

INVESTIGATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG WOMEN IN RURAL PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of socio-economic factors on political awareness among rural women in Punjab, Pakistan. The study uses primary data collected through a multi-stage sampling technique from three districts (Rawalpindi, Multan, and Faisalabad) to examine the influence of family background, education level, income and wealth, occupational prestige, and power and authority on political awareness. Political awareness is assessed by examining knowledge of political parties, manifestoes, and leadership. 1500 responses are collected out of which 1382 are deemed suitable for analysis. A 6-point Likert scale survey questionnaire is used to collect the data. Data analysis using MS Excel, SPSS 24, and SmartPLS software, and applying regression analysis reveals a significant relationship between socio-economic context and political awareness. The study finds that women from educated and affluent families are more politically aware, as their backgrounds encourage education and social networking. Additionally, women exercising personal power and authority are more engaged in political discussions. Occupational prestige and wealth further enhance political awareness by enabling active participation in community and political activities. Overall, the study underscores the critical role of socio-economic factors in shaping political awareness among rural women in Punjab, highlighting the importance of a supportive family background, education, and economic stability in fostering informed political participation.

Keywords: Political awareness, rural women, Punjab, Pakistan, socio-demography

INTRODUCTION

Political awareness refers to an individual's understanding of political functions and processes within their social settings (Goren, 2012; Zaller, 1992). Awareness is a vital component of an informed citizenry to make wise decisions while engaging in political activities (Cassel & Lo, 1997; Jordan, 2018; Nasihah, 2018). As far as women are concerned, Political awareness becomes more crucial as it teaches them to express their opinions in an organized manner. It is the first step towards bridging the gender gap in the political sphere (J. Kaur, 2022; R. Kaur & Singh, 2019; Ramsharan, 2014; Tiwari, 2015).

Women constitute about half of the population of Pakistan (241 million) out of which about 128 million are housed in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Among them, nearly 40 million belong to rural areas of Punjab (Brinkhoff, 2023; Mubashir, 2017; PBS, 2023; Ullah, 2022). The national literacy

rate for Pakistani women stands at 46.49% as compared to 69% of men which is reduced in rural areas with 25% of literate women as compared to 62% of men (Latif, 2009; O'Neill, 2024). Similarly, rural women's active involvement in politics remains limited despite efforts made by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) (Begum, 2023; Dr. Allauddin, Dr. Shahida Habib Alizai, Zareen Khan Rind, 2020; Kazi, 2024). The ECP Act 2017 binds political parties to field at least 5% of women candidates during general elections. Likewise, election results from a constituency shall be considered canceled where women's voter turnout remains less than 10%. Women occupy slightly over 20 percent of seats in the national legislature of Pakistan but their presence hasn't been useful for the political mainstreaming of women in rural Punjab (Noor & Yaseen, 2023; Reyes, 2011; W. A. Shah, 2018; SRD, 2024). There's still a long way to go for

women to get a noteworthy place in the power politics of Pakistan.

Rural settings bring even more challenges for women due to traditional gender expectations, uneven control of financial resources, mobility limitations, low levels of education, and busier lifestyles. Women in rural areas hardly find any time to rest or take care of themselves (Arunachalam & Kalpagam, 2007; Hussain & Abid, 2018; Sikha Bhuyan, 2020; Zia, 1998). Lack of basic facilities, less education and leisure time, extensive work hours, malnutrition and financial dependency make them the least privileged section of society. It is them who suffer the most during natural disasters as has been the case during floods in Pakistan (Kawoosa et al., 2022; Kreft et al., 2017; Sönke et al., 2015). Their contribution to the agriculture sector either at family farms or as low-wage laborers does not get due recognition. On the other hand, some recent studies pointed out rural women's growing interest in politics (Kazi, 2024). All of the above scenarios led the researchers to think about the political orientations of rural women. If they are aware of political functions concerning their socio-economic context, awareness is the first step towards the realization of one's legal rights. Owing to the importance of women's role in society and politics this study endeavors to investigate the factors i.e. family background, education level, income and wealth, occupational prestige, and power and authority that contribute to political awareness concerning political parties, manifestoes, and leadership among rural women in the Punjab province of Pakistan. This study is limited to the Punjab province of Pakistan as well as limited to the selected variables in a rural context.

Punjab is the most densely populated and progressive province of Pakistan housing the largest number of women in its rural areas (Britannica, 2022). It has a rich history and culture. During the 19th century, it was spread over an area of 360,000 square kilometers. It was a huge state that included Indian Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, some parts of Himachal Pradesh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Islamabad capital territory of Pakistan (GOP, 2024; Shaikh, 2023). Its present boundaries connect it to Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan and Punjab (India), and all the federating units in Pakistan. The name 'Punjab' was given due to the presence of five rivers in Punjab (Britannica, 2022).

Research Methodology

The largest portion of rural women of Pakistan resides in Punjab province which is the biggest unit of the Pakistani federation. A multi-stage sampling technique was designed to gather primary data from the respondents. Three districts Rawalpindi, Multan, and Faisalabad were selected randomly according to the administrative division of Punjab. The next stages involve the selection of two tehsils from each district, one rural union council from each tehsil, and at the last step, two villages from each rural UC. Respondents were registered voters aged between 20 to 60. Following a pilot survey, that confirmed the verifiability of the questionnaire, 1500 responses were collected out of which 1382 were deemed suitable for analysis. A 6-point Likert scale survey questionnaire was prepared (Table 1) to quantify data which was later analyzed using software MS Excel, SPSS 24, and SmartPLS. regression analysis is conducted to test the hypotheses of the study.

Table 1

Selected Variables and Indicators

Independent variables		Dependent variables	
Income and Wealth (INAW)		Political Party Awareness (POPA)	
C1ii	Your family has agricultural land	D1i	You identify political party flag
C1iv	Your family gives land on tenancy	D1ii	You know strong political party in your area
C1vi	Your family has bank balance	D1iii	You identify political party election symbol
C1vii	Your family has average jewelry	D1iv	You identify political party election posters
C1viii	Your inherited property	D1v	You identify political party banners
Family Background (FABA)		D1vi	You understand women leaders of political party
C2i	Your family identity is based on your elders	D1vii	You identify women-friendly political party
C2ii	Your elders promoted marginalized individuals	D1viii	You know major political parties in Pakistan
C2iii	Your parents supported needy people	D1ix	You know that parties allot specific seats

C2v	You are enjoying the status of your ancestors	D1x	You are familiar with women wings of parties
C2vi	Your family participate in community decisions	Awareness about Political Leaders (AAPL)	
C2vii	Your family prefer to support local politics	D3i	You are familiar with the political leaders
C2viii	You have prestigious family background	D3ii	You know the leader's family background
Power and Authority (POAA)		D3iii	You Know the work of Political leaders
C3i	You achieve desired ends in family	D3iv	You are familiar with the attitude of leader
C3ii	Family members listen to you carefully	D3v	Political leaders have inherited politics
C3iii	You take daily steps in your family life	D3vi	Political leaders have political family background
C3iv	You contribute to family disputes	Political Manifesto Awareness (POMA)	
C3ix	You have worth in your family	D5i	You know the main objective of political party
C3x	You participate in your family decisions	D5ii	You understand the work of political party
Occupational Prestige (PCPR)		D5iii	Political parties follow their political manifesto
C5i	Your family has occupational identity	D5iv	Manifesto is the official program of party
C5iii	Your family identity has position in your area	D5v	Manifesto proposes development plan
C5iv	Primary occupations really enjoy luxuries of life	D5vi	Manifesto is the measure of party performance
C5v	Your occupation brings respect for you.	D5vii	Manifesto is the key to election victory in future
C5vi	High occupation individuals are respected highly	D5viii	Manifesto represents central approach of party
C5vii	Your family occupation has worth in your area	D5ix	Manifesto is the basis for voters to vote wisely
C5viii	Your family supports your occupational status		
C5ix	Your family occupational position is very strong		
C5x	Your family occupation is very strong		
Educational Level (EDLF)			
C6i	Your family prefers to educate daughters		
C6ii	Education is very important for girls in your family		
C6iii	You have strong educational background		
C6iv	Your parents are literate		
C6v	Your family members have tertiary level education		
C6viii	Education creates awareness in your family		

Research Questions

The leading research questions are as follows.

- What is the role of rural women voters' family background on their knowledge of political parties, manifestoes, and leadership?
- How power and authority of rural women voters contribute to their awareness about political parties, manifestoes, and leadership?
- What is the influence of rural women's income and wealth on their know-how of political parties, manifestoes, and leadership?
- What is the relationship between rural women voters' education level and their awareness about political parties, manifestoes, and leadership?
- To what extent, does occupational prestige among rural women voters make them aware of political parties, manifestoes, and leadership?

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To find out the role of women's family background on their awareness of political parties, manifestoes, and leadership

- To examine the impact of women's power and authority on their political consciousness such as political parties, manifestoes, and leadership
- To study the relationship between women's wealth status and their knowledge about political parties, manifestoes, and leadership
- To what extent, does rural women voters' education level contribute to facilitating them to learn about political parties, manifestoes, and leadership
- To find out the role of rural women's occupation prestige in learning about political parties, manifestoes, and leadership

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The family background of rural women directly contributes to their power and authority status, occupational prestige, and awareness of political leadership.

Hypothesis 2: Rural women's power and authority in family affairs play a direct role in their income & wealth status, educational level, and awareness about political leadership.

Table 2

Construct Reliability and Validity

Factors	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AAPL	0.871	0.911	0.897	0.597
EDLE	0.877	0.879	0.907	0.620
FABA	0.883	0.889	0.909	0.587
INAW	0.827	0.845	0.877	0.590
OCPR	0.915	0.921	0.930	0.597
POAA	0.852	0.881	0.890	0.580
POMA	0.951	0.952	0.959	0.722
POPA	0.929	0.933	0.940	0.610

Hypothesis 3: Income and Wealth have a direct positive relationship with women’s awareness about political leadership, parties, and manifesto awareness in rural Punjab, Pakistan.

Hypothesis 4: The education level of women in rural Punjab directly affects their learning about political parties, leadership, and manifestoes.

Hypothesis 5: Occupational prestige has a positive relationship with power authority and education level among rural women in Punjab, Pakistan.

Results and Discussions

To validate and confirm the reliability of the independent and dependent variables a confirmatory factor analysis test was conducted. Each variable is measured using Cronbach’s Alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (rho_a and rho_c) tests. The results provided in the table confirm the internal consistency among the variable and its indicators

Path Coefficients Direct effect (Mean, STDEV, T values, p values)

The findings in Tables 3 (direct effect and total effect) and Table 4 (indirect effect) also depicted in Figure 1 underscore the influence of rural women’s socio-economic background on their political knowledge level. The impact of each factor is explained statistically through positive coefficient value and p-value. The results indicate that women’s social context provides the foundation for their overall political consciousness. Additionally, power and authority in family decisions are one of the most significant factors allowing women to get more political exposure and exercise more power in their personal lives. Similarly, the family background,

income wealth, and education level of women help them get more familiar with political processes which subsequently results in enhanced political vision.

The results explain the relationship between numerous socio-economic factors and political awareness levels among women in rural Punjab, Pakistan. Statistical measures coefficients, T-statistics, and p-value are applied to study the impact of key factors i.e., education level (EDLE), income and wealth (INAW), family background (FABA), power and authority (POAA) occupational prestige (OCPR) on awareness about political parties (POPA), manifestoes (POMA) and leadership (AAPL). Likewise, table 4 contains the statistical values of how these factors are indirectly responsible for political awareness among rural women in Punjab.

Hypothesis 1: The family background of rural women directly contributes to their power and authority status, occupational prestige, and awareness of political leadership.

Family background appears to be the strongest factor influencing all aspects of political awareness among women in rural Punjab, Pakistan. It is positively related to their education levels (Coeff. 0.510 & t-statistics= 30.067), income and wealth status (Coeff. 0.335), occupational prestige (Coeff. 0.688), power and authority (Coeff. 0.612) and political awareness (Coeff. 0.200).

The findings in Table 3 are in line with previous studies that concluded the decisive role of family background in all spheres of rural women’s lives i.e., educational, social, political, occupational, and autonomy in personal life (Naseem & Khan, 2022; Ullah, 2022). Educated and politically conscious

families encourage women to pursue higher education and pay attention to their civic duties. Similarly, women from strong families get more respect and develop their occupational prestige which in turn teaches them a lot about politics as compared to other women (Begum, 2023; J. Kaur, 2022; Sikha Bhuyan, 2020). Some studies suggest that the overwhelming effect of family background

increases even more in families with politically active mothers (Anwar et al., 2013; Chhibber, 2014; Gidengil et al., 2010). Even an indirect role of family background helps shape their political orientations. Family's involvement in community affairs and political activities allows women to learn a lot about day-to-day politics (Naseem, 2023; Alelaimat, 2019; Gidengil et al., 2010; Kaur, 2022; Tiwari, 2015;).

Table 3

Path Coefficients Direct and indirect effect (Mean, STDEV, T values, p values)

Factors	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Direct Effect					
EDLE -> AAPL	0.380	0.380	0.043	8.858	0.000
EDLE -> POMA	0.414	0.414	0.034	12.158	0.000
EDLE -> POPA	0.573	0.573	0.032	17.647	0.000
FABA -> AAPL	-0.187	-0.187	0.040	4.721	0.000
FABA -> OCPR	0.688	0.689	0.023	29.519	0.000
FABA -> POAA	0.422	0.420	0.044	9.527	0.000
INAW -> AAPL	0.205	0.207	0.041	4.947	0.000
INAW -> POMA	0.258	0.259	0.039	6.691	0.000
INAW -> POPA	0.168	0.169	0.037	4.503	0.000
OCPR -> EDLE	0.376	0.374	0.037	10.042	0.000
OCPR -> POAA	0.276	0.279	0.047	5.839	0.000
POAA -> AAPL	0.203	0.202	0.057	3.566	0.000
POAA -> EDLE	0.411	0.412	0.035	11.666	0.000
POAA -> INAW	0.548	0.548	0.029	18.975	0.000
Indirect Effect					
FABA -> AAPL	0.387	0.387	0.024	16.169	0.000
FABA -> EDLE	0.510	0.510	0.017	30.067	0.000
FABA -> INAW	0.335	0.336	0.022	15.499	0.000
FABA -> POAA	0.190	0.192	0.035	5.409	0.000
FABA -> POMA	0.298	0.299	0.016	18.311	0.000
FABA -> POPA	0.348	0.349	0.016	22.187	0.000
OCPR -> AAPL	0.273	0.274	0.023	11.764	0.000
OCPR -> EDLE	0.114	0.115	0.025	4.600	0.000
OCPR -> INAW	0.151	0.153	0.028	5.340	0.000
OCPR -> POMA	0.242	0.243	0.020	11.942	0.000
OCPR -> POPA	0.306	0.307	0.020	15.193	0.000
POAA -> AAPL	0.269	0.270	0.031	8.537	0.000
POAA -> POMA	0.311	0.313	0.025	12.577	0.000
POAA -> POPA	0.327	0.329	0.028	11.891	0.000

Hypothesis 2: Rural women’s power and authority in family affairs play a direct role in their income & wealth status, educational level, and awareness about political leadership.

Power and authority are among the most important factors that elevate various aspects of women’s lives in rural Punjab, Pakistan. Statistical results (Coeff. 0.471 & T= 11.844) indicate a strong relationship between the POAA of women with their education (Coeff. 0.411), income wealth level (Coeff. 0.548), and awareness about political parties (Coeff. 0.548) and manifestoes (Coeff. 0.311).

Personal autonomy leads women to pursue education, occupation, and social mobility which introduces them to a bigger world of political

with socio-political factors that determine the discourse of society. With increased power and authority, women get the freedom to manage their time and be educated further about politics (Begum, 2023; Mushtaq & Adnan, 2022) (Ahmad et al., 2017; UN, 2019). Therefore, the role of power and authority cannot be undermined when it comes to political awareness among women in rural Punjab, Pakistan in significant.

Results point out that power and authority enhance political awareness even when applied indirectly. Women with decision-making power are better positioned in family, workplace, and community. They tend to use their resources to educate themselves and others in the family which opens

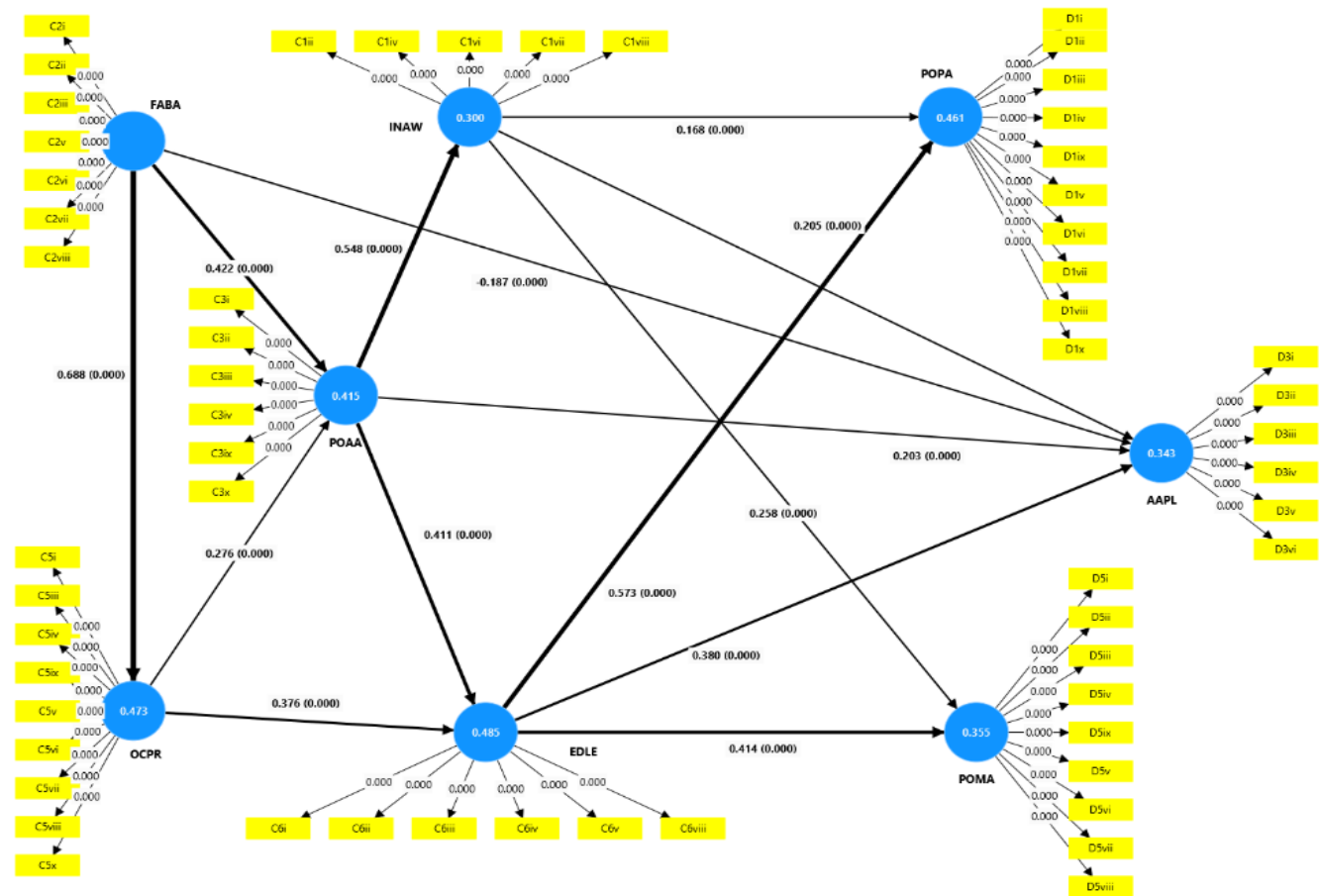


Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Model (Relationship)

exposure (Islam, 2020; J. Kaur, 2022; R. Kaur & Singh, 2019; Ullah, 2022). They come into contact

doors of awareness about political parties, manifestoes, and leadership (Qayyum et al., 2013; Singh, 2017).

Hypothesis 3: Income and Wealth have a direct positive relationship with women’s awareness about political leadership, parties, and manifesto awareness in rural Punjab, Pakistan.

The statistical analysis (Coeff. 0.205 & T= 4.947) discloses a significant impact of women’s income and wealth on their knowledge about political leadership, parties (Coeff. 0.168), and manifestoes (Coeff. 0.258) in rural Punjab, Pakistan.

Findings suggest that financial resources give women more power to make decisions in all spheres of life in rural Punjab, Pakistan (Jabeen et al., 2020;

Naseem, 2023). Women who possess money usually have higher education and more leisure time. They come in contact with the media which provides them with opportunities for community participation and political discussions. With increased money, women have more time and resources to be engaged in civic activities (Anwar et al., 2013; Jungkunz & Marx, 2021; Shaheed, 2010; Zafar, 2019) Moreover, higher income and wealth along with education let women present their demands in an organized manner which enhances their knowledge of political processes.

Table 4

Path Coefficients total effect (Mean, STDEV, T values, p values)

Factors	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EDLE -> AAPL	0.380	0.380	0.043	8.858	0.000
EDLE -> POMA	0.414	0.414	0.034	12.158	0.000
EDLE -> POPA	0.573	0.573	0.032	17.647	0.000
FABA -> AAPL	0.200	0.200	0.035	5.706	0.000
FABA -> EDLE	0.510	0.510	0.017	30.067	0.000
FABA -> INAW	0.335	0.336	0.022	15.499	0.000
FABA -> OCPR	0.688	0.689	0.023	29.519	0.000
FABA -> POAA	0.612	0.613	0.021	29.011	0.000
FABA -> POMA	0.298	0.299	0.016	18.311	0.000
FABA -> POPA	0.348	0.349	0.016	22.187	0.000
INAW -> AAPL	0.205	0.207	0.041	4.947	0.000
INAW -> POMA	0.258	0.259	0.039	6.691	0.000
INAW -> POPA	0.168	0.169	0.037	4.503	0.000
OCPR -> AAPL	0.273	0.274	0.023	11.764	0.000
OCPR -> EDLE	0.490	0.490	0.028	17.760	0.000
OCPR -> INAW	0.151	0.153	0.028	5.340	0.000
OCPR -> POAA	0.276	0.279	0.047	5.839	0.000
OCPR -> POMA	0.242	0.243	0.020	11.942	0.000
OCPR -> POPA	0.306	0.307	0.020	15.193	0.000
POAA -> AAPL	0.471	0.473	0.040	11.844	0.000
POAA -> EDLE	0.411	0.412	0.035	11.666	0.000
POAA -> INAW	0.548	0.548	0.029	18.975	0.000
POAA -> POMA	0.311	0.313	0.025	12.577	0.000
POAA -> POPA	0.327	0.329	0.028	11.891	0.000

Hypothesis 4: The education level of women in rural Punjab directly affects their learning about political parties, leadership, and manifestoes.

Education level has a substantial and multifaced effect on increasing political awareness among rural women in Punjab, Pakistan. The statistical analysis (Coeff. 0.380 & T= 8.858) validates the impact of education on women's political knowledge about parties (Coeff. 0.573), manifestoes (Coeff. 0.414) and leadership (Coeff. 0.258).

Data analysis in Table 3 also reveals the impact of education level on improved political awareness among women in rural Punjab, Pakistan (Aslam, 2021; Galston, 2004). Higher education prepares women for critical thinking and rational argumentation which allows them to learn more efficiently about politics (Aslam, 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Tamiru, 2014) because educated individuals are more likely to comprehend knowledge into useful information. The education level is hugely responsible for shaping women's political ideology (Batool, 2020; Borah, 2022). As a result of higher education, women's social circle is expanded which helps them learn about political functions.

Hypothesis 5: Occupational prestige has a positive relationship with power authority and education level among rural women in Punjab, Pakistan.

The role of occupational prestige is undeniable in enhancing political consciousness among rural women in Punjab, Pakistan. Findings indicate a strong relationship between high occupational prestige and their awareness about political leadership (Coeff. 0.273), education level (Coeff. 0.490), income and wealth (Coeff. 0.151), power and authority (Coeff. 0.276), party manifestoes (Coeff. 0.242) and political party awareness (Coeff. 0.306). Results indicate that women engaged in higher-paying and prestigious occupations are more confident while engaging in political discussions and expressing opinions (Khan et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2015). Such women are more likely to take part in activities at the workplace and raise their voices for community development projects. Occupation enables rural women to form social networks by providing them with training and social engagement opportunities. Occupational prestige improves their political knowledge because politics and the financial development of society go hand in hand (Aslam, 2021; Tamiru, 2014; Thi et al., 2019). Thus,

occupational prestige enhances overall political knowledge among women in rural Punjab, Pakistan. Likewise, the indirect effect of occupational prestige on political awareness is noteworthy. High-paying and prestigious occupations empower women, especially in family settings. (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2015; Thi et al., 2019; Zafar, 2019) that enhance networking with community and political workers which contributes to the political learning of rural women (Bhawna, 2002; J. Kaur, 2022; Ramsharan, 2014). Thus, occupational prestige gives political exposure to women even in an indirect manner.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the role of socio-economic factors that influence political awareness levels among women in rural Punjab, Pakistan. Findings reveal that the contextual factors of women are directly responsible for their political awareness.

As per data analysis, the family background appears to be the strongest factor concerning political knowledge because women from educated and wealthier families are encouraged to continue their education and build social networks which lead them toward political knowledge. Similarly, politically active families especially mothers, inspire daughters to get involved in politics. Moreover, women from strong families get more respect in extended families, their workplaces, and their social settings. Family background is very crucial both directly and indirectly in making rural women more knowledgeable about politics.

Likewise, the results point out that the power and authority of women is another factor that facilitates political learning. Women who exercise power in personal decisions, educate themselves, look for higher degrees, and get better employment which further enhances their autonomy to be involved in political discussions.

In the same manner, occupational prestige, income, and wealth have a great influence on women's political awareness level. Wealthier families tend to engage in active politics by supporting specific candidates, participating in community meetings, settling disputes, and donating money to political causes. On the other hand, prestigious occupation provides women chances to take an interest in community welfare at a large level and even with power brokers in the social and political arena. Thus,

paving the way to have precise knowledge of political parties, manifestoes, and leadership.

Additionally, the education level of women also lets them have more knowledge of their socio-political context. Educated women often keep abreast of the latest happenings in society which ultimately makes them rich in political knowledge.

In sum, the present study aimed at knowing the role of rural women's socio-economic context on their political awareness which was indicated through five factors: family background, income and wealth, power and authority, education level, and occupational prestige. The political awareness was measured through factors i.e., awareness about political parties, manifestoes, and leadership. Results point out a dynamic interplay among all the factors that positively correlate to one another to have a combined effect on women's political awareness. Analysis and results confirm the decisive role of socio-economic factors on political awareness among rural women in Punjab, Pakistan. A strong family background is the key enabler to strengthen women's position in their socio-economic environment which legitimates their financial and personal autonomy level in family affairs. Subsequently, a strong socio-economic context enhances political awareness among women in rural Punjab, Pakistan.

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