

Viewpoint

Modernizing criminal justice in Pakistan: the case for forensic reform

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Extract

The integration of forensic science, legal frameworks, and community health is crucial for achieving peace in developing territories. The judicial systems of countries such as Pakistan often struggle with low conviction rates as well as prolonged trial procedures, mainly owing to outdated fact finding methods and a blind reliance on eyewitness testimony, despite often being unreliable. This emphasizes the dire need to introduce advanced forensic technologies into the local legal system, including but not limited to digital forensics, DNA examination, toxicology screenings, and ballistic studies. To lower the odds of wrongful convictions, expedite legal proceedings, and help deter crime, dependence on objective, as well as scientifically validated evidence, is a pressing need. Therefore, this correspondence highlights that stronger forensic capabilities may build judicial trust and public faith in government institutions, which are key elements of a healthy and stable society.

Keywords

Forensic science; Criminal justice system; Social health; Judicial integrity; Societal peace; Pakistan

1. Introduction: relationship between society, law and justice

Harmony in any society directly correlates with its legal structure. Justice acts as one of the important pillars that contributes to making society healthy. When there are problems related to justice where the guilty go unpunished or the innocents do not become protected, it creates a sense of collective anxiety and fear [1]. The criminal justice system in Pakistan also suffers from several major issues, such as a low number of convictions and a long trial period. One of the most important weaknesses that the system faces is the heavy reliance on witness accounts of events that, according to cognitive science and history, are highly fallible [2]. To have a strong and peaceful society, it is very important for developing countries such as Pakistan to adopt a scientific way of doing things by employing forensic science technologies.

2. Transforming evidence by forensic science

To make a change in the judicial process, moving away from testimony-based evidence to scientifically proven material evidence becomes extremely important [3]. It is important to implement forensics, including 1) DNA profiling, which is a DNA-based analysis that provides extremely accurate means of identifying people by establishing centralized and legally supported DNA banks that would help in solving cases of sexual crimes, murder and mass casualty cases; 2) digital and cyber forensics, which has become extremely necessary to extract and preserve digital data from smartphones, cloud

systems and networks because of the increase in cyber-crimes over the past few decades; 3) forensic toxicology and chemistry, which is a chemical test that provides objective proof in cases of poisoning, drug abuse and crimes related to drug abuse; and 4) ballistics and tool mark analysis, which are automated systems for fingerprinting and ballistic testing that would help in identifying the guns used in crime.

3. Improving Pakistan's legal framework

Adopting scientific approaches within the judiciary has transformative benefits. For example, traditional evidence generally looks to eyewitness accounts that are accompanied by high error rates as well as delays [4]. In contrast, modern forensic approaches depend on scientific evidence and verifications, making the process more objective and supporting accurate prompt justice outcomes [5]. These developments have manifold imperative implications, including but are not limited to 1) reducing judicial bias by limiting influence in legal decision making; 2) fast-tracking case proceedings through clear scientific evidence easing court backlogs; and 3) preventing unlawful convictions by demonstrating that verdicts are made on the basis of objective data, ultimately strengthening human rights and their protection.

4. Societal advantages stemming from forensic science

The amalgamation of forensic science at the systemic level provides long-term societal benefits, including crime prevention, as lawbreakers are more likely to be deterred when they realize the certainty of punishment through scientific investigation, ultimately resulting in a decline in crime rates [6]. Moreover, the restoration of public confidence in the judiciary system strengthens public trust, reduces the likelihood of vigilantism, promotes social harmony and decreases communal discord. Furthermore, the protection of vulnerable members of society is enhanced, as forensic investigation serves as an impartial safeguard for women, children, and other vulnerable groups in cases of societal discrimination.

5. Problems in the forensic sector of Pakistan

Although institutions such as the Punjab Forensic Science Agency have demonstrated advancements in technology, several problems still exist, such as deficiencies in the training of first responders where the police may lack fundamental knowledge regarding the procedures of crime scene investigations and can contaminate the evidence and regional disparities where advanced forensic techniques are limited mostly to the urban population and outdated legislation, which requires regular updating of the legal framework because of the emergence of new forensic technologies globally [7].

6. Suggestions for better forensic integration

To take advantage of the full potential of forensic science in improving the system of justice and bringing about social peace, it is recommended that forensic training skills should be made compulsory in police training programs; the forensic services should be decentralized and established in each province and the legal education of judges and prosecutors should be introduced, with a focus on how to interpret forensic scientific findings, especially probabilistic DNA evidence, and forensic science should be introduced in the legal structure of Pakistan, which would not only be an administrative change but also a necessity for ensuring good social health. Replacing subjectivity with objectivity would enable Pakistan to create a criminal justice system that will effectively deter criminals and protect human rights.

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