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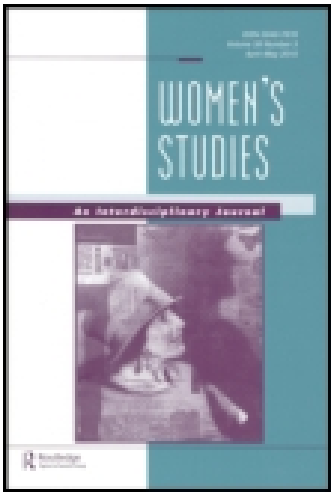

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Education as a Prerequisite to Women's Empowerment in Pakistan

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EDUCATION AS A PREREQUISITE TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN PAKISTAN

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Introduction

Women's empowerment has received considerable attention during the last few decades as one of the important issues on the international development agenda. Previously the values behind the dominant policy discourse on women's education saw education in terms of access to schooling but what is missing from this discourse was any discussion of the process of girls' schooling or of women's education, particularly in terms of how schools and literacy programs can either transmit or transform dominant values and relationships, such as gender hierarchies (Robinson-Pant).

Recently there have been several attempts by development organizations to break the development process down into more tangible, concrete goals that often include gender equity and women's empowerment (Murphy-Graham). For example, the Convention on the *Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979; the Beijing Platform for Gender Equality 1995; the Dakar Education for All (EFA) Framework of Action 2000,* and the *United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000*, all focused on the issues of gender inequality and women's empowerment. The United Nations *Millennium Summit* in September 2000 addressed this problem in its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The third Millennium Development Goal was broadly framed to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Within the Goal, the target relating to education was set in terms of eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 (not achieved) and in all levels by 2015 (Aikman and Unterhalter). The recognition that women's equality and rights

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are central to achieving economic and social priorities is important. But it is not by chance that this has come about. It is the result of work by women's human rights advocates over decades, creating a groundswell of activism for gender equality at global, regional, and national levels (Heyzer).

Despite this recognition, gender equality still remains a dilemma due to insecure school environments and inadequate sanitation that disproportionately affects girls' self-esteem, participation, and retention. Textbooks, curricula and teacher attitudes continue to reinforce stereotypes of gender roles in society (UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report 5). Education has recently been proven to raise the level of awareness about gender-related discrimination and disparities among women and has equipped them with the knowledge and skills to better compromise with their circumstances. Highly educated women become exposed to new ideas, making them challenge the existing norms more openly than less educated women (Maslak and Singhal). My study aims to shed light on the real link between education and empowerment and how education might foster women's empowerment.

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Background and Context

The concept of women's empowerment is not new. References to the term date back to the 1960s, particularly in the Afro-American movement. Since 1985, popular women's movements in Latin America and the Caribbean as well as feminists have used the notion of empowerment. At the level of development bodies, the concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference 1995. The *Beijing Declaration* (section 13) presents women's empowerment as a key strategy for development:

> Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. (Fourth World Conference on Women 4)

Despite being on the agenda of many development organizations (CEDAW, EFA, and MDGs) there is no agreed definition

of this concept. Scholars continue to question, rethink, and reflect on what empowerment means. However, there is some agreement about the key components of empowerment. In their review of the theoretical and empirical literature on women's empowerment, Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (cited in Murphy-Graham) found greater consensus than they expected on how writers conceptualize empowerment. They found that a few overlapping terms were often included in defining empowerment: options, choice, control, and power. They also found frequent reference to the ability to affect one's own well-being and make strategic life choices. The theoretical literature on empowerment revealed that empowerment is an intentional, ongoing process through which people who are lacking an equal share of valued resources, gain greater access to and control over those resources (Jejeebhoy; Malhotra et al.; Kabeer). Empowerment also involves an effort to exert control over one's environment, through proactive actions. At the opposite end of the spectrum, non-empowerment encompasses stress, frustration, and hopelessness (Nachshen). According to Alsop et al. empowerment is primarily influenced by two sets of interrelated factors: agency and opportunity structures. This argument is further elaborated upon by Kabeer that three inter-related dimensions are critical for women's empowerment: resources (access and future claims on material, human, and social resources), agency (the ability to define one's goals and act on them), and achievements (well-being outcomes).

Previous research on women's empowerment treated empowerment as an outcome of a particular intervention such as microcredit and literacy programs (Agha; Kishor; Hashemi et al.; Jejeebhoy; Strauss and Thomas). Most of them have taken basic education as the catalyst for women's empowerment. The perception that basic education automatically leads to empowerment is an analytical leap of faith. It is problematic to assume that the basic literacy program automatically empowers women because some recent studies (Gupta and Sharma; Mukhopadhyay cited in Maslak and Singhal) reflect that highly educated women challenge the existing norms more openly than less educated women. Maslak and Singhal also found that access to higher education can bring about changes in cognitive ability, which is essential to women's capacity to question, to reflect on, and

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to act on the conditions of their lives and to gain access to knowledge, information, and new ideas that will help them to do so. This finding is also supplemented by Kabeer that education, employment, and political participation are essential to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. In this framework, education is considered a potential resource or catalyst of empowerment and this knowledge also enhances a woman's knowledge of and exposure to the outside world, which then facilitates her capacity to question and reflect on issues. Sudha found that highly educated women expressed that schooling not only created awareness of their rights, facilitating the development of individuality and rationality, but also encouraged them to challenge traditionally constructed gender roles. I concur with the above findings and have tried to explore the link between higher education and women's empowerment in the context of Pakistan. This study aims to clarify the relationship between education and women's empowerment by examining if higher education has a role in the development of women's self-determination and empowerment.

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A Study

The main aim of this research was to examine the effect of higher education on women's lives and how higher education empowered women in an apparently patriarchal society such as Pakistan. A case study approach was used in this study. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates contemporary phenomena within its real life context when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. This approach helps to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth (Yin). The social phenomenon of empowerment that is being studied in this research is a multidimensional concept (Hashemi et al.) and could not be understood merely by quantitative analysis without contextual considerations. The present study has tried to understand empowerment in term of socially constructed reality as stated in term of the first axiom of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba).

The participants for this study were women working in different senior teaching and administrative posts of a local women's

university. Purposive sampling was used in this study, based on the premise that an emphasis on in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon is best achieved by selecting information-rich cases to illuminate the questions under study (Patton). The focus of the present study was to explore how higher education empowered women. So, deans and heads of the academic departments were selected as the sample of the study. The logic behind this selection was that women working in the same organization share the same job environment and culture, only their family and social background determined how much they were empowered by higher education. The sample comprised ten women; a vice chancellor, four deans, one head of department each randomly selected from faculties of Natural Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Humanities, Islamic and Oriental Learning and two from Social Sciences (as this faculty comprised 17 departments, much larger than the other three). Seven participants were Ph.D. degree holders and among them five were foreign qualified. Two of the participants were enrolled on a Ph.D. program at that time. Participants' age range was from 50 to 60 and they belonged to middle and upper middle class. All participants were married and one of them was divorced.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. Before data analysis the whole interview data were transcribed. The data were analyzed in the tradition of qualitative research. A four-step qualitative analysis process was designed to ensure that patterns and themes which might emerge from the data could be carefully verified. These included: coding the data with keywords as a way of identifying commonalities and variations; identifying common and variable patterns within the group; and abstracting themes which link or explain the data (Miles and Huberman; Patton; Basit).

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Construction of Gender Identities

Human differentiation on the basis of gender is a fundamental phenomenon that affects virtually every aspect of people's daily lives. Gender identity develops through a process of differentiation, interactions of biological, social, and cognitive-learning factors that occur over time (Bussey and Bandura). This differentiation arises right from the moment of a baby's birth.

When a baby is born, one of the first questions asked is: Is it a girl or a boy? Female infants are dressed in pink and male infants are dressed in blue. From the first day of life, human infants start living in a highly gendered world (Golombok and Fivush).Naming practices also clearly depict sex-role divisions that translate into clear gender-role differentiation, all of which perpetuate sex and gender value biases between males and females (Commeyras and Montsi). This argument is further explained by Susinos et al. that female identities are constructed in the framework of discursive practices which we could term as being conducive to social exclusion. The conception of gender as tied to essential sex difference has been radically critiqued by poststructuralist feminists. These theorists view gender as discursively produced rather than reflecting a physical dualism (Francis).

Until there are no equal opportunities for every member (male and female) of the society, there will be no justice. Holma stated that the tradition of feminist philosophy and feminist studies has always questioned the institution of gender as a dichotomy that permeates the social injustice in society. According to her educational ideals that are common to all human beings and simultaneously allow the richness of personal and cultural variations serve best in the pursuit of deconstructing gender dichotomy.

The ideology of sexual division of work between men and women plays a central role in constructing gender identities in Pakistan (Bari). This sexual division of labor assigns different roles, rights, and responsibilities to man and woman. The research participants described how gender identities are created among girls in Pakistani society:

> My parents did not differentiate much between daughters and sons as far as giving facilities and schooling was concerned. But there was a difference in training. For example, we (girls) were told not to go outside the home alone. We were not allowed to go to the market and our brothers used to bring back things. If we have to go somewhere, our brothers were supposed to accompany us. It was their duty to monitor our safety and security and to take care of our needs. So, it became a sort of a concept that brothers had to take responsibility . . . outside the home . . . being girls we had to fulfil the responsibility of household chores. It was just like that . . . different duties were being assigned to us. (Head, Punjabi Department)

Participants of the study argued that generally people do differentiate; children are told, this is men's work and this is women's

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work. A girl child cannot ask her brother to give her a glass of water but the brother can always ask her to make a cup of tea.

Girls are socialized from childhood to accept a subservient role, to learn modesty and self denial (Maslak and Singhal). The data also revealed that all participants believed that the role of the mother was important in creating gender identities and transformation of cultural norms. "My mother told us [sisters] how as girls we had to carry ourselves. I started wearing *dupatta* [a large scarf which is an important part of women's dress in Pakistan] because I used to see my mother wear one" (Head, Fine Arts Department).So substantial importance is given to the way a girl carries herself, the way she sits, talks, and interacts with others. This gender system is the part and parcel of Pakistani society. It specifies how gender conceptions are constructed. The data revealed that gender conceptions and roles are the product of a broad network of social influences operating interdependently in a variety of societal subsystems. One of the participants stated: "This is not actually gender sensitisation; this is the ethics of the family, if you know how your family think and what they want from you. You have an unwritten law before you" (Vice Chancellor).

Although it is commonly accepted that a child's gender social definitions are internalized very early as a result of differing parental attitudes toward the two sexes. The gender role identities are also believed to be shaped by specific institutional conditions of schooling. Schools, for instance, have been shown to exacerbate femininities and/or masculinities among their pupils depending on the gender context of the school (Brutsaert).

> I have very good memories of my school. I think what I am today is because of my school. My teachers played a very effective role. I was a good and renowned student of the school. I happened to be the best debater of 1967 in school; even you can say the best debater of Pakistan. The punctuality, discipline and confidence which I have are due to my school. The school played a vital role in my personality development. In my time school was the place where students were groomed. I am a very liberal woman but I believe in wearing the *dupatta* and this is what I learned from my school. (Dean, Natural Sciences)

Thus construction of gender identities was believed by participants to be shaped by the family (especially mother) and school. According to them in Pakistani society, the construction

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of children's gender identities is very much under the umbrella of sociocultural norms of society. These norms clearly portray the role of males and females in society. This finding is congruent with Bussey and Bandura that some gender differences are biologically founded, but most of the stereotypical attributes and roles linked to gender arise more from cultural design than from biological endowment. In this perspective, gender conceptions and role behavior are the products of a broad network of social influences operating within family and in the many societal systems encountered in everyday life.

Along with gender identity, personal identity, in terms of personality traits, is also important. Personal identity defines an individual in terms of differences from other persons and conceptualisation of this identity is directly related to education. Britton and Baxter stated that education is a key site for the construction of personal identity. So, the next section discusses about women's education.

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Women's Education

Aikman and Unterhalter stated that we live in a world in which education is characterized by extensive gender inequalities. Two thirds of all those who have no access to education are girls and women. Over the past two decades, women have made substantial educational progress. Changing expectations of men and women globally will have affected not only their educational and future aspirations, but also the educational opportunities offered to them. According to Maslak and Singhal important social changes have occurred in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries which have challenged female identity in middle and upper socioeconomic classes where education is prioritized for both boys and girls. Specifically parental approval of and support for a daughter's aspiration and plan to establish a professional status and career has increased. Basit had similar findings in her study of educational, social and career aspirations of teenage Muslim girls in Britain where parents were supportive and enthusiastic about their daughter's education and career. It has also been realized in Pakistan it is not possible to keep half of a population economically dependent. Economic targets cannot be met without the participation of women. Girls are now beginning to receive an

education and people have begun to respect educated women. For most of the participants, societal attitudes toward female higher education are mixed; some people are in favor of female education, which is depicted in a participant's personal experience. "My father used to say until you get an M.A degree I am not going to let you get married. He always emphasised that before entering into practical life we [women] should attain a higher degree of some kind" (Dean, Management Sciences).

Early views of limiting a daughter's education have been replaced by the belief that education at higher levels is necessary for autonomy and sociopsychological independence (Jha and Pujari cited in Maslak and Singhal). Ahmed investigated the achievements of British Muslim women and also found that education and professional qualifications were seen as a possible back-up, which assured a certain degree of security against the worst-case scenarios. In the event of the marriage breaking down, or if financial circumstances took a turn for the worse, an educated daughter's earnings or her earning potential, could act as a safety net. A degree, thus, was perceived and portrayed as a sort of insurance policy (Basit). Another participant comments that:

> Our parents were eager for our education. They did not involve us in household chores. They tried to keep us busy in different educational tasks. My parents wanted us to be educated because they believed that education helps us to understand people around us and our environment but our *biradri* [extended family] was not in favour of higher education for girls. If a female is not educated how can she teach the next generation? Kids become successful in life if their parents are educated. (Head, Physics Department)

However, in the South Asian region the majority of the population still belongs to lower the middle class where investment in the education of girls is considered to be a waste of resources as girls get married very early and become part of another family. The research participants talked about different social barriers for female education. Female disadvantage in law, rights, customs and social norms are persistent features of developing countries like Pakistan (Bari).

> Some parents start thinking that if their girls receive higher education they would become more independent. They would start earning and become

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> more empowered and thus not listen to us. Secondly, if they are highly qualified it would be difficult to find a match for her and that girl would become headstrong. (Vice Chancellor)

Poverty is another hurdle within female education. The opportunity costs of girls' schooling are high for poor households in developing countries, and often exceed the opportunity costs of boys' schooling. Opportunity costs include lost chore time and foregone earnings. The loss of girls' labor during school hours thus has an impact on women's ability to raise a household income either through food production or wage labor. The participants of the study also have a realization of this fact.

> A large number of the people in our society are still living below the poverty line. So investment in one child where family size is large . . . is not possible because higher education is expensive. We also have some backward areas where due to traditional values parents do not send their girls to school. There is another attitude which exists in a smaller portion of society that girls have so much work, like household chores and caring of younger siblings at home that they should not "waste" their time in education because ultimately after marriage they have to do all this. (Head, Punjabi Department)

The girls sometime do not have the opportunity to complete their education because early marriage is another factor creating hurdles for female education. As one participant stated:

> Usually after graduation parents wanted their daughter to get married. Most of my friends got married after the graduation. Firstly in our culture people prefer earlier marriages and in-laws also prefer young girls. If girls are past a certain age it becomes difficult to search for a suitable match for them. The second reason is that parents do not want to spend money on girls' higher education. They need to spend on their dowry because the ultimate goal is their marriage. (Head, Fine Arts Department)

Dowry (money, goods, or property brought by a woman to her husband at marriage) has become an essential part of marriage practices in Pakistan. With the passage of time, it has become a curse, particularly for the low socioeconomic part of the society. "When we talked about spending on girls, the main hurdle is the dowry. The day a girl is born parents start collecting for her dowry" (Dean, Humanities and Art).

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The above discussion revealed that participants identified the following factors as hurdles in the female education: social norms, poverty, early marriages, and dowry.

Despite these hurdles, participants of the study viewed higher education as a necessary asset in maintaining and gaining social prestige. The common theme throughout the research was that these women pursue higher education for self-development and personal identity. According to Murphy-Graham, if education expands women's knowledge, self-confidence and awareness of gender equity, it can trigger the empowerment process, which will be discussed next.

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Women's Empowerment

Nachshen argued that empowerment is a multidimensional social process that links with individual strengths and competencies. Women's empowerment is a prerequisite to gender equality and development. Empowerment is seen to occur at a number of different levels, to cover a range of different dimensions and to materialize through a variety of different processes. However, central to the idea of empowerment is the idea of power. One way of thinking about power is in terms of the ability to make choices, and gain access to resources and achievements. The notion of empowerment is thus inescapably bound up with disempowerment and refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability (Kabeer). According to one participant: "I think if a woman can control her education, mobility, awareness and productivity, she can become empowered and it becomes easy to manoeuvre things around her" (Dean, Social Sciences).

According to Kabeer, empowerment is a process that fosters power (i.e., the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define important. For most of the participants, decision making, access to resources, and free mobility of women are the indicators of women's empowerment and these are consistent with the findings of previous studies (Wallerstein; Hashemi and Schuler; Kishor; Kazi and Sathar; Kabeer).

Decision Making

It is not surprising that decision making is at the heart of some of the best-known attempts to conceptualize empowerment. Empowerment is measured by an index of women's role in decision making.

> I think an empowered woman is the one who can negotiate with the family for the decisions which she wants to make. Women should not be stubborn. A decision making process should not be an exploitation process rather it should be a negotiation process within the family. We can make a woman empowered, first of all by giving her education as well as a job and participation in decision making. (Dean, Humanities and Art)

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There is a hierarchy of decision-making responsibilities recognized by the family and community, which reserves certain key areas of decision making for men in their capacity as household heads while assigning others to women in their capacity as mothers, wives, daughters, and so on. Broadly speaking, the evidence from studies on South Asia suggests that, within the family, the purchase of food and other items of household consumption, and decisions related to children's health, appear to fall within women's arena of decision making, while decisions related to the education and marriage of children, and market transactions in major assets tend to be more clearly male oriented (Kabeer). These decisions suggest that they are not all equally persuasive as indicators of women's empowerment because not all have the same consequential significance for women's lives. Research participants were well aware of which types of decisions serve as indicators of empowerment. "I think an empowered woman is one who is given a due share in decision making, in negotiations and in conflict resolution. When I say decision making I mean all types of decisions like purchase of property and settling of other family related issues" (Dean, Social Science).

Empowerment of women refers to giving decision-making power to women in social, economic, and political spheres of life. It is a process of making women aware of socio-psycho-cultural rights and political injustice that is prevailing in society.

> If I say something, everyone values what I say and accepts my decisions. There are some important decisions in family life, for example, decisions

> about the marriage of your children, purchasing and selling of property, etc. My husband and I make all decisions with mutual consent and understanding. (Head, Punjabi Department)

In other words, all of the women in our study shared some decisions with their families and took some decisions independently. For example, they shared marriage decisions with the family but they pursued academic areas of their own interest. Participants were of the view that in middle class educated families, educated women are given due respect and they are equal partners in the decision-making process. The full participation of women in decision making at all levels is of paramount importance to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. Women's full participation in decision-making positions in the private sector, academia, civil society, and the media is also crucial to build synergies across different segments of society. Acknowledgments of women's decisions make them more confident. Women's involvement in decision making and conflict resolution will definitely bring change in society and make women more empowered.

Along with decision making, women's access to valued social resources is an important factor for empowerment. The "resource" dimension of empowerment includes control on earnings and expenditures; control defined in terms of self-reliance (can women support themselves without their husband's support), and control as decision making (who has the final say in making decisions about a variety of economic issues).

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Access to Resources

There was a general consensus among the participants that women's access and control over economic resources is central to their empowerment and must be expanded if gender equality is to be achieved. Women's access to land and property, including through inheritance, is critical to their economic empowerment. Land ownership is another important aspect of empowerment. Without equal access to economic resources, such as insurance or savings, women's economic empowerment will remain limited. "Financial independence is the first step towards empowerment . . . you should be able to buy what you want to eat . . . you should

be able to buy what you want to wear. After that it depends how much you want more. . . . " (Head, Gender Studies).

Participants of the study recognized that in society, people who have wealth, property, and control of jobs, prestige, and access to goods and services are powerful and people who have little access to these valued resources are experiencing powerlessness. "Earning makes a difference. If you are economically not dependent on your spouse you must have a say in many things and you have strong hold on resources" (Dean, Management Sciences).

For some participants, gaining employment was a pivotal point in their lives as a way of expanding their economic power. Interestingly, a job was also perceived as a way to expand other people's respect for the person.

> If a woman is economically dependent on man then the woman can never be empowered. If she is economically independent and contribute towards family uplift then everybody will come to her and ask—can we do this, should we do this, can we buy this plot for house, should the house has this design and how many rooms should be there. Because they know she is going to contribute. If she is not contributing and she is just making hitches like, oh! This land is not good, do not buy it; the man may think who are you to tell me not to buy. I am spending on my family and I have a right to participate in the decisions and that is what I have done. (Vice Chancellor)

A finding of the study suggests that women's access to resources contributed significantly to the mobility, political participation, and involvement in major decision making.

Mobility is another important indicator of women's empowerment. As a result of free mobility, women become aware of the importance of health maintenance, the benefits of becoming actively involved in the public sphere and their legal rights.

> I never seek permission yes! I inform the family about my plans. I even inform my son about my programme. I take it as my ethics. . . . I even used to ask my students why . . . you are dependent on your father or brother to pick and drop you. Make your-self strong and win your parent's confidence. If you keep depending on others it definitely restricts your mobility. I worked for three years almost 70 miles away from my home. I used to drive myself every day. (Dean, Natural Sciences)

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Most of the participants agreed that there is much instability and political turmoil in our country and women's safety and security remain so poorly assured by existing law enforcement and community-level adherence that the capacity of women to be mobile and travel around independently is severely limited. The effect of women's perceived insecurity consequently leads to restricted mobility of women and their reduced access to information.

> I never received a single phone call at the university from my home during my whole career . . . now families have become so scared due to these suicide bombings and blasts that they feel real threatened. I am giving you an example. When Sri Lanka team was attacked by terrorists I had just left my house. After hearing the news, my husband became worried. He called me and asked whether he should come and take me back home. So, the current situation restricts women's mobility. (Dean, Natural Sciences)

A complex array of cultural practices exists that are designed to afford informal protection to women as a substitute or to compensate for the law's poor enforcement. Unfortunately, however, such practices encourage women's increased dependency on their family and community, and in so doing, prevent women's empowerment. Participants recommended that in order to increase women's mobility political instability and security issues must be resolved.

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The Link Between Education and Women's Empowerment

Increased knowledge, self-confidence, and awareness of gender equity are components of the empowerment process (Murphy-Graham) and these components are developed during and as a result of higher education (Maslak and Singhal). The participants of the study also emphasized the importance of education and career for empowerment.

> You become empowered if you are educated and earning otherwise earning does not ensure empowerment. In lower class although a woman may be earning but yet not be empowered because she is uneducated. In upper class women are some time empowered even if not earning because they are educated and have enough financial resources. In the case of lower

> class, I can give you my maid's example; she gives everything to her husband. She does not have control on her own income because her husband takes away everything. So I think both education and earning are crucial factors for woman's empowerment. (Dean, Management Sciences)

Women who are educated and earning are in much better position in our society as compared to uneducated women.

> I think education is the most effective tool—instrument for empowering women. Actually in this scenario we need to define education. Education should be in terms of giving them knowledge, in terms of giving them some sort of character building and in terms of their personality formation. They are trained to handle various situations in life. They should train to face even the adverse situations in the life. If a woman is educated and well equipped, in most cases she is able to overcome deplorable and pathetic situations. (Dean, Social Sciences)

Educated women become more confident (Maslak and Singhal) and they can argue and make their own decisions. After getting higher education, women become more useful citizens. They become aware of their rights. They consciously start feeling about their rights and if someone tries to overrule their rights, they raise their voice. Education has a major contribution in reducing the dependency of women.

> If women want to be empowered they have to become more organized, more responsible, work hard and get the right type of education. I mean they should have to acquire skills which are the needs of the market. It is not necessary that everyone gets a high status job . . . like professor, but whatever you get should be beneficial for you and society as well. They [women] should acquire everything for self development. Literacy rate in our country is very low. Very few women are highly educated and that is why the ratio of empowered women is low in our society. The good sign is that this number is increasing. Education and empowerment are directly related. (Head, Gender Studies Department)

Education not only empowers women in different ways but also ensures a future civilized society as educated women provide better training to their children. Educated and working women are more confident. They consider themselves valued persons (not a commodity) who can do something for their families. The life of educated women is different from uneducated women as they

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have a different approach toward life and different styles to solve the problems of life.

> An educated woman with a job is empowered; I give you my example. If I was not educated and earning I would not survive at my in-laws—in a joint family home. Education helps me a lot to understand their psychology and behaviour as the environment is quite different from my parents' home. (Head, Computer Science)

For most of the participants financial independence, decision making, and mobility are important factors for empowerment and education is the crucial step that enables women to achieve this target. The participants also emphasize that women should have to be educated and mentally enlightened, not only be degree holders.

Individual empowerment through education is a key long-term strategy to change social and cultural norms. However, individual empowerment cannot, by itself, change the boundaries within which women live, work, and participate in public spaces (Murphy-Graham). There is a need to bring change at the society level. Participants of the study believed in community-based women's empowerment and recognized it as a duty of educated women to play their role to empower women.

Women's Empowerment and Collective Efforts

Robinson-Pant presented two views of women's empowerment: conservative and radical. The conservative view sees empowerment in terms of the individual woman being enabled to have greater access to resources, whereas the radical definition recognizes the political dimensions of empowerment as transforming patriarchal social systems. In a context where cultural values constrain women's ability to make strategic life choices, such structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone. Women's empowerment is not just an individual woman's empowerment. Women should make collective efforts (especially educated women) to empower women in society. They have to work in the wider social and political context for unprivileged women. Some of the study participants talked about

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what collective efforts women should make for overall women's empowerment in society.

"Women should take a stand for their freedom not only at family level but as well as on the country level. We should take a stand for those women in society who are unprivileged and subjugated" (Head, Gender studies Department).

The majority of the participants talked about education as an agent of change and through which the target of women's empowerment at society level can be achieved. Some of the participants mentioned their personal efforts and how they used teaching as a platform to guide female students. "I used the platform of my teaching profession to guide my students. I always tell them never waste your education. I took most of my old students in my faculty. I helped my students in searching for job. I used my sources and explored opportunities for them" (Head, Fine Arts Department).

Along with these individual efforts participants emphasized collective efforts from the female teaching community.

> Educated women should make a forum and establish linkages. There should be a clear agenda to improve the situation of subjugated women. The tasks oriented activities should be organised. Being a teacher we have a very good platform and we can equip young girls to compete on equal basis. There are individual efforts but we need collective efforts from the teaching community. (Head, Physic Department)

The majority of the participants realize that women have a secondary position in our society. Domestic violence is also common practice in the lower middle and lower classes. In order to change this attitude there is a need for change at a grassroots level. These changes will take place slowly and steadily, not overnight. So there is a need for parents to realize the importance of female education. In order to bring phenomenal change in society, there is a need to concentrate on this segment of society.

> We can empower women; first of all by giving them education, job and participation in decision making. Women need to be a part of politics in the country; these women should come from middle class. They should be the part of legislation making. Women should work on top level positions and should be selected on the merit basis not on women quota. Things are changing in Pakistan but slowly whereas other countries have taken concerted policy decisions to bring women forward. For example in Norway

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> 40% of women are parliamentarians. Empowering women is the responsibility of the state . . . state needs to take actions . . . it is a policy issue. (Dean, Humanities & Art)

Empowerment is strongly influenced by shared values, norms, beliefs, and traditions of the culture of society. So, collective action is more powerful and influential because it involves changing ideas about the social order.

Conclusion

The concept of empowerment has diverse meanings. While this study focused on the link between women's empowerment and education, many of those interviewed recognize that gender is conceptualized as a set of underlying systematic expectations for women's behaviors, and women's empowerment represents their relative exercise of power within that system. The study illustrates that decision making, access to resources, and free mobility of women are the indicators of women empowerment. The full participation of women in all spheres of life is of paramount importance to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. There are also some important insights from the study that can contribute to our understanding of women's empowerment. There are three areas in particular that illustrate these contributions. First, there is the interpretation of women's empowerment in Pakistani society. The women interviewed for this study echoed this concern that they wanted to become empowered while keeping their identity as Muslim women without sacrificing the structure of the family. It means they do not want to follow the Western traditions of women's empowerment. The women in this study are not simply resigned to the stigmatization of their religious practice; instead, they transform it into a symbol of might and dignity. Second, this study confirms the importance of female education. The participants of the study considered education as the most important factor for enhancing women's confidence and awareness of their rights. It helps women to look at things from different angles and to strategize things and put the things before family in a non-confrontational way. Third, participants in this study talked about balanced a gender system in the families. Both boys and girls should be treated

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equally and should have an equal access to education and job market. More research needs to be done in Pakistan, with different samples and in different regions and there is a need to compare the status of educated and uneducated (which are in majority) women. Future research can also examine the impact of women's empowerment in society and inform policy makers about the possible social impacts of increasing women's participation in every sphere of life.

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