



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Empowering Women through Land Ownership: A Case Study of Punjab**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the status of women's land inheritance rights in Punjab, focusing on the different regions of the province. Property rights for women are important to their economic, social, and political status but they hit major barriers arising from traditional practices, legal frameworks, and other socioeconomic determinants that differ between, and sometimes within, regions. In Punjab, women generally cannot receive land inheritance legally, as traditions, expectations and weak law enforcement get in their way. Although the Anti-Women Practices Act was created in 2011, the lack of effective enforcement and strong cultural challenges keep women financially weak over many generations. This research used both ways of collecting evidence: it analyzed records from the government and media plus an online poll with anonymous female respondents aged 18+ in Punjab to see what people know about land inheritance rights for women. To overcome women's land inheritance barriers in Punjab, integrated reforms must combine stronger legal enforcement, rights awareness programmes, economic empowerment, and cultural sensitization to challenge patriarchal norms and ensure sustainable gender equity in land ownership.

**KEYWORDS** Women, Land Rights, Legal Framework, Rights of Inheritance, Regional Differences And Policy Changes, Punjab

**Introduction**

The women in Punjab, specifically in rural areas, have a considerably less opportunity to own and control the land than men, and this determines actual positions, levels of risk, and the prospects of earning a living. Arable land is a major source of food, income, and political protection for rural men and women; nevertheless, land tenure is skewed with 64% of the land owned by only 5% of the rural households and with the pace of landlessness most acutely felt in rural Sindh region. This difference holds equally for women where they are legally forbidden to inherit lands from their male counterparts because of the patriarchal mentality and as shown in the mapping by Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre in Punjab (Wasif, 2023).

The sole purpose of this paper is to explore how Pakistani women are denied full rights over the land and while analyzing this issue, it will be observed that it leads as well as stems from women's general oppression. Although efforts to reform laws to make them compliant with women's rights could translate to an improvement in the women's ability to access land as a source of earning, the measures are normally inadequate to overcoming the problem of control and hegemonic power over women, Socialization and intersectionality with other forms of oppression including race, color, class and caste (Abdullah & Shah, 2024).

Pakistan is largely an agrarian economy in which most of the women do not have access to or control over their inherited land property. Women friendly laws and LRMIS playing their role to assist women regarding their land rights. This paper discusses existing laws to address violence against women and girls (VAWG) at federal and provincial levels in Pakistan. The law reform process in Pakistan was pioneered by the 2010 Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment that devolved more and additional provincial legislative authority and responsibilities for the implementation of VAWG-related laws to the provinces (Ali, Javed, & Sherazi, 2025).

The poor female literacy rate as compared to male literacy rate pushed them back to acquire their Rights. Article 23 of the constitution of Pakistan states that every citizen shall have the right to acquire, hold and dispose of property in any part of Pakistan. Moreover, some customary practices also creates hurdles for women in land inheritance Rights. There is dire need to take some legal initiatives at ground levels as well as organization should also be engaged. Women rights to inheritance are legally protected in Punjab but are usually violated by male-dominated practices, forced marriages, and remnants of unfriendly culture. In particular, the analysis substantiated restricted mobility and weak legal protection regarding gendered work and economic opportunities for rural women; therefore improved support systems and proper enforcement are required (Aslam, Mubashar, & Iqbal, 2024).

### **Literature Review**

“Deprivation Of Women's Inheritance Rights In Pakistan: Islamic Provisions, Judicial Pronouncements And Social Barriers” by Adeel Abid and his fellows in which they describe that even though laws were passed in colonial times and after independence, as well as the 2011 Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, women in Punjab are still hindered by inheritance issues because of traditional male rule over land and social traditions. Even though both the Quran 4:7, 4:12 and national laws give women inheritance rights, only about 3% of women actually receive what is rightfully theirs. It is necessary to have strong enforcement, more awareness and important changes in how land-ownership systems treat men and women differently (Abid, Hyder, & Rana, 2025).

“Understanding the costs of hiring women in Pakistan” by Hana Zahir in which she describes that the patriarchal society mostly women remained marginalized from decision making process due to exclusion of women from land ownership Economic restraints such as cost of safe transportation for women is particularly hinder women’s participation in workforce. Institutional and legal obstacles as well as gender norms often restrict women’s land ownership. There is need to strengthen legal framework and provision of awareness sessions to enhance women’s land rights. Empowering women through land ownership improves their social status and they can actively participate in decision making (Shibuya, Tirmazee, & Zahir, 2024).

“ Do Legal And Institutional Reforms In Punjab ,Pakistan Protect Women’s Inherited Land Rights" by Iram Rubab and Beenish Malik discuss that according to global gender gap index report 2020, Pakistan ranks at 153 out of 156 countries. Government of Pakistan took some initiatives to tackle the issue like 498-A: prohibition of depriving women from inheriting property. But these reforms are not sufficient to deal with the issue. There is dire need to recruitment of women in legal institutions (Rubab, Malik, & Aziz, 2023).

“Land Ownership And Inheritance Rights Of Women In Rural Pakistan” Riffat, Haque, Rabbia Aslam, Aisha discuss in their article that in rural areas women face hurdles in pursuing their basic rights as they are subordinated to the patriarchal structure. Many civil laws and international initiatives are contributing their efforts regard this. In rural areas of Punjab women are unaware of their basic Rights because of lack of education. National institution of Pakistan (MOWD) has Mandate to ensure that all gender and inherited concerns will be tackled as soon as possible. Male chauvinist society is the biggest obstacle in this way (Haque, Rabbia, & Aisha, 2022).

“Women’s Empowerment In Pakistan; A Socioeconomic Perspective” Dr. Tansif ur Rehman explore that how gender relations impact women’s land ownership in Punjab. This study highlights the role of dowries and informal justice mechanisms in shaping women’s access to land. Patriarchal inheritance practices override legal provisions to ensure women’s land rights (Ahmed, et. al., 2015). The role of local councils, which tend to favor male heirs. Women who challenge these rulings face social ostracism. Strengthen legal frameworks improve enforcement mechanisms, greater involvement of women in legal and community decision-making processes. Without addressing the socio-cultural to land ownership, legal reforms alone will not be sufficient to empower women in Punjab (Rehman, Usmani, & Parveen, 2022).

### **Material and Methods**

The research collected quantitative data from women and examined district land records to look into women’s inheritance rights in Punjab between 2019 and 2024. Highlights from the research were selected by sampling in different areas and adding those who are marginalized using snowball sampling. Surveys were used to collect data about the participants’ knowledge of the law and the obstacles caused by cultural differences, and the questionnaires were tested on a small group and checked for reliability. Approaches used were descriptive statistics, chi-square tests for analysis of relationships, regression modeling to uncover important aspects of land ownership, and analysis of the written comments. All the guidelines regarding ethics were strictly followed, such as gaining consent, guaranteeing confidentiality, and allowing people to join willingly. By using this approach, it was possible to carefully compare women’s right to inherit land with the land they actually own in Punjab.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Women’s Empowerment in Punjab**

In Punjab empowering women is considered to be the critical issue which is associated with social status, economic independence and legal entitlements. In spite of constitutional protections, deep rooted patriarchal norms and practices constrain women’s access to their inherited land ownership, which is a primary source of economic stability. In rural areas of Punjab, most of the land is commonly inherited by male heirs of the family, due to which women have to depend on fathers, brothers, or husbands for economic security. A report by Human Rights Commission of Pakistan 2022, showed that in Punjab only 5% of agricultural land is owned by women which clearly represents the systematic discrimination. Ownership of land not just strengthens economic security but also enhances decision making power of women in families as well as in societies. Women empowerment in Punjab is steadily emerging through educational, legal and social approaches (Ali, Javed, & Sherazi, 2025). The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill 2011 has played an important role in reinforcing claims of women over their inherited property, providing legal basis for their rights.

## **Legal Framework and Women's Land Rights**

Legal system of Pakistan grants women inheritance rights under Islamic laws as well as constitutional provisions. Despite that, due to patriarchal framework and corruption implementation could not be strengthened. The Punjab Land Reform Act of 2019 tried to strengthen women's claims of properties but it mostly faced resistance from local ruling systems. In 2023 a report by Aurat Foundation found that in Punjab only 12% of women claim their inheritance legally. In most of the cases, women are not aware about their rights, and when they came to know, they had to face strong resistance from family members, particularly from male members. Due to the lack of gender conscious land dispute mechanisms, issues become more complicated. Simultaneously laws exist on paper, societal beliefs and weak enforcement mechanism prohibit women from claiming their rights. By strengthening legal awareness and ensuring female representation in land governance, this disparity could be reduced (Aziz, Rubab, & Malik, 2023).

## **Socio-Cultural Barriers to Women's Land Ownership**

Traditional practices in Punjab restrict women from obtaining land rights because property operates as an area controlled by men. According to Journal of Gender and Social Issues (2020), resistance to land claims occurs among 80% of rural Punjab women. Men dominate the tribal council system known as the jirga whenever disputes regarding land ownership arise because they make decisions that work against women. Women in the education system hesitate to confront traditional customs due to their concerns about destroying their families (Hamza, Bibi, Bibi, & Arooj-ul-Hassan, 2020). Religious interpretations that are wrong provide grounds to prevent women from receiving their fair shares according to law. Social barriers which persist without adequate treatment will block the success of even the most forward-thinking legislative solutions.

## **Role of the Punjab Land Records Authority (PLRA)**

The Punjab Land Records Authority established through modernization introduced essential transparency measures in land documentation. The PLRA achieved these goals by implementing digital record management that decreased inequities and corruption and reduced both procedural delays and documentation tampering that impacted women seriously. The digitization process benefits women theoretically because it establishes an official record system which reduces the influence of mediators. Local patwaris retain unofficial control of land records because their areas have not completed the transition from manual to digital systems. The PLRA is lacking specific services that address women's needs through mobile facilitation centers and female staff as well as basic inheritance procedures. The PLRA requires better accessibility measures to reach its transformative potential because it needs to address women who lack literacy skills along with women who have physical mobility challenges.

## **Government Initiatives**

The Punjab government launched the Women's Land Rights Portal (2023) to ease inheritance claim processes yet execution has fallen behind. The digitization process by the Punjab Land Record Authority fails to include women in their records because most transactions involve men. The Punjab Women's Empowerment Package 2020 established a land grant program for female household heads although few eligible beneficiaries have received aid. The 2023 SDPI policy brief advised making it compulsory for women to join land documentation processes to stop fraudulent activities. Policies currently

prove ineffective because there are no strict enough penalties in place to prevent denial of inheritance to women. Gender-differentiated land statistic data fails to reveal the complete magnitude of gender inequality in the country (Rashid, 2022).

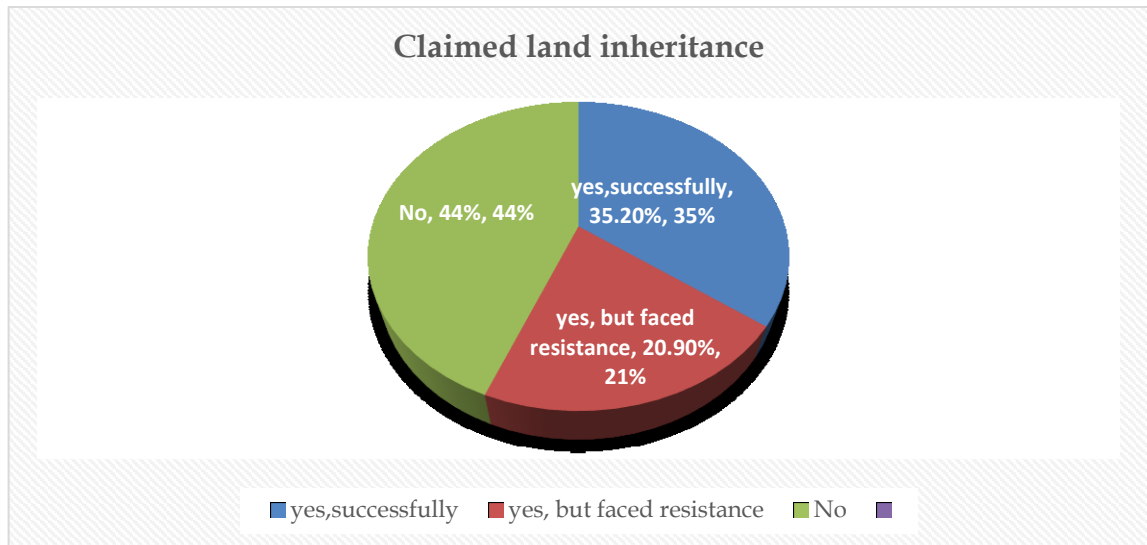


Figure 1 Claimed Land Inheritance

Respondents who answered "No" made up 44% of the total participants which implies that land inheritance claims have never been made by approximately half of the women or their relatives. The resistance against inheritance processes appears significant because cultural norms or lack of awareness and potential obstacles appear to prevent widespread participation. Survey results demonstrate that a significant chunk of 35.2% of women and their relatives obtained successful inheritance distribution. The respondents who faced resistance while claiming their rights accounted for 20.9% of the total sample. Over fifty-six percent of surveyed women and their families interacted with inheritance claims based on their account however many were impeded during the process. Systemic or cultural factors continue to discourage women according to the high percentage who did not pursue their inheritance rights. The data stresses that women in Punjab require purposeful programs to help them exercise their inheritance rights despite existing barriers.

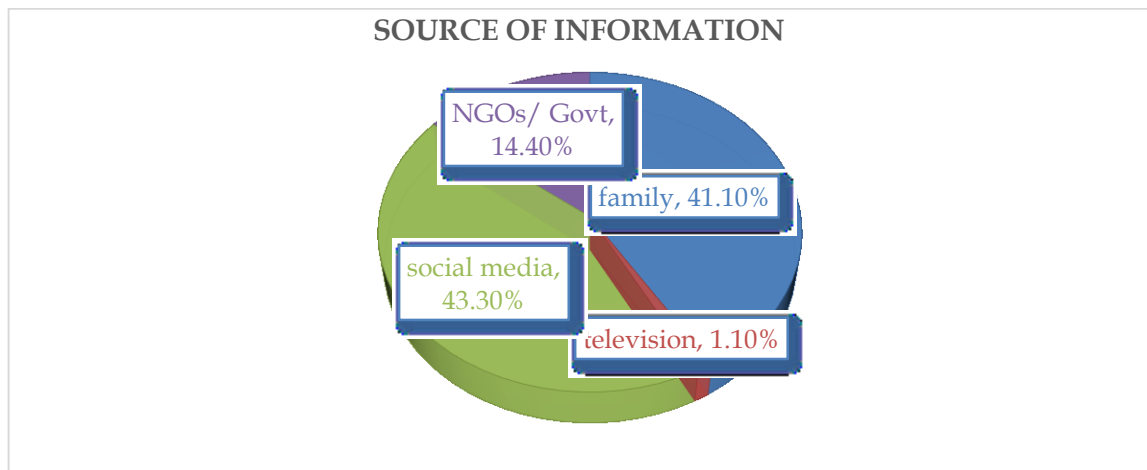


Figure 2 Source of Information

The information sources regarding women's land rights demonstrate encouraging results for research project. The public receives women's land rights information via traditional and digital means through equivalent channels that include family networks and social media 43.3% and 41.1% respectively. Clearest documentation shows that women access both family-based knowledge sharing networks and social media platforms equally which creates innovative paths to develop dual awareness approaches linking personal relationships with accessible online platforms. Civil society organizations and government institutions achieve satisfactory outcomes in rights education according to statistical data documents with a resulting attribution of 14.4%. The successful connection between formal initiatives and their target readers strengthens the organization's probable growth potential. Three years from now future rights campaigns need to implement different communication strategies since television/radio media have shown low effectiveness with only 1.1% engagement. Family appears as the leading source of the studied information so building robust family relationships produces important outcomes for educational inclusion within communities. The limited use of institutional information sources enables people to establish relationships with existing community-based programs.

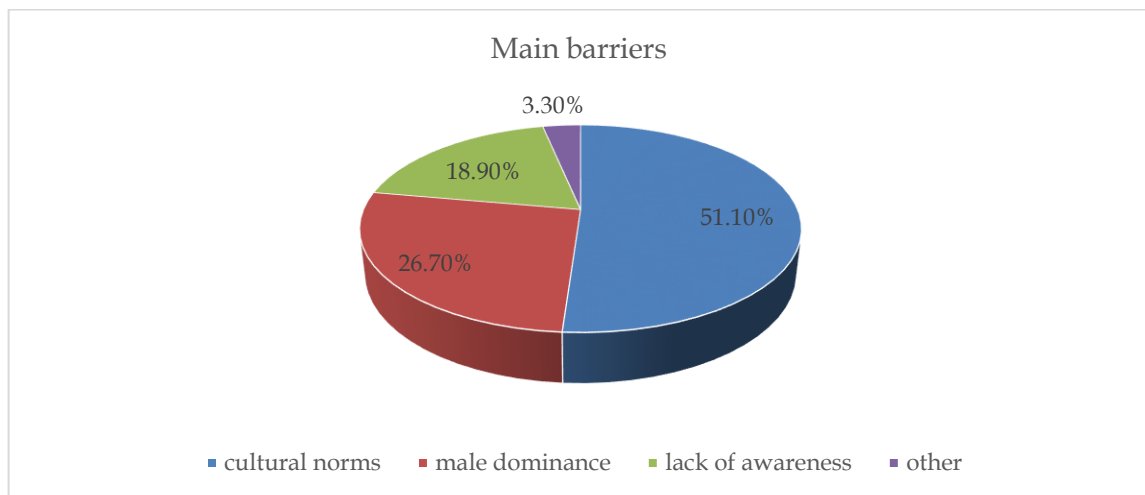


Figure 3 Main Barriers

According to survey findings cultural and traditional norms present the biggest obstacle to women owning land in Punjab since 51.1% of respondents selected this as their main roadblock. Society follows established customs that promote male ownership rights of land while inhibiting women from obtaining their legal land inheritances. Male family societal control over properties constitutes a major hindrance according to 26.7% of participants who observed that patriarchal family dynamics block women from participating in property decisions. Many women remain unaware about their rights or how to exercise them according to 18.9% of respondents who participated in the study. The data presents an overview of systemic barriers that impede women in their property rights which comprises collective cultural resistance and family-based patriarchy and insufficient legal comprehension. As indicated by the research findings we need to combine cultural education for sensitization with legal protection of inheritance rights for women along with educational initiatives to educate women about their legal entitlements. The strong influence of cultural barriers demonstrates that community-level interventions must become essential to transform traditional values which prevent women from obtaining land rights.

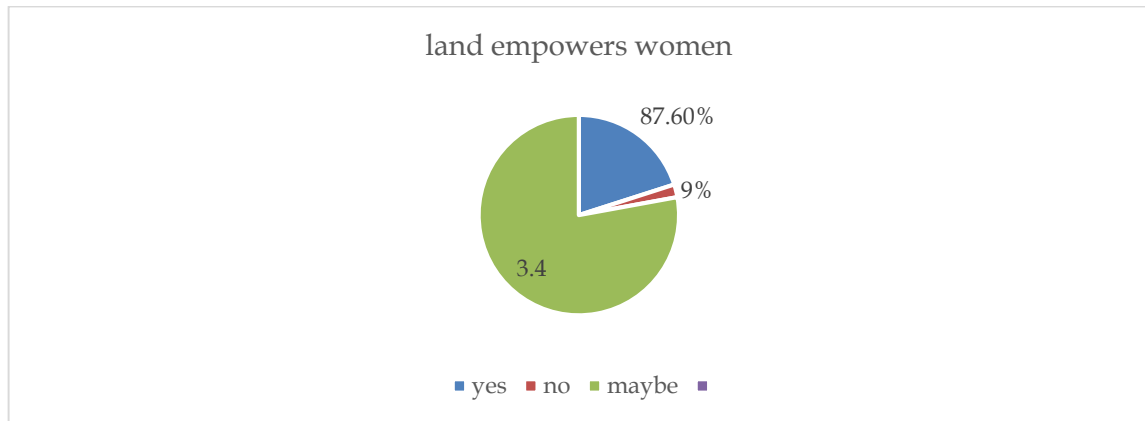


Figure 4 Land Empowers Women

Social and economic empowerment through land ownership is something that 87.6% of respondents fully understand the power of indicating strong local community knowledge about transformative role of property rights. Only a small minority of respondents disagreed that land ownership acts as an empowerment tool which demonstrates broad community acceptance of this practice. The research data shows that most community members currently grasp the essential value of women's land rights because they demonstrate support through their responses. These common beliefs between stakeholders form a suitable basis for policy initiatives that transform awareness into actual ownership possibilities.

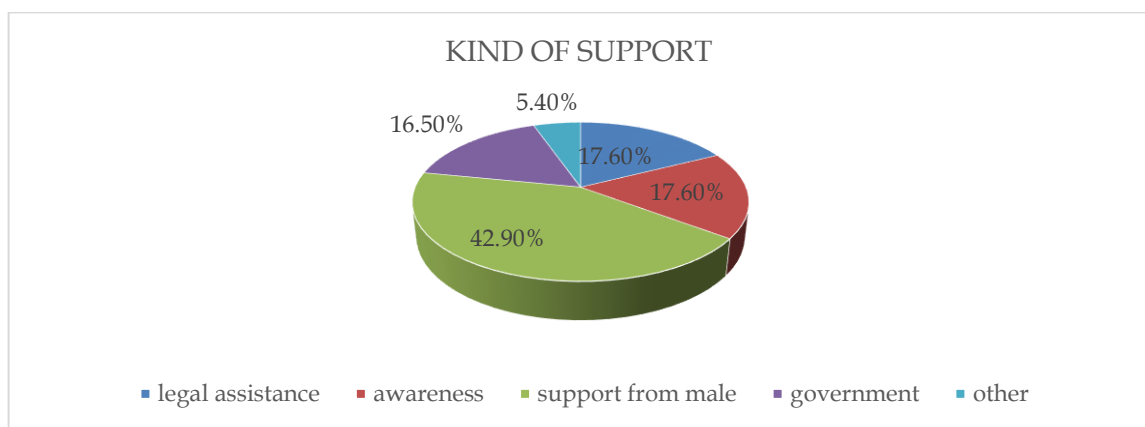


Figure 5 Kind of Support

The study revealed that male familial support stood first among participants' priorities for acquiring property ownership but such findings reveal existing social norms that inhibit women from accessing their property assets. Statistical information demonstrates that traditional cultural norms in combination with authoritative family roles prevent women from taking advantage of their formally granted legal rights. It is evident from the data analysis that legal support functions on equal footing with education initiatives because both contribute 17.6% importance toward property rights protection direction. The population assigned 16.5% of their attention to governmental enforcement because they either doubt institutional action or believe community-based approaches bring faster results. Research indicates that family opinions about land ownership represent essential progress towards equality but success demands coordinated improvements of both legal access and education programs and policy implementation to change these ownership numbers.

**Table 1**  
**District-Wise Analysis of Women's Land Ownership in Punjab (2019-2024)**

District	Male count	Female count	Male area	Female area	Male area (Acre)	Female area(Acre)
OKARA	431369	176787	34611584265	5792142888	795302.9473	133091.5186
ATTOCK	783440	456299	39972582420	9661457328	918487.6475	222000.3982
BHAKKAR	432419	185410	44441168103	6811797173	1021166.546	156521.0747
BAHAWALPUR	622301	308076	34347640585	6814422025	789238.0649	156581.3884
BAHAWALNAGAR	502593	180377	54361008773	8774807767	1249104.062	201627.0167
PAKPATTAN	303457	111987	20920290202	3633781409	480705.1977	83496.81546
TALLAGANG	203554	132006	21145801197	5043732066	485886.976	115894.5787
TOUNSA	229985	130516	20028352819	4562777567	460210.3129	104843.2345
JHANG	651201	229559	42911629511	6439717303	986020.8987	147971.4454
JEHLUM	389504	255784	15564280576	3900598081	357635.1235	89627.71326
CHINIOT	305923	129012	22013384166	4279351748	505822.2465	98330.69274
CHAKWAL	329163	233967	18803909451	4577456945	432075.1253	105180.5364
HAFIZABAD	221243	82271	18814986293	2910051031	432329.6483	66866.98141
KHANEWAL	479886	188828	27658746873	5008564752	635541.0587	115086.5063
KHUSHAB	244359	124945	32243056992	4726437389	740879.0669	108603.8003
RAJANPUR	434674	177272	46778761024	6893991563	1074879.619	158409.7326
RAWALPINDI	953479	603256	19409083246	5284615412	445980.7731	121429.5821
RAHIM YAR KHAN	790608	382123	49532211237	9948688459	1138148.236	228600.3782
SAHIWAL	416046	170843	24095078349	3814712974	553655.2929	87654.25032
SARGODHA	550473	220732	40794041527	6955946950	937363.0866	159833.3398
SIALKOT	636464	292970	19736914290	3292723990	453513.6556	75660.01815
SHEIKHUPURA	477629	186712	26342926081	4322028959	605306.2059	99311.32718
FAISALABAD	987114	418320	44476097663	7388898811	1021969.156	169781.6822
QASUR	511510	182495	28356526599	4190562135	651574.6002	96290.49023
GUJRAT	681075	372289	21292806289	4242935264	489264.8504	97493.91691
GUJRANWALA	502275	178007	17948015222	2640622212	412408.438	60676.06186
LAHORE	304754	112451	6632603345	1007093965	152403.5695	23140.94589
LODHRAN	413270	179959	21240821638	4409433114	488070.3501	101319.6947
LAYYAH	459259	166861	32335277587	4589373587	742998.1063	105454.3563
MURREE	118706	97241	1610899797	464441958	37015.16078	10671.91999
MUZAFARGARH	712682	348647	29602024941	6655185928	680193.5878	152922.4708
MULTAN	836607	403030	24774675628	5753423663	569271.0392	132201.8305
MANDI BHAULDIN	339769	133363	19633338828	2586598915	451133.7047	59434.71772
MIANWALI	476269	233324	30625546953	4935361170	703712.0164	113404.4386
NAROWAL	346839	165873	15182844441	2543621891	348870.5065	58447.19419
NANKANA SAHAB	254538	102570	18754159177	2922804235	430931.9664	67160.02378
WAZIRABAD	124528	54585	8061279778	1210032946	185231.6125	27804.06585
VEHARI	446207	181825	29759225372	5280736821	683805.7301	121340.46
TOBA TEK SINGH	405550	175316	26011311828	4099624590	597686.3931	94200.93267
DERA GHAZI KHAN	458042	214949	24833565795	4157452966	570624.214	95529.7097
KOT ADDU	310468	128955	17411241172	3089884645	400074.4755	70999.18761

### Comparative Analysis

The survey responses and official district data reveal both alignment and contradictions in understanding women's land ownership in Punjab. Survey respondents reported that 40.7% of households included women owners of land although official district records show lesser female land ownership and indicate male owners possess two to three times more land across all regions. A difference between recorded land ownership and official registry reports exists due to both undocumented land deals and incorrect documentation of land ownership categories. Cultural barriers exhibited at 51.1% of women responded while male family power as an obstacle reached 26.7%



according to the survey results but district statistics identified Rajanpur with 6.8:1 and Bahawalnagar with 6.2:1 as regions showing highest gender differences in land ownership. The Rawalpindi and Attock official data shows possible equal ownership opportunities between genders although both regions collected higher female responses in their surveys. The survey indicates that raising awareness should be the primary solution according to respondents yet official data shows land inequities exist thereby demanding legal reforms (survey participants supported this approach by only 16.5% of them). Survey findings show 87.9% of women understand inheritance rights while district records indicate low woman ownership indicating cultural practices continue after women learn about their legal rights.

### Conclusion

Because of patriarchy, weak law enforcement and lack of knowledge, it is still difficult for women in Punjab to obtain ancestral lands. Supportive rules are put in place, yet social issues remain, so women feel economically unstable. That is why Punjab must set up land tribunals and deal more sternly with anybody who is found guilty of breaking these rights. Decisions and knowledge about land rights should be passed on to everyone, records should be kept and computerized and women should be included in land management. Women receiving land and church officials teaming up with those who are concerned can encourage others to question their thinking. Economic and social change is needed along with new laws to make sure women truly gain benefits from owning land. Sustainable and inclusive development will be possible in Punjab only if these things are carried out.

### Recommendations

1. Introduce land tribunals that can deal quickly with women's property matters and give stiffer convictions to those responsible for haq bakhshwana. Put in place laws that make it necessary for both spouses to register financial assets to keep women from losing access to them.
2. Bring the proportion of female members in land governance bodies to 33% and make sure that training for revenue officials is gender inclusive. Make land databases separate by gender to help create equal policies.
3. Include Islamic rules relating to inheritance in schools and adult literacy programs together with programs broadcast by the media. Have religious leaders take part in community talks to challenge wrong ways of interpreting inheritance laws by men.
4. Give subsidies for agricultural products and loans to female landowners, along with courses on how to manage farmland for rural women. Work to make women part of successful farm cooperatives, so they can influence the market together.

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