

Economic Empowerment: A Strategy to Address Gender based Violence

Abstract¹

This study examines the prevalent issue of gender inequality in material resources and its relationship to violence against women in Pakistan, which focuses on Lady Health Workers (LHWs) in Karachi. The study uses a quantitative research approach and a survey research design to evaluate the status of working women in Karachi, especially LHWs. 200 participants completed a self-structured questionnaire that focuses on demographic data, measures of economic empowerment, and violent situations at home. The findings show that LHWs have a complicated financial situation even though they contribute to the family income. They also have serious difficulties saving money and owning a home. The results also highlight the startling prevalence of violence against women, as 20% of participants shared personal accounts of encounters. The survey highlights how important it is for lawmakers to take action in order to solve issues like equitable job opportunities, property rights, and violence against women. It also emphasizes how crucial it is to launch awareness efforts that support women's rights and challenge social conventions. The findings suggest the development of strong social safety nets and support networks that are adapted to the particular difficulties faced by working women.

Keywords: Access to Resources, Economic Empowerment, Gender Disparity, Lady Health Workers, Violence against Women,

INTRODUCTION

Global gender disparity in material resources exists and has been brought to light in many international reports (UN-MDG, 2015; UNDP, 2015; GIESCR, 2014). Researchers from both domestic and international institutions have emphasized that the significant economic gender gap in South Asian nations is primarily caused by patriarchal mindsets and statutes derived from customary practices (Adelman & Peterman, 2014; Berge, Daimon, Alister, & Henrik, 2014; Brohi, 2010; SDPI, 2010; Mumtaz & Noshirwani, 2007; Mehdi, 2002; Deere & Leon, 2001a). The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GIESCR) (2014) emphasized in its report that gender inequality in economic resources, access to and control over landed property, and inheritance across cultures are consistent patterns of gender discrimination. The Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index, which was mentioned in a different UNDP (2015) report, also highlighted the legal constraints and discriminatory practices that prevent women from benefiting from inheritance property. In Pakistan, the percentage of women who own land is less than 3% (HRCF, 2008). However, a report from the Punjab Commission on Status of Women (2016) states that the percentage of women who own land in Punjab province is 10.6%. Research conducted in Pakistan concentrated on barriers arising from cultural facets related to female inheritance and landed property. The results of

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several studies (Bibi & Bangash, 2018; Rubab, Parveen & Usman, 2016; Brohi, 2010; SDPI, 2010; Mumtaz & Noshirwani, 2007; Mehdi, 2002), show that there is a link between women's property ownership and avoiding taxes, women's withdrawal of their share and lack in handling property matters, and women's reliance on parental family. There is also a study that shows women's lack of awareness and land buying/selling through male family members, denying women's share, and maintaining property through illegal means.

A number of studies have discovered a connection between national and worldwide empowerment and land ownership (Kenny & Ana Paula, 2016; Mor, 2015; Domingo, 2013; Kelker & Maithreyi, 2013; UNESCAP, 2013; Brohi, 2010; SDPI, 2010; Mumtaz & Noshirwani, 2007; Mehdi, 2002). Agarwal (1996a) emphasized that women owning land indicates their higher economic standing. According to Kelker and Maithreyi (2013), women's landed property ownership can have a favorable impact on the roles that women play in the home and in society, as well as on the patriarchal ideology and system. Men and women in Pakistan have equal rights to inheritance under Article 23 of the 1973 Constitution. The Quran has predetermined Islamic regulations that govern the distribution of inherited portions (Engineer, 1994).

Pakistan has a population of 207.68 million people, of which 106.3 million are men and 101.3 million are women (Pakistan Census, 2017). The LFS (2020–2021) projects that 159.83 million people (10 years of age and older) will be employed. Remarkably, over 60% of this working population considers all women/girls who are 10 years of age or older to be essential members of the labour force. The percentage of Pakistani women in the labour force is 21% of the total. Women's participation in the labour force is slightly higher than 50% worldwide, while men's participation is 80% since women have fewer options for business expansion and career advancement, as well as a lower likelihood of working in formal employment and women who work make less money than men of the same age group.

According to a UN Women (2017) study, one in three women have experienced physical or sexual violence, usually at the hands of a husband or partner. Intimate partner abuse has been identified as a significant public health concern impacting over 2 million women globally. According to data released in 2012, one out of every two women globally has experienced the death of a partner or family member. Domestic violence can take many different forms, span a wide range of situations, and transcend social classes (Collins, 2009). Population Reports (1999) states that between 10% and 50% of ladies experience physical abuse at the hands of their partners. The establishment of power structures inside families leads to a patriarchal framework, which may increase the likelihood of violence against women. Because the patriarchal family structure upholds the status quo in which men are given higher status than women, there is a persistent risk of violence (Anderson, 1997).

Purpose of the Study

The study intends to examine the employability of women as evidence to increase access to material resources and decrease violence against women at the domestic level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is quantitative in nature with an aim to assess the situation of working women in the journey of change.

Research design

Survey research design was selected to explain the phenomenon by portraying an exemplary situation. The research specifically focuses upon Lady Health Workers and Lady Health Supervisors from all districts of Karachi division. The criteria for selecting the participants include the following: -

- Lady Health Workers of Karachi division (living/working in Karachi)
- An active employee at the time of survey (not retired)
- Lady Health Supervisors of Karachi division (living/working in Karachi)

Instrument construction

A self-structured questionnaire consisting of 25 questions was used to collect the data. The questionnaire was divided into three parts to get responses. The first part consists of demographic information of the participants, second part consist of income, expenses and access to resources, and the third and last part consists of the experience of violence in their life.

Sampling technique and sample size

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the sample size. A criterion was set to include the sample in the study. Therefore, in this research project, a sample of 200 LHWs/LHSs was selected from Karachi Division in Sindh. The sample is further subdivided into categories to systematise the process. The description and sub-division of the sample of 200 LHWs/LHSs into the seven districts of Karachi. All individuals who were willing to participate in the study were taken in the study. Following is the breakdown of the sample: -

Table: 1

The description and sub-division of the sample of 200 LHWs/LHSs

| Distri ct# | District names | Lady Health Workers – LHWs | Lady Health Supervisors – LHSs | Total |
|------------|----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Central | 25 | 3 | 28 |
| 2 | East | 25 | 3 | 28 |
| 3 | West | 25 | 3 | 28 |
| 4 | South | 25 | 4 | 29 |
| 5 | Kemari | 25 | 4 | 29 |
| 6 | Korangi | 25 | 4 | 29 |
| 7 | Malir | 25 | 4 | 29 |
| Total | | 175 | 25 | 200 |

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages.

Limitation of the study

Time constraint is a limitation in this research. We had about 3 months to not only collect the data but also to process and write the report. As this research focused on the LHWs (government employees) it may not portray the situation of private workers very well. Also,

the responses collected to complete this research are from Karachi Division only. Therefore, this research may not be 100 per cent applicable to the context that are not similar to Karachi or would require a little further investigation.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Table 2:
Demographics

| Variables | Response | N | % |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----|----|
| Age | 45-50 | 58 | 29 |
| | 35-44 | 94 | 47 |
| | 25-34 | 48 | 24 |
| Education | Matric | 107 | 54 |
| | Middle | 93 | 46 |
| District | Karachi Central | 4 | 2 |
| | Karachi East | 2 | 1 |
| | Karachi West | 4 | 2 |
| | Karachi South | 50 | 25 |
| | Kemari | 50 | 25 |
| | Korangi | 50 | 25 |
| | Malir | 40 | 20 |
| Language | Urdu | 106 | 53 |
| | Others | 94 | 47 |
| Marital Status | Married | 145 | 72 |
| | Single | 55 | 28 |
| Employment status of husband | Private employee | 51 | 26 |
| | Unemployed | 32 | 16 |
| | Not mentioned | 117 | 58 |

Table 2 provides a summary of the participants' demographic information that includes age, education, language preferences, city and district distribution, marital status, and husbands' job status. According to the age distribution, 29% lady health workers belong to the age group of 45 years and above. Another 47% of lady health workers belong to the age category between 35 and 44 years, whereas the last 24% lady health workers belong to the age category between 25 to 34 years of age. Regarding education, the majority (54%) hold a Matric level certification and the remaining 46% hold middle level education. 52% lady health workers speak Urdu language, which reflects linguistic preferences. 72% of lady health workers were married and the rest 28% were single. Regarding husbands' employment situation, 16% of them are unemployed; 26% work for private companies and 58% LHWs did not write the occupation of their husbands.

Table 3:
Access to material resources, income and expenses

| Serial# | Economic Empowerment | N | % |
|---------|---|-----|----|
| 1. | Spouse does not contribute to the family income | 68 | 34 |
| 2. | Spend their salary with their own hand | 172 | 86 |
| 3. | Can decide on their own, where to spend the amount | 113 | 56 |
| 4. | Women or wives should be in-charge of spending in the household | 131 | 65 |
| 5. | Failed to do any saving despite the service of two decades | 134 | 67 |
| 6. | Spend their salary for the fulfilment of their children's need | 85 | 43 |
| 7. | Their lifestyle improved after the job | 197 | 99 |
| 8. | The lifestyle of their family has improved since they started working | 197 | 99 |
| 9. | Managed to acquire some assets with their income | 51 | 26 |
| 10. | Property in their maternal family and some have a share in property | 92 | 46 |

Table 3 explains income, expenses and access to resources of lady health workers and lady health supervisors. Interestingly, a sizable percentage (34%) stated that their spouses do not contribute to the household income, underscoring the possibility that these women frequently bear sole financial responsibility. Most (86%) said they spent their pay on their own, which suggests they had some financial independence. But the plain truth is that, after decades of service, 67% of participants acknowledged they had never saved money, highlighting significant financial difficulties. Although lady health workers (63%) want to take charge of spending at home, this indicates a change in gender roles, but saving money is still a challenge. Thankfully, a huge portion (99%) said that getting a job improved their lifestyle, demonstrating the advantages of economic participation. Moreover, a more widespread beneficial knock-on effect is shown by a comparable improvement in their family's lifestyle (99%). However, the acquisition of property rights (46%) and assets with income (26%) in maternal families suggests that LHWs continue to face difficulties, especially in obtaining long-term financial stability and property entitlements. These results highlight the necessity of focused interventions addressing savings strategies, financial literacy, and legislative frameworks that guarantee the financial security and professional development of female health workers.

Table 4
Violence experienced or witnessed by lady health workers

| Serial # | Experience Violence | N | % |
|----------|--|-----|-----|
| 1. | All women in Pakistan experience different types of violence in their lifetime | 200 | 100 |
| 2. | Have you experienced violence? | 40 | 20 |
| 3. | If you did experience violence, did your family members help or save the victims | 20 | 10 |
| 4. | Witnessed women around them experiencing violence | 139 | 70 |
| 5. | Economic empowerment of women will prevent violence against women | 194 | 97 |
| 6. | Sindh has laws regarding prevention from violence | 197 | 99 |

Table 4 reveals the experience of violence faced or witnessed by lady health workers. 100% lady health workers mentioned that all women in Pakistan experience different types of violence in their lifetime. The 20% of the lady health workers reported having personally experienced violence which highlight the critical need to address this issue. Significantly, 10% of victims of violence report not receiving enough support or assistance from their families, which raises the possibility of a weakness in the family safety net. Additionally, a sizable majority—70 %—report having seen women in their immediate vicinity subjected to violence, highlighting the widespread influence of this problem on society as a whole. 97% of participants strongly supported the premise that empowering people economically can act as a deterrent to violence. Furthermore, a resounding 99% of participants think that Sindh has laws in place to prevent violence, indicating knowledge of legal frameworks designed to address this pressing social issue.

The study intends to examine the employability of women as evidence to increase access to material resources and decrease violence against women at the domestic level. The study highlights the complex network of financial difficulties Pakistani lady health workers, or LHWs, encounter. When one challenges the idea that participation in the economy leads to security and empowerment, a gendered divide is shown. LHWs struggle to ensure their future even though they actively contribute to the family income. The harsh truth is that since their income mostly supports households, their opportunities for personal financial progress are limited. This is related to more general concerns regarding the persistent pay gaps that exist between the sexes in the workforce. The study also shows a significant gap in women's access to family property and emphasizes the relationship between property rights and economic empowerment. LHWs do not have ownership rights despite their efforts, which highlights the need for legislative changes to ensure economic independence. The findings align with global trends where women face barriers to managing and obtaining resources, which hinders their ability to break out from economic dependency. Based on the personal testimonies of 20% of participants, the survey also highlights the pervasive issue of violence against women in Pakistan. Unsettlingly, several assault victims claimed that their family hadn't given them adequate protection, which raises the possibility that the system is broken

structurally. This requires urgent attention to improve social safety nets and address the root causes of violence against women.

A key finding is discovered regarding the impact that work has on LHWs' lives. Most of them assert that their circumstances have improved as a result of their efforts. The correlation between economic independence and a reduction in violence is positive, indicating that meaningful employment has the potential to alter societal dynamics. The findings are consistent with global programs that promote women's economic empowerment as a tactic to combat gender-based violence. The majority i.e 97% of the participants believe that economic empowerment of women can be achieved, if violence against women is reduced. This shows that financial independence is an important key to developing resistance against gender-based violence. The targeted interventions required to change the power dynamics within the families by providing access to resources and opportunities to control over their resources (income & housing). Immediate legislative actions are required to reduce violence against women, gender based economic inequalities and improve property rights. It is important to safeguard women's equal rights and property ownership. Initiatives are also required to raise awareness that challenge societal traditions, customs and enhance women's rights which can help to shift people's perspectives. It is also suggested to develop safety nets and support networks with the purpose of addressing the challenges encountered by working women.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the complex issue of gender inequality in material resources and its relationship to violence against women in Pakistan, with special focus on Lady Health Workers (LHWs) in Karachi. 200 lady health workers of Karachi division participated in the study. The study highlighted the situation of lady health workers who not only contribute to the family income but also look after household chores all in rather constrained conditions. They also have serious difficulty in saving money and are not able to buy their own house. The participating lady health workers also highlighted the startling prevalence of violence against women, as 20% of participants shared personal accounts of encounters. They also mentioned that although it has improved their lifestyle, 20 % are highlighted as facing violence in the event of asking anything from their husbands. The study also mentioned the importance of taking action in order to solve issues like equitable job opportunities, property rights, and violence against women. The findings also suggested the development of strong social safety nets and support networks that are adapted to the particular difficulties faced by working women.

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