

## **Cultural Barriers to Women Empowerment among Pashtuns:**

### **(A case study of District Loralai Balochistan)**

By

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#### **Abstract:**

*The process of empowerment involves a sequence of procedures in which people come to defend themselves and become aware of their rights. The issue of women empowerment has been going on for centuries around the world. In some rural areas of Pakistan, women can get the opportunity of working alongside with man in farms. In the urban areas, women can struggle with employment and get the opportunity of working. Sill Pashtun women lag behind in spheres of life and they are exposed to risk and menace of health, education and employment. This dissertation discussed empowerment of Pashtun women who have no equal rights in rapidly changing socio-economic fields of modern life. The purpose of writing is knowing the empowerment status of women among Pashtuns.*

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Culture, Equality, Cultural Barriers, Tribal Organization, Social taboos, Patriarchal society.

#### **Introduction:**

The process of empowerment involves a sequence of procedures in which people come to defend themselves and become aware of their rights (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007). People can raise high in the country by following the lead of empowerment and get rid of economic and education problems. The concept of empowerment emerged to provide a better life for humanity equally by giving them good governance, higher growth, improved services, and much more. This empowerment is the need of present society to have further development, especially concerning the women (Lombardini & Bowman, 2015).

Women have had the ultimate potential to achieve great heights all around the world. However, women need encouragement and motivation to move ahead in life, which does not happen often. The empowerment factor can come in many aspects, but mainly it starts at the childhood level with education (Malik & Courtney, 2011). Empowerment begins with several challenges and opportunities in a particular country. It is especially harder

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to have development activities in the rural and underdeveloped areas. Moreover, the cost of education can also be high in rural areas as compared to the cities.

The problems mentioned above also include the cultural barriers that have created problems for many women all around the world. More Often, the cultural barriers to conception is most common in the workplaces where the employees have to deal with different backgrounds and people.

### **Background of Study:**

Women across the country are lagging behind in all fields of life owing to social, cultural and religious restrictions. Impediment to women to play an active role in socio-economic fields has led to the generation of numerous social problems that cast direct impact on the development of human resource. Being a half of our population and its conscious neglecting results in the affecting not only the capability of women but of men too. The discrimination against women is a global phenomenon. Globally speaking, 65 million small girls do not start their school, and out of those who start school, 100 million fail to complete their primary education and 542 million of women remain illiterate in the world. Likewise, there are certain alarming facts when the status of women in Baluchistan is surveyed. In Balochistan and Pashtun areas, population is mostly settled in rural areas wherein women are exposed to vulnerability and striking risk of health, education and security.

### **Concept of Women Empowerment:**

There exists no harmony over the concept and broadly accepted definition of the word women empowerment across the globe. Women empowerment varies in meaning in different groups, cultures, classes, civilization and countries. Different people conceive it as per the best suitability of the word to their values and socio-cultural set up. The word empowerment of women is meant as women's control of their life, their capacity to preserve, struggle and fight for their rights at all forums and making decisions of their life without any restraints and fear. Empowerment means the expansion of choice and action. The women with empowerment exercise control over the resources and make decision in respect of their life.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

Women development and empowerment is a crucial concept that can lead to the country and individual development. Moreover, such factors can provide ultimate respect to the women that they have desired since years and decades. However, due to the rise of barriers in empowerment, women are lagging behind in development aspect. Many studies have recognized most common part of it as the cultural barrier globally. Such barriers continue to stop women from pursuing their individual dreams.

Several studies undertaken can present the situation of women in Pakistan but rarely any of them are able to provide overview of Pashtuns. Such underdeveloped places can provide much practical perception of the women empowerment and its status in Pakistan. Moreover, the literature fails to present the grounded perception of the extent of Government policy utilization in Pashtuns concerning the women empowerment.

### **Significance/Justification of the Study:**

This study would focus toward the advanced study of the status of women in Pashtun region at present date even after having several legislations. The region needs to have awareness of the policies and programs that enables women empowerment. In the present society of Baluchistan, the women do not get appropriate and required education due to which they lack the awareness of the need of empowerment. The men out of dominating desire suppress the women by keeping them away from normal and even basic facilities. Some of the women do not get the facility of having proper healthcare. The empowerment and its awareness can enhance the growth in the society. However, there is a need to have in depth study of the problem to find out whether programs initiated by the government concerning cultural barriers and empowerment are working or not.

### **Literature Review:**

According to Jagger (1993), liberal feminism controls the philosophy of liberation among women. They state that the women in Pakistan and everywhere do not get the facility of having equal rights. The social structure has been formed in such a way that the men would be able to all the benefit. Furthermore, Lee (2015) considers that the gender inferiority that has been present in the society today is completely incorrect and unjust. The little basis of such aspects is the inequality, according to Lee. However, the in-depth study of it is required to identify the cultural factors that pose a great threat to the empowerment of women in Pashtun.

### **Research Methodology:**

The current research provides that what methods, scales, procedures, sampling techniques, research design and settings have been used in the study. The detailed description of all stages has been mentioned to provide a clear understanding of the research modalities. The current research aimed to investigate the knowledge of women empowerment among Pashtuns. In this chapter, the methods of the research design, sampling technique, instruments, data collection, data analysis, ethical consideration and procedure have been defined in extensive way. The above mentioned modalities provided plain and straight direction to obtain the targeted goals. Each step has been extensively discussed to get a clear understanding of the research modalities. This research aimed at knowing the empowerment of women among Pashtuns.

### **Research Method:**

The mix methods research design was used to explore knowledge and perception regarding women empowerment among Pashtuns. Qualitative research design provides in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in form of words whereas Quantitative research design provides the knowledge of related variables.

### **Research Design:**

**Survey research design was used to collect data from participants.**

### **Sampling Technique:**

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants from the population.

### **Method of Data Collection:**

Interview of the participants was conducted. At first, all the respondents were called at the interview venue for taking the survey. They were given a set of 20 questions in the form of the questionnaire. It took them about 15 minutes to fill the form entirely. After collecting the information in the form of interview answers and questionnaire. The questionnaire was first evaluated using the SPSS tool and appropriate results were obtained. These results formed the basis of the interview questions to be created next.

Later, these respondents were called individually, or with family, for interview procedure. About 10 of them were called at a time. Each interview took about 40 minutes, which was further taken in a secluded room where women could provide valuable replies without the fear of family members watching over them.

### **Findings:**

This section would provide an overview of the respective results obtained after having the utilization of the appropriate research methodology mentioned above.

**Gender**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	140	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Female	60	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

It was observed that among the observed individuals that were supposed to take participation in the study failed to do so. However, about only 30% of the individuals were observed to be female while the remaining 70% had been male.

**Women are likely to be skilled in Pashtun**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	100	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Agree	82	41.0	41.0	91.0
	Disagree	18	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

It was observed that about 50% of respondents strongly agreed to the fact that women have been skilled in Pushtan. Furthermore, 41% had been agreeing related to skill factor. Only 9% of the individuals disagreed to the fact that women had special skills within the place that could have led them toward empowerment.

**Women have higher level of confidence**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	47	23.5	23.5	23.5
	agree	118	59.0	59.0	82.5
	disagree	25	12.5	12.5	95.0
	strongly disagree	10	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Furthermore, surprisingly, 59% of the individuals have been agreeable to the fact that women have high confidence. Other than that 23.5% had strongly agreed to this same fact. Lastly, about 12.5% disagreed and only 5% strongly disagreed to the same fact.

**There is zero gender diversity in place**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	23	11.5	11.5	11.5
agree	17	8.5	8.5	20.0
disagree	131	65.5	65.5	85.5
strongly disagree	29	14.5	14.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Another aspect that had been involved in the survey included gender diversity. Unsurprisingly, more than half, about 65.5%, of the participants disagreed to the fact that there had been zero gender diversity in Pashtun. However, only 11.5% had been able to strongly agree and 8.5% agreed to it.

**There is zero employment opportunity to pashtun women**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	25	12.5	12.5	12.5
agree	116	58.0	58.0	70.5
disagree	53	26.5	26.5	97.0
strongly disagree	6	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

As expected, about 58% agreed that Pashtun women had no facility to have a new opportunity. 12% strongly agreed while only 3% strongly disagreed. However, about 26% disagreed to fact.

**Culture of pashtun becomes an obstacle in job life**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	30	15.0	15.0	15.0
agree	113	56.5	56.5	71.5
neutral	5	2.5	2.5	74.0
disagree	45	22.5	22.5	96.5
strongly disagree	7	3.5	3.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

About 56% of individuals agreed to the fact that the Pashtun culture had been acting as the obstacle for the employment of women in the place. However, only 15% strongly agreed to the fact. Other than that, about 22.5% disagreed while only 3.5% had been strongly disagreed.

**Pashtun men respects the choice of women concerning employment**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	7	3.5	3.5	3.5
agree	49	24.5	24.5	28.0
neutral	3	1.5	1.5	29.5
disagree	117	58.5	58.5	88.0
strongly disagree	24	12.0	12.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

About 24.5% agreed that Pashtun men respect the choice of women concerning employment. However, more than half, 58.5% of them, disagreed to the fact that the choice of women is not respected related to employment. About 12% strongly disagreed to the same fact while only 3.5% had been able to strongly agreed to it. However, only 1.5% had been neutral in this aspect.

**Women have high power of decision making at home**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	4	2.0	2.0	2.0
agree	62	31.0	31.0	33.0
neutral	2	1.0	1.0	34.0
disagree	91	45.5	45.5	79.5
strongly disagree	41	20.5	20.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Such aspects have also been described related to decision making and women in the Pashtun. It had been observed that 31% of the individuals had been able to agree to the fact that women have high power in decision-making in Pashtun. However, about 45.5% were able to disagree with the same fact while 20.5% of them have been able to strongly agreed to the aspect.

**Violence against women is high among pashtun**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	9	4.5	4.5	4.5
agree	16	8.0	8.0	12.5
neutral	1	.5	.5	13.0
disagree	131	65.5	65.5	78.5
strongly disagree	43	21.5	21.5	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

However, surprisingly, 65.5% individuals disagreed to the fact that violence against women is high among Pashtun. Only 8% and 4.5% agreed and strongly agreed to the fact. About 21.5% strongly disagreed to the fact that Pashtun does not have violence against women.

**Women are always asked to stay in burkha**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	21	10.5	10.5	10.5
agree	141	70.5	70.5	81.0
disagree	34	17.0	17.0	98.0
strongly disagree	4	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

This aspect involved majority of the respondents. About 70% of them agreed to the fact that women are being asked to be in Burkha almost all the time. However, only 2% of them strongly disagreed while 17% disagreed.

**Widowed women can get married again and raise family in pashtuns**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	26	13.0	13.0	13.0
agree	143	71.5	71.5	84.5
neutral	1	.5	.5	85.0
disagree	28	14.0	14.0	99.0
strongly disagree	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

Surprisingly, women in Pashtun have been given appropriate freedom concerning getting married again after becoming widowed. About 71.5% of them were able to agree to it while 13% strongly agreed. Other than that, about 14% of them were able to disagree while only 1% strongly disagree to it.

**A pashtun woman can have marriage of her choice**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid strongly agree	1	.5	.5	.5
agree	82	41.0	41.0	41.5
disagree	115	57.5	57.5	99.0
strongly disagree	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

This aspect also includes uneven distribution by 57.5% disagreeing to the fact that Pashtun women can have a marriage of her choice. Other than that, about 41% agreed which indicates some women can have free will of choosing her husband.



**Women receive due share in inheritance**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid agree	27	13.5	13.5	13.5
neutral	9	4.5	4.5	18.0
disagree	152	76.0	76.0	94.0
strongly disagree	12	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	200	100.0	100.0	

This aspect states that women fail to get an appropriate inheritance in the family and it can be proved by seeing 76% of them disagree to the inheritance factor. Furthermore, 13.5% of them have been able to agree to the fact that women have been given due aspect in the family inheritance.

Remaining aspects concerning finding a solution to hypotheses were asked in the interview to the individual respondents. Certain questions were dedicated to the primary hypothesis: Pashtun people are conservative concerning women empowerment. Even though, this aspect was completely covered in the survey methodology, few questions were asked to the individuals to get appropriate details about it. One of the respondents said, “Many elders consider keeping women silent a common part of life.”

Another respondent said, “My mother would always force me to practice the household chores day and night even if I desired to study more. It wasn’t like she didn’t desire me to study. But her primary priority was household chores. I could have been a government employee.”

Other than that, questions regarding individual rights concerning women rights in Pashtun were also asked. Few questions regarding the awareness and knowledge about the individual rights of women in Pashtun. One of the respondents said, “Seeing women illiterate and unknowledgeable about anything, let alone women’s rights, is pretty common among Pashtuns. I don’t know women are even aware of the word ‘rights’ here because of illiteracy.”

Another respondent highlighted, “having awareness about the study, education, and other relatable rights are really rare. Women mostly deal with household chores and others. That means women are too busy to be aware. But really, a small ignition, a fire, of awareness is there. Some women, out of frustration of other things, desire to get out of the trouble.” After that, women were asked about the governmental policies and how helpful they were in raising awareness about women empowerment. They were also asked concerning the policies that had been able to help them in fighting back among the Pashtun society. Surprisingly, some of the respondents have been able to state that certain government policies have been able to ensure higher growth, which was also evident by seeing surprising answers in the survey. One of the respondents said, “If nothing, the governmental policies at least have raised the level of confidence in women today”

## **Discussion:**

This section would provide an interpretation of the main results that were observed in the previous sections. Main hypothesis will be discussed below concerned with the findings to identify whether the particular hypothesis is true or false. The focus will be given largely to the cultural and empowerment problems faced by women in Pashtun.

### **H1:**

**Pashtun people are conservative concerning women empowerment.**

This particular hypothesis had been proved to be correct because of many aspects. Firstly, the word conservative means the individual that has been able to define life with the eyes of traditionalism. Being a traditionalist is not bad in a sense, but if the individual growth factor has been hampered due to it, then and there, the rise of the high level of conservativeness can be considered.

The primary factor concerning the developmental factor that has been recognized by the individuals in Pashtuns, both men and women, was concerned with skills in women. Many agreed to the fact that women do possess the appropriate skills that can bring them close to empowerment. Furthermore, the Pashtuns have zero gender diversity that shows the ability of Pashtuns to be more conservative toward the developmental factor. In a conservative environment, men are likely to give more importance to the traditional values that are centre around men in Pashtun. Such aspects shape the society such that the women fail to get the overall benefit of everything. For instance, the height of diversity is seen in expecting women to be in burkha all the time even though other men fail to follow appropriate standards of culture themselves. Such cultural diversity in society has led the women to get controlled by the Pashtun men in many aspects of life, even making decisions and financial control.

### **H2:**

**Women in Pashtun are aware of their individual rights.**

This hypothesis has certainly been untrue because of the direct comments of respondents about the awareness of the individual rights among women in Pashtun. Such factors can be clarified by observing the illiteracy and desires of the women. Several rights of the women include the provision of proper education, non-discriminated environment, non-violence, to own the inherited property, and employment. Over all, it had been observed that only one of the aspects and freedom has been provided to individual women such as non-violence.

### **H3:**

**Several governmental policies and programs help women in fighting back.**

Fighting back involves the awareness of the problems at the same time to enhance the higher growth of the women in general. This hypothesis has

been found to be partially true since the policies in Pakistan have actually been able to solve many problems of women in general. Such a factor can be proved from the fact that the violence is reduced and widowed women have been starting to be provided better respect from men. However, the governmental policies have still not been able to overcome all the problems acquired by women in general in the Pashtun family. Marriage choice, family dominance, decision-making, and other aspects are some of the certain aspects such as respect given to divorced women. In such cases, the governmental policies should be more effective enough to solve all the issues. In many cases, women are not able to fight back in society even after having regulated policies and programs.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation:**

The research provided thorough knowledge of the socio-cultural factors that hampered the path of empowering Pashtun women. Patriarchal structure of Pashtun society combined with multi social factors kept women under the dominance of men. Lack of true religious knowledge and non orientation to modern world aggravated the state of women equality. It was observed that among three hypotheses, one is true, another is false, and last is partially true. It has been because women are still not completely aware of the term empowerment and what power it can behold.

1. It is recommended that Pashtun women need to be made completely aware of their individual rights.
2. Pashtun women have to be educated to get a chance to be developed and realize full development and empowerment.
3. Even Pashtun men are to be oriented to the importance of empowerment among Pashtun.
4. Women Empowerment needs to be incorporated in curriculum on primary level of education.

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