

Hurdles of Women Empowerment in Pakistan (A case Study of Balochistan)

Social Sciences and Humanities

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to understand the hurdles in women empowerment, this review has focused more on the hurdles specific to the hurdles of women empowerment in Balochistan. In this study, fifteen research articles have been reviewed to come to a conclusion. Different people give different meanings to the word women empowerment, it is important to look at it in relation to cultural, social, ideological and geographical landscape of an area. This review not only sees women empowerment as the role of women in decision making, but also women's status as equal to men in participation in the society. The women related issues have never been a priority of the government and the availability of authentic data and relevant data in this area is limited, especially in the case of Balochistan.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, Religious Perspective, Decision Making, forms of aggression, cultural norms

Introduction

At its inception, Pakistan focused more on its survival. Afterwards it seemed that the country would give priority in empowering women. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in a speech in the year 1944, reprimanded the past socially endorsed negative treatment of women when he stated: "No nation can rise to the height of glory unless your women are side by side with you; we are victims of evil customs. It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable condition in which our women have to live". (as quoted in Mumtaz and Shaheed, 1987:183) There is a range of literature available on the definitions of women empowerment. According to

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United Nations Guidelines on Women's Empowerment "Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally" (*The Guardian*, April 21, 2011). Hurdles in empowering women are not something new in this country. Throughout the history of the country the problems of women empowerment have hardly come to lime-light. Women's rights are highly transgressed, with the particular reference to their susceptibility to violence of high degree, their weaknesses in the conflict stricken areas and refusal of participating in political affairs and absence of access to justice are the most well-known. This trend of denial and transgression has kept Pakistan at the lower ebb in the developing countries (Khan, 2009, p. 15)The hurdles in women empowerment may be similar in nature as a whole, but it has never been discussed in context of Balochistan. As women in Baluchistan are suffering and analyzing them from an in-depth perspective would help us to overcome the sufferings of women when once we understand the essence of the issue of women empowerment in Balochistan. "It is a common concept in Balochistan that women are "just housewives and are not playing any significant role at the economic front"(Bukhari & Achackzai, 2011).This review will discuss and relate the hurdles of women empowerment in Balochistan like that of "War-like situation", "everyday forms of aggression" (domestic violence, abuse, sexual harassment), "socio -cultural norms" forces that restricts women, cultural constructions of gender, the different forms of insecurities, "Legal forms/sanctioned forms of violence" (forced and unequal marriages, dowry). The following questions have been discussed in detail in context of Balochistan. 1. To identify the hurdles in Women empowerment. 2. To discuss the factors that creates hurdles in women empowerment. 3. To discuss the resistance towards the hurdles of women empowerment.4. How women can go an extra mile to change the perspective of society towards their rights and empowerment (Rashid, Bibi, & Sirajuddin, 2012). Therefore, research articles relevant to our topic are reviewed to find answers to our research questions.

War-Like Situation

Warlike situations everywhere in the world, create hurdles in women empowerment. "Balochistan, the largest province in Pakistan, is the site of an armed insurgency by ethnic Baloch demanding autonomy or independence". In Balochistan province, there are several separatist movements like BLA,

BRP, and BLF, which are fighting against the state of Pakistan for getting independence from the federation of Pakistan (Brown, Dawood, Irantalab, & Naqi, 2012, p. 1).

These prolonged separatist movements have worsened the everyday life of women. Women feel insecure as their children are exposed to the warlike situation. Such incidents of violence limit the women to their houses. Their role to participate in the society is restricted. War also affects women's power over the everyday aspects of life. War makes many livelihoods less secure, and increased pressure on economic security can push women into unsafe and illegal occupations. In Sierra Leone, war zones became a space in which women could engage in looting and other lucrative but dangerous and illegal economic activities, in a context in which 'safe' spaces such as refugee camps offered limited options (Abdullah & Fofana-Ibrahim, 2010). In Bangladesh, the authoritarian response to the conflict in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has been implicated in rape and sexual harassment of women from ethnic minority groups (Mohsin, 2010)

Every Day Forms of Aggression

Those women that study in educational institutions do face sexual harassment in one or the other ways. In rural areas women are discouraged by their own family members to attend school or college due to fear of being sexually harassed. Sexual harassment is another deterrent to girls' and women's pathways of empowerment (Khan, 2009). "In the Balochistan Assembly, the Government has submitted and passed 2 legislations on domestic violence and promotion of breast feeding and child nutrition" (Zia, 2014) Evidence from around the world highlights how sexual harassment discourages girls and women from attending school, engaging in politics, taking up paid work (Wilson, 2008).

Socio- Cultural Norms

The circumstances in the third world are quite different in the context of socio-cultural norms with regard to women. The majority of the women is limited to serving the household responsibilities which is a time-consuming duty with least rewards and payment (Rehman, 2013, p. 6).

In the province of Balochistan women's mobility is restricted to a great extent. In rural areas women can be hardly seen roaming in bazaar and market places. Their role in buying goods/groceries for themselves is limited and male member takes this responsibility. In some areas women may be allowed to go out to bazaar but only when they are accompanied by male members of their family. The incidence of such socially constructed role is

slightly less in urban centers. This reduces the role of women in decision making and buying goods of their own choice. Even at the annual festivals of EID women cannot buy the clothes of their own choice, this responsibility of buying new clothes is also undertaken by the husband or male members of the family usually in joint families. Social conditioning with reference to women is so strong that legislators from across the political parties united to oppose the government's "honour killing" Bill 2005 epitomizing the mindset regarding women's lives and male control over them. Seeking to outlaw adjudication from jirgas and panchayats on murders in the name of honour, the Bill got watered down by making it possible for the murderer to get pardoned by the family of the killed woman. Given that most of the so called "honour killings" are by family members, pardon from the heirs of the dead woman is easy (Mumtaz, 2010, 47).

Legal Forms/ Sanctioned Forms of Violence

Institutions that are backed by cultural, religious and customary practices come in sanctioned form of violence. These include forced and child marriages, customs of honour killings, dowry, female excision, laws that restrict abortion. The kind of sanctioned forms of violence puts women in dangerous positions and may harm themselves in response to such situations.

In the context of Balochistan province, women's mobility is limited due to the customs of Pardah (veil), the situation becomes more strict towards women's mobility in rural areas. In rural areas and even in some cities of Balochistan, it is customary that men and women have to sit separately in religious ceremonies (Eid & Ashura) and funerals. One of the forms that pervasive insecurity threats (or perceived or constructed threats) take is socio-cultural norms that dictate women's behaviour, particularly their mobility and relationships. The best example of this is purdah or the practice of seclusion or segregation, as found mainly in Muslim Asia and the Arab world. In the Pathways work, this relates mainly to the 'strongly corporate forms of patriarchy' in the belt of countries from the Middle East and North Africa and the northern plains of the South Asian subcontinent, including Pakistan and Bangladesh. (Kabeer, 2011) In Pakistan women are targeted by religious fanatics in several ways. Malala Yousafzai is the resident of Swat Valley in the Northern Areas of Pakistan who fought courageously for her cause of education in the adverse conditions of the Taliban rule in the Valley. Therefore, Taliban attempted to murder her for her struggle for education which has made her world famous for her valor and cause of education. (Vuts, 2013). The incident of attack on Malala a school-going girl from Swat got global attention. It is known that Islam has given more rights to women than any other religion of the world, but the misguided so called religious

scholars try their level best to restrict women education and hence their constructive role in the society. This mindset is prevalent even in government hierarchy, for example, in Pakistan, a 2006 bill against domestic violence was opposed by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs as un-Islamic and (Mumtaz 2010)

We know that whether or not abortion is permitted or prohibited by law, women will seek abortion services and obtain abortions. They will seek them because of their social, economic, health or other personal circumstances. They will seek them because they have experienced rape and sexual assault. If safe services are not available, they will turn to unsafe ones. Even in countries with the most punitive of laws, there are flourishing markets in providers who offer abortion services; this leaves poorer women more vulnerable to impairment, illness through infection and death than middle-class women who are able to pay for safer options (Cornwall, Standing & Lynch, 2008). For the poorest women, and for young women with no money and no access to information about what services might be available, the only option is self-abortion, despite the steep risks it involves. Women stand a massively higher risk of dying as a result of pregnancy in countries with restrictive abortion laws than in countries where safe services are legal and available. (Cornwall, Standing & Lynch, 2008).

Keeping abortion aside, women in Balochistan do not have access to standard medical facilities especially pregnant women. The most rural population consists of quacks that further deteriorate the situation of pregnancy. Women develop post-delivery complications due to unhygienic facilities and mishandling by quacks. Even in cities, there is a lack of standard medical facilities for pregnant women. When it comes to abortion, doctors avoid carrying out such cases because of fear of the troublesome consequences. So the situation again becomes favorable for quacks carry out such cases in hidden facilities. Women's health is affected due lack of such medical facilities and this is reflected in her weak economic productivity. (Balochistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2010)

Conclusion

The traditional environment is highly conservative, some religious elements and organizations in Balochistan are reluctant to address the issues of these genders, especially when there is talk about the women rights and empowerment. In a male dominated society of Balochistan, it is perceived that when a woman gets empowered she becomes harmful for the society, which is completely a wrong perception. It is thought that woman's role as

caretaker of children is undermined when shows less concern toward home/household and family's bargaining power, In developed countries stress is laid on participatory development, both male and female work together to improve the quality of human lives, the review study analyses that what interventions should be taken to socioeconomic development and gender empowerment coupled with woman's self-esteem. Problems need to be identified and tackled at the grass - root level. According to the human rights commission more than 60% women from country reside in conditions that are tough and torturous. It is the need of hour to start an awareness program about women's rights across the remote areas of Balochistan. Socio-economic condition can be uplifted by improving education and equip women them with better decision-making abilities. The perception needs to be changed and women empowerment must not be seen as a threat to male supremacy. Moreover, the ending gender inequality and gender bias & ending assault against women should be ended.

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