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# Gender and Empowerment

## Evidence from Pakistan

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*With a Foreword by Nadeem Ul Haque*

**PAKISTAN INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS**

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	ix
<b>Preface</b>	xii
<b>Chapter 1. Introduction</b>	1
<b>Chapter 2. Adjustment Policies in Pakistan</b>	6
<b>Chapter 3. Household Survey for Gender Planning Network</b>	17
3.1. Sample Design	19
3.2. Pre-testing of the Questionnaire	20
3.3. Training	21
3.4. Data Processing	21
3.5. Scope of the Questionnaire	21
3.6. Community Level Indicators	22
<b>Chapter 4. Demographic Indicators</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1. Data	30
4.2. Age and Sex Structure	30
4.3. Household Headship and Size	33
4.4. Marriage Patterns	34
4.5. Health	37
4.6. Mortality	39
4.7. Malnutrition	41
4.8. Family Planning	44
4.9. Migration	47
4.10. Conclusions	47
<b>Chapter 5. Education</b>	<b>49</b>
5.1. Characteristics of Sampled Households	54
5.2. Model	58
5.3. Demand for Education	58

5.4.	Reasons for Leaving School	61
5.5.	Conclusions	65
<b>Chapter 6.</b>	<b>Gender Dimensions of Labour Market</b>	<b>66</b>
6.1.	Labour Force Participation	67
6.2.	Employment in Industrial Sector	78
6.3.	Gender Patterns in Manufacturing Employment	89
6.4.	Employment Structure in Selected Industries—Findings of the Survey	94
6.5.	Determinants of Earnings	105
6.6.	Gender Discrimination	106
6.7.	Conclusions	108
<b>Chapter 7.</b>	<b>Autonomy and Empowerment</b>	<b>110</b>
7.1.	Female Empowerment	110
7.2.	Control Over Asset and Income	112
7.3.	Household Activities	116
7.4.	Impact of Market Work	118
7.5.	Mobility	120
7.6.	Marriage and Dowry	122
7.7.	Family Set-up	126
7.8.	Sexual Behaviour	126
7.9.	Decision-making	129
<b>Chapter 8.</b>	<b>Non-conventional Indicators</b>	<b>139</b>
8.1.	Forms of Gender-based Violence	142
8.2.	Institutional Violence	152
8.3.	Violence and Abuse—Survey Evidence	153
8.4.	Conclusions	156
<b>Chapter 9.</b>	<b>Mental Distress and Psychological Well-Being</b>	<b>157</b>
9.1.	Mental Distress (GHQ)	157
9.2.	Mental Well-Being (SUBI)	161

9.3. Conclusions	167
<b>Chapter 10. Case Studies</b>	<b>168</b>
10.1. Razia Bano	168
10.2. Bushra	172
<b>Chapter 11. Conclusions and Policy Implications</b>	<b>177</b>
11.1. Conclusions	177
11.2. Policy Implications	184
11.3. Future Directions	185
<b>References</b>	<b>186</b>
<b>Notes on Authors</b>	<b>197</b>

### LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1. Share of Various Products in Total Exports of Pakistan	4
Table 3.1. Distribution of Establishments by Product Group	20
Table 3.2. Distribution of Households by Cities	20
Table 3.3. Availability of Infrastructure	23
Table 3.4. Distance to the Facilities	24
Table 3.5. Grading of Housing Facility	24
Table 3.6. Cooking Facility	25
Table 4.1. Age Structure of the Population of Pakistan, 1981 and 1998	31
Table 4.2. Age Distribution of Survey Respondents	33
Table 4.3. Dependency Ratio	33
Table 4.4. Household Size by Gender in Pakistan: 1990-1996-1997	34
Table 4.5. Head of Household by Marital Status, HIES, 1991 and 1997	34

Table 4.6.	Percentage Males and Females by Age Who Never Married: Census 1981 and 1998	35
Table 4.7.	Gender Difference in Singulate Mean Age at Marriage: 1951-1997	36
Table 4.8.	Marital Status	37
Table 4.9.	Gender Differences in Infant Mortality, Maternal Mortality, and Life Expectancy at Birth in Pakistan: PDS 1991, PIHS 1996	37
Table 4.10.	Sickness	39
Table 4.11.	Type of Treatment Sought	39
Table 4.12.	Prevalence of Anaemia among Pregnant and Lactating Mothers, by Age, in Pakistan: NNS- 1985-87	41
Table 4.13.	Percentage of Anaemic Population, by Gender and Place of Residence, in Pakistan, NHS-1990-94	43
Table 4.14.	Use of Family Planning Method (Females Response)	44
Table 4.15.	Total Fertility Rate (TFR) and Contraceptive Prevalence Rates in Pakistan: 1984-85—1996-97	45
Table 4.16.	Contraceptive Use by Gender in Pakistan: PCPS-1984-85 and PFFPS-1996-97	46
Table 4.17.	Age-specific Fertility Rates in Pakistan: 1984-85 to 1996-97	46
Table 4.18.	Migration Status of Workers (Percentage)	47
Table 5.1.	Human Development Indicators in Selected South Asian Countries	49
Table 5.2.	Literacy Rates (Population Aged 10 +)	50

Table 5.3.	Net Primary Enrolment Rate by Income Quintiles (Excluding Katchi Class)	52
Table 5.4.	Educational Attainment of the Respondents (Percentage)	52
Table 5.5.	Perceptions about Education of Boys and Girls	55
Table 5.6.	Similarity in Providing Education to Boys and Girls	56
Table 5.7.	Differences in Attitude to Educate Boys and Girls	56
Table 5.8.	Who Will Be Picked Up from School	57
Table 5.9.	Distance to the Educational Facilities of Boys and Girls	57
Table 5.10.	Demand of Education	60
Table 5.11.	Reasons for Leaving School by Education and Gender	62
Table 5.12.	Determinants of Discontinuity in Education	64
Table 6.1.	Refined Activity Rate: Pakistan and Provinces	68
Table 6.2.	Distribution of Employed Labour Force	69
Table 6.3.	Employment Status by Education (Percentage)	70
Table 6.4.	Percentage Distribution of Employed Labour Force by Industry	74
Table 6.5.	Percentage Distribution of Employed Labour Force by Industry Division—Province	76
Table 6.6.	Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons by Type of Enterprise	77

Table 6.7.	Composition of the Manufacturing Sector	81
Table 6.8.	Manufacturing Employment by Gender	82
Table 6.9.	Manufacturing Employment by Gender, Employment Status, and Occupations, (Percent) 1996-97	82
Table 6.10.	Composition of Exports	83
Table 6.11.	Production Trends in the Manufacturing Industries	84
Table 6.12.	Employment Trends in Manufacturing Industries	86
Table 6.13.	Composition of Total Exports	88
Table 6.14.	Composition of Manufactured Exports	88
Table 6.15.	Employment Level by Gender in the Manufacturing Industries	90
Table 6.16.	Structure of Employment in the Manufacturing Industries	91
Table 6.17.	Employment Level by Gender and Mode of Employment in the Industrial Sector	92
Table 6.18.	Employment Trends by Gender and Occupational Category (Percentage), 1987, 1992 93	
Table 6.19.	Labour Force Participation Rate of Population, for Population Aged 10 Years and Above (Percentage)	95
Table 6.20.	Labour Force Participation Rates	96
Table 6.21.	Employment Status of Population, for Population Aged 10 Years and Above (Percentage)	97



Table 6.22. Occupational Distribution of the Workers	98
Table 6.23. Place of Work	99
Table 6.24. Work Schedule (Percentage of Respondents)	99
Table 6.25. On the Job Training	100
Table 6.26. Previous Job	102
Table 6.27. Reasons for Leaving Job	102
Table 6.28. Average Income of the Workers, by Gender and by Cities	103
Table 6.29. Nature of Payments and Other Benefits	104
Table 6.30. Overtime Work	104
Table 6.31. Earning Functions	106
Table 7.1. Indicators of Females Empowerment (Percentage)	111
Table 7.2. Contribution to Household Income	113
Table 7.3. Asset Ownership	114
Table 7.4. Control Over Assets	115
Table 7.5. Control of Income	116
Table 7.6. Household Work Sharing	117
Table 7.7. Change in Activity after Work	118
Table 7.8. Positive Changes after Work	119
Table 7.9. Negative Changes after Work	119
Table 7.10. Change in Females after Work	120
Table 7.11. Mobility	121
Table 7.12. Mobility—Reasons	122
Table 7.13. Consent for Marriage	123
Table 7.14. Allowing Marriage Outside <i>Biradari</i>	124

Table 7.15.	Demand for Dowry	125
Table 7.16.	Reasons for Leaving Spouse	127
Table 7.17.	Son Preference	128
Table 7.18.	Sexual Behaviour	128
Table 7.19.	Decision-making	130
Table 7.20.	Perception about the Decision-making	131
Table A.7.1.	Change of Occupation	132
Table A.7.2.	Going to Educational Institution	133
Table A.7.3.	Mobility to Work Place	134
Table A.7.4.	Mobility—Banks	135
Table A.7.5.	Mobility—Cinema/Restaurant	136
Table A.7.6.	Mobility—Market	137
Table A.7.7.	Mobility—Parental House	138
Table 8.1.	Domestic Violence by Education of Respondents (Percentage)	143
Table 8.2.	Incidence of Physical Abuse	144
Table 8.3.	Characteristics of Burnt Victims	146
Table 8.4.	Honour Killing in Pakistan, by Provinces	148
Table 8.5.	Incidence of Psychological Abuse	150
Table 8.6.	Reasons for Suicide in Karachi and Rawalpindi	151
Table 8.7.	Economic Abuse	151
Table 8.8.	Causes of Violence	154
Table 8.9.	Type of Abuse	155
Table 8.10.	Violence Coping Strategies	156
Table 9.1.	Mental Distress	157
Table 9.2.	Mental Distress by Marital Status	159

Table 9.3.	Mental Well-Being by Marital Status	164
Table 9.4.	Mental Well-Being by Work Status	165
Table 9.5.	Mental Well-Being by Education Level	166
Table 9.6.	Factors Affecting Mental Well-Being	167

#### **LIST OF GRAPHS**

Graph 1.	Work Status and Mental Distress (GHQ)	159
Graph 2.	Age and Mental Distress (GHQ)	160
Graph 3.	Education and Mental Distress (GHQ)	160
Graph 4.	Income and Mental Distress (GHQ)	161
Graph 5.	Work Status and Mental Well-Being (SUBI)	162
Graph 6.	Age and Mental Well-Being (SUBI)	163
Graph 7.	Education and Mental Well-Being (SUBI)	163
Graph 8.	Income and Mental Well-Being (SUBI)	164

# *Foreword*

**P**IDE has for years been providing Pakistan with studies based on hard evidence and strong analysis. In keeping with this tradition, this volume, *Gender and Empowerment: Evidence from Pakistan*, presents survey-based evidence to examine several aspects of the role and status of women in our society. The study shows that gender differences in access/availability to resources and cultural norms result in differential impact of public policies on males and females.

This book is likely to help the ongoing discussion on the role of women in Pakistan by providing detailed information on women's activity in the marketplace, and the role played by women at home and in the family. Some interesting results can be highlighted.

- We learn about the state of female education and education decisions within the family. Not comfortingly, we learn that the gap between male and female literacy rates has increased. Evidence supports Larry Summers's hypothesis that mother's education is an important determinant of child education, and specifically female education. Interestingly enough, having large families, especially male siblings, results in the lowering of the chances that a girl will get educated. Moreover, an educated mother recognising better market opportunities for boys puts in more effort for the completion of schooling for boys than for girls.
- We also learn about female labour market conditions. Although there is evidence of feminisation of labour force in Pakistan, in the 1990s, female unemployment rates were higher than those for males. Female labour is also concentrated in a few occupations—stitching and other low-

return jobs. On average, females' working days were higher, and the working hours longer.

- Females tend to be in the informal labour market. Most working females are not eligible for fringe benefits as they are not permanent workers. Since they have no health care, working females prefer to spend money on health care and go to a private doctor to minimise the number of sick days taken off from work. Provision of transport facilities plays an important role in females' decision to work; it also provides the employers assured supply of labour services.
- How does market work affect women? While it increases the burdens of working females and impacts negatively on children, it also measurably increases their self-esteem and economic security. The negative factors are alleviated to the extent that there are female members of the family available to share the burdens.
- Survey data also inform us of the attitudes of males! Not surprisingly, the majority of males do not think that women are competent to deal with market transactions or community affairs. And surprisingly, this view is supported by many women. Consequently, women are kept out of decisions relating to asset management and community affairs.
- We also learn about hierarchy within the family which determines family income and resource use. In most cases, the mother/mother-in-law controls income, not the daughter/daughter-in-law.
- The study also shows that violence against females increased in the 1990s. The main reason for the crime/violence is identified as economic hardships, and domestic and community pressures. Furthermore, the perception of violence also varies between males and females. Since, in most cases, abused women depend emotionally and financially on their abuser (male relationships), it becomes difficult to intervene effectively. Lack of technical competence and resources, cultural stereotypes, negative social attitudes, institutional

constraints, and females' reluctance to disclose the incidence of violence are also the barriers to controlling violence.

- The results of the study show that mental distress and mental well-being of the respondents are closely linked to the employment status and the age of males and females, both. So mental well-being is affected by economic indicators as well as living conditions.

These are only some of the results that this study offers on a very important subject affecting a majority of our citizens.

As a responsible research institute, PIDE continues to provide the public good of good research on important socio-economic questions. Information such as this is critical to understanding society and its development. Armed with this knowledge, the policy-maker can determine the appropriate interventions to improve the situation of women.

Nadeem Ul Haque

Islamabad  
15 May, 2006

# Preface

**G**ender empowerment indicators are evidently important, though not studied often enough. Our analysis of these conventional and non-conventional indicators, based on secondary data for the 1980s and 1990s and own survey data of export-based industries, reveals that the socio-economic impact of economic shocks may not be gender-neutral. It suggests that during the last fifteen years, despite the rise in sex ratio, no significant achievements have been made to improve the quality of females' lives or to improve their contribution to economic development and empowerment. As such, this book covers various aspects of the lives of males and females, ranging from the conventional indicators like education, health, and labour market participation to non-conventional indicators like the roles in decision-making, violence, mental health, and well-being.

Using the tools of economics and psychology, the study concludes that ignoring gender dimensions of the impact of policy reforms may lead to unexpected outcomes. It appears that the effects of economic downturn, initiated by the Structural Adjustment Programme, increased the age at marriage, increased the contraceptive use among males, and helped in the decline of fertility. The rise in the female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) in the 1990s indicated feminisation of the labour force. However, this has not resulted in higher employment opportunities for females. The concentration of female workers in occupations requiring low skills affects the return on their efforts. There is a need to improve education and skills to help males and females to diversify the occupational and industrial choices for them. The property rights and inheritance laws also need to be clearly specified and implemented to improve females' access to credit market and productive resources.

It is to be noted that violence against females increased in the 1990s. The main reason for the crime/violence is identified as

economic hardships, and domestic and community pressures, and perhaps also better reporting of the crimes. The legislative support for females is not effective due to its limited coverage and non-implementation (because of social and cultural taboos). Particularly, given the state of violence, there is an urgent need to provide efficient and effective legal support to correct the gender imbalance in the society. The need to empower females is obvious, as without their empowerment any external support will not be as effective.

The research for this study was conducted under the project of “Gender Planning Network” for the South Asian region. The funding for it was provided by the Institute of Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada. The Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), India, acted as the coordinator for the region. We are thankful to the IDRC, (Canada) and the ISST (India) for providing the support to complete the study. Randy Spence of IDRC (Canada) and Swapna Mukhopadhyay of ISST (India) deserve special thanks for encouraging our research on this topic. We are grateful to Dr A. R. Kemal, former Director, PIDE, for his support and encouragement, and to Dr Nadeem Ul Haq, Director, PIDE, for his support towards publication. We thank Professor Aurangzeb A. Hashmi, Literary Editor and Chief of the Publications Division, PIDE, and also his staff, for editing and publishing the book. The support of owners of all the industrial units in Faisalabad, Sialkot, and Karachi, is highly appreciated. Thanks are due to Ms Ayesha Salam for helping us with the tedious work of editing data and reading the first draft of the original report. We are very thankful to Mr Saif, Mian Nadeem, and Mr Khurram of the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Ms Yasmeen of Islamabad, several researchers at PILER in Karachi, and many other individuals in the three cities for their support during the survey. Our thanks are also due to the computer team at PIDE for data entry, and to Mr Afsar Khan, Mr Muhammad Siddiq Quershi, and Mr Zaheer Abbas for their excellent typing support. Last but not the least, all the survey workers deserve our special thanks for making the survey a really joyful and learning experience for all of us. Our thanks and



apologies to all those whom we might have missed. Any errors remaining here are the responsibility of the authors.

May, 2006

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