

EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH EDUCATION: A CULTURAL & GLOBAL ISSUE FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

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ABSTRACT

This research intends to find out the cultural deterrents women are confronting in rural Punjab. In Rural Punjab strong cultural boundaries with a patriarchal mindset of society for women still exists. The research study is survey in nature. Female of age cohort (18-45) from three regions of Rural Punjab were taken as targeted population. Sample sizes of 380 women were taken from three regions of rural Punjab with the help of Proportional random sampling technique. Focus group discussion (FGD) was used as a tool for data collection. Anecdotal case studies from three different regions of Rural Punjab (south, central and north) were also used as data collection tool. The main objective of the study was to identify the obstacles which act as cultural deterrent in Empowering Women. The findings of the study revealed that the factors which came across the women were harassment, patriarchal mindset, gender discrimination, lack of parents support and strict caste barriers in their inclination towards Education & Empowerment.

Keywords: cultural deterrents, Women Empowerment, Rural Punjab

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment and Education are the two main perplexing issues of Women in a Pakistani Rural society. Women play significant part in the progress of a country for its sustainable growth. Empowerment is the transformative process of desired choices. It is the capability and progress of an individual to make choices and to convert them into desired actions and outcomes. In Pakistan, efforts are being made to Empower Women in almost all field of life but in rural and marginalized areas women are still living in despondent conditions. They are deprived of adequate education and job opportunities due to patriarchy, punitive societal and familial aspects found in rural Punjab. Awareness and Education can play a vibrant role in empowering the women. It is important to probe those issues which are embedded in the cultural and social boundaries. Education is that milestone which make women capable enough to solve their issues and problems and capable of being heard in the society. Women can become autonomous in society with the help of education. In spite of this proven fact of female education, women lag behind men in educational field in the rural set up of a country like Pakistan. Punjab is the 50% of total population which continues to be predominantly a rural population.

Literature Review

Sadgopal (2003), and Mukhopadhyaya (2009) concluded that empowerment of rural women is meaningless unless the society and its institutions respond to the discriminatory practices against rural women and women themselves endeavors to transform their life situation. Linguistic reforms are necessary to dislodge the patriarchal mindset and enhance the dignity of rural women but this refers will not be a balanced to the psychological confusion of rural

women's secondary position. Study by Padhi (2012) appraised the effect of agrarian disaster on rural women in Punjab clearly concluded that women facing the agrarian catastrophe are enduring with deficits and deficiencies. The planned tyrannies of cast, culture and patriarchy in rural setting is encrusted and disturb women in manifold ways. In this region high dropout rate among the girls has reduced the educational empowerment of women. Bishaw (2013) conducted research on Assami women which revealed that as the level of education of rural women increases their participation and involvement in society and household also increases. It further states that socio economic progress has a close relationship to Education.

Patrions and Psacharopoulos (2007) concluded that as the level of education attainment increases women become sounder financially and can earn 20 percent of more income than those having low level of education. Women get high earnings after attaining education as compared to men. The educational investment on women has a direct link with the social and financial development which in turn effect positively on the sustainable development of o country. Validating these outcomes, Mohanty (2009) also explained that socio economic status has the significant association with the educational attainment and the academic performance among rural women and girls.

Qualitative studies by Rao (2014), Zwarteveen & Neupane (1996), Joshi (2014) and Guerin et al. (2013) expose certain expectations, that financial empowerment will lead to overall empowerment and their contribution in decision-making processes will empower them. These studies explains clearly that these factors influence and intermediate empowerment. Other concepts of gender and empowerment further reveals in studies as Kandiyoti's (1988) "patriarchal bargains" and Sen's (2014) "cooperative conflicts". Charmes and Wieringa (2003) conceptualize women empowerment that it is the phenomena which progresses on by awareness to choices, whether these are resources, education, social factors, political factors, familial factos.

Only a few studies have considered women's perspectives and understandings of empowerment. The previous study of Guérin et al. (2013) revealed that women are "not necessarily looking for autonomy and independence from men, but rather for respect within their own community" (Kabeer, 2001; Cornwall, 2007; Ciotti, 2009). During their empirical study on microfinance in Tamil Nadu, they analyzed that lots of women primarily did not comprehend the term empowerment, but when they were enlightened to the term, in a well-defined way in their own words as the capability "to solve problems" and "to manage suffering" (Guérin et al., 2013, p. 80). Some related empowerment to material constrains, while others related it to the freedom of mobility and being respected by their family. This study explains that women identify their empowerment, not as liberation from male supremacy, but in relevance to other women, their husbands, families and societies. Sharp et al. (2003) deliver a motivating example with an empirical investigation of Bedouin women in Southern Egypt. They explore gender relations and find that women choose relegation to empowerment, since they comprehend better assistances by not challenging the proven directives. It is also worth noting that normative discourses on empowerment may be a source of exclusion. As a matter of fact (Mayoux, 2001), the deprived and those who are deficient in social relations are exempted, but inconsistent standards are also a basis of self-exclusion, both on females' particular resourcefulness or from side to side their spouses or relatives. Point to be mentioned here is that the only dependency is not male members of family it varies with the internal house hold relationships, which is a blend of clashes and collaborations and imbalanced dependency. (Kabeer, 2001). Most of the women are impeccably conscious of the level of their relegation and their narrow admittance to assets, management, privileges and esteem. By acquainted with women's manifold distinctiveness, requirements and restraints, these hardliner movements have supported women to step into

new practices of community duties, to come into community places and even to task certain male-controlled practices (Sen,2007).

Women empowerment starts from household. If women get freedom from their family in their matters inside and outside home they are able to make decisions on their own. And can be able to get desirable outcomes. Empowerment here means that women are been able to gain access to education about every aspect like health care, fertility matters and the illness of their children .women may equally act able outside as well as inside household.(Caldwell 1986; Dyson and Moore 1983; World Bank 2001). The specific traits of household empowerment are self -reliance, mental and physical freedom, women s economic decision making, trust of male family members upon them, respect from family and gender parity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study was led by the exploration of following major research questions:

1. What are the factors embedded in the rural culture that act as the barriers in empowering women?
2. What is the perception of rural women regarding educational attainment in rural Punjab?

METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted qualitative approach; this study is descriptive in nature and based upon the survey on rural women residing in three regions of Punjab.

Tool

Focus group discussion (FGD) was used as a tool for data collection. According to Creswell (2008), focus group is a moderated discussion with a group of participants. FGD is the preferred mode of inquiry when an in-depth exploration is required. First Focus group discussion comprises of illiterate women with information rich cases, which can provide a variety of views. Another FGD was held with educated women which dug deep into the issues regarding socio cultural norms and attainment of female education. Each FGD included 10 to 20 participants. Therefore, a total of 09 Focus Group discussions (FGDs) were carried in three districts of rural Punjab, with a total of 380 participants. However, case studies and anecdotal tales were also used to get in depth relevant information.

Sample

A representative sample of 280 rural women was selected by proportionate random sampling technique. The women were identified and designated as rural in the age group of 18 to 45 years. Total sample is further stratified into educated and uneducated category of women. Rural woman in the study is defined as woman who is resident of peripheral area of Punjab. Data were collected individually and personally from women in the form of narrative anecdotal tales. The whole inferences are presented in the form of tables, bar graphs and discussion.

Findings of Anecdotal Case Studies

Despite being lack of parents support, Sumaira a young girl of 21 from the peripheral rural area of central Punjab went on to earn graduate degree .She felt discriminatory behavior of family and among her male sibling. By using social media, she has given her community a global voice, and encourages several students to stay in school and find employment. Her efforts along with the other anecdotal stories mark enormous developments in gender empowerment across the community.

Nabila aimed at bringing vital issues to the forefront, she narrated that she faced harassment from her caste and society particularly from male members. She confronted many hurdles to get a graduate degree and getting employment. According to her it is very challenging in rural South Punjab to fight for women’s rights against harassment.

Kousar stated that forcibly she was being made to learn conventional madrassa education rather than formal education stream, all her decisions are taken by the male members of her family. According to Kousar, she grew up in marginalized south Punjab where she was coerced into wearing a hijab at the age of seven. She further revealed that she lived in a highly patriarchal society where, she was confined to home the day she reached puberty.

The first graduate woman, Musarat spite of being a common target of harassment and bullies in the rural community of north Punjab, Musarat went on to earn graduate degree, and encourages other rural female students to stay in school. She supports and motivates them morally for the importance of female education.

Gulnar after struggling for her own rights for equality and education, she realized how hard it was for women in rural Punjab to start educate themselves and live their life independently.

Nazia from central rural Punjab was outcast from her community for sending her daughters to school. Her Voice, was heard by society that devotes hard work to struggling gender discernment and provided that provisions to sufferers. The NGO helps victims in taking legal action against assaulters as well as relocation. It also visits courtrooms to advocate for justice in cases of out casting from the tribe, and seeks to encourage further affirmative attitudes to women by conveying male role models to communicate to head of community and caste system in rural Punjab.

Fozia describes that patriarchy dominates all over rural Punjab, and it needs to be addressed to empower women in rural areas of Punjab. Deterrence thrives due to lack of women’s presentation in major political positions in the Punjab. The middle-aged or elderly women in a pejorative way, decided to do their level best to empower women’s opinions in rural Punjab. Indigenous gatherings were held to explore females’ interpretation through districts and nominees are interrogated on basic females’ matters.

Inferential Findings of the survey questionnaire showing the perception of rural women
Table 1. Perceptions of Rural Women with respect to harassment among three regions of Punjab

Reasons for harassment	Rural North %	Rural south %	Rural center %
Illiteracy	12	29	28
Social norms	22	11	18
Narrow minded approach	24	23	14
Male Domain	18	15	13
Feudalism	16	21	15

Table 1 presents the data pertaining to the harassment of rural women and the cultural issues. According to data mentioned in the table women are facing harassment at all the levels in society.

Figure 1 demonstrate that a very high percentage of women in all the three rural regions of Punjab revealed harassment in the society, at home and at workplace as a major cause behind the low empowerment of women in rural areas.

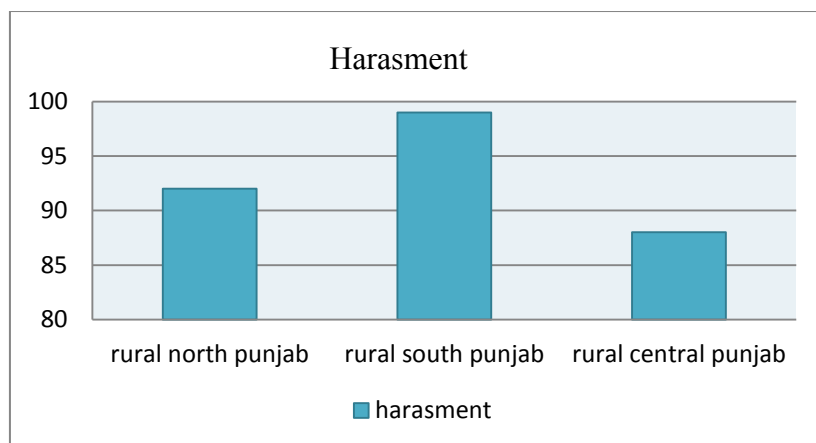


Figure 1. Harasment in the three rural regions of Punjab

Table 2. Percentage of Rural Women with respect to lack of parents support

Lack of parents support	Rural North %	Rural south %	Rural center %
Illiterate	20	65	25
Literate	10	04	06
Primary	05	03	05
Elementary	05	05	02
secondary	03	04	04
Higher sec	05	01	05
vocational	02	13	12
Graduate	1	00	01

Table 2 presents educational level of the rural women and parents support. Data present in table 2 shows that for the illiterate woman regardless of the rural area, the factor behind is lack of parents support. It is seen that with the increases in the level of parents support the women are more educated and empowered.

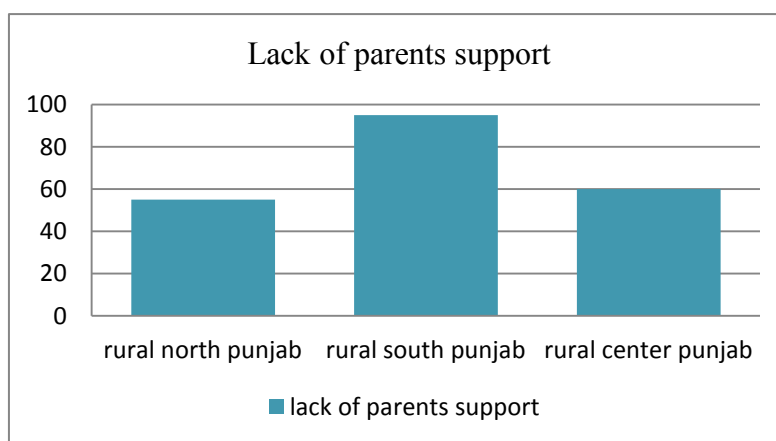


Figure 2. Lack of parents support

Figure 2 shows that lack of parental support is an issue of rural society in Punjab, which acts as a deterrent in the educational attainment of rural girls and women.

Table 3. Perceptions of women on patriarchy

Reasons for patriarchy	Rural North %	Rural south %	Rural center %
Narrow mindset	09	12	16
illiteracy	23	38	20
Cultural taboo	12	16	11
Escalator hierarchy	14	11	12
Dominating male	12	12	29

Results of table 3 reveal that patriarchy is a hurdle in the way to educational access which further leads to poor education attainment and empowerment for the rural female population.

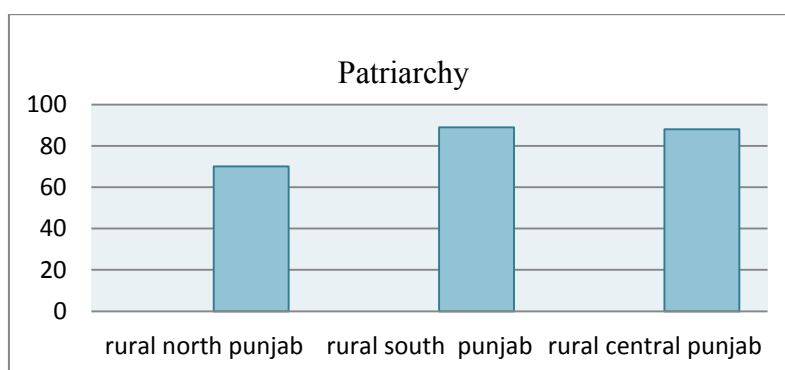


Figure 3. Patriarchy

Fig 3 shows that rural Punjab is a highly patriarchal based society. Rural women faced this cultural and social issue which is a hurdle in their way to empowerment

Table 4. Perception of Rural Women with respect to caste barriers

Reasons for Caste barrier	Rural North %	Rural south %	Rural center %
Strong caste	18	28	13
illiteracy	22	19	18
Political support	10	23	14
Social taboo	16	21	15

Table 4 shows that caste barrier is a strong cultural hurdle in the way to girls education and empowerment. Strong casts, illiteracy, political support, and social taboos are the menace found in rural culture.

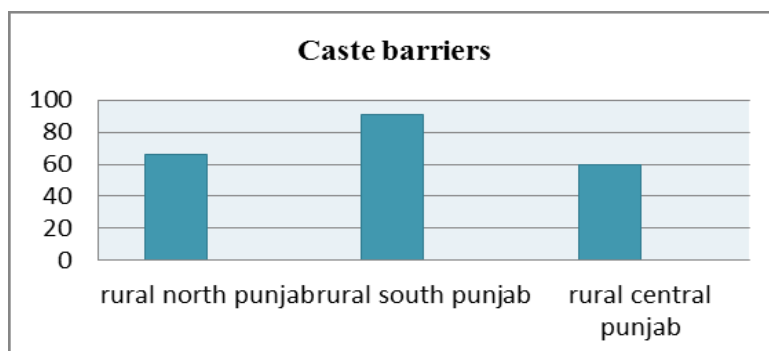


Figure 4. Caste Barriers

Figure 4 reveals that there is strong caste barrier embedded in the rural culture which acts as an obstacle towards empowerment of rural women.

Table 5. Perceptions of Respondents on gender discrimination across 3 regions of rural Punjab

Reasons for gender Discrimination	Rural North	Rural south	Rural center
	%	%	%
Conventional thought	14	18	15
Illiteracy	21	25	24
Social taboo	13	15	10
Preference of boys over girls	11	12	10
Responsibility as girl	15	15	12
Familial Attitude	11	10	16

Table 5 demonstrates the percentage for gender discrimination which became ultimately the reasons for their low educational attainment and empowerment.

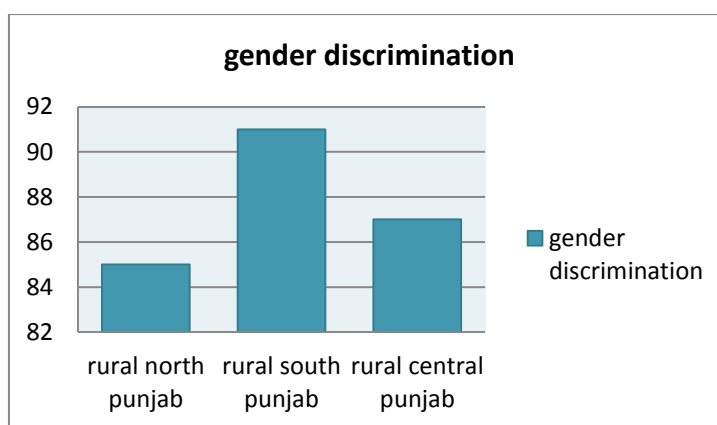


Figure 5. Gender discrimination

Figure 5 further demonstrate that a very high percentage of women in all the three rural regions of Punjab revealed gender discrimination in the society as a major cause behind their educational deprivation and scarcity.

DISCUSSION

This study provides a detailed overview on the identified cultural issues like patriarchy, gender discrimination, harassment, caste barriers and lack of parents’ support, which further leads to many dimensions. The low attainment of female education in rural Punjab is directly associated with the low empowerment of women. The factor behind the illiteracy is the lack of parents support regardless of the rural area. The average education level in rural Punjab is matric. It is seen that with the increases in the level of parents support the women are more confident, educated and empowered. Narrow mindset, cultural taboos, Escalator hierarchies and dominating male society are the other dimensions found in this study. Strong cast barrier, illiteracy, political support, and social taboos are the menace found in rural culture which are the hurdles in the way of girls’ education and empowerment. Patriarchal conventional thoughts, illiteracy, preference of boys over girls and harassment are the root causes of low educational attainment and low women empowerment in rural Punjab.

CONCLUSION

The empirical analysis of the above results discloses that the cultural conditions are the impelling elements that affect the situation of rural women in a considerable manner. Unfortunately the situation of rural women is not at satisfactory end. The results drawn here evidently show that educational system cannot be a success story for rural women in Punjab, Pakistan because of strict cultural barriers in rural areas like patriarchal mindset, caste barriers, gender discrimination, lack of parents support, and harassment. These identified cultural and social deterrents are that issue which never paves the way for the educational development and women empowerment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is very important to break the shackles of the caste barriers by awareness and political will.
2. It is of utmost important to highlight the impact of educated women in their communities and in global context for motivation and uplift of rural women.
3. Ensure necessary action to be taken to keep female employees feel safe and accepted at their workplaces.
4. Ensure to open centers which work as a podium wherever females can report harassment events.
5. Male members of rural society in Punjab should be given awareness so they become enthusiastic devotee on females' human rights and parity.
6. Find employment opportunities for educated and skilled women. The professional trainer should reach out to self-made female entrepreneurs in rural Punjab.
7. The Commission on the Status of Women in Pakistan should plan to organize an international conference to raise the voice of rural women and should also ensure their participation.
8. The media access should be provided to rural women in Punjab exclusively, "the internet facility".
9. One window operation should be set up for the rural women to allow them to collect monetary fund for education from class 1 to higher secondary level.

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