

# Women Empowerment: Myth or Reality?

## Outline

### 1- Introduction

### 2- Examining the Status of Women Empowerment in Pakistan

### 3- Contrary viewpoints contend that Women Empowerment has become a tangible reality

#### a) Implementation of legal reforms in Pakistan

- prevention of women against harassment
  - ↳ The Protection of Women at the Workplace Act 2010
- Women participation in politics
  - ↳ The Election Act 2017

#### b) Advocacy of women rights through different platforms

- Working of different NGOs
  - ↳ Shirkat Gah, Women Rights Association

## Activism

~~voice raising~~ through Aural March

c) increase in the number of women in educational sector

- 62% women enrolled in universities  
↳ Express Tribune

- increasing number of female teachers in private schools

↳ Pakistan Education Statistics 2021-22

4- Despite having arguments in the favor of women empowerment, the notion of women empowerment still remains a myth

a) Restrictions regarding pursuing education in rural areas

- 39% of rural girls attend secondary school in comparison to rural boys  
↳ UN report

- 18% girls are married early  
↳ Express Tribune

b) limited participation in politics

- Elite class women in politics: Maryam Nawaz, Benazir Bhutto

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- 12% women are appointed at ministerial positions in Pakistan  
↳ Global Gender Gap Report 2023

### c) Limited presence in Legal Sector

- Few female lawyers and judges  
↳ Women Lawyers in Pakistan: Navigating in a male-dominated field by Lums University
- Women have inferior mental capacity

### d) Discouraged for pursuing medical profession

- Conservative prejudices regarding medical field
- Majority of women leave their profession after marriage  
↳ BBC Report 2015 & 2017

### e) Face a curse of domestic violence

- My Feudal Lord by Tehmina Durrani
- Pakistan 5<sup>th</sup> worst country in terms of domestic violence  
↳ Reuters Foundation

f) Biasness against having female baby

- Cultural Conservatism enhances biasness
- 241.2 million sex-selective abortion were conducted in Pakistan  
↳ Population Research Institute

g) Killing women as a result of honor problem

- In 2023, 145 women were killed  
↳ Human Rights Commission in Pakistan

h) Cultural Constraints and social upbringing restrict women empowerment

- Gender Trouble by Judith Butler
- misinterpretation of religion

i) Case studies of women who faced societal rage for pursuing empowerment

- Case study of Saba Qaiser
- case study of Qandeel Balouch

## 5. Conclusion

## The Essay

On 22 June, 2002, a woman named Mukhtarom Mai was called in jirga, a local community level gathering for resolving conflict of mild nature, on the pretext of seeking forgiveness for the act of her brother that she had not committed herself. The opponents of Mukhtarom Mai had already evil intentions of humiliating her in front of public eye. When Mai visited the jirga, the opponents, to make their evil intentions a reality, had not only brutally raped her but also forced her to parade nakedly in the village. Despite considering this incident as a curse of fate, she decided to pursue justice by getting the attention of higher authorities. She had struggled for nine years yet she remained **unable** to get a proper justice. This story of Mukhtarom Mai makes it abundantly clear that women are considered a vulnerable prey for men in Pakistan.

The limited participation of women in limited sectors encourages the proponents of women empowerment to argue that womit has become a tangible reality. However, the conventional mindset and few opportunities for women in undeveloped countries such as Pakistan prove that women empowerment is a hard reality <sup>cannot</sup> ~~that~~ be achieved easily. Therefore, the notion of women empowerment still remains a myth and a tough nut to crack. The limited factors also endorse the view that women empowerment seems a reality in Pakistan. These steps include implementation of legal reforms regarding preventing women from harassment, more participation of females in educational sector, and advocacy of women rights through different platforms. Yet, these steps do not ensure women empowerment in the country because there is a plethora of issues that challenge the existence of women empowerment in Pakistan. First comes the problem of restriction

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regarding pursuing education for girls in rural areas. The limited participation in political, legal, and medical sectors serves as a second problem. Moreover, the cultural constraints, honor killing of women, and biasness regarding having female baby are hurdles in the way of women empowerment. Hence, women empowerment remains a distant dream in Pakistan.

The situation of women in Pakistan seems unfavorable. More alarming thing is that women are deprived of basic education as it is enshrined in article 25(a) of Pakistani constitution that the basic education is a right of everyone without any gender specification. Moreover, the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, has ranked the country 142 out of 146. According to Reuters Foundation, the country is six most dangerous country for women in terms of violence. Apart from this, the proponents of women empowerment in the country claim that it exists

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in the country.

Firstly, it is argued that the country is experiencing women empowerment by implementing legal reforms regarding women. These reforms are aimed at safeguarding the rights of women and securing them from becoming a vulnerable prey to evil-minded men. In order to achieve this purpose, the state has passed a law for restricting women from harassment. The Protection of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 solely deals with harassment issue of women. If a man found guilty of violating this law, he would be punished according to the prescribed punishment by this law.

Furthermore, the state has taken a step for ensuring women participation in politics. The article 206 of The Election Act 2017 states that there should be 5% quota for women representation in national and provincial assemblies. Hence, these legal reforms indicate the existence of women empowerment in the country.

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Secondly, the advocacy of women rights through platforms is considered as another factor for women empowerment in the country. These platforms which promote women voice are taken as a beacon of hope for women empowerment. In this scenario, different non-governmental organizations are enlisted for this purpose. The non-governmental organizations NGOs include Shirkat Goh and Women Rights Association Pakistan that talk about securing women rights in the country. In addition to this, Aurat March is also deemed as a sign of women empowerment in the country. According to the proponents of women empowerment in Pakistan, Aurat March is a distinctive platform for raising women voice for their compromised rights. In this way, the promulgation of women voice through different platforms enlisted as a strong factor for women empowerment.

Thirdly, a perspective often presented is that women are more in number in educational institutions. The number of women

educational sector is constantly rising and bringing women empowerment. As a matter of fact, women enrollment in higher educational has been significantly increased.

According to Express Tribune, the enrollment percentage of female students has reached to 62 in comparison to the enrollment of boys. The boys enrollment is standing at 38 percent. Additionally, the number of female teachers is also rising rapidly.

Pakistan Education Statistics 2021-22 has unveiled that female teachers are more in number in private schools. Therefore, the rising number of women in educational sector is also considered as a sign of women empowerment.

The contrary perspectives, which have been mentioned above, attempt to assert that women empowerment has become a reality but it is not like this in reality. The following paragraphs will prove that women empowerment still remains a myth.

Despite experiencing increase in women number in educational sector, female students are still restricted for pursuing education in rural areas. The limited increase in number has been seen because of the participation of urban area girls. As far as the rural girls are concerned, they are not allowed to get higher education. The UN report has claimed that only 39 percent of rural girls managed to attend secondary school in comparison to rural boys. Moreover, the conventional mindset play a significant role in rural areas regarding depriving girls from higher education. The fears of harassment remain persistent among the guardians of girls. Due to this fear, girls are married early and early marriage bounds them not to pursue further education. According to Express Tribune, 18% percent of rural girls are married before the desired and constitutionally prescribed age for marriage. Hence, the restriction of getting education for rural girls

Shows that women are still far away from empowerment.

The legal reforms have announced the women participation in political sectors, yet they are provided limited opportunities in politics. The political sphere of Pakistan is dominated by men, coming from influential background. Although women got an opportunity to serve in political sphere, these are only from elite class. Maryam Nawaz, a current chief minister of Punjab, is a daughter of three time prime minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif. The most alarming thing is that if women somehow managed to secure political victory, they are not preferred for ministerial positions. Pakistani political field is dominated by feudalals and they considered it their insult to work under a woman. According to Global Gender Gap report, only 12% percent women are appointed at ministerial positions. Furthermore, this also becomes clear from the cabinet of Shehbaz Sharif, a current PM of Pakistan, that includes

only one woman minister. Therefore, <sup>the</sup> limited participation of women in politics discourage the notion of women empowerment.

Despite limited presence in political sector, the problem of few opportunities in legal field is another issue that restrict women empowerment. Similar to political field, the legal field is also dominated by men in Pakistan. As a result of this, women get few opportunities for pursuing career in legal sector. The research of LUND University, has also highlighted limited participation of women in legal sector. The research titled "Women Lawyers in Pakistan: Navigating in a male-dominated field" endorses the view that women lawyers in Pakistan receive limited opportunities in comparison to male lawyers. Apart from this, social conservative ideas discourage women from joining legal profession. As it is bizzarly claimed that women have less mental capacity than men, and they can not solve complicated cases. Therefore, <sup>the</sup> less

representation of women in legal sector restrict women from empowering themselves.

Similar to less representation in legal arena, women are discouraged from joining medical field. In medical field, the male dominance is apparent and female get less opportunities. First of all, women are restricted from making a career in medical field due to prevailed societal prejudices against field. For instance, the nursing field is considered as a way of women's expectation by conservative people. Due to this, they restrict girls to join medical field. Moreover, the husbands also assert their dominance over their wives and restrain them to leave their profession after marriage. Under the pressure of her husband, a wife has no other option except leaving the field. BBC reports of 2015 and of 2017 make it obviously clear that majority of women leave their profession after marriage. Hence, the helplessness of women regarding pursuing

medical field is another sign of women weakness.

Apart from limited opportunities and restrictions to join different sectors, women are not exempted from facing the curse of domestic violence. Due to patriarchal mindset, women bear the burden of violence initiated by men. Both elite class women and lower class women equal participants in facing domestic violence. As Tehmina Hussaini in his book titled "My Feudal Lord" has explained that how she faced domestic violence of her husband Mustafa Khair, a politician, despite being a member of elite class. Similarly, lower class women also face brutal treatment by their husbands over minor issues. Especially, the tribal areas women face various type of domestic violence. Sati has become a common practice of domestic violence. Reuters Foundation has ranked Pakistan 5th worst country in terms of domestic violence. Hence, women empowerment remains

a distant dream due to domestic violence.

Apart from initiating domestic violence against women, the men-dominated society shows biasness against having female baby. Mostly, male baby is preferred and female baby is not accepted by some factions of the society. As a result of this, they decided to drop female child before birth. Pakistan Population Research Institute has estimated that 1.2 million sex selective abortions for not having female baby were conducted in the country. In addition to this, male son is preferred because he is associated with extending progeny and preserving societal honor of a particular family. In tribal areas, such notions are frequently associated with male child. In this way the issue of female feticide is a biggest problem in restricting women empowerment.

In addition to the issue of female feticide, the problem of honor killing is another factor that stops women empowerment. Women are killed by their own family members over minor allegations of sexual involvement. Recently, a such incident has occurred in Toba Tek Singh, where a brother has killed his own sister due to honor problem. Moreover, Human Rights Commission in Pakistan has estimated that 145 women were killed in 2023 in the country. In this way, honor killing practice which is common in Pakistani society stops women empowerment.

Along with killing problems of women, the prevailed cultural notions among society and cultural constraints also hinder women empowerment. The social upbringing serves as a best example of moulding the mind of women since their childhood, women are shackled by cultural constraints. For instance, girls are not allowed to play with boys and pink colour is associated with

them. To endorse this view, Judith Butler, a feminist writer, has claimed in her book titled "Gender Trouble" that social upbringing of girls play an important role in restricting them from demanding their rights. This practice is found excessively in Pakistan. Moreover, the misinterpretation of religion is used for asserting cultural practice. For instance, Islam has allowed women to go outside but the "Pashtunwali" code of tribal people does not allow this. In order to support their cultural code, they misinterpret religion. Therefore, these cultural practices and social upbringing restrict women from pursuing their goals.

Last but not the least, the thing that provides an instrumental insight about poor situation of women in Pakistan is the case studies of victim of violence. These women faced societal violence because they had struggled to break the shackles of social constraints. Firstly, Saba Qaiser, a victim of honor

from Ajranwal, was shot by her uncle. Luckily, she somehow managed to survive. Secondly, Qandeel Balouch, a social media star, was killed by her own brother on the excuse that she was violating the image of family. To put long story short, these case studies make it obvious that women empowerment still a distant reality.

In conclusion, it becomes logically clear that women empowerment still remains a myth. Few opportunities for women remain unable to ensure that women are pursuing empowerment. The empowerment notion consists of implementation of legal reforms, advocacy of women rights through various platforms, and increase in the number of women in educational sector. However, these steps do not completely endorse the view that women empowerment has is a reality. There are still various challenges persist that overcome the notion of women empowerment. These challenges include restrictions for rural

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girls regarding pursuing education,  
less women participation ~~of~~ in political sector  
legal sector, and medical sector, and the  
problem of domestic violence. Moreover, the  
issue of honor killing is also another  
problem that restrict women empowerment.  
But women empowerment plays an instrumental  
role in the development of a country. For  
instance, women had played an active  
role the development of Germany after  
second world war. Therefore, Pakistan must  
ensure the women participation along  
with men for achieving progress.

Well attempted