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SOCIAL HURDLES FOR RURAL WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to analyze the hurdles that are impacting women's participation in economic development. Primary data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire from the two districts of Sindh: Hyderabad and Tando Allahyar. Data were collected from 215 female respondents using purposive sampling. The findings of the study reveal that most of the women living in rural areas of Sindh are illiterate. They are being deprived of their basic rights to receive education and take part in decision-making. More than half of respondents revealed that their parents believed that their daughters does not need to get an education and work outside the home. In contrast, 20% stated that one of the main obstacles to literacy was the shortage of separate schools for girls. The respondents urged that they were fully engaged in household activities, while they were partially involved in farm-related activities (crop and livestock). Results show that the income of women working in the service sector was higher. Still, those who were engaged in small businesses (i.e., shops selling handicrafts) were higher than those who were working in agriculture. So based on the results, the study suggests separate schools should be established for girls near residential areas in rural Sindh, and equal educational opportunities and wages should be given to the women.

Keywords: *Social Hurdles, Economic Development, Rural Women, Sindh.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women make up almost half of the worldwide populace, yet their role to the socioeconomic development of society is far below their potential. Global Statistics (2020) reports that women account for almost 49.6 percent
of the total world population. However, they still face limitations to control their lives and make decisions. Women's support in the workforce is considered essential for the economic development and growth of any country. In Pakistan, women make up 48 percent of the country's total population, despite that the participation of women in the country's workforce has been below the regional average level (Amber and Chichaibelu, 2023). From 1990 to 2019, the female percentage in the Pakistan labor force has increased from 13.95 to 25 percent according to the estimates of the International Labor Organization. According to the labor-force survey 2020-21, female participation accounts for only 21 percent. This shows that the country's female participation is one of the lowest in the South Asian regions. Pakistan is ranked 142 positions out of 146 by the Global Gender Gap Index 2023, whereas India stands at 127th position.

Women's empowerment and development go hand in hand, as development leads to women's empowerment and women's empowerment leads to less inequality. Women play a major role in the economic development and growth as they comprise close to half of the populace leading towards the economic prosperity of a country (Ashraf and Ali, 2018). The role of women is very important for our society. Women play an important role in the economic development of a country. They have huge responsibilities in livestock, family support, crop production, and cottage industry (Begum and Yasmin, 2011; Chandio, 2013; Luqman et al., 2006). It is generally acknowledged that people are just something practically the same. Gender is just about how we look. The role of working women in the study will make sense of the various roles of the women in Sindh Pakistan. To know what they do, what assets they have, and what their constraints and priorities are.

Sindh contributes about 24 percent to the provincial GDP and employs 70 percent of the population (World Bank, 2023). Women make up a significant portion of the agricultural workforce and are actively involved in every stage of crop production, starting from sowing the seeds to harvesting the crops. Women in Sindh play a significant role in the economy, but their contribution is still poorly understood (Chandio, 2013; Magsi et al., 2015). Most of the population living in Sindh belongs to rural communities. Most women living in rural areas are engaged in agriculture, poultry, and cattle farming. These women are also involved in sewing, embroidery, supermarkets, franchises, beauty parlors, individual teaching, house servant, nursing, working as waitresses in hotels, receptionists, different NGOs, owning small businesses (Like small shops in their own homes of cloth, or other commodities), and various other kinds of Small Medium Enterprises (SME's). Whereas women entrepreneurs play a major part in economic development by contributing about 3 percent in the total GDP share of Pakistan (Latif et al., 2011).

The study conducted by Bukhari et al. (2023) found that rural women of Sindh are highly unempowered and are facing significant social, psychological, political, and economic suppression due to their weak socio-economic status in society. Women in our society are not aware of their basic rights which brings about them being bound in the trap of dependency. According to the labor force survey 2020-21, there is a higher unemployment rate for females than males, with almost 8.9 percent of females being unemployed

compared to only 5.5 percent of males. It further reveals that female unemployment is higher in urban areas than in rural, 16.4 percent and 7.4 percent respectively.

One can't neglect that a woman's life is considerably more tangled than a man's life. A woman needs to manage her own life and if she is a mother, she similarly needs to manage her children's life. Women will always be crucial to society since they bring a sense of love and emotion and in this manner, basically society should start thinking about what's going on even more carefully. Women's participation in the labor force increases the economic growth and development of a country. However various social and cultural factors are influencing the economic empowerment of women in Pakistan, the socio-cultural components incorporate hindrances to quality education, modest work conditions, and access to property rights. The consideration of women in the labor force wouldn't just assist with expanding the pace of financial development but also reduce the dependency rate. This would in like manner help with extending productivity improvement, financial widening, and making household income available for family utilization.

There is immense literature available on the role of gender in economic development but through this research, we would like to share the experiences of women from randomly selected districts of Sindh province, Hyderabad and Tando Allahyar, to expose some ground realities about the neglected role of women in society. This study features the significant role of women in the two districts of Hyderabad and Tando Allahyar to analyze the role of working women in economic development. Therefore, the specific objectives of this study are to analyze the role of working women in economic development, to identify problems faced by women in the study area, and to give suggestions for the problems faced by women in Hyderabad and Tando Allahyar.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The current study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data were collected from the two districts Hyderabad and Tando Allahyar through a closed ended questionnaire. Non-probable purposive sampling technique was used. While the sample size consisted of a total of 215 respondents, 115 from Hyderabad and 100 from Tando Allahyar, where all the respondents were female. The proportion of females was based on the total population in the districts. It was very difficult to approach females for data collection, in this connection, female students were employed as enumerators and they were trained at the Department of Agricultural Economics, Sindh Agriculture University Tandojam (Pakistan). This is because many families do not allow their females to talk with male researchers/enumerators. Data once collected, were tabulated in MS Excel, where frequency, mean, and percentages were calculated. The results are presented in the following section of the paper.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Descriptive socioeconomics characteristics

To know the rural women’s total physical participation in socioeconomic activities their working days were given as shown in Table-1.

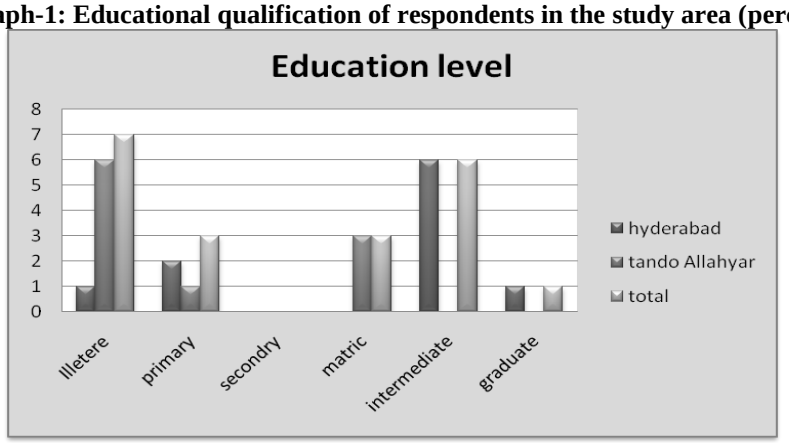
Table-1: Women Employment in Pakistan

Description	Unit	Statistics
Total population (2022)	Million	229.22
Percentage of women in total population	Percentage	48.4
Total population in rural areas (both sexes)	Million	144.53
Women in rural areas	Million	70.1
Literacy rate of women in rural areas (all ages)	Percentage	40.8
Total women in the labor force in rural areas	Million	13.93
Total women employed in rural areas	Million	12.90
Total women unemployed in rural areas	Percentage	7.4
Women employed in Agriculture, forestry & fishing in rural areas	Percentage	67.9
Women employed in industry	Percentage	14.7
Women employed in services	Percentage	17.4

Source: GoP, 2020 & GoP, 2023

Table 01 shows that women are about 48.4 percent of the total population and about 70.1 million are living in rural areas. According to a labor force survey of Pakistan, only 40 percent of the women living in rural areas are educated. They make up 13.93 million of the labor force in rural areas. It can be seen from the above statistics that only 12 percent of rural women are employed. According to Magsi et al. (2016), rural women in Sindh province are quite deprived, due to the most ignorant entity. A huge population of rural women about 67.9 percent in Pakistan are engaged in the agriculture sector, 14.7 are linked with the industrial sector, and 17.4 percent are in the service sector. Habib et al. (2022) in their study revealed that Pakistan is an agricultural country where many of rural women are involved in farming, livestock, and agriculture-based industries.

Graph-1: Educational qualification of respondents in the study area (percentage)



It is observed that the education level of Hyderabad district literacy rate is 71.5 percent and the education level of Tando Allahyar district is 47.3 percent. So, it analyzes the education level of Hyderabad district improved day by day and the education level of Tando Allahyar decades according to the increasing growth rate of population.

3.2 Women rights and contributions in the study area

In study areas, it has been observed that most of the men do not allow their women to study. There are many cultural and social barriers stopping women from pursuing their education and careers, which may be the reason that women are not so independent in decision making roles. Literature suggests that rural women have very little or no role in family decision-making (Ishaq and Memon, 2017; Magsi et al., 2024).

Table-2: Reasons for illiteracy in selected areas (N=215)

Description	Number	Percentage
Gender biasness: only boys were allowed to go to school	52	24.18
No need to go/work outside home	48	22.32
Lack of facilities/school is too far	27	12.55
Cannot bear the high cost of education	25	11.63
No girls separate school in our village	20	9.30
Cultural barriers: considering superior caste (Syed, Baloch, etc.)	17	7.90
To take care of farmlands accompanied with the parents	14	6.51
Early marriages	12	5.58

Source: Own elaboration

The above-mentioned questions were asked to find out the opinion of the respondents on why they do not let their girls study. Most of the respondents believed that there is no need for women to get an education. Around 12.55 percent of respondents said that institutes are far from their residences and no basic facilities are even available. Whereas a high majority of about 48 percent of respondents said that they do not feel like need for women to get an education, and to go outside and work. According to them, only the male members of the family can get education and fulfill the needs of the family. In many rural households' women's education is often considered a secondary option as the male children are considered the primary source of earnings for the family (Fatima et al., 2021; Memon et al., 2015). Only 6.51 percent of the respondents said that they have to take care of their farmlands, if they go for education there will be no one to take care of their lands. However, 11.63 percent of respondents said that they were not able to face the high expenses of education. About 9.30 percent of women complained that there were not any separate schools available for girls which was also a major hurdle in their way to education. Whereas 5.58 percent of women complained that early-age marriages are also a significant obstacle in their educational pursuit. Literature also suggests that marriage at an early age is a major barrier in women's way to pursue their education and career (Muzaffar et al., 2018; Naveed et al., 2020; Nawaz et al., 2021).

Table-3: Earning sources of women in the study area

Source of earnings	Percentage		Average monthly wages (Rs)
	Hyderabad	Tando Allahyar	
Services/jobs	61	42	9677
Farm business (crops + livestock)	27	53	6581
Other than farm business/shops, etc.	2	5	7022

Source: Own elaboration

The average income of the female respondents of Hyderabad and Tando Allahyar is unique in relation to one another. The results revealed that majority of women in the Hyderabad district are engaged in the service sector while in Tando Allahyar a large portion of them is engaged in the farm sector. This might be the reason that the Tando Allahyar district is surrounded by agricultural lands. Women assume a huge part in both the farming as well as in livestock sectors (Manzoor et al., 2018).

Whereas in both districts only a smaller proportion was engaged in small businesses like shops, handy craft selling, etc. to earn their livelihood. Interestingly, it was found that working women and those who had their own businesses were earning more than women engaged in farm-related activities, even though they were spending more time on farms as compared to working females. This might be the reason that at farms their work is very low paid. Literature suggests that payments/salaries for females are discriminatively low as compared to male workers in Sindh province (Mirani et al., 2014).

Table-4: Women's daily economics activities (rural and urban areas)

Description	Involvement	
	Fully	Partially
Care of children & elders	√	
House cleaning	√	
Food preparation	√	
Water fetching		√
Washing clothes		√
Collection, carrying & preparation fodder for animals		√
Farm engagement: weeding, crop harvesting		√
Prepare dung cake		√
Milking from animals		√
Making yogurt, butter & ghee from the milk		√
Embroidery & stitching		√
Selling homemade crafts		√
Home tuition		√

Source: Own elaboration

It has been observed that majority of women living in rural areas are engaged in different kinds of social, agricultural, and economic activities. The above table demonstrates that women are fully involved in household responsibilities. Though in different exercises their participation is simply halfway. They play a significant role in looking after the home and

handling household chores like cleaning the house, taking care of the family, and preparing food. Women also take an active part in farming activities working shoulder to shoulder with their men. Some women were also engaged in doing small-scale businesses at home to earn without going outside. Some of the business included hand embroidery, stitching, giving home tuition, and so on.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Women play a significant role in the economic development of any country. However, in Pakistan, their role is just confined to looking after the household and children. The present study concluded that women living in rural areas of Pakistan are facing serious hurdles in pursuing their education and careers. They are deprived of their basic needs and rights. A male-dominated society is observed in the study area where most of the decisions are made by males of the family. The data collected from the two districts of Sindh, Hyderabad and Tando Allahyar, shows that various factors affect women's education. The unavailability of separate schools for girls is observed as one of the major problems, causing serious hurdles in their education. The study further revealed that in the Hyderabad district, the majority of the respondents were involved in the service sector while in Tando Allahyar, the majority was engaged in the farm sector. They are also fully involved in caring for their families with partial participation in farm and business activities.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations have been proposed:

Women should be given an equal and fair chance of getting an education, to cater to the economic path faster. To establish separate schools for girls near their homes will help to catch the maximum number of girls for schooling. Women's wages must be market competitive, as it will enhance their work efficiency and productivity leading them to make independent decisions regarding their choices.

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