Individual, Familial, and Socio-Cultural Determinants of Women's Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This research paper assesses the relative strength of individual, familial, and socio-cultural factors that determine women's empowerment. A sample of 1000 married women of age ranged from 21-49 years (M_{age} =35. 55 years, SD= 7.80) from Punjab, Pakistan was included in the study. Women's empowerment was measured by Composite Women's Empowerment Index. Stepwise Regression Analysis was carried out to assess the relative contribution of predictors in women's empowerment. The results show that individual-level factors (paid job, personal income, own property, self-esteem, gender awareness perception, internal locus of control, and legal awareness), familial level factors (conjugal age, family head, and husband's support), and socio-cultural factor (use of mobile phone) appeared as significant predictors of women's empowerment. The value of R^2 indicated that 57 percent of the variance in women's empowerment was accounted for by these three levels of determinants. The study concluded that in a patriarchal culture like Pakistan, women's personal attributes were the most significant enabling factors to empowerment, yet attainment of women's empowerment was also contingent to their position in the family, the attitude of the family, and use of communication technology (i.e., mobile phone). The scope of the study and policy were also discussed.

Keywords: women's empowerment, self-esteem, internal locus of control, husband's support, use of mobile phone.

JEL Classification Codes: J11, J12, J16, J24, K38, O15, Z13.

INTRODUCTION

Women's empowerment is a process which provides the women a power or ability to challenge some situation (Basu & Basu, 2003). The issue of gender inequality is a shared feature of developing countries, where women usually keep silent as their voice is hushed due to intrinsic cultural and economic elements. Pakistan is an Islamic country where almost 50 percent of the population consists of women who lag behind men in various walks of life. According to the government of Pakistan (2013), the rate of adult literacy in Pakistan is 57 percent and for men and women, it remains 45 percent and 69 percent respectively. The figures of Gender Gap Index (GGI) showed that the position of Pakistan in the list of 134 countries remained 112, 126, 127 and 132 from years 2006 to 2009 consecutively (Mehar, 2009).

Almost one-fourth of Pakistani women were brought in employment during 2014; while, the rate of men's labor force participation in the same year was 83 percent ("World Development Indicators", 2016). However, in line with the international efforts, the Pakistani government has also taken initiatives to improve the position of women (Haider, Asad, Fatima, & Abidin, 2017). In this regard, Pakistan has signed numerous conventions and declarations associated to gender parity and the abolition of violence against women, for instance, Millennium Development Goal (MDG), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action etc. Regardless of various efforts by governments and non-government organizations, the position of women in Pakistan is still depressing. The socio-economic problems in Pakistan will persist until women are brought in the flow of development process. Hence, the question arises: how can we make our women as effective members of the economy and empower them? What are the contributory factors that can help women to attain empowerment? These critical questions can be answered by investigating the determinants of women's empowerment through valid and reliable measures. Keeping in view the significance of the matter, the current study was planned to measure the determinants of women's empowerment in Pakistan and to suggest suitable recommendations to advance their empowerment in the society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the determinants of women's empowerment highlights various factors. Age is among the salient factors that determine the empowerment of women, and the empowerment of women is positively associated with different stages of their age (Sheikh, Meraj, & Sadat, 2015). As age at marriage concerns, the women who are married at a tender age (teenage) are not able to get their say recognized in their in-laws (Khan & Maan, 2008, Rahman, Karmaker, & Mia, 2009). Jumani, Safdar, Bhatti, and Ghazi. (2012) counted conjugal life or marriage duration as a predictor of women's empowerment. The women of age equal to their husbands are reported as highly empowered and women older to their husbands are less empowered. In both economic and household decision making (Haque Islam, Tareque, & Mostofa 2011). A wide body of literature has highlighted the positive role of education in empowering women (e.g., Heaton, Huntsman, & Flake, 2005; Khan & Awan, 2011; Khan & Maan, 2008; Kishor & Gupta, 2004; Parveen & Leonhauser 2004; Rahman, et al., 2009). In a study in Bangladesh, Haque et al. (2011) emphasized that education for a woman was a very crucial prerequisite for empowering her in all walks of life. Husband's education also played a significant role to respect the wishes of wife and encourage her to participate in decision making, and to give her autonomy of choices along with mobility.

Several researchers have supported paid job to have a positive relationship with empowerment (e.g., Heaton et al. 2005; Khan & Awan, 2011; Khan & Maan, 2008). It is well-established that women active in the economic sphere, who contribute within the household with their income, have greater economic power. This brings them higher bargaining position at home, therefore making them more empowered and is likely

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to challenge the core traditions that may restrain their capabilities to make choices (e.g., Khan & Awan, 2011). On the other hand, higher income of family may draw women out from the labor force, limiting their freedom of mobility and making them more dependent on men (Desai, 1994). The role of rights regarding land and property in empowering women is reinforced in many studies (Khan & Maan, 2008; Kishor & Gupta, 2004; Parveen & Leonhauser, 2004). Khan and Maan (2008) claimed that both property and dowry gifted to daughters on wedding had a significant positive influence on women's empowerment. Self-esteem: an understanding of one's quality as an object that is, how good or bad, valuable or worthless, positive or negative, or superior or inferior a person is (Thoits, 1999), and internal locus of control: the extent to which individuals consider that they can control the situation, rather than outside powers, determine what occurs in their lives (Rotter, 1966) have been reported to be positively related to psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995).

Social support is recognized as an essential component of the empowerment process. Support of family and husband's support, in particular, have been appeared to be positively correlated with women's empowerment. When a husband is kind to his wife and gives her the freedom of expression, she feels herself as empowered (Khan & Maan, 2008; Tijani & Yano, 2007). Khan and Maan (2008) concluded that women who had more brothers and had their perceived support were found more empowered than those having lesser number of brothers. Khan and Awan (2011) declared that the number of children in an array of familial factors was a significant determinant of women's empowerment.

Schuler, Hashemi, Riley, and Akhter (1996) declared that women who gave birth to sons were not more likely to be hit and crushed. Khan and Maan (2008) recognized that women who lived in families being headed by their husbands were found more empowered as compare to the women living in the families headed by others. On the other hand, some researchers considered the joint family system to be the in charge for women's empowerment (e.g., Rahman, 2009).

Women can attain empowerment if they themselves challenge the prevalent traditions and culture of any society to effectively maintain their own well-being (Kabeer, 2001; Swain & Wallentin; 2009). The positive association of awareness about legal and social rights with women's empowerment has also been supported by (Tijani & Yano, 2007).

Women's participation in outdoor activities and use of information and communication technology also boost up their empowerment. Political participation delivers women with awareness and sense of joint action that may support them to raise their voice and assist them to attain empowerment. (Khan & Maan, 2008). Ever increasing use of mobile phone has created awareness and new opportunities to empower women (Handapangoda & Kumara, 2012; Schuler, Islam, & Roltach, 2010). Media can also play a vital role to empower women (e.g., Parveen & Leonhauser, 2004; Rahman et al., 2009). Many studies have supported the role of social networking in empowering women (Kabeer, 2001; Khan & Maan, 2008; Parveen & Leonhauser, 2004). Woman's agency (ability) is largely shaped by social and cultural background even with her individual qualities. Kabeer (2001) contended that a residential

area also defined a disparity in women's autonomy. According to Chaudhry and Nosheen (2009), resilient Islamic point of view (religious opinion) could prove to be supportive to help empower the Muslim women. Sheikh (2015) declared observing veil (Purdah) to play a remarkably important role in women's empowerment.

The literature reveals that there are large numbers of factors that determine women's empowerment. These factors can be classified as individual, familial, and socio-cultural (Parveen & Leonhauser, 2004). This classification can help us to conclude which group of factors plays a significant role to empower women. Although individual, familial, and socio-cultural factors were separately assessed as determinants of women's empowerment in different studies, no study used all these three groups of factors collectively anywhere in the world. So the present study was an effort to combine all these factors so that the relative contribution of individual, familial and socio-cultural determinants can be assessed.

Moreover, women's empowerment is not a rigorously studied field in Pakistan. Data used in the previous studies in Pakistan were mostly of secondary nature. To the best of our knowledge, no study used women's empowerment index which covers all dimensions (viz., economic, familial, socio-cultural, and psychological). The current study was carried out to contribute in the existing literature by assessing the relative impact of a large number of factors (individual, familial, and socio-cultural) on women's empowerment by using Composite Women's Empowerment Index as a women's empowerment variable.

The study was carried out to:
- Assess the relative strength of the contribution of individual, familial, and socio-cultural factors in predicting women's empowerment
- To make women aware of their personal attributes that they may improve to empower themselves.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The participants of the present study included 1000 Pakistani women whose age was 21 to 49 year (M_{age} =35. 55 years, SD= 7.80). Lahore and Multan city districts of Punjab, Pakistan were purposively selected to represent upper and southern Punjab. A convenient sample of married women of reproductive age, who had minimum one child, took part in the study. Divorced or women who got separation from their husbands, and women who had no child were not included in the sample as some questions in the questionnaires were related with husband and child/children. The independent variables in the present study were classified into three groups: individual, familial, and socio-cultural (Parveen & Leonhauser, 2004): 1) Personal/ individual variables were (age, age at marriage, own education, paid job, personal income) measured via demographic datasheet, self-esteem was measured via the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965), internal locus of control was measured via the Scale of Self-Control by Reid and Ware (1974), gender awareness perception, legal awareness about rights, and political awareness were measured via Likert type self-report measures; 2) Familial factors (husband's education, husband's income, family system, family head, number of brothers, number of sons, conjugal age, age difference from husband) were measured via demographic data sheet and husband's support was measured by using 6 items regarding.

Attitude and behavior (i.e., empathy, love, support, and care etc.) of husband in different circumstances (e.g., when she is upset, when she needs the support of husband etc.); 3) socio-cultural factors like, Dowry: worth in rupees, and observing veil (Purdah), was measured via demographic datasheet. Use of mobile phone and the use of social networking were measured via a Likert scale. Berlin Social Support Scale (BSSS) by Schwarzer & Schulz (2000) was used to measure social support.

Women's empowerment as an outcome variable was measured via Composite Women's Empowerment Index (CWEI: Batool, 2017). The CWEI contains 33 items and consists of 4- dimensions: economic empowerment (viz. control over economic resources), familial empowerment (viz., decision making within family, and participation in family discussion), socio-cultural empowerment (viz., social mobility) and psychological empowerment (viz., meaningfulness, impact, self-efficacy, self-determination, problem-focused coping). Cronbach's alpha for the index was .80 in the present study. The data were collected through a survey method with the help of questionnaires that contained closed-ended questions catering to the objectives of the research. After taking the consent of the participants, they were briefed about the purpose of the study. The instructions relevant to the response format and completion of the questionnaire were provided to them. The participants were assured that the privacy and confidentiality of their information would be upheld. Initially, 1500 women were contacted to contribute to the study, but some refused to take part in the study, some detained questionnaires, and many of them returned incomplete questionnaires. Final data consisted of 1000 respondents.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics (N= 1000).*

Variable		Frequencies	Percentages
Age (Years)			
	21-30	335	33.5
	31-40	355	35.5
	41-49	310	31.0
Education			
	M.Phil./MS	120	12.0
	M.A/M.Sc	130	13.0
	B.A/B.Sc	70	7.0
	F.A/F.Sc	202	20.2
	Matric	180	18.0
	Middle	198	19.8
	Primary	100	10.0
Paid Job Status			
	In Paid Job	662	66.2
	Not in paid Job	338	33.8
Own Income (thousand PKR)			
	No income	338	33.8
	20-40	186	18.6
	41-60	283	28.3
	61 & above	193	19.3

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

As the main objective of this study was to assess the relative strength of predictors of women's empowerment, a stepwise regression analysis was run by using CWEI as a dependent variable after fulfilling the assumptions of regression analysis. Generally, a stepwise regression technique is followed by the researchers in order to decide on the "best" group of explanatory variables for a specific regression model. In such techniques, one may proceed either by introducing the independent variables one at a time (forward stepwise regression) or by including all the likely independent variables in one multiple regression and discarding them one at a time (backward stepwise regression). The decision to keep or drop a variable is commonly made on the basis of the contribution of that variable to the explained sum of squares, as arbitrated by the F test (Gujarati, 1995). The results are reported in Table 2.

Table 2: *Stepwise Regression Estimates for Predicting Women's Empowerment from Individual, Familial and Socio-Cultural Factors (N=1000)*

Final Model	B	S.E	*B*	t	Sig.
GAP	13.75	.561	.56**	4.52	.000
HSUPP	2.85	.462	.14**	6.17	.000
PJOB	2.91	.785	.09**	3.72	.000
LAWARE	1.91	.486	.09**	3.95	.000
SES	2.26	.492	.10**	4.61	.000
PINCOME	2.32	.764	.07**	3.05	.002
OPROP	1.25	.381	.07**	3.29	.001
UOMOB	1.04	.354	.06**	2.94	.003
ILOC	1.44	.499	.06**	2.89	.004
FAMHEAD	2.01	.714	.06**	2.82	.005
CAGE	.81	.335	.05*	2.44	.015

Note: **p<.01 *p <.05, R^2 =.57

GAP=gender awareness perception; HSUPP= husband's support; PJOB=paid job; LAWARE=legal awareness; SES =self-esteem, PINCOME=personal income; OPROP=own property; UOMOB= use of mobile; ILOC= internal locus of control; FAMHEAD=family head; CAGE= conjugal age.

By using Forward Stepwise Regression 11 models were found. Table 2 shows the final model (11th model) of stepwise regression that displays a set of the best possible determinants of women's empowerment. The results presented in Table 2 show that eleven factors appeared as significant predictors of women's empowerment (viz., PJOB, PINCOME, OPROP, FAMHEAD, SES, GAP, ILOC, LAWARE CAGE, HSUPP, UOMOB.). Out of eleven determinants, seven are related to individual-level determinants (viz., PJOB, PINCOME OPROP, SES, ILOC, GAP and LAWARE). Whereas, among the remaining four, three are related to family level determinants (viz., FAMHEAD, HSUPP, and CAGE) and only one determinant (viz., UOMOB) is found to be related to the socio-cultural domain. R^2= .46 for model 1, R^2= .50 for model 2, R^2= .52 for model 3, R^2=.54 for model 4, R^2=.55 for model 5.

$R2$= .56 for model 6, R^2= .56 for model 7, R^2= .56 for model 8, R^2= .57 for model 9, R^2= .57 for model 10 and R^2= .58 for model 11(p<.001, p<.01, p <.05), and all t-values are significant. So we may conclude that the predictor variables significantly contribute to the outcome variable (CWEI). Maximum variance = 46% is accounted for by GAP in model 1, additional 4.1 % is accounted for by HSUPP in model 2, PJOB adds 2.6% variance in model 3, LAWARE adds 1.7% more variance in model 4, additional 1.1% is accounted for by SES in model 5, PINCOME adds only 0.5% variance in model 6, OPROP adds 0.4% variance in model 7, UOMOB adds 0.4% variance in model 8, 0.3% variance is accounted for by ILOC in model 9, FAMHEAD adds 0.3% variance in model 10 and finally in model 11 CAGE adds only 0.3% variance. Eleven factors significantly account for 57% of variance in women's empowerment (CWEI). F-statistics for model '1' to model '11' = 849.529, 500.351, 369.374, 296.115, 247.533, 210.012, 183.288, 162.832, 146.473, 133.121, 122.162 with Ps< 0.001 consecutively support the fitness of all models.

DISCUSSION

Stepwise regressions were run to determine the relative strength of variables listed in the literature. The variables under

individual, familial, and socio-cultural groups of determinants were assessed in the prediction of women's empowerment. In the stepwise regression analysis, eleven variables appeared as significant determinants of women's empowerment (see Table 2). Gender awareness perception, paid job, personal income, legal awareness, self-esteem, internal locus of control, and own property (individual level determinants); family head, husband's support, and conjugal age (familial determinants), and use of mobile phone (socio-cultural) appeared as significant determinants of women's empowerment. Out of eleven determinants, seven belonged to the individual level, three were from familial level and only one belonged to socio-cultural level determinants. Overall the results demonstrate that the regression analysis produced a good model.

Gender Awareness Perception (GAP) appeared to be the most salient determinant and a positive correlate of women's empowerment. It means gender awareness perception increases women's empowerment more than all the rest factors. Our results coincide with the work of Swain and Wallentin (2009) that women's empowerment could be achieved if women themselves have the courage to challenge the prevailing culture and customs of any society to efficaciously advance their own welfare.

The results are also in agreement with theories (Kabeer, 2001), which state women's agency (their own willpower) as an important constituent of women's empowerment. Husband's support (HSUPP) appeared as a second salient variable that determined women's empowerment. The HSUPP as a positive correlate of women's empowerment signifies that increase in HSUPP of women increases their empowerment. Our results are in line with the results of studies by (Khan & Maan, 2008; Tijani & Yano, 2007) that husband's support and co-operation is a statistically significant predictor of women's empowerment.

The results in Table 2 indicate that paid job (PJOB) is a third most significant positive correlate of women's empowerment. It means that in case women are involved in the paid job, the level of their empowerment increases and the situation is vice versa where women are not engaged in a paid job. The results are in line with a study by Khan and Awan (2011) in the context of Pakistan that found employment of women among other factors as an important determinant of their empowerment. The results also support the economic bargaining theory of household that suggests that increase in the earned or unearned income increases the bargaining power of a woman that increases her empowerment in the household domain (Khan & Awan, 2011). A woman who shares within the household with her own independent savings and greater income has more economic power. This brings a higher bargaining power for her within the domestic sphere, thereby turning her to be more capable and probably to challenge the prevailing customs that assures her capability to make choices (Swain & Wallentin, 2009). The women who are not involved in paid work are destined to corrode their economic potential and restrict their human capital. Women's greater involvement in income-generating activities is a significant indicator of dipping down gender disparity (World Bank, 1991).

Legal awareness is found to be the fourth significant positive correlate of women's empowerment. The result that legal awareness of women increases their empowerment is in line

with (e.g., Berg, Horan & Patel, 2010; Tijani & Yano, 2007). Law constitutes a powerful tool to improve the situation of women. Women's awareness of their legal rights gives them a sense of empowerment; they raise their voice for their due rights in the society.

Self-esteem (SES) appeared as a fifth salient determinant and a positive correlate of women's empowerment. The positive relationship between self-esteem and women's empowerment illustrates that an increase in self-esteem leads to an increase in women's empowerment and vice versa.

Although the empirical literature is not available on the role of self-esteem as a determinant of women's empowerment, however, we find the evidence of its role in psychological empowerment at the workplace (Brockner, 1988; Spreitzer, 1995), which supports self-esteem as an antecedent of women's empowerment. Contrarily, the individuals having lower self-esteem are not found to see themselves having the potential to influence their organizations and job (Zimmerman, 1995).

Personal income (PINCOM) appeared to be the sixth positive correlate and determinant of women's empowerment which means women's empowerment increases with increased income. Economic bargaining theory of household suggests an increase in the earned or unearned income to increase the bargaining power of a woman, particularly the empowerment of a woman in the household. The results coincide with (e.g., Khan & Awan, 2011; Swain & Wallentin, 2009). Researchers like Nayak and Mahanta (2009) support income as an indicator of empowerment and consider it as a pre-condition in the process of empowerment.

Own Property (OPROP) appeared another (seventh) important factor that determined women's empowerment in this study. A positive value of the OPROP as a correlate indicates that an increase in possession of the property increases women's empowerment. Our results are in line with Roy and Tisdell (2002), in which it was found that women who owned land were treated in a better way by the male members of their families. The role of land rights and property in empowering women is supported by different studies (Heaton, 2005; Khan & Maan, 2008; Kishor & Gupta, 2004; Parveen & Leonhauser, 2004). Our result is also reinforced by Sheikh et al. (2015) that in Pakistan, ownership of the property has a positive and statistically significant effect on women's economic empowerment.

The use of mobile phone (UOMOB) appeared as an eighth significant positive correlate of women's empowerment, which demonstrates that an increase in the use of mobile phone by women may increase their empowerment. Our results are in line with (Handapangoda & Kumara, 2012; Schuler et al., 2010) that mobile phones boost-up choices and powers of dependent housewives in the developing countries.

The variable internal locus of control (ILOC) appeared as a ninth significant positive correlate of women's empowerment, which illustrates that an increase in the ILOC increases women's empowerment.

Though empirical literature is not available on the internal locus of control as a determinant of women's empowerment, yet we find the traces of its role in the psychological empowerment at the workplace (Spreitzer, 1995). When a woman considers that she has control over her actions and emotions, it supports her to deem that she can control the

situation, which may empower her socially and in the domestic field.

Family Head (FAMHEAD) appeared as a tenth positive predictor of women's empowerment. The results show that in case women live in a family headed by their husband, it increases their empowerment. The results are consistent with Harry (2011) that in a typical joint family system (like in Pakistan), father-in-law and mother-in-law are typically the heads of a family and are in charge of family affairs. In the majority of families earning goes under the control of mother-in-law, and she acts as a bookkeeper of the family expenditures. The needs of a daughter-in-law like, clothing etc. are usually fulfilled by her mother-in-law, which makes the woman economically dependent and induces in her the feelings of powerlessness.

The Conjugal Age (CAGE) appeared as an eleventh positive correlate of women's empowerment, which means women's empowerment increases with the increased year of marriage. Our results coincide with (Jumani, 2012; Khan & Maan, 2008; Parveen & Leonhauser, 2004) that conjugal age positively predicts women's empowerment. The results are also consistent with the standpoint of Kabeer (1999) that the conjugal age is the most likely indicator of women's empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

Results of the study illustrate that individual/personal level determinants (viz., gender awareness perception, paid job, legal awareness, self-esteem, own property, personal income, and internal locus of control) play a major role in empowering women followed by familial and social factors. Whereas, three factors out of individual-level determinants (viz., paid job, own property, and personal income) pertain to the economic domain of women's strength. Our findings support the leading role of individual-level factors in women's empowerment and provide additional arguments for the continuity of actions in the favor of opportunities for women to earn money for their economic independence by the paid job, own income through other resources, and controlling family expenditures.

Recommendations

The emergence of individual-level determinants as outstanding in the study suggests that women can avert their fate and improve their status by enhancing their personal strengths.

Familial factors (conjugal age, family head, and husband's support) also emerged to be significant in the women's empowerment. So the study also suggests that family members should change their attitude towards women, especially, husband's support can play a vital role to empower women. The development of national policies and programs aiming to substantially increase women's status in Pakistan should also consider women's economic position, as well as foster positive socio-cultural attitudes toward gender equality. The emergence of socio-cultural factor (use of mobile phone) as a salient predictor supports the provision of opportunities to women to learn the use of the latest communication medium to augment their empowerment.

Some of the limitations of the study minimize the generalizability of results: The sample was selected from two major cities of Punjab (Pakistan), so in future, data should be collected from other three provinces of Pakistan. The present study was a quantitative survey however, it is recommended

that qualitative studies should be conducted to explore the women's perspective on the dynamics that they believe to be vital in determining their status and empowerment. Education did not appear as a determinant of women's empowerment in the present study. So the indirect role of education through mediational analysis is recommended to be explored in future.

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