

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS OF WOMEN IN PAKISTAN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MARDAN DISTRICT, NWFP PROVINCE

Mohammad Jalal-ud-Din* and Munir Khan**

ABSTRACT

This study was carried out in district Mardan, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan during 2006. The basic purpose of the study was to analyze the socio-economic and cultural constraints of women in the research area. Primary data were collected from 100 respondents randomly selected in two villages namely Moheb Banda and Zando Dheri. The results show that socio-economic status of women was worse because of low literacy rate, lack of educational facilities, awareness, poor economic condition, lack of skills and insecure environment of the society for working women. Men have more decision-making power than the women regarding family, choice of selecting male partners and household expenditure. In certain cases only elderly women were consulted for opinion in decision-making. Women were culturally constrained to remain at home and care for their children. Majority of the sampled respondents were in favour of getting formal education but only few of them were able to take independent decision in getting formal education. Independent decisions about family type, level of income, landholding and level of literacy of the sampled respondents had no significant effect on the living standard. Similarly the education of a household's head had no significant effect on the literacy level of the sampled respondents. After studying and analyzing the socio-economic and cultural status of the women in selected areas of district Mardan, it is to recommend that female education is essential for the economic development of the area. For this purpose better educational facilities should be provided for women. Moreover, promotion of research on the conditions and problems of women is essential. Also Employment opportunities should be provided for women by establishing cottage and agro-based industries.

Key words: Culture, Mardan, Socio-Economic factors, Women, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Society throughout the world consists of two sexes (male and female). Though their roles are not uniform throughout the world, but still they have to play their productive role in the society. In underdeveloped world, the strength requiring activities, presumably a male trait, are not strictly apportioned to males. In fact, activities such as burden bearing and water carrying are done more by female than by males (Begum, 2002).

In most societies of the world, particularly in developing countries, household is the world of women, and the public and politics are the world of men. These differences are indirectly due to biological difference in man and woman. Females give birth to children and are equipped to feed the newly born children. They are bound by biology to domestic duties. Males are physically strong and leave their offspring for extended periods and, therefore, are logically more likely to become engaged in activities such as hunting and fighting and other socio-economic activities (Ramesh, 2000).

In most underdeveloped countries of the world the women as a girl-child has a lower status and enjoys fewer rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood than the boy-child. Women at a very young age experiences inequality and find it very difficult to overcome this inequality (Rizvi, 1980).

Women in Pakistan are facing disadvantages from the time they are born. The birth of a girl is frequently

met with disappointment, even anger, and the blame is usually placed on the mother. As a rule, the girl-child receives less food, less access to education and less health care than a male child. As a result girls are more likely to die of childhood diseases (Population Census, 1991). Investment in girls' education and skill development is meager. As one women's organization put it; "The girl is a liability. At an early age the girl-child is made aware that she is only a temporary member of the family. Any skill she learns will benefit not her own family but her in-laws".

It has been reported that those girls who get vocational training have little chance to become teachers in the vocational institutes due to non-availability of employment opportunities and lack of finance (Rizvi, 1980).

According to Amnesty International, school enrolment of girls is low. According women's organization groups, only 28% of the girls go to primary school, and only 11% of the older girls go to high school. The dropout rate is high. Girls are kept at home to do household chores or to look after younger children when required by the family or when financial position is weak. Only some 24% of the females are literate, compared to 49% of the males. Women's organization groups estimate that only 12% to 15% of the females can read and write (Hirway and Mahadevia, 1996).

Girls, generally, marry young at around 15 years of age. The birth rate is high. Women give birth to six

* Department of Economics, Islamia College University of Peshawar – Pakistan

** Department of Agriculture Economics, NWFP Agricultural University Peshawar – Pakistan

children on average and both infant and maternal mortality rates are also high. Women are usually married off in a transaction in which, bride's price is negotiated through two families. The women is considered and treated as the property of her husband and may not defy him. Wives, it is assumed, have given permanent consent to sexual relation with their husband. Marital rape-intercourse without the consent of the wife is only an offense if it results into serious injuries. Sexual activity outside marriage is a criminal act for which the law prescribes stringent punishments. Domestic violence against women is widespread and rarely brought to public notice or punished unless the woman dies or suffers gruesome injuries.

Differentiation based on gender is evident, virtually, in every human society. Most people are socialized to hold quite different expectations for women and men. Man has traditionally been assigned as the providers for the family, while women have to take almost total responsibility for childcare and household activities. In addition, one culture views, many forms of works as "Women's work" or "Men's work" using as a basis for gender stereotypes. A person's gender thus becomes a means for categorizing people and is given a distinct social significance. Women and men have assigned with particular social role in every culture.

Social scientific research has shown that gender role is not innate but is heavily influenced by culture. In an underdeveloped country like Pakistan, culture considers women as second-class citizens. Therefore, they are deprived of their due rights. They are less consulted in men's activities.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study are:

- i. To describe the socio-economic role and status of rural women in their households and other activities in the study area.
- ii. To identify socio-economic and cultural constraints faced by rural women in respect to their socio-economic and cultural environment in the study area.
- iii. To probe into the role of education and mass media in gender awareness.
- iv. To study the perception of sample respondents regarding their potential role in socio-economic development of the study area.
- v. To suggest policy recommendations as to how their constraints can be minimized.

Women Status in Pakistan

- i. Kishwar and Akhtar (1982) claimed that restrictions on the movement of women, their employment, participation in spectator parks, access to education and a prescribed dress code are issues, which downgrade the role of women in the society.
- ii. Pakistan is a cultural bounded country where the women participation in paid labour is still very low. For example, Himayatullah and Parveen (1990) pointed out the following factor for low female participation in paid labour:
- iii. First factor is that like most other underdeveloped countries, in Pakistan the labour force data tend to underestimate the number of economically active women especially in the category of unpaid helpers on farms and other family operated enterprises.
- iv. In Pakistan the Muslim custom of Purdah also inhibits the employment of women.
- v. Women are still largely responsible for domestic work and child rearing. They are not as free as men to enter the labour market.
- vi. Majority of women prefer to stay at home and look after their children.
- vii. Also the cultural trails not only affect the extent to which women actually engage in income generating activities, but also the reporting of activities during the time of labour force surveys or census.

Women Status in Other Parts of the World

The situation in similar developing countries is not much different as Sadie (1995) studied the status of women in rural Africa.

As far as women status in India is concerned, it was reported that conceptual framework for measuring gender development through Gender Development Index (GDI) devised by the UNDP was unsatisfactory, while Gender Development Measure devised by UNDP was found as an appropriate system because it operates at two levels. For example, Hirway and Mahadevia (1996) found that in 15 major states of India Gender Development Measure, on the one hand, was more comprehensive covering all the critical aspects of gender development and, on the other hand, more useful for policy makers as it presents tailoring indices for different sectors. Also Ramesh (2000) identified gender backward districts among 15 major Indian States using 13 Gender Sensitive Indicators (GSI). Variables included in this exercise were indicative of the demographic, educational, health-related, social, cultural and economic status of the women. In the

states of Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab, all districts recorded poor status of women, while in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar most districts exhibited backwardness by one or more GSI. Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa with 7 districts each were numbered in middle range in term of the chosen variables. The States of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujrat were relatively better off.

According to Adams (1997) gender relation affects the functioning and management of groups, the roles played by members and the distribution of benefits through participation. He stressed for the need of equality in gender relation so that rural community may utilize their available resources for the betterment of the community.

The Asian crisis regarding rural women and their families in Banjaran, Indonesia was encouraging as compared to Pakistan and India. For example, Hancock (2001) analyzed the status of rural women in Banjaran from 1997 to 2000. He examined the effects of crisis of price increase for basic items such as food, oil, transport, health and education and decline in women's purchasing power and wages. Women factory workers reported the following changes at household level. For example:

- i. Contribution of a greater proportion of the earnings to the household's budget.
- ii. Adoption of new consumption and spending habits.
- iii. Increase in the women's bargaining power and decision-making abilities in the household.

In case of Zimbabwe Mehretu *et al.* (2001) reported that there were multidimensional aspects to the plight of women in the rural margins of Africa. Shortfalls in the provision and implementation of adequate social-economical infrastructure in the rural margins have failed to address marginality in either their contingent or systemic modalities and the government should focus more closely on the factors responsible for female marginality and redress them with deliberate intent.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in district Mardan, NWFP, Pakistan during June-August 2006. Primary data were collected from 100 respondents randomly selected from two villages, i. e. Moheb Banda and Zando Dheri. Within these villages 60 and 40 respondents were selected from Moheb Banda and Zando Dheri respectively. Since an access of a strange male to the respondents for data collection was not possible due to cultural reasons, therefore a

female investigator was employed to collect data. The data were collected during June-August 2006.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table I reveals that out of total respondents in the sampled area, about 75% were counted as illiterate and 25% as literate. This shows that in the sampled area the rate of female literacy is extremely low. The reasons for low literacy level of the respondents were that the concept of female education was not much accepted by the society. Also there were no proper educational facilities for females in the research area. Therefore, they had no chance to get formal education. Majority of the respondents had read the Holy Quran as part of religious education.

Table I shows an extremely low percentage of literacy rates in the study area. Out of 60 total respondents from Moheb Banda, only 17% are literate and 83% illiterate, and in Zando Dheri out of 40 only 8% are literate and 92% illiterate. A literate woman means the one has passed the secondary school examination.

Marital Status of the Sampled Respondents

Marital status is one of the important factors that influence the household member to work and earn income. In the third world countries like Pakistan on the whole and especially in the rural areas particularly early marriages are fairly common. Table II shows the marital status of the sampled respondents in the study area.

Table II described the material distribution of sampled respondents in the study area. The number of singles in Moheb Banda contributes 20 (33%), while in Zando Dheri it is 10 (25%) of the total respondents. The number of married in Moheb Banda contributes 35 (58%), while in Zando Dheri it is 25 (63%) of the total respondents. Widows contribute 5 (9%) of the total respondents in Moheb Banda, and 5 (12%) of the total respondents in Zando Dheri. From Table II we can see that the numbers of married in both villages are very high than others. Reason for the high rate of married is that sampled respondents are the opinion that early marriages could increase labour force, which is a source of income for them. However, this kind of act weakens health conditions of the women.

Monthly Income of the Household

Monthly income of the male members of the households of the study area depends mainly upon the size of landholding and its utilization. Table III shows the classification of the male members of the sampled respondents on the basis of monthly income.

Table III illustrates that 53% male members of the sampled respondents, which is a majority, had a monthly income of Rs. 1500-2000. The remaining 24%, 13% and 10% were in the range of Rs. 1500, Rs. 2000-3000 and above Rs. 3000 respectively.

The male members of the sampled respondents with an income of Rs. 3000 is an evidence that high-income group has comparatively more land holding than the other groups. Male members of the sampled respondents with monthly income between 1500 and 2000 are tenants cum labourers who were having subsistence holdings of land and their income was seasonal rather monthly.

Constraints to Respondents in the Performance of their Activities

In villages Moheb Banda and Zando Dheri, all of the respondents had to observe purdah and carry out their stated economic activities inside their houses. They were strictly restricted to their indoor activities and prohibited to work outside. About 100% of the respondents declared that they were allowed to participate in various indoor economic activities. Table IV illustrates the position of the sampled respondents constrained in performing their economic activities.

It can be seen from Table IV that all the sampled respondents in both villages perform their socio-economic activities indoor, which means that they are strictly constrained to house activities of child rearing, cooking, and engaged in feeding the livestock.

Attitude of Husband / Father / Household Head and Other Family Members

Indeed, in underdeveloped countries the women is considered and treated as the property of her husband and may not defy him. At paternal house, a girl is absolutely subdued to the head of the house and other members of the family. Table V illustrates the attitude of the family members of both sides towards the woman.

Different attitudes of husband/father/household head towards women may be seen from Table V. In Moheb Banda 11% of the total respondents said that their household heads are very polite to them. About 39% of the total respondents expressed the behaviour of their elders as normal, while 50% of the total respondents said that the attitudes of their elders are harsh. In villages Zando Dheri 10% of the total respondents said that their elders are very polite to them, while 33% were of the opinion that their husband/father/household heads are normal and 57%

of the total respondents said that the attitudes of their elders and husbands are harsh. From the above explanation it is obvious that majority of the women are living a constrained life.

Availability of Health Facilities and Source of Treatment to the Sampled Respondents

The data in Tables VI shows that 42% and 50% of the sampled respondents in Moheb Banda consulted doctors and hakeems respectively for medical treatment. Other 8% believed in domestic prescription, while no one visited Pir Sahib. In Zando Dheri, 38% and 57% of the sampled respondents consulted doctors and hakeems respectively. Other 5% believed in domestic prescription while no one consulted Pir Sahib. During the survey, majority of the sampled respondents were of the opinion that availability of health facilities were not of standard quality and hospitals did not have proper medicines and staff members as will be shown in Table VII. They said that in case of serious diseases they were to go to urban areas.

Table VII shows that majority of the sampled respondents i.e., about 87% in both villages have no health facilities. Only 2%, 3%, 5% and 3% in Moheb Banda were having hospital, GHU, Dispensaries and Hospital cum Dispensary facilities respectively.

Marital Status of the Sampled Respondents

Marriage is the emotional, physical and social union of two adults. Marriages vary in different societies depending on varying customs, rituals and traditional forms. Table VIII shows the marital status of the sampled respondents in the study area.

It may be seen from Table VIII that in the study area the sampled respondents are in favour of early marriages. Therefore majority of the sampled respondents (83%) were found married. Only 13% of the total sampled respondents were reported unmarried and 4% were found to be widow.

Distribution Regarding Marriage and Choice of Selecting Male Partners of the Sampled Respondents

In rural society woman has not been given independent right to enter into marital relationship at their own will. She is considered incapable of choosing her life partners because of her mental capacity being considered inferior. Table IX shows the choice of selecting male partners.

It is clear from the Table IX that 39% of the sampled respondents showed their consideration regarding marriage and 61% did not. The data also revealed

that 11% of the sampled respondents had the choice to select their male partners on their own while 89% had no choice to do so.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to analyze and examine the socio-economic and cultural constraints of women in the rural areas of district Mardan, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan. For this purpose two villages were selected randomly and total 100 respondents out of 1000 households were interviewed, i.e. 60 from Moheb Banda and 40 from Zando Dheri. In conclusion one can say that the socio-economic and cultural societal status of women in the selected areas was very poor due to lack of formal education. This lack of education and low literacy level contributed to woman's ignorance in the society in terms of decision-making employment. The low level of economic status of women was due to lack of availability of earning skills on the one hand and cultural constraints on the other hand.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of findings in the study areas, the following recommendations are proposed for the improvement in the socio-economic condition of the women in rural areas.

- i. Better educational facilities for female should be provided, which is acceptable to local community. For this purpose formal as well as informal meetings between government officials and elders of the rural areas should take place when necessary.
- ii. There should also be routine meetings between elders and educated people of the area to make it understandable for the uneducated, that women can also play an important role in the socio-economic uplift of the area, which may have repercussions for the country in general.
- iii. Federal government should take effective measures to provide educational, health and employment opportunities for women.
- iv. Women should be given appropriate training for the improvement of working environment in the area.
- v. Various social welfare organizations can also take part for the socio-economic uplift of the rural women.
- vi. Various cottage industries by the public as well as private sectors should be established to provide job opportunities to rural women so that they can earn income and help their heads in household's expenses.
- vii. For providing better health facilities to the rural women, public and private sectors should open more hospitals, BHU and dispensaries.

Table I. Educational status of the sampled respondents

<u>Villages</u>	<u>Total No. of Households</u>	<u>Sampled Households</u>	<u>Sample Literates</u>	<u>% of total sample</u>	<u>Sample literate</u>	<u>% of total sample</u>
Moheb Banda	600	60	10	17	50	83
Zando Dheri	400	40	03	08	37	92
Total	1000	100	13	13	87	87

Table II. Marital Status of the Sampled Respondents

<u>Description</u>	<u>Villages</u>			
	<u>Moheb Banda</u>		<u>Zando Dheri</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>
Single	20	33	10	25
Married	35	58	25	63
Widow	05	09	05	12
Total	60	100	40	100

Table III. Monthly income of the male members of the sampled respondents

<u>Villages</u>	<u>Monthly Income (Rs.)</u>				<u>Total</u>
	<u>Up to 1500</u>	<u>1500-2000</u>	<u>2000-3000</u>	<u>Above 3000</u>	
Moheb Banda	15	35	06	04	60
Zando Dheri	09	18	07	06	40
Total	24	53	13	10	100
%age	24	53	13	10	100

Table IV. Constraints of the sampled respondents

<u>Description</u>	<u>Villages</u>				<u>Total</u>
	<u>Moheb Banda</u>		<u>Zando Dheri</u>		
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	
Indoor	60	100	40	100	100
Outdoor	00	00	00	00	00
Both	00	00	00	00	00
Total	60	100	40	100	100

Source: Survey 2006

Table V. Attitude of husband/father/household head and other family members

<u>Villages</u>	<u>Very Polite</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Normal</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Harsh</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
Moheb Banda	07	11	23	39	30	50	60	100
Zando Dheri	04	10	13	33	23	57	40	100

Table VI. Distribution of sampled respondents according to the source of treatment

<u>Source of Treatment</u>	<u>Doctor</u>		<u>Pir Sahib</u>		<u>Hakeem</u>		<u>Domestic</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Villages</u>										
Moheb Banda	25	42	-	-	30	50	05	08	60	100
Zando Dheri	15	38	-	-	23	57	02	05	40	100

Table VII. Distribution of sampled respondents according to availability of health facilities

<u>Health Facilities</u>	<u>Hospital</u>		<u>BHU</u>		<u>Dispensaries</u>		<u>Hospital & Disp.</u>		<u>No Facilities</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Villages</u>												
Moheb Banda	01	02	02	03	03	05	02	03	52	87	60	100
Zando Dheri	01	2.5	01	2.5	02	05	01	2.5	35	87.5	40	100

Source: Survey 2006

Table VIII. Distribution of sampled respondents according to marital status

	<u>Marital Status</u>						<u>Total</u>	
	<u>Married</u>		<u>Unmarried</u>		<u>Widowed</u>		<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>		
<u>Villages</u>								
Moheb Banda	51	85	06	10	03	05	60	60
Zando Dheri	32	80	07	17.5	01	2.5	40	40
<i>A//</i>	83	83	13	13	04	04	100	100

Table IX. Distribution of sampled respondents According to Opinion Regarding Marriage and Choice of Selecting Male Partners

	<u>Respondents</u>	<u>Opinion Regarding Marriage</u>				<u>Choice of Selecting Male Partner</u>			
		<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>		<u>Yes</u>		<u>No</u>	
		<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Villages</u>									
Moheb Banda	60	25	42%	35	58%	05	8%	55	92%
Zando Dheri	40	14	35%	26	65%	06	15%	34	85%
<i>A//</i>	100	39	39%	61	61%	11	11%	89	89%

Source: Survey 2006

REFERENCES

Adams, L. 1997. Participatory Oppression: A gender analysis of community resource conservation, Solomon Islands, 11: 72.

Begum, A.G. Dijkstra. 2002. Measuring socio-economic gender inequality in: Towards an alternative to the UNDP gender-related development index. Working Paper Series. Instt. of Social Studies, The Hague, 251: 30.

Hancock, P. 2001. Rural women earning income in Indonesian factories: The impact on gender relations. In: Gender Development, Geneva, 9:1: 18-24.

Himayatullah and S. Parveen. 1990. Interrelationship between population and status of women. In: J. Rural Dev. and Administ. (JORDA), Pak. Acad. for Rural Dev. Vol. XXII (2): 113-119.

Hirway, I. and D. Mahadevia. 1996. Critique of gender development index towards an alternative. In: Economic and Political Weekly. 31: 43.

Khan, A. R. 1997. Social action programme in Balochistan: Prospects and problems. Deptt of Commerce, Quetta. Asian Profile: 259-263

Kishwar, I. and P. Akhtar. 1982. Investigation into the pattern and problem of improving rural women skills, Women Div. Cabinet Sectt. Govt. of Pakistan: 5

Lagerweij, I. and C. Vulto. 1999. Implementing a participatory gender-based approach in Balochistan. 18:1: 5-7

Mehretu, P., 2001. The plight of women in the margins of rural life in Africa; the case of Zimbabwe. Globalization and marginality in geographical space, in: A political, economical and social issue of gender development in the new millennium: 279-293

Population Census Govt. of Pakistan. 1990-1991. Manpower and social welfare, 399.

- Ramesh, P. 2000. Identifying gender backward districts using selected indicators. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 35:48: 4276-4286
- Rizvi, F. 1980. Background of vocational education for girls. The national conference on critical issues concerning women in education, March 29-April 03, 1980, Women Div. Govt. of Pakistan, Islamabad: 4
- Sadie, Y. 1995. Affirmative action in South Africa; a gender development approach. *Africa Insight*. 25:3: 180-185
- Saulniers, S.S. 1991. Transforming women's roles in Pakistan's rural sectors; Donor policy and local response. Women in agriculture. A selection of papers presented as a workshop at the World Congress of Rural Sociology held in Bologna, Italy, in July 1988. In: *J. of Rural Studies*. 7:1/2: 107-113
- Thompson, J. and J. Shah. and Foellum, E. 1994. Planning for a change: Participatory rural appraisal for community based development. Report of the training workshop and follow-up activities organized by the Kalam Integrated Dev. Proj. and Intl. Instt. for Envir. and Dev. London: IV+164
- World Bank 1996. Oxford Univ. Press, Inc., New York.