
Women are not likely to seek help or speak up about

their experiences of gender-based violence to others. Partly this is a result of social norms, where domestic violence is seen as a private matter, and sexual violence, particularly rape is a matter of family honor. Among the 11% of women who experienced physical or sexual abuse in the past 12 months, 50% of women told no one about the incident, 43% women discussed it with their families and 7% women talked to their friends and neighbors. The statistics for women who sought help is even lower as only 4% women sought help from Police, hospitals/health centers, courts and local/religious leaders.

*"The fear of violence is enough for women to self-censor any actions that they perceive will trigger violence and invite sanctions from family members. The high level of tolerance for spousal violence is testimony to the acceptance of a culture of domestic violence".*

Survivors of violence hesitate in seeking help or sharing their experiences for a number of reasons. Almost 64% of women felt that doing so would bring bad name to the family and 53% women feared that speaking up about their experience could end their marriage or Nikah/engagement. Another 59% women believed the violence was not severe enough to justify seeking help (Fig.6).

**FIG 6: PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR (%)**



These results indicate that although legislation and reforms have been implemented to help women report abuse and gender-based violence, the social stigma attached to being a survivor and the social responsibilities of women to protect the family's honor hinder the help-seeking behavior of the victims of violence against women.

Nearly half of the 3% of ever-married women with children who had experienced physical or sexual abuse, felt their children were affected; one-third women reported their children missed school; 24% women felt their children developed behavioral and emotional disorders after witnessing the violence and almost half the women admitted that they stopped caring for their children after the incident of violence.

## Physical and Social Costs of VAW

Violence against women can gravely affect the survivor's mental, physical and reproductive health. Physical injuries, psychological trauma leading to low self-esteem, hypertension, post-traumatic stress disorder, and sleep problems have been reported. 58% of the ever-married women, who had been physically abused by their husbands in the past 12 months, said that they received acute injuries including cuts and bruises, 2018 while 42% reported to have received severe injuries including bone fractures, burns, and deep cuts.

17% of the ever-married working women reported to have experienced sexual or physical spousal abuse in the past 12 months. Among these women, 67% felt that the violence adversely impacted their productivity at work, as they were unable to concentrate, lost work days due to being unwell and experienced a loss of self-confidence.

The survivors who reported incidents of physical and sexual violence in the past 12 months, also reported mental health issues and emotional trauma. Among the 12% ever-married women who reported physical and sexual violence, 66% women experienced a decline in their mental health and 10% women thought about ending their lives after the incident of violence, and another 16% women were unhappy in their lives, and 29% women believed their daily lives and ability to perform simple domestic chores including fetching water, cleaning, or washing clothes, were adversely affected due to their experience of violence. **The negative effects of domestic violence on children who witness their mothers being abused have been documented.**

## Recommendations

Gender based violence restricts women from accessing opportunities, whether it be for education, for work, or for participation in any aspect of public life. Policy is no longer silent on violence against women, and the gaps that remain can be addressed by more rigorous implementation of laws, increased resources, and media campaigns for behavior change.

1. The Government of Punjab needs to build on the legislative reforms and response strategies introduced so far, and invest in bringing the desired change in the gender-based attitudes and community's acceptance of GBV.<sup>4</sup> Gender-sensitivity trainings provided to members of the judiciary and police officers on an ongoing basis to facilitate interactions with survivors of violence. Existing laws need to be expanded to protect the survivors and their families. Further, all discriminatory laws against women should be made unconstitutional and a woman's history should not be the focus of inquiry while charging her offender.
2. Women do not have confidence in law enforcers and service providers and hence do not seek help. Response strategies to cases of VAW should be strengthened.
  - a. Properly trained and gender sensitized police force and health providers should be designated as focal points in each thana and BHU.
  - b. Each thana should have at least 2 female personnel trained to deal sensitively with female complainants.
  - c. SoPs, at the thana and the shelters, for dealing with complaints that recognize the extreme vulnerability

- of women who manage to reach them, should be implemented and monitored.
- d. Shelter homes and transitional housing that provide safe and secure housing for women should be available at Tehsil level, well-resourced and staffed and open 24 hours for admission.
- e. Existing shelters, such as the Darul Aman, the Women Center in Multan, and the crisis centers should be provided adequate resources to function optimally. The District Darul Aman should be reconceptualized and should function as a one stop center for survivors of VAW, providing medical aid, counselling, legal advice and shelter. Recreational activities and trainings to equip survivors with important life skills should be provided. Facilities should be provided for the children of survivors for education, life skills training and counselling. Free legal aid should be provided to women who cannot afford legal fee. Efforts need to be made to expand the outreach and awareness of the existing Free Legal Aid Centers and the services provided.
- f. Setting up special courts for gender-based violence and crimes will facilitate women in seeking legal advice and justice. Court proceedings should be completed within a 3-month time frame, and hearings organized to reduce the burden of appearances and travel for women.
3. Implementation and awareness of the laws against sexual harassment of women at the workplace should be ensured. Only 9% of women in paid employment in Punjab are aware of the law against sexual harassment at the workplace.
4. Behavioral change is a process that needs to begin early and be sustained. School curricula and management training should promote pluralism and tolerance, and teach the effects and costs of GBV on individuals, families and communities.
5. Behavioral change through effective use of mass media with positive messaging about women and men should be promoted. This requires changing the perception of men about GBV, gender equality, working women, and challenging and modifying the perceptions of masculinity prevalent in society.

## End Notes

Punjab Gender Parity Report (PGPR), 2018, Punjab Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>1</sup> Aurat Foundation report on VAW in 2014, provides a snapshot of gender-based violence in the country by using statistics compiled from national and local newspapers for six regions in Pakistan to estimate that approximately 70 to 90% of women experience domestic violence at least once in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Punjab Gender Parity Report 2018.<sup>3</sup> Preventing Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence against Women. WHO 2010.<sup>4</sup> Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity. World Bank 2014.<sup>5</sup> Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia, World Bank 2014.<sup>6</sup>

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The Punjab Commission on the Status of Women is a Special Institution of the Women Development Department, Government of Punjab, established through the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2014 as an oversight body to ensure that laws, policies and programs of the Government of Punjab promote women's empowerment; that efforts are made for expansion of opportunities for socio-economic development of women, and discrimination against women in all forms is eliminated. PCSW provides periodic feedback and status updates on international instruments affecting women and girls. PCSW is represented in all 9 divisions of Punjab through its Members and Divisional Coordinators.

