

## **Factors Effecting Women's Empowerment in Baluchistan**

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### **Abstract**

*Empowerment of women is not only vital for their welfare but also for the development of country. It requires the just environment where women can exercise their rights without any threat of violence and impediments. These impediments are present in every region of the world however their nature and intensity varies from one to other region based on its social, economical, geographical and religious identity. Developed and under developed countries are eager to improve the status of women and for this it is significant to understand those factors which effect the empowerment of women.*

*This paper is an attempt to explore the various determinants on women's empowerment specific to Baluchistan and while doing so this review will also cover the intermingled effects of these factors on women's position in a society.*

### **Introduction**

Baluchistan is the least developed province in Pakistan (Javaid, 2010) in terms of its socioeconomic position. Statistics reveal that poverty in Baluchistan is higher than in Pakistan in general: more than half (58%) of the population lives below the poverty line. Furthermore, it has the lowest

literacy rate, 29.81 percent compared to a national average of 39.69 percent (Sial and Basit, 2010, p. 8).

Women in Baluchistan are suffering from various discriminations in social, economic, cultural and political field. According to the report of Aurat Foundation during 2014, 187 cases of violence against women were reported across Baluchistan which is higher than in 2013 when it was 151 cases (Notezai, 2015). In terms of health women suffers lack of medical services, sometimes due to the non-availability of medical centers in their areas and sometimes there is a deficiency of medical equipment and trained medical staff. In Baluchistan, maternal mortality is 785 per 100,000 live births, compared to the all-Pakistan rate of 276 to 280 deaths per 100,000 live births (Hanif and Qazi, 2012) is an indicator of their deplorable condition. Same situation prevails in the field of women's education where overall literacy rate in Baluchistan is 26.6% with the percentage of 36.5 % males and 15% females (PDMA, 2012). This situation further worsen in rural areas where female literacy is only 2% compared to 26% of the province (Notezai, 2015). Overall the participation of women in formal income generating activities is quite low. However, women do involve in daily household chores, agricultural activities and looking after livestock with the fact that these all are not paid work rather classified as household or family work. Other side, some women are also engaged in producing traditional embroidery items though they depend on the services of middle man to access the city markets which in turn decreases their income.

Keeping in view this situation of women in Baluchistan the word empowerment has special significance for them. Before moving towards the discussion on the notion of women's empowerment we briefly look at the concept of empowerment.

Empowerment is the term which is been widely discussed in literature, and is accredited to be multi-dimensional and difficult to define (Paterson, 2008; Chaudhry, Nosheen and Lodhi, 2012). It is multidimensional because it covers social, economic, psychological and political aspects of one's life (Pettit, 2012). It is hard to define because it has different meanings in different socio-cultural contexts (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005). Scholars agreed that empowerment is a process consisting of several empowering activities and that people who used to be disempowered, by participating in such activities, can become empowered. This participation enhances their capacity to utilize resources to bring about improvements in their lives. This improvement is determined by the quality of life achieved, which enables them to make decisions about their life. (Kabeer, 2012). This argument helps us to understand the significance of empowerment in relation to women.

### **Women's empowerment**

The importance of empowerment for women is high because in general they have little control over their lives. Scholars argue that understandings of empowerment and its implications are different for every woman, depending upon her societal upbringing, cultural and religious background, age and ethnicity, economic and social conditions and understanding of gender relations (Mosedale, 2005; Pettit, 2012). Kabeer (1999, p. 435) argued that 'women's empowerment is about the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability'. She asserted that women should gain the capacity to make their own life choices, in regard to their marriage, education, livelihood or any other matter that significantly affects their lives. In similar vein, Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall (2008) stated that women's empowerment is to enable

women to understand their rights and to control over their lives and its decisions, thus to exert influence in society.

As discussed earlier that empowerment is a multi-dimensional notion, the World Economic Forum 2005 categorizes 'economic participation, political empowerment, educational attainment, health and wellbeing as dimensions of women's empowerment' (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi, 2005, p. 2). Chung et al. (2013) included the media as fifth dimension in the list, along with economic contribution, education, government and health. Empirically, there is a strong correlation among these dimensions however it is also important to consider that empowerment in one dimension does not always give empowerment in other dimensions (Mason and Smith 2003). For example, a study conducted by (Khan and Bibi, 2011) on a Participatory Development Project in Baluchistan found that the project improved women's decision-making as well as their economic activities, but did not significantly affect their movement and control over income. The most commonly cited dimensions are economic and social which are quite interrelated.

### **Women's socio economic empowerment**

Socio-economic empowerment for women is fundamental for their development. Both the terms stand separately yet interlinked with each other. Economic empowerment deals with the free will of joining any profession and then earns its benefits. It includes women's control over their earnings as well as exercising their property rights (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2012). Being an earning member of home, women can participate in household expenditures which will consequently raises their status in home. Moreover, their male counterparts can acknowledge their participation (Isran and Isran, 2001). Study witnessed

that earning status strengthened their position in decision making (Naeem et.al,2014).

Social empowerment denotes to the equal status of women at home and in society. It also refers to women own understanding of their capacities (Khan & Bibi, 2011). Social empowerment helps women to find and make choices, and select that, which best suits their needs. Economically strengthen women would me more aware about their social status which helps them to strengthen their relationship with family members. Therefore, women in Baluchistan are eager to economically strengthen their families by involvement in income generating activities which support their families and also empower them financially and socially (Naeem et.al, 2014).

However, economic independency does not always necessarily give women social status. Hence, (Awan, 2012) suggested that to achieve gender equality women require economic, social, reproductive and political autonomy.

In Baluchistan, empowerment of women is affected by several factors; following discussion will explore them in detail.

### **Patriarchy and women's empowerment**

Patriarchy is the normative system that constrains women's empowerment (Habiba, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016). Men hold power over the household (Habiba, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016) and occupy the vast majority of positions in social, economic and political institutions, especially in the highest posts. Women are seen as inferior, mainly because of their biological makeup, the social and cultural interpretations of which provide justification for their dependency on men for their financial needs and for protection from the outside world.

Any attempt to empower women and transform patriarchy will encounter male resistance. The study conducted by (Sohail, 2014) in Lahore,

Pakistan, found that men feel insecure if power is extended to women; the gendered division of roles and responsibilities is one of the most effective ways of establishing and reproducing patriarchal norms in society, which in turn strengthens men's domination and women's subordination. Scholars such as (Rowland, 1997 & Kiriti, Tisdell and Roy, 2006) agree that social and economic changes which can increase women's access to income do make men defensive, as this is perceived to be against the gender norms of Baluchistan's society (Naeem et.al, 2014). The patriarchal structure has deprived women from property rights, access to credit and access to land reform programs (Kabeer 2000; Habiba, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016). Furthermore it also refrains women from receiving education, restricting them only to specific low paid jobs, creating a male-oriented market system, and lastly it condones harassment techniques (Connell, 2011) which further discourage women.

### **Cultural restrictions and women's empowerment**

The culture of Baluchistan is primarily tribal, patriarchal and conservative in nature (Khosro et al, 2011; Perveen, 2013). The prevailing cultural practices such as dowry, exchange marriages, bride price, property division and women given in compensation for murder and honour killings are serving as great impediments in availing women's empowerment. While analyzing the purpose of these practices we can understand that it brings women under the unquestioned authority of men and positioned them as men's property. These practices basically negate the role of women as decision maker for their own life. The effects of cultural based restrictions are not limited to their very personal sphere of life but it also covers other aspects of women's lives, such as financial. This is affirmed by the (United Nations

Industrial Development Organization UNIDO 2013) that due to cultural norms, women do not have easy access to market so they possess little knowledge about market system which eventually affects their capacity to deal in markets.

Women are also deprived from owning property rights, most of the time their husbands, brothers, fathers or male relatives prevent them from exercising their legal rights (Khan, 2006). This is because culturally men are the heads of family and they are economically responsible for covering the household expenditures. Furthermore, they can easily look after the matters pertaining to property while women cannot as they are bound to home and have controlled mobility due to cultural restrictions. In similar vein, culture promulgates the rule of observing purdah for women which mean it does not approve men to women interaction and thus restrains women from leaving home for availing education, training or job.

Cultural restrictions are deeply embedded in the patriarchal society of Baluchistan which makes difficult for women to escape or avoid them and seek legal help. The reason of this is the women's little legal knowledge and weak states policies which decreases their chances to claim their rights (Quisumbing&Pandolfelli, 2009). Thus, most of the times, when women become the victim of these constraints they can hardly make their ways to be empowered. Parallel to cultural, women have low status in society which makes them more vulnerable. They suffered with poverty more than men do. Their income sources are meager; access and utilization of resources are lesser. This deprivation leads to their long term dependency on men which effect their empowerment. Government of Pakistan and UNICEF (2012, p. 33) also reported that: 'a gender gap exists across most well-being indicators in terms of capacities, access to resources and opportunities; inequality exists

within the family, in the workforce, in the political sphere, in education and in health care', affecting women's status. Consequently, women need access and control over resources which could strengthen them to gear up their energies for achieving empowerment (Vijayanthi,2002). One of these resources is education which is discussed as follows.

### **Education and women's empowerment**

In Baluchistan, illiteracy is one of the pivotal factors which severally create hindrances in women's empowerment. While comparing women's literacy situation with other provinces, the figures show that Baluchistan has the largest percentage of women, who have never attended school that is 85%, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 72%, GilgitBaltistan 68%, Sindh 58%, Punjab 51% and Islamabad16% (NIPS 2013, p. 38). There are several reasons of women's low literacy in Baluchistan, parentsprefer son to educate rather daughter as they will be married earlier while men are expected to be breadwinner of the family. Parents consider daughters as liabilities (Ambreen&Mohyuddin, 2013) and fear that any investment in their daughter's education would be beneficial for her future husband or in-laws (Dollar &Gatti 1999), who may not allow her to work (Chaudhary, 2010).Moreover, educating women is still considered as modernization of women, as then she may interfere in decision making process which is not accepted in cultural society (Sheehan, 1994). Another reason of women's illiteracy also includes their confined mobility and non-availability of primary or higher schools near to their residency.

The significance of educationfor women's empowerment is indispensable. It does not only increase their knowledge and understanding of gender issues but also enables them to improve their livelihoods. Educated women have a



sense of control over their lives which gives them confidence in decision-making. It helps them in achieving better employment opportunities and thus improves their status.

### **Restrictions on women's free movement**

The ability to move freely is one of the chief indicators of women's empowerment (Malhotra, Schuler &Boender, 2002) and restriction on this is the prime constraint to achieving emancipation for women in Baluchistan (Paterson, 2008; Gulistan, 2014). The lack of mobility can create isolation, which eventually deprives women from receiving benefits of development. There are several reasons counted by the scholars, for the lack of women's mobility. Scholars such as (Kirti, Tisdell& Roy, 2006 and Lachance-Grzela& Bouchard, 2010) stated that women are bound to their home, due to their responsibilities of child care, household chores and home-based agricultural activities. Furthermore, conservative customs exercise constraints, such as strict norms of observing the veil (purdah), men's control on women's movements, and a male-oriented market system(Gulistan, 2014).

On account of lack of movement, women remain illiterate, unemployed. Due to their denied access to educational institutions, hospitals and basic health units, they are not able to get benefits from any welfare program. They are dependent on men in terms of having access to information and markets, so as to sell or purchase any products/items.It is further argued by (Palriwala, 2000, p. 49) that due to restricted mobility, women are believed to know little about anything, compared to men, who possess more knowledge on account of their free mobility.Additionally, the patriarchal norms do not allow women to go outside unaccompanied. The men justify this restriction as giving protection to their women, to save the family's respect and honour (Paterson, 2008; Weiss, 2010).

The findings of a study by (Naz&Chaudhry, 2011) in Malakand, affirm that restricted mobility is an important factor in the disempowerment of women as they are not aware of social services and economic opportunities available in the society which they can utilize. Consequently, they cannot enter into the mainstream of empowerment.

#### Infrastructure and women's empowerment

Infrastructure is one of the main indicators of developed society where well equipped education and health centers, better road networks, easy access to transport and safe travel ensures the overall wellbeing of its citizens. The underdeveloped infrastructure is one of the reasons for the lack of improvement in social life, health, education and economic opportunities in the region.

In Baluchistan, women have limited access to educational, occupational and health care institutes, due to the non-availability of such institutes and also due to the poor transport and road systems. It is further emphasized by (Kabeer, 2012) that the lack of safe transport, poses more challenges to women's mobility. The holistic impacts of this can be easily observed on women's empowerment. For example, if parents do desire education for their daughters, they will prefer to send their daughters to girls' school, but in Baluchistan there are few girls' schools. Education for All Plan Baluchistan (2011-2015, p. 32) also reports that enrolment of girls in primary schools is much less than that for boys, due to girls' lack of access to primary schools and the availability of fewer girls' schools (Government of Baluchistan, NCHD & UNESCO, 2011) . Girls who have completed primary school can hardly ever continue their education because of the non-availability of educational institutions in their area; in any case, these are mostly located in main cities. Furthermore, the schools themselves hardly

encourage their pupils to linger: about 93% of the schools are without electricity, 83% are without boundary walls and 74% lack water and sanitation facilities (Government of Baluchistan, NCHD & UNESCO 2011, pp. 24-25). This situation of schools in the region is not encouraging for the parents to enroll their children and therefore most of the girls remained uneducated.

### **Insecurity and women's empowerment**

The ongoing instability is not only threatening the general population but also the women as they are on high risk to be assaulted. It is reported by (Brohi&Khattak, 2013) that, regional conflict has increased gender inequalities in Baluchistan. Due to security concern women's movement is restricted which means they can no longer be a part of empowering activities such as education or job.

Instability is an emerging reason for women's lack of participation in earning activities, leading them to work close to home or in areas where the security situation is better. If they cannot find a job in a safe locality, then they prefer to stay at home. For example, (Shah, 2014) reports that most of the female teachers in Baluchistan's rural areas quit their profession, refusing to perform their duties in insecure areas, or left the area for security reasons. Similarly (Detraz, 2004) highlighted that due to security concerns women access to health services is restricted. This adversely affects the socio-economic development of the region, decreasing access to welfare services while increasing gender discrepancies (Brohi&Khattak 2013, p. 7). This insecure situation in Baluchistan is another factor which hampers the empowerment of women in the region.

The above factors are commonly cited in regard to hampering women's empowerment in Baluchistan. They adversely affect the well-being of

women, and contribute to their low position in the mainstream of development. These factors may be treated separately but at the same time are very much linked with each other thus has a direct influence on women's education, mobility and socio-economic status which leads to their disempowerment.

### **Conclusion**

The tribal patriarchal structure with its strong cultural implications, illiteracy, limited female mobility, poor infrastructure and security concerns, in Baluchistan play a central role in women's low status. While analyzing these factors, patriarchy appears to be the vital factor effecting women's empowerment as it is directly associated with other factors except infrastructure and security concerns. In a sense that patriarchy holds power on women's lives and they are always bound to seek permission from men. Therefore, it is necessary to bring change in men's attitude towards women so that women can exercise their rights. Creating environment of empowerment never mean to disempower or threaten men's authority but to encourage women to enjoy their human rights.

In today's world it is almost difficult to eschew from the sufferings of women who constitutes almost half of the world population. Its importance is also emphasized by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals 2000. Gender equality and the empowerment of women is the third of the eight goals on that all 191 UN member states have agreed to try to achieve by the year 2015. For achieving the main goal of women's empowerment three areas are targeted, women's access to education, equal employment opportunities and political participation. The MDGs complement other international declarations on gender equality in education, employment and political participation. These are all significant ends to attain the women's

empowerment goal and across the world the signatory countries have been devising policies and implementing different programs through their government as well as non-government bodies. Similarly in Pakistan government and non-governmental organizations are trying to support the women in attaining empowerment. Interms of providing legal security to women,government passed different laws such as Women's Protection Bill 2006,[Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace 2010](#),Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2012 and Anti-honour killing and Anti-rape bills 2016. However, these laws are not proved to be much effective in providing protection to women because of weak implementation. In addition,government and non-government organizations are well aware with the importance of women's economic position which in most cases leads to raise their social status. To this end government initiated in 2008, Benazir income support programwhich provides financialsupportto the poor women. Currently this program is working across four provinces of Pakistan including Baluchistan. In similar vein,several organizations are also providing microcredit and giving short term trainings to women for bringing stability in their economical position. Nonetheless, these efforts are not sufficient as still there is a dire need to introduce further reforms which help women to raise their status in society. To meet this end it is necessary to initiate gender based awareness programs especially in remote areas where most of the population resides. The focus of these programs should not be only the women but also the men as their support to women for attaining the empowerment is inevitable especially in the regions like Baluchistan.

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