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Relevance of Education for Women's Empowerment in Punjab, Pakistan

By Shehzadi Zamurrad Awan¹

Abstract

In Pakistan, women's empowerment has always been a subjective matter of debate among the media, civil society and the state machinery because of its multifarious connotations and dimensions. The focus of my study is to evaluate how, along with many other agents of modernization (for example, media, state legislation, and civil society), female education plays a fundamental role in transforming the traditionally conceived submissive role of Punjabi women into individuals, whose potentials are fully realized. Although in comparison with males, the female literacy rate and workforce percentages have been disappointing in Pakistan. Nevertheless some improvement can be witnessed, depending on the geographic location. This study, through a survey questionnaire and focused group discussions targeting undergraduate female university students of Punjab, observes that in comparison with illiterate women, educated and professional women are not only sensitized but also equipped to deal with various issues of life, ranging from health to financial needs. My findings from qualitative and quantitative data analysis further imply that despite gaining education and professional expertise a majority of women are not completely free in their decisions about basic personal matters of life like marriage, divorce, mobility and claims over ancestral inheritance. The results of my research indicate various reasons for this lacuna. First, are centuries old gender biased socio-cultural practices, which unlike for men, confine, scrutinize and specify the roles of women in society. Second, is misinterpretation of religion by orthodoxy, overlooking the contextual meaning of Quranic verses. These cultural practices and religious orientations are two separate domains; however, in Pakistani society over a period of time, these distinctive realms have overlapped in ways that have become difficult to disentangle, for common individuals. My research concludes that there is a need to transform the mind-set of the over-all society through effective education, mass media campaigns (print, electronic and social), and civil society support in order for society to begin to understand the value of women's education with an endorsement of their equal rights in all decisions of their lives, manifesting women's empowerment as a reality.

Keywords: education, civil society, orthodoxy, workforce, literacy, women empowerment, Punjab, Pakistan

Introduction

In this paper, I focus particularly on the impact of education as an agent of change, and one of the measures of the status of women in Punjabi/Pakistani society. I explore the correlation between female education and its impact, through at least four dimensions. The first variable is the health sector, where I seek to understand the relationship between the degree of an educated female

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and various health related issues, particularly regarding fertility, family size and fitness of children. The second variable is the relationship between level of educational attainment and the induction of women into the workforce in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Finally, the article examines links among women’s education, inheritance and social and familial acceptability of their choices in marriage, divorce and mobility.

This study further attempts to understand the transformation of women’s status in Punjabi/Pakistani society in relation to both those who would preserve the status quo—examining the preservation of discriminatory traditional values and norms against women—and on the other hand, those who desire socio-economic and political transformation of the centuries’ old biased cultural mind-set. My research takes into account obstacles created, even for conscious, educated women. Ultimately the paper is concerned with those areas where women have made progress, engendering some sort of empowerment².

State of Education in Punjab/Pakistan:

According to the *United Nations Development Program Index* for 2010, Pakistan ranked 123 in the world gender inequality index, where the percentages of male/female population for secondary education (2006-2010), remained 43.1/18.3, respectively (UNDP, 2012). A 1997 study stated the overall male literacy of Pakistan at 52%, whereas the female literacy rate was well below 20%” (Khan & Mahmood, 1997, p. 660). Punjab constitutes approximately 60% of the country’s population and according to 2011 estimations, the male/female number is 48.75 and 44.25 million respectively.

Before assessing the impact of education on the lives of Punjabi women, it is important to point out the existing differences between the total literacy and rural/ urban male/female literacy ratio. It is important to do so because the social conditions and opportunities differ considerably in these two situations.

Table 1: Literacy of Punjab
*Ten Years and Above*³ (Percentage)

Year	Total Literacy			Urban Population Literacy			Rural Population Literacy		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1998	46.6	57.2	35.1	64.5	70.9	57.2	38.0	50.4	24.8
2009-10	59.6	69.1	49.8	73.5	78.9	67.8	52.5	64.0	40.7
2010-11	59.8	69.0	50.7	72.8	77.9	67.5	53.3	64.3	42.3
2012-13	61.3	70.0	52.6	75.0	79.8	70.1	54.2	64.7	43.8

Source: 2013 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2013), p.149; 2014 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2014), p.149, 2015 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2015), p.149.

² Empowerment in this context signifies the ability of women to acquire appropriate education, choose a profession of their choice and exercise freedom in matters of marriage, divorce and mobility.

³ While comparing the literacy ratios from the 1972 and 1981 census it may be pertinent to indicate that the question of literacy in the two censuses were worded differently. In the 1972 census it was enquired whether a person can ‘read and write with understanding’. In the 1981 census a more practical question was asked i.e., ‘Whether a person can read a newspaper and write a simple l’

Table 1 depicts how, over a 15 year period, the literacy ratio of Punjabi women increased. Among rural area women, awareness of the utility of female education has increased progressively, which in turn has improved the quality of life and made the survival of low/middle class households possible. Here it is important to consider that economic pressures can have far-reaching impacts on lower and middle class rural women, who face two challenges. One is on the financial side and the second is the prevalence of biased orthodoxy⁴.

In the presence of these two challenges, the sufferings of rural women increases, when they remain uneducated and cannot contribute towards the financial upgrading of their families. However, uneducated rural Punjabi women, apart from fulfilling their household responsibilities, indirectly contribute towards the economic uplift of their families, by working in the fields, without acknowledgement and compensation. Apart from the rural/urban female literacy rate, a noted aspect of Punjabi women's education is the level of education they have attained as pointed out in Table 2.

Table 2: Primary to Degree Level Education 1977-2012 (Percentage)

Enrollment	1977-1988				1989-1999				2000-2012			
	1976-77		1987-88		1988-89		1998-99		1999-2000		2011-2012	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Primary School*	65.7	34.2	62.8	37.1	61.5	38.4	57.6	42.3	59.6	40.3	54.5	45.4
Middle School*	70.6	29.3	63.4	36.5	60.3	39.6	46.4	53.5	49.8	50.1	47.3	52.6
High School*	69.8	30.1	67.7	32.2	67.5	32.5	62.2	37.7	62.6	37.3	57.4	42.5
Degree College (Art and Science)*	69.6	30.3	67.5	32.4	66.8	33.1	47.3	52.6	45.2	54.7	46.2	53.4

* Primary School comprises grades 1-5 (I-V) of the Educational System.

* Middle School comprises grades 1-8 (I-VIII) of the Educational System.

* High School comprises grades 1-10 (I-X) of the Educational System.

* A Degree College comprises Four/Six Grades (XI to XVI) of the Educational System.

Source: Figures compiled by the author from various sources. *1988 Punjab Development Statistics* (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 1988), pp. 168-169, 172; *1995 Punjab Development Statistics* (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of Punjab, 1995), pp.109, 110,112; *2008 Punjab Development Statistics* (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2008), pp. 114, 118.; *2013 Punjab Development Statistics* (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2013), pp. 114, 115,118.

Table 2 reveals that although Punjabi girls' enrollment at the primary level increased from 34.2% (1976-77) to 45.4% (2010-11), it remained lower than boys' education, at 65.7% and 54.5% respectively, in the same time period. This table also demonstrates that during the given time-period, when it comes to higher education, female enrollment increased proportionally more than male enrollment with 69.6% in 1976-77 (Punjab Development Statistics, 2013, p.284). The table also reveals the increasing trend among girls to attain higher education. According to 2011-12 figures, the percentage of primary education was 45.4, while it rose to 53.4 at the degreed college

⁴ Biased orthodoxy includes that section of the society, which interprets religion exclusively from a fundamental perspective that mirrors their particular mind-set and interests; therefore, reinforcing already prevalent biased gender discriminatory socio-cultural practices against women, which is devoid of any change, development and openness.

level. It is important to acknowledge that the higher education of women is an important incentive for better job opportunities, thus enabling them to become economically empowered.

This lopsided depiction is the result of competitive enrollment procedures, where women fare better than men. The table also shows that girl's enrollment at the primary level is more or less equal to the number of boys enrolled at the same level in rural and urban Punjab. However, the dropout rate of girls after primary education is higher than boys and this gap increases in rural areas. The main reason of this difference is due to economic pressures, which in the Punjabi patriarchal setting affect girl children more than boys, because sons are considered to be the first priority for probable 'investment' due to their prospective role as future principal earners. Another reason to invest in boy's education is that the girls are visualized as 'temporary' residents of the family, expected to be married and become part of another family. Therefore, the "male members of the family are given a better education and are equipped with skills to compete for resources in the public arena, while female members are imparted domestic skills to be good mothers and wives. They are given limited opportunities to create choices for themselves in order to change the realities of their lives" (Chaudhary & Rahman, 2009, p. 174-175).

Apart from the financial pressures, there are other factors responsible for the lack of enthusiasm for rural girls' and women's education. First, in various places, schools are a far distance from the home; therefore, girls have more difficulty than boys reaching their destination. It is because of various socio-cultural restrictions, and the security concerns of parents. They believe that the girls are incapable of safeguarding themselves. Another factor is that while boys can ride bicycle, the culture constrains girls from also doing so. Thus, they need the company of a male member of the family. An added factor is the absence of school busses or reliable public transportation systems. Second, is the early-age of marriage for girls, which is considered to be a family's priority after girls reach puberty, although the legal marriageable age is 16 years. Thus, education becomes a second priority, as they are required to under-take household responsibilities. A third reason is uneducated parents, who are unable to acknowledge the value of education for girls. However, with the passage of time, as demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2, there has been an adjustment in attitudes due to recognition that educated women are able to join a profession, and they can financially contribute in the budget of their households. Therefore, the education of girls and women has become an important, financially contributing factor in maintaining a desired quality of life for her family.

Education and Health

Growing health related consciousness through education, among Pakistani women are reflected in their desire to care for their health and utilize the health facilities Irrespective of rural and urban divisions, health related awareness among Pakistani women have played a determining role in changing their lives. This is more so for those who have completed at least the minimum level of education, as it is presumed that educated women are more sensitive about health issues. In this regard, it is relevant to consider that there is a lack of medical facilities in rural areas. However, in urban centers, private and public medical facilities are more advanced and easily accessible. Supporting these views, research by demographers opined:

The significance of the use of health care services in urban areas raises many questions. It may be argued that it is not only the concentration of the facilities but more educated women are located in the urban areas.... Education plays an

important role and creates general awareness about the matters which affect the quality of life, therefore, female education is of crucial significance as it affects the family's health acquisition. (Khan *et al*, 1994, p. 1161)

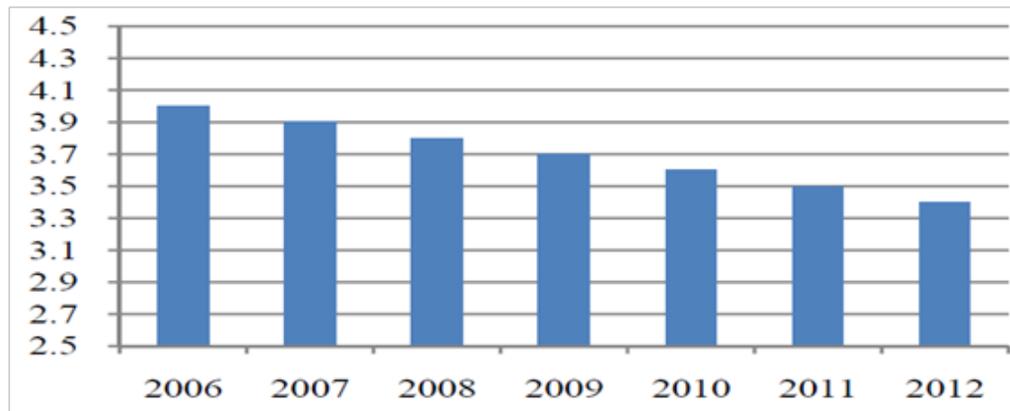
The relevance of education for developing health related consciousness has been highlighted in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe session, with reference to developing countries of the “Southern region” as follows:

Education is absolutely crucial to development, because school can serve as a means of passing on basic standards of hygiene. This means that education can make a real contribution to public health. Resources being insufficient, health services are often defective in the countries of the South. Medicines are too expensive and are regularly unavailable. ... The shortcomings of public health facilities, the education deficit, uncontrolled urbanization, irregularities in the labour market and unchecked population growth are the major domestic obstacles to development in the South. Added to these purely home-grown causes are international factors which mean that the poor countries have not yet been able to catch up in terms of development. (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe session, 2004, p. 342)

From the above, it can be gathered that education by itself is not enough for women to attain medical attention. The important factor is also the availability of such services. Nevertheless, in rural Punjab, the low literacy rate of women, accompanied by the lack of medical facilities are the dominant factors responsible for their feeble health conditions, when compared with their urban fellows. Nonetheless, it cannot be overlooked that the utilization of available health facilities for Pakistani women also depends on their financial conditions, because government provided health facilities are inadequate. In rural areas, private clinics and hospitals are enormously expensive, if available. Thus, it can be assumed that if cheap and qualitative medical facilities are provided to rural and urban centres equally, only then will female education become an important factor to determine the effective use of health measures (Khan *et al*, 1994, p. 1161).

Another aspect of women's health is their fertility rates. Larger families put tremendous burdens on poor women's health in particular, since they can neither afford medicines or the extra help in childcare that wealthier women obtain from nannies. Their situation is further aggravated by the fading structure of joint families, where children are commonly cared for by aunts, grandmothers and other close female relatives living in the same compound, reducing pressure on mothers. It has become widely appreciated that educated women prefer smaller families, in part to preserve good health and increase the distribution of limited resources. These factors contribute to women's ability to convince their husbands of the importance of smaller families, notwithstanding tremendous social pressure for larger families exerted by close female relatives.

Figure 1: Trends in Fertility Rate: 2006-2012 (%)



Source: Population Labour Force and Employment, *Pakistan Economic Survey 2011-12*. Retrieved from http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapter_12/12-PopulationLabourForceAndEmployment.pdf

Figure 1 indicates the trend of declining fertility rates, from 2006 to 2008 in Pakistan. It can be assumed that one of the reasons for this downward trend is rising female literacy as well as former President Pervez Musharraf's (2001-2008) liberal family planning facilities and awareness through government machinery. It is also important to mention that female literacy, combined with male education, effectively contributes to reduce fertility, since educated couples consciously create smaller families, to provide their children with the best health and educational facilities. This notion is supported by Hakim and Mahmood, who assert that "educational attainment alters parents' perceptions of the advantages of small families, brings changes in the status of women, changes the social and economic aspirations, and affects both attitude towards contraception and ability to understand and make use of particular method" (Hakim and Mehmood, 1994, p. 693).

Thus, educated, urban couples have become more independent in their decision-making process about reproduction, unlike their rural fellows, who usually operate under the pressure of traditional culture that involves elders and in-laws in their private matters. Additionally, lack of contraceptive knowledge is another hindrance in planning their families. In Punjab, based on survey analysis, Casterline, Sathar and Haq identify that changing socio-economic needs are instrumental in weakening traditional patterns, and "a further change that respondents perceive is a withdrawal of elders and in-laws from the decision making process, with the result that decisions about contraception are increasingly the exclusive province of the wife and husband" (Casterline *et al*, 2001, p. 97). This author does not fully agree with the above assertion that change has occurred in the reduced influence of influence of elders and in-laws. Rather, I believe that in a number of cases, predominantly in rural areas, the old patterns still exist and elders have a say in family size. It is mainly among literate families especially those belonging to the urban strata who are in a better position to resist this traditional pressure. Hakim and Mehmood identified the following trend in their research data gathered between 1984 and 1985:

Women with no education have a higher mean number of children ever born compared to those with some education. The mean number of children ever born to women with no education is 4.5, with primary education 3.6, with secondary education 3.2 and with tertiary education 2.3. In all age groups, an increase in the level of education is associated with a decline in the number of children ever

born. Even the age standardised mean number of children ever born reveals that fertility is lower for those women who have attained a higher level of education, compared to those who have less education or no education (Hakim and Mehmood, 1994, p. 694).⁵

In sum, there is a reasonably strong correlation between education and various aspects of women's health, including the management of family size, and the subsequent health of their children. Numerous studies undertaken by the World Bank, United Nations, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the Population Council demonstrate that family size is related to the level of female education which contributes to their fertility rates as indicated below:

The World Bank calls women's education the "single most influential investment that can be made in the developing world." Many governments now support women's education not only to foster economic growth, but also to promote smaller families, increase modern contraceptive use, and improve child health. Educating women is an important end in and of itself. But is education the best short-term strategy for advancing women's reproductive choice in low-resource settings? The United Nations, the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, the Population Council, and others have examined the linkages between education and childbearing to provide a greater understanding of these issues. This policy brief highlights key findings from their investigations. The evidence suggests that a number of factors influence childbearing decisions, and that both short-term and long-term policy options need to be considered to improve women's reproductive health (Population Reference Bureau, 2000)

Education and the Work Force

Generally in Pakistan, women's increased educational attainment is perceived as a vehicle for better jobs and thus increased empowerment. Apart from the existing gap in the workforce between rural and urban women, the overall ratio of working women in Pakistan in general and Punjab in particular, has increased. Table 3 identifies Pakistan's age specific labor force participation between 1998 and 2011, permitting assumptions about Punjab's literacy rate higher than other provinces.

⁵ Although this research data is considerably old, the trend which it reflects remains constant. Even in 2016, uneducated women tend to have large families because of their lack of awareness of health related issues and the availability of health care facilities. In other words, there still remains a strong correlation between education and family size and education and family health.

Table 3: A Comparison of Male and Female Working and Housekeeping Population in Punjab 2005-2011 (10 Years and Above)

YEARS		TOTAL			URBAN			RURAL		
		Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female
2005-06	Working	30281	22635	7646	8039	6832	1207	22242	15803	6439
	House-Keeping	16388	258	16130	5879	67	5812	10509	191	10318
2006-07	Working	29132	21666	7466	8136	7005	1131	20996	14661	6335
	House-Keeping	16522	216	16306	6095	70	6025	10427	146	10281
2007-08	Working	28968	22062	6906	8132	7185	947	20836	14877	5959
	House-Keeping	17488	252	17236	6427	79	6348	11061	173	10888
2008-09	Working	29946	22673	7273	8513	7369	1144	21433	15304	6129
	House-Keeping	16527	217	16310	6296	64	6232	10231	153	10078
2009-10	Working	31950	23620	8330	9030	7790	1240	22920	15830	7090
	House-Keeping	16604	222	16382	6538	76	6462	10066	146	9920
2010-11	Working	32265	23595	8670	9017	7746	1271	23248	15849	7399
	House-Keeping	17251	193	17058	6709	69	6640	10542	124	10418

Source: Figures compiled by the author from various sources. Federal Bureau of Statistics, Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan Islamabad (Labour Force Survey), quoted in 2008 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2008) p.210; 2009 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2009) p.209; 2010 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2010) p.218; 2011 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2011) p.218; 2012 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2012) p.223; 2013 Punjab Development Statistics (Lahore: Bureau of Statistics, Government of the Punjab, 2013) p.223.

Observing table 3, it can be identified that the most productive female (20-24 age group) labour force in Pakistan, increased from 15.16 in 1998-99 to 24.20 percentage in 2010-11. The discouraging aspect remains that these figures are significantly low, when compared to the male

population. There is a minor improvement in the percentage of Punjabi working women in Table 3, between the years 2005-06 to 2010-11, demonstrating that over a period of time, women's involvement in the job market has increased slightly. This slow increase can be attributed to rapid population growth, accompanied by a near collapse of the industrial sector and shying away from foreign investors, due to terrorism and insurgencies.⁶

Apart from this rural/urban division researchers Faridi, Chaudhary and Anwar who conducted a case-study of the Bahawalpur district in South Punjab, stating that financial needs, family organization (joint or nuclear family), household size, education of other family members and availability of jobs also determine the numbers of women in the workforce. However, the dominant factor among all of these, is their level of education: literate women with advanced qualifications are more independent in their decision-making, including their employment (Faridi, *et al*, 2009, p. 360-366). From the above two case studies, it is clear that education is the dominant variable for Punjabi women's employment.

The above statements has been supported by focus group interviews⁷ and the survey responses of 622 university-enrolled.⁸ These Punjabi girls represent nearly all geographic and socio-cultural locations of the province of Punjab. While sharing their views, the undergraduate university students, belonging to various discipline and mostly from small towns, in a focus group interviews, shared that educated women are not entirely free in selection of their jobs. According to these women, the most highly valued careers are teaching and medical profession. Even in these, certain conditions have to be considered such as working conditions and the number of female employees in the workplace. Most of them claim that highly educated women are not desirable as wives for men who are less qualified than they. Continuing, they mention that such men feel insecure as they operate in a cultural environment, where men are perceived to be superior to women. In this situation the respondents verified that if a wife is more empowered and aware of her rights then she might resist to the traditional role as a female member of the household (Group Interview A & B, September 14, 2014).

They further stated that in some cases, married working women are expected by the husbands and in-laws to bear the financial burdens of the whole family, in addition to other household chores. One of the participants in this discussion ironically described the expectations of a husband from a working wife by saying, "Husband want a wife, who is a maid at home and Cleopatra outside". The women students also asserted that this multiplicity of tasks places significant pressure on them, while simultaneously enabling men in the family to ignore their financial responsibilities by solely depending on the earnings of their wives (Group Interview B, September 14, 2014).

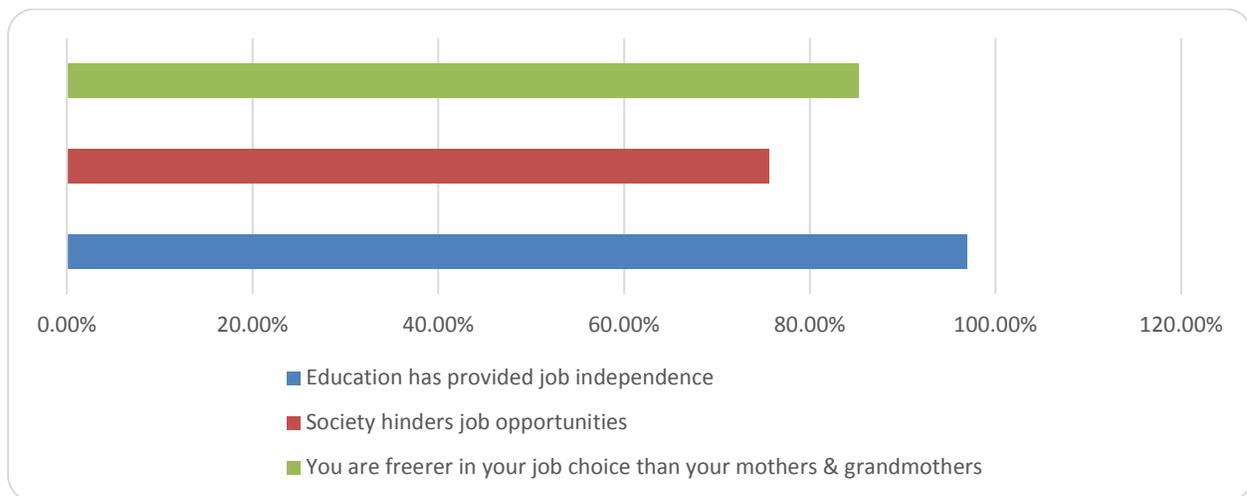
Our above discussion regarding the flexibility of an educated woman to seek a job of her choice with little hindrance is verified by Figure 2 as below.

⁶Pakistan Economic Survey 2010-11 stated that the war against terrorism "affected the country's exports, prevented the inflows of foreign investment, affected the pace of privatization programme and slowed down the overall economic activity." *Dawn*, June 19, 2011.

⁷Focus Group Interviews were held at The University of Punjab, Hostel No 8 (Hazrat Hafza Hall) on September 19, 2014 and Lahore College Women's University on October 10, 2014 in the Urdu language. There were 30 total participants (15 each). The proceedings of the interview are translated by the author. Throughout the paper, the first institution has been categorized as Group Interview A, while the second as Group Interview B.

⁸ University of the Punjab, Lahore Women University and Forman Christian College (A Chartered University, Lahore. Throughout the paper, this survey is quoted, where needed.

Figure 2: Relationship of Education with Employment Opportunities



Source: Survey through questionnaire by researcher from 622 female students of University of the Punjab, Lahore; Lahore College University for Women and Forman Christian College (A Chartered University, Lahore; held on August 20, 2014).

Figure 2 shows that nearly all university women (96.6%) agree that they have attained more independence in the selection of a job because of their higher educational attainment. As expected, a larger number of students that is 75.6% state that it is society, instead of their families, which creates obstacles in the attainment of their chosen job; only 22.3% of students stated that these obstructions come from their families. While comparing themselves with their mothers and grandmothers regarding their job options, again a large number of educated girls (85.2%) assert that they have more opportunities than their mothers and grand-mothers; while only 14 percent consider that their freedom for employment remains stagnant.

For all young women, rural and urban, their level of education remains the most important factor in attaining a job. However, family support declines when they seek to exercise their rights in other matters of life. I now turn to a discussion of these other variable.

Education and Inheritance

The overwhelming population of Punjab follows Islam and its injunctions; therefore, in this section I investigate the ability of both educated and uneducated women to receive their fair share as heirs to their ancestral property. I also examine the obstacles created by socio-cultural norms. In Pakistan, the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Bill 2011 has strengthened women's claims over their ancestral property. In spite of these legal developments, the majority of Punjabi women are deprived of their lawful and religious rights, due to various socio-cultural pretensions. There is a general societal belief, confirmed by the data collected through my above stated two sampled studies, where one of the university students shared the following:

Although, generally women are provided a share in their ancestral property they are continuously reminded by their families that since they were (or will be) given dowries therefore they should refrain from demanding their share. My family

further says that although you have a legal right in the inheritance but do remember that if you persist in your demands then your parents and brothers will not assist you in any possible need and you will have to rely solely on your in laws. Secondly, being married you are financially a responsibility of your husband. Therefore, you don't need the inheritance share.

From this statement, we derive that the denial of sisters' and daughters' shares in their ancestral property is justified by the argument that they receive dowries at the time of their marriage. Additionally, they receive gifts and pecuniary assistance from their brothers throughout life; therefore, young women should withdraw their inheritance claims in favor of their brothers. This concession is frequently supported and appreciated by mothers and other members of their families. As a result, sisters and daughters believe that relinquishing their legal right of inheritance is a sign of benevolence and would further address their apprehensions of abandonment by their male relatives including brothers and father, who in the future might become their potential support, in such situations as (a) divorce (b) widowhood (c) financial need. In addition, even if they were to attain their legal shares, they would be controlled by their brothers under the excuse of legal and logistic complications, reinforced by their ignorance of property matters and restricted mobility issues, especially if they are uneducated. In this situation, women are dependent on their brothers—both educated and uneducated women, living in rural or urban areas; brother who may or may not provide them profit from their own share of property. Thus, despite being a legal custodian of their inherited land and property, these women are culturally bound to accept their share (business and agricultural land) as provided by their brothers, without any questions. (Korson and Sabzwari, 1984, pp. 404-408). Group Interview A respondents shared that though in recent times daughters and sisters are able to get their share of inheritance, there is culturally oriented pressure to surrender their due share to the brothers, in particular. One of the participants shared a real life experience and stated:

My grandfather gave the share of inheritance to his four daughters, including my mother. But, after his death my uncles refused to accept my mother's declared share and in fact pressurized her to withdraw from her right. I strongly support her in her claim over the inheritance and reiterate that she should not surrender her share. (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014).

Another interviewee shared a similar inheritance related incidence expressing,

Among one of my relatives, a young woman with a daughter was widowed and abandoned by her in-laws. She expected from her brothers to give back her share in inheritance, which she had surrendered when her husband was alive. But they refused. She is living a miserable life, without finances. (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014).

Yet another respondent supporting the same issue opined:

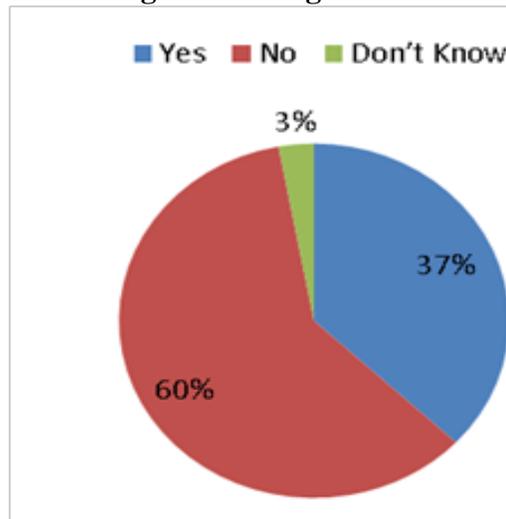
We are seven sisters and one brother, and for us our brother is the focus of the family. Therefore we unanimously surrendered our inheritance in his favour. Since our dowry would be from the income of a brother, it doesn't look proper

that we should ask for an inheritance share. (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014).

I have assumed from the above responses that sisters usually surrender their share in favour of brothers, as a gesture of good will. However, if a woman's husband dies and she is in need of financial support, the brothers who had benefited do not like to return the share to the rightful female heir. The interviewees made it clear that female members of a family *should not* surrender their rights of inheritance, even under pressure, as it is their legal and Islamic right.

The views of these educated girls were further confirmed by an additional survey from university enrolled students in Punjab, in a figure 3 below.⁹

Figure 3: Do you believe that the girls should give their inherited property to their brothers?



Source: Survey through questionnaire by researcher from 622 female students of University of the Punjab, Lahore; Lahore College University for Women and Forman Christian College (A Chartered University, Lahore; held on August 20, 2014).

Figure 3 indicates that more than half (60%) of the girls believe that they should not surrender their inherited property, in favour of their brothers, while 37 percent consider it justifiable to gift their property share to their brothers. My estimation is that Punjabi societal pressures and cultural norms are difficult to resist, no matter how unjust they are. However, I gather from the university women that a large number are not only aware of their inheritance rights but also expect that these rights would be implemented. On the opposite end, a small portion of the girls were more conscious of the real-life realities of the Punjabi culture and recognized the fact that ultimately they would have to surrender their inheritance rights, as they will be unable to bear the burden of socio-cultural pressures, especially in those cases where the parents are uneducated. I believe that since the surveyed girls are still young, they do not fully comprehend the realities of practical life. The real life challenges in Punjabi society are much more difficult to handle and many compromises have to be made. An interesting aspect of my research reveals that

⁹ University of the Punjab, Lahore Women's University and Forman Christian College (A Chartered University, Lahore).

once the girls were asked to give their opinions in a group discussion situation, only one student opted for the surrender of her inheritance right as quoted above.

This is significant: In group discussions, fear of being labeled as orthodox and conservative by their peers might have pushed them to support the female right of inheritance. Secondly, in front of their friends, they might have felt shy to disapprove their religiously and legally accepted inheritance right. Hence, the “resistance to the application of Islamic law with respect to inheritance of land can be clearly seen in rural areas. The authority of *Biradari* in Punjab through *Panchayats* (councils) has been instrumental in enforcing customary law where women's inheritance to landed property is concerned” (Rauf, 1987, p. 404).

Education and Choices

In the following section, I evaluate the role of education in facilitating the choice of marriage, divorce and mobility of Punjabi women. As far as the choice of marriage is concerned, education has made a slight difference, with the provision that an educated daughter is at least given the impression by her family that she has final approval in the selection of her future husband. In reality, even this apparent right is manipulated by the family, as they are the main source of information, regarding the proposal's education, financial status, family set-up and habits. Thus, in theory such decisions are seemingly finalized by the concerned daughter, but in reality her family is the decision-maker. Generally, families exert socio-cultural pressures, and it is difficult for a girl to challenge the choice of her family. In the previously quoted group interview A, nearly all of the interviewees shared their observation that marriage by choice in big cities like Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi has attained some acceptability; however, in rural areas it is still considered taboo. They further point out that in most cases, parents focus on similar caste and financial stability as important qualities in a suitor, while other traits such as personality and education are secondary. One of the respondent expressed:

In a majority of cases, the financial status of a suitor's family is preferred, while his individual capacity to earn is ignored. No one values a hard working individual. There is lot of deception involved in the process of proposing to a girl. People pretend to have a certain socio-economic status, which in reality does not exist. (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014).

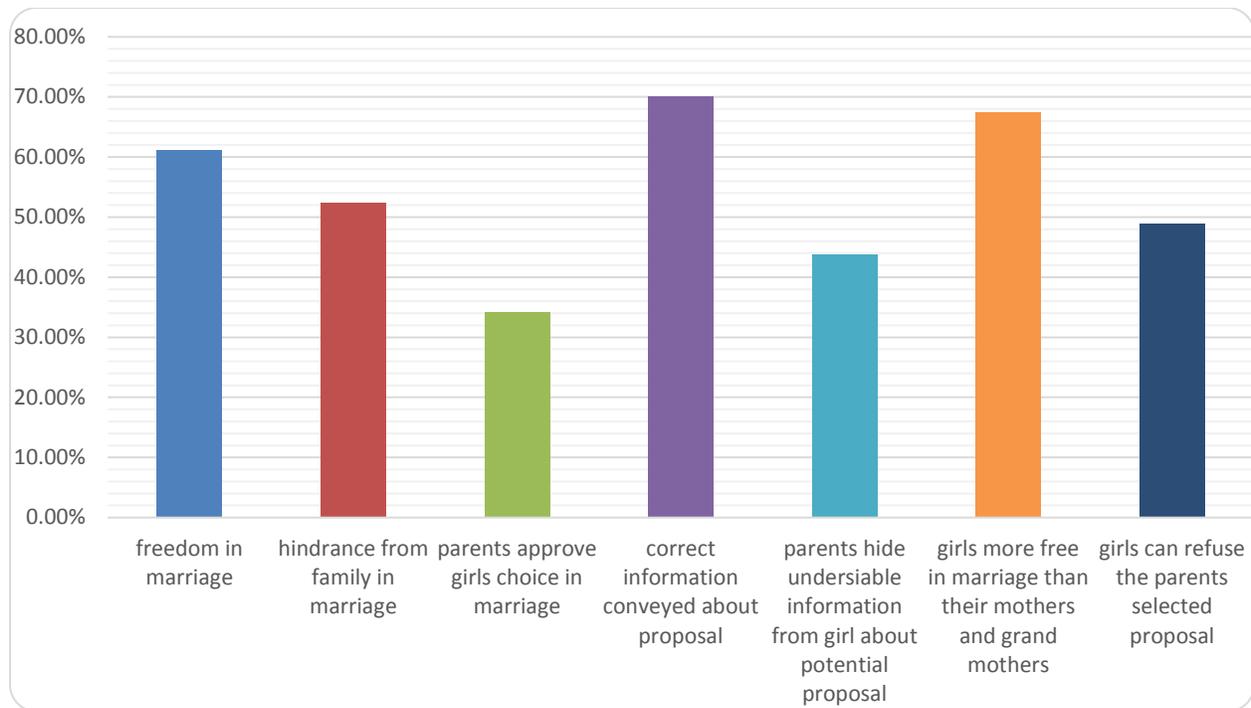
Some of the girls pointed out that in their families, education is now being considered a contributing factor but at the same time they are of the opinion that when it comes to marriage, a girl has little choice and if she takes an initiative to choose her partner, she faces a social boycott. One of the interviewees in a group discussion shared:

In marriage related matters, our choice is somewhat valued. This is due to our education, which has enabled us to express our opinion, which was not prevalent during our mother's time. Here it is also relevant that educated parents and a good bond between parents and daughters does become a factor while taking a decision about our life partners. (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014).

A dominant theme deduced from group interviews is that young women are to blame for challenging societal norms because of education. In contrast, the respondents claim that when it comes to sons, their choices are welcomed (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014). The respondents from Group B state that it is mostly among educated urban families where girls' choices regarding marriage partners is increasingly accepted (Group Interview B, September 14, 2014). The students of both universities argued that society interferes most when it comes to young women's marriage choices. In such a climate, spaces single women who opt not to marry are limited. Such women are considered odd, often facing character assassinations by their own families and society (Group Interview A & B, 2014).

It is evident from the surveys that education ensures some degree of freedom regarding matters of marriage; however, they do face certain challenges in this regard as depicted in figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Relationship of Education with Marriage



Source: Survey through questionnaire by researcher from 622 female students of *University of the Punjab, Lahore; Lahore College University for Women and Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore*; held on August 20, 2014.

The results in figure 4 show that better educated girls have more freedom in their choice of marriage (61.1%). Despite of this, these girls believe that hindrance to love marriages comes more from the family (52.3%) than from society (44.1%). Therefore, they have to rely on their families' preference for marriages. In cases where young women choose whom to marry on their own, they feel that it is society more than their families which disapprove of their choice (64.8%). Similarly, these young women are of the view that in an arranged marriage, their families cooperate with them when it comes to providing information about their future husbands, and they do not hide information. Still, a sizable number, 43.7%, believe that undesirable information about their future

husbands is not provided to them. An important point is that in matters of marriage, the young women are apprehensive even about trusting their families, demonstrating that in a patriarchal society, even though they have made some inroads, parents and society exercise control over their daughters.

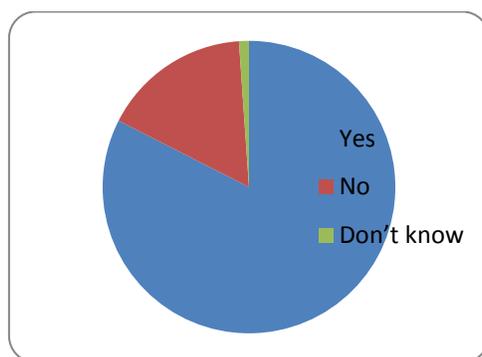
The surveyed girls are equally divided in their conviction when it comes to a refusal of their parents' choice: 48.9% said they cannot refuse a proposal approved by their parents, while 50.5% believe they can. Another observation is that the young women regard their own freedom with respect to marriage related choices as higher than their mothers and grandmothers: 67.4% responded positively.

Similarly, when it comes to divorce (*Khula*), even educated and professional women face multiple socio-cultural and psychological obstructions, by their own family and friends who seem to disregard whether they spend a miserable life with their husbands and in-laws. Thus, although Punjabi women's options for divorce have been addressed via legislative measures and judicial interpretation, divorce is still considered as a socio-cultural taboo and social acceptability is feeble. Group A respondents are of the opinion that although Islam provides women the right to divorce in an unhappy marriage Punjabi socio-cultural norms do not approve it as desirable. A few women asserted that because divorce is unacceptable, education is the only pathway toward independence and empowerment. Nearly similar views are shared by the Group B respondents with variation, since they expressed that it was better to stay in an abusive marriage than to divorce, because the stigma would make her life more miserable than an abusive marriage (Group Interview B, September 14, 2014). One of the respondents shared:

Society only blames a woman for her failed marriage. If a woman is educated then the situation becomes worse as she is accused of giving greater preference to her profession than her husband, children and home. In case of divorce, it does not matter who initiated the process, the fault is always perceived to be with a woman. I believe that people around us are convinced that an educated woman is not family oriented and incapable of being in a healthy married relations. (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014).

The opinions of university women are supported by another study which states that "normally, working women are derided and many men prefer not to marry them" (Khaliq, 2014, p.59). However, if a divorced woman is well-placed in her profession and is contributing towards her parents' budget then she would not face such treatment. Both sets of respondents believe that in their households, a divorced woman is generally blamed for the broken marriage, while the husband is given the benefit of the doubt. The gender biases in Punjabi society are further highlighted by Group A respondents expressing that it is easier for a divorced man to remarry than a divorced woman.

Figure 5: Has education empowered you to claim your right to divorce from an undesirable husband?



Source: Survey through questionnaire by researcher from 622 female students of University of the Punjab, Lahore; Lahore College University for Women and Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore; held on August 20, 2014.

Figure 5 shows that although the choice of divorce remains a difficult proposition for a well-educated woman, 82.5% believe that education has empowered them to exercise their right to divorce an undesirable husband, because an educated woman can live an independent life. Only 16.4% are convinced that education does not empower them to make such a decision.

Because elder males in households manage marriage documents, educated university women state that the marriage contract is not explained properly to the bride, especially those clauses which deal with the right to divorce. In a majority of cases, the women pointed out that the brides are entirely unaware of the written information, provided in the marriage contract. They suggested that such sensitive documents ‘should be well understood by the brides’ and for their financial guarantee, a reasonable amount of “*HaqMehar*”¹⁰ should be guaranteed, which might ensure some compensation in case of divorce, especially if she is unemployed (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014).

Apart from controlling the choice of marriage and divorce, rural/urban Punjabi women whether educated or uneducated, working or housewives, face restrictions on their mobility outside their home. There are various factors responsible for this. A woman’s movements are typically monitored by the elder male of the family (father, brother and husband), and supported by elder women (mother, mother-in-law and sister-in-law). The explanation is to ensure security and maintain socio-cultural and religious norms. This author asserts that such norms are pretensions: as far as the security pretext is concerned, family members assume that females are physically weak, thus they must be accompanied by some male family member, whether younger or older. The easy targets of this notion are young and un-married women, who are considered by the culture to be the responsibility of their male family members. Regarding women’s mobility generally in Pakistan, and particularly in rural Punjab, the demographers Ali and Haq state, “it is generally believed that an important indicator of women’s autonomy is her freedom of movement outside her home. Generally, Pakistani women have limited mobility outside their homes” (Ali and Rizwan-ul-Haq, 2006, p. 124). Sathar and Kazi, who confine their research to rural Punjab claim that “over two-thirds of women require someone’s permission to visit relatives in the village and

¹⁰*Haqmehar* is a value, which can be in the form of property or money, which can be claimed at any time during a marriage, by a wife from his husband. However, at the time of divorce, it is mandatory to deliver provide *Haqmehar*.

90 percent of women require someone's permission to go to the next village. Moreover, when women leave their homes, they generally are escorted by someone who is usually a close relative” (cited in Ali & Haq, 2006, p. 124).

In yet another survey by the National Institute for Population Studies for the year 1996-97, it was reported that only 18% women of all localities could go to another village and only ¼ of women were able to visit a hospital or clinic without the company of any male member (cited in Ali & Haq, 2006, p. 124). However, the concept and meaning of mobility differs when it comes to the movement of rural women who work in the fields and go to fetch water on a daily basis. By necessity their movement is less restricted than their urban fellows. According to one villager quoted in a 1987 study: “we are working people, we cannot shut our women within the four walls of the house. We depend on them for doing several simple chores, alongside men, in the fields where strict purdah is not possible” (Rauf, 1987, p. 409). Although this study is almost 30 years old this view persists: according to recent research by Shahnaz Rouse on Pakistani society, “rural women in settled agricultural settings have traditionally enjoyed greater mobility than their urban counterparts. This is primarily the consequence of their active and prolonged participation in the labor force” (Rouse, 2011, p. 325). Similarly, in the urban setting, women with jobs and those belonging to higher economic classes do have “reasonable mobility”¹¹ options within the city limits.

A second restrictive aspect is religious-based, socio-cultural stigma, where men express apprehension about the mobility of their family women, even if they are educated and employed. These conservative families according to the *World Bank* (2013) have various concerns about women’s movements outside the home. It further states that such families are sensitive about their image, in case their young female members seek employment. This Pakistan based study further assesses:

Such activity can brand the family as low status and imply that the men cannot adequately provide for the economic needs of the household. In more unequal communities where status hierarchies are quite rigid, such actions can also make women vulnerable to loss of reputation or honor. Families thus may worry even more about the safety and honor of young women who leave the household for work than they do about girls who leave the household to attend school” (World Bank Organization, November 12, 2013).

Orthodoxy provides different reasons to restrict women’s mobility. For the orthodox, male and females have different roles. Women are best at their domestic roles, while men are suitable for the public domain. When women start operating in the public domain, things become complicated because of their interaction with men. Explaining this notion further, Idris writes, “Gender relations in Pakistan are based on the view that women are subordinate to their male counterparts and like in other orthodox Muslim countries they have a duty to protect the honor and dignity of the male members of their family. Therefore, to keep up the family’s honor, these societies put restrictions on women’s mobility, behavior and activities, only allowing limited contact with the opposite sex.” (Idris, 2015, p. 132). Yet another writer observes that in Pakistani society, “most women spend the major part of their lives physically within their homes and

¹¹ Reasonable mobility reflects the freedom to step out from the home for various activities like shopping, dining in the company of friends/family or other recreational activities like university functions, festival and university managed trips.

courtyards and go out only for serious and approved reasons. In urbanized and wealthier parts of some cities, people consider a woman and her family to be shameless if no restrictions are placed on her mobility. (Khanna, 2006, p. 95)” From this, I can presume that the reasons of restricted mobility are attached to honor. In spite of reservations about women’s mobility especially in lower and middle class families, women’s freedom of movement is tolerated if they contribute to household finances. In these cases, there is a conflict between the conservative attitudes and economic necessities, where the financial side prevails.

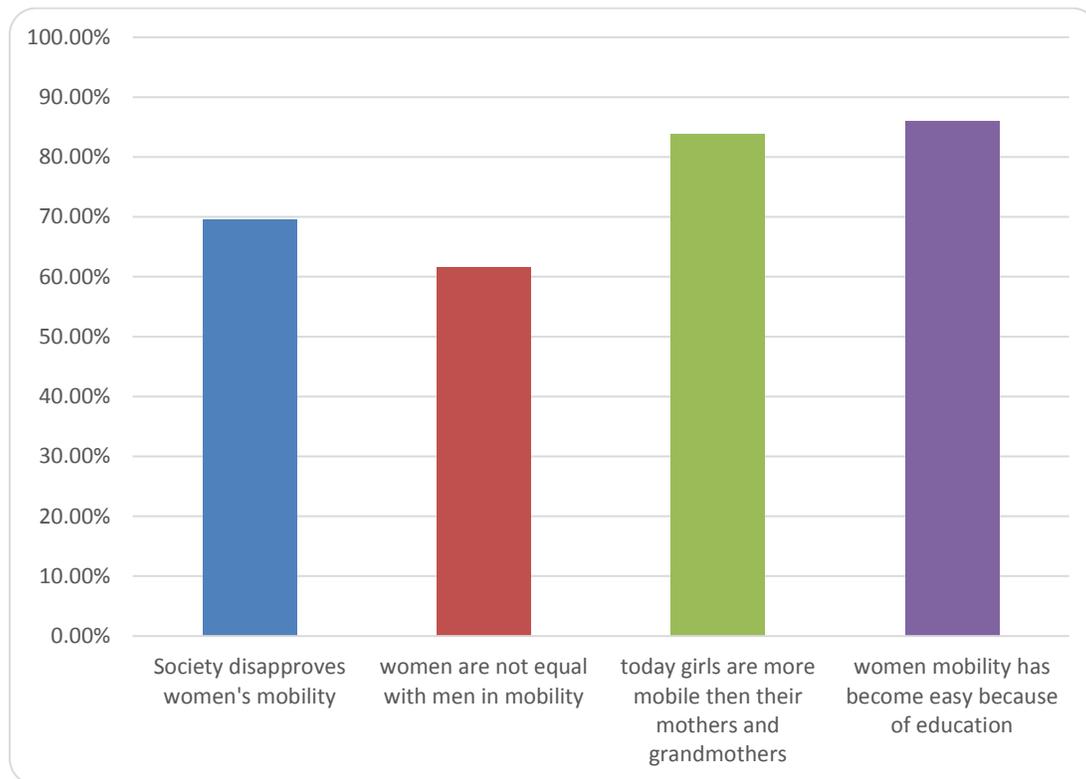
Punjabi girls assert that there is a marked difference between how they are treated and their brothers when it comes to leaving the house, especially in the evening. These girls attribute this dichotomy to normally stated “reasons of security for the unaccompanied girl along with the undesirability of girls returning home late, without offering a specific reason” (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014). Punjabi women’s mobility is also influenced by their marital status and age. However, I can further divide the marital status, according to joint or nuclear family systems¹². It is observed that married women living in a nuclear family arrangement and elderly women, either in rural or urban settings, are freer in their mobility. Sathar and Kazi state:

“Age represents the life-cycle position of women in their families. It is usually a good indicator of whether a woman has just joined a new household as a bride, or has established herself as the senior daughter-in-law or is the mother-in-law with married sons. Not surprisingly, age has a strong positive association with all of the autonomy indicators. Older women are much more mobile, have greater access to resources in the family, likely to be economically autonomous, and to make decisions both in the inside and outside spheres” (Sathar and Kazi, 2000, p.105).

However, here it is important to distinguish that to some extent in Punjabi society, old age provides more flexibility to women with unrestrained movement as by that time they have become mothers and grandmothers of grown-up children. It also enables them to have an effective say in family affairs including “mate selection, marriage rituals and gift exchange, [but] the final say still remains with the male head of the family. Only an exceptionally old matriarch (i.e. widow) may be able to play dominant role comparable to that of a male head of the family” (Rauf, 1987, p. 407). In Punjabi society, women who do not reside in a joint family system, have more flexibility to leave their residence for number of reasons like employment, shopping and other family related recreational activities. The absence of family pressure allows them to exercise greater options. In sum, even after being reasonably educated with a stable job, Punjabi women’s choices are still limited in a number of ways from marriage to divorce to the freedom of movement.

¹² A joint (or extended) family system is comprised of parents, their children, spouses of the children and their offspring living in one premises, while the nuclear family is confined to the husband, wife and their children.

Figure 6: Relationship of Education to Mobility



Source: Survey through questionnaire by researcher from 622 female students of *University of the Punjab, Lahore*; *Lahore College University for Women and Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore*; held on August 20, 2014.

We observe from the results in Figure 6 that education does play a role in granting more empowerment to the educated girls. However, this enhancement is not unconditional and has its own downside in certain cases. In the case of mobility, educated girls overwhelmingly feel (86%), that they have acquired more mobility outside their homes after attaining a reasonable level of education. The meaning of mobility is limited even for educated young women. It is restricted to their daily commute and specially occasions arranged by their institutions or friends. Moreover, only 37.6 percent believe that they share equal mobility with men. In addition, 69.5% of the respondents believe that they are handicapped in their movements outside their homes, mainly because of societal pressures. Here, I would like to point out that the circumstances of uneducated women are far grimmer, as understandably they are not even aware of their basic entitlements. In some cases, they might be aware of their rights, but they find themselves incapable of taking any steps against the abuses and violations due to lack of awareness about the cumbersome administrative/legal adopted procedures. Thus, such women are entirely subject to the dictates of male members of their families. Regarding mobility, Group B respondents after admitting the patriarchal nature of society as one of the reasons behind restricted women mobility in comparison with men, state that “the parents are today insecure about their daughters, which prompts them to put restrictions on their mobility. This insecurity has increased because of media reporting on murder and rape cases” (Group Interview B, September 14, 2014)

Conclusion

In concluding the impact of education on various aspects of women's lives, it can be summed up from the views of Group A that "education has played a vital role in opinion-building and has given them confidence to register their protest against violation of their rights, although education has not been able to change the societal norms and values regarding women's roles in society" (Group Interview A, September 14, 2014). There is a greater likelihood of changing attitudes for an educated girl if her mother is also educated; thus, significant change does not occur in one generation but it is a continuous process, taking its roots gradually in terms of solidifying a new cultural value system. The respondents of Group B also endorsed this change and believe that "education has enabled girls to express their likes and dislikes, which are well-heard today by the parents-no matter whether they accept it or not" (Group Interview B, September 14, 2014).

Another clear distinction is the difference in mobility between educated and uneducated Pakistani women; however, their freedom is linked considerably to the economic needs of their respective families. Without such mobility, their ability to become educated or to obtain employment is hindered. Moreover, this 'granted freedom' is curtailed significantly when it comes to their socialization even with close friends or in visiting places devoid of monetary benefits. However, some change has been observed, when educated women demand their legal and religious rights of inheritance and in marriage. In spite of limitations faced by educated women at the very least they have become sensitized toward many of their rights, which they can exercise under the above-defined favorable circumstances.

Ultimately, education has improved women's participation in the job market and women are more aware of health related issues. However, there are other arenas where educated women continue to face restrictions, such in marriage choice, divorce, full freedom of mobility and their rights to inheritance. As well, levels of education shape the degree of freedoms attained. The proponents of traditional values in Pakistani society continue to exercise their pressure to curtail the accomplishments of all kinds of women, desiring the confinement of their activities within their homes, notwithstanding their level of education. Apart from what little empowerment educated women have gained, their progress is generally restricted to mere awareness about gender related injustices, at the individual level. This awareness has thus far not been translated into a collective effort to exert pressure on the forces of orthodoxy.

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