

**MEN'S PERCEPTION REGARDING RELIGIOUS IMPEDIMENTS TOWARDS WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA PAKISTAN**

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Abstract

The main outcomes of this study are, Joint family pattern is very common in rural traditional society. People are less educated, earning low as compared to their needs. Religious misinterpretation is the major influential factor behind the disempowerment of women, majority of the women cannot exercise the rights given by Islam, and most of women are unaware from their religious rights. The common masses considered women empowerment as a bad stigma from the religious background of the family while the misuse of the religion also goes against the favour of women empowerment. The present study was carried out to explore men's perception regarding women empowerment from religious perspective. The study was conducted in the rural areas of district Dir lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, through measurement of variables as obstacle to women empowerment and stability from religious point of view i.e. religious misinterpretation, exercise of religious rights, women ignorance from religious right, misuse of religion, cultural and traditional influence on religion. The study found significant association was between women empowerment and religious misinterpretation which is the major influential factor behind the disempowerment of women. Further, significant association was also noticed between women empowerment in exercise of religious right and with women's social activities which are considered against the religious dogmas.

Keywords: Religious misinterpretation, religious rights, ignorance, negative stigma, subordination.

INTRODUCTION

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, being a rural part of the country where in 70% of the population lives in rural areas out of which 51% population is composed of women folk. The main profession of the people living in this part is farming due to lack of industrial development. The existing industrial set up is agro based utilizing the local raw material which is unable to cater to the needs of people living in this province. The per capita income in this province is 2.2\$ per day which is quite low as compared to other countries of the same rank. The rural social structure in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gives authority and key role to male population, while the women being 51% of the whole population are ignored and they live as a paralyzed organ. They are not allowed to take part in political activities and decision making for the national development. Men are enjoying the authority of thumb rule as a father, husband and religious leader while many taboos are implemented against women folk (Nayrop, Bendrly, Cort, Parker, Perlmutter, Shinn, & Shivanauden, 1971; Naz, Ibrahim & Waqar, 2012 and Daraz, 2012). In Pakistan, especially in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa women are primarily involved in agriculture, child care and household duties. Share of women's works or her contribution

are ignored and remain invisible because any independent involvement outside the household do not exist due to strict Pashtun culture and misinterpretation of religion (Momsen, 2006). Male members are responsible for the earning activities and economic responsibilities. Traditionally they have remained the leaders of the family (Jamal, Haroon, Aisha, Ghaus-Pasha, 2007).

Empowerment is a comprehensive phenomenon which is bound to give an equal share to women in various domains like political, educational, economic, religious, socio-cultural and many other spheres of life just to make them capable to deliver as an equal partner to men in society. The process of decision making is the part of empowerment which gives authority to women and enhances their status to make them capable to work shoulder to shoulder with men in the society (United Nations Report, 2005). In Pakistan, most of the rural women are restricted to express their desire due to religious pressure regarding mate selection, family decisions or even family size because of the reason that they dwelled in conservative culture. Most of the Pashtun women are also forcefully denied of their religious right to divorce rather the husband is enjoying the authority (Ali and Sultan, 1999; Naz et al., 2012; United Nations Development Program, 2010; Kristof, WuDunn, & Half 2009; Mariam, 2014, Femida, 2004 and Aryan, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research study was a cross sectional study generally called as One Shot study. Cross sectional design gives a complete picture of this situation prevailing at a time of research study (Babie, 1989). The present study was limited to five villages of district Dir Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These villages were selected due to its traditional rural structure and the researcher's familiarity with the environment of the area. For a total population of 775 sample size of 272 respondents are sufficient (Sekaran, 2003). The sample size was taken on stratified random procedure from their respective population through proportional allocation method ($n_1 = K * n/N$) given by Kumar (2010). The respondent targeted for this specific study having age limit between 30-60, while both educated and illiterate respondents were selected.

For primary data collection, a complete and well thought out interview schedule was planned, covering all the fundamental sections of the research study. The interview schedule was pre-tested for its significance to the study objectives, ambiguities and inconsistencies was excluded before collection of actual data. The data collected was coded and entered in a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software for analysis. Chi-square test was applied to determine the degree of association between dependent and independent variables.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Frequency and percentage distribution of religious aspect of women empowerment in men's perception

Islam declared both male and female as equivalent co-worker and do not give preference on the basis of sex. In spite this, empowerment of women in Muslim countries is one of the major issue. Muslim women are the least empowered part of the Islamic society. Islam gave a respectable position to women in society about 1500 year ago. Man and women both are essential for the perpetuations of mankind. This dilemma is faced by the Muslim world due to misinterpretation of religious values, corruption and un-Islamic tradition prevalent in the existing set up. Since women empowerment is the main key in the developmental process, it faces various challenges due to religious and regional attributes in the traditional society, it is so owing to highly patriarchal structure

based on the old age primitive traditions of obedient and secondary role of women. A girl in traditional society is raised in the way as to how to serve and obey the male. All the decisions made by the male members are backed by the misinterpretation of religion (Badawi, 1971 and Bugaji, 1997). Due to lack of education, awareness and traditional influence of the dominant segment, male in rural areas are interpreting religious doctrine under the influence of tradition and the prevalent norms for their own benefit especially against women (Imran, Farhan, & Muhammad, 2012).

Data shows that (68.8 percent) of the respondents were of the opinion that religious misinterpretation is one of the major influential factor behind the disempowerment of women. While 57.7% of the respondents were of the opinion that in rural traditional society of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa women cannot exercise the rights given to them by religion in decision making and other related matters. Furthermore, majority of the respondents i.e. (70.2 percent) were of the opinion that women are kept ignorant and unaware from their religious rights. Findings of the study are closely similar to (Bugaji, 1997 and Imran et al., 2012) and they state that misinterpretation of religion under the attributes of tradition and social norms by dominant segments of the society are responsible for women disempowerment. Indeed, women are kept ignorant from their rights either consciously or unconsciously (Bushra, 2010). Unfortunately historically women have never been equal to men and this was just another instance when age long traditional belief system had been set aside. The fact that there was no equality between the two, therefore, changing this structure may take years of awareness of rising efforts. A woman grows up to believe that she cannot decide or say anything against her brother, father or husband and subsequently will remain silent even in the face of adverse cruel behavior. According to (Imran et al., 2012), most of the rural women are unaware from their religious rights, while men consciously exclude female from the domestic decision making.

Moreover, in most of the traditional rural communities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa empowerment of women is considered not good for the family reputation. Majority of the families having religious background consider empowerment of women as a sin. They perceive that women empowerment is an act which can degrade their family values and status in the society. Many people in rural areas were of the opinion that, female confinement inside the boundary wall makes them more prestigious. (59.9 percent) of the respondents were of the opinion that, empowerment of women are considered as a bad stigma from the religious background. Due to religious set up and conservative thinking they do not allow females to take part in the family and social affairs. Finding of the study also supported by (Mann, 2005; Moghadam, 1992; Tapper, 1991 and Kandiyati, 1988) that in rural areas empowerment of women is still a debatable chapter and she cannot fit in the social set up and her empowerment considered against the prestige of the family and society.

Moreover, (59.2 percent) of the respondents were of the opinion that, in our society men use religion to subordinate women and to confine her in the boundary wall and to keep her away from the family administration. While (78.3 percent) of the respondents were of the opinion that one of the major cause of women disempowerment is lack of female religious scholars, religious education and awareness in the rural areas. Religious schools in rural areas are established only for boys and no such institutions are present for females. Most of the household heads in rural areas are not interested and do not give any attention to impart the religious education to their girl child, due to which female are easily deceived to false interpretation of religious rules. Due to unawareness from religious knowledge they cannot make any claim for inheritance rights nor participate in any decision related to her life and family. Findings of the study were supported by (Imran et al., 2012; Musokotwana and Siwala, 2001) they stated that male use religion in their own favor to subordinate

female and to strengthen their role in society. Due to lack of religious education, awareness and knowledge in rural area females are unable to safeguard their religious rights. On the other side (62.5 percent) respondents argued purdah is the reason towards women disempowerment. Finding of the study were supported by (Jones, Snelgrove Muckosy, 2006) that veil (purdah) is a hurdle in the way of women empowerment. It makes women under confident and do not let women to achieve their dreams. While according to the study of (Tariq and Ashfaq, 2008) women wearing veil are less empowered than the others, and according to (UN, 2009) in some traditional communities of Afghanistan, removal or not using of Burqa of women are being considered as a sign of liberation.

Additionally, the data explored that religion is used to create impediments in the way of women's social and political activities. Data shows that majority i.e. (76.8 percent) of the respondents were of the opinion that in the research areas women social and political activities are considered the violation of religious dogmas and violation of Islamic ways. It is also noticed that religious leaders also interpret religious doctrine under the influence of culture which shows the strength and influence of cultural values, though majority of the respondents i.e. (48.5 percent) were not agreed with the statement and answered that they are not in a position to say something about the statement due to its sensitivity, while a significant portion of the respondents express their agreement with the statement. Finding is in line with (Naz et al., 2012) who stated that self-made Mulas in Pashtun society are interpreting religion under the influence of culture and tradition which creates hurdle to women empowerment and other social issues, and also causing severe loss to the Islamic doctrine.

Presenting frequency and percentage distribution regarding religious aspect of women empowerment in men's perception

Religious Aspect	Response			Total
	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	
Religious misinterpretation is the major influential factor behind the disempowerment of women.	187 (68.8%)	3.0 (1.1%)	82 (30.1%)	272 (100%)
Women can exercise rights given by Islam.	105 (38.6%)	10 (3.7%)	157 (57.7%)	272 (100%)
Women are kept ignorant/unaware from their religious right.	191 (70.2%)	2.0 (0.7%)	79 (29.0%)	272 (100%)
Empowerment of women is considered as a bad stigma from the religious background.	163 (59.9%)	3.0 (1.1%)	106 (39.0%)	272 (100%)
Men misuse religion in their own favor to subordinate women.	161 (59.2%)	4.0 (1.5%)	107 (39.3%)	272 (100%)
Women disempowerment is due to lack of female religious scholars and religious education.	213 (78.3%)	4.0 (1.5%)	55 (20.2%)	272 (100%)
Purdah is the reason towards women disempowerment.	170 (62.5%)	5.0 (1.8%)	97 (35.7%)	272 (100%)
Women political activities are considered against the religious dogmas.	209 (76.8%)	2.0 (0.7%)	61 (22.4%)	272 (100%)
Culture and tradition influence religious interpretation.	80 (29.4%)	60 (22.1%)	132 (48.5%)	272 (100%)

Values in each cell indicate frequency and parenthesis show percentages. It shows that how much respondents recorded their observation in favor or against the given statement.

Association between religious aspect of empowerment and men's perception regarding women empowerment

According to (Badawi, 1971) Islam discusses family and society on ethical grounds. It is neither a drawback to be a woman or man. Islam has put certain limitations, guidelines and responsibilities over both sexes. Islam does not give preferences to sex. In front of the Allah Almighty both are equal, one's income, property, happiness, power, beauty and intelligence are of no meaning in our religion, but it is the piousness which make an individual important in front of Allah. Islamic teachings brought revolution in life of women through Islamic laws regarding women empowerment. It is the misinterpretation of religious value, corruption and un-Islamic tradition prevalent in the existing set up which is the main cause of women disempowerment. About the actionable areas for women much confusion is present in the Islamic World. In rural societies due to highly patriarchal structure based on the old age traditions and secondary role of women leads them towards disempowerment. A girl in traditional patriarchal society socialized in a way that how to serve male. All the decisions made by the male members are backed by the misinterpretation of religion (Bugaji, 1997).

Data shows association between religious aspects of empowerment and men's perception regarding women empowerment. Data explore a significant association ($P < 0.05$) between misinterpretation of religious values and men's perception regarding women empowerment. Ignorance, little knowledge and cultural dominance over religion. Rural people interpret religious values according to their cultural set up. Majority of the rural traditional cultures are male dominant therefore, they interpret religious values from their own point of view. Finding of the recent study is supported by (Imran et al., 2012). He explored that due to illiteracy, ignorance and cultural influence the dominant segment in rural society interpret religious doctrine under the influence of tradition and prevalent norms which leads women to disempowerment (Ahmed, 1992). Musokotwana and Siwala (2001) disclosed that religious doctrines are interpreted in such a way to subordinate women, to confine women inside the boundary wall and to keep her away from active participation. Whereas, a highly significant association ($P < 0.05$) was found between weak participation of women in decision making and the men's perception regarding women empowerment. In rural areas women participation in decision making is influenced by various factors, due to which they are restricted from participating in decision making. However, the religion Islam gives equal importance to men and women. According to Holy Quran "And the believer, men and women both are friends in savior of each other, both enjoin the doing of what is good (right) and restricted the doing of wrong deeds and are regular in prayers and giving the sanctifying dues and pay attention to God and its Messenger" (AT-Tuba, 9:71). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has given great stress on women rights and protection such as freedom of expression, right of inheritance, freedom of earning, worship, and right of education and choices of spouses. According to the Holy Prophet (SAWW) "the best amongst you is the one who is best for their wives" Further he said that "Acquiring of knowledge is the responsibilities of all Muslim, man and women". These findings is supported by Bugaji (1997). He states that lack of women empowerment in Muslim society is due to their own culture and man-made laws which are responsible for lack of women participation in decision making and their disempowerment. Islam is the greatest advocate of women rights and empowerment. Women empowerment in Muslim countries is one of the key issues faced by half of their population. Women are the most under developed part of the Muslim society. Islam gives respectable position and equal importance to women. It is the misinterpretation of religious values and influence of traditional existing norms, patriarchal structure and male dominance, which create ambiguities about the

actionable areas for women in the society. Majority of the women are consciously or unconsciously kept ignorant from their religious rights. They are excluded from the process of decision making (Bugaji, 1997; Imran et al., 2012; Musokotwana; Siwala, 2001 and Bushra, 2010).

Furthermore, a non-significant association was found between ignorance of women from the right of inheritance, decision making and use of religion to subordinate them and men's perception regarding women empowerment. During data collection many respondents were of the opinion that women have the knowledge regarding their right of inheritance and decision making. They are not unaware from such rights but it is the culture and family pressure which compel them to leave up such rights. Men misuse religion to subordinate women and blackmail them through various other cultural means to surrender from such rights i.e. violence, life threat, breaking of relation NANG and Pashtunwali etc. Findings are supported by (Bugaji, 1997 and Imran et al., 2012) and they state that, women cannot exercise the rights granted by religion to them in inheritance and decision making because the culture or system force her to surrender. Moreover, a non-significant relation was also observed between the perception that women empowerment is a bad stigma for the religious background of the family and men's perception regarding women empowerment. Families with religious backgrounds are imparting religious education to both the gender with equal priorities. They educate both with religious knowledge and they have their own areas and perception about empowerment of women. They are against the modern concept of empowerment. The families who follow according to religion are living a satisfactory life. Findings are in line with (Moghadam, 1992; Tapper, 1991; Mann; 2005 and Kandiyati, 1988) who state that, majority of families with religious background consider that modern concept of women empowerment is a sin. They consider modernity is an act which will degrade their family value and status in the society. Those families who follow religion Islam, have a very clear concept regarding women empowerment. Islam is the only religion which gives respectable status to women 1400 years ago. Western types of modernization is totally a failure of the society. In western countries people use women only to uplift their economic status in the society in the name of recent modernization and empowerment.

Furthermore, a non-significant association was explored between lack of female religious scholars/interpreter and men's perception regarding women empowerment. In rural traditional Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, religious scholars interpret doctrines of religion without any prejudice and influence. They equally give importance and stress to the matters related to both the sexes. According to the present study, the relation explored that female religious interpreter do not have any role linked with women empowerment. Moreover, the data also explores a non-significant relation between influence of culture and tradition on religious scholars to interpret religion from the view point of social set up and men's perception regarding women empowerment. Islam is a complete code of conduct which cannot accept any pressure from outside neither Islam is obedient to culture or tradition in any sort of explanation. Islamic rules are clear to everyone, it is the unaware community of some dominant people (mostly male members) who interpret Islamic rules in their own way to retain their power on others. Finding is also supported by (Bugaji, 1997) who state that, women disempowerment in Islamic society is due to manmade laws. Islam is the greatest advocate of women rights and empowerment. Furthermore, data shows a non-significant relation between women disempowerment due to purdah and men's perception regarding women empowerment. People are very sensitive about religious matters in rural traditional communities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is the other factors like ignorance, illiteracy and unawareness due to which they connect various un-Islamic practices with religion in such a way as to give men an upper hand in the name of religion. Findings of the study were supported by (Jones et al., 2006; Tariq and Ashfaq,

2008) that veil purdah is a hurdle in the way of women empowerment and do not let women to achieve their dreams.

Participation of women in political activities in rural societies are considered against the religion. They were of the opinion that Islam does not permit women to take part in political activities publically. Data shows a significant association ($P < 0.05$) owing to lack of religious permission to women political activities and men's perception regarding women empowerment. Besides religion, many other factors are also contributing towards their less participation in political affairs. In many rural areas politics is purely considered as the field of men, so they do not let their females to be involved. The participation of females in political affairs is considered against family honor and status. Finding is supported by (Catherine, 2011) that due to unawareness, lack of suitable environment and motivation rural women are unaware to take any combined political initiative to alter their condition in the form of association or group efforts and moreover, due to male dominancy in rural social structure, women are discouraged to establish any association with regards to socio-political activities to change their life. They are discouraged through various means like religion, culture and honor which leads to their disempowerment and less participation in political affairs.

Presenting association between religious aspect of empowerment and men's perception regarding women empowerment

Independent Variable (Religious Aspect)	Dependent Variable	Statistics
Religious misinterpretation is the major influential factor behind the disempowerment of women.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=8.756$ (0.075)
Women can exercise rights given by Islam.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=30.264$ (0.000)
Women are kept ignorant/unaware from their religious rights.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2= 1.286$ (0.56)
Empowerment of women is considered as a bad stigma from the religious background.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=4.751$ (0.093)
Men misuse religion in their own favor to subordinate women.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=2.091$ (0.351)
Women disempowerment is due to lack of female religious scholars and religious education.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=0.840$ (0.657)
Purdah (Veil) is the reason towards women disempowerment	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=5.473$ (0.065)
Women political activities are considered against the religious dogmas.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=10.493$ (0.005)
Culture and tradition influence religious interpretation.	Men's perception regarding women empowerment	$\chi^2=3.217$ (0.200)

Value in each cell indicates Chi-square and parenthesis values show significance at 0.05 level of confidence. In parenthesis when the value recorded below 0.05 it means that significant association between the variables exist while in the parenthesis if the value recorded higher than 0.05 it means that the association is not significant between the two variables.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The current research paper explored religious misinterpretation which is a major influential factor behind the disempowerment of women. Women cannot exercise the rights given by Islam to them. In the rural areas women are kept ignorant/unaware from their religious rights, while empowerment of women is considered as a bad stigma from the religious background of the family, further in research area it was explored that men misuse religion in their own favor to subordinate women. It was explored that women disempowerment is due to lack of female religious scholars and religious education and religious ban on women's social activities. In light of this specific study it is recommended that parents must be sensitized through various social awareness programs to give equal importance to the female future to be secured and their future should not be associated with any other. Social movements must be initiated and such people must be encouraged which want to eradicate the ill cultural practices against women. Awareness among common masses should be created through campaign about the role of women which she can play in local, national and international development. Religious leaders/Mulla must be registered in the rural areas to avoid the concept of self-preaching etc. Special emphasis must be given towards their proper training, so the concept of misinterpretation of religious doctrines can be controlled. Religious leaders are the potential segment of the society. They can convince the male members of the society towards women empowerment and can help to implement the women's religious rights. The educated religious leaders can help a lot in matters related to women empowerment without being pressurized from cultural/societal influences. Furthermore, proper salaries and stipends should be granted to them to minimize their dependence on local community. Awareness must be created among women regarding the religious rights which have, and the common masses must be sensitized about the ill consequences of religious misuse against women religiously, morally and socially. Basic skills of self-employment business must be provided to the rural women & rural women must be encouraged to establish social organization to alter their condition.

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