

## Nexus between Higher Education and Women Empowerment



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**Abstract:** *The study's overarching goal is to investigate how higher education affects the status of women. The empowerment of women and the campaign for gender equality is a global phenomenon that continues to grow. In Pakistan, a growing nation with a large population, the ratio of males to women is about equal. Violence and prejudice against women are prevalent in our culture. It is the responsibility of governments, educational institutions, and non-governmental groups to prohibit all types of discrimination against women. In addition to all of these factors, the duty of the media is substantial in this matter. Education is one of the most essential tools of equipping women with the information, skills, and self-confidence they need to succeed. In order to empower women, higher education will play a crucial role. Dependent women are not empowered women. Women must rouse themselves from a profound sleep and comprehend the real meaning of empowerment. Women's empowerment begins with empowering themselves, and one of the best ways to do so is via education. Women's equal participation in society with men is essential to the country's growth and prosperity. The term "gender equality" is used to describe a social system in which both sexes have the same access to and responsibility for all parts of life. When men and women have equal access to positions of authority, they are truly equal. Present study was conducted in the public sector universities of the district Faisalabad. Two Universities GCUF and*

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### Introduction

The movement to support equal rights for men and women and to give women more power is growing all over the world. After World War II, international laws paid a lot of attention to human rights. However, as time went on, it became clear that women's rights needed to be given extra attention. Because of this, fighting for women's rights picked up speed in the 1970s. Extreme poverty and inequality in politics, education, and money have made women more like men. This is why women's freedom is

openly supported and accepted. In order to protect women's rights, the study tried to close the gap between men and women by stressing how important it was for women to take part in all parts of society. Empowering women has been a main goal of many development projects, and it has led to more wealth, less poverty, and better government (Murry & Newbay, 2012).

Women's empowerment is the process of making women and their groups stronger on a social, political, economic, educational, gender, and spiritual level. In Pakistan, women's

empowerment depends a lot on where they live (city or country), how much schooling they have, their social status (caste and class), and their age. There are policies at the national, state, and local (Panchayat) levels about empowering women in a number of areas, such as health, education, income opportunities, gender-based violence, and political participation. But there is a big difference between what policymakers say and what people in the community actually do. Women's empowerment is the process of improving the economic, social, and political status of women who have generally been at a disadvantage. It is the process of keeping kids safe from all kinds of harm. Women's empowerment means making a culture and political climate where women don't have to worry about being oppressed, exploited, afraid, treated unfairly, or feeling like they're being persecuted because they're women in a traditionally male-dominated group. Women make up about half of the world's population, but in Pakistan, the number of men is much higher than the number of women. When it comes to their social standing, women are not treated the same way as men everywhere. In the West, women and men have the same rights and standing in many areas of life. But Pakistan still has discrimination and drawbacks based on gender. Due to the strange situation, she sometimes thought of herself as a goddess and sometimes as a slave (Arndit & Oman, 2006)

Empowerment is a process that consists of a series of phases through which individuals become aware of their rights and learn how to defend them. By implementing these measures, individuals improve their health, economic situation, and education. Empowerment is a means to an aim, not a means to overthrow the power or rights of other individuals or groups. The empowerment process enables people to significantly enhance their standard of living (Harvey, 2022).

In many socio-cultural and political situations, empowerment has varying connotations that are not easily translated between languages. Examining local terms associated with empowerment throughout the world typically sparks a lot of discussion. These include the

capacity for hostility in defense of one's rights, independence, one's own decision-making, freedom, awakening, and the ability to lessen the lack of money. They also include the ability to live a life of dignity in line with one's principles (Smith and Ross, 2021).

### **Role of Higher Education in women Empowerment**

Women are essential members of society and can play a crucial part in any nation's development process. If they are adequately empowered, women's contributions to development can play a key role. Women's empowerment is crucial because it boosts their self-esteem and enables them to recognize their identities. Men and women must be treated equally for nations to advance, as doing so will enable women to labor alongside men to advance the country (Dubey, 2019). Women have struggled for their rights since the beginning of the 20th century, but it has only lately become a worldwide issue.

In the past, their battle for equal rights and opportunities was ignored, but it is now acknowledged on a global scale that women's empowerment is crucial for the social and economic development of a nation (Singh, 2018).

Higher education caters mostly to the demands of women at the present time. Especially in rural areas, women are completely dependent on men due to their lack of financial independence. Their subordination can be traced back to the historical circumstances that have produced the societal institutions that dictate their interactions with their spouses. Multiple studies have shown that when women combine going back to school with caring for their homes and children, they work a "double day." Planners of public policy should think about ways to combine educational opportunities and economic benefits. Women in general benefit from more educational opportunities. Literacy programs on the one hand, and college and graduate school on the other, are two ways to achieve this goal. A UNICEF study from 1998 found that sending all girls to school would be an effective long-term solution to the problem of violence against

women in South East Asia by giving them the tools they need to become economically independent (UNICEF, 2020).

Education is recognized as the primary instrument for empowering women and integrating them into the mainstream of development, as well as the key to overcoming the obstacles women confront. In addition to helping women improve their health and economic stability, education also empowers them to take their proper place in society and the development process. Education is the path to power and authority. The best way to fight poverty is to invest in the education of women. Globally, the importance for women's education is highlighted.

The empowerment of women is a factor in the value of higher education to national development. Higher education benefits women in two different ways. It aids in the advancement of qualified women into positions of leadership in society and in their capacity as role models for younger women (Usha and Shrma, 2001).

The key to giving women more agency in their lives is education. However, social norms still limit women's opportunities to further their education. One of the worst breaches of women's rights and a major drag on social and economic development is gender disparity in educational opportunities (UNESCO 2020).

The primary objective of HEC's strategy is to increase the quality and accessibility of higher education. Only when increased access to high-quality higher education is ensured can a nation reap the benefits of globalization and raise local manufacturing productivity. Access to higher education can also be improved through fostering an open and tolerant society through crime control, environmental consciousness, and civic duties. In Pakistan, the obstacles are enormous, but the rewards are few.

Access to higher education is not a game for HEC, but rather a tool for Pakistan's progress. HEC's primary objective is to recruit more students from disadvantaged regions. Talented students from rural districts of Sindh, Azad Kashmir, and Balochistan can now be found in the best universities of Pakistan, as well as the

world's finest universities.

The following are the primary goals of the HEC's strategy to Increase Equitable Access to Higher Education:

- To substantially expand enrollment in undergraduate and graduate degree programmes.
- To give talented students with chances for further study
- To encourage institutions to develop new areas of teaching and research through quality remote education.
- To equip universities with the infrastructure necessary to accommodate a larger student body.
- To provide students with on-campus housing options so that qualified students do not lack access to a quality higher education.

Whether a woman contributes to the family's income or not, a higher education will unquestionably elevate her standing. She is comparable to males. Because the majority of women in our country are ignorant, they are oppressed. It is the responsibility of educators to inform kids that marriage is not their final objective. The significance of their standing tall and being something cannot be overstated. By inculcating, education can bring about extraordinary changes in women's lives, resulting in long-term social reform. Following characteristics are included:

- Increasing their assurance
- Improving their standing among the family and community
- Raise them awareness of their rights
- Increasing their self-worth
- Boosting their own self-efficacy
- lowering their reliance
- Better education for their children
- Increasing their portability
- Creating employment opportunities (Murphy-Graham, 2008; Maslak and

Singhal, 2008).

Pakistan has the highest illiteracy rate in the South Asia region. The principle set for literacy rate by the Federal ministry of Education, Islamabad is that an educated person can read a paper and write an easy note in any language (Latif, 2009). In Pakistan, the women literacy rate is less than the males particularly in the rural areas. Males are leading in the education sector having seventy percent literacy rate whereas female had 48.2 percent rate of literacy. Moreover, if we look at the urban and rural areas than it is found that women had 36 percent literacy rate in the rural area and 68 percent in the urban areas of Punjab (GOP, 2022).

Men and women are not regarded equally in the workplace. Women are paid less than males for comparable work. Women are always viewed as less competent than males. At every stage of life, the capabilities of women are underestimated. In societies dominated by males, it is believed that women are unfit for jobs involving risk or requiring sensitivity. These individuals believe that women lack the capabilities and qualities possessed by men, and that women cannot execute a task or manage things better than men. In these societies, women are viewed as the most vulnerable members of society (Sahgal, 2007).

Women in Pakistan must still overcome illiteracy, poverty, and mistreatment. Honor assassination is a prevalent and disturbing problem. In order to give women a sense of their own value, social structure, and educational environment, as well as to empower them politically, 33% of local government seats were allocated to women. Currently, women must be positively conspicuous. Every society's center is the family, and the woman is the family's fulcrum. Women must maintain a balance between their responsibilities at home and outside the home; society is fragmented when women prioritize their responsibilities outside the home over those at home. To increase women's participation in society, women must participate fully in all political processes and in all elective entities (GOP, 2020).

### **Significance of the study**

Promotion of women's education in Pakistan,

particularly in rural and suburban regions, may play a crucial role in achieving gender equality. Education will also boost women's employment prospects in the formal sector. It is a truth that, currently, higher education primarily serves the demands of women. Especially in rural communities, women are completely dependent on men since they lack spending power. Their historical connections with their spouses are impacted by historical factors that shape the subservient social systems in which they exist. Several research investigations have revealed that women endure a double day when they return to school and assume home responsibilities. The policymakers must consider incorporating economic benefits into schooling. The purpose of the study is to determine the perspectives of highly educated women who have attained senior positions at a female university. How do they perceive the issues associated with women's education, employment, and participation in social life? What hinders the advancement of women? What obstacles did they face and what chances did they have that allowed them to effectively pursue their careers? How can social transformation be achieved in Pakistan through the education of women?

### **Objectives**

The main objective of the study is to explore the nexus between higher education and the women empowerment. However, following are the specific objectives of this study:

- To find out the importance and relevance of higher education and empowerment in women's life
- To suggest some possible policy measures to empower the females through promotion of higher education

### **2.1 Theoretical framework**

Sociological perspectives consider women empowerment and mental illness and its treatment as part of a wider social context. One type of research in sociology looks at the social factors that affect the level of women empowerment. The theoretical model assists

researchers in probing the causes of events, phenomena, and behaviours towards the topic, which is an important aspect of empirical study. Theories' framework is made up of various events for driving bridges in hypothetically verifiable statements, as well as the relationships between them (Babbie, 2010).

As one of the emerging social theories, empowerment theory seeks to bridge the gap between the individual and society, the small and the large. The current inquiry is not limited to exploring connections between individuals and communities that are not organic-biological or system-mechanical in nature. Traditional classifications created by male-dominated disciplines (like sociology, for example) are challenged by feminist theory. The goal is to generate new ideas that can be used to better explain the world to the unseen and disadvantaged people who are its subordinate subjects (Ritzer, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

A technique is an organized approach to doing research. It provides a framework for doing study and evaluating claims for understanding. This arrangement is not final and cannot be terminated at any time. These guidelines and standards are regularly revised as researchers seek out new methods of observation, investigation, reasonable interpretation (the process of developing logical deductions based on recognized correct grounds or gathered

evidence), and generalization. The "soundness of examination" rules that govern the systematic procedure are updated to include these processes once it is determined that they are consistent with the underlying assumptions of the systematic methodology (Babbie, 2010).

This research was conducted in the public universities in Faisalabad District. Sampling is the practice of selecting a portion of a larger group of people in order to make inferences about them. Sampling is crucial because it makes the process easier to control, less expensive, and quicker to complete than it would be to analyze every possible cause. For sampling, a multi-stage phase sampling technique is utilized. In the initial step of sampling, the University of Agriculture Faisalabad and Government College University Faisalabad were chosen at random. In the second step, after receiving a list of enrolled students at the designated universities, 220 responders are selected at random. Data was collected with the help of interview schedule and analyzed by using SPSS.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter's goal is to present data analysis and interpretation in relation to the research issues being looked into. Bivariate analysis demonstrates the connection between one independent variable and one dependent variable. Section 2 presents each part's specifics.

**Hypothesis 1: higher the age of the respondents, intense will be higher that media placed gender equality in the shows**

**Table 4.50: Association between age of the respondents and Education serves as gender equalizer**

Age			Women empowerment			Total
			To great extent	To some extent	Not at all	
	18-27	Count	26	27	14	67
		% of Total	11.8%	12.2%	6.3%	30.4%
	28-37	Count	31	13	24	68
		% of Total	14.0%	5.9%	10.9%	30.9%
	38 or above	Count	7	4	64	75
		% of Total	3.1%	1.8%	29.0%	34.0%
Total		Count	64	44	102	220
		% of Total	29.0%	20.0%	46.3%	100.0%

Chi-square= 89.21      gamma=768      Sig.=0.000

The link between age of respondents and education as a gender equalizer is depicted in Table 4.50, and the chi-square value indicates that the association is extremely significant. The theory is therefore accepted. In contrast, a positive value of gamma indicates the intensity of the association between variables, indicating that both variables had a direct proportional relationship. Results corroborated Sahgal's (2007) assertion that men and women are not treated equally in the workplace. Women get

paid less than males for comparable work. Women are always viewed as less competent than males. At every stage of life, the skills of women are underestimated. In communities dominated by males, it is believed that women are unfit for vocations involving danger or requiring sensitivity. These individuals feel that women are unable, but equal access to education and jobs gives them greater independence and self-assurance.

### **Hypothesis 2: Education focus on women empowerment that give freedom of expression to women**

**Table 4.51: Association between education focus on women empowerment and freedom of expression**

Education			Women empowerment			Total
			To great extent	To some extent	Not at all	
	To great extent	Count	70	13	7	90
		% of Total	31.8%	5.9%	3.1%	40.9%
	To some extent	Count	23	24	13	60
		% of Total	10.4%	10.9%	5.9%	27.2%
	Not at all	Count	4	28	38	70
		% of Total	1.8%	12.7%	17.2%	31.8%
Total		Count	97	65	58	220
		% of Total	44.0%	29.5%	26.3%	100.0%

Chi-square=99.23      gamma=0.721      Significance=0.000

Table 4.51 displays the link between education's emphasis on women's concerns and freedom of speech, and the chi-square value indicates that the association is extremely significant. The theory is therefore accepted. A significant positive value of gamma indicates the intensity of the association between variables, indicating that both variables had a direct proportional relationship. According to Wikigender (2016), media and education is regarded to be the most significant instrument of modern society since it has the ability to reach a huge audience through mass communication and produce an influence

wherever it may reach, which is now globally. Through its constantly evolving apps and networking, social media is an unavoidable source of public influence. By emphasizing on the neglect and marginalization of the status of women in society, the media as a whole has supported the campaign for women's liberation, but not to the extent desired. Communication is crucial to the growth of women, and the function of the media is critical. It should be noted that the expansion of women's education and their work in the media industry have contributed to its expansion.

### **Hypothesis 3: women access to education/literacy leads towards the reduction of cultural barrier in the way of women empowerment**

**Table 4.52: Association between women access to education and reduction of cultural barrier in the way of women empowerment**

Women Access to education			Women Empowerment		Total
			Yes	No	
	Strongly Agree	Count	10	62	72
		% of Total	4.5%	28.1%	32.7%
	Agree	Count	20	29	49
		% of Total	9.0%	13.1%	22.2%
	Uncertain	Count	27	6	33
		% of Total	12.2%	2.7%	15.0%
	Disagree	Count	32	4	36
		% of Total	14.5%	1.8%	16.3%
	Strongly disagree	Count	21	9	30
		% of Total	9.5%	4.0%	13.6%
	Total		Count	110	220
			% of Total	50.0%	100.0%

Chi-square=78.125      gamma=0.492      Significance=0.000

Table 4.52 depicts the link between women's access to education and the lowering of cultural barriers to women's empowerment, and the value of chi-square indicates that the association is extremely significant. The theory is therefore accepted. In contrast, a negative value of gamma indicates the negative direction of the link between variables, indicating that a rise in one variable leads to a drop in the others. The people of Punjab live in a patriarchal culture. Here, both men and women are split into two different groups. Women should be at home, while guys should be out in the world. This practice of divergence makes it harder for women to learn new things and get access to tools and opportunities (Bari, 2000). Tanvir, et al. (2019) say that poor human development, poverty, illiteracy, and the patriarchal structure of society in the southern part of the Punjab all contributed to the high level of violence against women there. In every relationship, men and women expect women to be passive. A wife is expected to admit that her husband is in charge. (Bhattacharya, 2014) A guy has full power over a woman's body, feelings, thoughts, and even her life. In many places of the country, most people follow traditional and not-very-civilized practices in the name of Islam. This has a huge impact on the lives of women. Akhtar and

Metraux (2013) say that both "forced marriages" and "marriage with the Quran" go against what Islam is all about. Unfortunately, this act is done all the time in backward rural parts of Pakistan, especially where feudalistic ideas are used (Muzaffar, et. al. 2018). Rahman, (2015) discussed the various rights given by Islam to women such as the right of life, the right of education, the right to choose the spouse, and the right of inheritance. The authors argue that before Islam in Arab culture female infanticide was a common practice but Islam declared it to be immoral and unlawful, this resulted in Islam giving full protection of life to both women and men. Islam commands its followers (both men and women) to seek knowledge. The authors also argue that another major step toward equality taken by Islam includes the fact that Islam made it mandatory for all slave owners to give basic as well as educational rights to their slaves both men and women. It is also argued that it is mentioned in the Holy Quran that virgins as well as widows/divorced women have the right to choose their husbands and nobody can stop them from doing so or impose their choice on them. Furthermore, Islam also grants the right to patrimony to women but in the contemporary Muslim world patriarchal culture denies this right to them. The authors further

said that Islam has given the right of inheritance to women but since the local culture is extremely patriarchal therefore at the ground level women are excluded from the right to patrimony. Very often women “voluntarily” surrender their right in patrimony to their brothers and patri lateral parallel cousins. The authors also point out that in many Muslim countries today due to incorrect interpretation and implementation of Islam in the case of adultery women are sentenced to death while men are spared any punishment.

## 5.2 Conclusions

One of the most efficient methods of providing women with the knowledge, abilities, and sense of self-assurance that they require in order to take an active role in the process of growth is to educate them to a higher level. Empowerment is the transition from a posture of weakness to one of strength. Women's access to higher education is the most effective instrument for altering their status in society, since it enables them to make better decisions and become stronger contributors to the economy. In addition to reducing inequities, higher education improves a person's social standing within the family. We may argue that education plays a significant role in the development of any society for minimizing gender prejudice, encouraging women to make a positive contribution to society, and empowering women to become the economic backbone. Males and females engage equally in the growth of the country as a result of it. However, cultural norms and behaviors continue to impede the successful introduction of change in Pakistan, despite the fact that major attempts are being made to close the existing gender gap. The provision of facilities for higher education has been considerably aided by several organizations. The ratio is still quite low; therefore more work will be needed in the future to bring it into balance. A list of discriminatory behaviors that are represented as related and mutually reinforcing has been highlighted in several research papers. Discrimination against women continues throughout their lives, starting with the favoritism of men over women in the household. Girls are placed in a passive and submissive position because they are mostly excluded from decision-making, denied an equal

part of the wealth, and most importantly denied the chance to become confident in their abilities. The educational system reinforces the value system that women experience at home and hence contributes to these discriminatory behaviors. Females are unable to realize their full potential as a result of these pervasive social impacts. They won't feel good about themselves since they weren't given the chance to grow their self-confidence in their abilities. Due to their gender, they won't have the knowledge or skills required for economic independence. They thus cannot expect to be treated with the same respect as an educated person. For the same reasons, they are largely prevented from taking an appropriate and responsible part in society. Women who pursue higher education get the information necessary to sustain their economic independence. The attainment of these accomplishments confers enhanced prestige and acknowledgment from their family and the community at large. Possessing an education, obtaining economic independence, acquiring personal confidence, earning standing in the community, and being granted a voice are all components of a set of advantages that are intricately interconnected.

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