

Abstract: Women and the Jirga System in Rural Punjab

At the village level in rural Pakistan, the *Jirga* system serves as an informal institution that exerts control on women through village courts, and reinforces a system of power and patronage. How are such traditional networks still able to maintain the power to shape policies that influence women's lives and aspirations?

My research analyzes the means through which these traditional networks sustain their dominance through village courts, and the mechanisms in motion (if any) that give women the agency to contest sentences, which pose a threat to their basic human rights.

While this gap is understandable given the language and cultural barriers of the region, not to mention security concerns, more primary data is a necessity today especially for domestic and global institutions, policymakers, and scholars to make sense of the complexities in women's rights issues in Muslim societies.

Subsequently, my research is based on qualitative interviews and participant observations conducted in DG Khan and Chistiyan in rural Punjab, Pakistan. I will explore how the structure of Jirga systems in rural Punjab legitimizes patrimony not only among men but more importantly women: What is the rationale for these women to not rebuke this system? Is it out of fear or genuine trust in this traditional system?

Sarah Ahmed
University of Oregon