

Empowering Women is an Approach to Development of a Nation: A Case Study of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Women are important for our society, without an active participation of women a society cannot move towards development. Woman empowerment is too essential for the development of the country and specially in developing countries like Pakistan. Empowerment means giving the power or authority to someone to do something of their choice so empowering women means giving them the power to live their life according to their wish. Nowadays, Pakistan's Women face a lot of problems especially harassment and gender inequality etc. Our society is male-controlled in nature, and which cannot give power to women. This study is qualitative in nature and analyzes the past literature about the woman empowerment. The findings of the study suggest that women empowerment is too important and can't be ignored. Government had to play important to empower the women to make effective policies for women empowerment and make her to play an active role in society and in building nation.

KEYWORDS

Education, women empowerment, Economic Development, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment is the increase of freedom of choice and effort to make their own decision, an empowered woman will be one who believes in oneself. It is understandable that the status of Pakistani woman has changed during the past some years, and they are more empowered. Women empowerment has five components: women sense of self-worth, their right to have choices; easy access to the available opportunities; they have their own control on their lives, and to set their own guidelines to face the social and economic challenges of national and international level (Malik & Courtney, 2011). Before Islam in the time of ignorance, girls were buried alive but after Islam came into being women were given their rights and were treated equally. We are talking about women empowerment since then, twenty, thirty or more years but Islam is the religion which had focused on women empowerment for fourteen years. There are many examples of women empowerment in Islam, e.g., Hazrat Ayesha RA not only fought a battle but also got a victory, Hazrat Khadija RA was a successful businesswoman. In my point of view women inspired from western culture and lifestyle is not women empowerment, believers of Islam have nothing to do with western world. The pillar of my success is Islam and Quran is complete code of life.

UNICEF (2006) explored in his report that the society of Pakistan is male dominated, men are considered comparatively powerful. Rights of females are commonly violated in many areas of the country, there opinion have no value, even if they want to take decision for their personal life i.e., decision about their marriage they faced strong discouragement (Madhani, 2007). Klein and Nestvogel (1992) further concluded that women of Pakistan are being restricted from paid jobs while most of women are being divested from their property share. There is lots of work required for the women empowerment. By this the status of women will be uplifted in the society which will also help in economic development.

Education is an instrument for women toward empowerment, through education women will get a prominent status in the society and as well as in the family. Broadly speaking empowerment is the process through which women will get identity in the society and it will make women able to take her decisions of life by her own. The main constrain in the way of empowerment is male dominated society in Pakistan. Pakistani politics have been dominated by male and the higher positions are in hands of male, and women are ignored or are given soft profiles which are danger for their empowerment (Rasul, 2014).

Figure 1, show the data about gender equality in Pakistan for previous 14 years, gender equality rating 1 for low equality and 6 for high. According to the data there is still gender discrimination in Pakistan. While somehow it declines in past 10 years, women empowerment will further reduce the gender discrimination and inequality in the country.

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah agreed; "without woman no nation can grow well; we are casualties of evil customs. To prisons the woman in the four walls in the homes is also crime and inhumanity behavior. There is no punishment anywhere for the disgraceful condition in which our women have spent her life. You should take your women in conjunction

with you as companions in every circle of life” (Shami, 2009). To empower a woman is the responsibility of both men and women. Men should support the women in every sphere of life. Giving social protection to women in the public domain, the government of Pakistan has made a law with the title of anti-women’s harassment bill (The Dawn, April 11, 2014). This law was made to give full security to women during their paid labor at market. As revealed in the Holy Quran, Allah always addresses both men and women, proving their equality and importance: “For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women who are patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah’s praise - For them all has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward” (Al-Ahzab 33:35)

Source: World Bank (2019)

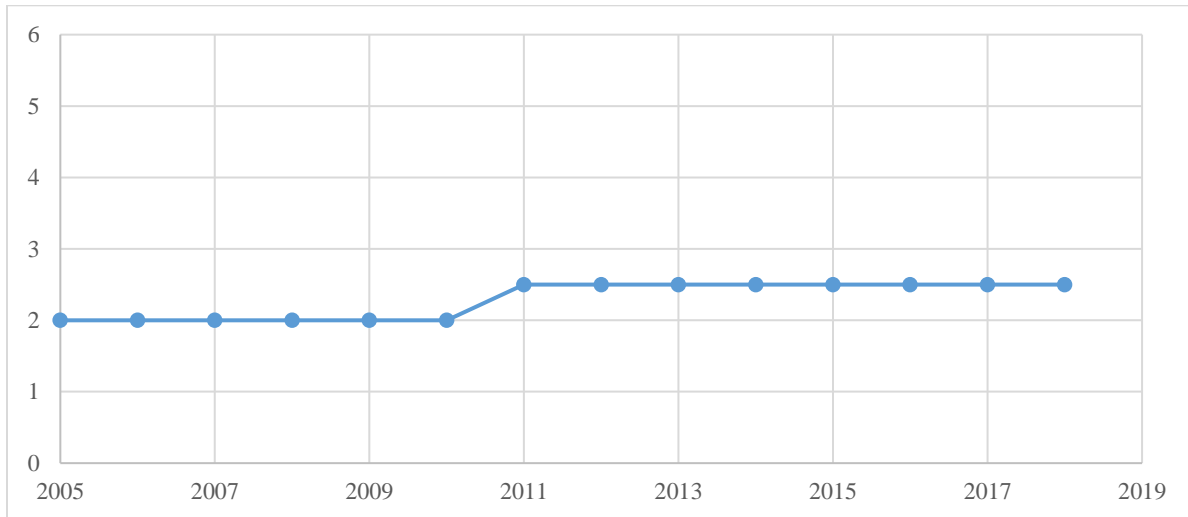


Figure1: Gender equality in Pakistan

Some people have misperception, and they are of the view that women empowerment is foreign agenda, but this is totally baseless. If we seek help from Quran Majeed and Hadith then it would be clear, that they both stressed on the protection of the right of women, including the rights of education, freedom of opinion, get gender relations of their own choice, economic freedom and social role. Islam is such a religion where women got a respectable place about 1400 years ago. Unfortunately, being a Muslim nation, we cannot provide to women their due place and respect in our communities, because of the lack of understanding and proper Islamic knowledge on the issue of women empowerment (White, 2010). The Holy Quran narrated, “And (so for) the believers, both men and women-they are friends and protectors of one another; they [all] enjoy the doing of what is right and forbids the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayers, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed into God and his Messenger” (Al-Toba 9:71)

The traditional mullahs misinterpreted Islam which is also affecting the empowerment of women. In Islam no one is superior what is right is for both and what is wrong is for both men and women. Prophet (PBUH) said “Knowledge seeking is prescribed upon each and every Muslim man and woman” (Altawajjri, 2009). Economically women are also very important for a country. They are important for economic growth of a country. Women are half of the population of Pakistan and if they are also involved in economy of country so the GDP of the country will grow. Women should be empowering in the field of economy. The working woman can reduce half of the burden of her husband and they will spend a happy life.

For sustainable development of a country women participation is important only men participation is not enough. There should be more choices for women and that is what empowerment is. For the development of a country empowerment is very important. And if women are not empowered, so how could they contribute to the development of a country. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine the role of woman empowerment in the economic development of Pakistan. This study will significantly contributes in the existing literature and highlight the role of woman in the development in the country and also more beneficial for policymakers and government agencies to make policies for facilitation and motivate for woman to work and play a significant role in the economic development of Pakistan. Rest of the paper consists of a brief old and latest literature review about the related topic, methodology of research, results and discussion and a brief conclusion according to the empirical results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In a study by Bahramitash, (2002, & 2003) examines the economic role of women in two different countries that is Indonesia and Iran, and try to prove that Islam is not a hurdle or obstacle for the women to work, but impose some restrictions and liabilities. Seddon and Hussein (2002) gave a brief description of the struggle of women rights in political conflicts in Iran. In his view point it is a larger struggle between conservatives and reformists over two nations of Islam. Sethuraman (2008) proved women empowerment in different nutritional status and growth of children in different circumstances between 6 to 24 months and explored that underage or mother's nutrition problem can be minimized or reduced through women empowerment and ending violence against women to eliminate their nutrition problem especially in rural and tribal community. Gallant and Pounder (2008) examine the feminism in Arab world and according to it is only possible if they followed religion properly. Women are an important element of our population, and the government should take important steps for their empowerment. Jabeen and Iqbal (2010) argues that women face many challenges and that is against fundamental rights. They believed that women empowerment means to replace men power, but this is not true. The women empowerment is seen to be unfavorable in the male dominated society. Noreen (2011) stressed to understand that education is the key for women in Pakistani community. In her paper she evaluates the hurdles in getting higher education. She examines in semi-structured interview schedule. She proved that education can play a vital role in women's life by developing their mental level to the optimum level and due role can bring positive changes in their lives. Naz et al. (2012) examine the woman socio-cultural independent to political right in the pakhtun society. They collect data from 200 respondent through structural interview and found that Pashtunwali, feudalism, patriarchy, and discriminatory social structure decrease woman political empowerment.

Chaudhary et al. (2012) determined the awareness of women about their rights which could be helpful to achieve the targeted goals of women empowerment. They emphasize on the women sensitivity about their rights during the era of 1996 to 2009 in Pakistan and eventually they reveal and derived the overall nourishment and development of women consciousness about their due role had a positive and significant effect on women empowerment according to the Gender empower measure A research has been conducted by Murtaza (2012) in Gilgit Baltistan on women empowerment through Higher Education Programed, a scheme of Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN). Higher education will improve the self-confidence and economic conditions of women and will significantly reduce their dependence on men on day to day works. Bushra and Wajiha, (2013) stated the core reason behind the woman imprisonment is illiteracy, lack of equal opportunities of job, and lack of awareness etc. The unawareness about their rights is badly affect them and exploited by society. Ali et al., (2015) argues that the government of Pakistan is marching toward woman empowerment by opening schools at certain places.

Aina (2016) mention a famous quote in her study that is, "if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate the nation". She argues that education brings confidence in women and establish her self-esteem. It is a recognized fact that women are important for economic development of a nation. Half of the population are women of a country and if the half of the population doesn't get access to education, healthcare, and employment so how can a country be developed. A nation is developed when both men and women are contributing to the development. Akram (2018) explored the dimensions and determinants of women empowerment in Pakistan. Data has been collected from demographic and health survey for the year 2012-2013, in order to explore the elements which, effect the women empowerment in Pakistan they utilized descriptive, correlation technique, logit and ordered logit techniques for the analysis. He found that there were positive and significant association between women empowerment and age, female education, women employment and number of alive kids. While there was a negative impact of women empowerment with the age of head of the family and family size. Similarly, Santoso et al., (2019) considered empowerment of women very critical for nutrition of kids during there early life. They indicated that child nutrition and empowerment of women relations is questionable. They recommended further research in same field with better indicators for women empowerment. Many previous studies endorsed that woman play a vital role in the social economic improvement of society (Abu *et al.*, 2014; Muhammad & Ahmad, 2010, Azam & Ahmad, 2015, Rehman *et al.*, 2018, Khan *et al.* 2018, Khan *et al.*, 2019, Azam, 2019, Khan *et al.*, 2020, Faizi *et al.* 2020, Rehman & Khan, 2020, Azam *et al.* 2019, Akbar *et al.* 2020).

The factors which are responsible for women empowerment are education, awareness and believe if her family members believe in her and if a women believe in herself so she can do anything she want, she will be empowered. Education and awareness are the key factors for empowerment. Figure-2 show the factors effecting women empowerment in a society. These factor education, awareness and believe of the family people on their woman. These are the key factor with the increase of factor women will be empowered.

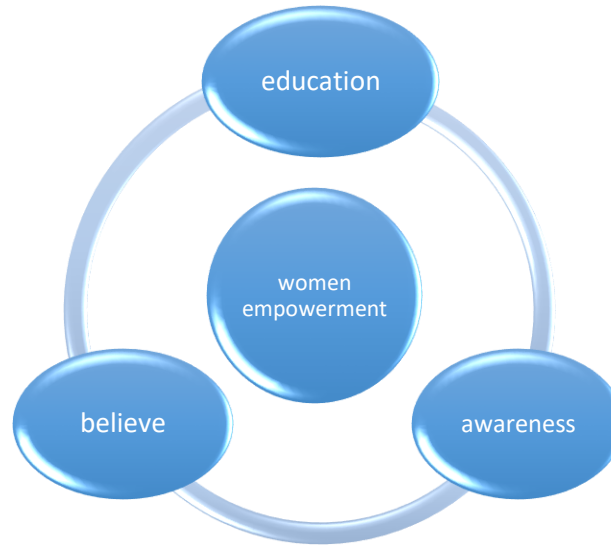


Figure2: Factor responsible for women empowerment

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study based on secondary data, which collected from internet, journals, articles, books and reports etc. The purpose behind this study is to find out what is the importance of women empowerment in Pakistan. The research used qualitative method, secondary, primary and document analysis, including articles, journals, and newspapers.

According to the Figure 3 of conceptual diagram, the factors effecting women empowerment and its role in the society has been illustrated. Major factors determining women empowerment are economic decision making, household decision making and decision about physical movement. Women authority on spending money and daily purchases leads to economic decision making. Similarly, if a women can take decision about family planning and decision about her own or her child health, so it will lead to household decision making. Physical movement decision is determined by going to shopping or hospital alone and going to another city alone. These all factors combinedly leads to women empowerment.

Women empowerment plays a vital role in the society. Importance of women empowerment is evident from the existing literature. With the increase in the women empowerment there will be an increase in the economic development, which will in turn improve standard of living, similarly women empowerment will help in women health, education, awareness, and poverty reduction.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Women have very sacred status in Islam. Before Prophet (PBUH) in the times of ignorance girls were buried alive but after Prophet (PBUH) women get very good status. Women get their due rights; in times of ignorance, she was treated badly but after ignorance she get a better status. And in Islam women get the right to job and she have the right to choose her spouse according to her wish there is no restrictions on her. And she has the right to live her live the way she wants. But within the prescribe limit and those limitations are not as such that she can't breathe. The are many examples in history which proved that women could do her own business and there are not any restrictions on her for example Hazrat Khadija (R.A), she was a successful businesswoman. There is heaven in feet of a mother that is a woman is in the sight of ALLAH. And she is equal with men in good deeds and bad deeds women will get the same reward and punishment as the men. He also discus in his study that women are important part of society and in Islam they have a special place. Women are given importance in Islam and are given their rights. Muhammad (PBUH) said "The believers with perfect faith are those who have the best disposition and the best of you are those who are best to their wives"

The women could play an important role in the economic development of a country, because half of our population contains on women in Pakistan, which is 48.7%. So, how a country can be economically developed if the half of population is not educated and deprived of their rights. The whole burden of the family is on one person so if the other person of the family the wife also get education so she will support her family and husband easily. Not only family but it will also add to the economic development of a country, the GDP will increase, and the capital of the country will also increase if they start to do jobs or business. And the production will also increase. Pakistani women are very strong they only need a push to their success. Masood (2018) elaborate the importance of women for economic development of a country. He argues that those countries are more developed in which women are empowered and he support his statement by giving example of Sweden.

Education is the key factor for women empowerment. If a woman is educated, she will be aware of her rights and if someone violate her rights she will take stand for her. Education is the end of every step toward women empowerment if we need economic development so we will need education if need a happy and healthier nation we will need education. So an educated women is a empowered women.

Source: Authors constructed diagram

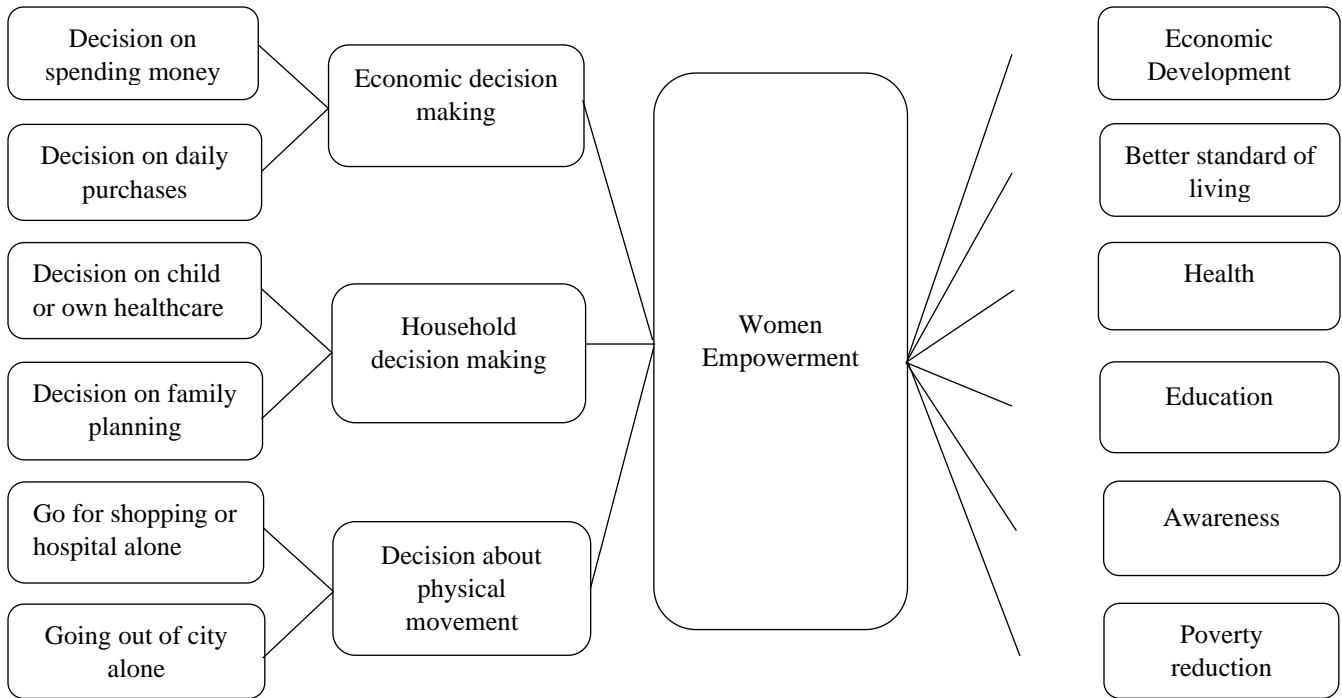


Figure-3: Conceptual Framework of women empowerment

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Women are integral part of the society because women are at least half of the population about 49%. For economic development of a country women are very important if they contribute as equal as men so Pakistan well be a developed nation from a developing. For this its mandatory, the woman must be empowered, and education is the key factor of empowerment. Empowered in simple words is living a life according to one own choice and have power over their life and can do what they want. In Islam women get a sacred position. The traditional mullahs wrongly interpret Islam about girls’ rights but if one read the Holy Book Quran so they will get to know that what is the status of women in Islam. In front of ALLAH every person is equal whether men or women. Pakistan begins a male dominate society doesn’t give equal rights to women and now it is the responsibility of government to make such bills which are in favor of women. The women should believe in themselves. Women get independence because of education, if they are educated, they will be independent and confident. There will be no restrictions on them. An educated women can do good decision for herself as compared to uneducated women. An educated women have freedom to choose her spouse because she is mature enough. Education also effects women mobility in society. Women have freedom of movement if she is educated. Education has made mobility of women easy in today’s world. Girls of today are more mobile than their mothers and grandmothers. Therefore, this study concluded that woman empowerment is too essential for socio-economic and economic development of Pakistan. This study recommended that government should focus on female education to empower the woman to enhance the economic development.

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