DETERMINANTS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY FROM DISTRICT RAWALPINDI, PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT: Women empowerment is one of the important issues of today world. Despite a major contribution in the development process, female population has low status as compared to men, specifically in the developing world. The situation in Pakistan is same. A vast majority of women in Pakistan are not authorized to make decision about their own life. The present study is designed to know the reasons of low women empowerment and suggest suitable policy measures to raise their status in the society. A sample of size 300 cases was selected using multistage random sampling technique from the District of Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. This study concluded that education, political participation and working for paid job of women are important determinants of women empowerment in the Punjab Province. Women also improve their empowerment status with increase in their conjugal age and cooperation of husbands.

Keywords: Women-empowerment, determinants, Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment has become a popular issue during the last two decades. Augmentation in women empowerment is as one of the strategy of UN and other international organizations for reducing population growth rate and poverty alleviation (Kabeer, 2001). Despite a major share of female population in the development of civilization, their status is not equal to those of men in the most of the world (Rahman and Naoroze, 2007). Globally, sixty percent of the unpaid work is done by women (UN, 2007), hence two third of the poor in the world are women (ESCAP, 2002). Inspite of all this only 1 % of the total worlds' asset is on their name (Al Mugharity, 2004). UNO is encouraging to increase the women empowerment under its organization 'Division for Advancement of Women (DAW)'. The Millennium Development Goals (3rd goal) urge to achieve the gender equality and women empowerment (UN, 2007). Pakistan is experiencing patriarchy. Women labour force participation rate in Pakistan is less (19.1 %) as compared to men (70.1%) (GOP, 2008). Pakistan has been ranked second lowest country of the world in this regard (World Economic Forum, 2009). To deprive the daughters of inheritance in favour of sons is a common practice in Pakistan (Zafar, 1993). Government of Pakistan launched National Policy of Development and Empowerment in 2002, which targeted to empower women in Pakistan economically, socially and politically. Increase in the number of seats for women in the National and Provincial assemblies, and Senate in Pakistan is the result of these policies. Yet Females in Pakistan are not authorized to take decisions even about their own life (Habib, 1996). Enhancing the women empowerment in the traditional societies like Pakistan is the need of hour. The present study aimed to identify the determinants of women empowerment in Punjab Pakistan and to present the policy implication for enhancing the women status in the country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The District Rawalpindi is nearly 300 km away from Faisalabad. It is situated in the north of Punjab on the Potwar Plato. Administratively District Rawalpindi is divided into eight town, these towns are further subdivided into 175 union councils. All the married women of reproductive age (15-49) excluding widows and divorced living in District Rawalpindi constitute the population for the present study, and hence considered the suitable respondents for this study. Therefore, a sample of 300 respondents was selected by using multistage random sampling technique. Two towns, Potohar town and Rawal town were selected at first

stage of sampling. At second stage, three urban and three rural union councils were selected from two selected towns of District Rawalpindi. In fourth stage of sampling 300 household were selected from six union councils of District Rawalpindi. Finally one respondent was selected from each household with suitable respondent. Number of households selected from each town and each union council was kept proportionate to the population size (Population Census-1998, 2000) of respective towns, and union councils. Selection of sampling units was made randomly in all stages. The survey was conducted during the last week of April, 2008.

The response variable -women empowerment- was measured at individual level in the light of prevailing norms of society. This variable was operationalized on the basis of four main dimensions viz. economic, decision making, mobility and communication. Economic dimension relates to women's control over household economic resources (Parveen, 2005; Sridevi, 2005). In present study, the measuring technique for this dimension, was made by preparing a matrix question based on seven indicators/items i.e. control over; routine household purchase, purchases of expensive items, purchase of gifts, use of saving, purchasing of clothes & makeup articles, control over household valuable, and sale or exchange of property. Responses were measured on 4-point rating scale by using score -1 for 'control of other family member on household economic resources', 0 for 'complete control of husband', 1 for 'control of husband but wife is also involved', and 2 for 'total control of wife' The sum of responses of an individual to all seven questions constitutes value of index variable for economic dimension. Hence, the values of economic dimension index variable can vary from -7 to 14. The value of Cronbach's alpha for this index variable was 0.888. 'Decision making' relates to women's participation in household decision making (Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001). Quantitative measurement of this dimension was also made by preparing a matrix question consisted of seven household related decisions. *i.e.* decision about family health, making larger household purchases, visiting relatives, children education, family size, family planning services, and job of women. Responses were measured on 4-point rating scale with scores, -1 used for 'the decision within family made by others', 0 represented 'decision made by husband without involving wife', 1 represented 'decision made by husband by involving wife in decision' , and 2 represented 'decision made by women independently.' The sum of responses of an individual to all seven questions constitutes value of index variable for decision making dimension. The values of decision making index variable were expected to vary from -7 to 14. The value of Cronbach's alpha for this index variable was 0.865.

'Mobility' relates to women's freedom for their visits to various places (Kishor, 2000). This dimension is concerned with the freedom of respondent to go to various places. This dimension is complex of three sub-dimensions or categories. Among them, the first category was about seeking permission to go to 6 different places *i.e.* local market, health centre, neighbourhood, friend's or relative's home, other city, club and cinema. Two-point rating scale was used where 0 represented 'permission needed' and 1 represented 'permission is not needed'. Second category of mobility index was about, with whom respondent is allowed to go to aforementioned six places. For this purpose 4-point rating scale was used where 0 'represented not allowed to go', 1 represented 'allowed to go with some adult', 2 represented 'permitted to go along with child', and 3 represented 'allowed to go alone'. Third category of mobility index was concerned with the frequency of visits to the five different places; 3-point rating scale was used for this purpose. Where score 0 represented 'not at all,' 1 represented 'some time' and 2 represented 'often.' The sum of responses of an individual to all 17 questions constitutes the value of index variable for mobility dimension. The values of communication index variable were expected to vary from -6 to 34. 'Communication' concerns to women's participation in family discussions on various issues (Ahmad and Sultan, 2004). Measurement of this dimension is based on a set of five questions i.e. respondent's involvement in discussions about; politics, purchasing household items, household finance, family health, and children education. 4-point rating scale was used to measure this dimension where score -1 represented 'non involvement in discussions', 0 represented 'low involvement', 1 represented 'moderate involvement', and 2 represented 'high level involvement,' in family discussions. The sum of responses of an individual to all 5 questions constitutes the value of index variable for communication dimension. These values of index could vary from -5 to 10. The value of Cronbach's alpha for this index variable was 0.865.

As stated earlier, women's empowerment is a multidimensional construct therefore, it is essential to measure it by combining all the dimensions of empowerment. Keeping in view this idea, it was attempted to assemble these dimensions to make a whole multidimensional construct of women's empowerment. For this purpose index variable for women's empowerment or Summative Empowerment Index (SEI) variable was developed by cumulating or summing up the individuals' scores for all the four dimensions of women's empowerment. The value of Cronbach's alpha for SEI variable was calculated to be 0.8. In present study value of SEI variable ranged from -19 to 72. The smallest value of SEI represented the no empowerment and the largest value of index indicated highest level of empowerment.

Number of variables were assumed fit for explaining the variation in dependent variable -women's empowerment. Education is an important variable which brings many positive changes in human's personality. Education has greater influence on many variables used in social science as it provides knowledge, awareness and confidence and potential for paid job. In present study educational attainment level is measured by considering number of years of schooling of a respondent. Conjugal age refers to the marital duration in years. It was the difference between total age and age at marriage. Level of political participation of respondent was measured by developing an index variable containing eight questions regarding; vote casting, casting vote in favour of candidate of own choice or not, attending the speeches of contestants, taking part in election campaign, awareness about the changing political situation, discussing problems of local people; intentions to contest election; and whether women should contest election or not. In this index score 1 represented 'Yes' and 0 represented answer in 'No'. The sum of scores of a respondent to all 8 questions constituted a value of index variable for political participation. The values of this variable could range from 0 to 8. The value of Cronbach's alpha for this index variable was 0.737. 'Husband's cooperation' was another independent variable involved in this study. Index variable was constructed on the basis of nine items related to husband attitude *i.e.* whether he deals politely, helps in work, shares problems, respect your parents, appreciates your work, takes care of you, gives importance to your opinion, trusts you and ignores your mistakes. Three-point rating scale was applied by using 2 for 'often' 1 for 'rarely' and 0 for 'not at all. The sum of scores of a respondent to all 9 aforementioned questions constituted the value of index variable for husband's cooperation. The values of this variable could range from 0 to 18. The value of Cronbach's alpha for this index variable was 0.868. The stepwise multiple linear regression analysis was used to model the response variable against set of independent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Twenty one percent of the total respondents had never been to school. Majority of the respondents (48.0%) had completed 6 to 12 years of education Thirteen percent of the respondents had more than 12 years education. Majority of the respondents (81.64%) had conjugal age from 11 to 20 years. Mean conjugal age was 12.01 years with standard deviation 8.43. The mean and standard deviation of the husband cooperation index variable were 2.82 and 2.01 respectively. Approximately 7% of the respondents experienced

lower level of cooperation, 45.8% of the respondents received moderate level of cooperation and 47.3% of the respondents enjoyed high level of cooperation from their husbands. Only 8% of the respondents were formally involved in paid job and remaining 92% of the respondents were housewives. Pakistan has second lowest position in the world regarding female participation in paid job (World Economic Forum, 2008). The respondents with lower, middle and higher levels of political participation were 66.73%, 27.64% and 5.63% respectively. Aforementioned statistics on political participation' indicate that women residing in study area do not play significant role in politics. It may be attributed to patriarchal culture and restricted mobility of women. The score on political participation index variable ranged from 0 to 18 with mean 13.59 and standard deviation 3.81.

Appropriateness of multiple regression models for present study was confirmed by verifying the assumptions of multiple regression models viz. linearity of relationship between dependent variable and independent variable, homosecdasticity; consistency among the variances of error term, autocorrelation and multicollinearity. As depicted in table 1, increase in one year of schooling brings 0.68 units increase in SEI. This evidence supports the hypothesis that educational attainment level of women has greater influence on women empowerment. Education provides awareness, confidence and knowledge to the women that help them to decide about their lives and the lives of their intimates. These views were also shared by various researchers (Kishor and Gupta, 2004; Sridevi, 2005). A significant regression coefficient 0.67 (p-value < 0.001) for variable 'conjugal age' reflects that a woman gets more empowered with increase in duration of married life. Increase in empowerment with the increase in conjugal age can be attributed to the fact that larger marital duration provides awareness and experience to women that help them to develop better understanding with their husbands and better marital adjustment (Parveen, 2005). Paid job of women causes a substantial increase in SEI *i.e.* 7.1 units. Paid job provides women a source of income that reduces their economic dependency and enhances their control over resources that lead them towards empowerment. These findings are in line with a number of studies (Heaton *et al*. 2005; Jones *et al*. 2006). Regression coefficient for the index variable 'husband's cooperation' indicates that one unit increase in index variable 'husband's cooperation' brings 0.56 units increase in SEI. The rationale of this relation can be attributed to the fact that good cooperation of husbands provides woman, confidence and strength that leads them towards empowerment. The relationship between husband' cooperation and women's empowerment was also confirmed by Parveen (2005; 176). Likewise one unit increase in 'political

participation' of respondent causes 1.12 units increase in SEI. Statistics indicate that political participation gives women awareness and knowledge and sense of collective action that help them to raise their voices and their vocal attitude help them to be empowered. Almost similar point of view was presented by Bari (2005).

The variables 'income of the household', 'education of husband' and 'age of respondent' were removed during stepwise regression due to their weak contribution in explaining the response variable.

Recommendations: Education is the basic human right of every individual. An educated woman is more likely to be aware of her rights and to adopt a paid job, which further leads to increased empowerment. The Government of Pakistan should allocate top priority to the education of females for improving their status in society. Women activists and women political leadership can playa vital role in this regard. A woman working for paid job has better empowerment status than their counter parts without it. The situation requires introducing a culture of women working in the society of Pakistan. There is dire need to encourage women's participation in politics of Pakistan at state level.

Table-1. Influence of explanatory variables on women's empowerment-Multiple regression model.

Independent Variable	Regression Coefficients	t-values
Education	0.68	4.86**
Conjugal age	0.67	8.39**
Paid job involvement	-7.1	-3.07**
Husband's cooperation	0.56	3.39**
Political participation	1.12	3.30**

** sign. at 1% level of significance; Adjusted-R^{-2} = 0.47; F = 30.91 with p< 0.001

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