

WOMEN AND PAID WORK IN PAKISTAN

**Pathways of Women's Empowerment
South Asia Research Programme
Pakistan Scoping Paper**

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1. Introduction

This paper will offer an analysis of women and paid work with a view to identifying where there are changes underway in this area that may play a role in leading to equitable gender relations in Pakistan in the long-term. The discussion is based on existing research on the subject, which in turn comes from a variety of disciplines. Much of the research that will be discussed below is preliminary and based on micro-studies, or else it is based on larger quantitative surveys that may have ignored some of the diversity within the country.

Women live in a society that is highly stratified according to class, caste, regional and cultural variations, all of which have implications for their lives and opportunities. Researchers have already argued that policy-makers ought to take into account the specificities of women's experiences of gender structures and systems in different parts of the country (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1990, Sathar and Kazi 2000). This paper will seek to re-emphasize this by pointing out diversity wherever possible.

The discussion will begin by providing some statistical information in Section 2 about trends in women's labour force participation rate in the past decades and what it means for changes in the paid work force. Issues of defining women's work have been hotly contested in recent years, and that will be briefly discussed. Section 3 introduces the research pertaining to the significance, cultural values, and implications for gender norms, of women's work. Here, *purdah* will be highlighted because it works as a catch-all concept for the regional face of patriarchy. There has been some work done, although not enough, on the impact of work for income on women's lives, and that will be assessed in Section 4 with a view to uncover where further research may be possible. Section 5 will highlight that government policies and programmes have been slow to appreciate the fact that women work at all, but now they are trying to encourage their economic productivity to some extent. Section 6 discusses how policies of economic liberalization and a context of increasing poverty in recent years have put a double burden on the poorest working women. Section 7 concludes the discussion with another look at the concept of empowerment in the light of these research findings.

1. Trends in Women's Labour Force Participation

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Population 10 Years of Age and Above by Sex and Area 2003-2004.

Country/Area	Total	Male	Female
Pakistan	100.00	50.86	49.14
Rural	64.22	32.37	31.86
Urban	35.78	18.50	17.28

Source: Statistics Division, Federal Bureau of Statistics. *Labour Force Survey 2003-2004*

It is useful to note that Pakistan's population distribution remains predominantly rural, although the pressure on urban centres to provide jobs and housing to eager

migrants is unrelenting. The policy and planning requirements, therefore, maintain focus on both rural and urban services in terms of economic growth and social sector development.

Human development indicators for women in Pakistan are weak and experts seek explanations both in the cultural/religious context and in the lack of political will to change things, although it remains unclear which is more responsible for the other. The gross female participation rates in schools are still too low, reported by one reliable survey at 45% at the primary level, 32% at the middle level and 27% at the secondary level in the year 2000. (Ministry of Women Development 2005:13) Figures from labour surveys remain hotly contested and one routine explanation for the unreliability of data is considered to be the segregation norms of society.

There has been some attempt at making visible the invisibility of women's work in recent years. (Kazi 1999: 391) In the process of preparing the Pakistan country paper for the Fourth World Conference for Women at Beijing 1995, it became clear that lack of data was a major stumbling block to planning women's economic empowerment. Before the 1998 Census a gender sensitization programme was carried out with the Population Census Organization, and the Federal Bureau of Statistics hired more female employees and adopted a System of National Accounts.¹

Table 2: Refined (and Improved) Labor Force Participation Rates: Provinces and Area

Province Area	Total	Male	Female	Improved Participation Rate*	
				Total	Female
Pakistan	43.7	70.6	15.9	55.3	39.3
Rural	46.3	72.6	19.5	62.9	52.7
Urban	39.2	67.1	9.4	41.7	14.5
Balochistan	40.0	68.1	7.6	56.4	42.6
Rural	42.0	71.5	8.2	62.6	52.1
Urban	34.0	58.1	5.9	37.8	14.0
NWFP	37.2	65.7	10.2	57.7	50.0
Rural	37.5	66.0	10.8	61.1	56.2
Urban	35.7	64.3	7.1	41.4	18.5
Punjab	47.0	71.8	21.8	55.0	37.8
Rural	49.9	73.6	26.4	61.1	48.5
Urban	41.0	68.5	12.3	42.8	16.0
Sindh	40.5	70.8	6.6	54.5	36.1
Rural	43.6	75.8	7.4	70.5	64.3
Urban	37.8	66.4	5.9	40.6	11.7

¹ The *Human Development Report South Asia 2000 on Gender* also says that in the region, due to a flaw in the systems of national accounts, there is an invisibility of data regarding women. (53) The gender sensitization programme produced two useful publications from the Federal Bureau of Statistics: *Women and Men in Pakistan* (1995) and *Compendium of Gender Statistics in Pakistan* (1998).

Source: Statistics Division, Federal Bureau of Statistics. *Labour Force Survey of Pakistan 2003-2004*:127-131.

Table 3. Distribution of Workers in Industry by Gender (percent)

	<i>Rural</i>		<i>Urban</i>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture	53.8	76.9	5.3	9.4
Other Services	13.2	10.6	27.6	57.5
Manufacture	6.6	11.2	20.2	27.1
Construction	10.0	0.2	6.7	0.6
Trade	9.9	1.0	27.1	4.3
Transport	5.6	0.0	11.1	0.8

Source: Estimates using *Pakistan Integrated Housing Survey 2001-2*. (World Bank 2006: 89)

Agriculture has been somewhat redefined by the Labour Force Survey to include women's economic contribution more accurately, and fourteen activities have been included.² The Labour Force Participation Rate, therefore, when accounted for based on what is termed "probing" questions is now a much higher figure. Women's other invisible work such as reproductive and household work still remains uncounted. (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Center 2000: 53)

A recent analysis of the distribution of workers by industry is based on the Pakistan Integrated Housing Survey, due to continuing debates over which data sources remain the most reliable. Table 3 reflects the reality that women are concentrated in mainly agricultural work in the rural areas, and in urban areas they work in a range of services and manufacturing, that include home-based and informal sectors. However, according to the Labor Force Survey 2003-4 the only industry that has seen some growth in employment for women is "skilled agriculture and fishery", a category in which growth (from 48.4% in 2001-2 to 52.8% in 2003-4) has been led by females exclusively. (Mumtaz 2005:36)

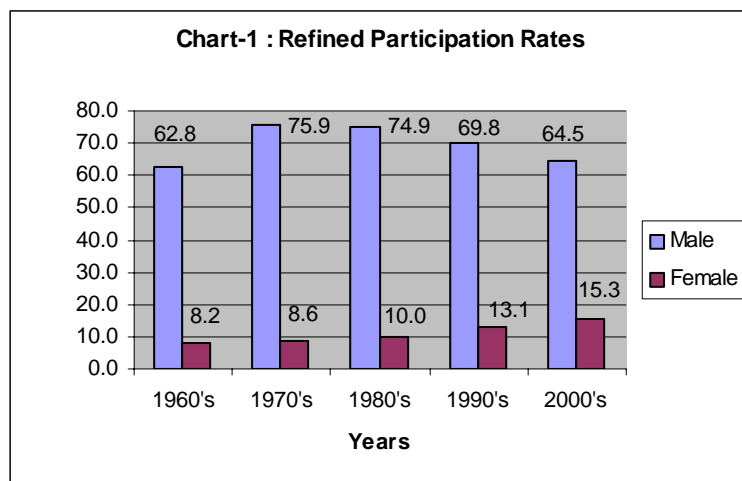
Women from civil society demand that time-use surveys be included in the next Pakistan Integrated Housing Survey (Shirkat Gah 2005:11) In particular, time-use data would be helpful in giving a clearer picture of women's true labour force participation rates in the urban informal sector, where women are responsible for much manufacturing and domestic work. (Kazi 1999: 385, 390-2, Shaheed and Mumtaz 1990) The *Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women* (1997) published by the government also recommended that agricultural and domestic workers be included into the definition of workers and brought under the purview of all laws applicable to them. (p.53) The confusion of accurate data collection is captured in Chart 1 below, in which Labour Participation Rates, not based on the revised definition of women's work, is presented based on Census data and provides some view of how rates were perceived over time.

A rise in women's labour force participation has been matched with a higher female unemployment rate, which at a total of 12.75% in 2003-4 is much higher than the male unemployment rate of 6.59%. Figures in the rural areas reflect the same reality,

² Women are now part of the labour force if they spend time on these activities : agriculture and fishing, mining, manufacturing, electricity and gas, construction, trade, transport and communications, hotels and restaurants, financial mediation, real estate business, public administration, education and health, and social service. (Siddiqui et al 2006a: 2)

at 10.88% for females and 5.65% for males. And in the urban areas the gender imbalance is even more severe, with female unemployment at 19.82% and male unemployment at 8.38%. (Statistics Division 2004: 127) The job options for women remain limited to agriculture, services (domestic) and small-scale industries. (Siddiqui et al 2006a: 178-9)

Women's labour force participation in **rural** areas has increased, as reflected in the increase in their participation in agriculture. Reasons for this include male out-migration to the Gulf and urban areas and the growth of cotton production (Kazi 1999: 387) In fact, the majority of women (67.3%) fall into this category, according to the Labour Force Survey distribution of employed women according to major industry divisions in 2003-4.³ Outside of agriculture, most women in the rural areas (73% of those employed according to the LFS) are employed in the informal sector. Their work includes earnings from livestock products, on-farm labour, home-based income-generating activities, piece-rate work, brick-kiln workers, domestic services, and more.



Sources: Economic Survey of Pakistan (1987, 1995, 2000, 2006)

There are changes underway among adolescent girls in rural areas. Findings from the only national survey ever conducted of adolescents and youth in Pakistan show increase in adolescent girls ages 15-19 doing paid work in rural areas. Girls ages 15-19 are more likely to enter paid work now than their older cohorts (ages 20-24) were at that age, whether or not they ever attended school. They are also more likely to delay marriage. (Lloyd and Grant 2004: 17) The survey, because it interviewed young people directly for the first time, tell us something important about their attitudes. A remarkable 80 percent of all females say they would do paid work if opportunities were available. This implies that mobility constraints, including even their concerns about leaving their homes, would be overridden if they had suitable opportunities. The study finds that work is seen as a way to enhance income or increase one's capability to cope with the outside world. (Sathar et al: 125)

³ In the Labour Force Survey 2003-4, major industry divisions for employed women are: Agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing: 67.3%, Manufacturing 14.7%, Construction 0.3%, Wholesale and retail trade 1.7%, Transport, storage and communication 0.1%, Community, social and personal services 15.8%, Others 0.1%. (Statistics Division, 2004: 137-141)

Tables 2 and 3 show that less women work in **urban** Pakistan, and that most of those who work are in “other” sectors, which means informal sector occupations. These include manufacturing, community, social and personal services, crafts and related trade workers, according to the Labour Force Survey categories. There are also changes in the traditional division of labour at both ends of the socio-economic spectrum. Growing numbers of middle class urban women are making use of higher education and entering professions in modern sector. (Kazi 1999:409) However, females are still only a small share of formal sector workforce (13.45%) relative to South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka (45%). (Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre 2000: 63) The increase is mainly in a U-shape, with women at the top-end and bottom-end of the work force entering in greater numbers only. (Kazi 1999: 392) Despite these changes women’s labour force participation in urban areas is still low. One reason for this could be that most women still work in the informal sector, and of that most of them are home-based workers. They are among the most poverty-stricken, the most under-enumerated and invisible of all women workers.

At the top end of the U-shape, there are some sectors of the labour market that have been traditionally open to women, such as the medical and teaching professions. As Table 4 below indicates, there has been a steady growth of women in the teaching sector over the last decade. Many of these have been employed in the public sector in government-run schools, but also in the burgeoning private education sector. However, the proportion of women teachers in schools remains greater than in colleges and universities, reflecting a bias against women receiving higher education in general, and against women receive more prestigious formal sector employment.

Table 4. Teachers in Educational Institutions by Kind, Level and Sex (thousands)

Year	Primary Schools		Middle Schools		Secondary Schools		Arts & Science Colleges		Professional Colleges		Universities	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
1993-4	322.0	109.6	80.4	39.9	178.8	56.9	21885	7945	6494	1381	5217	918
2002-3	433.5	191.7	236.3	145.8	285.3	133.6	27911	11024	9841	2107	6180	1375

Source: Federal Bureau of Statistics (2005a) *Pakistan Statistical Yearbook 2005*: 118-119.

While the health sector does admit women, it does so in lower status occupations, as lady health visitors, midwives and nurses. According to 2004 figures they numbered a total of 78,746. The number was in stark contrast to a total of 113,206 doctors counted in the same year. (Federal Bureau of Statistics 2005a: 225) This points to the serious problem in Pakistan of inadequate primary health staff to service communities and too many doctors seeking lucrative jobs in the urban areas. More women are required at all levels in the health care profession, while the imbalance between the primary and tertiary levels needs to be corrected at the same time. There is some recognition of this, with the government making an effort to expand its programme of Lady Health Workers offering primary health care at the village level, and the current figure stands at 92,000 nation-wide.⁴

The proportion of women in white-collar jobs in non-traditional areas, such as engineering, banking and law, has not increased significantly. According to the Labour Force Survey, for example, the total distribution of employed people in the finance, insurance, real estate and business services is only 1.06%, of which only

⁴ See the Ministry of Health, Government of Pakistan website at www.phc.gov.pk.

.01% is female. Women in manufacturing are 2.49% and community, social and personal services, are 2.67%, whereas their male counterparts in these sectors are over ten percent. (Statistics Division 2004: 132) While, the establishment of the First Women's Bank by the government in 1990 encouraged the entry of women into this sector, it nonetheless stands accused of not creating an enabling environment to encourage the participation of women in public life. It has done so first by not fulfilling its own quota of hiring women in public sector jobs and second by not creating a broad policy environment that fosters women's equal opportunity.⁵

2. The Significance of Women's Work

Research on women doing paid work in Pakistan reveals that they work out of economic need, face a hostile environment of limited employment options, unequal wages, bad work conditions, and a double burden of labour due to unremitting domestic responsibilities at home. This is true whether they perform agricultural wage labour in the rural areas or piece-rate work in the cities. Even those in the formal sector are not free from discrimination in the workplace and sexual harassment. Nonetheless they persist and their contribution to the economy has yet to be fully and correctly accounted for.

There are many factors, beyond the stresses of extreme poverty, that have been shown to influence the value system of a community and thus determine in part whether or not a woman will be able to engage in paid work. In a study comparing women's autonomy in Punjab, north and south India, Jejeebhoy and Sathar (2001: 708) have shown that region, more than religion, plays a more important role in determining the degree to which women can exercise autonomy. In a further elaboration of the same Punjab research, conducted in ten villages in 1996-7, Sathar and Kazi have shown that only paid agricultural work outside the household had the potential for increasing the autonomy of women. But those parts of the Punjab where women's labour force participation were the highest were also where their mobility was the lowest (Southern Punjab), and where other measures of autonomy such as mobility and decision-making were low as well, and women practiced *purdah* (segregation). The researchers' explanation for this was that findings on autonomy are sometimes contrary to expectation because gender systems at the village level need to be understood as part of the context for understanding women's opportunities.

A. Why Women Work

In some of the earliest, and still some of the only sociological micro-studies done on working women in Pakistan, Shaheed and Mumtaz (1981: 16-22) found in a survey of piece-rate home-based workers in Lahore that one of the major reasons for women in the age group 15-20, which represented the largest number of workers in the 300 households covered, to work was to amass a dowry. Other reasons included keeping girls busy and at home after they reached puberty, caused in part by negative attitudes to female education, and the compulsions of female-headed households to earn for their families.

⁵ See the *Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women: Pakistan*. August 1997. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan, and also see National Commission on the Status of Women, 2003, *Inquiry into the Status of Women in Public Sector Organizations*. Islamabad: Government of Pakistan.

An analysis of data from the Pakistan Integrated Household Survey 1998-99 suggests that women who are younger, poorly educated and from larger families enter the labor market not out of their own choice at all, but upon instruction from other household members. In contrast, the decision to work for women who are older, better educated, heads of households themselves, or from smaller and better off urban families, is theirs to make themselves. (Naqvi and Shahnaz 2002:15)

B. *Purdah* and the Significance of Home-Based Work

In one of the first studies to explore the relationship between the norms of *purdah*, or the practice of secluding women and wearing the veil outside the home, and women's work, Shaheed and Mumtaz (1981:75-7) found that home-based workers in Lahore said that it was a main reason for them to be working from their homes. Whereas in rural areas the practice or *purdah* in its more severe form, ie keeping women within their homes, is considered a luxury because it means that a man is able to hire paid male labour to replace unpaid female labour, in urban areas the practice is linked more closely with social prestige and male domination over women.

Before we elaborate on how *purdah* norms have been shown in later research studies to deepen the disadvantage faced by women in the workforce, it is interesting to examine the findings of one small study on the political economy of the household in Pakistan's Peshawar valley, where *purdah* norms are considered to be very harsh. The author finds from a survey of two villages that rich peasant women spend a higher proportion of their working time (ie unpaid work) on the household farm than do women of the other classes. This may be due to the increased demands of food preparation for hired-in labor and livestock maintenance, stricter enforcement of seclusion, increased entertainment of guests, unavailability of hired in female help. (Akram-Lodhi 1996:97) The author suggests that the conservatism of Pakhtun society may have an ideological foundation, "but it ultimately manifests itself in the ability to control female labor and the ability to control female access to resources through the practice of seclusion." (93) So the perpetuation of gender inequality in the Peshawar valley has both economic and ideological dimensions that are explored in more detail in the study. Conventional economic theory, argues the author, fails to take account of changes in total unwaged labor performed by women within the household. While rich peasant men will work less than men of any other class, it turns out that the rich peasant women are working more. (98)

The above analysis does enrich our understanding of why the greatest growth of women workers has been in the informal sector, and within that among home-based workers. That is, we already know from a body of existing research on women and development issues in Pakistan, about the "cultural norms that separate activities of men and women" (Kazi 1999:377) and the severe restrictions on female mobility (World Bank 1989, World Bank 2006). While Kazi (1999: 387) correctly explains that paid work outside the home has been considered socially undesirable, and that the large majority of economically active rural women work on their own farms (36-38 percent) as unrecognized members of the productive labor force, there could be one more element worth researching. That is, the political economy of *purdah* itself. If it is correct, and borne out through further research, that women's household work actually increases with income levels in certain contexts (possibly in those parts of the

country where *purdah* norms are most severe) then it appears even activists will have been treating it as a more benign institution than it really is.

What we are treating with some degree of deference, as part of traditions, cultural norms, and so on, that must be accommodated in government policies and programmes⁶, certainly has a political economy of its own that is well worth researching in its own right. It could be a pattern of segregation that keeps women inside the home in order to ensure that the political economy of the household remains intact so that women's unpaid work within the home continues to be exploited. At any rate there is much that remains to be discovered in Pakistan about the household and its manifold variations across caste and regions, and further about how unpaid labour is related to the paid work that is meant to empower women.

Although the subject of *purdah* has stimulated extensive research, in the context of women's work in Pakistan it has not been explored in much detail. The Lahore study mentioned above is unique in that, although dated, it does include findings on home-based working women's views of *purdah* norms. Almost half the women surveyed said they didn't mind whether their own daughters would work at home or outside, and 21% said they would actually prefer their daughters to work outside the home. The most outstanding reason for wanting to work outside the home was the better chances of higher pay. Most women said the practice of *purdah* was impractical and a hindrance to their work and independence. Even among those who did practice veiling in public, over half saw no reason to impose it on their own daughters. (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1981: 80-82)

In Weiss' (1992) study of women in Lahore's walled city, 67 percent of one hundred women surveyed either worked or say they would if they could. Women here also associated different levels of *purdah* with increased degrees of freedom. For them, removing the *burqa*, or full veiling from head to toe, in favor of the *chador*, and then a simple *dupatta* on the head, signified enormous and enviable changes in women's lives. Nonetheless, for women to leave their neighborhoods and work outside the home often brought unwanted challenges to the family's status and morality, and as a result working from the home was usually the best solution for many reasons. (161-2)

C. Values Associated with Women's Paid Work

There is scant research that explores men's views on women's paid work in Pakistan. An early example remains the 1981 study discussed above, in which women said men did not help them in the household with their paid work tasks, due to a "psychological block" against the fact that their wives or sisters were working. However they could assist in procuring work for women if they were motivated to do so. For working women the burden of their household responsibilities continued unabated. (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1981:44)

⁶ In its *Pakistan Country Gender Assessment 2005*, the World Bank (2006: 61) suggested that one possible way to overcome women's mobility constraints and fear of public spaces in rural communities that prevented their access to schools was to start community-based chaperone/escort services for them.

The World Values Survey covered a random sample from across rural and urban Punjab in 1995 and a nationwide sample in 2000.⁷ Among its questions investigating socio-cultural and political change were some relating to women's employment. When asked if a husband and wife should both contribute to income, in a tabulation of the results of both surveys together, more than half of men agreed (59.1 percent) with the statement, and even more women agreed (76.2 percent). When asked if men should have more right to a job than women, two-thirds of women agreed and 73 percent of men also agreed. Around ten percent of both men and women said they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Table 5. Husband and wife should both contribute to income (1995, 2000)

Total Base = 2733	Total	Male	Female
Agree strongly	29.7	25.8	33.8
Agree	37.7	33.3	42.4
Disagree	24.7	31.1	17.8
Strongly disagree	7.9	9.7	6.0
Total	2687 (100 %)	1390 (100 %)	1297 (100 %)

Source: World Values Survey.

In the 1995 WVS the question was asked if it was a problem if women have more income than husbands, and more than 65 percent of males respondents agreed that it was a problem (55.5 percent agreed strongly with the statement). Over 62 percent of women, on the other hand, disagreed with the statement (26.6 percent disagreed strongly). These findings may reflect a growing acceptance in recent years of the reality of increasing numbers of women entering the paid work force, mainly due to economic compulsions.

D. Factors That Determine What Kind of Work Women Do

Kazi explains that multiple constraints circumscribe women's work options in general:

- Exclusion from more remunerative non farm employment
- Social mores regarding suitability of particular occupations in eyes of family members and employers
- Work in non farm sectors further away and in nearby urban centres not acceptable, not compatible with domestic duties
- Gendered work patterns keep women in low-paying, low-status activities.
- Restricted job options and low returns inhibit parental motivation to invest in their education, particularly where resources are limited. (Kazi 1999: 387-88, 410)

In the **rural** areas, paid work is considered undesirable because it involves working outside the home and therefore only the poorest women engage in work as farm labourers, and agricultural labourers are amongst the lowest paid group in the rural sector. (Kazi 1999: 387) Poverty therefore is a major determinant that drives women into low-wage work.

⁷ See www.worldvaluessurvey.org. The 1995 sample size in Punjab, in which the rural sample half the size of the urban sample, was 733 (375 male and 358 female). The 2000 sample size covering the whole country was 2000.

As a related issue, women's unpaid agricultural work is not to be ignored. The Labour Force Survey 2003-4 noted that the ranks of "unpaid family helpers" among women, which include those who help on family farms, swelled six percent over the preceding year. It attributed this to the inability to draw women from the unorganized to the organized sector. (Mumtaz 2005: 36)

Education has been found to reduce rural women's labour force participation as well as their hours of work, possibly due to the association with greater wealth. Yet women from households that own land or livestock are more likely to be in the labour force than landless women, but the latter work the longest hours (as wage labourers) when they do find work. (Kazi 1999: 388-89)

In the **formal** sector based in the **urban** areas, so-called cultural norms explain the overwhelming concentration of women in the "respectable lines of teaching and medicine as well as the low social status of sales and secretarial jobs that involve contact with men at a personal level." (Kazi 1999: 391) They are also largely responsible for another overwhelming concentration of women workers in the informal sector in home-based income-earning activities.(409) There is also a presumption that *purdah* norms are enhanced, at least temporarily, due to rural-urban migration forcing women to remain indoors more in a strange city both as a way to enhance a family's status in a new environment and also to avoid contact with strange men outside their kinship group.

There is little work on the segmentation of the labour market as it affects women workers, especially the poorest. Available evidence shows that in Pakistan it is highly stratified according to caste and kinship structures as in other parts of the region. Recent studies on domestic workers and beggars in Sindh and Punjab, for example, revealed that these women workers were extremely poor and belonged to certain castes that were very low in the social hierarchy. As members of these castes their employment opportunities did not extend far beyond brick-kiln work, agricultural labor (as indebted wage labourers), sex work, domestic work in homes of landlords in villages, or domestic work in the cities. (Collective for Social Science Research 2004, 2004a) Government policies, and even community development projects, did not take into account how caste limited access of these groups to social services. These studies found that we know little about how caste and social hierarchy affects women's opportunities. In exploring how women's opportunities are limited we need to enrich our understanding of society beyond the institution of "*purdah*" and how it is implemented in various forms, and learn to see how caste and class operate in our context as well.

4. The Impact of Work for Income

There is scant research available to assess how paid work has changed women's lives, particularly in terms of how it has helped gender relations to become more equitable over the long-term. A clearer picture will emerge when researchers conduct inter-generational studies to compare how work has impacted both first-generation women workers and then their daughters as they enter the workforce. It should be possible to undertake such studies in Pakistan today and use these findings to improve the conditions of women in the growing informal sector, as well as to support them in their efforts to keep their children healthy and in school.

Existing studies have attempted to assess the impact of paid work using different indicators, although there is not a single concept agreed upon among researchers who themselves work in different disciplines. The linkages have been studied in relation to specific research areas, as discussed below.

A. Employment, Education and Health There is a body of research in Pakistan that has established significant linkages between women's "autonomy" and other indicators that are important for this discussion. Some of the most instructive insights have come from collaborative research between leading demographers and development economists. For example, we know that increased women's autonomy will have an inhibiting effect on female fertility and infant child mortality. (Kazi 1999)

In a 1987 study of 1,000 women in Karachi, the link between reduced female fertility and employment was been shown to be dependent on type of employment – particularly, whether or not it is in the formal sector. (Sathar and Kazi 1990: 66-69) When poor women seek employment, the study found, they often do so because they already have many children and need to supplement the family income. The effects of employment seem to outweigh those of education, giving women who have ever worked in the formal sector two-thirds the level of recent fertility of women who ever worked in the informal sector and those who never worked. Women working in the formal sector were also less likely than others to rely on traditional sources of support in their old age.

In fact, home-based workers, as opposed to informal sector workers outside the home, were shown in a 1987 study in Karachi, to have a better impact on child survival. Informal work outside the home is associated with high levels of fertility and less likelihood of child survival and child schooling, although it is clearly essential for survival in poor households. Data from the 1987 Karachi study showed child deaths were significantly higher for informal sectors workers employed outside the home even after controlling for income and education. This placed women working outside the home at a greater disadvantage in terms of child survival than home-based workers also from poor households. (Kazi 1999: 399)

A recent nation-wide study by the National Commission on the Status of Women of over 1,000 home-based women workers, rural and urban, in all four provinces of Pakistan, offers some of the most contemporary insights. Two-thirds of the women surveyed had initiated the start of their income-generating work themselves. 86% of them said that the impact of their work on their lives was positive (2% said it was not) and 84% said they had control over their income (16% said they did not). Despite low earnings and low market rates, 83% of women expressed satisfaction with their work conditions. (NCSW 2005:19-23)

Mothers who work in the formal sectors are more likely to send their children to school in urban Pakistan, while employment in the informal sector brings with it a lower probability of children being in school and greater likelihood of their dropping out compared to women in the formal sector and non-working women. The negative implications for child welfare of increasing numbers of women entering the informal sector are a cause for concern. (Kazi 1999: 399-400) If recent trends that report

Pakistan's increase in poverty, combined with an increase in women's labour force participation among poor women joining the informal sector are correct, then these negative implications for child welfare have only increased in the last decade. However, they may be somewhat off-set if most of these women workers are based at home. Further research is required to understand recent developments affecting household decision-making among informal sector women workers (both home-based and outside the home) in the urban sector regarding such as issues as child schooling, health and other family decisions.

B. Doubling of Work Burden Working women in Pakistan have much in common with their sisters in South Asia, as reported in *Human Development in South Asia 2000*. They mainly work out of need, have gender based wage disparities, low skills, little pay, and have the double burden of work along with domestic responsibilities of child care and household work. (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Center 2000: 64) In the early study on home-based workers in Lahore, Shaheed and Mumtaz (1981) found that women's work day had doubled. They spent an average of six hours per day on piece-work, and an additional 6-7 hours a day on housework. (53) Men also seemed to be reluctant to accept the fact that the women in the household worked, as this was mentioned by women as one of the problems they faced as workers. (97)

Khattak (2001:76-7) found that women in the urban manufacturing sector two decades later also faced a double burden of paid and household work, but that sizeable proportions (over half in the pharmaceuticals and food sectors) of women reported that household chores are not their primary responsibility. This did not mean that their work was automatically assumed by men, it was usually delegated to other women in the household and there was very little change with regard to women's traditional roles in the home. However, men are more likely to take some part in grocery shopping and children's education, but little beyond that.

There are implications for child welfare of this double burden. Daughters have been taken out of school to help poor working women cope, particularly as the nuclear family unit has become more common in urban centres. (Sathar and Kazi 1988) The implications of a double burden of work would be especially severe for female-headed households. However, the incidence of such households is underestimated, at less than five percent according to one survey, because women are less likely to be recorded by enumerators as household heads. Women-headed households are among the most impoverished. (Kazi 1999: 396)

In a more recent analysis of women industrial workers in Pakistan's export sectors, employed in the cities of Karachi, Faisalabad and Lahore by a mix of formal and informal establishments, findings were that market work may not necessarily increase the double burden. If other females were in the household they may assume responsibility for household work. (Siddiqui et al 2006a: 183)

C. Positive Socio-Psychological Impact

The same study, which was an extensive analysis of the effect of stabilization and structural adjustment programmes on women, found that the most important positive impact on women of market work was their rise in self-esteem and greater economic

security. This did not, however, mitigate other negative impacts, such as continued limited decision-making within the home by women, mental distress due to adverse living conditions, and increased violence against women that were identified in the study as additional outcomes of women's work under current conditions. (Siddiqui et al 2006a: 182-84)

Similar positive findings were identified in the home-based piece-rate workers 1981 Lahore study. (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1981: 56-9) It reported positive impacts on women from paid work such as new self-confidence gained from economic independence, such as the ability to meet their own needs and those of their family. Other positive impacts were that they said they had gained more say in family matters, and some said their husbands were more considerate to them and they were more respected within the family. Further, women said there was an improved atmosphere in the home due to being economically more relaxed.

The 1987 Karachi survey of 1,000 working women, mentioned earlier, concluded that employment opportunities do not necessarily enable women to gain status within the home or to change their reproductive behavior. But women employed in the formal sector, with prospects of salary raises and upward mobility, desire fewer children, have lower current fertility, and perceive themselves as more independent. "Thus, it appears that the prospects for change in women's status and fertility lie not in the expansion of income-generation schemes or in employment *per se* but in increased opportunities for women in jobs that are valued by society." (Sathar and Kazi 1990: 69) This suggests that the psychological impact of women's work has to be two-fold for it to be fully positive, ie there has to be a change within the woman and her perceptions about her self and her needs, and her work itself has to be of the kind that is valued by society.

In a review of women in the urban manufacturing sector,⁸ Khattak (2001:78-82) found that the majority of women said that all their decisions were given more importance now that they were working. Others said they could purchase whatever they wished, they were consulted regarding the construction of their house, marriage proposals. Some reported that they only had decision-making power pertaining to food. Khattak concludes that women in the paid work force have acquired confidence and assertiveness in taking decisions pertaining to the household. She also finds that there is no shift in gender ideology and it is maintained by both men and women. Most women would like to stop working once their families are financially stable. However a potential shift in gender relations in the long-term can be predicted in the importance given to education by the women interviewed. 86 percent said they gave equal important to girls and boy's education and over 85 percent of all respondents were sending their children to school.

Khattak concludes that work is simultaneously empowering and disempowering due to the conflicting findings mentioned above. Empowerment is being studied in the context of poverty, which undermines the beneficial impact of work on women's lives. For example, Khattak uses women's ability to accumulate savings as an

⁸ The total sample size was 630 divided across Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta, the major cities of Pakistan's four provinces. The sample was two-thirds from the informal sector (37% home-based, 31% small scale) and one-third formal sector. The sectors covered were garment, plastic, pharmaceutical and food. (Sami Khan 2001: 17)

indicator for empowerment, and finds that due to high levels of poverty, savings are spent on transport and utilities rather than luxury items for personal use. (79) Similarly, it is poverty that drives women into the work-force rather than the kind of autonomous decision-making process that researchers would prefer as an indicator of empowerment, although the outcomes may show that paid work has had a positive impact to a limited extent. If the work had been in the formal sector and poverty had not exerted such an overriding influence, one imagines, the positive impacts may have been greater.

D. Shift in Gender Relations

More than three quarters of the women interviewed in the study of working women in Lahore's walled city during the 1980s said that they would like to see their daughters work. This is true even though women held strong views on maintaining segregation norms, thus ruling out certain professions for women which were deemed unrespectable. The medical profession and teaching were considered most appropriate and were most appealing to women. (Weiss 1992: 82-84)

In her study of women in selected formal and informal urban manufacturing sectors Khattak (2001: 65) concludes that there is a lack of incentives to challenge the existing social order and that women's paid work has not resulted in a significant change in gender ideologies or gender roles. She does note that women workers are sending their children to school and do not appear to practice gender discrimination. Her findings are supported by Kazi (1999: 399) in her overview *Gender Inequalities and Development in Pakistan* when she writes that in urban Pakistan gender discrimination in sending children to school is lower for women working outside the home both in formal and the informal sector.

However, in the Siddiqui et al (2006) study on women in selected urban industries findings of the effect of market work on gender relations within the household were more mixed. The sample groups were low-income, and some women reported that they worked in order to earn for their dowries. However control over income within the household, and a woman's ability to buy and sell assets such as jewellery, rested with her mother-in-law, that is, with a female of a particular status only. The study notes that female autonomy is limited not only by gender difference, but age and hierarchy within a household as well. Paid work did impact female mobility, self-esteem and decision-making positively. However, findings also showed women's decision-making power was limited to household provision and children's education, and they seemed to agree with men that it should remain limited. (Siddiqui et al 2006: 13-15)

In their study on rural women in the Punjab, Sathar and Kazi found if agricultural work is unpaid and on the household farm it does not have the potential for increasing women's autonomy. But paid work outside of the house does potentially increase autonomy, while education is not necessarily a means to greater autonomy in the rural Punjabi context (Sathar and Kazi 2000:108). In central and southern Punjab, women have lower educational levels but greater opportunities for paid employment, and these are taken advantage of by the poorest women working in agriculture. Women of slightly higher socio-economic status will take up paid employment within the home

if these opportunities are available in their communities. Women's perception of economy autonomy was highest in those areas of rural Punjab, ie rain-fed areas and Southern Punjab, where the labour force participation of women was also the highest. This was despite the fact that other indicators of autonomy, such as mobility and access to resources were lower in these areas, but opportunities for case income and work on farms were more lucrative.(Sathar and Kazi 2000: 102-3)

It is sobering to realize that although there are changes underway among adolescent girls entering the workforce in rural areas, the first ever national survey of adolescents shows that young people still hold very stereotyped views of gender roles. The division of responsibilities within the home remains along the lines of stereotypical gender norms. (Sathar et al 2002:41) However, more research needs to be done to learn more about those adolescent girls ages 15-19 who are entering the paid work force, what they are doing, and how it is that they have overcome those mobility constraints that are meant to be virtually insurmountable due to "cultural restrictions" and leave their homes!⁹

Box 1. Gender Disparity Among Adolescents in Pakistan

- Females more likely to work inside home on domestic unpaid work.
- Females experience greater mobility restrictions.
- Females have less say than males in education and work decisions, while both sexes little say in marriage decisions.
- Fewer than half of all females ages 15-24 have ever enrolled in school. Those who do attend more likely to drop out earlier than males especially in lower socioeconomic stratum.
- Less than 40 percent of young women have entered workforce by age 24. Most young men eventually transition in paid labor force.
- Employment domains segregated by gender. Young women who do paid work more likely to work part-time than young men.
- Increasing gap between onset of puberty and time of marriage for females, but little substantive skills-enhancing activity filling this gap. Females still marry younger than males, and rural adolescent females more than twice as likely to be married before age 20 than her urban peers.
- Number of schools accessible to females at each level is less than number available to males; gap most pronounced in rural areas.

(Source: *Adolescents and Youth in Pakistan 2001-02: A Nationally Representative Survey*, pp xvii-xix)

While there are some positive indicators of change among our adolescent girls, including a higher age at marriage and some increase in access to education, it is not the rapid and dramatic improvement that is needed in order to substantially reduce gender disparities

Next, a closer examination of the impact of micro-credit seems timely, as questions have been raised about whether the structure of existing programmes perpetuate existing social stratifications and gender relations. (Mumtaz 2000) When the government has attempted through its outreach Rural Support Programmes to provide micro-credit to women in rural areas it has been critiqued for accommodating to *purdah* restrictions and requiring women to be accompanied by men to register for

⁹ See Lloyd and Grant, 2004, "Growing Up in Pakistan, the Separate Experiences of Males and Females," Working Paper No.188, New York, Population Council.

loans. Further, the problem of men receiving loans under women's names has also been noted. As the government itself observed in its assessment of its National Plan of Action after Beijing 1995, while micro-credit to the poor and women was identified as a powerful intervention to alleviate poverty and improve the status of women within a household, its impact has not yet been fully investigated. Further, it noted that education is also important in determining employment productivity and the income status of women, which in turn impacts women's status in the household and society as well. (Ministry of Women Development 2005: 9)

5. Policy Measures to Support Women's Work

The aim of this section will be to draw attention to those policy measures that have supported women's employment, ie enhanced their ability to work for pay and created an enabling environment for employment. In the years prior to those mentioned below, the government had seen women as beneficiaries of welfare projects, rather than as productive members of the economy, but despite the change on paper things were slower to move on the ground. The government was also accustomed to designing skill-training projects that enhanced women's domestic roles between the 1950-1970s (Kazi 1999: 405) until it began to be a bit more ambitious.

For the **Sixth Five-Year Plan (1983-87)** the government acknowledged that there were wide gender disparities in access to resources and it attempted for the first time to integrate women in the development process. By the **Seventh Five-Year Plan 1987-1992** it had gone a few steps further and designed special schemes to extend credit to rural women's cooperatives, yet these could not be implemented properly at the local level due to the inability of provincial departments to do more than run typical welfare-oriented women's projects in the form of special skills training programmes rather than the kinds required to extending loans to landless poor women. The Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan (ADBP) launched a programme in 1992 for the purpose of extending credit to poor farmers and rural women, but not enough loans were handed out.. Although the programme intended to establish a large number of women's cooperatives, it failed to meet that objective as well.(Kazi 1999: 403-5)

Much has been written about the **First Women's Bank Limited**, established in 1989 and still the only major financial institution established by the government to cater to the needs of women. The purpose of FWBL was to operate as a commercial bank and at the same have a development role to meet the special needs of women to encourage them to run trade, industry and other businesses. But when it suffered a large loss in 1996 the government decided to privatize the bank. The Women's Action Forum, representing the urban-based women's movement, filed a petition to in the Lahore High Court in November, 1997, to stop the privatization, arguing that the bank was a government initiative for the economic development of women, and as a such protected by the principles of policy in the Constitution. (Khan 1998: 22, 34) The matter was resolved only in 2001 when the government of current President Musharraf decided not to privatize the Bank and helped it to recover financially. Today it still has a strong micro-finance and small-medium enterprise funding profile, and it runs two training centres to help women entrepreneurs run their businesses

more effectively.¹⁰ This reflects increased understanding at the policy level that credit alone does not generate income, and that market incentives and infrastructure are needed to make profitable investments. FWBL is the only commercial bank that offers development finance as well as training to women. (Mahbub ul-Haq Human Development Centre 2000: 67)

In its report on progress on implementing the National Plan of Action after the Beijing Conference, the government begins with a chapter on women and poverty and discusses how it has taken measures to minimize the effect of structure reform policies on women. It outlines the social safety nets for women and increased access to credit facilities that it has provided. They include the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund and Rural Support Programmes. Both of these are government programmes funded through multilateral and bilateral international finance assistance. The Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan and Khushali Bank provide funding opportunities to rural women, with the latter having women as 31 percent of its own employees and 35 percent of its client. The government created the **National Fund for Advancement of Rural Women** in 2004-5 as a major step for the income-enhancement of rural women by helping them become self-employed through micro-credit, vocational training and employment opportunities. A Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Bank and First Micro Finance Bank in the private sector also operate under a new relaxed regulatory environment (Shaheed and Zaidi 2005: 7,18,44).

Expanding government employment opportunities for women became official policy when the government decided to introduce a five percent quota for service jobs in 1988. However that was never implemented, and upon recommendation by the Commission of Inquiry for Women as late as 1998 the federal government finally enforced compliance by all the provinces. Only Sindh province endorsed it, and in fact the North-West Frontier Province chose to reduce the quota to two percent, a matter taken up for protest by activists monitoring Pakistan's compliance with its commitments to the National Plan of Action formulated after the Fourth World Conference at Beijing in 1995. (Shaheed and Zaidi 2005: 27)

The National Commission on the Status of Women (see below) in its report on women in public service found that women make up only 5.4 percent of federal government employees, mostly in the social sectors. It also found that around half of women in the public sector face harassment, and that the main reason for the lack of women in higher status occupations is the lack of a conducive, safe work environment. It recommended the government implement properly its own five percent quota for women in all ministries. It further recommended the government reserve 33 percent of jobs in the public sector for women. Not only was this ignored, but the five percent reservation was abolished in 2004 with the argument that the reservation constituted gender discrimination and violated the Constitution. (Khan 2004) In July 2006 there was a partial reversal when the Prime Minister announced that cabinet had just approved a ten percent job quota for women in civil services in order to provide more job opportunities to educated women and increase their participation in policy-making. (*Dawn* August 1, 2006) Civil society women's organization support the NCSW demands for increased women's employment in the

¹⁰ More details can be found at the First Women Bank website: www.fwbl.com.pk.

public sector, and in fact also demand that the NCSW be empowered to enforce its own recommendations. (Shaheed and Zaidi 2005:4)

The government launched a **Village-Based Family Planning Workers** scheme on a national level in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1993-98) and continued it subsequently in the form of a **Lady Health Workers** programme to provide a combination of health and family planning services in rural and poor urban areas. Currently there are 92,000 such LHWs in place¹¹. Although the government's intention on both schemes was to extend the outreach to meet its intended health and family planning outcomes, it was also perhaps unintentionally easing the structural and institutional barriers that constrain women's earning opportunities in the rural areas. As Kazi (1999: 410) pointed out, these are powerful levers to weaken the influence of cultural norms and create economic incentives at the household level to invest in women, ie create an interest in their secondary education because there are jobs available for educated women at the village level even in low-income settings. There is a strong preference for educated and earning women in the job market. The success of the LHW programme in helping women to overcome constraints to accessing health services and encouraging them to meet the educational requirements for employment in turn demonstrates how the government can play an important role in creating opportunities for social change when it is motivated to do so.

United Nations Platforms and Conventions have had a positive influence both directly on labour issues in Pakistan and more broadly on pushing for positive policy and development initiatives for women during an era when women were bearing the brunt of a discriminatory political and cultural environment.

- In 1994 Pakistan played a positive role at the International Conference on Population and Development, with the participation of then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who was viewed as a moderate Muslim leader who could mediate between extreme states such as Iran and the Vatican and other countries on contentious issues pertaining to reproductive health. Pakistan signed the Platform of Action that emphasized the link between population issues and poverty.
- 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing, followed by National Plan of Action for Women in 1998, also attended by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, motivated the government to signed CEDAW the following year.
- 1996 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) signed and ratified, with just one reservation.
- The United Nations Millennium Development Declaration, ratified in 2002, links poverty to health, education and women's rights, and commits Pakistan to specific targets in order to achieve its goals of cutting poverty in half by 2015. The Millennium Development Goal that is specifically dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women is the only one in which the Government of Pakistan has mentioned women's employment, in terms of an indicator of the share of women in wage employment in the non-agriculture sector. That is, if women's share of wage employment were to increase, then it would indicate greater gender equality in the economic sphere. Women's organizations and representatives from civil society have suggested that the government include additional indicators, such as ownership and control over

¹¹ See website at Ministry of Health, Government of Pakistan: www.phc.gov.pk.

resources, and national data to monitor the proportion of these assets controlled by women. (Shirkat Gah 2005: 6-7, 11)

The Commission of Inquiry for Women, the third of its kind¹², was constituted in 1994 and released its report under the chairmanship of a retired Supreme Court justice. Its recommendations were based on women's fundamental rights as guaranteed under the Constitution, as well as recognition of women's rights as human rights. It noted that Pakistan had subscribed to the Vienna Declaration in 1993 that recognized women's rights as human rights, and other UN conferences that followed. It further stated that Islam recognizes women's individual rights and status and also that Pakistan cannot divorce itself from international norms.¹³ This statement was significant because the use of Islam to generate legislation discriminatory to women had become fundamental to the debate on gender issues in the country.

The Commission's 1997 Report has been an influential document for researchers, government and donors, used as a standard-bearer for policy direction in future years. The Report recommends that Parliament should mandate affirmative action to give women a fair chance to participate in all facets of national socio-political and economic life. It also states that in draft legislation, laws that claim to protect women and actually deprive them of opportunities should be struck down. It states that women should be free from discrimination regardless of which industry they work in as well as what type of employer they work for. Labour laws should extend to the agriculture and inform sectors. The bar on trade union activities in certain places, such as export processing zones and the Ministry of Defence establishments, should be lifted. Loopholes in existing labour laws that allow employers to short-change contract labourers should be addressed, and the world of labour laws must become gender neutral. The laws should ensure equal protection to all workers without reliance on sex as a classification. (Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997: 46-8).

It is important to note that this key document places women's employment issues within the chapter entitled "Development Rights", stating that improvement in women's economic status is vital to their overall empowerment. In that context it states that policies need to acknowledge the role women are already playing in economic production. Further, women need to have their inheritance and property rights recognized and facilitated, and a host of judicial and other issues pertaining to their financial status sorted out by the state. (Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997: 98-99)

On the recommendation of the Commission, a **National Commission on the Status of Women** was established in September, 2000, although it only has powers to make recommendations on policy to the government. Nevertheless it has important symbolic stature, and has taken positions on major national issues. The NCSW has

¹² There was a 1975 Pakistan Women's Rights Committee established by the government in response to the UN declaration of the Decade for the Development of Women, which recommended legal and structural reforms to improve women's status in its report in 1976. General Zia ul-Haq established the Pakistan Commission on the Status of Women to identify women's needs in a wide range of sectors, but its report was suppressed when it was ready in 1985 and only released by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1989. That same year the Women's Division became a full-fledged Ministry, the First Women's Bank was created, and the minimum five percent quota for women's employment in government services was established. (Khan 1998: 49-50)

¹³ Commission of Inquiry for Women 1997: xi.

taken a stand that discriminatory legislation, particularly the well-known 1979 Hudood Ordinances that make sex outside of marriage a crime and for which many women have been liable to severe punishment under Islamic law, be repealed. Currently, the government is engaged in an effort to pass legislation to amend the Hudood Ordinances. The NCSW has conducted in-depth and serious research on women in public sector employment, home-based women workers, drug addiction among workers, domestic violence, honour killings, Islamic legislation affecting women, and is also helping the government to develop a policy against sexual harassment in the workplace.¹⁴

Another landmark was the development of the first-ever **National Policy for Development and Empowerment of Women in 2002** that also grew out of the Beijing process that produced the National Plan of Action after Beijing. But policies aside, women working in development and research argue that implementation and follow-through of ambitious agendas still remain the weak link in a government that still has to prove its credentials when it comes to women's "empowerment".

In a follow-up document reviewing the Beijing process by women representatives from civil society organizations, selected recommendations for the women and economy sector that have not already been mentioned above are:

- Social security and old-age benefits (for both formal and informal sector)
- Laws against sexual harassment
- Translation of international conventions and agreements into domestic laws and policies
- Ratify ILO's home-based workers rights
- Uniform wage structures within formal/informal sectors
- Establishment of export trade houses and display centres for women-led/owned medium and small enterprises.
- Non-traditional skill training for women in vocational centres.

(Shaheed and Zaidi 2005:19-20)

6. Influence of Broader Context

A. Politics and Legislation in Pakistan

Researchers are well aware of the effect that political and legislative environment has on the status of women in Pakistan. Shaheed and Mumtaz (1990: 66) argued that when there was a legislative environment in favor of women in Pakistan they experienced greatest progress in other indicators. For example, the 1960-65 period under Ayub Khan's rule was marked by the Muslim Family Laws Ordinances 1961 that remain to date the most progressive laws for women, and 1970-76 that are also distinct for the fact that there were no deliberately discriminatory laws passed against women, and most of the indicators of female status stagnated or declined during 1975-85 when General Zia began his process of Islamization and the start of discriminatory laws against women.

The relationship between women's work and the political environment, and women's work and the sexual politics of Pakistani society is also very close. As the policy

¹⁴ For more information see the NCSW website www.ncsw.gov.pk

environment deteriorated during the 1980s and women were discouraged from participated in the public sphere there was a lack of political commitment behind the Five Year Plans discussed above to implement the changes required to mainstream women within the development process and certainly recognize their economic productivity. The issues discussed earlier in this paper regarding *purdah*, have possibly gained in stature in policy-making circles over the last decades politically due to the ideologies of the government. While politically the government has been promoting segregation, particularly under General Zia ul-Haq, it is understandable that it would defer to culture and traditions regarding *purdah* as an explanation for women's inability to take greater part in employment outside the home and access social sector services or have greater political participation. And the sexual violence that has been the darker side of social norms, the threat that has helped to keep women obedient and indoors, has also grown in visibility as this political culture has taken over society.

B. Economic Policy Reforms

In Siddiqui et al's (2006: 3-4) study on women workers and the effects of stabilization and structural adjustment programmes in Pakistan, general findings include the following:

- The country has experienced a slower growth rate of output, declining employment and a rise in poverty.
- Expansion of female employment in manufacturing is taking place outside regular factory workforce and mainly in the form of temporary and contract workers. This reflects the low absorptive capacity of large scale industrial sector, and also indicates a deliberate policy by employers to exploit females as cheaper and more pliable form of labour.
- Female workers are concentrated in a few occupations and industrial groups, which depresses their wages. They have low skills and less mobility, hence they have not increased their participation in the modern highly productive sector of the economy.

Exports from Pakistan are concentrated in a few products like textiles, readymade garments, leather goods, carpets and rugs. Additions include sports goods, chemicals and drugs. Gender patterns of employment in manufacturing industries for period 1987 and 1992 are the latest available figures; they show that there were changes in employment structures in manufacturing, with percentages of women permanent employees in textiles dropping from 45.8 percent to 32.4 percent from 1987-1992, and their share in the chemicals industry increasing slightly from 41 to almost 48 percent. Possible reasons were a post-liberalization demand for a higher skilled workforce in a few sectors, and a rise in informal employment activity in the post adjustment period. This is particularly important because another study found that out of total female workers in the manufacturing sectors over half were employed as temporary, casual and seasonal workers in 1989, and only 1.8 percent were permanent workers. (Siddiqui et al 2006: 5)

Earlier studies confirm that macro-economic policies in the region have created new opportunities in the form of a greater demand for cheap labour and rising demand in the export market. More women, and younger women are coming in the

manufacturing jobs, although women bring their own issues (greater absenteeism, need for maternity/childcare benefits) and advantages (less tendency to unionise, more likely to segregate, work for less). (Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre 2000: 61) In the agricultural sector the growing mechanization of labor has replaced women from traditional jobs because in the gender hierarchy it is men who operate machinery while women move to lower status jobs. (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1990: 62)

Pakistan's textile and clothing sector is Pakistan's leading industrial and export sector. Cotton pickers are predominantly women and girls, an estimated 700,000 who are employed on 1.6 million cotton-growing farms during the picking season between September and December, according to recent research conducted by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute.¹⁵ Under a World Trade Organisation agreement in January 2005 the quota system that had constrained exports was abolished and as a result the prices of textile and clothing products dropped due to the harsher competition among producers. Preliminary research suggests that female cotton pickers do not enjoy higher wages, despite the fact that price levels of exports have climbed between 2004-2005. Further, they remain exposed to the increased use of pesticides, in part because pesticide prices dropped due to import liberalization in 1995, and lack protective gear in the fields. Finally, there is an obvious absence of bargaining power between the workers and their employers and they are unable to negotiate better working conditions and wages, and to avoid sexual harassment.

Research has shown that the factors that have worked towards the expansion of informal activities in Pakistan, by the late 1990s, affected women on the whole more severely than men. Women joined the work force out of economic need, to supplement their family income. Kazi explains that women find it more difficult to enter the formal sector. Keeping women out of the regular work force and avoiding the restrictions on wages, working conditions is part of the strategy in formal firms to lower costs and maintain flexibility in the size of their labour force. The informal sector has become essential to the economic survival of women, especially poor women. (Kazi 1999: 394)

Yet as early as 1981 Shaheed and Mumtaz made key observations about women piece-rate workers in Lahore. Their observations were made before the policies of economic liberalization had added to the plight of women workers in the informal sector and the effects of agricultural mechanization and other policy changes had transformed the landscape in the rural sector. They noted that women were working out of economic necessity and the conditions under which they were allowed to work put them in a position of disadvantage. They were isolated in separate households, enjoyed little mobility, were unaware of market rates for similar work, had few skills and were paid little. (Shaheed and Mumtaz 1981: 96)

This continued into the new millennium, despite well-articulated findings that warned of its consequences. Sayeed and Khattak (2001: 20) wrote of "the distress sale of women's labour" caused by privatization, downsizing and the increase of poverty in Pakistan. To this date the informal sector, and home-based workers who form an undetermined proportion of working women in this sector, do not benefit from laws

¹⁵ The information in this discussion of cotton pickers is based on Siegmann (2006)

and the regulation required to protect their interests. Recommendations to this effect from the NWSC are welcome but the government is not required to act upon them.¹⁶

In Siddiqui et al's study (2006) of the gender impact of adjustment policies on women in Pakistan, male and female workers in formal and informal industrial units producing major exportable goods (textiles and garments, sports goods, surgical goods, and fisheries) were interviewed. Women working in the garment and sports good industries surveyed were concentrated in stitching and related jobs, while those in surgical and fishing industries were also employed in the lowest paying jobs. They worked longer hours and more days, and were not permanent workers, a fact that had negative impact on their earnings. (Siddiqui 2006: 12)

Some salient conclusions were drawn about the impact of these policies over the last fifteen years. These include:

- Despite the rise in female labour force participation it has not resulted in higher employment opportunities, rather more job opportunities for women are needed and an increase in government expenditure on social sectors.
- The female unemployment rate has increased at a sharper rate than for males. Women workers are concentrate in agriculture, services (mainly domestic) and small-scale manufacturing, while their main occupational categories are limited to farming, production and community services. Female work days are more and hours are longer than males. As most are not permanent workers, they are not eligible for fringe benefits.
- Women need improved literacy, property rights and inheritance laws, access to credit market, and occupation and industrial choices.
- Violence against women increased during the 1990s and is linked to increased economic hardships and domestic and community pressures. Legislative support and open access to job opportunities is urgently needed. (Siddiqui et al 2006a: 178-182)

C. Women's Employment Organizations and Trade Unions

There are over seven thousand trade registered trade unions in Pakistan. Total male membership of reporting unions is around 245,400 and female membership no more than 2,134 in 2002. In 1998, however, female membership was triple the amount and male membership was almost 300,000. The larger registered unions with membership ranging from ten to sixty-seven thousand were to be found in the textiles/hosiery, engineering/metal, mining, tobacco, docks/ports, municipalities, food, banks and chemicals/dyes industries. But by 2002 their numbers had dwindled and among registered trade unions, membership above ten thousand was limited to only these industries: textile/hosiery, post/telecommunications, chemicals/dyes (Federal Bureau of Statistics 2005a: 255-6)

There are currently trade unions in major government organizations, such as the airlines, railways, post office, education institutions, hospitals, water and power development authority, and more. They all employ women, numbering in the

¹⁶ In its recent study on home-based workers the NWSC has suggested that home-based workers be encouraged to register as part of an association so as to enable them to be recognized as employees and enjoy workers' rights. (National Commission on the Status of Women and Pakistan Manpower Institute 2005: 6)

thousands, yet women do not have significant membership or decision-making power in these unions. At a recent meeting with the government, civil society and labour stake-holders, one of the major recommendations was that if there was an enhanced number of women workers in industry it would ultimately lead to an increased number of women in trade unions, and to that end there should be a specific quota for women in each industry as well as in the trade unions. Another recommendation was made that trade unions should have a specific clause in their constitutions to allow women key leadership positions, and that trade unions should provide an independent section for women to discuss their issues. (Ministry of Labour et al 2005: 26-7)

However, over 8,000 trade unions (presumably including unregistered ones as well) in Pakistan represent only 2% of the workforce, according to the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, a leftist organization that is trying to revive the dwindling trade unions in the country. Student unions are currently banned in colleges and universities. In July 2006 a ban on teachers unions in Sindh province was announced, prompting an on-going series of demonstrations and protests that has disrupted government-run schools and colleges in the provinces. Teachers are protesting against the proposed privatization of government educational institutions, partly because it is believed the intentions of the government are to sell off state-owned land for a high profit, and they continue to demand the right to unionize. The Sindh High Court has accepted a petition challenging the government's ban.¹⁷

In July 2006 the government announced an increase in work hours to a twelve hour day and longer over time, allowing employers to make female workers for the first time to remain at work in factories until ten at night and work in two shifts. It has also legalized contract work. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and nine major unions protested that this measure violated ILO Conventions and the laws of the land, and benefited only large multinationals and industrialists. Whereas female workers were once banned from working at night, now they would work as contract labour and also lose legal compensation for overtime work, along with other benefits.¹⁸ This new law may indeed have affected many workers, 52 million according to the HRCP statement, but the trade unions are not empowered enough to protest effectively against it.

The NCSW survey of home-based workers in Pakistan finds that although the majority of women say they are satisfied with their work conditions, leading causes for dissatisfaction are related to low earnings and low rates in the market. When asked what kind of legal cover they would like to have to improve their work conditions, 30% voted for home-based workers' unions (40% voted for a loan facility) and 65% said they would be willing to make contributions for their benefit to a social security organization. (NCSW 2005:46) At the beginning of 2005 HomeNet South Asia was launched in Pakistan to start such a process for home-based women workers.

D. Migration

There are a host of complex international and internal migration issues to be faced within Pakistan, and inadequate research to inform debate and policy.¹⁹ There is only

¹⁷ See Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign (18 August 2006) and Ali Khan (September 2, 2006).

¹⁸ See their press statement, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and PILER (June 27, 2006).

¹⁹ For a comprehensive overview see Gazdar (2003).

preliminary data and research on the impact of migration on women's work in Pakistan. Rural to urban migration is an established phenomenon, and growing numbers of women are joining in the flow of labour to the cities. The Labour Force Survey, which defines a migrant as one who has moved from one administrative district to another, puts the total migrant population at 14.7% in 2003-2004. The rural figure for females is 3.6% and the urban figure is 4.31%. All these figures are slightly higher than the corresponding figures for males. (Statistics Division 2004: 121) Reasons for this may include the fact that women move residence upon marriage.

We do know, however, that women migrate to the cities in search of work, and there is an increasing number of poverty-driven migrants from rural Punjab working in Karachi for this reason. Women working in the informal sector, particularly in domestic service, remain invisible and uncounted, and further research is required to understand their labour arrangements. Some preliminary studies exist that point to the high risk faced by such women workers, such as domestic servants and sex workers, who lack physical and legal protection. (Collective for Social Science Research 2004)

The analysis of structural adjustment policies and their effects on women workers mentioned above found that in the three cities surveyed (Faisalabad, Sialkot and Karachi) where export-oriented manufacturing takes place, the majority of workers (male and female) were long-term residents of those cities. Karachi had the most migrant women workers (40%) among those surveyed. (Siddiqui et al 2006a: 47)

Pakistani women are not known to emigrate in large numbers outside of the country in search of job opportunities, at least not to the extent that it has been noted by the media or researchers to date. Trafficking in women for illegal sex work does take place in South Asia and cities such as Karachi and Quetta are transit points to the Gulf and western countries for the trade. There have been local efforts to draw attention to the problem and to advocate for the rights of women who are caught and jailed in Pakistan for prostitution.²⁰ The regional association SAARC adopted a *Convention on Prevention and Combating Trafficking of Women and Children for Prostitution* in early 2002 after engaging in some dialogue with feminist and human rights groups from Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan.

There are an estimated 200,000 undocumented Bangladeshi women in Pakistan, and some human rights organizations argue that the majority of them have been trafficked into the country for the slave trade and prostitution. They include ethnic Bengali and a smaller proportion of ethnic Burmese women. (Gazdar 2003: 25) Anecdotal evidence and newspaper accounts shows that they also engage in domestic service and other informal sector occupations, suggesting that there may be a deeper story of economic compulsion to explore through further research into their migration experience.

Out of a population of three and a half million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, 1.49 million are female. They earn their living primarily through daily wages, although almost twenty percent say they are self-employed. (SAFFRON et al 2005: 4-8) Preliminary research shows that many Afghan migrants are uncounted through formal census mechanisms and work in major cities such as Karachi. Further, their

²⁰ A well-known NGO in Karachi engaged in such advocacy is led by Zia Awan, called Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid.

communities are self-contained and they provide labour and services for each other.²¹ Within this, the extent to which women work as piece-rate or home-based workers remains to be explored further, however their contribution to household income must not be ruled out.

7. Exploring Work and Empowerment

It is in this context, a combination of broadly bleak and occasionally exciting research findings, that the research, policy-making and development community in Pakistan continues to evolve its understanding of women's empowerment. The measurable components of this concept, or at least those aspects of empowerment that have been influential at the policy-making level, are in part identified below. The table is by no means exhaustive, but represents how many indicators can be used to measure what remains an elusive phenomenon.

Concept being measured	Indicators	Study or Policy Document
Autonomy "It is a first step in operationalising terms such as the empowerment of women." [reference to ICPD 1994 and FWCW 1995] (Sathar and Kazi 2000: 90)	Domestic decision-making, financial decision-making (includes women's work outside the home), access to household resources, type of mobility, fear of domestic abuse, communication with husband.	<i>Female Autonomy in Rural Punjab</i> (Sathar and Kazi 1997)
Empowerment	Based on parameters established at FWCW Beijing 1995. Indicators are improvement in 12 critical areas: poverty, education/training, health, violence, armed conflict, economy, power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, human rights, media, environment, and girl-child.	National Plan of Action , based on FWCW Beijing 1995 Government of Pakistan
Equality between the sexes Adherence to Human Rights	Based on the principles of equal rights, justice, freedom from discrimination between the sexes and full equality between the sexes.	Pakistan signed and ratified CEDAW in 1996.
Empowerment	Changes in sexual division of reproductive labour, degree of assertiveness, self-confidence among women in terms of mobility, household decisions, self-confidence in public realm; changing value systems.	<i>Women's Work and Empowerment Issues in an Era of Economic Liberalisation: A Case Study of Pakistan's Urban Manufacturing Sector</i> (Sayeed and Khattak 2001)
Empowerment	All of the above, including domestic violence, mental health, honour killings, details about mobility, assets and property owned, and political participation.	<i>Gender and Empowerment: Evidence from Pakistan.</i> (Siddiqui et al 2006a)

The research that has been discussed in this paper covers many decades, often small sample sizes and incomparable sample sites, but is important because it represents an evolving effort to develop a language for women's development research in Pakistan. The research is multi-disciplinary, and even the study of women's employment has engaged demographers, economists, political scientists, and others over the years, and still not produced enough work for us to conclude very much at all. Researchers do seem in agreement, however, that women's work ought to lead to some sort of measurable improvement in gender relations, ie decrease in gender oppression,

²¹ See The Collective Team (2006)

whether it is explicitly termed “empowerment” or not. International conventions such as CEDAW have helped to define the human rights aspect of this concept, while field research in Pakistan has developed the indicators listed in the table above.

In order for this research to develop further, however, it will likely be necessary for the field to take some clear directions beyond what is required by the parameters of the development community. That is, a political critique of women’s employment issues is absent from the current literature and is sorely missed. Further, Pakistan lacks a strong community of feminist economists and researchers in other disciplines who can apply explicit feminist analyses to the subject at hand. Their critiques would leave the [insert adjective that describes the current language and practices of empowerment] language of empowerment used in development programmes behind in the corridors of diplomacy and allow more practitioners and researchers to venture out in search of creative solutions.

7. Concluding Comments

This preliminary analytical review of research on women and employment has shown that there is scope for innovative research and policy work in Pakistan despite the overwhelming setbacks in recent years.

Much of the analysis of women’s employment has focused on the possibility of paid work improving (or even burdening) the position of individual women workers in their respective families. While this focus on the individual woman or family is important and understandable, there are wider issues at stake with respect to empowerment that come up in the conceptual and empirical literature only peripherally. It is important to inquire about the impact of greater numbers of women outside the home, for example, on the construction of the very cultural and social norms that govern the gendered segregation of public spaces. Research on female mobility has already shown how the division of space has been contested and renegotiated over time, and also how the state plays a role in creating women’s access to public spaces. The case of women’s political participation is particularly relevant for this story. There are also accounts of the impact of women’s employment in professions such as teaching and health services on prior social norms even in remote areas in which the state has had a positive role to play, as we have seen in the case of Lady Health Workers.

This leads us to the possibility of re-thinking our emphasis on *pardah* and cultural norms in our analysis of why women have such limited access to public spaces, such as work opportunities, schools, health centers, and so on, in Pakistan, and also why policies and interventions are often so unsuccessful. We need to examine the political economy of unpaid work, as researchers, and on the policy level accommodate ourselves less to cultural constraints as an excuse for why policies and programmes fail to deliver. The donor community, government, as well as researchers, have taken refuge in the same “cultural” shelter, when perhaps its deconstruction is more appropriate.

It may be possible for us to have more room to manoeuvre and negotiate protection from the pitfalls of macro-economic policies if we can both study and intervene

directly in those households, in the informal sector, where most poor women are now entering the paid workforce without protections, bargaining skills, and benefits. Actually the double burden of *pardah* and household work has become an invisible triple burden of *pardah*, household work and paid work, and we have an opportunity to de-mystify it with the knowledge we are gaining about women and the work they do.

We know too little about our young population; but we do know for sure that their demands for better education and jobs exceed their opportunities and that they are the most important cohort in the country's population. We also know that little has been done by the state to reduce the gender inequalities faced by the next generation. There is much scope for further research around the country to explore how increased levels of women's employment in the current adult population has impacted the female youth, their expectations, and their opportunities for paid work. Are we on the verge of impending social transformation without recognizing the signs?

Pakistan is undergoing many of the economic and social changes experienced by its neighbors in the region. Unfortunately it does not benefit from as much research to interpret what is happening. While we do have some basic information about women and paid work, and where changes are taking place, much work of our own is left before we can claim knowledge about the field.

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