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Factors affecting the Women Empowerment in Punjab Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

In the field of development, the term "women empowerment" is relatively recent. The problem has become a focal point for many researchers as a result of the tremendous boost it has received since the advent of feminist activists in the mid-20th century. The present study focuses to investigate the motivational factors behind women empowerment. Public sector universities of Punjab Province were the universe of the present study. Only three main District universities i.e. Government College University, Faisalabad, University of the Punjab, Lahore, and University of Sargodha, Sargodha, were randomly selected out of thirty Public sector universities. 150 interviewed conducted to get quantitative data. Results demonstrate the importance of education and social awareness as primary factors which are contributed towards autonomy of women in household decision making. Such women empowerment policies should be designed that will additionally strengthen the role of women in society so the economy of the nation will ascend with the commitment made by females. The future researchers can study the causes of male dominance in patriarchal societies and they can also find ways of eliminating such gender inequality from developing societies.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, factors, decision making, women autonomy

INTRODUCTION

When people are empowered, they have the ability to make strategic decisions about their lives that they did not have previously. The World Bank defines "empowerment" as improving people's ability to make decisions and see them through to the desired consequences. Women are empowered by their freedom to make decisions for themselves and their family, especially financial decisions. Women's empowerment is frequently viewed in a variety of ways due to the many elements it encompasses: reproductive, economic, social and cultural, interpersonal, family, legal, political, and psychological.

The present study draws its roots from the Empowerment theory articulated by Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) which states that inherently people are in a conflict mode and each separate group seeks some degree of power and control over scarce resources to fulfill their personal, interpersonal and institutional needs. Conflict and discrepancies mount up when the system fails to treat all members of the society equally and fairly in terms of power which is largely experienced by the female counterparts globally. Empowerment theory just not focuses on one factor however; it has left multiple facets which view human needs through multiple lens that align together to provide a holistic picture of how and why people want to be empowered in a society.

Women empowerment falls within the empowerment theory as women have an inherent desire to be treated as equal members of a society. Along personal lines, women desire to have a peaceful mind and a sound health to live their life without any unnecessary interference from family or outsiders. Along with economics decisions, women must have control of decision making in their family matters which highlights the interpersonal aspect that women wish to have power onto. Also, on an institutional level, women representation and autonomy within legal and political structure is an important aspect which lies within our interested framework. Hence, analysis of these researches reflected the empowerment theory (Turner and Maschi, 2015).

Although the term "empowerment" has increased in popularity, no single definition can fully express its essence. The fact that empowerment is not clearly visible is a barrier. Internal vitality is difficult to judge, but aggregate outputs, consequences, and effects are readily apparent. Women's growing independence and freedom today are typically referred to as empowerment, albeit to a limited extent. However, there is a trade-off: empowerment entails increased responsibility and conscientiousness, neither of which guarantees health benefits. Women, for example, are more likely to be the victims of aggression due to their increased visibility (Basu and Koolwal, 2005).

Empowerment, then, is the ability to direct one's own life and act in accordance with one's own beliefs and priorities. It enables them to achieve their objectives and earn financial resources such as money, as well as social capital such as education, influence, and status within their family and community. Women's autonomy in making domestic decisions is critical as a measure of empowerment and a predictor of improved outcomes for moms and families (Adhikari, 2015). Because of gender inequality and superiority, women may feel less empowered to make decisions about their families and are less inclined to engage in open discourse with their friends and family about these issues. Numerous pieces of data from numerous emerging nations and governments suggest that women's decision-making authority is mostly determined by their possession of household controls (Adhikari, 2015).

There has to be a better knowledge of the variables that influence women's administrative autonomy, as well as how this differs among regions, states, countries, and even within the same country as a result of cultural norms that place women in less autonomous positions. According to a wide body of research, cultural factors influence a wife's decision-making power more than individual-level traits. Another study found that wives underestimate their competence to make decisions at home when compared to their husbands (Duflo, 2012). In contrast, partners who are both intelligent and cooperative are more likely to have a say in the final decisions. Whether husbands or wives respond influences the amount of women's freedom. Women's decision-making processes are influenced by constraints to their physical, sexual, economic, social, and enabling sovereignty. In Pakistan, as in most of Asia, men traditionally have more autonomy and independence when it comes to making domestic decisions. Adhikari (2015) observes that women frequently confront inequities in a variety of areas, including food, education, and healthcare, as well as limited economic opportunities, restricted access to and ownership of productive assets, and inadequate legal protections. Societal position, poverty level, urban/rural classification, education level, and the number of living children all have an impact on a woman's ability to self-regulate while making home-related decisions. Pakistani women's difficulties are exacerbated by a lack of awareness of their legal rights and prospects. It has been accepted that their low socioeconomic status impedes the establishment of national health and population policy in Pakistan. Gender justice has resulted in women having greater say in politics and better access to reproductive health care than ever before (Duflo, 2012).

Women empowerment has been defined as the process of gaining control of the rights and decisions that one must have but has been stripped off by the society or others (Cornwall, 2016). Each individual has certain right and control over his life and within society but the society denies this strategic right to many people especially women. The measures or ability of a woman to gain back that right predominantly counts as women empowerment (Ganle, et. al. 2015).

The concept of women's empowerment encompasses several aspects, including those related to the family, community, economy, culture, psychology, law, and politics. Another meaning of women's empowerment is a change in a woman's living situation that provides her more agency and the ability to pursue the life she wants for herself. Both internal (self-awareness and self-confidence) and external (health, mobility, education and awareness, family status, participation in decision-making, and material security) factors are impacted (Nayak & Mahanta, 2009).

Women's empowerment is widely accepted as critical to developing countries' long-term economic progress and poverty reduction (Klasen, 1999). According to the World Bank Policy Research Report, women's empowerment is emerging as an important policy goal for improving not only women's but also family well-being. According to Chaudhary et al. (2012), empowering women is critical to a country's development since it eliminates poverty and stimulates economic growth. Women's empowerment must be promoted, and gender sensitization must be integrated into all development activities, according to the United Nations Women Policy Division (2013). Education contributes to women's empowerment by lowering fertility rates and raising salaries. In most developing countries, women rely on men due to early marriage, a high female unemployment rate, and a lack of investment opportunities. Female labor force participation is lower in developing countries than in industrialized nations, with early marriage playing a significant role (Doepke et al. 2012).

There is a multitude of evidence demonstrating a direct link between women empowerment and the use of contraception, decreased fertility, and longer birth spacing. Education contributes to women's empowerment by lowering fertility rates and raising salaries. An educated woman is more likely to understand her rights and be able to participate in political decision-making, both of which contribute to her political influence (Rihani et al., 2006).

Factors behind Women Empowerment

There are a plethora of contributory factors towards women empowerment. These factors are embedded in family, economic, educational, legal and social environment.

Education plays a critical role in the cognitive, psychological and mental development of women. Moreover, it also instills awareness in women who face subjugation and wish to be emancipated from their miserable lives. Educated women have the necessary exposure and voice to achieve empowerment which makes education a critical factor for achieving liberation. Not only can women identify discriminatory practices but they also have the courage to speak up and bring about a change in their own favor because of the grace of education they have received (Malik and Courtney, 2011). Educated women also wish to be more vocal in their political and legal matters which vouch for their empowered status.

Economic independence is another significant motivator of women empowerment. Increased female labor force participation helps women become independent bringing more to the table and sharing the burdens of the family as equals. This independence makes a woman more in control of her life and does not allow others to treat her as an object shunning the idea of female subjugation. Male counterparts of such females also treat their women with respect and empower them in family decision making (Burnet, 2011).

The social structure of a country also has a considerable impact on women's empowerment (Mayoux 2001). In underdeveloped as well as developing economies patriarchy is deeply rooted in the system which is why majority of the women face subjugation at the hands of the male counterparts. In strict male dominant social structures women find it harder to voice their opinions and make some decision for their lives. Joint family system is another factor where women feel in shackles and cannot make their important life decisions. Women are viewed as responsible for just reproductive roles. According to patriarchal mindset, women are supposed to reproduce, nurture the children and dedicate their lives to the household which bars them from their fundamental rights of decision making in many cases (Duflo 2012). Hence, societies with liberal mindsets and lesser male dominance find it easier to promote and practice women empowerment.

Impact of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment has deep repercussions on an individual's health, family life and political ideology. The scars of female exclusion profoundly impacts on woman's physical and mental health. When women are barred from living their life on their own terms, they face mental stress and torture. Male patriarchy and abusive relationships affect the physical state of women and their dependence on such men strips them off their basic rights pushing them deeper into depression and related illnesses (Ahmed et al., 2010).

Female emancipation impacts the health and mental peace of females. In liberal societies, women are not weighed on the reproductive scale which is why they enjoy a better healthy life. Women are advanced the right to make child-rearing decisions which is why they can keep in mind their physical ability to produce another child or not. Such liberty to take one's important decisions in life directly impacts the mental relief that one feels which is why empowered women are happier and more satisfied in life (Upadhyay, 2014).

Family decision making must be done mutually as each partner is responsible and concerned about the household affairs. Women empowerment directly affects the autonomy that women enjoy within their household matters. Stronger women who are empowered savor this opportunity and are equally responsible for making important decisions such as the number of children to conceive and where and how much to spend. Women higher on the education and social level are more in command at their house and have the courage to involve in important family decisions. From trivial to key decisions; inclusion of female participation is important to ensure a sound healthy life (Acharya et al., 2010).

Legal and political representation is the right of every citizen. When females are empowered, they build their own political voice and take interest in the changing political landscape and how that change may affect their lives (Leijenaar, 2013). Women empowerment positively impacts the political judgment and interest of women. It makes them feel valued in the political system signaling how they can work for their betterment. Hence, women emancipation affects all walks of a woman's life and helps her attain a respectable position within society.

Objectives

The present research is focused on assessing the motivational factors of women empowerment and its impact on family decision-making, women's health and political and legal structure within the geographical boundaries of Punjab, Pakistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study of problem-solving techniques is known as methodology. The scientific paradigm also serves as its foundation. It can be used correctly to define either a set of principles and procedures unique to a certain discipline of knowledge or a theoretical evaluation of approaches appropriate to a given field of study. Additionally, it helps to describe and clarify the research design and techniques. Unless a study is conducted to rigorous and scientific procedures, its validity and precision may give a misleading picture. Sociological technique addresses all areas of modern social science empirical work, including conceptualization and modeling, research design, data collection, measurement, and analysis (Neuman 2001).

"Universe or population is defined as the total number of people living within a specific territory" (Neuman, 2001). The population of the study was all the females living in Punjab, Pakistan but for the convenience of the author the sample was selected at random from three main districts of Punjab, Pakistan; namely Sargodha district, Faisalabad district and Lahore district. The target population of the present study consisted of the career women of three public sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan.

1. G.C. University, Faisalabad
2. University of the Punjab, Lahore
3. University of Sargodha, Sargodha.

A sample of 150 women was selected conveniently from the selected universities. Moreover, data was collected with the help of structured interview schedule. It was constructed in English language and then translated in Urdu language for the convenience of the respondents. Collected data was analyzed through SPSS. Chi-square test was applied to check the association between variables.

Hypothesis no.1:

- Ho- The autonomy of decision about bearing a child is not affected by Women empowerment
 Ha the autonomy of decision about bearing a child is affected by Women empowerment

Table 1: Relationship among women's consultation about family size with husbands and their empowerment

Consultation	Women empowerment			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
No	8	13	2	33
	4.5%	39.4%	6.1%	100.0%
Yes	7	63	27	117
	3.1%	53.8%	23.1%	100.0%
Total	5	76	29	150
	0.0%	50.7%	19.3%	100.0%

Chi-square = 13.41 d.f. = 2 P-value = .001**

Gamma = .576 P-value = .000**

Cramer's V Coefficient = 0.30

No of rows (r)=2, No of columns (c)=3, $n = 150$

Table 1 represents association among women's consultation about family size with husbands and their empowerment. χ^2 value (13.41) is display a highly significant ($p = .001$) which describes relation among women's consultation about family size with husbands and their empowerment. λ value (.576) showed a significant & positive relation between above discussed variables. It tells that women's decision making power positively related to their consultation with husbands about family size. It is clear from the above findings; if the women had no consultation with husbands about family size then their decision-making power was low (54.5%), medium (39.4%) and high (6.1). On the other side, if the women had consultation about family size with their husbands, then their decision-making power is low (23.1%), medium (53.8%) and high (23.1%). So, the null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis "The autonomy of decision about bearing a child is affected by Women empowerment" is accepted. The value of Cramer's V coefficient was 0.30. Which means the result was moderate. The fields were moderately associated. Effect of women empowerment on decision making autonomy of bearing a child was moderate. Women who are educated and financially independent are considered powerful. When women have agency, they can pick how many children to have. Using data from the 2002 Eritrean DHS, one study investigated the likelihood of a link between women's autonomy and reproductive decisions. Having a small desired family size, not wanting any more children, and always using contemporary contraception were all associated with women having the last say in day-to-day home purchases. Women's reproductive choices are influenced by socioeconomic and demographic factors such as income and employment position. A study of data from the 1990 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey discovered that women with high literacy levels were more likely to engage in marital conversation about ideal family size. According to the findings of these studies, other African countries with more agency for women had smaller optimal family sizes (Upadhyay, Ushma D. & Karasek, Deborah, 2012).

Women who are financially comfortable and have additional personal liberty are more likely to request fewer children and be able to have the exact number of children they want. Another potential benefit associated with women's empowerment is the ability to overcome psychological and social costs. Women's capacity to manage their fertility is dependent on their understanding that it is possible and that there are effective methods for doing so (Birdsall and Chester 1987). There is scientific evidence that as women's social status improves, so does their reproductive health and use of contraception (Balk 1994, Kritz et al. 2000, Gage 1995, Hogan, Berhanu, and Hailemariam 1999).

So factors of education, income, awareness, household decision making contribute to women empowerment and it affects women decision making related to family size positively.

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Hypothesis no. 2:

Ho- Women health is not affected by women empowerment

Ha- Women health is affected by women empowerment

Table 2: Relationship among health problem of women and their empowerment

Health problem	Women empowerment			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
No	14	28	19	61
	23.0%	45.9%	31.1%	100.0%
Yes	31	48	10	89
	34.8%	53.9%	11.2%	100.0%
Total	45	76	29	150
	30.0%	50.7%	19.3%	100.0%

Chi-square = 9.58 d.f. = 2 P-value = .008**

Gamma = -.269

P-value = .007**

$r=2, c=3, n = 150,$

Cramer's V Coefficient = 0.25

Table 2 represents association among health problem of women and their empowerment. χ^2 value (9.58) is display a highly significant ($p = .008$) which describes relation among health problem of women and their empowerment. λ value (.269) showed a significant & negative relation between above discussed variables. It tells that if the women's had more decision making power then they had less health problems, comparatively those women who were having less empowerment. It is clear from the above findings; if the women were not having health issues then they had low (23.0%), medium (45.9%) and high (31.1%). On the other side, if the women were facing health problems, then they had low (34.8%), medium (53.9%) and high (11.2%) level empowerment. So, the null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis "Women health is affected by women empowerment" is accepted.

Cramer's V Coefficient value was 0.25. Effect size was moderate. The variables women empowerment and women health were moderately associated.

Autonomy refers to the ability to manage one's own affairs, such as acquiring information and making decisions. It facilitates access to both monetary and social resources, such as food, land, money, and social standing, as well as information, power, and prestige within one's family and community. Women's autonomy in making healthcare decisions is critical as a measure of empowerment and a determinant in improving maternal and child health outcomes. Power disparities between sexes may impede women's access to reproductive health care as well as couples' ability to address key reproductive health decisions. This could lead to negative health consequences.

Higher-educated women are more likely to participate in health care decision-making. In Nepal, elder women, particularly mothers-in-law, traditionally make decisions about young women's health care. On the other side, educated young ladies may subtly influence their mothers-in-law's decisions while also offering fresh ways of thinking about decision making. A more important component in modifying health-related behavior than exposure to relevant knowledge is the development of self-worth and confidence, which can be acquired through education (Acharya et al. 2010).

Hypothesis no. 3:

Ho- Decision making about household budget is not affected by women empowerment

Ha- Decision making about household budget is affected by women empowerment

Table 3: Relationship among decision making about household budget by the women and their empowerment

Decision making about household budget	Women empowerment			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
No	15	5	5	25
	60.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Yes	30	71	24	125
	24.0%	56.8%	19.2%	100.0%
Total	45	76	29	150
	30.0%	50.7%	19.3%	100.0%

Chi-square = 14.57 d.f. = 2 P-value = .001** Gamma = .405

P-value = .039*

$r=2, c=3, n = 150,$

Cramer's V Coefficient = 0.31

Table 3 represents association among decision making about household budget by the women and their empowerment. χ^2 value (14.57) is display a highly significant ($p = .001$) which describes relation among decision making about household budget by the women and their empowerment. λ value (.405) showed a significant & positive relation between above discussed variables. It tells that if the women's had more decision making about household budget then they had also more empowerment, comparatively those women who were having less decision making about household budget. It is clear from

the above findings, if the women were not decision making in household budget then they had low (60%), medium (20.09%) and high (20.0%). On the other side, if the women were having decision making in household budget, then they had low (24.0%), medium (56.8%) and high (19.2%) level empowerment. So, the null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis “Decision making about household budget is affected by women empowerment” is accepted.

The value of Cramer’s V Coefficient was 0.31. The result was moderate. The variables women empowerment and Decision making about household budget were moderately associated.

The amount to which women participate in decision-making at home in Pakistan is a more reliable predictor of their liberation than their participation in public. The extent to which women have control over the purchasing of large-ticket products such as autos and appliances reflects their role as primary breadwinners in the home (Mukhtar et al. 1991).

According to research from other developing countries, women's decision-making authority is mostly determined by their age and family structure. Women in nuclear households and those over the age of 50 have a greater say in crucial family decisions than women of any other age group. It appears that married women who work for income are more likely to consider how they can participate in decision-making. Domestic labor is not a viable alternative to paid employment for working women (Acharya et al. 2010).

Hypothesis no. 4:

Ho- Women’s freedom of political expression is not influenced by women empowerment

Ha- Women’s freedom of political expression is influenced by women empowerment

Table 4: Relationship among women’s interest in political issues and their empowerment

Interested in political issues	Women empowerment			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Not interested at all	15	5	5	25
	60.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Not too interested	10	8	5	23
	43.5%	34.8%	21.7%	100.0%
Somewhat interested	13	44	8	65
	20.0%	67.7%	12.3%	100.0%
Very interested	7	19	11	37
	18.9%	51.4%	29.7%	100.0%
Total	45	76	29	150
	30.0%	50.7%	19.3%	100.0%

Chi-square = 25.88 d.f. = 6 P-value = .000**

Gamma = .320

P-value = .005**

r=4, c=3, n = 150,

Cramer’s V Coefficient = 0.29

Table 4 represents association among women’s interest in political issues and their empowerment. χ^2 value (25.88) is display a highly significant ($p = .000$) which describes relation among women’s interest in political issues and their empowerment. λ value (.320) showed a significant & positive relation between above discussed variables. It tells that if the women had more interest in politics then they had also more empowerment, comparatively those women who were having less interest. So, the null hypothesis is rejected and hypothesis “Women’s freedom of political expression is influenced by women empowerment” is accepted.

The value of Cramer’s V Coefficient was 0.29. The result was moderate. The variables women empowerment and Women’s freedom of political expression were moderately associated.

Empowered women are those who have freedom to move outside, have decision making autonomy, and have freedom to spend money as they wish. So if women are allowed to move outside freely, and to take part in political activities or to join political organizations. This, in turn, enhances their empowerment. On micro level, if women are empowered they can caste vote according to their will. On macro level, if women are empowered they can represent half of the population on government level.

Women and girls are sometimes unable to completely exercise their human rights and basic freedoms, such as the ability to freely express themselves, as a result of assault, intimidation, harassment, and discrimination, even in public. This prohibits individuals from fully participating in economic, social, cultural, and political activities (Human rights council resolution, 2013).

Many reasons contribute to women's exclusion from political participation, including discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes, and stereotypes, as well as low levels of education, insufficient health care, and the disproportionate impact of poverty on females (Mambo, et al. 2019).

So, Gender discrimination discourages women,s freedom of political expression and political participation. And women,s freedom of political expression is positively influenced by women empowerment.

Conclusions

It is concluded that in Pakistan even though the females are getting empowered still this empowerment has many “censors” and the freedom of females is still capped. The women in Pakistan are still expected to behave in a certain way and any deviance in behavior is still a cause of concern for many families. Today the females are outnumbering males in educational

institutes and after spending half of their lives in studying and spending a lot of money to get degrees from prestigious institutes, females are still expected to become home-makers to be respected and those who devote more time to work and don't take part in household chores are considered inefficient by their families. The females who focus on their vocations and give less time to their kids or homes are viewed as incompetent spouses and are often given separation by their husbands and are denounced by their fathers and siblings too. This dissuasion makes many women to leave their jobs after marriage to focus on home making and raising children. Regardless of whether the females are monetarily stable they are disparaged by the general public for being an incompetent person who couldn't manage her home. There are some females who don't have kids; these females are additionally forced to have children and it makes them feel inferior to other ladies or think of her as less of a woman. Such an attitude needs to be changed in order to make the women empowered and to make society flourished.

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