



Institutional and Digital Harassment and Violence against Women: A Comparative Analysis of Pakistan and South Korea

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ABSTRACT

Background: Women violence is an increasing menace all over the world. In this digital age, the modes of violence have changed altogether. The Asian countries have specific historic manifests in this regard, which need to be studied comprehensively.

Objective: In this research the complicated dynamics were studied between institutional, socio-cultural norms and shifting digital ecologies and a growing gender-based violence against women. This research particularly, compared the challenges of institutional and digital harassment between Pakistan and South Korea. This study further analyzed various attitudes towards institutional responses to the issues both countries face and how these responses influence women's approach to justice.

Methodology: In this research, atypical use of legal and technological foundations was made. It is a mixed-method qualitative study leveraging feminist legal theory and structural violence theories. A comparison was made in the issues encountered by Pakistan in weak implementation, limited persuasion of the laws and entangled patriarchy system, as compared to South Korea's use of science-based and advanced digital crimes/image-based violence, and accompanying deepfake pornography.

Results: It is found that digital violence is not a unique issue in the world of disparity but an incredibly harmful, troubling and larger issue, and that institutional responses play a key role in shaping access to justice for women in this context. However, institutional responses in both cases of digital violence are exacerbated by issues of disparity and institutional inertia.

Conclusion: It is crucial to design a strategy with multiple facets, legal changes as well as accountability measures for organizations, effective technical solutions that help prevent and deal with gender-based violence. Culture-changing solutions to dismantle the institutional structures that permit and support gender-based violence and give women equal access to justice are also imperative.

INTRODUCTION

Today's realities of Gender-based violence (GBV) have not only evolved beyond the realm of physical violence (Carannante *et al.* 2026). It is also known as an unspoken digital and ubiquitous GBV institutional crisis in today's world (Jahangir 2018; Nazakat and Malik 2025). Women now face violence in online spaces, too – online violence as an ongoing form of structural inequality (Aleem *et al.* 2021).

Lack of proper content moderation, a slow pace in a judicial remedy, and gender-inappropriate support systems

allow women to be silenced and enables the perpetrators to be emboldened. The technologies fall short of sustainable solutions, therefore there is no technological solution according to the argument in this article. Rather, a complete overhaul of our concept of justice is needed, one that involves changes to the legal system, increased accountability of technology companies and a fundamental change in culture that will break the cycle of structural inequalities that enable digital violence (Ali and Gavino 2021; Zaghloul *et al.* 2022). So, it does not seem to be only about regulating the internet, but reforming the very

institutions that govern our societies, as we take a look at how we should protect women in the digital age, as we look to models like Australia's safety Commissioner for guidance.

As far as institutional violence is concerned, it refers to violence that occurs because of the lack of care or prejudice of an official institution, including the police, courts, office, and other regulatory institutions. When institutions cannot protect women or are not able to respond sufficiently, violence normalizes, according to scholars (Jahangir 2018). For feminist legal theorists, laws still exist symbolically and institutional practices are still patriarchal (Gilani *et al.* 2025). In the Pakistani literature, the major reasons given for low convictions for crimes against women are poor investigation, a victim-blaming attitude among law enforcement and procedural delays. Institutional inertia promotes the lack of reporting and reinforces impunity (Gondal *et al.* 2024).

Digital harassment can be any of any sort including cyber stalking, online threats, doxing, sharing of private photos without consent, deepfake pornography, and digital blackmail (Citron 2014; Mukred *et al.* 2024). There is increasing recognition in research of digital violence as "real violence" that has psychological, societal, and economic consequences. The Digital Rights Foundation (DRF 2023) in Pakistan found that women journalists, activists and professionals are subjected to higher levels of abuse online. Reporting is greatly decreased by fear of social shame and reputational harm. South Korea's research is aimed at sexual crimes facilitated by technology, like those shot on a hidden camera and AI-generated pornography (Ma'arif *et al.* 2025; Lee 2026). More robust laws have not stopped these actions from happening online, where anonymity and cultural misogyny also play a role (Aleem *et al.* 2021).

In addition to this, the gap between the economic status of Pakistan and South Korea and the national technological infrastructure are enormous, but there is an unsettling similarity; that in both countries, women have no state functions that can provide protection from the weaponization of technology effectively. The problem in Pakistan is the lack of a proper and effective justice system due to the influence of patriarchal norms in the country, where conviction rates are extremely low. Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 is not properly enforced and when victims report a crime, they face extreme social stigma and victim blaming (Jahangir 2018; Lee and Park 2024). However, South Korea, a frontrunner in digital connectivity, is facing the problem of sophistication because criminal laws cannot keep up with the increasing popularity of offences such as "molka" and deepfake pornography, which have enhanced with artificial intelligence (Lee 2026; Lee and Park 2024).

Pakistan and South Korea are two entirely different sociopolitical environments and can be compared to see how the failures of their institutions, deeply oodles of socio-cultural norms and the fast-changing digital

architectures intertwine to produce and sustain violence against women (Jahangir 2018). It is here where culture and reputation are the impetus of violence, and where a tech-literate misogyny outpaces legislation. Comparing these two settings offers the evidence that the 'digital' is just another form of an old form of oppression. It shows that unless institutions change, whether due to budget or gender policing, or hesitation to put legislation in place in regard to AI, they are complicit in violence.

In both South Korea and Pakistan, there are specific issues that can be addressed by institutional and legislative change, both of which have the potential to enhance the capacity of women to tackle institutional and online harassment, and access to justice. This research focuses on feminist legal theory and structural violence theory, which argues that digital harassment does not refer to "out of the ordinary" and isolated incidents, but is instead a structural shift from the patriarchal past, which is embedded in institutional inertia. There are numerous studies on violence against women in both countries alone, but there is a lack of studies that compare institutional and digital violence. This study brings together institutional analysis and digital gender violence, whilst also providing a comparative approach.

METHODOLOGY

After giving consideration to feminist legal theory and structural violence theory (Farmer 2004; Qayyum 2025), the qualitative comparative methodology (QCM) is used in this study, supplemented by secondary quantitative data, to analyze the influence of power asymmetries and systemic inequalities on women experiences. It is an outcome of the multi-source evidence and thematic analytical framework, which understand how institutions respond to harassment and digital violence against women in Pakistan, based on government statistics, NGO reports and case studies from 2020-24. While yes, there is a certain legislation like the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, she adds there is a gap in implementing such law, and the structural set up for the bodies is dim, as there is lack of resources in the cybercrime units, and also high underreporting from the victim due to stigma effect (UN Women 2021). This institutional failure is a second round of violence, aggravating the first one experienced by women.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Even in a country with a well-developed legal system like South Korea, there are no signs of abating sexual violence linked to usage of advanced communication technology such as the use of encrypted communications for cyber blackmail, hidden cameras and deepfake pornography (Rasmussen and Jalmerud 2025; Lee 2026). Despite the state's steps to counter misogyny in its digital presence, from introducing specialist units for digital crimes to even

sending heavy sentences, the study results show a slippery slope in which the advancement of technology fosters radicalization of misogyny (Zagloul *et al.* 2022; Rasmussen and Jalmerud 2025). But due to the rapid evolution of technology and the society's conviction that the internet is an innocent space where society does not consider online abuse to be a concern, enforcement is still inadequate. This chilling atmosphere induces the feminization of women's retreat from public and virtual space.

In Pakistan/South Korea, the institutional responses to digital violence have a gender aspect, with women less likely to report on violence. Legal provisions are based on the reworked Prevention of Electronic Crimes (PECA) Act 2016 which includes provisions for a comprehensive overhaul of laws to address digital harassment crimes, including cyberstalking and non-consensual sharing — which poses challenges for Pakistan on the institutional capacity and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms. Improved digital forensics, gender-responsive training for officials and more enforcement and judicial capacity are key in addressing GBViC effectively.

To prevent secondary victimization, victims of gender-based violence and deepfake crimes need robust support from others, such as legal support and psychological counseling. Gender equality is of importance in South Korea, where institutional patriarchy is an important issue in the face of digital crimes such as deepfake pornography (Rasmussen and Jalmerud 2025; Lee 2026). While there have been recent efforts to punish the use of deepfakes, there is still a need for proactive measures in the areas of AI and content moderation (Mukred *et al.* 2024). The need for quick removal process for the deepfake content is important in the support of the victims, including financial support. To address the issue of digital sex crimes effectively (Javed *et al.* 2025; Rasmussen and Jalmerud 2025), there is a need for greater cooperation with international partners and more public awareness campaigns.

Precedents for legal reforms, like the Online Safety Act in the United Kingdom and the eSafety Commissioner in Australia, could be referenced by nations like Pakistan and South Korea in their fight against institutional and online harassment ((Jahangir 2018; Aleem *et al.* 2021; Im *et al.* 2022; Schoenebeck *et al.* 2023). The eSafety Commissioner is independent, and its work is directed towards improving online safety through an integrated approach to this work, including its focus on establishing a centralized body with strong investigative powers to address issues such as image-based abuse and cyberbullying (Javed *et al.* 2025; Gallegos *et al.* 2026). This could also be an office to investigate complaints made to it, to notify senders of any removal notices and levy penalties on platforms that refuse or do not comply, to ensure greater accountability and facilitate the support of victims. One of the key strengths of the eSafety Commissioner's role is its ability to use a fast content removal system to allow the rapid removal of intimate images that have been shared without the

victim's consent, helping to minimize the impacts on victims (eSafety Commissioner 2017). Further, the Commissioner creates a supportive environment focused on victims, provides guidance on reporting, help in emotional and psychological management and connects victims with legal aid components necessary for their overall recovery (Burton *et al.* 2025).

This model also incorporates digital literacy and awareness of online safety in the form of proactive education and prevention measures, including public awareness campaigns and amongst children, parents and educators (MacKinnon 1989; Aleem *et al.* 2021).

Pakistan could have an eSafety Commissioner body to assist its application of the digital safety laws, including the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). This agency could respond to cyber harassment in a focused way, expedite removal of the content, be there to assist the victims and provide specialized training to law enforcement, which has been identified as a challenge for them in combating cyber harassment (Baig and Jafary 2025).

Although South Korea has a strong legal system, it might handle problems like deepfake pornography and other image-based abuse better if it had a specialized organization like eSafety (MacKinnon 1989; Rasmussen and Jalmerud 2025). A central reporting point will be put in place, abusive content will be deleted faster, and victims will be provided with targeted support to manage the specific psychological and reputational impact of AI-related abuse (Gondal *et al.* 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study finds that institutional and digital harassment of women is not an incidental but systemic, as is illustrated in Pakistan and South Korea. In Pakistan, weak institutions, weak enforcement, and cultural stigma maintain a culture of impunity. On the other hand, South Korea's technological developments, which are technologically powerful, have not received sufficient gender protection, with which new forms of abuse are emerging.

Institutional accountability, gender-informed policing, digital governance, survivor-oriented justice systems are needed to tackle these issues, in addition to legislative changes, and solutions must be comprehensive. Digital spaces need to be acknowledged as public space, and women's rights are to be the same as in the offline world.

A multi-pronged approach is needed to address the issue of institutional and digital harassment of women in both countries. This also includes necessary amendments of critical laws in Pakistan, such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016. These modifications should make clear definitions of new types of online harassment such as deepfake pornography and sharing digital images without consent, in order to ensure the law is effective and relevant. Secondary victimization may be reduced by strengthening legal measures to protect victims

(such as providing legal assistance, psychological counseling services, and reporting safe outlets), as well.

There is an urgent need to train judicial officers, law enforcement personnel in Pakistan on the issue of GBV, and victim centered approaches to improve institutional accountability against GBV. More investment is needed in the digital forensic system and the efficient judicial system in order to boost conviction rates. Greater accountability in an independent enforcement and victim support network. South Korea needs to take active measures in the law to protect the victims of deepfakes. This includes quick mechanisms for removing content, and thorough support for victims of digital offenses, since digital offenses can impact people on emotional and reputational levels.

Beyond this, social media and online service providers need to follow enhanced content moderation guidelines and have a prompt system in place to remove illegal deepfake content. To address regulatory challenges, the adoption of transparency measures concerning deepfake technology is essential, encompassing the necessity to inform viewers or identify artificial speech and images, such as the EU AI Act. Moreover, the creation of specialized digital forensics for AI-generated content will boost investigators' tools and techniques.

To successfully fight the spread of illegal material, encrypted messaging services and other online platforms must be utilized to an increased degree. To cultivate a digital accountability culture, South Korea needs to conduct large-scale public education campaigns on the legal repercussions of creating, sharing, or possessing illegal deepfake videos. It is also important to tackle social polarization in connection with the gender issue in order to avoid social backlash against protective measures and to create a more inclusive digital environment.

The recommendations are specific to Pakistan and South Korea but stress the universal need for flexible law, transparency in institutions, responsible technological governance and cultural shift to tackle institutional and digital harassment of women. To conclude, the struggle against violence towards women should evolve together with the progress of technology, to not become another instrument of oppression.

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Both authors contributed equally to this work

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