
**PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S PERCEPTION ABOUT ROLE OF HIGHER
EDUCATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS**

*Dr Mukesh Kumar Khatwani
Ishrat Afshan Abbasi
Farida Yasmin Panhwar*

ABSTRACT

The existing literature on the perception of Pakistani professional women about their social status, respectability and autonomy suggests that higher education plays a vital role in rising women's ability to make decisions, however; various other factors such as socio-cultural norms, gender norms and values, religious norms, patriarchy, caste and locale could possibly affect negatively. Similarly, the human capital theory also postulates that education or training increases the efficiency of workers and increases access of people to decision-making process. Realizing the catalyst role of human capital theory, this research paper aims at investigating perception/experience of academic and non-academic female employees at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan about the role of higher education in increasing their say in the decision-making process. Further, the paper also attempts to comparatively assess the similarities and dissimilarity of participants' perception regarding the role of higher education in empowering academic and non-academic women. The sample size of this study consisted of 100 women having minimum of 5 year work experience at the university.

Keywords: Professional women, Perception, Higher education, Decision-making, Violence

INTRODUCTION

Education is considered a significant determinant of the development of any nation, and also a contributing factor to egalitarianism and social transformation in any society (Ghazala & Khalid, 2012:51). Similarly, human capital theory (Becker, 1994) advocates that education or training improves the efficiency of workers as it brings improvement in persons' skills and knowledge and it also proliferates their access to decision making process at family, community and national level. This is the reason throughout the globe the education for girls have always remained the utmost priority of feminists, social workers and organizations working for the emancipation of women and gender equality.

Traditionally, teaching has remained the most favorite profession for women in Pakistan because culturally and religiously, reverence and

respect has been given to this profession and its suitability for women in traditional societies. Besides, this profession is also considered safer as compared to other professions for women because they may have the limited communication chances and interaction with strangers especially to male gender (Ferdoos, 2005). In spite of encouraging and favourable conditions, the number of female employees in tertiary education is considerably lower than male though there has been noticed a more than 12 percent increase in a number of women teachers at the university level since 1998-99 (FBS, 2011). There is no doubt, the increasing number of women in paid-work both in public as well as private sector in Pakistan has significantly brought positive changes in peoples' attitude and women's involvement in the family decisions has been accepted (Khatwani, 2017; Ghazala & Khalid, 2012; Acharya, *et.al.*, 2010; Hussain, 2008). However, the question of woman's role as an equal citizen in society is still challenging because she has been discriminated socially, politically, culturally and academically (Khatwani, 2016).

Realizing the emerging trends of women in employment and governments' initiatives to empower women through their active participation in education and employment, this paper attempts to explore the role of higher education in empowering professional women. Moreover, comparing the academic and non-academic women's point of views regarding their empowerment, this study addresses the following specific research questions:

- Does the higher education of academic and non-academic women employed at the University of Sindh, Jamshoro empower them in the decision-making process?
- Do academic women perceive themselves more empowered than those of non-academic?
- Do academic employees have more access to and control over financial matters as compared to those of non-academic employees?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is not merely regarded as the most contributing factor in overcoming the social, cultural and religious barriers faced by women, but it also plays a significant role in bringing them into the mainstreaming development. The need for girls' education is accentuated throughout the world because it is argued that investing in girls' education is the key to reducing poverty and changing subjugated position of women in society (Murtaza, 2012; Ali *et.al.*, 2011; Jeffery & Basu, 1996; Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996; Jejeebhoy, 1995; Bhatt & Sharma, 1992). The education and

women's social status are interlinked; hence, reducing illiteracy has been the concern of the movements.

Across the globe, higher education is considered as the significant instrument and means of social change (Ashraf, 2004; Herz & Sperling, 2004), and also a crucial factor to the emancipation, empowerment and progression of women as it multiplies their abilities and capabilities of decision-making (Khalid & Mujahid, 2002). Ghazala and Khalid (2012:55) in their research that based on interviews with 10 women holding senior management positions in a local women university found association between higher education and women's established position within family matters. Moreover, study found that higher education created awareness amongst women, abridged their dependency, boosted their physical and social mobility, unlocked job opportunities, and boosted self-confidence and self-reliance. Similarly, Malik and Courtney (2011) employing survey instrument collected data from 1290 female students and 290 female faculties from 10 public universities of Pakistan regarding women's higher education and their empowerment. They found women's higher education benefited them in terms of economic independence and better social position not only within family but in society too. Moreover, findings revealed 62 percent of female faculty had complete control over their income. On the contrary, Sathar and Kazi's (2000) study on autonomy of women in the perspective of rural Pakistan found significant positive association of respondents' education and access to resources, however; did not found its association with economic self-sufficiency and decision-making inside or outside the home. This contradiction between the findings of Malik and Courtney (2011), and Sathar and Kazi (2000) is because their studies were conducted in different socio-economic, rural-urban, class and geographical backgrounds and settings.

Correspondingly, human capital theory (Becker, 1994) argues that education and training of individual increases possibilities of socio-economic development and can bring positive change in the socio-economic status (SES) of a person. This is why most scholarships on gender studies and organizations working on women's empowerment and equality across the globe have always focused quality education of girls. It is also observed that the active involvement of women in economic activities, specifically paid-work, have not only increased socio-economic status (SES) of the family but have also positively affected women's ability of decision making within the family (Chaudhury, 2010; Sathar & Kazi, 2000; Moser, 1998). A study conducted in the Indian context,

which is socially and culturally similar to Pakistani society, found women who possessed university education were more empowered and considered themselves more autonomous in their decisions and choices (Sridevi, 2005). Based on the above-discussed studies, it can be perceived that women possessing higher education enjoy several socio-economic benefits such as decision-making abilities, access to financial resources (Hussain, 2008; Malhotra & Mather, 1997). However, various socio-economic, socio-cultural and demographic characteristics of women may become problematic for women's abilities to making their choices and decisions (Gupta & Yesudian, 2006; Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001).

Furthermore, previous studies such as Rahaman (2010), Kabeer (2001) and Jejeebhoy & Sathar (2001) also suggest that existing gender systems and norms in specific setting may assign authority to women in certain domains while disclaiming in other locations. This is the reason women's ability to make decisions either within household or outside could be affected by the gender systems such as patriarchal, religious and feudal (Ferdoos, 2005) and, certainly, it could become an encounter for women's empowerment in some situations. Thus, in the context of Sindhi society, which is more gendered, patriarchal, as well as caste and class-based, it could be problematic to undertake that higher-education of women would deliver to women's increased social status and gender equality in Sindhi society.

RESEARCH METHOD

The survey research design was employed for knowing the perception of academic and non-academic women employees about the role of higher education in empowering women. As Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) argues questionnaire as a tool of data collection is the most suitable technique for accumulating quantitative data, hence, structured questionnaire was employed for this study, which consisted of two types of questions (i) factual questions, and (ii) subjective questions. The survey questionnaire developed on a five-point Likert-type scale (Likert, 1932) piloted for ensuring the overall format of the questionnaire and questions included (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Babbie, 2001; Bryman, 2001). The justification for the selection of Likert-type scale format was its 'user-friendliness' (Likert, 1932), which means it is immaculate and easy to understand and provides participants with comprehensive understanding. The questionnaire had two sections, the first section was about personal information of the research participants (a multi-category scaled item), and the second section of the questionnaire was about actual research data.

DATA COLLECTION

For this research, the academic and non-academic staffs were selected in order to understand and compare the diverse backgrounds of the respondents of both the groups. The total number of selected academic and non-academic women staff was hundred with a minimum five year work experience. The respondents were equally selected through convenience sampling technique. We contacted research participants throughout their duty hours, informed them about the purpose of the survey and also asked for their permission. They were informed that their participation in this research is voluntarily and they can withdraw their participation at any stage of the research. We approached research participants in their respective office room and distributed the research questionnaire and asked them to fill out the questionnaire, which took about 10-15 minutes.

TABLE-1
DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS BY THEIR
PROFESSIONAL POSITION (N=100)

Academic participants	Freq.	Non-Academic Participants	Freq.
Professor	05	Computer Programmer	10
Associate Professor	09	Librarian	03
Assistant Professor	16	Computer Operator/Clerk	21
Lecturer	20	Laboratory/Library Assistant	16
Total	50		50

Source: Own Survey 2013.

The Statistical Programme for Social Science (SPSS) was used for compilation, organization and analysis of the collected data and results were presented in tabular form. As this research focused on the perception of respondents, therefore, simple statistical test i.e. percentage and frequencies were used and findings reported.

Profile of the Respondents: Four major demographic indicators were considered for developing the demographic profile of the research participants. These were as; age, marital status, qualification and monthly income. The detailed profile is given in the following sections.

Research Participants' Age Category: Five categories of the research participants were created as per the age of the respondents. The majority of both groups of the research respondents were under the age category of 25-34 years while only 4 were 55 years old or above (see Table-2).

TABLE-2
AGE CATEGORY-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS (N=100)

Age Category	Frequency	Percentage
Under 24 years	12	12
25-34 years	49	49
35 -44 years	24	24
45-54 years	11	11
55 and above	4	4
Total	100	100

Source: Own Survey 2013

Respondents' Marital Status: We categorized four marital statuses including never married, married, widow, and divorced/separated. Out of 100 respondents 65 were married while a sufficient number (31) were unmarried (see Table-3).

TABLE-3
MARITAL STATUS-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (N=100)

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Never married	31	31
Married	65	65
Widow	03	03
Divorced/Separated	01	01
Total	100	100

Source: Own Survey 2013

Respondents' Qualifications: Majority of the respondents was post-graduate (Master's degree), only 11 percent of the respondents were a graduate (Bachelor's degree). Interestingly, none of the non-academic respondents had the degree of Master of Philosophy/Doctorate of Philosophy (M.Phil./PhD). The details are presented in the following table.

TABLE-4
QUALIFICATION-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (N=100)

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Graduate	11	11
Masters	62	62
M.Phil	8	8
PhD	19	19
Total	100	100

Source: Own Survey 2013

Participants' Monthly Income: We prescribed six categories of monthly income, the lowest one was under twenty thousand rupees per month, whereas highest category was above one hundred thousand rupees per month. Most of the respondents, who belonged to the non-academic staff category had less than twenty thousand rupees income per month while only 11 had more than one hundred thousand income per month (see Table 5).

TABLE-5
MONTHLY INCOME-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS (N=100)

Monthly income In Pak Rupees (000)	Frequency	Percent
Under 20	29	29
21-40	20	20
41-60	13	13
61-80	21	21
81-100	6	6
Above 100	11	11
Total	100	100

Source: Own Survey 2013.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The actual survey contained six statements, out of which four were pertinent to their involvement in family and national level decisions, whereas the other two were about having control over income and home based-violence. 40 percent of the academic respondents strongly agreed, 46 percent agreed, 10 percent neutral, and 2 percent respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed to the statement '*I think that university education empowers women in decision making within family*'. On the contrary, 16 percent non-academic respondents strongly agreed, 64 percent agreed, and 20 percent were neutral to the above statement (see Table-6). Thus a massive majority of academic (86%) and non-academic responses (80%) favoured the above statement indicates that higher education increases women's involvement in family matters. Only 6 percent difference in responses of academic and non-academic women clearly indicates that HE empowers women in decision making within the household. However, 40 percent of academic women were strongly agreed while only 16 percent of non-academic women were strongly agreed, which further shows that level of the decision within house

matters a lot and academic women are more empowered as compared to non-academic.

TABLE-6
PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY DECISIONS/MATTERS (N=100)

Respondents	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Academic (n=50)	40	46	10	2	2
Non-academic (n=50)	16	64	20		

Source: Own Survey 2013

Regarding the statement *'I think that university education increases women's say in the decision-making process in the workplace'* only 30 percent of academic respondents strongly agreed, 52 percent agreed, and only 10 percent were neutral to the statement. On the contrary, 12 percent of non-academic respondents strongly agreed, 70 percent agreed, 16 percent stood neutral, and only 2 percent were strongly disagreed to the above statement (see Table-7). The majority of faculty and administrative respondents was of the opinion that the higher education empowers women in taking decisions in the workplace.

TABLE-7
PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE WORKPLACE (N=100)

Respondents	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Academic (n=50)	30	52	10	5	3
Non-academic (n=50)	12	70	16		2

Source: Own Survey, 2013.

Concerning the statement *'I think university education increases women's say in the decision-making process in the community'*, 26 percent of academic respondents strongly agreed, 46 percent agreed, 24 percent remained neutral. On the other hand, 12 percent of non-academic respondents strongly agreed to the statement, 36 percent agreed, 42 percent stayed neutral (See Table-8). Accordingly, overall 72 percent of the academic while only 48 percent of the non-academic respondents were of the opinions that the university education increased women's involvement in the decision-making process in the community.

TABLE-8
PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY LEVEL DECISIONS (N=100)

Respondents	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Academic (n=50)	26	46	24	4	
Non-academic (n=50)	12	36	42	8	2

Source: Own Survey, 2013.

In response to the statement, *'I think university education increases women's say in the decision-making process at national level'*, 26 percent of academic respondents strongly agreed, 38 percent agreed, 34 percent were neutral to the statement. In contrast, 14 percent of non-academic respondents strongly agreed, 32 percent agreed, 44 percent persisted neutral response to the above statement (see Table-9). Consequently, overall 64 percent of the academic and only 46 percent of non-academic responses were in the favour of the above statement.

TABLE-9
PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS AT NATIONAL LEVEL (N=100)

Respondents	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Academic (n=50)	26	38	34		2
Non-academic (n=50)	14	32	44	4	6

Source: Own Survey, 2013.

Talking about having control over their monthly income and monetary resources 86 percent and 90 percent of the academic and non-academic staff respectively, had experienced having asserted their control over their income and resources (see Table-10).

TABLE-10
CONTROL OVER INCOME AND FINANCIAL MATTERS (N=100)

Respondents	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Academic (n=50)	38	48	12	2	0
Non-academic (n=50)	28	62	4	6	0

Source: Own Survey, 2013.

Sharing the view to the most interesting and important statement about the association of women's university education and protection from violence, around 18 percent of academic respondents strongly agreed to the statement, 44 percent agreed, 14 percent reserved the right to stay neutral. On the part of the non-academic staff the ratio of responses was quite similar, 18 percent of respondents strongly agreed, 40 percent agreed, 16 percent preferred to take a neutral stand in their views, 20 percent disagreed and 6 percent strongly disagreed that University education saves women from violence. Therefore, overall 62 percent of the academic and 85 percent of non-academic responses were in favour of the statement (see Table-11).

TABLE-11
UNIVERSITY EDUCATION PROTECTS WOMEN FROM
ABUSE/VIOLENCE (N=100)

Respondents	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Academic (n=50)	18	44	14	20	4
Non-academic (n=50)	18	40	16	20	6

Source: Own Survey 2013

KEY FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

- An overwhelming number of academic (86%) and non-academic women (80%) agreed that higher (university) education increases women's involvement in family decisions and matters. However, responses noticeably decrease to 64 percent and 46 percent of both academic and non-academic respectively against the role of higher education in decision-making process at national level.
- Interestingly, 82 percent of academic as well as non-academic women perceived/experienced that university education increase women's say at the workplace.
- 72 percent of the academic respondents were of the opinions that the university education increased women's say in the decision-making process in the community, while only 48 percent of the non-academic respondents were in the favour of the above statement.
- In terms of having access to and control over income and means of income generation, the ratio of non-academic women was higher than those of academic women. This means that professional women from economically lower class contribute a significant role (meet with family's economic needs), hence, they are heard and valued more in their family decisions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE RESEARCH

The study opens the avenues for further research on relationship of women's higher education and autonomy, how other various social, cultural, political and religious factors can possibly put hindrances in acquiring women's more equal status and position in society. Firstly, the research is confined to a single public university, thus, the group of research was homogenous in terms of socio-economic, socio-cultural and educational backgrounds, therefore; it would be interesting to explore the experiences of female employees from other public and private universities. Secondly, this study highlights the relationship between women's higher education and their involvement in decisions while

comparing two group of professional women; one from higher ranking position while other lower-ranking position. On the basis of this research, further research may be conducted on focusing the women serving in other public and private sectors such as engineering, multi-national companies and other profession which are culturally considered suitable for men.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As this study has been conducted in a specific setting, hence, it contains many limitations. Firstly, as a case study with a small number of participants its results cannot be generalized, though it can be replicated on different groups of women in various social and cultural settings. Secondly, most of the participants had the similar linguistic, socio-cultural, geographical, and educational backgrounds, hence, again the issue of generalisability and applicability of the research findings in other socio-cultural and geographical settings.

CONCLUSION

Corroborating the past studies (e.g., Ghazala & Khalid 2012; Gupta & Yesudian, 2006; Ferdoos 2005; Mason 1998) this research claims that higher education increases women's say in decision-making, however; the potential of that decision making varies at different levels like within household, the community, at the workplace and on national level. The findings suggested that tertiary education of women definitely empowers women more in decision making within household than outside at the workplace, in the community, and on a national level. The findings revealed the slightly lower difference in responses of academic and non-academic women regarding the role of higher education in decision making within the household, however; there was a wide difference in their opinions as regards to their role on national level decision-making process.

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