

## DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

This study was designed to explore the socio-cultural impediments of women empowerment in rural Punjab Pakistan. Women empowerment has emerged as a crucial agenda in the World, aiming to promote gender equality and provide women with equal opportunities to participate and thrive in various spheres of life. However, the realization of women empowerment faces numerous socio-cultural impediments that hinder progress towards this goal. Deep-rooted patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes perpetuate the subordinate status of women, limiting their access to education, employment, and decision-making roles. Cultural traditions and practices, often steeped in patriarchal ideologies, pose significant challenges to women's empowerment. These practices include early and forced marriages, female genital mutilation, and restrictions on mobility and social interactions. Such traditions not only curtail women's individual rights but also perpetuate gender inequalities across generations. Discriminatory social norms and attitudes marginalize women in various domains, including politics, economics, and public spaces. These norms reinforce a biased perception of women's abilities, devaluing their contributions and impeding their participation in decision-making processes. The overall objective of study was to explore the current socio-cultural impediments of women empowerment in rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan. A sample size of 600 respondents was taken at random to collect quantitative data from the three districts of Punjab Multan, Faisalabad and Sargodha. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and presented descriptively and conclusively. The results show that there is a strong connection between socio-cultural barriers and women's empowerment in the study area. Most respondents reported that the lack of women's active participation in decision-making in rural areas of Punjab has significant effects on empowerment. As the majority of respondent testified the low economic opportunities to females, we now had to see that between religion and culture which factor is placing more hurdles on the way of economic empowerment in tribal areas. The quantitative findings also suggest that the majority of respondents believed that poverty is, at least to some extent, the cause of women's underdevelopment. Large numbers of respondents see customs as an obstacle to women's empowerment. Moreover, legislative reforms and strict enforcement are necessary to protect women's rights and eliminate discriminatory practices.

### INTRODUCTION

Nearly half of the world's population are women, however due to the societal structure of gender, they face discrimination in many areas of life and are often more vulnerable to issues (Naz, 2011; Khan, 2011; Daraz, 2012). Women are a vulnerable group in society, it is a truth (Bari, 2005). Women's empowerment, however, is not a goal in and of itself; rather, it serves as a catalyst for the societal

advancement of political and social empowerment of society (Mahmood, 2004; Ibrahim, 2011).

The struggle for equality and the empowerment of women is a contemporary phenomenon that is ever-evolving globally. Human rights received a lot of attention in post-World War II international agreements, but it eventually became evident that women's rights required special consideration. As a result, advocates for women's

rights lobbied more after the 1970s. Disparities in politics, education, and money, as well as the feminization of extreme poverty, are reasons for explicit support and acknowledgement of women's empowerment. The shift to emphasize women's empowerment started in 1995 with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. To protect women's rights, the declaration addressed gender disparities and called attention to women's participation in all areas of society. In 2000, a movement for women's rights in areas like education, health, and poverty was supported by the Millennium Development Goals. The fundamental objective of many development programs is to empower women, and this has paved the way for better governance, poverty reduction, and growth (Arndit and Oman, 2006).

The international development organizations examine actions, development policy options, and women's status using indicators. Since agencies frequently do not use the same indicators, a survey of current indicators and an analysis of their efficacy might help improve efforts to measure women's empowerment. This research examines indices of women's empowerment across five categories: economic contribution, education, government, health, and media. Relevant indicators are grouped into subcategories for each dimension. Our approach differs between dimensions depending on the breadth and types of indicators because there are significant variances between them (Murry and Newbay, 2012; Kiyani, 2022).

People or individuals can become empowered through a process that consists of numerous steps in which they become aware of their rights and learn how to protect them. People improve their level of health, economic situation, and educational attainment by taking these behaviors. Empowerment is a means to an objective rather than the acquisition of another person's or group's authority or rights. People can dramatically raise their level of living through the process of empowerment (Harvey, 2004).

In various socio-cultural and political circumstances, empowerment can signify different things, and it is difficult to translate into all major languages. There is always a spirited discussion when local terminology for empowerment is examined from different parts of the world. Self-empowerment, control, self-power, self-confidence, self-choice, a life of value according to one's own

values, the ability to be hostile to one's rights, independence, the ability to make one's own decisions, being free, awakening, and the capacity to lessen a lack of money are some of these concepts (Smith and Ross, 2006).

Increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic power of women as individuals and groups is empowering women. In India, several various factors, including as physical location (urban/rural), educational attainment, social standing (caste and class), and age, all have a significant impact on how empowered women are. However, there is a considerable gap between Community-level policy advancements and real behaviors (Prat and Cullen, 2023).

## **1.2 Situation in Pakistan**

While women's empowerment is gaining ground globally, its implementation is being stymied by barriers such as the glass ceiling and societal taboos. Like many other countries, Pakistan promotes women's involvement in politics, economics, and public life to advance gender parity. Most working women encounter challenges often lost in the spotlight of a few high-profile role models (Rauf, 2022). Pakistan's legislative laws prioritize women's empowerment and are grounded in Universalist principles. However, the home situation has various presuppositions, making it more challenging to implement the legislation. In Pakistan, gender inequality persists and is rooted in antiquated practices. Pakistan's 2017 census found that women make up 49 percent of the country's population (GOP, 2018), although they hold disproportionately few positions of economic power.

In Pakistan, wives want to come to an agreement with their husbands about many things, such as their daughters' schooling, where they can go, who they work for, how they spend their free time, who does the housework, etc. (Ashraf et al., 2017; Yasmeen and Karim, 2014) say that fights lead to conflict, which makes women less happy with their lives. Ishaq and Memon's (2016) study also showed that 43.5% of rural women said that problems with their husbands were their biggest problem. Yasmeen and Karim (2014) also say that women in Pakistan were usually the ones who wanted freedom and needed to start their own businesses to reach their final goal of choosing their work, responsibilities, workplace, and clients. But when most of the women started their own businesses, they ran into financial

and social problems. Because Pakistan's economy has grown at different rates in different parts of the country, there are some differences in how women are treated in rural and urban places. Pakistan is a very patriarchal country, so most women there have to deal with discrimination (Sheikh et al., 2016).

The same is true in politics, where women have few representation and engagement opportunities. According to studies on women in politics, electing women to office has been more symbolic than transformative in achieving gender parity (Iwanaga, 2007). Further, women's advancement toward parity may be hampered by prejudiced legal structures and cultural practices (Eastin and Prakash, 2013).

Women constitute about half of the population in Pakistan, so it's puzzling that just few of them holds positions of power in the country's most important institutions of learning, government, law enforcement, or commerce. Salman (2016) said that their contributions are not fully exploited in the country's progress because of gender imbalance. This is primarily because of obstacles, including low levels of education, ignorance of political problems, and ingrained societal conventions that discourage female engagement. One thing is sure, though: no society can have a thriving democratic system in which half the population is given power and the other half is marginalized. Women are often not permitted to vote or participate in political activities because they are seen as private property by their families, even though politics and voting are concerns of public importance. Indeed, some households maintain the view that respectable women do not become involved in politics since it is their job to take care of the home and children. These limitations not only stifle women's ability to advance in their lives and careers but also stifle Pakistan's social, political, and intellectual progress (Rauf, 2022).

These discriminatory practices (with the rigid hours of most professions) are huge roadblocks that prohibit women from being valued for their competence in the workplace. Activities that promote women's self-worth, the right to decide their choices, access to opportunities and resources, the right and power to manage their life (in and out of the house), and the capacity to influence societal change are all a part of Pakistan Vision 2025 (GOP, 2021).

These advancements demonstrate the ongoing work being done to advance women's rights

in Pakistan. While this may sound like a beautiful place for women, the reality is that not all of them can get in. As a matter of fact, due to gender norms and cultural expectations, few women have access to these options. It is fair to argue that the current situation in Pakistan has resulted in a substantial gap in women's status between the country's rural and urban communities, and it is poor because of the influence of both unequal socioeconomic development and tribal society (GOP, 2022).

Pakistan, like many other nations, has signed several international treaties protecting women. In 1979, for instance, the United Nations General Assembly passed CEDAW, which is commonly referred to as an international law for women's rights. Pakistan's government also signed CEDAW, but Pakistani women faced a great deal of discrimination. During the rule of military dictator Zia-ul-Haq (1978–1988), the Pakistani state and its patriarchal manifestations at all levels repeatedly emphasized that women are the guardians of the family's honor and that their conduct must conform to so-called Islam. It was the worst moment for poor people and women when the military government passed the "Hudood Law" in 1979 (Regulation No. VII of 1979, signed on February 9, 1979). Even though Islamic law was in effect, the military government made religious and undemocratic administrative and legislative decisions. Women have been very concerned about the implementation of this rule prohibiting adultery and rape. From 1978 to 1988, when Pakistan's military government under Zia attempted to criminalize sexuality, women felt the most insecure. The "Black Age" ended thirty years ago, but the same laws remain in the books (Laws of Hudood, Law of Evidence, Law of Qisas and Diyat) (Azhar, 2011). The same power structure and patriarchal manifestations continue to exist in government and society.

In this light, Pakistan's poor ranking on the Gender Gap Index (151 out of 153) is a real issue when discussing the lack of female empowerment in the country (World Economic Forum, 2020). Similarly, in 2021, females had a lower Human Development Index rating than males (0.464 vs 0.622). In 2022, Pakistan ranked 145th out of 146. However, the country has improved by 5.1 percentage points in the "economic participation and opportunity" sub-index over the past decade, reaching a parity of 36.2 percent, although this parity remains one of the lowest in the world (WEF, 2023)

**Objective**

The overall objective of study is to explore the current socio-cultural impediments of women empowerment in rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The examination of the different approaches that were used in the current study to explain the many features and strategies is regarded as a gigantic effort in sociology research since it seeks to explain the various aspects and strategies. Researchers in the social sciences typically utilize forward-thinking strategies in sociology and cutting-edge research procedures when conducting their investigations currently. Researchers in the social sciences are currently utilizing improved strategic techniques and computer systems in their work. An exploratory examination's validity, reliability, and precision are directly correlated to the logical approach that was followed (Babie, 2010).

The Punjab is the region being examined in the present research. In terms of population, Punjab is a sizable province and has a significant impact on the nation's economy. Only a few residents are from other tribes, and the majority is Punjabis (GOP, 2017). Three districts from Punjab province were selected i.e. Faisalabad, Sargodha and Multan.

The sampling process takes different forms at each stage, and the last stage gives researchers a sizable sample or unit of analysis. Three areas from the Punjab province Sargodha, Faisalabad, and Multan were chosen for the initial sampling. Using a practical sample technique, the researcher selected one tehsil (a smaller administrative unit) from each

of the specified districts at the beginning of the sampling process. At the second step, the researcher simply chose the tehsils Samundri from the district of Faisalabad, Sargodha from the district of Sargodha, and Multan from the district of Multan. In third stage of sampling six union councils were selected. In fourth stage different villages from the union councils were selected i.e. Chak # 473 GB and Chak # 479 GB from UC # 113 and Chak # 474 GB and Chak # 475 GB from UC # 114 from the tehsil Samundri was selected according to convenient sampling technique. In the same manner researcher was selected four villages from the tehsil Sargodha i.e. Chak # 142 SB and 117 SB from UC # 84 and Chak # 109 and 104 was selected conveniently from UC # 82. Moreover, four villages were also selected from tehsil Multan i.e. Pull Wasil Wala and Sorak Miayani from UC # 53 and two villages Chah Naliyan Wala and Chah Shahdat Wala was also selected namely from the UC # 83. At final stage a sample of 600 women was selected randomly (200 from each district and 50 from each village) with the help of online sample size calculator that is counter verified by using Fitz Gibbon Table. A random number was chosen to represent the total number of households in each district, city, and federation. To fulfil the prerequisites for the utilization of multi-stage random sampling methodology, sampling units were chosen at random throughout the entire process (GOP, 2022). Data was collected with the help of well-designed interview schedule. Collected data analyse through SPSS. Chi-square test for association and gamma test was applied to check the relationship and strength of the relationship between independent and dependent variables.

**Hypothesis: Higher the completed years of Schooling, higher will be the women empowerment**

**Table 1: Nexus between education and women empowerment**

Education	Women empowerment			Total
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
Illiterate	81	11	20	112
	13.5%	1.8%	3.4%	18.7%
Primary (1-5)	100	18	14	132
	16.7%	3%	2.3%	22%
SSC and HSSC	51	108	16	175
	8.5%	18%	2.7%	29.1%
Graduation and above	27	76	78	181
	4.5%	12.7%	13%	30.2%
Total	259	213	128	600
	43.2%	35.5%	21.3%	100.0%

Test	Value	d.f.	Sig.
X <sup>2</sup>	172.34	6	0.000**
Gamma	0.627	--	0.000**

The relationship between education and the autonomy of women is broken down in table 1 below. The extremely high significance of the relationship between variables is demonstrated by the chi-square statistic (172.34) The value of gamma, which is 0.627, is used to characterize the strength of a relationship and demonstrates a strong positive association among variables. This relationship explains the same direction of variables and the present and directly proportion relationship. As the education level of individuals improved, so did women's empowerment. It coincides with Geol (2007)'s report that education has a significant influence on people all over the world. It instructs people in the proper way to think and decide, so guiding their minds and educating them. Education is necessary for a country that aspires to experience

economic expansion and cultural advancement. The findings are in line with those of a few other studies, like Khan (2020) provided an explanation for the issues raised by Pakistan's allotment of public funds for higher education. Khan assessed the social rates in this research and made the claim that internal efficiency in the usage of these higher education expenditures was quite low. His research indicates that public spending on higher education amounts to a subsidy. Additionally, he claimed that lower income groups benefited more from this subsidy than high income groups. Like how the creation of two professional universities changed the actual makeup of higher education, Pakistan's loan program for higher education is currently relatively weak and has a very small quantitative influence.

**Hypothesis: Socio-cultural backgroundn effects the women empowerment**

**Table 2: Association between socio-cultural background and women empowerment**

Socio-cultural background	Women Empowerment			Total
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
Patriarchy	12	106	27	145
	2%	17.7%	4.5%	24.2%
Son preference	17	60	57	134
	2.8%	10.0%	9.5%	22.3%
Beliefs	47	23	12	82
	7.8%	3.8%	2%	13.7%
Feudalism	96	17	13	126
	16%	2.8%	2.2%	21.0%
Caste Identity	75	15	23	113
	12.5%	2.5%	3.8%	18.8%
Total	247	221	132	600
	41.2%	36.8%	22%	100.0%

Test	Value	d.f.	Sig.
X <sup>2</sup>	102.34	8	0.000**
Gamma	0.542	--	0.000**

The relationship between a woman's socio-cultural background and her level of empowerment is discussed in table 2. The value of chi-square (102.34), which indicates a highly significant correlation between the independent variable and the

dependent variable, and the value of gamma (0.542), which depicts the strength of a positive relationship, both agree that there is a positive relationship. Therefore, the idea that "Socio-cultural background affects the empowerment of women" is

acknowledged as a valid explanation. According to the findings of the following study, Pakistani students heavily utilized social media platforms to obtain and share information regarding social issues, politics, sports, fashion, and religion in addition to academic topics. These findings are consistent with those found in earlier research on students that was carried out at the national and international levels. The nature of Punjabi society can be described as patriarchal. In this regard, males and females are each divided into their own distinct domain. Women have the right to their own space in the home, whereas men belong in the wider world. This practice of divergence eventually limits the women's exposure and abilities, as well as their access to resources and opportunities (Bari, 2000).

The majority of people in various regions of the country follow traditional and uncivilized habits in the name of Islam. This has a significant impact on the lives of women in such parts of the country. According to Akhtar and Metraux (2013), the practice of "forced marriages or Marriage with Quran" is incompatible with the spirit of Islam as it is practiced today. Sadly, in Pakistan, this behavior is frequently practiced in rural areas that are considered to be backward, particularly in areas where feudalistic trends are applied (Muzaffar et al. 2018).

It is also linked with Rahman, (2015) who described the different rights that Islam bestows upon women. As a direct result of Islam's proclamation that this behavior was immoral and unlawful, Islam gave full protection of life to both women and men. Knowledge is something that all Muslims, men and women alike, are obligated to pursue. The authors also say that another significant step that Islam took toward equality was that it made it obligatory for all slave owners to offer fundamental as well as educational rights to their slaves, regardless of whether the slaves were male or female. This applies to both men and women. Virgins, as well as widows and divorced women, are said to have the right to pick their husbands in the Holy Quran, and nobody has the authority to prevent them from exercising this right or force their decision upon them. This is another argument that is put out. In addition, women are granted the right to patrimony by Islam; yet, in today's Muslim societies, patriarchal culture makes it difficult for women to exercise this right. The writers went on to say that Islam grants women the right of inheritance, but because the local culture is very patriarchal, this does not mean that women actually have access to the right to patrimony on the ground level.

**Hypothesis: Political participation leads towards the women empowerment**

**Table 3: Association between political participation and women empowerment**

Political Participation	Women Empowerment			Total
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
Right to vote	16	58	67	141
	2.7%	9.7%	11.1%	23.5%
Vote as per choice	39	112	12	163
	6.5%	18.7%	2%	27.2%
Attend speech	81	12	12	105
	13.5%	2%	2%	17.5%
Election campaign involvement	93	13	15	121
	15.5%	2.2%	2.5%	20.2%
Contest election	32	17	21	70
	5.3%	2.8%	3.5%	11.7%
Total	261	212	127	600
	43.5%	35.3%	21.2%	100.0%

Test	Value	d.f.	Sig
X <sup>2</sup>	201.26	8	0.000**
Gamma	0.528	--	0.000**

The association between political engagement and women's empowerment is discussed in Table 4.27, and the value of the chi-square (201.26) shows the highly significant connection between social media maintenance behavior and social capital. Thus, the premise that "Political participation leads to the empowerment of women" is accepted. Additionally, the strength of the positive link between the explanatory and explained variables is also shown by the value of gamma (0.528). The inference was correct. Women's political empowerment is not a goal in and of itself, but it plays a key role in encouraging social and political empowerment, which in turn encourages society's general growth (Mahmood, 2004). Women's political empowerment is defined as the freedom to vote as they see fit, participate in politics, express themselves politically, and demonstrate politically. It also refers to the authority, power, decision-making, and implementation of their priorities, needs, and actions (Ibrahim, 2011).

According to Naz (2011) and Khan (2011), women are relegated to a subordinate position and are denied a voice in topics pertaining to economics and politics. Both the political and the occupational spheres are totally driven by sex and gender bias, and as a result, men are given higher positions than women in both areas. Women either do not have any interest in national politics or do not desire to participate in any capacity in this arena. They have no knowledge of the various political parties or the structure of the country's government. According to Shaheed et al. (2009), there are several barriers to women's political empowerment in Pakistani society. These barriers can be broken down into three distinct but interwoven categories: economical, societal structure, and religious arguments. Each of these factors makes it more difficult for women to gain knowledge and experience in political arenas. The emotional and physical toll of having children and being a parent makes it difficult for women to pursue careers in politics. The conversation outlined above demonstrates clearly how deeply inequality entrenched in the political sphere and the political empowerment of women is around the world. Additionally, the issue has worsened effects in rural areas where traditional values dominate the way of life. Such customs grant greater authority to the masculine population, which enjoys greater benefits in the realms of politics and power (Naz, 2011 and Khan, 2011).

## Conclusions

According to the survey, women are treated differently in the family's material possessions. In terms of opportunities for education, employment, and other areas, they are given fewer than men. Women are crippled and prevented from achieving empowerment because they face discrimination in every aspect of life. Women are denied their fundamental rights and seen as a burden.

There is a pressing need to increase women's sociocultural influence. This appears to be the most effective strategy to halt social decline and usher in genuine harmony, happiness, progress, wealth, and peace for everybody. Due to its complexity, it requires a multidimensional, multifaceted, and interdisciplinary approach to treatment. In order to empower women in all spheres of life, it is crucial to support women's education, employment opportunities, the elimination of gender-based discrimination, equal representation of women in decision-making, women's vocational training, occupational health and safety, and the elimination of health disparities.

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