Barriers to Women's Empowerment: A Case Study of Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract
The authorization of women in the political sphere of life is highly inevitable and important for the cultivation of sustainability. But in these narrow-minded regions, such as Lower Dir and KP, women face crucial obstacles that confine their lives to chores, and they are not allowed to participate in ethnic, monetary, and political arenas. The article evaluates myriad factors affecting women's decision-making capabilities in a specific district, Lower Dir. The qualitative research is being used by incorporating data from research articles and using the case study method to understand the challenges faced by women in Lower Dir. The results present those backward traditions and folks, a narrow way of thinking and behavior, parochial consent for getting education, fiscal reliance, and poor coordination and cooperation in the political scenario are the prior hurdles to revoke the women's independence. This study emphasizes that women can secure their rights through enacting laws related to this problem and prerequisite endeavours, including paying heed to academics, offering monetary pathways, and allowing political participation and getting contributions from people of the locality. The research paves the way for contemporary content by granting views on utilising calibre of women in a socio-cultural patriarchal community.
***Keywords:** socio-cultural barriers, patriarchy, education, political participation, partnership-based approach*

Introduction
Women's empowerment, or female independence, is crucial for the economic development of a country. It instils confidence in women, encouraging their involvement in the workforce, education, and political participation, including the policymaking process. If we talk about Pakistan, women are still facing restrictions and obstacles in their participation despite having many constitutional norms and governmental policies to improve this field. Women are still forced to stay back in these political, socio-cultural, and economic aspects of state. These problems are all over Pakistan, but they are mainly hindered by the society of KP in Lower Dir, as women of this area are prohibited from participating in any field or any factor of independence. Lower Dir from the province of Pakistan is a clear instance of

this issue of women's empowerment. Due to powerful values of male dominance and other social customs and cultural factors, lack of education for women. Some of the social obstacles include young age marriages of girls, less knowledge among women, and other healthcare factors. Women are also deprived of getting positions in the politics of Pakistan, which results in the bad impacts on the growth of women's personal life, but it also affects the development of the whole society and state. The reason for this study is to modify the obstacles to women's empowerment in Lower Dir by describing different factors of society. Understanding issues of this matter improves the importance of gender equality and maintains a stable economic growth and development of the region.

Literature Review

In Pakistan, women's empowerment and participation are extensively studied across various fields, including political, educational, and socio-economic domains. Research indicates that the obstacles to empowerment are deeply ingrained within all sectors of the state and institutional structures. These studies reveal that social and cultural restrictions are significantly influenced by male dominance in society. Traditional values, customary practices, and cultural norms continuously act as barriers to women's empowerment, both nationally and internationally. If we study Pashtuns and other similar societies that have patriarchal minds (conservatives) refers that the mind of male supremacy is not just the typical behaviour of society, but it regulates and forms a proper structure that stops and blocks the path of female empowerment and independence, and also confines and limits the prestige and prominence in all spheres of life. (Samia Anwar, 2025)

Social and cultural values, which consist of assumptions based on gender, sense of duty, and ethos, prominently restricts female's vigour and prominence of patriarchy. These values and customs are not just composed of speculation, but they consist of the daily routine of life, which shows us that female society is facing the issues of independence and empowerment in traditional areas. If we study on a large scale, these cultural values and social norms are described in inclusive circumstances of Pakistan, which describe the male–dominance values, customary cycles of practice, and gender inequality, which are connected with their hopes demoralize female from participation in any political movement or institution, and other policy-making descriptions, encourage disturbance of inequalities. (Samia Rani, 2025)

With the addition of socio-cultural restrictions and being discouraged from getting an education, and also the obstacles in the economic sector, Pakistani females are discouraged by these issues. Studies on this topic give us more information about the male-dominated society due to their cultured norms and restrictions of the economy prescribed the point of view of the scholar, meaning there are limitations in the way of women's participation and empowerment in Pakistan. (Faseeh U Din, Asma Noor, Ayesha Wazir, 2025)

Research objectives
- To analyze the immense ethnic, monetary, and organizational barrier that suppresses women's participation in the region.
- To assess the contribution of society and institutional coordination to trigger hurdles to women's cooperation in the political arena.
- To evaluate the influence of these obstacles, paving the way for collaboration of women in academics, fiscal management, and inevitable decision-making.

Research Questions
- What are the crucial blockages to women's decision-making capabilities in the area of Lower Dir?
- How do formal sections of individuals and foundational cooperation help dealing barriers to the independence of women in political scenarios in Lower Dir?

- In what kind of ways do these obstacles adversely influence cultural, fiscal, and political processes in the peculiar district?

Research Methodology

This research paper employs a qualitative methodology to explore the obstacles that hinder women's empowerment in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The primary objective of this study is to identify the barriers faced by women in this specific region. The case study approach is adopted, as it allows for an in-depth examination of organizational, ethnic, and communal factors that contribute to the limited empowerment of women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Secondary sources, including books, research journals, and newspapers, are employed to analyze and understand the ground realities in this region of Pakistan.

Discussion and Results

Issues of Women's Empowerment in Lower Dir, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Overall, this research study highlights that obstacles to women's independence and participation in Pakistan are largely interconnected. Social and cultural norms influence choices related to education, socio-economic involvement, and political engagement, creating a framework that remains unbreakable in its region. Additionally, many other issues arose due to limited educational institutions and facilities, a lack of awareness about accessing proper education, and related factors. These problems have created a sensitive situation across the country, especially in Lower Dir. (Ullah, S. 2024). Many studies tell us that even if behaviours in the case of females' education and studies are emerging and improving positively, educational institutions and educational facilities for women are still lacking in all aspects in Lower Dir, which is the main cause of a lack of balance in their society and institutions towards women. Some of these causes which are effecting these factors are lack of educational institutions which are far from their areas and affecting them badly, young age weddings of girls which is so a major cause of this bad situation, poverty which stops them and made their selves to sacrifice for the sake of their families and also religious and cultural barriers which are making obstacles for women to go out for their own and get proper education because most of the families have the mind-set that "if women will go out to get education and knowledge about the world, they will become independent and will start the downfall of their society". (Daraz, U., & Ul Hakim, A., 2024).

So, the researchers also wrote that these societies have a lack of interest in educating women because they focus more on male studies. After all, they think that if they adequately get an education, they would be able to make their society strong and stable in all ways, like in the situation of economic conditions, in the aspect of positivity of cultural factors, they think that education and studies for women are not that important in becoming a good and strong person. After studying this factor, they realized that biasing different genders and giving them separate importance can lead to inequality and hinder their ability to access opportunities, especially for women in education in the future. These obstacles and barriers in the way of getting proper education for women are not only stopping them from getting proper facilities and opportunities for getting jobs, but they also minimize the number of legal rights to get acknowledgment from women, awareness in the field of politics, and information about their diet and health. So, in the case of lower Dir, women of these areas are facing obstacles to get their education, which could give them empowerment and independence in the coming future, because of some reasons such as barriers in transition of force and factors that are pressing them in their families. (Naz, A., et al., 2014).

Political and Institutional Barriers

There are many obstacles in Lower Dir that women face in their path toward empowerment. After studying this region closely, we see numerous barriers and restrictions placed on women regarding

leadership roles, participation in institutions, and involvement in politics. Unfortunately, our institutions are rooted in bias, and our cultural behaviors tend to be conservative. Although women are sometimes given opportunities to participate in politics, we are still not strong enough to fully adopt this system. The main reasons for their limited political involvement include the structure of political parties and low political awareness, which prevent us from embracing this system. (Akram. R, 2025).

In the Lower Dir area, it is often observed that women from this region usually do not participate in politics and other political institutions such as educational institutions, the economic sector, and many other positions. They lack these opportunities in a male-dominated society. Therefore, it is clear from the researchers that their involvement rate is very low. Researchers also discussed the situation and the problem of the low number of votes among women in this area. When it comes to other government movements and struggles, women are also not supported by their families and societal views to take on leadership roles. They believe that if women get involved and participate in government institutions and political sectors, they would be in danger, not safe in society, and it would go against cultural norms for females.

Among these studies, researchers focused on encouraging society to ensure women receive education and knowledge about society, whether from educational institutions or other organizations capable of teaching them various skills. They also emphasized providing support for women in politics and government institutions in regions like Lower Dir and Chakdara, highlighting the cultural norms and limited awareness of different sectors of their state and society as key barriers. Additionally, they noted that the features and structural influences of many political parties pose significant obstacles to women's participation through quotas in politics. (Bibi, U., et al., 2025.) The findings on lower Dir also indicated that independence and empowerment of women in government institutions or other political sectors are necessary to make society equally strong across different genders, mainly between males and females, which would help maintain and stabilize society.

But if we eliminate females from governmental institutions and many other processes, such as decision-making and development of political involvement and participation, then it is obvious that the policy makers (which would be male dominant) would not give importance to the prime concerns and most important considerations of women, which would result in a lack of abilities and opportunities to overcome their needs. This becomes a main failure to make the women of society firm because this problem mainly causes a cycle in which the needs and problems of women lacks power are not addressed, which would be the result of more pressing of female society. This is also a major reason that is stopping and marginalizing the women of this society (Lower Dir) and making them non-confident among male dominant society. Lack of knowledge and understanding about their rights is continuously emerging as the major reason in this society. (Khan, A. 2009).

Intersection of Religion, Culture, and Global Trends

Some of the scholars pointed out the reasons of religion that how its illustration can be connected with cultural and social values, which would affect women's empowerment either in a positive or in a negative way, meaning they can work in a supportive manner or be neglected. Many trends based on feminism started on a global level had impacts on the local governments of Pakistan, but still they are somehow limited by respect and rules of Islam and its principles. This type of impact, which works as duality, tells us that even socio-cultural norms plays a key part in the maintenance of these obstacles, but still hope that these initiatives can make a base for the voice of women empowerment. (Qais. U, Aziz. A, & Fazil. M.D, 2023).

Economic Barrier and Dependency

In the case of women's empowerment, this economic factor is also a main and important factor that shares the past experiences of how girls are not being participated in the higher sector of state of Pakistan, unlike men. The constituency in the deficiency of this issue is brightening the restrictions given by social norms and cultural structures. The research on female department in Pakistan who somehow knows about the economy of Pakistan points out the dependency on wealth, short range of access to money factors and the most of the problem is the lack access to participation in labour force is restricting women and putting obstacles for independence of female sector and other discussion of money exchange even in their houses and others is being discouraged. (Khan. A, 2024). Helplessness in the field of economics of women in Lower Dir is one of the strong obstacles to getting their education and knowledge and making them independently strong and firm, which is also caused by many factors, such as family pressure and resurgence, low rate of quality education for women, lack of equality among different types of genders, etc. These studies provide a comprehensive overview of how women are discouraged and pressured by their families and societies when it comes to empowerment. These limitations include a lack of proper opportunities to find jobs, earn money, and become independent, as well as a shortage of resources to help them become stronger in these societies. Obstacles and barriers related to culture and customs, such as restrictions on women's mobility and the difficulty of talking with people outside their families or those they do not know clearly, hinder their opportunities in the workforce and create significant barriers to employment. (SHAHEEN, J. 2021).

Many of the females of lower Dir are forced to participate and work in job markets which are actually not paying them their dues or there are many other jobs which are domestically not involving the women but if they involve them and make them participate in them still, they are not giving the proper support in financial manner which are backing them to become independent and non-helpless in their societies. This factor of inequality in society between males and females is forcing women and girls to stop them from becoming independent in society and making them dependent on their families, resulting in a male-dominated society all over the area, lacking the ability in their households in matters of negotiation. Studies on lower Dir said more additionally that the situation in the economic sector of this area is also caused by less knowledge about many other skills along with education, lack of job opportunities and institutions in which women are dominant or only women are holding them where they could enjoy their working time independently and easily, many other facilities which could made them independent in generating money for women which could make them empowered in society. While lacking independence of women and girls in the economic sector, they cannot be self–sufficient in adopting any option for their future, such as steps taken personally for their marriages. This factor is stopping them from being the empowered gender in this society. (Khan, Y., 2019).

Educational Barriers and Their Impact

When we talk about independence or empowerment, the main thing that comes to our mind, which reflects their growth and smooth functioning, is education. But unfortunately, in this most important sector, we can see in our studies how different obstacles are restricting women from getting their proper education in Pakistan. Researches modulates that how male dominance society is degrading and discouraging young girls from getting their education, and giving them responsibilities of houses is continuously increasing the rate of illiteracy of women in Pakistan compared to men. This factor is continuing the bad impacts of the participation of women in the economic sector as well as in politics (Akram, 2025).

People of Lower Dir mainly focus on the studies of boys because they believe boys will lead society, so they prioritize their education and studies more. Their views on girls' education are less important

compared to boys' education, as they give girls lower priority. Most of their schools, colleges, and universities are mainly for their male society, which makes a huge gap and inequality between these two dominant genders, and obviously makes women insecure about getting their legal and constitutional rights given by their religion, society, and state. (Ali, Z., 2013). This is a continuous process of backing women to get proper opportunities towards jobs, participation in political institutions, system, and sectors, getting unlimited education, lack of institutions to get proper skills.

Even though the government and state are trying to provide these facilities to the females, these societies still fail to provide them with facilities and institutions for systematically getting an education and other skills. These factors not only stopping them to get education but these are also becoming a major factor for them to be the face of the state majorly due to the pressure putting by their families and societies, lack of figuring out the instructions, a smaller number of institutions and facilities, lack of policies in the decision-making process on this matter are the major causes of the back stepping and being the strong barriers on this issue.

Socio-Cultural and Patriarchal Constraints to Women's Empowerment

These two features are the main part of our research as they advocate the strong cultural and social values that give us a clear image of women of Pakistan. These values describe the importance and contribution of all genders, the obstacles to equality, and the patriarchy. Therefore, these are the reasons that are continuously limiting the roles of women in Pakistan in different fields of life. Our study is mainly focusing on the backward areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which describe the prospect of patriarchy, male code of honour, which are limiting the independence of women and forcing them to follow their traditional norms (Khan. A, 2021).

The normative and societal challenges are the major constraints in Lower Dir, which hinder female empowerment. Many highlighted that most of the time women are restricted to managing house activities, and their duties and functions are described communally. In lower Dir, traditional customs such as patriarchal guardianship, Gender segregation practices, and honour–based norms confined women's autonomy and movement. (Rubab, M., Mustafa, D. G., & Nawaz, A., 2020). Women are restricted to being in their privacy, while the public places are meant to be male-dominated. The male population in the Pashtun community follows their traditional and cultural practices instead of religious teachings. They use cultural tactics to suppress women.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women have to seek permission from their male family members to get basic chores, e.g., education, healthcare, and employment. This makes women less confident. In Pakistan, people often confuse cultural and normative practices with religious teaching. Therefore, they put pressure on women and want them to be isolated in their houses. They make them stay at houses and do day to day working indoor and manage house chores. All these normative values blocked women's participation in educational, institutional, and economic sectors of life. (Zahid Khan et al., 2022). Masculism and the superiority of men in governmental institutions and political sectors are also another strong and important factor in this matter. It is the superiority of male dominant sector not only outside the house (governmental and political sectors) but also makes their huge stance and hold within their houses, which is becoming a major factor in the depression of women in societies. These discoveries also found that usually male leads and control the domestic level of decisions for the needs, priorities, and well-being of their families.

These decisions are made depending on or in dependence on members in financial cases, to do the marriages of their family members, mainly choosing for the girls, educational situations and facilities of members of families, and giving permission for getting jobs, etc. Somehow these studies reveal that they deprive female individuals from making their decisions, such as educational institutions, marriage

proposals, and getting job opportunities, which having deeply impacts on their future as well as on society. When the processing and matters of policy making and formulation consist of teams that are mainly male-dominant, and men are superior, it causes limitations in empowering and relying on women. Many researchers and writers also reveal that those women who try to stand against these cultural and social norms, which are wrongly structured by society on traditional bases, are usually challenged by society and people around them as well as by their families in face of counter blast, deprivation by their own families or they are being exploited and deceived by emotionally and physically through many ways. From this whole scenario, it is definitely described from the point that this condition of male dominant society, women are being stopped individually from various sectors, but also become a major cause to make the society weak.

Systematic and Organizational Constraints

The findings on this matter are described and evolved as the major law in institutions, which is emerging as the major obstacle to the way of empowerment and independence of women's society. Researchers and writers figured out the situation and described that the major factor, which is also becoming a failure of women's dominance in society, is policy-making ability and ideas, which consist of the execution of policies in a successful manner, and also the low and weak interaction and connection of political institutions from different governmental sectors with the common people of the society. These factors are also the main cause of the major barrier to women's empowerment and independence in Lower Dir. (Saeed, M., 2012). Some of the political and governmental institutions and sectors have somehow failed to expand in the countryside of this area because of a resurgence in the political scenario and barriers in socio-cultural norms in rural areas. The studies, along with the research on the state level, describe and wrote the space in these studies and instructions in these institutions compromised in different genders of society in the form of policies for equal distribution of resources among all genders, mainly males and females, in Pakistan. This research also gives us a lesson that all governmental and non-governmental which are correlated to political institutions should work and make policies on state matters as well of society good deed should work connectively with locals and common people of their society to make them possible for well-being in case of cultural norms and implications of different policies and decisions to make women independent and empowered in society.

Conclusion

The case study of Lower Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Kp) province, Pakistan, illustrates the significant barriers to female independence and empowerment. In this region, prevailing socio-cultural norms, coupled with entrenched male dominance, contribute to a stifling environment for women. Widespread illiteracy further compounds these challenges, limiting women's access to opportunities in the economic sector. Many women are also unaware of their rights and face systemic obstacles in the implementation of constitutional protections affered to them. To address these pressing issues, it is essential to provide comprehensive education and raise awareness about their rights. Establishing a robust support system will not only enhance female independence but also contribute to the broader development of the state in Lower Dir. By empowering women through knowledge and opportunity, we can pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous society.

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