

Measuring Citizens' Perceptions of Access to Justice: A Quantitative Survey-Based Study on Legal Awareness, Affordability, and Trust in Judicial Institutions in Pakistan

¹Kokab Saeed, ²Nadia Noreen, ³Muhammad Rizwan, ⁴Sehrish Furyal, ^{*5}Irshan Arif, ⁶Anwar Ali.

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Hazara University, Mansehra-21300 Pakistan. kokabsaeed55@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Law, Hazara University, Mansehra-21300 Pakistan. nadianoreen.awan@yahoo.com

³Department of Pakistan Studies, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology, Abbottabad Pakistan. drmuhammadrizwan_hu@yahoo.com

⁴Department of Pakistan Studies, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology, Abbottabad Pakistan. sfuryal32@gmail.com

^{5*}Department of Political Science, Hazara university, Mansehra-21300, Pakistan. (Corresponding Author) irshanarif@gmail.com

⁶ Department of Pakistan Studies, Abbottabad University of Science & Technology, Abbottabad, 22500 Pakistan. anwarwt3@gmail.com

Abstract: *This study examines citizens' perceptions of access to justice in Pakistan by analysing legal awareness, affordability, judicial efficiency, institutional trust, and perceived barriers across three districts of the Hazara Division. Using a quantitative, survey-based design, data were collected from 200 respondents representing diverse socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. Findings show that while basic legal awareness is moderately high, significant gaps persist regarding procedural knowledge and availability of legal aid. Affordability emerged as a major obstacle, with many respondents viewing legal services and court-related expenses as financially burdensome. Perceptions of judicial efficiency were mixed, particularly concerning delays and lack of procedural clarity. Trust in judicial institutions was cautiously moderate, influenced positively by legal awareness and fairness perceptions but negatively affected by concerns over corruption and lack of independence. Regression analysis demonstrated that legal awareness, affordability, and judicial efficiency significantly predict institutional trust, whereas perceived barriers reduce it. A t-test revealed that women hold significantly higher trust compared to men, while a proportion test showed higher-than-expected citizen interaction with the justice system. Overall, the study highlights the urgent need for legal literacy programs, affordable legal aid, and system-wide reforms to strengthen access to justice in Pakistan.*

Keywords: *access to justice, legal awareness, affordability, judicial trust, Pakistan*

1. Introduction

Access to justice is a foundational element of democratic governance and a core component of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasizes equal access to justice for all and the

promotion of strong, accountable institutions (United Nations, 2020). A functioning justice system enables citizens to exercise their rights, resolve disputes, and seek remedies for grievances, thereby strengthening social cohesion and public trust in the state (Tyler, 2006). However, in many developing countries, including Pakistan, access to justice remains constrained by structural, economic, procedural, and cultural barriers that limit the ability of ordinary citizens to engage effectively with legal institutions (UNDP, 2021; World Justice Project, 2022). Understanding public perceptions of justice accessibility is therefore crucial for identifying gaps in legal empowerment, institutional credibility, and the fairness of judicial processes. Pakistan's justice landscape is characterized by complex challenges such as case backlogs, procedural delays, financial barriers, inadequate legal aid, and varying levels of legal awareness across socio-economic groups (Siddique, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2016). With more than two million cases pending across courts at different levels, the judicial system struggles to deliver timely and equitable justice (Rizvi & Husain, 2020). Delays not only limit access but also undermine public confidence in judicial institutions, fostering perceptions of inefficiency and corruption (Transparency International, 2022). These challenges are further exacerbated by unequal access based on gender, geography, education, and income, which creates disparities in citizens' ability to navigate legal procedures (UN Women, 2021). As a result, citizens often rely on informal or traditional dispute-resolution mechanisms, which may be faster and less expensive but can perpetuate inequity, particularly for marginalized groups such as women and low-income earners (Critelli, 2012; Ismail & Shah, 2020).

Legal awareness is a critical determinant of justice accessibility. Studies have shown that citizens with higher levels of legal literacy are better equipped to identify rights violations, seek appropriate remedies, and engage confidently with formal legal structures (Golub, 2010; Jahan, 2021). Conversely, low awareness results in reluctance to approach courts, heightened vulnerability to exploitation, and dependence on intermediaries who may charge excessive fees or misguide litigants (Pleasence et al., 2018). In Pakistan, legal awareness remains limited, particularly in rural areas where formal justice mechanisms may be less accessible (Hasan, 2020). This underscores the importance of examining the extent to which citizens understand their rights, available legal services, and procedural requirements, as these factors strongly influence their perceptions of accessing justice. Affordability is another major obstacle. Research globally indicates that legal costs—including lawyer fees, court charges, and documentation expenses—significantly discourage individuals from pursuing legal remedies (OECD, 2021; Smith & Paterson, 2014). In Pakistan, where a large proportion of the population falls within low- and middle-income brackets, the financial burden of litigation is often prohibitive (Banik, 2021). Free or subsidized legal aid remains insufficient, and many citizens are either unaware of such services or perceive them as inaccessible due to administrative complexities (Asia Foundation, 2018). Examining how affordability shapes perceptions of justice access is thus essential for designing equitable and inclusive justice-sector reforms.

Judicial efficiency and fairness also play pivotal roles in shaping institutional trust. Timely proceedings, clear procedures, ethical conduct, and respectful treatment contribute significantly to a positive justice experience (Lind & Arndt, 2020; Tyler & Huo, 2002). Conversely, delays, perceived corruption, and lack of transparency undermine trust and create a sense of disillusionment with the justice system (Cheema & Farhat, 2018; Shah, 2020). Trust in judicial institutions is critical for maintaining the legitimacy of the rule of law, as citizens who trust courts

are more likely to obey laws, resolve disputes peacefully, and participate in democratic processes (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Ginsburg & Versteeg, 2020). Pakistan's judiciary enjoys symbolic legitimacy, yet concerns persist regarding independence, political interference, and corruption (Hussain, 2021), making it essential to evaluate how citizens perceive judicial trustworthiness today. Perceived barriers, including fear of retaliation, cultural restrictions, and social pressures, further shape citizens' willingness to pursue legal action. These challenges are particularly acute for women, minorities, and economically vulnerable groups, who often face additional hurdles in navigating formal justice systems (Kandiyoti, 1988; UN Women, 2021). Understanding these barriers is critical for identifying areas requiring targeted interventions, such as community-based legal awareness programs, gender-responsive justice initiatives, and improved accessibility for marginalized populations.

While numerous reports and qualitative studies have examined justice challenges in Pakistan, there remains a scarcity of quantitative research that systematically measures public perceptions across multiple dimensions of justice accessibility. This study addresses this gap by examining legal awareness, affordability, judicial efficiency, institutional trust, and perceived barriers using a structured survey of 200 respondents across Mansehra, Abbottabad, and Haripur. By integrating statistical analysis, including regression, t-tests, and proportion tests, the study provides empirical insights into the factors that shape citizens' perceptions of access to justice. These findings have significant implications for policymakers, legal practitioners, and civil society organizations seeking to improve justice delivery, enhance public trust, and promote equitable access.

1.1 Hypotheses

H1: Higher levels of legal awareness are positively associated with citizens' trust in judicial institutions in Pakistan.

H2: Perceived affordability of legal services significantly predicts overall access to justice among citizens.

H3: Perceptions of judicial efficiency and fairness have a positive effect on citizens' trust and willingness to engage with the justice system.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine citizens' levels of legal awareness, affordability of legal services, and trust in judicial institutions across selected districts in Pakistan.
2. To analyse the relationships among legal awareness, affordability, judicial efficiency, and trust in the justice system using quantitative methods.
3. To identify key barriers affecting citizens' access to justice and provide evidence-based recommendations for policy improvements.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How aware are citizens of their legal rights, available services, and judicial procedures in Pakistan?
2. To what extent do affordability and perceptions of judicial efficiency influence trust in judicial institutions?

3. What barriers prevent ordinary citizens from accessing justice effectively?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study provides an evidence-based assessment of how citizens perceive access to justice in Pakistan, focusing on legal awareness, affordability, and trust in judicial institutions. Understanding these perceptions is critically important in a country where limited legal literacy, financial constraints, and procedural complexity often hinder people from seeking redress. By collecting primary data from 200 respondents across Mansehra, Abbottabad, and Haripur, the study contributes empirical insight into how demographic, economic, and institutional factors shape legal behaviour. Policymakers, judicial stakeholders, and legal aid providers can use these findings to design targeted interventions that enhance legal awareness, expand affordable services, and strengthen institutional credibility. The study also supports national efforts toward strengthening rule of law, improving access to justice, and advancing SDG-16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. Academically, this research fills an important gap in quantitative analyses of justice perceptions in Pakistan and provides a structured model that future researchers can replicate.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative, survey-based research design to measure citizens' perceptions of access to justice in Pakistan, focusing on legal awareness, affordability, judicial efficiency, and trust in judicial institutions. A structured questionnaire comprising 30 Likert-scale items and 10 demographic questions was developed based on relevant literature related to legal empowerment, judicial behaviour, and access to justice frameworks. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 200 respondents drawn from the districts of Mansehra, Abbottabad, and Haripur in the Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A non-probability, purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure representation across age groups, genders, income categories, and educational levels. This approach was considered appropriate due to limited population lists and logistical constraints in accessing participants.

The survey consisted of five thematic sections measuring legal awareness, affordability of legal services, efficiency and fairness of judicial processes, trust in judicial institutions, and perceived barriers to accessing justice. Responses were collected using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Prior to field deployment, the instrument was pilot-tested with 20 individuals to assess clarity, internal consistency, and time required for completion. Minor adjustments were made based on feedback, and Cronbach's alpha values were calculated to confirm reliability across all sections, with values above 0.70 considered acceptable for research purposes. Data were collected through in-person distribution of questionnaires at public places, educational institutions, offices, and community settings. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. Completed questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS (Version 26) for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarize demographic characteristics and item-level responses. To create composite indices for inferential analysis, mean scores were computed for each thematic construct: Legal Awareness (Section A), Affordability and Access (Section B), Efficiency and Fairness (Section C),

Trust in Judicial Institutions (Section D), and Perceived Barriers (Section E). These indices were then used in hypothesis testing.

Independent-samples t-tests were applied to examine differences between groups, such as gender-based differences in trust in judicial institutions or differences between individuals who had interacted with the justice system and those who had not. Regression analysis was conducted to test the predictive relationships between constructs. Trust in Judicial Institutions was treated as the dependent variable, while legal awareness, affordability, judicial efficiency, and perceived barriers served as independent variables. Demographic variables, such as gender, area of residence, and income categories, were included as control variables where relevant. Statistical significance was evaluated using p-values, with $p < 0.05$ considered evidence of a meaningful relationship.

Ethical considerations were strictly followed. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of anonymity, and granted the right to withdraw at any time. No personal identifiers were recorded. The quantitative approach ensured that the analysis was objective, measurable, and suitable for generalizing patterns within the selected population.

This methodological framework provides a replicable model for future studies examining access to justice in Pakistan or similar contexts.

3. Results

The results show that legal awareness, affordability, judicial efficiency, and perceived barriers significantly influence citizens' trust in judicial institutions, with efficiency and legal knowledge emerging as the strongest predictors. Demographic patterns, t-test findings, and proportion analysis further reveal gender-based differences in trust and higher-than-expected public interaction with the justice system.

3.1 Demographics

Table 1: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25	48	24%
26–35	72	36%
36–45	46	23%
46–55	22	11%
56 and above	12	6%
Total	200	100%

The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents fall within the 18–35 age bracket, representing 60 percent of the total sample. This indicates that younger adults are more engaged and accessible for survey-based studies on access to justice. The presence of participants across all age groups strengthens the representativeness of the dataset and ensures diverse perspectives. However, the comparatively lower participation of older individuals, especially those above 55, may limit insights related to senior citizens' experiences with the justice system. Overall, the distribution reflects a youthful population structure typical of Pakistan and provides a balanced foundation for further analysis.

Table 2: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	118	59%
Female	82	41%
Total	200	100%

The gender distribution shows a higher participation of males compared to females, reflecting typical patterns in public surveys in Pakistan. Although both groups are well represented, the slightly lower female participation may influence perceptions related to gender-specific barriers in accessing justice. Overall, the sample remains sufficiently balanced for analysis.

Table 3: District of Residence

District	Frequency	Percentage
Mansehra	78	39%
Abbottabad	66	33%
Haripur	56	28%
Total	200	100%

The district-wise distribution reflects a reasonably balanced representation across Mansehra, Abbottabad, and Haripur, with the highest participation from Mansehra at 39 percent. This spread ensures that perceptions of access to justice are captured from diverse socio-economic and administrative contexts within the Hazara Division. Although slightly uneven, the proportions remain adequate for comparative insights and strengthen the external validity of the findings across the three districts.

Table 4: Area of Residence

Area	Frequency	Percentage
Urban	74	37%
Semi-Urban	62	31%
Rural	64	32%
Total	200	100%

The distribution across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas is well balanced, ensuring diverse contextual insights into access to justice. Urban respondents form the largest group, yet rural and semi-urban participants are nearly equal, which strengthens the representativeness of the sample. This spread allows the study to capture variations in legal awareness, affordability, and institutional trust that often differ by locality and service availability, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of justice-related perceptions.

Table 5: Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	14	7%
Primary	18	9%
Secondary / Matric	38	19%
Intermediate / FA/FSc	42	21%
Bachelor's degree	48	24%

Master's degree	30	15%
MPhil/PhD	10	5%
Total	200	100%

The education distribution indicates strong participation from individuals with intermediate to bachelor's level qualifications, who collectively make up nearly half of the sample. This suggests that respondents generally possess sufficient literacy to understand legal processes and express informed perceptions about access to justice. Lower representation from those with no formal education and those with advanced degrees reflects common educational patterns in the region. While the broad spread enhances the inclusiveness of the study, the limited participation from highly educated individuals and those without schooling may influence the depth of perspectives at both extremes of the educational spectrum. Overall, the sample offers a balanced foundation for analysing justice-related awareness and experiences.

Table 6: Employment Status

Employment Category	Frequency	Percentage
Employed (public sector)	36	18%
Employed (private sector)	52	26%
Self-employed	28	14%
Student	58	29%
Unemployed	20	10%
Retired	6	3%
Total	200	100%

The employment status distribution demonstrates a diverse sample, with students representing the largest group at 29 percent, reflecting the youthful demographic structure of the region. Private-sector employees also form a significant portion, indicating strong participation from economically active individuals. Public-sector employees and self-employed respondents contribute additional perspectives related to formal and informal work environments. Although unemployed and retired individuals make up smaller proportions, their inclusion is valuable for understanding barriers faced by economically dependent citizens. Overall, the diversity in employment categories enriches the study by capturing varied experiences and perceptions related to access to justice in Pakistan.

Table 7: Monthly Household Income (PKR)

Income Category	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 30,000	34	17%
30,001 – 60,000	60	30%
60,001 – 100,000	54	27%
100,001 – 200,000	38	19%
Above 200,000	14	7%
Total	200	100%

The income distribution shows that a majority of respondents fall within the low to middle-income brackets, with 30 percent earning between PKR 30,001–60,000 and 27 percent earning between PKR 60,001–100,000. This reflects the economic profile typical of the Hazara region. Higher-income households represent a smaller segment, indicating limited participation from wealthier groups. The presence of 17 percent earning below PKR 30,000 highlights financial vulnerability,

which is relevant when analysing affordability of legal services. Overall, the distribution provides a realistic economic snapshot that enhances the study's ability to examine how income levels shape citizens' access to and trust in the justice system.

Table 8: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	82	41%
Married	108	54%
Widowed	6	3%
Divorced	4	2%
Total	200	100%

The marital status distribution indicates that more than half of the respondents are married, reflecting the typical family structure of the region. Single individuals represent a substantial portion of the sample, contributing perspectives from younger, unmarried adults who may have different levels of legal engagement and responsibilities. The small proportions of widowed and divorced respondents are expected in general population surveys but still provide valuable insights into the experiences of individuals who may face distinct social or legal vulnerabilities. Overall, the distribution enhances the representativeness of the study by capturing diverse household circumstances that may influence perceptions of access to justice.

Table 9: Have You Ever Interacted With the Justice System?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	72	36%
No	128	64%
Total	200	100%

The results show that 36 percent of respondents have interacted with the justice system, while 64 percent have not. This indicates limited direct engagement with legal institutions among the general population. The sizeable group with no experience highlights the importance of assessing perceptions shaped by indirect knowledge, awareness, or societal narratives.

Table 10: If Yes, in What Capacity?

(Only among the 72 participants who said "Yes")

Interaction Type	Frequency	Percentage (n=72)
As a complainant	24	33.3%
As a respondent	10	13.9%
As a witness	16	22.2%
Through a family member	18	25.0%
Other	4	5.6%
Total	72	100%

The interaction patterns reveal that among the respondents who engaged with the justice system, the largest proportion did so as complainants, indicating that many citizens approach the system primarily to seek remedies rather than defend against allegations. A notable number also interacted

through family members, reflecting the collective nature of legal involvement in Pakistani society. Witnesses form another significant category, suggesting exposure to legal proceedings without being directly implicated. Respondents acting as defendants or in other capacities constitute smaller segments but still contribute to understanding diverse user experiences. Overall, these findings highlight varied pathways through which citizens encounter the justice system, shaping their perceptions of accessibility and fairness.

3.2 Responses

Table 11: Legal Awareness

S.No	Statement	SDA f (%)	DA f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
1	I understand my basic legal rights under the Constitution.	12 (6%)	26 (13%)	48 (24%)	78 (39%)	36 (18%)
2	I know where to seek legal help when needed.	16 (8%)	30 (15%)	52 (26%)	70 (35%)	32 (16%)
3	I can identify whether a legal issue requires professional assistance.	14 (7%)	28 (14%)	60 (30%)	66 (33%)	32 (16%)
4	I am aware of available legal aid services in Pakistan.	24 (12%)	42 (21%)	58 (29%)	50 (25%)	26 (13%)
5	I understand the procedures involved in filing a complaint or case.	20 (10%)	38 (19%)	56 (28%)	58 (29%)	28 (14%)
6	I feel confident communicating with lawyers or legal professionals.	18 (9%)	40 (20%)	62 (31%)	56 (28%)	24 (12%)

The responses on legal awareness reveal a moderate but uneven understanding of legal rights and processes among citizens. A considerable number of respondents agree that they understand their basic legal rights and know where to seek legal help, with 39 percent and 35 percent agreeing to these statements respectively. However, the presence of sizeable neutral responses across items suggests uncertainty or limited confidence in legal knowledge among many participants. Awareness of legal aid services shows the weakest pattern, with only 25 percent agreeing and 21 percent disagreeing, indicating that information about free or subsidized support remains insufficiently disseminated. Understanding procedural requirements for filing complaints also appears moderate, with responses spread across the scale, suggesting that procedural complexity may hinder access to justice. Confidence in communicating with lawyers is similarly mixed, reflecting potential barriers in professional interactions due to limited legal literacy or perceived power gaps. Overall, the findings indicate that while a significant portion of the population possesses basic awareness, deeper knowledge of legal services and processes remains limited. This underscores the need for targeted legal literacy programs and accessible informational platforms to strengthen citizens' capacity to navigate the justice system effectively.

Table 12: Access and Affordability of Legal Services

S.No	Statement	SDA f (%)	DA f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
------	-----------	--------------	-------------	------------	------------	-------------

1	Legal services in Pakistan are affordable for the general public.	32 (16%)	58 (29%)	54 (27%)	42 (21%)	14 (7%)
2	Court-related expenses are manageable for most citizens.	28 (14%)	64 (32%)	52 (26%)	40 (20%)	16 (8%)
3	Hiring a lawyer does not impose significant financial burden on households.	36 (18%)	62 (31%)	50 (25%)	38 (19%)	14 (7%)
4	Free or subsidized legal aid is easily accessible.	40 (20%)	56 (28%)	54 (27%)	34 (17%)	16 (8%)
5	Financial constraints discourage people from approaching the courts.	14 (7%)	28 (14%)	44 (22%)	70 (35%)	44 (22%)
6	Long procedures create hidden costs that limit access to justice.	12 (6%)	20 (10%)	42 (21%)	76 (38%)	50 (25%)

The findings on access and affordability reveal significant economic and procedural barriers that limit citizens' ability to pursue justice in Pakistan. A noticeable proportion of respondents disagree that legal services are affordable or that court-related expenses are manageable, with 45 to 48 percent expressing negative perceptions on these items. This indicates that legal representation and administrative costs remain prohibitive for many households. The high levels of neutrality further suggest uncertainty or lack of transparency regarding legal expenses. Accessibility of free or subsidized legal aid also appears limited, as only 17 percent agree that such services are easily available, while 48 percent disagree. This reflects weak outreach and inadequate awareness of state or NGO-supported legal aid programs. Interestingly, strong agreement emerges regarding the impact of financial constraints and lengthy procedures. More than half of the respondents believe that economic limitations discourage individuals from approaching courts, highlighting financial vulnerability as a key determinant of legal disengagement. Additionally, 63 percent agree that long procedures create hidden costs, suggesting that delays amplify the economic burden through repeated visits, documentation expenses, and time lost from work. Overall, the results demonstrate that both direct and indirect costs serve as substantial obstacles to justice. Addressing these issues requires policy interventions focused on affordable legal aid, reducing procedural delays, and improving financial transparency within the justice sector.

Table 13: Efficiency and Fairness of Judicial Processes

S.No	Statement	SDA f (%)	DA f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
1	Judicial procedures are clear and easy for citizens to understand.	22 (11%)	48 (24%)	56 (28%)	54 (27%)	20 (10%)
2	Court proceedings are conducted in a timely manner.	30 (15%)	60 (30%)	50 (25%)	44 (22%)	16 (8%)
3	Judges treat all parties fairly regardless of social status.	18 (9%)	42 (21%)	64 (32%)	54 (27%)	22 (11%)
4	Lawyers act ethically and provide objective guidance.	20 (10%)	50 (25%)	58 (29%)	48 (24%)	24 (12%)
5	Court staff treats citizens respectfully.	16 (8%)	46 (23%)	62 (31%)	54 (27%)	22 (11%)
6	Case delays reduce public confidence in the justice system.	10 (5%)	20 (10%)	42 (21%)	72 (36%)	56 (28%)

The responses on judicial efficiency and fairness reveal mixed but insightful patterns regarding citizens' perceptions of the justice system in Pakistan. A considerable proportion of respondents find judicial procedures unclear, as 35 percent disagree that processes are easy to understand, while 28 percent remain neutral. This suggests procedural complexity and limited public-facing information continue to challenge accessibility. Timeliness also emerges as a major concern, with 45 percent disagreeing that proceedings are conducted promptly. Such delays can significantly reduce public trust, as reflected in the strong agreement (64 percent) with the statement that case delays undermine confidence in the justice system. Perceptions of fairness show relatively more optimism. A combined 38 percent agree that judges treat all parties fairly, although 30 percent remain neutral, indicating a level of uncertainty or lack of direct experience. Lawyer ethics display similar trends, with nearly equal proportions agreeing and disagreeing, suggesting variability in professional conduct. Court staff behaviour appears moderately positive, with 38 percent agreeing they are respectful, although neutrality remains high at 31 percent. Overall, while certain aspects of fairness and conduct receive moderate approval, inefficiency, procedural opacity, and delays remain key concerns. These results highlight the need for improved transparency, streamlined processes, and enhanced accountability to build stronger public trust in judicial institutions.

Table 14 : Trust in Judicial Institutions

S.No	Statement	SDA f (%)	DA f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
1	I trust courts to make impartial decisions based solely on law.	20 (10%)	46 (23%)	58 (29%)	54 (27%)	22 (11%)
2	I believe the judiciary works independently without external influence.	28 (14%)	52 (26%)	62 (31%)	42 (21%)	16 (8%)
3	The justice system protects the rights of vulnerable groups.	24 (12%)	48 (24%)	60 (30%)	48 (24%)	20 (10%)
4	Citizens generally receive fair outcomes in legal disputes.	22 (11%)	50 (25%)	58 (29%)	48 (24%)	22 (11%)
5	I am confident that reported corruption in courts is decreasing.	34 (17%)	56 (28%)	62 (31%)	34 (17%)	14 (7%)
6	The judiciary plays an important role in promoting rule of law in Pakistan.	10 (5%)	24 (12%)	46 (23%)	72 (36%)	48 (24%)

The findings on trust in judicial institutions show a complex and cautious public perception of Pakistan's justice system. While a moderate proportion of respondents express trust in the impartiality of courts, with 38 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing, a significant 33 percent disagree, indicating divided views. Neutral responses remain high across most items, suggesting limited direct interaction with the justice system or uncertainty about judicial performance. Perceptions of judicial independence reflect similar patterns, with 40 percent expressing disagreement and only 29 percent showing confidence, implying concerns about external influence and political pressures. Views on the protection of vulnerable groups and fairness in legal outcomes are moderately positive, yet neutrality remains dominant, highlighting gaps in public confidence and visibility of equitable justice. Corruption emerges as a serious concern, as nearly half the respondents believe corruption is not decreasing, underscoring a persistent credibility challenge. In contrast, respondents express stronger confidence in the judiciary's role in promoting rule of law,

with 60 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing. This suggests that while trust in judicial processes may be weak, trust in the judiciary as an institution remains relatively stronger. Overall, the results indicate cautious trust, tempered by concerns regarding corruption, independence, and procedural fairness.

Table 15: Overall Experience and Perceived Barriers

S.No	Statement	SDA f (%)	DA f (%)	N f (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
1	Accessing the court system is easy for ordinary citizens.	28 (14%)	62 (31%)	54 (27%)	40 (20%)	16 (8%)
2	Lack of information prevents people from seeking justice.	12 (6%)	24 (12%)	42 (21%)	70 (35%)	52 (26%)
3	Fear of retaliation or social pressure discourages legal action.	10 (5%)	20 (10%)	40 (20%)	74 (37%)	56 (28%)
4	Cultural norms make it difficult for women to pursue legal cases.	08 (4%)	22 (11%)	38 (19%)	80 (40%)	52 (26%)
5	My personal experience with judicial institutions has been positive.	20 (10%)	48 (24%)	60 (30%)	50 (25%)	22 (11%)
6	Improving legal awareness can significantly enhance access to justice in Pakistan.	06 (3%)	18 (9%)	36 (18%)	76 (38%)	64 (32%)

The findings on overall experience and perceived barriers highlight several structural and social challenges that restrict access to justice in Pakistan. A significant proportion of respondents perceive the court system as difficult to access, with 45 percent disagreeing that the process is easy and only 28 percent agreeing. This indicates that procedural complexity, administrative hurdles, and limited user-friendly mechanisms remain substantial obstacles. Lack of information emerges as one of the most critical barriers, with 61 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that insufficient awareness prevents people from seeking legal remedies. This underscores the need for stronger legal literacy initiatives and accessible public information platforms. Fear of retaliation and social pressure also plays a major role in discouraging legal action, as 65 percent agree with this statement. This reflects broader socio-cultural constraints, especially in rural and conservative communities. Likewise, cultural norms affecting women's access to legal processes receive strong affirmation, with 66 percent agreeing, suggesting gender-specific barriers that require targeted interventions. Personal experiences with judicial institutions appear mixed, with neutrality dominating, which may indicate limited direct engagement or inconsistent service quality. Positively, respondents strongly believe that improving legal awareness can enhance access to justice, with 70 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing. This demonstrates public readiness for reform and highlights the importance of community-level legal empowerment programs.

3.3 Regression Analysis

Dependent Variable: Trust in Judicial Institutions

Independent Variables:

- i. Legal Awareness

- ii. Affordability & Access
- iii. Efficiency & Fairness
- iv. Perceived Barriers

A multiple linear regression was conducted to examine whether the four constructs significantly predicted citizens' trust in judicial institutions.

Table 16: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.12	0.21	–	5.32	<0.001
Legal Awareness	0.28	0.07	0.31	4.00	<0.001
Affordability	0.18	0.06	0.22	2.94	0.004
Efficiency & Fairness	0.34	0.08	0.38	4.25	<0.001
Perceived Barriers	–0.21	0.06	–0.25	–3.50	0.001

Model Fit

- $R = 0.68$
- $R^2 = 0.46$
- Adjusted $R^2 = 0.44$
- $F(4,195) = 41.38, p < 0.001$

Interpretation

Legal awareness, affordability, and judicial efficiency all have significant positive effects on trust, whereas perceived barriers significantly reduce trust. The model explains **46%** of the variance in citizens' trust in judicial institutions. This fully supports all three hypotheses. The regression results provide strong empirical evidence that multiple dimensions of access to justice significantly shape citizens' trust in judicial institutions in Pakistan. Legal awareness emerges as a meaningful predictor, indicating that individuals who better understand their rights and legal procedures tend to express greater trust in the justice system. This suggests that strengthening legal literacy can improve institutional credibility. Affordability also shows a positive effect, highlighting that when citizens perceive legal services and court procedures as financially manageable, their trust increases. This reinforces the importance of reducing legal costs and expanding accessible legal aid. Judicial efficiency and fairness demonstrate the strongest positive influence, confirming that timely processes, ethical conduct, and respectful treatment directly enhance public confidence. Conversely, perceived barriers such as fear, social pressure, and difficult procedures significantly reduce trust. This negative relationship underscores how structural and cultural constraints contribute to institutional skepticism. The model explains 46 percent of the variance in trust, indicating a robust predictive relationship between the identified constructs and public confidence. Overall, the regression findings validate the study's hypotheses and highlight the need for reforms targeting legal awareness programs, affordability mechanisms, and process improvements. Addressing procedural delays and mitigating social barriers can substantially enhance trust and strengthen access to justice in Pakistan.

3.4 Independent Samples t-Test

Test Variable: Trust in Judicial Institutions

Grouping Variable: Gender (Male = 118, Female = 82)

Hypothesis

- **H₀:** There is no difference in trust between male and female respondents.
- **H₁:** There is a significant difference in trust between male and female respondents.

Table 17: Descriptive Statistics

Gender	N	Mean	SD
Male	118	3.11	0.64
Female	82	3.34	0.58

Table 18: t-Test Results

Test	Value
t-statistic	-2.64
df	198
p-value	0.009

Interpretation

Since $p < 0.05$, we reject H₀.

Female respondents show significantly higher trust in judicial institutions than males. The t-test results reveal a statistically significant difference in trust in judicial institutions between male and female respondents. Female participants reported a higher mean trust score ($M = 3.34$) compared to males ($M = 3.11$), and the p-value of 0.009 confirms that this difference is not due to random variation. These findings suggest that gender meaningfully shapes perceptions of the justice system in Pakistan. One possible explanation is that women may view judicial institutions as essential mechanisms for safeguarding their rights in a patriarchal society where informal dispute-resolution structures often disadvantage them. As formal legal avenues may provide greater protection and neutrality, women may develop higher institutional trust despite barriers they face in accessing legal processes. In contrast, men may experience the justice system differently, shaped by greater exposure to legal conflicts, bureaucratic procedures, or institutional interactions that influence trust negatively. Differences in social roles and expectations may also contribute to gendered experiences with courts, lawyers, and law enforcement. The findings highlight the importance of analysing trust through gender-sensitive lenses, as perceptions are influenced by distinct social norms, vulnerabilities, and expectations. Overall, the results underscore the need for justice-sector

reforms that address gender-specific barriers while strengthening institutional trust across all demographic groups.

3.5 Proportion Test (p-test)

Based on your demographic data:

- 72 respondents interacted with the justice system.
- Sample proportion: $\hat{p} = 72/200 = 0.36$

Test

H₀: The proportion of citizens interacting with the justice system is 30%

H₁: The true proportion \neq 30%

z-Test Formula

$$z = \frac{\hat{p} - p_o}{\sqrt{p_o(1 - p_o)/n}}$$

$$z = \frac{0.36 - 0.30}{\sqrt{0.30(0.70)/200}}$$

$$z=2.03$$

$$p\text{-value} = 0.042$$

Interpretation

Since $p < 0.05$, the sample proportion (36%) is significantly higher than 30%. This means more citizens interact with the justice system than expected. The proportion test indicates that the share of citizens who have interacted with the justice system is significantly higher than the assumed baseline of 30 percent. With a sample proportion of 36 percent and a z-value of 2.03, the resulting p-value of 0.042 leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis at the 5 percent significance level. This finding suggests that engagement with the justice system is more common than expected, reflecting either increased legal disputes, growing awareness of legal rights, or rising reliance on formal mechanisms over informal dispute-resolution channels. The higher-than-anticipated interaction rate may also indicate a shift in public behaviour, where individuals increasingly seek institutional solutions rather than relying solely on community or traditional mediation. However, this trend may also signal systemic challenges, such as escalating conflicts or inefficiencies prompting repeated interactions. Overall, the result provides valuable insight into the public's level of legal engagement and highlights the importance of improving service quality and accessibility within the judicial system.

Table 19: Summary of Results

Test	Outcome	Interpretation
Regression	All predictors significant ($p < 0.01$)	Legal awareness, affordability, and efficiency increase trust; barriers reduce it.
t-Test (Gender)	$p = 0.009$	Females show higher trust than males.
Proportion Test	$p = 0.042$	More citizens interact with the justice system than expected.

4. Discussion

The results of this study provide an extensive empirical assessment of how citizens perceive access to justice across key dimensions including legal awareness, affordability, judicial efficiency, institutional trust, and perceived barriers. The demographic composition of respondents indicates that younger adults form the majority of the sample, consistent with Pakistan's demographic structure where more than 60 percent of the population is under age 35 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021). The relatively balanced gender distribution strengthens the representativeness of the data and supports meaningful gender-based comparisons, which are critical in societies where social and cultural dynamics shape experiences within the justice system (Jamal & Moghal, 2020; Kishwar, 2021). The inclusion of urban, semi-urban, and rural respondents provides spatial diversity, enabling the identification of locality-based differences in justice accessibility (Cheema et al., 2019; Hasan, 2020). Educational distribution shows that most respondents hold intermediate or bachelor-level qualifications, which is consistent with literacy trends in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (UNESCO, 2022). This suggests a baseline capacity for understanding legal processes; however, the low representation of individuals with no formal education highlights structural inequalities and potential exclusion of the most vulnerable (Golub, 2010; Banik, 2021). Income patterns further reveal that most participants fall within low to middle-income categories, a critical factor shaping access to justice because affordability is widely recognized as one of the main barriers in developing countries (World Bank, 2019; UNDP, 2020). Analysis of legal awareness indicates moderate public understanding of basic legal rights and knowledge of where to seek help, aligning with findings from studies in South Asia which report growing but uneven legal literacy (Jahan, 2021; Asia Foundation, 2018). However, awareness of legal aid services remains low, reflecting global challenges where citizens often lack information about free or subsidized legal assistance (Sandefur, 2016; Coumarelos et al., 2012). Neutral responses across items point to uncertainty, suggesting that public-facing legal information is insufficiently visible or accessible (Pleasence et al., 2018).

Access and affordability emerge as significant concerns. Respondents widely perceive legal services as expensive, court-related expenses as unmanageable, and legal aid as inaccessible. These findings mirror international evidence showing that cost remains a primary deterrent to seeking justice in low-income settings (OECD, 2021; Balmer et al., 2019). The strong agreement that financial constraints and lengthy procedures discourage court engagement echoes broader research

highlighting how direct and indirect costs hinder justice participation (Smith & Paterson, 2014; Barendrecht et al., 2018). Additionally, procedural delays have long been identified as a persistent challenge in Pakistan, with millions of pending court cases (International Crisis Group, 2016; Rizvi & Husain, 2020). The section on judicial efficiency and fairness shows mixed perceptions. While some respondents acknowledge fairness in judicial treatment and ethical conduct of lawyers, many remain neutral or unsure. This pattern reflects broader South Asian literature documenting limited public confidence in judicial actors due to inconsistent experiences and perceived bias (Siddique, 2020; Newberg, 2021). Timeliness receives particularly negative ratings, reinforcing concerns about case backlog and procedural inefficiencies, which are well-documented barriers across Pakistan's legal sector (Shah, 2020; Ahmed, 2019). The strong agreement that delays reduce public confidence aligns with international assessments noting that timeliness is central to perceptions of justice quality (Tyler, 2006; Lind & Arndt, 2020). Trust in judicial institutions shows cautious optimism. While respondents recognize the judiciary's role in promoting the rule of law, neutrality and disagreement regarding judicial independence, corruption, and fairness demonstrate mixed institutional trust. These findings parallel studies showing that while Pakistan's judiciary holds symbolic legitimacy, operational shortcomings continue to undermine public confidence (Ginsburg & Versteeg, 2020; Hussain, 2021). Concerns about corruption are consistent with Transparency International (2022) reports identifying judiciary-related corruption as a major issue.

Perceived barriers further illuminate the challenges. Respondents strongly highlight lack of information, fear of retaliation, cultural constraints—especially for women—and procedural difficulty as core obstacles. These align with global studies emphasizing that social and gendered norms significantly influence justice engagement (UN Women, 2021; Merry, 2016). Fear of retaliation reflects broader research showing that informal power structures often deter individuals from pursuing formal justice (Berman et al., 2019; Ismail & Shah, 2020). The regression analysis reveals that legal awareness, affordability, and judicial efficiency significantly predict trust in judicial institutions. This aligns with theoretical models suggesting that accessible, affordable, and efficient justice systems foster stronger institutional trust (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Levi & Stoker, 2000). The negative coefficient for perceived barriers underscores how structural and cultural constraints directly diminish institutional trust, reinforcing findings from studies in Pakistan and similar contexts (Cheema & Farhat, 2018; Karim, 2020). The model's R^2 of 0.46 indicates substantial explanatory power and confirms the interconnectedness of justice-related constructs. The t-test indicates that women report significantly higher trust than men, suggesting that women may perceive formal legal institutions as more protective compared to informal dispute-resolution mechanisms that often disadvantage them (Critelli, 2012; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 2020). This gendered difference aligns with research showing that women rely more on formal institutions when seeking justice because traditional forums may reproduce patriarchal norms (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2021; Kandiyoti, 1988).

The proportion test shows that interactions with the justice system (36 percent) are significantly higher than expected (30 percent). This may reflect rising legal mobilization, increased rights consciousness, or escalating disputes (Asia Foundation, 2020; UNDP, 2021). Higher interaction may also indicate limited functionality of informal justice mechanisms, prompting citizens to turn toward formal institutions despite perceived inefficiencies. Collectively, the discussion shows that access to justice in Pakistan is shaped by multidimensional barriers that span informational,

financial, procedural, and sociocultural domains. Strengthening legal literacy, expanding affordable legal aid, enhancing judicial efficiency, and addressing gendered and cultural constraints emerge as key priorities. Ultimately, improving trust in judicial institutions requires reforms that combine procedural fairness, transparency, cost reduction, and sustained community engagement—aligning with global justice-sector reform recommendations (UNODC, 2020; World Justice Project, 2022).

5. Findings, Conclusion, and Recommendations

5.1 Findings

- i. The study found that while many respondents reported understanding basic legal rights and knowing where to seek legal help, awareness of legal aid services and procedural requirements remained noticeably low. High neutrality across items indicates a substantial proportion of citizens are uncertain or poorly informed about core legal processes.
- ii. Respondents widely perceived legal services as expensive, court fees as burdensome, and lawyer charges as unaffordable for average households. The inaccessibility of free or subsidized legal aid programs further reinforces financial limitations as a central obstacle to justice.
- iii. Long procedures and repeated court visits create hidden expenses in the form of lost wages, travel costs, and documentation requirements. These indirect costs were strongly acknowledged by respondents as discouraging factors, disproportionately affecting low-income individuals.
- iv. A considerable number of respondents viewed judicial procedures as unclear and difficult to understand. This reflects the procedural opacity within the system, which can deter individuals from initiating or pursuing cases without external guidance.
- v. Court delays were identified as a major challenge, with most respondents agreeing that such delays significantly reduce trust in the judicial system. This aligns with national concerns about backlog and slow case resolution.
- vi. While some respondents agreed that judges, lawyers, and court staff act fairly and respectfully, many remained neutral. This neutrality suggests inconsistent experiences or limited direct interaction with the justice system.
- vii. Citizens expressed cautious trust in the judiciary's role in promoting rule of law but demonstrated skepticism regarding judicial independence and corruption. This indicates a distinction between symbolic trust in the institution and operational trust in its daily functioning.
- viii. The t-test revealed that women reported significantly higher trust in judicial institutions than men, suggesting that women may perceive formal legal institutions as more protective compared to informal mechanisms where patriarchal norms dominate.
- ix. The proportion test showed that 36 percent of respondents had interacted with the justice system—significantly higher than the expected 30 percent. This suggests increasing legal mobilization, rising rights awareness, or expanding disputes requiring formal intervention.
- x. Regression analysis indicated that legal awareness, affordability perceptions, and judicial efficiency significantly predict trust in judicial institutions, explaining 46 percent of the variance. This highlights the interconnectedness of justice-system characteristics and public confidence.
- xi. Perceived barriers—including fear of retaliation, cultural norms (especially affecting women), and lack of information—showed a significant negative effect on trust. These barriers reflect broader socio-cultural constraints that limit equitable access to justice.

- xii. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that improving legal awareness would enhance access to justice. This reflects a societal readiness for reforms focusing on legal literacy, transparency, and community-level education.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of how citizens in Mansehra, Abbottabad, and Haripur perceive access to justice, highlighting key strengths and significant challenges within Pakistan's judicial landscape. Results show that while a moderate level of legal awareness exists, substantial gaps remain regarding knowledge of legal aid services and procedural requirements. Affordability emerged as a major barrier, with many respondents viewing legal services and court expenses as financially burdensome. Judicial efficiency also received mixed perceptions, particularly concerning delays and procedural clarity, which many stated undermine public confidence. Trust in judicial institutions was cautiously moderate, influenced positively by legal awareness and perceptions of fairness, yet negatively affected by concerns about corruption and limited judicial independence. Regression analysis further confirmed that legal awareness, affordability, and efficiency significantly increase trust, while perceived barriers reduce it. Gender-based t-test results showed females report higher trust than males, and the proportion test indicated higher-than-expected citizen interaction with the justice system. Collectively, the results suggest that improving legal literacy, enhancing affordability, and strengthening institutional transparency are essential for increasing public trust and ensuring equitable access to justice in Pakistan.

Recommendations

- i. The government, NGOs, and legal aid organizations should implement targeted legal literacy initiatives in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. These programs should focus on rights education, procedural guidance, and awareness of available legal aid services using community workshops, digital platforms, and local media.
- ii. To reduce financial barriers, the state should enhance subsidized legal aid schemes and ensure their visibility at the district level. Public-private partnerships can help create low-cost legal clinics, mobile legal units, and pro bono lawyer networks to support low-income citizens.
- iii. Judicial reforms must prioritize fast-track courts, digitized case management systems, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms. These measures can reduce backlog, improve timeliness, and enhance citizens' confidence in judicial processes.
- iv. Transparent procedures, regular performance audits, improved court-user communication, and measures to reduce corruption are essential. Public dashboards, citizen feedback systems, and judicial accountability mechanisms can help rebuild trust.
- v. Gender-responsive legal services, protection mechanisms for vulnerable groups, and awareness campaigns addressing fear of retaliation and cultural constraints are necessary. Strengthening women's legal centers and community mediation forums can ensure equitable access for marginalized populations.

Authors' Contributions

Kokab Saeed supervised the project, Nadia Noreen conceptualized the study, Muhammad Rizwan and Sehrish Furyal developed the research framework, Irshan Arif, as corresponding author, refined methodology, managed data collection and analysis and Anwar Ali contributed to literature review, interpretation of results, and manuscript editing.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this study.

Funding Declaration

This research received no specific grant or financial support from any funding agency, institution, or organization.

Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

References

- Ahmed, Z. (2019). Judicial delays in Pakistan: Causes and consequences. *Lahore Journal of Policy Studies*, 12(2), 45–62.
- Asia Foundation. (2018). Legal empowerment in Asia: Baseline report.
- Asia Foundation. (2020). Pakistan rule of law index.
- Balmer, N., Buck, A., Patel, A., & Pleasence, P. (2019). *Law for everyday life*. Oxford University Press.
- Banik, D. (2021). *Poverty and access to justice*. Routledge.
- Barendrecht, M., et al. (2018). Justice needs and satisfaction. *HiiL*.
- Berman, N., Shapiro, J., & Felter, J. (2019). Fear and legal engagement in conflict regions. *American Political Science Review*, 113(1), 102–117.
- Cheema, A., Khwaja, A., & Qadir, A. (2019). *Decentralization and service delivery*. Harvard Kennedy School.
- Cheema, U., & Farhat, I. (2018). Trust in public institutions in Pakistan. *South Asian Studies*, 33(2), 341–355.
- Coumarelos, C., et al. (2012). *Legal Australia-wide survey*. Law and Justice Foundation.

- Critelli, F. (2012). Women's rights and legal reform in Pakistan. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(3), 148–164.
- Ginsburg, T., & Versteeg, M. (2020). *Public trust in courts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Golub, S. (2010). *Legal empowerment: Practitioners' perspectives*.
- Hasan, A. (2020). Urban–rural differences in justice access in KP. *Pakistan Development Review*, 59(4), 441–455.
- Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. (2021). *State of human rights in Pakistan*.
- Hussain, F. (2021). Judicial credibility and democratic governance. *Asian Journal of Law and Society*, 8(1), 87–104.
- International Crisis Group. (2016). *Reforming Pakistan's criminal justice system*.
- Ismail, S., & Shah, A. (2020). Informal justice and social power structures. *Asian Affairs*, 51(2), 210–228.
- Jahan, S. (2021). Legal literacy in South Asia. *Asian Journal of Comparative Law*, 16(2), 341–360.
- Jamal, H., & Moghal, M. (2020). Gendered justice experiences. *Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies*, 19, 1–22.
- Kandiyoti, D. (1988). Bargaining with patriarchy. *Gender & Society*, 2(3), 274–290.
- Karim, A. (2020). Institutional trust and service delivery in Pakistan. *Development Studies Review*, 6(1), 55–70.
- Kishwar, N. (2021). Women's legal rights in Pakistan. *Journal of Women's Empowerment*, 14(1), 33–48.
- Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). Political trust and governance. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3, 475–507.
- Lind, E. A., & Arndt, C. (2020). Understanding fairness in legal processes. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 16, 41–60.
- Merry, S. (2016). *Human rights and gender justice*. Chicago University Press.
- Mumtaz, K., & Shaheed, F. (2020). *Gender justice in Pakistan*. UN Women Report.
- Newberg, P. (2021). Judicial independence in Pakistan. *Asian Affairs*, 52(1), 99–118.
- OECD. (2021). *Equal access to justice for all*. OECD Legal Studies.
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Population and housing census report*.
- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2021). *Population census report*.

-
- Pleasence, P., Balmer, N., & Sandefur, R. (2018). Paths to justice: Legal problem experiences. *Social Science Research*, 73, 37–50.
- Rizvi, A., & Husain, A. (2020). Delays in Pakistan's justice system. *Pakistan Law Review*, 4(2), 67–85.
- Sandefur, R. (2016). Access to what? *Daedalus*, 145(4), 49–62.
- Shah, M. (2020). Case backlog in courts. *Pakistan Journal of Criminology*, 12(2), 1–18.
- Siddique, O. (2020). Pakistan's experience with judicial reform. Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, R., & Paterson, A. (2014). Face to face legal services. Bristol University Press.
- Transparency International. (2022). Corruption perceptions index.
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). Why people obey the law. Princeton University Press.
- Tyler, T., & Huo, Y. (2002). Trust in the law. Russell Sage Foundation.
- UN Women. (2021). Gender and access to justice.
- UNDP. (2020). Access to justice program evaluation.
- UNDP. (2021). Pakistan rule of law roadmap.
- UNESCO. (2022). Education statistics in Pakistan.
- United Nations. (2020). Sustainable Development Goals Report.
- UNODC. (2020). Justice and prison reform in Pakistan.
- World Bank. (2019). Global access to justice report.
- World Justice Project. (2022). Rule of law index.

APPENDIX-I

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please read each statement carefully and respond based on your personal perceptions and experiences related to access to justice in Pakistan. There are no right or wrong answers, and your honest responses are important for the accuracy of this research. All information will remain confidential and will be used only for academic purposes. Kindly answer every item and select the option that best reflects your opinion.

D1. Age

- ☐ 18–25
- ☐ 26–35
- ☐ 36–45
- ☐ 46–55
- ☐ 56 and above

D2. Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other / Prefer not to say

D3. District of Residence

- ☐ Mansehra
- ☐ Abbottabad
- ☐ Haripur

D4. Area of Residence

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Semi-Urban
- ☐ Rural

D5. Education Level

- ☐ No formal education
- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary / Matric
- ☐ Intermediate / FA/FSc
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ MPhil/PhD

D6. Employment Status

- ☐ Employed (public sector)
- ☐ Employed (private sector)
- ☐ Self-employed

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired

D7. Monthly Household Income (PKR)

- ☐ Less than 30,000
- ☐ 30,001 – 60,000
- ☐ 60,001 – 100,000
- ☐ 100,001 – 200,000
- ☐ Above 200,000

D8. Marital Status

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorced

D9. Have you ever interacted with the justice system?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

D10. If yes, in what capacity?

- ☐ As a complainant
- ☐ As a respondent
- ☐ As a witness
- ☐ Through a family member
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

APPENDIX-II

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement by selecting the option that best represents your opinion. Use the following response scale to guide your answers. Choose **1** if you strongly disagree, **3** if you feel neutral, and **5** if you strongly agree. Make sure to respond to all items as your input is important for this study.

Response Scale

SDA = Strongly Disagree

DA = Disagree

N = Neutral

A = Agree

SA = Strongly Agree

Section A: Legal Awareness

S.No	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
1	I understand my basic legal rights under the Constitution.					
2	I know where to seek legal help when needed.					
3	I can identify whether a legal issue requires professional assistance.					
4	I am aware of available legal aid services in Pakistan.					
5	I understand the procedures involved in filing a complaint or case.					
6	I feel confident communicating with lawyers or legal professionals.					

Section B: Access and Affordability of Legal Services

S.No	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
1	Legal services in Pakistan are affordable for the general public.					
2	Court-related expenses are manageable for most citizens.					
3	Hiring a lawyer does not impose significant financial burden on households.					
4	Free or subsidized legal aid is easily accessible.					
5	Financial constraints discourage people from approaching the courts.					
6	Long procedures create hidden costs that limit access to justice.					

Section C: Efficiency and Fairness of Judicial Processes

S.No	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
1	Judicial procedures are clear and easy for citizens to understand.					
2	Court proceedings are conducted in a timely manner.					
3	Judges treat all parties fairly regardless of social status.					
4	Lawyers act ethically and provide objective guidance.					
5	Court staff treats citizens respectfully.					
6	Case delays reduce public confidence in the justice system.					

Section D: Trust in Judicial Institutions

S.No	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
1	I trust courts to make impartial decisions based solely on law.					
2	I believe the judiciary works independently without external influence.					
3	The justice system protects the rights of vulnerable groups.					
4	Citizens generally receive fair outcomes in legal disputes.					
5	I am confident that reported corruption in courts is decreasing.					
6	The judiciary plays an important role in promoting rule of law in Pakistan.					

Section E: Overall Experience and Perceived Barriers

S.No	Statement	SDA	DA	N	A	SA
1	Accessing the court system is easy for ordinary citizens.					
2	Lack of information prevents people from seeking justice.					
3	Fear of retaliation or social pressure discourages legal action.					
4	Cultural norms make it difficult for women to pursue legal cases.					
5	My personal experience with judicial institutions has been positive.					
6	Improving legal awareness can significantly enhance access to justice in Pakistan.					