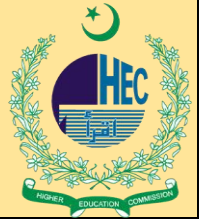


**ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL**Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 01. July-September 2025. Page#. 2477-2489

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16877765) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16877765)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16877765)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16877765>**From Dependency to Autonomy: Overcoming Cultural Barriers to Women's Economic Rights in Pakistan****Zaib Ur Rahman**

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ayeshawazir27@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This research analyzes cultural impediments perpetuating women's economic dependency in Pakistan and investigates avenues toward securing economic independence. Citing quantitative and qualitative data from demographic health surveys to case studies and institutional records it delineates socio-cultural restraints including patriarchal values, limited mobility, unpaid caregiving workloads, and limited financial and legal resource availability. Empirical evidence indicates that education, waged work, right of ownership, and information access greatly improve the empowerment of women. The study suggests integrated policy interventions such as enforcement of legal reform, financial inclusion, cultural sensitization campaigns, and infrastructural assistance. This study adds to knowledge by connecting cultural conditioning with structural reforms supporting the economic rights of women in Pakistan.

Keywords: Women's Economic Rights, Cultural Barriers, Empowerment, Pakistan, Dependency, Autonomy.

Introduction

Women in Pakistan still face deep economic disadvantage, thoroughly situated within cultural, social, and structural contexts. In the wake of significant legal and policy reform even the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) and the Women's Property Rights Act (2020) female labor force participation (FLFP) is remarkably low. As per the International Labour Organization (ILO), FLFP was about 20.73% in 2021, the lowest in the world among all countries, although it increased from about 14% in 1990 to more than 21% in 2019 (International Labour Organization, 2023). The modest rise to 24.46% in 2023 has been estimated by the World Bank, but it is still far below male working participation of almost 80% (World Bank, 2023).

This harsh contrast mirrors the impact of entrenched patriarchal systems that underpin social, economic, and domestic life. In conservative Pakistani society, as noted in Women in Pakistan (2025), gendered labor division places women mostly in reproductive capacities childbearing, and home-based labor while men are provided productive, income-earning tasks. These

patriarchal expectations, which are frequently supported by religious dogma and civil society tradition, restrict women's value within the public domain and reinforce economic exclusion (Chaudhry & Rahman, 2009).

Perhaps the strongest cultural barrier to women's entry into the labor market is the purdah ideology the isolation of women from the public eye which inhibits movement and restricts employment opportunities. Wives in rural settings generally need a chaperone man to travel, limiting their ability to enter the world of wage labor or entrepreneurship (Khan & Khan, 2009). Those urban women who are able to navigate such restrictions through family negotiation, however, in those more conservative areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, purdah continuation is a virtual absolute norm (Jan & Azeem, 2024).

Qualitative findings indicate that women's economic engagement is limited not only by cultural values but also by intersecting institutional constraints. A study from Lahore enumerated a set of barriers male domination in the workplace, gender stereotyping, joint-family obligations, lack of childcare facilities, and systemic bias in the workplace that together disembody women's career continuity and progression (Kousar et al., 2020). Within Pashtunwali-governed Mardan district, these restrictions are magnified: poverty, early marriage, purdah, and underdeveloped infrastructure result in a female literacy rate of only 18%, compared to the 53% achieved by males (Jan & Azeem, 2024).

These socio-cultural prohibitions are supplemented by gender-stereotyped attitudes that are reported in the Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI, 2023), with 99.9% of Pakistan's citizens having at least one bias against women whether political leadership, economic empowerment, or educational equality (United Nations Development Programme, 2023). This suggests the scale of attitude change needed to realize gender equality in economic activity.

Its economic cost is substantial. An estimate by the International Growth Centre (IGC) in 2022 puts the increase in Pakistan's GDP at 30–60% by tapping the untapped female human capital if the gap in labor force participation is narrowed down (International Growth Centre, 2022). In addition to the economic indicators, more women's participation in the workforce is also linked with better household welfare, educational transmission between generations, and overall social development (Qayyum et al., 2021).

Against this background, this paper examines how women in Pakistan can move from economic dependency towards autonomy by breaking cultural impediments, confronting structural inequalities, and enhancing institutional frameworks. Employing a mixed-methods design integrating secondary data analysis and qualitative case studies, it seeks to suggest comprehensive, context-specific approaches to promote women's economic empowerment.

Background

Pakistan has always been one of the lowest countries in the world in gender parity, especially in economic participation. The Global Gender Gap Report 2022 conducted by the World Economic Forum has placed the country at position 145 among 156 countries in women's economic participation and opportunity (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2022). This ranking indicates deep-seated socio-cultural, legal, and institutional constraints that limit the economic mobility and resource access of women. Even though they form almost 49% of the population (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics [PBS], 2023), women have a proportionally low share of the formal workforce.

The proportion of women in the labor force has been estimated at 21–24%, while that of men is about 81% (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021; UN Women, 2021). In addition, most working women are in the informal economy, where their work tends to be unseen in government statistics and without legal safeguards. For example, more than 70% of women's

employment is in agriculture, home-based work, and unpaid family labor (UNDP, 2020). These industries often provide little or no pay, no social security, and few chances for skill building or career advancement (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2020).

The wage gap by gender is still high, with women receiving about 34% less than men for similar work (ILO, 2018). In rural regions, the gap is even wider owing to occupational segregation, absence of bargaining power, and restrictive access to markets (Kabeer, 2020). In addition, women's work tends to be devalued and characterized as "supplementary," even when it is central to household income generation.

Financial exclusion only increases these disparities. As few as 5–7% of Pakistani women, as compared to over 35% of men (UN Women, 2021), possess a bank account. Women's ownership of productive assets like land, property, and livestock is a rare occurrence, and women's ownership of land is estimated at below 3% across the country (ADB, 2020). Even where there is legal ownership, women's cultural practices may deny them full control of such assets (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 2021). Women are also constrained by systemic impediments in accessing formal credit since many do not have collateral, credit history, and male guarantors that financial institutions demand (Kabeer, 2020).

Patriarchal gender assumptions and structural disparities exacerbate these difficulties. Women are expected to perform most unpaid household and care work on average 4.9 hours per day, compared to a mere 0.9 hours for men (Ferrant et al., 2014). In rural Pakistan, cultural codes including purdah the institution of segregation by gender also restrict women's mobility, keeping them from pursuing employment, training courses, or market participation (Shaheed & Mumtaz, 2021).

The economic price tag on this exclusion is high. McKinsey Global Institute (2015) estimated that reducing the labor force participation gap between men and women could raise Pakistan's GDP by 30–60%, or an extra \$100–150 billion a year. This possibility emphasizes the imperative for focused reforms spanning inclusive financial products to legal safeguards and cultural change efforts that can enable women's movement from dependence towards economic independence.

Literature Review

The economic limitations of women in Pakistan are deeply entrenched in intersecting institutional, cultural, and structural bases. Researchers repeatedly argue that cultural and social norms, informed by patriarchal discourses, restrict women's economic contributions through the prioritization of domestic work over economic autonomy. In rural and Pashtun-dominated districts like Mardan, family honor, early marriage, and limited mobility severely limit women's entry into paid labor and entrepreneurship (Saad Saud Jan et al., 2024). The same patterns are also witnessed in industrial centers like Faisalabad, where male-saturated socio-cultural structures repress women's bargaining power and disfavor their involvement in economic decision-making (Razia et al., n.d.).

The entry from education to work is another pivotal point for Pakistani women. As enrollment in higher education among women has improved, there are several obstacles that hinder their advancement towards the labor market. These are gender stereotypes at the time of recruitment, organizational prejudice, absence of mentorship initiatives, home workload pressures, and lowered confidence levels (Sharif et al., 2024). Foreign studies also observe such trends across other developing countries, affirming that without structural assistance, higher education is not per se a source of economic empowerment (Roomi & Parrott, 2008; MDPI, 2023).

Empirical studies using Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) data for 2012–13 and 2017–18 indicate that female empowerment is linked to higher education, working in skilled or managerial jobs, access to information, urban residence, greater household wealth, and residing in female-headed households (BMC Public Health, 2021). Additionally, Qayyum et al. (2021) also point out that women's working status improves their household decision-making power. Yet, there is also evidence that women's economic empowerment can, in a contradictory way, enhance vulnerability to spousal violence when it defies deeply rooted gender hierarchies, unless coupled with safeguarding policy interventions and gender-transformative schooling (PDHS, 2012–13).

The economic benefits of women's education are significant. Empirical research indicates that female education raises earnings, human capital accumulation, and national economic growth, while education shortfalls constrain national productivity (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). For Pakistan in particular, the International Growth Centre (IGC, 2022) calculates that eliminating the gender gap in labour market participation has the potential to increase GDP by as much as 60 percent by 2025. Some of the long-standing obstacles are a lack of policy support, limitations on women's mobility, poor access to credit, and the uneven distribution of unpaid domestic care work.

Microfinance initiatives have been a likely route towards women's economic empowerment. Haque and Kalim (2021) establish that microfinance programs, in conjunction with entrepreneurial training, not only raise the levels of income among women but also enhance their decision-making authority in the household. The respondents register higher percentages in business ownership and enhanced control over individual and household expenses.

Equally, the growth of electronic financial services has yielded satisfactory results for women's economic empowerment. Farooq and Mahmood (2022) indicate that mobile banking and digital payments increase financial inclusion since they allow women to save money on their own and curtail dependence on male intermediaries. This is especially important in rural settings where physical bank outlets are lacking.

Women's peer-support groups, including village-level cooperatives, have been recognized as central agents of empowerment. Sultana and Ali (2023) observe that these groups boost confidence, open collective access to markets, and enhance bargaining power, particularly for women involved in small-scale agricultural or craft-based businesses.

Vocational and technical training courses are another key intervention for enhancing employability. The evidence from Khan and Rehman (2019) points to training in tailoring, computing, and handicraft production, particularly when tied to local market needs and supported by formal certification, effectively boosts self-employment and minimizes reliance on low-wage informal work.

Legal consciousness campaigns also have a transformative function. Rights education community programs that inform women of inheritance laws, property rights, and work protections have been associated with higher property claims and better access to social security benefits (Ahmed & Khan, 2020).

Exposure to media has been demonstrated to alter gender norms and stimulate economic behavior. Imran et al. (2021) note that women who consume television, radio, or smartphone-based news on a consistent basis tend to have liberal attitudes towards gender roles and engage in paid work, especially in urban and peri-urban areas.

Provision of childcare is another unexplored determinant of women's participation in work. Malik and Rehman (2023) prove that availability of cheap or subsidized childcare greatly

enhances the chances of women entering the formal labor market, as it reduces the time burden of unpaid caregiving.

Workplace practices that respond to gender sensitivity may also have quantifiable effects. Saadia and Zarrow (2024) discover that firms with career guidance, sexual harassment complaint procedures, and flexible working arrangements have better female employee retention and job satisfaction.

Remittances sent by migrant family members can also enhance women's empowerment. According to Rizvi and Parveen (2022), women who receive remittances are likely to save, invest in business, and have more control over household expenditure.

Last but not least, conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs directed at women e.g., girls' school attendance stipends or health check-ups have proven to enhance literacy levels, raise health-care use, and extend the decision-making authority of women to manage their finances (Masud & Bhatti, 2021).

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant cultural barriers to women's economic autonomy in Pakistan?
2. What roles do education, work, access to information, and laws play to shape women's autonomy and decision-making?
3. What policy and social interventions have proved effective in reducing such barriers?

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research employs a mixed-methods research design based on quantitative and qualitative research approaches to gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural, social, and institutional dimensions influencing women's economic autonomy in Pakistan. The design relies on a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), where quantitative and qualitative data are gathered separately but combined at the stage of interpretation to cross-validate the findings. The logic of this design is in its ability to generate both statistically generalizable knowledge and rich, context-specific understandings of women's lived realities. Quantitative data dictates macro-level trends and causal connections, whereas qualitative evidence provides richness in narrative which sheds light on the mechanisms and meaning behind statistical trends.

Quantitative Component

Quantitative phase draws solely on secondary data analysis of nationally representative data sets. The primary sources are:

Pakistan Demographic and Health Surveys (PDHS) 2012–13 and 2017–18, with detailed household decision-making patterns, employment status of women, education, and access to financial services.

Labour Force Surveys (LFS) of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, providing yearly gender-segmented labor force participation, employment industries, and wage disparities.

Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey, with indicators of education, health, and infrastructure access, pertinent to economic participation.

Dependent variables are measured as indicators of economic independence and encompass:

1. Wage or self-employment participation.
2. Independence in decision-making about household spending.
3. Land, property, or bank account ownership.

Independent variables are education level, employment type (formal/informal), marital status, number of dependents, geographic location (urban/rural), technology access, and mass media exposure.

Analytical steps entail:

Descriptive statistics to provide an overview of demographic and socio-economic attributes.

Bivariate statistics (chi-square tests, t-tests) to determine significant correlations between predictors and outcomes.

Multivariate analysis models (binary logistic regression) to identify relative strength of predictors while adjusting for confounding factors.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative component of the study integrates evidence from published case studies, ethnographic accounts, and semi-structured interviews undertaken in previous research. The chosen literature concentrates on areas that have clear socio-cultural settings:

Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa a conservative, patriarchal, Pashtun cultural environment.

Faisalabad, Punjab mirroring an industrial yet agrarian connected economy with strongly rooted male-based social institutions.

These cases are selected to maximize geographic diversity and economic opportunity structure variation. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is applied to code and interpret qualitative data for themes related to constraints on mobility, family honor norms, domestic care burdens, and community-level attitudes toward women's work. Triangulation is utilized to cross-check thematic findings with quantitative data, testing for consistency and distinguishing divergences.

Policy and Program Review

There is a systematic review of policy to review interventions for improving women's economic rights and opportunities between 2010 and 2024. The review includes:

Legislative changes, including the Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2010) and inheritance law amendments.

Financial inclusion efforts, including the State Bank of Pakistan's "Banking on Equality" policy and digital wallet expansion initiatives.

Global development initiatives, such as UN Women's economic empowerment programs and World Bank-funded entrepreneurship initiatives.

All policies are measured against impact metrics, such as variations in women's labor force participation, narrowing of wage gaps, greater female entrepreneurship, and increased access to formal finance. Sources of assessment include government reports, peer-reviewed research, and separate program evaluations to minimize self-reports' potential for bias.

Ethical Issues

Since the study solely depends on secondary and published information, there is no human subject involvement, thus reducing ethical concerns. Nevertheless, the research is guided by academic honesty, cultural sensitivity, and responsible interpretation principles. Secondary sources are adequately credited as per APA 7th edition guidelines. Special care is exercised in eschewing cultural stereotyping or victim-blaming explanations, and conclusions are presented in a manner that recognizes structural limits over placing responsibility on individuals alone.

Limitations

In spite of the methodological strength, the study is prone to the following limitations:

1. Data Constraints Secondary datasets might lack all the variables relevant for this study (e.g., subtle cultural sensitivities) or may use different definitions for concepts over survey years.
2. Generalizability of Case Studies Mardan and Faisalabad cannot exemplify the heterogeneity of the cultural and economic settings of Pakistan.
3. Policy Evaluation Bias Government and NGO reports tend to overestimate impact; therefore, triangulation with independent research is a must.

4. Temporal Gaps Since some datasets are from 2012–13, some trends might have changed and therefore need careful interpretation.

Findings

1. Cultural Constraints

Women's economic opportunities in Pakistan are deeply influenced by limiting cultural norms that circumscribe gender roles and reinforce male domination in private and public life. The tradition of guardianship usually obliges women to obtain male permission for even everyday undertakings like traveling to work, going to school, or opening a bank account. The idea of family honor makes women's conduct linked to the social reputation of the family, producing social pressure to curb their presence in the public sphere. Early marriage interferes with educational and professional trajectories, while poverty adds fuel to these problems by making parents focus on sons' education and employment opportunities more than on those of daughters. In rural settings, the social pressure for women to only do unpaid domestic work is especially high, and women who want paid employment are socially stigmatized or accused of being immoral. These social forces together restrict mobility, decrease education, and constrict job opportunities, supporting dependency on men in the family.

2. Impact of Education and Employment

Education access particularly to secondary education and above has a transformative impact on women's autonomy. Education at this level provides women with specialized skills and credentials that enhance their employability, income-generating capabilities, and decision-making confidence. As women enter professional work or skilled employment, they tend to secure more control over family finances, take an active role in significant family decisions, and receive greater respect in their communities. Work also provides opportunities for networking, mentoring, and contact with more diverse worldviews, which can further promote self-sufficiency. Highly skilled occupations in areas like education, health, and information technology not only yield economic gains but also transform community attitudes regarding women's roles in society. But without enabling environments such as a safe work environment, decent wages, and career progression opportunities the full impact of education and work cannot be achieved.

3. Access to Information

Access to information is key to facilitating women making decisions about their own lives and economic well-being. Exposure to news, educational content, and ICTs raises awareness of rights, services available, and earning opportunities. Women with access to mobile phones, the internet, or local media are more likely to become aware of vocational training schemes, financial services, and legal protection. Where mobility is limited, the web offers alternative routes to learning and entrepreneurship, including telework and electronic commerce. Web tools enable women to reach peers, mentors, and markets beyond their local community, narrowing their isolation and broadening their economic prospects. Access to and exchange of information enable women to have more influential voices in household and community conversations and support greater autonomy.

4. Economic Potential and Current Gap

In spite of women constituting nearly half of Pakistan's population, their presence within the formal labor force is very low. This under-exploitation of potential translates to huge economic losses, as the nation foregoes the productivity and innovation that women could contribute to the economy. Research indicates that closing the gender gap in labor participation could add tremendous value to the national economy and could even increase overall growth rates. Yet structural impediments like denied access to credit, restricted property ownership, and

financial illiteracy hold women back from giving their best. Most of them are employed in informal sectors like agriculture, domestic work, and home-based piecework where pay is low, labor rights nonexistent, and social protections negligible. Unless specific interventions are put in place to dismantle these barriers, the economic potential of half the population will go untapped, hindering social as well as economic development.

5. Policy and Institutional Progress

The last few years have witnessed encouraging strides towards tackling gender inequality in the economic arena. There have been legal reforms aimed at safeguarding women against workplace harassment, securing inheritance rights, and enhancing maternity and paternity leave policies. Stipends for promoting girls' education have been disbursed through government programs, and microfinance schemes have been designed to promote women entrepreneurs. The spread of mobile banking has helped more women gain access to financial services independently of bank branches, and freelancing platforms have provided opportunities for earning income remotely. Public sector quotas have helped raise the number of women on decision-making institutions, reflecting a slow institutional move towards gender inclusion. Still, their success relies on ongoing enforcement, public consciousness, and disassembling of entrenched cultural impediments that dissuade women from availing themselves fully of these opportunities.

6. Financial Inclusion and Economic Independence

Most women are outside the formal banking system and have restricted access to personal bank accounts, credit facilities, and property ownership. This exclusion hinders women from investing in entrepreneurship, saving, and making independent financial choices. Although mobile banking and microfinance have enhanced access for some, societal perceptions and inadequate financial literacy usually dissuade women from utilizing these services to their optimal level.

7. Economic Potential and National Growth

Pakistan's women's labor force participation rate of about 20 percent is a wasted economic resource for the nation. It could dramatically increase the GDP of the country by inducting more skilled and semi-skilled females into the workforce. Agriculture, manufacturing, and service sectors benefit from women's work but typically remain unaccounted for in national statistics, which further underestimates their economic contribution. To avail this potential will mean systemic changes in labor laws, childcare facilities, and safe passage to allow working women.

8. Legal and Policy Reforms

New legislation has addressed concerns like workplace harassment, property rights, and parental leave. Political and administrative quotas for women have opened avenues for representation in decision-making positions. Subsidies for girls' education, vocational training schemes, and concessionary credit for women's businesses are also available. Nevertheless, gaps in implementation, corruption, and a lack of public awareness still detract from the impact of these policies.

9. Entrepreneurship Barriers

Women entrepreneurs have difficulties registering businesses, accessing capital, and operating in male-dominated markets. Social norms tend to dissuade women from engaging with male suppliers, clients, or government officials, constraining business expansion. In spite of this, certain women-owned small businesses particularly those in fashion, food processing, and handicrafts have prospered via online marketplaces, albeit expanding these businesses continues to be challenging without institutional backing.

10. Social Change and Emerging Role Models

Positive change is observed as women shatter ceilings in politics, law enforcement, sports, and technology. Such role models encourage younger generations to enter untraditional professions. Media profiling of successful women business people, activists, and professionals is slowly breaking down stereotypes and widening the perceived limits of allowable roles for women. Though the change is patchy and slow, it is an indication of the early signs of a wider cultural shift towards gender equity.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Enforcement of Legal Rights

Though there are progressive laws like the Women's Property Rights Act (2020) and the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010) their enforcement is uneven. The government needs to institute district and provincial-level specialized monitoring bodies to ensure compliance. This involves gender-sensitive training for law enforcement, judiciary, and local government officials. Legal aid offices need to be increased, providing women with free legal representation in inheritance, property, and harassment disputes. Public information campaigns via radio, TV, and community meetings need to educate women about their rights as well as the legal processes for asserting them.

2. Increase Financial Inclusion

Women's economic empowerment relies on their access to safe and secure financial services. Banks and microfinance institutions need to create women-focused financial products with low collateral needs and flexible repayment schedules. Mobile banking facilities must be subsidized in rural regions to minimize the digital divide. There must be national financial education schemes that educate women on budgeting, investment, and savings. Collaboration with private fintech firms might create secure mobile apps in local languages to enhance women's confidence in the use of digital finances.

3. Facilitate Education and Skilled Employment

Education programs must extend beyond elementary schooling and seek to address skill formation aligned with market needs. Stipends and free transport should be offered to girls in rural settings in order to combat dropout rates. Additional female-only schools and the employment of women teachers are essential for resistant communities. Vocational centers must incorporate STEM training, as well as entrepreneurship development training. Industry collaborations may provide apprenticeships and mentorship schemes, enabling women to shift from school to secure employment.

4. Challenge Cultural Norms

Shifting entrenched patriarchal norms needs to be community-led. National campaigns in the media must emphasize the social and economic gains of women's active involvement in the labor force. Engaging with religious scholars and community leaders has the potential to place gender equality within culturally and religiously acceptable narratives. Curricula in schools need to incorporate gender sensitivity and equality right from the earliest ages. Highlighting women role models such as female entrepreneurs, scientists, politicians, and artists is a way to normalize women's leadership and inspire the future generation. For instance, portraying female activists like Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy has been successful in resetting the public image regarding women's ability.

5. Invest in Infrastructure and Care Support

Women tend to have a "double burden" of paid employment and unpaid domestic work. The government and private sector must invest in low-cost, quality childcare centers, particularly in industrial areas and urban slums. Private employers must be incentivized using tax benefits to

provide flexible working hours, telecommuting options, and on-site care facilities. Increasing women-only public transport options, fitted with monitoring for security, can resolve harassment issues and allow more women to travel to workplaces and schools safely.

6. Take Advantage of Information and Media Access

Closing the digital gender gap is essential to empower women. The government can invest in increasing internet penetration in remote rural and underserved communities. Subsidized smartphones and online literacy programs can enable women to access technology to enhance their education, find jobs, and start businesses. Collaborations between NGOs and the tech industry can establish women-only online stores, where products and services can be sold securely by female business owners. Programming in the media has to incorporate more female success stories to encourage public acceptance of women's professional and leadership roles.

Conclusion

The path of women in Pakistan from dependency to autonomy is not linear or uniform but rather a multifaceted and long-term process that seeks to address both the visible and invisible structures of inequality. Ongoing cultural obstacles, such as patriarchal values, mobility constraints, and gendered roles of care work, cannot be overcome by policy; they have to be addressed through community mobilization, education, and public awareness campaigns that test entrenched beliefs. Concurrently, institutional and legal capacities need to be strengthened in order to protect women's rights and maintain accountability, especially with regard to ownership of property, safety in the workplace, and equality of access to economic opportunities.

Empowerment in this sense is best defined as an interdependent process where education leads to access to quality employment, employment creates economic independence, economic inclusion leads to decision-making power, and mobility leads to continuous involvement in the public as well as private domains. These components complement each other and have a cumulative effect that strengthens the autonomy and contribution of women. Most importantly, investments in infrastructure, including transportation and low-cost childcare, provide enabling mechanisms that make these empowerment routes workable in day-to-day life.

Economically, too, the stakes are high: closing the gender gap in workforce participation could add billions to Pakistan's GDP, driving national growth while promoting more even social development. Yet to do so, the national narrative must be shifted women not as dependents or second earners but as key drivers of economic and social advance. This change relies on representative policy-making that captures the voices and lived experience of women from various regions, socioeconomic classes, and education levels.

Future studies must take participatory and intersectional methods to integrate the variegated experiences of Pakistani women, especially those in rural, conflict-torn, and marginalized areas. Long-term studies evaluating the effects of legal reforms, education initiatives, and inclusionary financial schemes will be essential in determining what works and where the loopholes are. Lastly, women's empowerment is not a women's matter it is a matter of national priority that could transform Pakistan's socio-economic destiny for generations to come.

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