

IMPACT OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN OF RURAL AREAS

ABSTRACT

Women from rural areas are coming out of their homes after attaining higher education with an intention to get their rights and status in society and in family as well as to achieve economic independence. The research conducted in two villages of Tehsil Gujar Khan was aimed at finding the impact of higher education on the economic status of the women of rural areas. The objectives were to find out the importance of women's education, to identify the role of education in improving the economic status of women in rural areas and to explore the present condition of rural women regarding higher education and employment. The population of the study consisted of the highly educated women of all the villages of Tehsil Gujar Khan. Hundred working women having bachelors degree or above were taken as the sample. Instrument used for data collection was self constructed questionnaire having thirty six closed ended and two open ended questions. The result indicated that higher education has positive effects on the economic status of highly educated rural women. They have become confident, economically independent and have become more competent. Now they are socially recognized and are enjoying more respect and honor from their families and society. In order to boost the educational level of women in rural areas girls colleges should be opened in the near by areas so that parents can send their daughters to attain higher education without any hesitation and after the completion of higher education women should be provided with levelheaded employment opportunities according to their qualification and capabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The development of a nation is deeply related to the education. In fact, they both are related to each other. It is realized everywhere that education is important for the development of country. Education provides knowledge, skills, and competencies to an individual. It is a tool for the development of human beings. All over the world education is considered as an agent of change and as an indicator of the socio-economic status. Isani and Virk, (2003) argued that the basic aim of higher education is to meet the educational and socio-cultural needs of a country.

Education serves as a change agent role in the field of life whereas higher education takes up leadership role in every sphere of life. Women consist of half of the population of Pakistan; they need equal opportunities of higher education. In spite of the fact that girls'

enrollment is increasing in higher education but for those who belongs to the rural areas equal chances are not available. But, like women of other developing countries, Pakistani women are now becoming aware of their rights and are coming towards education as it is their fundamental right and through education they can get better jobs which raises their economic status and make them more respectable in their family and society Pakistani women are also becoming strong both socially and economically as today's woman has the power of education in her hand and she is serving the society her family and herself in a better way. Now they are getting reasonable jobs on the basis of their education, especially the higher education, and are becoming more respectful in the society.

Women especially of the rural areas are considered as the oppressed part of the society. Education opens the door to opportunity and choice for women. It is the main source to overcome oppressive customs and traditions that have made girls and women second class citizens in their families and societies. Education is a key towards the women empowerment. It is a principle mean to empower women and to them realize their potentials and capabilities. Higher education enhances a woman's self-worth, confidence and sense of power. It also increases her income- earning potential and contributes to overall national development.

Education increases manpower for different levels of economy. It empowers the poor people to become independent to take part in national development process. According to Pathak (2003) it works as an instrument for ensuring equity and social justice and in the development of an economically prosperous society. Gould, (1993) illustrates that education has a role to play. It is seen by governments and individuals as a key vehicle to increase national and individual income and bring economic growth.

Women Education

The role of education has been emphasized in the movements to improve the status women all over the world. These movements were started to empower women and to make them realize their importance in male dominant society. Women were being suppressed by men. Education was the best way to give them empowerment so that they could be aware of their rights and through education only they could get jobs as well Kumar (2006). Educating women is the key to reducing poverty. Mohaptra, (1998) stated that poverty and illiteracy go together everywhere in the world, both are closely linked and are part of the complex system of inequity and deprivation.

Schech & Alwy, (2004) stated that

“Lack of education frequently relegates women to lower poverty levels and contributes to their economic dependence on men”

A World Bank study of 200 countries showed that nations that had invested heavily in female education benefited through higher economic productivity. As Kumar, (2006) stated educated women plays a more productive role both at home and at workplace.

Higher Education and Economic Growth

Higher education can lead to economic growth through both private and public channels. The private benefits for individuals are well established, and include better employment prospects, higher salaries, and a greater ability to save and invest. These benefits may result in better health and improved quality of life, thus setting off a virtuous spiral in which life expectancy improvements enable individuals to work more productively over a longer time further boosting lifetime earnings (Bloom, Canning, & Chan, 2005)

A study in Taiwan showed that higher education played a strong role in the country's economic growth.¹¹ It found that a 1 per cent rise in higher education stock (as defined by those who had completed higher education, including junior college, college, university, or graduate school) led to a 0.35 per cent rise in industrial output, and that a 1 per cent increase in the number of graduates from engineering or natural sciences led to a 0.15 per cent increase in agricultural output. (Lin T.C, 2004)

Wolff and Gittleman (1995) showed that higher education enrollment rates are correlated with labor productivity growth. The number of scientists and engineers per capita is also associated with economic growth.

Higher Education and Women

Higher education of individuals offers an opportunity to empower them. It is responsible for high level manpower that is the need of a country. The objectives of higher are closely related to spiritual and material needs of society (UNDP, 2004). Licuanan (2004) in the article *The Challenge of Women's Higher Education in Asia* stated:

“Higher education for women leads to substantial economic returns achieved by raising productivity and the income levels of families.”

Women Status and Education

Since the beginning of mankind women were not advantaged socially, politically, and economically they were not given priority for getting higher education and earning goods. They were deprived of basic economic and social rights. Education has raised the status of women both socially and economically. To enhance equal opportunity and status for women, illiteracy has created great hurdle. Women were fixed in a fierce circle imposed by the patriarchic society. The education of women largely hindered by their low status, and in turn, the lack of education constricted their position and status. Over the years, the female literacy rate has improved noticeably, the level in the early 1990s fell far short of the male level (Lewis, 1991). As Qasmi, (2001) states that, it is proved and accepted worldwide that education, especially among women play an important role. In all ages to come, education will always remain a symbol of status it helps women raise their productivity and bring more income in to the family.

Rahim, (1999) argued that the process of women empowerment deals with how to increase capacity of women and what they need to become empowered. Women are the main caretaker in the families and also contribute to the household, their works are

related to the food preparation, financial management, health care of family members, social participation in decision making and greater access to resources etc. Empowerment also means having choices and women's ability to make choices. Equal participation of women in the decision-making leads to their empowerment. Education is the biggest indicator of women empowerment which boosts women's ability.

Impact of Education on Rural Women

In education the participation of rural women is inadequate in most of the developing countries. They are denied of their right to get education. They are not provided with the opportunities and facilities of education As Kalam, & Rajan, (1998) viewed that "Access to higher education, especially for women, is extremely limited in rural India. Cultural, economic and social factors, as well as lack of educational facilities, have kept women behind men literally and figuratively"

When a rural woman is educated she becomes able to recognize what her rights are and how to protect these rights. Education enables her to contribute in the development of her family in a much better way than other women who are not educated. When an educated woman works with in the home or outside home she is able to show her potentials and capabilities in an excellent way. With in her home she can show better managerial skills she can take decisions according to the circumstances, she can manage her home well. When she works outside her home she is better aware of her dues and can perform her duties as required by her job. Where as an uneducated women is always suppressed towards other. So education can empower the rural women and make them able to stand for their rights.

Economic Development of Women through Education

The economic development of any nation depends on the effective and proper utilization of all her resources, both human and material. Material resources are useless without men and women able to employ themselves therefore the first priority should be the adequate development of human resources. Education is said to be the key stone to development, as it provides the knowledge and training in various skills that development requires. This education is given at various level: primary, secondary, or higher education. The production of high-level manpower through higher education should ensure trained and trained and responsible leadership for development efforts. Higher education therefore can be said to provide the main thrust in development. (Thompson, Fogger and Dannel, 1994).

Education increases the productivity of labor market and enhances income for all. However, educating women has valuable benefits on social welfare which cannot always measured by the market. Rising level of women's education makes them more productive in their homes which in result bring improvement in family's health and upbringing of the children. Women's education offers a variety of social benefits; which start from the fostering economic growth to extending the average life expectancy in the population and continues towards improving the

functioning of political processes (King & Hill, 1995). Increase in their education not only leads toward the increased labor force participation but also in their earnings. Educated women's greater participation in labor market work and their higher earnings are thought to be good for their own status within the household, and are good for their children because it appears that a greater proportion of women's income than men's is spent on child goods (Kingdon, 1997).

Statement of the problem

The study was aimed to examine the impact of higher education on the economic status of women of rural areas.

Objectives

In particular the objectives of the study were to explore:

- the importance of the women's education in social and economic perspective.
- the role of education in improving the economic status of women in rural areas.
- the present condition of rural women regarding higher education and employment.

Higher Education

Higher education defined as the women having bachelors, Masters or other professional degrees which are equivalent to bachelors and above.

Economic Status

The economic status is defined as status determined by what percentile a person fall into with regard to personal income or wealth. The economic status of the person is based on his income, education level, occupation, and the community's perception of the person.

Significance of the Study

The study highlights the importance of the higher education of women. It also highlights the role of higher education in raising the economic status of the women of the rural areas. Higher education has brought changes in the lives of women specially those of the women of the rural areas. The educational level of women is significant because it has direct influence upon the chances of employment. The number of employed women in a country's labour force directly affects the national income and the total income of a family. It is important to know how higher education has brought economic changes in the lives of these women in order to persuade other women from rural background to get higher education.

Population and Sample

All the working women having Bachelors or Masters degree or any other professional degree equivalent to these, of all the villages of Tehsil Gujar Khan were the population of the study. The sample of the study was hundred educated women belonging to the rural areas and who were working at any grade level. Purposive convenient sampling technique was used and the help was taken from the persons belonging to those villages and who were known to the researcher. Another factor for selecting convenient sampling was the availability and willingness of the sample. The majority of the sample was related to the teaching profession some were working in different offices and banks.

Study Design

The descriptive study was designed to assess the economic status of highly educated rural women. The study was conducted to explore the impact of higher education on the economic status of women of rural areas. The study was aimed to identify the indicators of economic status like job satisfaction, social recognition, confidence and decision making, competencies and professional autonomy, income benefits and way of living style and women empowerment. Research was quantitative and qualitative in nature because the result was interpreted by taking percentages and through discussion.

Instrument and Data Collection

The instrument of the study consisted of a self constructed questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of thirty six close ended and two open ended questions for data collection from women regarding the economic changes brought by the education in their lives.

The questionnaire was divided in to three parts. The first part had seven categories related to the indicators of economic status (Job Satisfaction, social recognition, confidence and decision making power, independency and responsibility competencies and professional autonomy, income benefits & living styles, and women empowerment). The categories contained five point scales having the options of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree.

The second part of the questionnaire contained two open ended question in which the respondents had to provide their own point of views regarding the economic changes that higher education has brought in their lives, and the role of the higher education in the attainment of a reasonable job. The third and the last part of the questionnaire consisted of three close ended questions having different options and the respondents had to mark the option of their choice.

RESULTS

Table 1: Job Satisfaction

STATEMENTS	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
My designation is according to my qualification	16%	52%	7%	20%	5%
I am satisfied with my present job status.	15%	48%	9%	23%	5%
Highly educated women have equal chance of promotion in their jobs.	17%	39%	5%	34%	5%
Educated women have opportunities to show their abilities and potentials.	34%	29%	11%	25%	1%
Average%	20.5	42	8	25.5	4

Through the responses of the above mentioned table it is analyzed that the majority of the working women are satisfied with their present job status. This section contained four statements. The table2 shows that out of 100 respondents 20.5% strongly agreed with the statement given in the section, 42% agreed, 8% were undecided, 25.5 % disagreed where as 4% strongly disagreed with the statements given in the section. When the women from rural areas get higher education they tend to get reasonable jobs according to their qualifications. Through the responses of the above mentioned table it is analyzed that the majority of the working women are satisfied with their present job status.

Table 2: Social Recognition

STATEMENTS	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
My family gives importance to my suggestions and opinions.	34%	53%	3%	9%	1%
Higher education empowered women to have freedom of choice and expression of their recognition in society.	36%	49%	6%	8%	1%
Educated women are encouraged to share their opinions and ideas on national issues.	23%	47%	10%	18%	2%
Parents spent equal money on the education of their daughters and sons.	19%	40%	7%	29%	5%
Investment in women education has many positive effects on the well being of the family and economic development.	60%	32%	4%	4%	0%
Highly educated women have enough	6%	31%	5%	4	18%

opportunities for employment.	0 %
Average%	29.6 42 5.8 18 4.6

The table 2 shows that out of 100 respondents 29.6% strongly agreed with the statements and 42% agreed , 5.8 were undecided where as the percentage of disagree is 18% and 4.6% strongly disagreed with the statements given in the category. So the overall results given in the table 3 shows that women with higher education are socially recognized not only within their families but in society also.

Table 3: Confidence and Decision Making

STATEMENTS	SA	A	UD	DA	SD A
My education has given me confidence and satisfaction.	63 %	36 %	1%	0%	0%
Women have authority to decide about their education.	35 %	39 %	8%	14%	4%
Women are free to choose their profession according to their interest.	13 %	35 %	9%	36%	7%
Education enables women to hold any public office including the highest office, on merit and without discrimination.	30 %	41 %	2%	20%	7%
I feel myself confident to make economic decisions independently.	33 %	53 %	4%	9%	1%
Average%	34.8	40.8	4.8	15.8	3.8

Table 3 shows that women had gained confidence and decision making power as the overall percentage of strongly agree is 34.8, agree is 40.8, undecided is 4.8 and disagree and strongly disagree is 15.8 and 3.8 respectively. So most of the women had gained confidence through their education and they could take decisions according to their interests.

Table 4: Independency and Responsibility

STATEMENTS	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
Girls should get higher education.	82%	17%	0%	0%	1%
Higher education enables the women to lead independent economic life	52%	34%	3%	9%	2%
Highly educated women can do positive and constructive contribution outside home, if needed.	63%	35%	2%	0%	0%
Women do have full control on their earnings.	18%	57%	0%	16%	9%
Highly educated women enjoy the right of independent ownership in property after marriage.	13%	21%	21%	34%	11%
Average%	45.6	32.8	5.2	11.8	4.6

Table 4 shows that out of 100 respondents 45.6% strongly agree with the statements, 32.8% agreed, 5.2% were undecided 11.8% disagreed with the statements and the percentage of strongly disagree was 4.6%. The overall results showed that education had given sense of responsibility and had made women independent

Table 5: Competencies and Professional Autonomy

STATEMENTS	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
There is quota for highly educated girls in the organization.	17%	32%	15%	35%	2%
I would like to enhance my qualification to improve my present status.	54%	38%	2%	5%	1%
My education has enhanced my managerial skills.	41%	57%	2%	0%	0%
I can manage my financial resources according to the circumstances.	38%	51%	7%	4%	0%
My family supported me in getting higher education	70%	23%	0%	7%	0%
Average%	44	40.2	5.2	10	0.6

Table 5 shows that out of 100 respondents 44% strongly agreed, 40.2% agreed, 5.2% were undecided, 10% disagree and 0.6% strongly disagreed with the statements given in this category.

Table 6: Income benefits and way of living styles

STATEMENTS	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA
My earning is sufficient to maintain me at acceptable level.	32%	43%	8%	8%	9%
Higher education has brought changes in my life	55%	44%	0%	0%	1%
My job has brought positive changes in my living conditions.	36%	56%	3%	5%	0%
Women status is improving with the passage of time.	52%	43%	0%	1%	4%
Most of the earnings of women are spent n household need and requirements.	44%	31%	11%	11%	3%
Average%	43.8	43.4	4.4	5	3.4

The results shown in the table 6 represent that women of rural areas took benefits from their income that had changed their living styles. Out of 100 respondents 43.8% strongly agreed with the statements, 43.4% agreed 4.4% were undecided, 5% and 3.4% disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statements respectively.

Table 7: Higher education and women empowerment

STATEMENTS	SA	A	UD	DA	SD A
Low education level of women is the primary hurdle to attain empowerment.	48%	44%	0%	8%	0%
Economic empowerment of women is a key towards their emancipation in the country.	41%	51%	0%	8%	0%
Higher education awakens the pros and corns of the empowerment in women.	47%	50%	2%	1%	0%
Average%	45.3	48.3	0.7	5.7	0

This category was related to the higher education and women empowerment. The results show that 45.3% respondents strongly agreed with the statements, 48.3% agreed 0.7% were undecided and 5.7% disagreed with the statements given in the category. This shows higher education is the key towards women empowerment, and women from rural areas can be empowered on the basis of higher education.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Following are the findings of the study:

1. The first objective of the study was to find out the importance of the higher education in the lives of the rural women. The results shown in the table 2, 3 & 7 of the questionnaire revealed the importance of higher education in the life of rural women.
2. Another objective of the study was to explore the role of higher education in improving the economic status of women in rural areas. The table 4& 6 meet with this objective, as, through this the researcher came to know that the high percentages of agree and strongly agree showed that higher education had made women economically independent as women become able to perform economic contributions effectively outside home if needed which helped in raising the status of rural women and their families. Higher education provides women sense of independency and they have full control on their earnings.
3. The third objective of the study was to explore the employment conditions of highly educated rural women. The results shown in Table 1 & 5 of the questionnaire revealed that majority of rural working women have jobs according to their qualification and that they had opportunities to show their abilities and chances of promotion. The same idea is supported by Assaad and El-Hamidi, (2001) that education enables the women to get jobs according to their qualification and higher education helps women in the attainment of good jobs and enables them to fulfill the requirements of the job.

In respond to the questions in which women were asked to share their ideas about the economic changes that higher education had brought in their lives, majority of them argued that their education has enabled them to get a job through which they could fulfill their necessities independently and to manage their financial resources in a better way. Higher education helped them to perform their duties within the home and outside the home in an effective way. This is supported by the argument of Kumar, (2006) who stated that today's women are highly independent persons who have the sense of performing their domestic and public work more efficiently. Women responded that their education had enabled them to help their children in their studies. Some of them responded that they were helping their husbands in the construction of their new houses. Some of them were supporting their families and they said that it had raised their worth within the family, now they were recognized as the worthy members of the family. Almost all the respondents presented their view that education is the main instrument in the attainment of the reasonable job. They said that when a woman gets education she became aware of the opportunities available to her and became able to choose the best for her. The same idea is supported by Shireen (1998) that only educated women are aware of the services available to them and they can make decisions regarding the use of these services and they are more likely to use these services in an appropriate way. Some of the

respondents argued that though education is also important but in our country one should have strong reference in order to get a reasonable job.

Overall by analyzing the whole responses it has become clear that now the rural inhabitants have also recognized the importance of higher education of their women. Women from rural areas are attaining higher education in spite of the fact that for that they have to travel the whole day. Those women who have obtained higher education are working outside their houses to support their families. Gone are the days when the people of rural areas considered it to be insulting to send their women to work in offices. Now the women of rural areas are working with men and are competing with urban women and men confidently.

Conclusion

Women from rural areas are working in every walk of life. Their education has given them self-belief and has made them able to interact with outside world more confidently and boldly. Higher education has empowered women now they are no more subjugated part of the society. The main purpose of the working women is to run house economy and to support their families in order to get more respect and better position in the family. The study concludes that now in the rural areas the attitude of parents towards female higher education is changing with the passage of time but still enrollment of girls in higher education from rural areas of Pakistan is not pleasurable. Economic development of a family, society and country is not possible without the participation of women whether they are from rural or urban areas.

The study underlined the fact how higher education improves the status of the women in the society. Women after obtaining education get reasonable jobs which give them confidence, decision making power, better awareness of their rights & responsibility and above all income benefits through which they can win regarded social status.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of the study following recommendations are made:

- At government level steps should be taken to provide quality higher education to these women in nearby areas so that parents can send their daughter to get higher education without any hesitation.
- Mass media campaigns should be further strengthened to create awareness about the significance of women education and importance of their role in the economic development of a country. In order to create awareness among the people of far flung` areas who do not have access to electronic media, teams should be send to create awareness about the benefits of the women education.
- In order to get maximum economic benefits from women of rural areas, who are highly educated, employment opportunities should be provided in their vicinity so

that they can easily access these jobs and play their role in the economic development of their family, society and country.

- Favorable social environment should be created to encourage the women to obtain higher education and participate in the economic activities.
- The progress of any country is accompanied by the full participation of women folk in the development process. Participation of the women, whether rural or urban, is necessary for the economic development of any country. Women should play their role in the development of the family, society and country and their contributions should be recognized and appreciated.
- Further research is needed to explore the difference in the socio-economic status of rural and urban women.

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