

GENDERED ASPECT OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA: A FEMINIST QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES

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ABSTRACT

Women are regarded as a fundamental pillar of societal structure, significantly influencing a nation's economy, productivity, and overall well-being. This research addresses the intersection of gender, poverty, and the pandemic in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through a feminist qualitative analysis. The primary objective of the study was to explore multidimensional poverty in this region with special focus of socio-economic barriers, social inclusion, religion, covid-19 and patriarchal system in local population. The research was conducted using qualitative methods, focusing on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, which consists of seven divisions further divided into thirty-five districts. The Kohat division was selected, encompassing five districts: Kohat, Karak, Hangu, Kurram, and Orakzai. Specifically, the study targeted women-headed households. Key findings indicate that such element are the leading causes of women poverty and has a profound impact on individuals' lives, with inflation, lockdowns, and household responsibilities adversely affecting morale and limiting job opportunities for female in the region.

Keywords: Gender, Inequality, Multidimension Poverty, Covid-19, Social Inclusion, Patriarchal System, religion, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a serious threat to the cultural, economic, social, and political rights of the individual. Furthermore, those living in poverty face a formal contradiction of dignity and honor. In this context, poverty is all about money. The deficiency is not interpreted as a hurdle to basic human rights, which are representation, wealth, food, health, nutrition, education, and many more. Taking all these factors into account, extreme poverty is considered the most ruthless killer in the world (OHCHR, 2012). The feminist poverty process is defined in such a way that women face a disproportionate poverty pace compared to that of men. While women in industrialized countries are under great pressure to reduce poverty and engage in the working margin,

the greatest pressure on women in the world and the largest economic problem is poverty, and there is often poverty (Abbate, 2010). Domestic poverty can be defined as households whose minimum daily income is less than modest wealth, or 1.25 dollars per day in less wealthy countries that lack the basic needs of life. The loss of family power is due to treatment, including payment for food, shelter, clothing, education, health care, and utilities. Feminism is not a single theory; it is a collection of liberal, radical, socialist, neo-feminism, post-feminism, and liberal feminism. Basically, it is based on equality in many distinctions of life. As men and women are both humans, they should be treated likewise. Many researchers argue that not only in social aspects but

in any other aspect of life, they both deserve equality. Basic traditions refer to the cultural, introspective, and psychological rights of women. The latter represents an emerging trend called "post-feminism." Here, feminist thinkers follow the women's traditional role in society for social stability, discipline, and family values. By demanding restoration, they have begun to compromise on their anti-masculine or anti-property stance, a long formal tradition of women's rights (Mohapatra, 2009; United Nations, 2011; Ahmed, 2005).

The decrease in poverty and sustainable development depends on the empowerment of the poor. One of the ways to empower rural unprivileged women is through feasible livelihoods. In conditions of habitat, food security, and earnings generation, women play a vital role in the rural economy (Kristjanson et al., 2014; McKee, 1989; Mutopo, 2014; Oberhauser, Mandel & Hapke, 2004). The means of subsistence are called activities and resources for employment. The most common definition of means of subsistence includes the economy and activities used to earn a living. The main source of stability of the resources of subsistence are the resources of production that create material resources for the survival of society (Vercillo, 2016). Sustainable employment is what can address the weaknesses. They must be capable of maintaining the shape and structure of natural resources without adversely affecting their base, capabilities, and resources in the present and future (Daveis et al., 2013). The lack of technology, improper access to resources, lack of services, inaccessible infrastructure, limited credit, education, and many other crises are barriers (Garikipati, 2010). For rural women in Sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture is the central source of income. So for this resource, any initiative helps them in many ways to empower (Scoones et al., 1996; Freeman & Ellis, 2004; Kristjanson et al., 2014; Frost et al., 2007).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

By shedding light on the unique manifestations of poverty in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, this study underscores the urgent need for a holistic understanding of poverty that considers not only income levels but also the underlying social and cultural dynamics that perpetuate inequality. The significance of this research lies in its potential to

drive change, fostering a deeper awareness of the complexities of poverty and paving the way for more equitable solutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

NATURE OF STUDY

This research study was primarily qualitative. The inclusion criteria focused on women-headed households. The universe was Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Province, comprising seven divisions. Collecting data from all of KP Province proved challenging, so I chose one division that is nearest to my study: the Kohat division, which comprises five districts: Kohat, Karak, Hangu, Kurram, and Orakzai.

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

Both old and young females (ages 20 to 70) were the respondents. The sample for the study was collected from the districts of Kohat, Karak, and Hangu of Kohat division, through a purposive-convenient sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were based on women-headed households. Furthermore, the study was conducted in a way that respondents were selected due to their better understanding of the study, i.e., to explore multidimensional poverty in KP through a qualitative feminist perspective. A total of 40 interviews were conducted, and the number of interviews was based on data saturation.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

Data was obtained from young and aged female-headed households through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The minimum time for an interview was thirty minutes, while the maximum was one and a half hours. For data collection, a research guide was developed to conduct in-depth interviews, and secondary data was also reviewed. Initially, all participants were asked for their consent, and then they were asked about the statements written in the interview guide. Recording interviews was not an easy task because convincing them to trust me and assuring them that their privacy would not be exposed was really difficult for those poor people, especially from rural areas. I managed to save time and facilitate a better understanding of the interview discussions; thus, recording was necessary. That's why I convinced them without breaking their trust and privacy.

DATA ANALYSIS

The research data was collected in the native languages (Urdu, Hindku, and Pashto) of the respondents and was also recorded with their consent. After data collection, the data was translated and transcribed into English. Different themes were developed after the translation, and the analysis process was conducted. Data was analyzed using thematic and narrative analysis methods. Themes were arranged according to the objectives of the study. Four themes were generated, and narrations were organized based on those themes.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS & CHALLENGES

There were some challenges faced by the researcher, such as hot weather and travel limitations as a woman.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the exploration of multidimensional poverty, there were many aspects that were highlighted by participants. Participants suffered a lot because of poverty. In this regards the different qualitative statement regarding the multidimensional poverty were formulated and the respondents of that were then correlated to respondents' views.

SOCIAL INCLUSION AND WOMEN POVERTY

Discrimination, social norms and structural hurdles limit decision making power of women and in rural communities' political participation in families. In rural areas, girls and women do not have access equally to goods and productive resources, to services of public such as sanitation and water, infrastructure, health care and education, on the other hand mostly their salaries are unpaid and hidden. They usually, depend upon male members of the family for satisfaction of basic felt needs. The workload becomes very weighted, because of men's migration. Worldwide, in comparison with men rural and urban both women cope difficultly with the consequences of poverty, climate change and emigration.

The women here reliant on male family members, leaving them feeling marginalized and excluded. Even those who achieved some level of

independence struggled to attain a dignified and peaceful life, highlighting how female poverty is perpetuated by their economic dependence on men within society.

COVID-19 AND WOMEN POVERTY

Alongside the other socio-cultural and religious aspects of gender inequalities and women's poverty, the recent pandemic of COVID-19 has multiplied the challenges for females in terms of job-seeking and sustenance, making them more severe than for male members of society. Likewise, other causes have also harmed the female portion of the world population (Sevilla et al., 2020). This is not gender-neutral, as a higher fatality rate among females has been reported globally compared to males. Women lost their livelihoods more frequently, and the ratio of violence against them, both at home and in the workplace, has increased throughout developing countries (Peterman et al., 2020). The burden of unpaid labor, domestic violence, and increased sexual exploitation has been visibly observed. Women and girls in communities already reeling from institutionalized poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination are particularly at risk (U.N. Women, 2020). To explore the multidimensional causes of women's inequality and, consequently, poverty in third-world countries and developing regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, various statements were formulated during field studies. In this context, the majority of the sample agreed that, like other causes, the pandemic has multiplied the existing poverty among females in the region (Pailhe, 2021).

...The majority of respondents were highly affected by Covid-19-related inflation. The income sources of most respondents were seriously damaged. Most of the respondents were frustrated regarding the lockdown because everyone was so messed up mentally. Mostly, their point of view was that if everyone used to wear masks, then it would be better. Women had the capacity to work in all conditions, but the pandemic-related situation affected their lives.

SOCIO-CULTURE CAUSES OF WOMEN POVERTY

Alongside the other socio-culture and political constraint and inequalities on gender basis the female

portion of local region face significant constraints in maximizing their productivity due to both sexual harassment and the region's socio-cultural norms as well. Such restriction further boundary the accessibility of female to job occasions. The labor market is not equally accessible to women, as societal expectations and restrictions confine them to limited roles. They often earn less than men despite working longer hours and, globally, own only 15% of land. In KPK, women are overrepresented in insecure, seasonal, and precarious jobs that lack proper labor protections. However, these challenges are compounded by frequent harassment at the workplace and the cultural perception that restricts women from seeking jobs outside the household, further marginalizing them in society (Aragon & Miller, 2012). In context of socio-culture hurdles the majority of the sample respondents show disagreement to literately information of the study. They were of the view:

"...Nothing is inherently good or bad; everything depends on the person you work with or are related to. Sexual harassment is neither new nor uncommon—it exists in every society around the world. In today's complex society, sexual harassment has taken on a normalized form, affecting not only females but also males and even children. However, if your company consists of good people who are morally and culturally civilized, sexual harassment does not prevail."

While proceeding with the primary information, the sample respondents were asked whether religion is a major hurdle and a leading cause of female poverty and gender inequality. In response to the statement, the majority of the sample respondents expressed the following views:

".....Religion, in general, is not a major or leading issue in finding jobs in our society. However, in some specific cases, such as for minorities, it becomes challenging to work within the broader society and find jobs in areas dominated by the prevailing religion. On the other hand, some respondents disagreed with the statement and supported the role of religion in job-seeking. They argued that religion brings peace to their lives. Despite all the challenges they face, they find comfort and solace in prayers, even when they have empty hands."

According to a USAID survey, the number of female-headed families has climbed from 4 to 15 percent. Since most job opportunities are in male-dominated fields, widows and single mothers have a harder time making ends meet. Women's traditional abilities in sewing, knitting, and needlework provide relatively limited opportunities for financial independence. Those who do not have these abilities, if they can gain them, turn to salaries or commonly resort to begging. Women's personal and professional advancement, which requires mobility, is hampered by low literacy rates, insufficient transportation options, and social conventions against women travelling alone. The laws governing women, particularly their freedom of movement and social engagement, are not as stifling as one might expect. For example, while a woman's movements are normally restricted, she can leave her home when she needs work. During the day, he works in the fields and frequently travels vast distances without a male guard to gather fuel, water, and wood (Kamal and Woodbury, 2016). In this context the sample respondents' views were taken and given below:

Most of the participants stated that poverty was never the result of a single factor but is linked to the absence of a series of correlated factors that influence people living in poverty. In a minority, respondents stated that illiteracy was not the one that added to poverty, but it is money deficiency that leads them into poverty by highlighting the example of shrinking job opportunities. Skills played an important role in poverty reduction, argued most of the participants. In rural areas, where women were not educated enough and got married at early ages, they knew sewing, knitting, and many other skills to earn money and kill time.

The inability to afford basic necessities such as public transportation, healthcare, and a safe place to live is a direct result of being at danger of poverty. In every EU Member State, low-income women are less likely to have safe and sanitary housing than other women. It is more common in the Central and Eastern European Member States to have limited access to primary healthcare services and public transit. Women have a significantly higher propensity to engage in non-standard employment arrangements than men do, yet males in such positions are much more likely to be at risk of poverty. Single mothers and women who have

moved to a new country are disproportionately represented in homes with weak ties to the labor force. Children are impacted by their parents' poverty, and the cycle of poverty continues. Children from low-income backgrounds are disproportionately represented in homes headed by a single parent or a migrant mother in many parts of the world. Single moms and women who have moved around a lot, are more likely to have a tenuous connection to the labor market, which contributes to their higher rates of child poverty (Lancker et al., 2015). Regarding the social exclusion majority of the sample respondents were of the views:

"...poverty results in social and personal exclusion, leading to the isolation of females from other social networks in the community. This not only limits their access to basic life needs but also restricts them from participating in other socio-cultural activities. Specifically, the inability to afford nutritious meals was seen as a significant obstacle to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, further deepening their exclusion. Alongside these challenges, the majority of the sample respondents stated that social exclusion was not an absolute experience at all times. On many occasions, poor family members favorably supported us, which gave us motivation for more domestic labor and unpaid work for our families. However, such unpaid recognition is not enough, and these positive interactions, though meaningful, are insufficient to overcome the structural issues we face."

TRADITIONAL PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

Domestic poverty is that condition of households whose minimum daily income are less than modest wealth, or 1.25 mole per day in countries that are less rich and lack the basic needs of life. Such poverty in developing nations especially in Pakistan and rural area of Khber-Pukhtunkhwa further causing to gender inequality and women poverty in shape of inappropriate family power and traditional negligence of female in patriarchal system (United Nations, 2011; Ahmed, 2005). According to the study, 73% of the FATA population and 73% of Balochistan suffer from multidimensional poverty, particularly from traditional patriarchal authoritative and male dominant society. Similarly, such poverty ratio has been reached to 49% in KP, 43% in Gilgit-

Baltistan and Sindh, 31% in Punjab and 25% in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Even in capital city of Pakistan and other big cities such gender base inequality and women poverty exist. According to the UNDP (2016), in most populus city of Pakistan like Lahore and Karachi such difference exists and harmfully affecting the major portion of population. The know about the factor of traditional patriarchal system and gender inequality in local region, the stamen was asked from sample respondents. In this regards majority of sample respondents replied;

It is just that in our area, women traditionally do housework. Along with this, women have to manage land, do farming, and take complete care of children. Because there is no cash in these things, we do these jobs without cash money, salaries, or even informal recognition from morning till evening. In this way, it is obvious that if you don't earn money, how will you spend it? All we have to say is that men have to earn money, and then they have to invest it. Islay, our household heads are often men. The main reason for our poverty is the traditional system that keeps us away from cash and market jobs. On the contrary, if women start earning money and are allowed to run the house, they can easily do this work compared to men. They further explored that female-headed households (FHH) give greater visibility to poverty. But along with that, they also indicated that it depends on the situation and the female head—whether she is well aware of the consequences of hard times and struggles.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with the major objective of exploring gender-based inequality in terms of multidimensional poverty in district Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. All the primary information in terms of social inclusion, religion, COVID-19, women's poverty, and the traditional patriarchal system was matched and discussed with the views of the sample respondents. Due to certain reasons, like lack of access to political participation, working in the open job market, and unpaid domestic labor, the majority of the sample respondents revealed that "the women here are reliant on male family members, leaving them feeling marginalized and excluded." Similarly, in the context of COVID-19, the majority of sample respondents revealed that, like other pandemics, COVID-19 was not neutral regarding

gender. They further added, “The majority of respondents were highly affected by COVID-19-related inflation. The income sources of most respondents were seriously damaged.” The data further disclosed that socio-cultural barriers, especially sexual harassment, are also one of the leading causes of women’s poverty in the local region. Many of the sample respondents replied that “nothing is inherently good or bad; everything depends on the person you work with or are related to. Sexual harassment is neither new nor uncommon—it exists in every society around the world.” Besides, the sample respondents negated religion as a reason for poverty in the region. Lastly, the views of the respondents strongly supported that the patriarchal traditional system is the most important cause of women’s discrimination in earning and their poverty in the region.

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