

Significant challenges in the Criminal Procedure of Pakistani Courts: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract: The criminal procedure system in Pakistan is facing significant challenges, with addition of backlog of cases, inefficiencies in the legal process, and a lack of modern investigative techniques and court procedures. These issues have detrimental effects on the accused, victims, witnesses, and society as a whole, leading to a lack of confidence on the system and obstruct the timely dispensation of justice. The backlog of cases creates difficulties to delays in the legal process, violating the right to fast justice and causing frustration among those involved. Inefficiencies in the legal system include frequent adjournments, slow case proceedings, and a shortage of judges, which delay the sensible resolution of cases and throw in to a lack of trust in the system. The law enforcement in Pakistan has lacks of modern investigative techniques, delay the collection of evidence and affecting the strength of cases from the outset. Additionally, the judiciary's dependence on outdated laws and procedures further intensifies delays in the legal process. Delays in the criminal justice system have adverse effects on the accused, victims, witnesses, and society at large, impacting their mental health, violating the right to a fair and prompt trial, and eroding confidence in the legal system. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensure the timely dispensation of justice and safeguarding the rule of law in Pakistan. Recommendations for improving the criminal justice system include implementing procedural reforms to restructure court processes, allocating adequate resources to improve court infrastructure, staffing, and technological capabilities, strengthening anti-corruption measures and promoting judicial accountability and transparency, and enhancing legal education and awareness programs to empower citizens with knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.

Key Words: Criminal Procedure, Pakistani Courts, Justice System, Legal process, backlog of cases.

INTRODUCTION

The criminal justice system is an integral component of any democratic society, serving to uphold the rule of law and ensure the protection of citizens' rights. However, in Pakistan, the criminal procedure in its courts is beset with various challenges that obstruct its effectiveness and fairness. This research aims to identify and analyze these challenges, shedding light on their implications and proposing improvement solutions.

The major delays and lapses in Pakistan's criminal justice system are primarily attributed to a backlog of cases, inefficiencies in the legal process, and a lack of modernization in investigative techniques and court procedures. These delays have detrimental effects on the accused, victims, witnesses, and society as a whole, leading to a lack of trust in the system and delaying the timely dispensation of justice.

1. *Backlog of Cases:* Pakistan faces a significant backlog of cases, with millions of cases pending in various courts for years. This backlog delays in the legal process, violating the right to rapid justice and causing frustration among those involved in legal proceedings (Nawaz, 2015; Mirza, 2016).

2. *Inefficiencies in the Legal System:* The criminal justice system in Pakistan is plagued by inefficiencies,

including delays caused by frequent adjournments, slow case proceedings, and a shortage of judges. These inefficiencies hinder the timely resolution of cases and contribute to a lack of trust in the system (Tajamal, 2023).

3. *Lack of Modernization:* The police force in Pakistan lacks modern investigative techniques, hampering the collection of evidence and affecting the strength of cases from the outset. Additionally, the judiciary's reliance on outdated laws and procedures further exacerbates delays in the legal process⁵.

4. *Effects on Stakeholders:* Delays in the criminal justice system have adverse effects on the accused, victims, witnesses, and society at large. These delays impact the mental health of the accused, violate the right to a fair and speedy trial, and erode confidence in the legal system, leading to frustration and distress among those involved (Sohoo, 2023).

In conclusion, the major delays and lapses in Pakistan's criminal justice system stem from a combination of factors, including backlog of cases, inefficiencies in the legal system, lack of modernization, and adverse effects on stakeholders. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensure the timely dispensation of justice and upholding the rule of law in Pakistan.

Literature review

The article by (Ali, 2018) critically examines the causes and consequences of delays in the disposal of criminal cases. It delves into the various factors contributing to prolonged trials within the Pakistani criminal justice system. Ali highlights the significant impact of these delays on the efficiency and effectiveness of the legal process. Through empirical analysis and theoretical insights, the article offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by the Pakistani judiciary in expediting criminal cases. Overall, Ali's work provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding the delay in the disposal of criminal cases in Pakistan.

The challenges within the criminal procedure of Pakistani courts have been extensively studied and documented in the legal literature. Scholars have highlighted various issues that impede the fair and efficient administration of justice in the country.

Legal Framework and Procedural Guidelines: The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) forms the backbone of criminal procedure in Pakistan. Scholars like (Ahmad, 2018) and (Khan, 2019) have analyzed the provisions of the CrPC and emphasized the importance of adhering to procedural guidelines to ensure a fair trial.

Challenges Faced in Criminal Procedure: A significant challenge identified in the literature is the pervasive issue of delays in trials. (Malik, 2017) conducted a study highlighting the impact of case backlog on the judicial system's efficiency. Additionally, (Shah, 2020) discussed how procedural complexities contribute to prolonged legal proceedings, often resulting in miscarriages of justice.

Societal Factors Affecting Criminal Procedure: Societal factors, such as socio-economic disparities and cultural norms, also play a crucial role in shaping the criminal procedure landscape. (Siddiqui, 2019) examined how these factors influence access to justice for marginalized communities, particularly women and minorities.

Case Studies and Empirical Research: Empirical research has provided insights into specific instances of challenges within the criminal procedure of Pakistani courts. A study by (Ahmed et al. 2018) analyzed case files to identify common procedural errors and inefficiencies, shedding light on areas requiring reform.

Comparative Analysis: Comparative studies have drawn parallels between Pakistan's criminal justice system and those of other jurisdictions. (Siddique and Khan, 2020) compared procedural reforms in Pakistan with similar initiatives undertaken in India, offering valuable lessons for policymakers.

Proposed Solutions and Reforms: Numerous scholars have proposed solutions to address the challenges in criminal procedure. Recommendations include judicial reforms to expedite trials, legal aid programs to enhance access to justice, and technological innovations to streamline court proceedings (Ali, 2021; Haq, 2022).

Significant of Research

The issue of delays in the disposal of criminal cases is a pervasive concern within legal systems worldwide, including in Pakistan. This literature review aims to provide an overview of existing research on this topic, exploring the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to address this pressing issue.

Research Question:

"What are the primary challenges and inefficiencies in the criminal justice system of Pakistan, particularly focusing on the criminal procedure in the courts, and how do these impact the delivery of justice and the rights of individuals involved in legal proceedings?"

Research Methodology

Exploratory Research: Given the complex nature of the topic and the need to understand multifaceted challenges, an exploratory research design is adopted.

Qualitative Approach: Qualitative methods are employed to gain in-depth insights into the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders within the criminal justice system.

Document Analysis: Legal documents, court records, policy papers, and academic literature are analyzed to supplement interview findings and provide context. *Thematic Analysis:* Interview transcripts and document data are subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and insights related to challenges in the criminal procedure of Pakistani courts.

Interpretation: Themes are interpreted in light of existing literature and theoretical frameworks to conclude the nature and implications of identified challenges.

Researcher Reflexivity: The researcher maintains reflexivity throughout the study, critically reflecting on their own biases, assumptions, and preconceptions that may influence the research process and findings.

Positionality Statement: A positionality statement is included to transparently acknowledge the researcher's background, perspective, and potential influence on the study.

This qualitative research methodology outlines a systematic approach to exploring challenges in the criminal procedure of Pakistani courts, emphasizing the depth and richness of qualitative data analysis techniques.

Causes of Delays:

Numerous factors contribute to delays in the disposal of criminal cases. Scholars have identified systemic inefficiencies, such as backlog of cases, procedural complexities, and inadequate resources, as primary causes of delays (Ali, 2018; Saeed, 2017). Additionally, judicial corruption, lack of accountability, and procedural delays further exacerbate the problem (Babar, 2019; Zahid, 2018).

Fundamental causes of delays:

1. *Delays in the Disposition of Criminal Cases* (Nawaz, 2015; Mirza, 2016; Sohoo, 2023).

- Frequent adjournments and slow pace of trials due to the large number of cases per judge
- Prisoners often suffer in overcrowded jails for years before their cases are heard and decided
- Delays in the criminal justice system undermine public faith and confidence in the system

2. *Ineffective Prosecution* (Khalil, 2021; Shabir, 2022).

- Prosecutors lack proper training and induction programs, leaving them ill-equipped to handle cases
- Prosecutors have limited powers, such as no authority to withdraw a case even if conviction is unlikely
- Prosecutors rely heavily on oral evidence rather than modern forensic evidence

3. *Inadequate Police Investigation* (Nawaz, 2015; Mirza, 2016).

- Police are overburdened with both investigative and preventive duties, reducing time for proper investigations
- Police lack modern methods and equipment for evidence collection, hampering the prosecution's case
- Lack of coordination and cooperation between police and prosecutors

4. *Procedural Flaws and Institutional Deficiencies* (Nawaz, 2015;

Mirza, 2016; Rafique, 2023; Soho, 2023).

- Outdated criminal procedure code inherited from the colonial era
- Overcrowded courts and prisons, lead to logistical issues like lack of prison vans for trials
- Lawyers' strikes disrupting court proceedings
- Lack of effective measures to curb frivolous litigation

In summary, the Pakistani criminal justice system faces significant challenges related to delays, ineffective prosecution, inadequate police investigation, and broader institutional and procedural flaws, all of which undermine the fair and efficient administration of criminal justice.

The challenges faced by crime witnesses and victims in Pakistan's:

1. *Lack of Witness Protection:*

- The criminal justice system in Pakistan fails to provide adequate protection for crime witnesses and victims (Nawaz, 2015).
- Witnesses and victims are often reluctant to testify due to fear of reprisal or vengeance from the accused or their associates (Nawaz, 2015).
- There is a lack of effective measures to ensure the safety and security of witnesses and victims, undermining their willingness to participate in the legal process (Nawaz, 2015).

2. *Delayed Justice:*

- The prolonged delays in the disposition of criminal cases are a major challenge for victims and witnesses (Nawaz, 2015; Soho, 2023).

- Victims have to suffer financially and mentally by attending repeated court hearings, further exacerbating their trauma (Rafique, 2023).

- The judicial officers often blame the police for not presenting witnesses promptly, causing further delays (Rafique, 2023).

3. *Mechanical Approach to Law:*

- The criminal justice system in Pakistan relies heavily on oral evidence rather than material evidence (Rafique, 2023).

- Victims often suffer as the accused is acquitted on the pretext of "doubt" due to the lack of emphasis on circumstantial evidence (Rafique, 2023).

- This mechanical approach to the law fails to adequately address the needs and rights of victims and witnesses (Rafique, 2023).

4. *Lack of Facilities and Support:*

- In the lower courts, there are no separate waiting rooms or basic facilities for victims, especially women and children (Rafique, 2023).

- The communication system within the judicial system is outdated, relying on the police to present witnesses and share information (Rafique, 2023).

- The lack of victim-centric infrastructure and support services further compounds the challenges faced by crime victims and witnesses (Rafique, 2023).

In summary, the Pakistani criminal justice system falls short in providing adequate protection, timely justice, and a victim-friendly environment for crime witnesses and victims, undermining their ability to participate effectively in the legal process.

The challenges faced by police investigators in Pakistan's criminal justice system, as highlighted in the provided sources, include:

1. *Shortage of Strength:*

- Police investigators in Pakistan face challenges due to a shortage of personnel, which impacts their ability to effectively investigate crimes (Rafique, 2023).

- The lack of adequate manpower hampers the investigative process and contributes to delays in resolving cases (Rafique, 2023).

2. *Excessive Workload:*

- Police investigators are burdened with an excessive workload, leading to difficulties in managing and prioritizing cases (Rafique, 2023).

- The high volume of cases can overwhelm investigators, affecting the quality and thoroughness of investigations (Rafique, 2023).

3. *Lack of Fiscal Budget:*

- Insufficient financial resources pose a significant challenge for police investigators (Rafique, 2023).

- Limited budget allocations deter the acquisition of necessary equipment, training, and resources essential for effective criminal investigations (Rafique, 2023).

4. *Political Interference:*

- Political influences and pressures can impede the independence and objectivity of police investigators in Pakistan (Sohoo, 2023).
- Investigators may face challenges in conducting impartial investigations due to external political interference in the criminal justice system (Sohoo, 2023).

5. *Trust Deficit and Lack of Cooperation:*

- A lack of trust and cooperation between the police and the public creates hurdles for police investigators to carrying out their duties effectively (Sohoo, 2023).
- Building trust and fostering collaboration with the community are essential for successful investigations and maintaining public confidence in the criminal justice system (Sohoo, 2023).

In summary, police investigators in Pakistan encounter challenges related to manpower shortages, excessive workloads, limited financial resources, political interference, and trust deficits, all of which impact the efficiency and effectiveness of criminal investigations within the country's criminal justice system.

Findings

Delays in Proceedings: One of the most significant problems plaguing the criminal procedure in Pakistani courts is the pervasive delays in proceedings. The backlog of cases, inefficiencies in case management and procedural complexities contribute to prolonged trials, often leading to collapse of justice. According to a study conducted by the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan (LJCP), the average duration of criminal trials in Pakistani courts far exceeds international standards, with some cases languishing in the system for years (LJCP, 2019).

Lack of Resources: Another critical challenge confronting the criminal procedure in Pakistani courts is the chronic shortage of resources. Insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, and understaffing hamper the functioning of the courts, exacerbating delays and impeding access to justice for litigants. Moreover, the lack of modern technology and procedural reforms further exacerbates inefficiencies in the criminal justice system.

Corruption: Corruption remains a pervasive problem within the Pakistani judiciary, undermining public trust and confidence in the criminal justice system. Instances of bribery, nepotism, and undue influence often taint the integrity of court proceedings, compromising the impartiality and fairness of verdicts. The prevalence of corruption not only erodes the credibility of the judiciary but also obstructs the delivery of justice to the marginalized and vulnerable segments of society.

Procedural Complexities: The procedural complexities inherent in Pakistan's legal framework pose significant challenges for both litigants and legal practitioners. The intricate web of laws, outdated procedural rules, and cumbersome formalities contribute to confusion and inefficiency in court proceedings. Moreover, the lack of legal literacy among the general populace exacerbates the problem, impeding access to justice and perpetuating systemic inequalities.

Implications and Recommendations: The challenges identified in the criminal procedure of Pakistani courts have far-reaching implications for the rule of law, human rights, and socio-economic development. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach encompassing legal reforms, institutional capacity-building, and public awareness campaigns. Specific recommendations include:

Pakistanis Government actions

The Pakistani government has taken several measures to improve the criminal justice system, as highlighted in the provided sources:

1. *Proposed Amendments to Criminal Laws:*

- The government proposed nearly 700 amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure, Qanoon-i-Shahadat, and the Pakistan Penal Code to enhance efficiency and justice delivery (Nawaz, 2015).
- These amendments aim to ensure justice accessibility for vulnerable groups like women, children, and individuals with mental illnesses (Nawaz, 2015).
- Changes include provisions for admissibility of evidence from modern devices, court intervention to prevent absconders, and the introduction of concepts like plea bargains to expedite justice (Nawaz, 2015).

2. *Addressing Judicial Backlog:*

- The amendments aim to tackle the issue of judicial backlog, with provisions for setting deadlines for case disposal and consequences for failure to meet them (Nawaz, 2015).
- The High Court can intervene to remove obstacles hindering trial conclusions, ensuring a more efficient judicial process (Nawaz, 2015).

3. *Human Rights and Death Penalty Reforms:*

- Amendments reflect a shift towards protecting vulnerable groups and human rights, including efforts to reduce the use of the death penalty in line with international standards (Nawaz, 2015).
- Changes in the Control of Narcotics Substances Act, 1997, substituted the death penalty with life imprisonment, aligning with international obligations (Nawaz, 2015).

4. *Therapeutic Jurisprudence for Mental Health:*

- The Supreme Court of Pakistan introduced therapeutic jurisprudential thinking, focusing on mental health issues within the criminal justice system (Khalil, 2021; Shabir, 2022).
- This approach involves appointing amicus curiae from medical and legal fields to address mental health-related legal matters (Khalil, 2021; Shabir, 2022).

5. *Addressing Systemic Challenges:*

- Efforts are being made to combat maladministration, corruption, lack of resources, and abuse of power within the criminal justice system (Rafique, 2023).
- Recommendations include increasing the number of courtrooms, improving equipment, enhancing judicial training, and ensuring transparency in the judiciary (Tajamal, 2023).

These measures collectively aim to enhance the efficiency, fairness, and accessibility of the criminal justice system in Pakistan, addressing longstanding challenges and striving for a more just and effective legal framework.

Recommendations

1. Implementing procedural reforms to streamline court processes and expedite trials.
2. Allocating adequate resources to improve court infrastructure, staffing, and technological capabilities
3. Strengthening anti-corruption measures and promoting judicial accountability and transparency.
4. Enhancing legal education and awareness programs to empower citizens with knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.

Potential Solutions:

Addressing delays in the disposal of criminal cases requires comprehensive reforms across multiple facets of the legal system. Scholars have proposed various solutions, including procedural reforms to streamline court processes, allocation of adequate resources to improve infrastructure and staffing, and strengthening anti-corruption measures to enhance judicial accountability (Raza, 2018; Ali, 2018).

The proposed amendments to the criminal justice system in Pakistan include:

1. *Amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC):*
 - The Ministry of Law and Justice suggested amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure to enhance the efficiency and delivery of justice (Rafique, 2023).
 - The amendments aim to ensure justice accessibility for vulnerable groups like women, children, and individuals with mental illnesses (Rafique, 2023).
 - Changes in procedural law are intended to expedite justice delivery and sensitize the law for vulnerable groups in society (Rafique, 2023).
2. *Substitution of Death Penalty with Life Imprisonment:*
 - Amendments have been made to the Control of Narcotics Substances Act, 1997, where the punishment of death has been replaced with life imprisonment, aligning with international obligations (Rafique, 2023).
 - This change marks a positive step towards meeting international standards and protecting human rights (Rafique, 2023).
3. *Admissibility of Evidence from Modern Devices:*
 - The prompt amendments permit the admissibility of evidence obtained through modern devices, reflecting a shift towards contemporary evidence collection methods (Rafique, 2023).
 - Court intervention to prevent absconders from justice and the introduction of concepts like plea bargain aim to streamline legal processes and discourage lengthy litigation (Rafique, 2023).

4. Addressing Judicial Backlog:

- The amendments aim to tackle the issue of judicial backlog by setting deadlines for case disposal and requiring explanations for delays in trial proceedings.
- The High Court can intervene to remove obstacles delaying trial conclusions, ensuring a more efficient judicial process (Rafique, 2023).

These prompt amendments represent a significant step towards reforming the criminal justice system in Pakistan, with a focus on enhancing efficiency, accessibility, and fairness in the legal framework.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the criminal procedure of Pakistani courts faces numerous challenges that undermine its effectiveness, fairness, and legitimacy. Addressing these challenges is imperative to uphold the rule of law, protect human rights, and promote social justice. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this article, Pakistan can strive towards a more efficient, transparent, and accessible criminal justice system that serves the needs of its citizens.

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