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of Pakistan



GENDER FAIR LANGUAGE FRAMEWORK

AN AWARENESS INITIATIVE BY
LAW AND JUSTICE COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN
2026





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The development of Pakistan's Gender Fair Language Framework for the Judiciary was initiated by Mr. Fakhar Zaman, then Senior Director (Academics and Training) at the Federal Judicial Academy (FJA). On behalf of UN Women Pakistan, the initiative was led by Ms. Ayesha Wadood, Head of Sub-Office Balochistan, and Ms. Uzma Halimi, Programme Officer, under the overall leadership of Ms. Fahmida Khan, Deputy Country Representative, with valuable technical contributions from Ms. Saman Ahsan, Portfolio Manager.

We express our profound gratitude to Hon'ble the Chief Justice of Pakistan, in his capacity as Chairman of the National Judicial (Policy Making) Committee, as well as to the Hon'ble Chief Justices of all High Courts, in their capacity as members of the Committee, for their guidance, encouragement, and continued support throughout this process. We also acknowledge the steadfast cooperation and institutional support extended by the Director General, Federal Judicial Academy, and the Secretary, Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan.

The successful completion of this Framework reflects the collective commitment, dedication, and meticulous efforts of all contributors. Their invaluable contributions have laid a strong foundation for promoting gender-fair and inclusive language practices within the justice sector of Pakistan.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Gender-Fair Language

Language that avoids bias, stereotypes, or discrimination based on gender and treats all persons with dignity and respect. It includes the use of gender-neutral terms and expressions that do not privilege one gender over others.

Gender-Neutral Language

Language that does not specify or assume gender and avoids the use of gendered nouns or pronouns unless gender is legally or contextually relevant.

Gender-Sensitive Language

Language that recognizes gender-based differences, inequalities, and power relations and seeks to address them without reinforcing stereotypes or discrimination.

Gender-Biased Language

Language that reflects, reinforces, or perpetuates stereotypes, prejudice, or discrimination based on gender. It includes expressions that assume roles, attributes, or behaviors based on gender, or that diminish the dignity, credibility, or equality of any person.

Note on the above terms:

These terms are related but not interchangeable. Gender-fair language is the overarching standard, while gender-neutral and gender-sensitive language are approaches that may be used to achieve it. Gender-biased language refers to expressions that must be avoided.



Gender-fair language
normative goal /standard



Gender-neutral language
Technique /linguistic tool



Gender- sensitive language
analytic lens awareness
of inequality



Gender-biased language
problematic practice
to be avoided

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Any harmful act directed at an individual based on gender, including physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm, whether occurring in public or private spaces.

Violence Against Women (VAW)

Any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

Victim

A person who has suffered harm, injury, or loss as a result of an offence or rights violation, as recognized under law. The term is commonly used in legal and criminal justice contexts, particularly at the investigation and trial stages, to establish the occurrence of an offence and the application of legal protections and remedies.

Survivor

A person who has experienced violence, abuse, or harm and continues to live beyond that experience. The term emphasizes dignity, agency, and resilience, and is often used in policy, psycho-social, and rights-based contexts, particularly in cases involving gender-based violence.

Note on the above terms:

Both terms are valid and context-dependent. While “*victim*” may be appropriate in legal and procedural contexts, courts are encouraged, where suitable, to use “*survivor*” or other person-centered language to uphold dignity, avoid stigma, and reflect a rights-based and survivor-centered approach.

Complainant

A person who brings a complaint or allegation of wrongdoing before a court or competent authority, regardless of the outcome of the proceedings.

Courtroom Etiquette

Standards of respectful conduct and communication observed in court settings, including appropriate forms of address and language used when referring to parties, witnesses, and court users.

Access to Justice

The ability of individuals to seek and obtain remedies through formal or informal institutions of justice, in conformity with human rights standards.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Within Pakistan's evolving legal and social framework, the judiciary plays a pivotal role in upholding justice and equality for all. This report, prepared by the Secretariat of the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan in collaboration with UN Women Pakistan, presents a comprehensive set of guidelines for integrating gender-fair language into Pakistan's judicial system.

The report advances the statutory mandate of the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan to bring laws into accord with the changing needs of society, consistent with the ideology of Pakistan and the principles of Islamic social justice. The Commission carries a vital mandate to design and implement public awareness campaigns that promote legal understanding, strengthen access to justice, and empower individuals, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups to recognize and assert their rights within the legal system.

Gender-fair language is not merely a matter of style, but a substantive component of access to justice. In Pakistan's judicial context, the language used by courts directly influences perceptions of credibility, fairness, and dignity, particularly for women, children, survivors of gender-based violence, persons with disabilities, and gender-diverse persons. Judicial language can either reinforce harmful stereotypes or uphold constitutional guarantees of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination.

Drawing on the Supreme Court of the Philippines' *Guidelines on the Use of Gender-Fair Language in the Judiciary and Gender-Fair Courtroom Etiquette* (approved in February 2022), the report outlines a framework for gender-sensitive judicial communication in Pakistan, grounded in its constitutional provisions, national jurisprudence, and international obligations.

By adopting gender-fair language, the judiciary can foster inclusivity and eliminate harmful stereotypes. The report further provides implementation strategies to support the effective institutionalization of gender-fair language within judicial processes.

This framework also contribute to the realization of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Access to Justice), and support Pakistan's international reporting obligations, including under CEDAW and the Universal Periodic Review.

Implemented through this awareness initiative, the proposed framework shall promote the use of gender-neutral terms to ensure equality, dignity, and respect for all, in accordance with the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

2. BACKGROUND

Language is the most widely used medium of communication, both written and oral. It articulates human consciousness - thoughts, feelings, and needs - reflects culture by encoding and transmitting shared meanings and values, and shapes socialization, as the absorption of cultural assumptions and biases influences the behaviour and beliefs of younger members of society. This underscores the necessity of transforming language from traditional usage to a more emancipatory form, one that is gender-sensitive and gender-fair. Gender-biased language diminishes one gender, almost invariably women, and in doing so reinforces gender inequality.

In this context, the language employed by courts assumes particular significance. Judicial discourse does more than merely adjudicate individual disputes; it shapes public understanding of rights and obligations. By virtue of its normative force, judicial language influences how justice is perceived, internalized, and ultimately practiced within society. Consequently, the adoption of gender-fair and gender-sensitive language in court proceedings and judicial decisions is not merely desirable but imperative. In this way, judicial language carries not only legal authority but also significant social and normative influence.

2.1. Understanding Gender-Fair Language

Gender-fair language avoids bias, stereotypes, and discrimination in communication, ensuring respect for all genders. It involves the use of inclusive terms, neutral pronouns, and non-discriminatory expressions. For instance, terms like “chairperson” replace “chairman,” and phrases like “they” substitute “he or she.” In judicial settings, gender-fair language is particularly important to ensure that legal reasoning, courtroom interaction, and judicial writing uphold dignity, equality, and non-discrimination.

2.2. Importance of Gender-Fair Language in the Judiciary

In Pakistan, gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in society. The judiciary, as the guardian of constitutional rights, has a moral and legal obligation to reflect impartiality and fairness. Language shapes perceptions; thus, gender-sensitive judicial communication can:



In judicial proceedings, language also affects credibility assessments, evaluation of evidence, and sentencing. The use of gender-biased or stereotypical language may undermine judicial impartiality, re-traumatize survivors, and weaken public confidence in the justice system.

3. JURISPRUDENCE ON GENDER EQUALITY

3.1. Constitutional Provisions in Pakistan

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan embodies a comprehensive commitment to gender equality, both as a formal guarantee and as a substantive constitutional objective. Article 25 secures equality before the law and equal protection of the law, expressly prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex, while Article 27 extends this protection to public employment, subject to permissible affirmative measures. Article 34 enjoins the State to ensure the full participation of women in all spheres of national life, reflecting a move beyond formal equality towards substantive inclusion. This commitment is further reinforced by Article 37 and Article 38, which obligate the State to promote social justice, eliminate social and economic inequalities, and secure the well-being of all citizens. Article 35 mandates the protection of marriage, the family, the mother, and the child, thereby requiring sensitivity to women's dignity and rights within familial and social structures. These provisions are to be read in light of Article 2A, which incorporates the Objectives Resolution as a substantive part of the Constitution and affirms equality, social justice, and human dignity as foundational constitutional values. Additionally, the reservation of seats for women under Articles 51 and 106 reflects constitutional recognition of historical disadvantage and the legitimacy of corrective measures to achieve meaningful equality. Taken together, these provisions establish a coherent constitutional framework that not only prohibits gender-based discrimination but also obliges the State, and all its institutions including the judiciary, to actively advance gender equality.

3.2. National Jurisprudence on Gender-Fair Language

The Supreme Court of Pakistan has, in its recent jurisprudence, consistently emphasized the importance of adopting gender-sensitive and gender-fair language in judicial reasoning and decision-making. In *Atif Zareef v. The State* (PLD 2021 SC 550), the Court held that references to a rape survivor's sexual history or intrusive observations about her body violate her fundamental rights to dignity, privacy, bodily integrity, and reputation under Articles 4(2)(a) and 14 of the Constitution. The Court affirmed that dignity is an absolute and inviolable constitutional right, safeguarding the inherent human worth and autonomy of every person, irrespective of past conduct. The Court further observed that the use of expressions such as "habituated to sex", "woman of easy virtue", "woman of loose moral character", or "non-virgin" are unconstitutional and impermissible, even where a charge of rape is not proved.

In *Zahida Parveen v. Govt. of KPK* (PLD 2025 SC 529), the Supreme Court underscored the broader systemic harm caused by such language, holding that:



The use of gender-biased language by judicial or administrative bodies does not merely reflect prevailing social prejudices; it perpetuates and legitimizes structural discrimination and risks encoding bias into the law itself... Thus, we deem it imperative to reaffirm that all judicial and administrative authorities bear a constitutional responsibility to adopt gender-sensitive and gender-neutral language. This is not a mere formality, but reflects a substantive commitment to the values of dignity, equality, and autonomy guaranteed to all citizens under Articles 25, 14, and 27 of the Constitution. The judiciary must lead by example, ensuring that the words used to interpret and apply the law do not themselves become instruments of exclusion.



Similarly, in *Ambreen Akram v. Asad Ullah Khan* (2025 SCP 308), the Court held that judges bear a constitutional and ethical duty to employ gender-sensitive, rights-based language that affirms the equal legal status of women as full and autonomous persons. Judicial decisions, the Court observed, must avoid stereotypes and refrain from language that undermines the dignity of women.

In *Seema Hanif Khan v. Waqas Khan* (PLD 2026 SC 91), the Supreme Court further emphasized that language shapes perception, and that the continued use of moralistic or gendered expressions undermines judicial impartiality while contravening the constitutional values of dignity, equality, and non-discrimination guaranteed under Articles 14, 25, and 35 of the Constitution. Consequently, courts are required to ensure that both their reasoning and their language consistently uphold these fundamental constitutional guarantees.

Taken together, this jurisprudence establishes that the use of gender-fair language is an integral component of constitutional adjudication and judicial responsibility, rather than a matter of discretion or style.

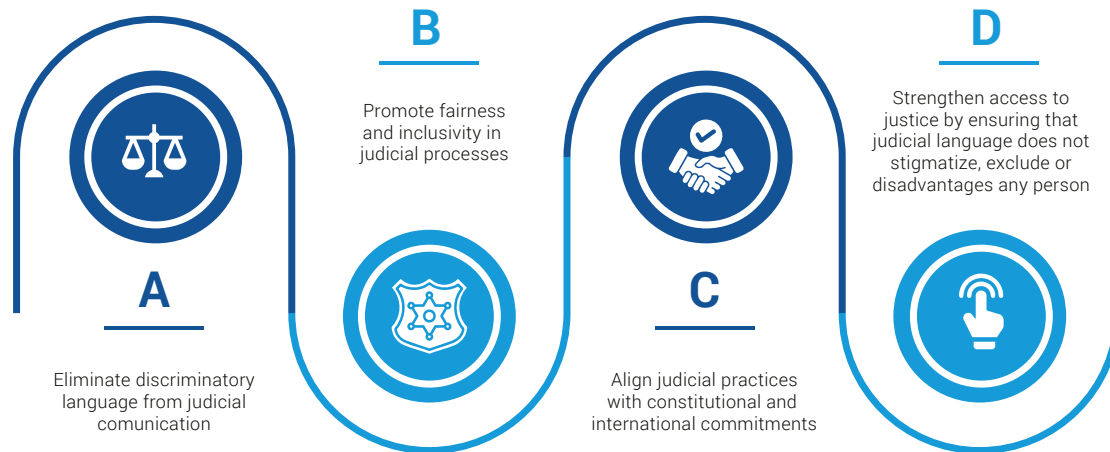
3.3. International Instruments and Obligations

Pakistan is a signatory to several international frameworks promoting gender equality, including: (i) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (**CEDAW**): Mandates non-discrimination and equality in all public and private spheres. (ii) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (**UDHR**): Guarantees equal rights for all. (iii) Beijing Platform for Action (**BPfA**): Calls for the elimination of gender biases. These international instruments reinforce the obligation of courts to ensure that judicial language advances substantive equality and does not perpetuate discrimination or harmful stereotypes

4. FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER-FAIR LANGUAGE

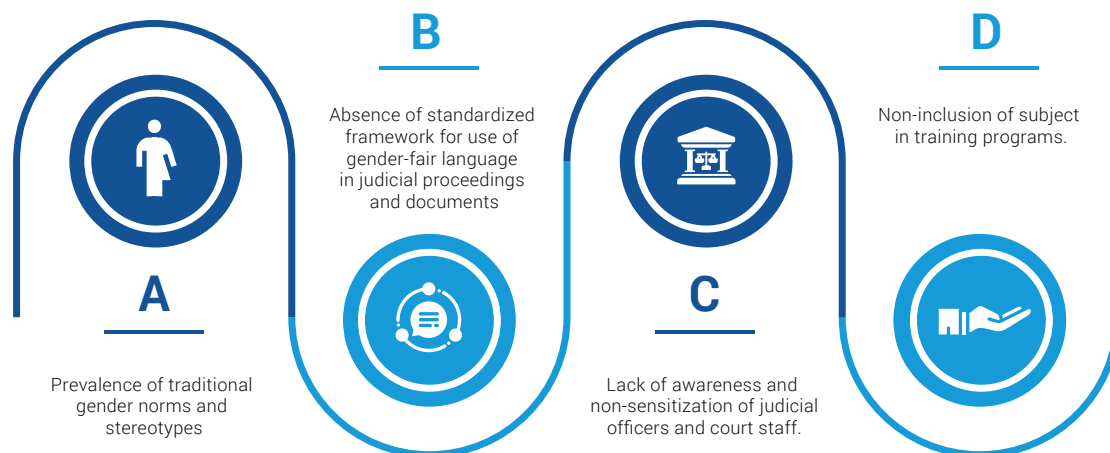
4.1. Objectives and Principles

The adoption of gender-fair language aims to:



4.2. Barriers to Implementation in Pakistan

The barriers to implementation of gender-fair language in Pakistan include:



5. GUIDELINES FOR GENDER-FAIR LANGUAGE

Language is one of the most significant mediums of communication in judicial proceedings and processes. In this context, it reflects institutional values, shapes professional conduct, and influences how justice is perceived and experienced. It is therefore essential to transform language usage to promote inclusivity and equity, ensuring it reflects respect for all genders and avoids perpetuating stereotypes.

Courts, being the custodians of justice, must lead by example and adopt language that is free from gender biases and stereotypes. Gender-fair language ensures impartiality and inclusivity, thereby fostering equality in judicial proceedings and judgments. Below is a framework to help eliminate discriminatory language and promote gender fairness. As institutions vested with constitutional authority, courts have a heightened responsibility to ensure that the language they use does not itself become a source of discrimination or injustice.

5.1. Use of Generic Masculine

STOP: Using generic masculine terms to represent all genders, such as the term “man” and similar terms to subsume all of humanity.

START: Using gender-neutral terms and inclusive phrasing, such as people, person(s), human(s), human being(s), humankind, humanity, the human race.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** “Negligence is the omission to do something which a reasonable man would do.”
Revised: “Negligence is the omission to do something which a reasonable person would do.”
- ii. **Original:** “Piracy is a crime not against any particular state but against all mankind.”
Revised: “Piracy is a crime not against any particular state but against all of humanity.”
- iii. **Original:** “Man is naturally endowed with the faculties of understanding and free will.”
Revised: “Humans are naturally endowed with the faculties of understanding and free will.”

START: Including women in a general statement about the human condition.

Example:

- i. **Original:** “Man is naturally endowed with the faculties of understanding and free will.”
Revised: “Men and women are naturally endowed with the faculties of understanding and free will.”

5.2. Use of Masculine Pronouns

STOP: Using singular masculine pronouns unless the antecedent is unequivocally male.

START: Using plural nouns or restructuring sentences to avoid gender bias.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "A lawyer shall avoid testifying on behalf of his client."
Revised: "Lawyers shall avoid testifying on behalf of their clients."
- ii. **Original:** "The judge must base his decision on the evidence presented."
Revised: "Judges must base their decisions on the evidence presented."

START: Using articles (a, an, the) as substitute for pronouns.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "Within 15 days from receipt of the appellant's memorandum, the respondent may file his memorandum."
Revised: "Within 15 days from receipt of the appellant's memorandum, the respondent may file a memorandum."
- ii. **Original:** "Merely testifying does not render the witness immune from prosecution notwithstanding his invocation of the right against self-incrimination."
Revised: "Merely testifying does not render the witness immune from prosecution notwithstanding an invocation of the right against self-incrimination."

5.3. Use of Masculine for Occupations and Roles

STOP: Using terms that assume only men can perform specific roles.

START: Using gender-neutral forms for professions and roles.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "He was the Chairman of the Pakistan Bar Council."
Revised: "He was the Chairperson of the Pakistan Bar Council."
- ii. **Original:** "The layman may find it difficult to understand the legal jargon used in court."
Revised: "The layperson may find it difficult to understand the legal jargon used in court."
- iii. **Original:** "Petitioners being businessmen of experience acted with due care."
Revised: "Petitioners being business owners acted with due care."

5.4. Use of Gender-Appropriation

STOP: Using terms that apply primarily to males or exclude other genders.

START: Using inclusive terms that apply to all genders.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "No judge or judicial officer shall sit in any case in which he or his wife is materially interested."
Revised: "No judge or judicial officer shall sit in any case in which they or their spouse is materially interested."

- ii. **Original:** "It is not unnatural for a murderer caught in the act of killing his wife and child to resist arrest."
Revised: "It is not unnatural for a murderer caught in the act of killing their family to resist arrest."

ELIMINATE language, written and spoken, that excludes or renders invisible persons of another gender and/or people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

5.5. Use of Feminine Suffixes

STOP: Using suffixes like -ess, -ette, -trix, or -enne that trivialize women's roles.

START: Using gender-neutral terms.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "The actress received the award for her role in the movie."
Revised: "The actor received the award for their role in the movie."
- ii. **Original:** "She served as the executrix of the estate."
Revised: "She served as the executor of the estate."
- iii. **Original:** "The usherette guided the audience to their seats."
Revised: "The usher guided the audience to their seats."

5.6. Use of Gender Modifiers

STOP: Using unnecessary gender-linked adjectives or modifiers.

START: Using gender-neutral forms.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "The female lawyer made an impressive argument."
Revised: "The lawyer made an impressive argument."
- ii. **Original:** "The male nurse assisted the patient."
Revised: "The nurse assisted the patient."
- iii. **Original:** "The lady doctor performed the surgery successfully."
Revised: "The doctor performed the surgery successfully."

5.7. Use of Outdated Forms of Address

STOP: Using honorifics that trivialize or obscure women.

START: Using modern, neutral, or preferred forms of address.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "Mrs. Fatima Ahmed was invited to speak at the event."
Revised: "Ms. Fatima Ahmed was invited to speak at the event."

- ii. **Original:** "Lady Dr. Shaista Khan conducted the session."
Revised: "Dr. Shaista Khan conducted the session."
- iii. **Original:** "The letter was addressed to 'Dear Sir'."
Revised: "The letter was addressed to 'Dear Colleague'."

5.8. Use of Disparaging Language

STOP: Using language that trivializes or marginalizes genders or sexual orientations.

START: Using respectful and inclusive language.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "She belongs to the weaker sex and needed assistance."
Revised: "She needed assistance."
- ii. **Original:** "The transgender entertainer performed at the event."
Revised: "The entertainer performed at the event."
- iii. **Original:** "Spinster Maria was declared incompetent."
Revised: "Unmarried Maria was declared incompetent."

START: Using the term "woman" instead of unnecessary metaphors.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "Nor does it prove that it was preceded by an unlawful aggression attributed to a person of the weaker sex."
Revised: "Nor does it prove that it was preceded by an unlawful aggression by the woman."

5.9. Gender Stereotyping

STOP: Using terms based on gender assumptions.

START: Using inclusive and gender-neutral language.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "The policeman directed traffic during the protest."
Revised: "The police officer directed traffic during the protest."
- ii. **Original:** "Flight stewardesses were provided special uniforms."
Revised: "Flight attendants were provided special uniforms."
- iii. **Original:** "Defendants breached the gentleman's agreement."
Revised: "Defendants breached the agreement."

5.10. Adopting Parallelism in Word Choices

STOP: Treating genders with a lack of parallelism, and using words and phrases that lack parallel structure.

START: Adopting parallelism in word choices.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** They were married in the City of Lahore and lived together as man and wife.
Revised: They were married in the City of Lahore and lived together as husband and wife.

ELIMINATE language that fosters unequal gender relations.

5.11. Unnecessary Reference to Gender

STOP: Drawing attention to gender unnecessarily.

START: Focusing on the role, not gender.

Examples:

- i. **Original:** "Appellant, aged 20, was employed as a delivery girl."
Revised: "Appellant, aged 20, was employed as a delivery person."
- ii. **Original:** "She requested maternity leave as she was on her way to motherhood."
Revised: "She requested parental leave as she was preparing for parenthood."
- iii. **Original:** "The woman's virtues prevented her from accepting the offer."
Revised: "The individual's principles prevented them from accepting the offer."

5.12. Gendered Language in Quoted Material

STOP: Quoting unfair conclusions about genders and retaining gender-biased language.

START: Paraphrasing the quote using non-gendered language.

Example:

- i. **Original:** "The Railway Administration, as bailees, is bound to take as much care of the goods bailed to them, as a man of ordinary prudence under similar circumstances takes care of his own goods." (*Pakistan v. M/s Habib Insurance Co.*, 1991 CLC 1270)
Paraphrased: Negligence is assessed by reference to the level of care that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in similar circumstances.

START: Adding 'sic' in a direct quotation.

Example:

- i. **Original:** "The standard of duty cast upon the bailee is to take such care of the bailed goods as a man of ordinary prudence would have taken under similar situation." (*Habib Metropolitan Bank v. Nazir Rice Mills*, 2020 CLD 796)
(sic added): "The standard of duty cast upon the bailee is to take such care of the bailed goods as a man (sic) of ordinary prudence would have taken under similar situation." (*Habib Metropolitan Bank v. Nazir Rice Mills*, 2020 CLD 796)

START: Partially quoting the material and rephrasing the gender-specific part.

Example:

i. **Original:** “No man of ordinary prudence would agree to sell the property to the petitioner and the petitioner as a man of ordinary prudence would not under mere oral agreement of sale pay an amount of Rs.26,000...” (*Muhammad Tufail v. Shahid Pervez*, 2002 SCMR 1266)

Partially Rephrased: “No [person] of ordinary prudence would agree to sell the property to the petitioner and the petitioner as a [person] of ordinary prudence would not under mere oral agreement of sale pay an amount of Rs.26,000...” (*Muhammad Tufail v. Shahid Pervez*, 2002 SCMR 1266)

ABANDONMENT of stereotypes in jurisprudence.

Example:

Judges, particularly in family law matters, are not merely arbiters of individual disputes; they are reformers and thought leaders capable of guiding society toward progressive and inclusive thinking. They bear a constitutional and ethical duty to adopt gender-sensitive, rights-based language that affirms the equal legal status of women as full and autonomous persons. Judicial decisions must avoid stereotypes...

(Ambreen Akram v. Asad Ullah Khan, 2025 SCP 308)

[U]sing language loosely or without thought stigmatizes women, trivializes abuse, and reinforces the same patriarchal thinking that the law seeks to overcome. Words used in judicial reasoning matter. When judgments rely on stereotypes or excuse unlawful conduct, they perpetuate inequality and shape social attitudes in ways that deny women dignity, fairness, and justice... It is important to emphasize that language shapes perception. The continued use of moralistic or gendered terms undermines the impartiality of the courts and offends the constitutional values of dignity, equality, and non-discrimination guaranteed by Articles 25, 14 and 35 of the Constitution. Hence, courts must ensure that their reasoning and their language uphold these fundamental guarantees.

(Seema Hanif Khan v. Waqas Khan, PLD 2026 SC 91)

6. GENDER-FAIR COURTROOM ETIQUETTE

6.1. Addressing Lawyers

Address all lawyers neutrally as “counsel” or “advocate.” Refrain from referring to female lawyers as “lady” or “female” counsel or advocate, and avoid referring to male lawyers as “gentleman” or “male” counsel. Use their surnames after the professional title (e.g., Adv. Malik) or simply “Counsel.” When making inquiries, use questions that apply to all participants, for example: “Will all counsel please identify themselves to the court?”

Public Prosecutors and Public Attorneys should be referred to by name (e.g., Prosecutor Iqbal, Public Attorney Mehmood), not as “Madam Khan” or “Mister Khan,” nor as “the Lady Prosecutor/Attorney” or “the Gentleman Prosecutor/Attorney.”

6.2. Addressing Litigants

Address all non-lawyer litigants, witnesses, and other court users as “Mister,” “Miss,” “Sir,” or “Ma’am,” as appropriate. Refrain from referring to litigants as “Madam Plaintiff” or “Mister Plaintiff,” and instead use their name or role (e.g., Mr. Iqbal, Miss Khalida, or simply Plaintiff). Avoid referring to witnesses as “Mister Witness” or “Madam Witness.”

Refrain from any act or proceeding that could demean, embarrass, humiliate, or degrade any party on the basis of gender. For instance, in criminal arraignments, if the information contains allegations that may expose a party to ridicule related to their gender, the public should be excluded, and the reading of the information should occur only in the presence of the parties and their counsel, unless waived. Similarly, testimonial evidence that might invite gender-based embarrassment or bias should be restricted to the parties and their counsel.

6.3. Addressing Minors

When addressing minors, avoid terms such as “little boy” or “little girl.” Use their first names or known nicknames to put them at ease and avoid diminutive references.

6.4. Addressing Transgender Persons

Individuals should be addressed by their self-identified name and pronouns. Derogatory, sensational, or medicalized references to gender identity must be avoided.

6.5. Refrain from perpetuating gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes must be avoided. For example, do not make one counsel go first with her cross-examination because she is female, saying “ladies first.” Comments, jokes, and remarks with sexual content, or that insinuate gender stereotypes, may not be used in the courtroom setting. For example, remarking that a lawyer appears to be more organized because she is a woman.

6.6. Avoiding Comments on Physical Appearance

Avoid comments on or insinuations related to physical appearance that may draw unwanted attention to one's gender. For example, calling attention to a lawyer's pregnancy while she is conducting business may affect how others perceive her. Judges, court personnel, and litigants are all responsible in observing gender-fair language and etiquette in the courts. Gender insensitive acts or omissions committed in one's presence should be courteously but discreetly corrected in the most respectful manner.

6.7. Using Gender-neutral Terms in Judicial Writing

Use gender-neutral terms (e.g., "spouse" instead of "husband/wife"). Avoid unnecessary gendered pronouns; use "they" instead of "he/she." Eliminate stereotypes in judgments (e.g., avoid implying care-giving is a female role).

6.8. General Courtroom Communication

Address all individuals respectfully and neutrally, using their preferred titles. Avoid making assumptions about gender roles based on appearance or cultural norms.

6.9. Revision of Official Court Documents and Templates

Revise all templates, including summons and notices, to incorporate gender-neutral language. Provide additional fields for gender beyond "male" and "female" where applicable. Avoid terms like "Miss" or "Mrs." in official correspondence; use neutral titles such as "Ms."

7. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

7.1. Capacity-Building and Training Programs

- Organizing mandatory gender sensitivity workshops for judges and court personnel, and developing e-learning modules on gender-fair language.
- Integration of gender-fair language modules into judicial academy curricula.
- Mandatory induction and refresher trainings for judges and court staff.

7.2. Awareness Campaigns and Stakeholder Engagement

- Collaborating with bar associations, NGOs, and academic institutions to raise awareness, and publishing a handbook on gender-fair language for justice sector stakeholders.

7.3. Monitoring, Reporting, and Evaluation

- Establishing a Gender Sensitization and Equality Committee to oversee compliance, and regularly auditing judicial documents to ensure adherence to guidelines.
- Periodic review of judgments and official templates for compliance.
- Judicial academies to publish the review of the judgements in a journal published annually.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our courts are courts of evidence, and their power to take judicial notice of matters is limited. Consequently, courts may not perpetuate gender stereotypes, which rely on unfounded generalizations about the characteristics and roles of binary and non-binary genders, yet continue to influence the perspectives of judges and litigants. This is evident both in the matters before the courts and in the language employed during adjudication.

The adoption of gender-fair language is essential for fostering a more inclusive and impartial judiciary in Pakistan. By eliminating biases and stereotypes, the judiciary can uphold constitutional principles and fulfill international obligations more effectively. These guidelines contribute directly to the realization of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Access to Justice), and support Pakistan's commitments under CEDAW and the Universal Periodic Review by promoting non-discriminatory and dignity-affirming judicial practice.

Recommendations:

- a. **Training and Resources:** Allocate sufficient resources for training programs and developing materials.
- b. **Awareness Promotion:** Promote awareness among justice sector stakeholders particularly litigants and legal professionals regarding gender-fair language in judicial proceedings.
- c. **Periodic Reviews:** Conduct regular evaluations to assess the effectiveness of these measures.

Through sustained effort and collaboration, Pakistan's judiciary can establish a precedent for gender equality and encourage similar reforms across other institutions.



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