Women's Career Challenges in Hazara Division: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

This research investigates the socio-cultural factors influencing the career choices of women in the Hazara Division, with a specific focus on the challenges faced by female teachers in the region. Using a qualitative methodology, the study involved in-depth interviews with 24 female teachers from three government colleges in Haripur. Grounded theory was employed to identify emerging patterns in the data. The study population consisted of all female teachers in six girls' colleges in Haripur, totaling 220 teachers. Convenience sampling was used to select three government colleges for data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and confidentiality was ensured. The analysis involved coding, identifying patterns, and organizing data into related groupings. The study revealed significant challenges in female career choices, including the low priority given to female education within families, limited availability of professional colleges, and societal conservatism. Findings indicated a cultural belief in restricting women's roles to homemaking, which hinders their career progression. Additionally, mobility restrictions, family obligations, and societal expectations shape career choices towards academia, particularly teaching.

Key Words: Challenges, Female Teachers, Hazara Division, Qualitative Methodology

Introduction

The socio-cultural landscape of the Hazara Division in Pakistan presents unique challenges and opportunities for women, particularly in the realm of career choices. This research investigates the socio-cultural factors influencing the career decisions of women in this region, with a specific focus on the challenges faced by female teachers. Despite the increasing participation of women in various professional fields across the country, the Hazara Division remains a region where traditional norms and values significantly impact women's career trajectories.

This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural factors influencing the career choices of women in the Hazara Division, with a focus on female teachers. By shedding light on the challenges they face, the study advocates for greater support and equitable opportunities for women in this region, aiming to foster an environment where women can pursue their professional aspirations without undue socio-cultural constraints.

Literature Review

In developing nations, male members exert substantial influence over societal dynamics, relegating women to domestic roles as wives and mothers. This gendered division hinders half the population's participation in developmental processes. The prevailing societal belief in male superiority contributes to the inferior treatment of women from birth. Pakistani culture, emphasizing men's roles outside the home, discourages female education and steers women toward household responsibilities. Educational preferences align with gender norms, prioritizing boys' education under the assumption that they are more deserving of educational skills to compete in the public sphere. Conversely, girls are directed toward domestic skills for their perceived future roles as mothers and wives (Murtaza, 2013).

This bias is reflected in Pakistan's low rankings in the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM), highlighting gender inequality in education. The UNDP's 2010 report positioned Pakistan at 120 out of 146 countries in GDI and 92 out of 94 countries in GEM. This educational gender disparity is measured through gross and net enrollment rates, completion rates, and dropout rates. While Pakistan aspires to achieve Millennium Development Goals, gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in its education system (UNDP, 2010).

This entrenched gender division denies women the freedom to make independent career choices in a male-dominated society. Hindered from progressing in education, women face limited emphasis on the importance of their education, contributing to Pakistan's classification as a "low human development" country with a female literacy rate of thirty percent. Numerous obstacles, rooted in societal beliefs of male superiority, impede women's advancement to senior positions (Nzomo, 1995; Kirai and Kobia, 2012).

International research indicates that career choices for women in developing countries are influenced by familial, societal, gender-based, and cultural norms. Factors such as family, society, and cultural constraints discourage women from pursuing diverse careers, including roles in the military, intelligence, and police. While studies have explored these issues at the national level in Pakistan, there is a notable gap in research specific to the Hazara division. This study seeks to address this gap, examining factors influencing women's career choices, particularly in teaching, within the Hazara division, with the anticipation that it will contribute valuable insights to understanding the obstacles women face in their career decisions.

Challenges Faced by Women in Workforce Entry

Women face numerous barriers when entering the workforce. These include sex-typing of professions, gender bias, insufficient job-related expertise, limited educational backgrounds, lack of transportation, and child care responsibilities. Despite these challenges, studies have shown that in recent years, women have demonstrated greater ambition and aspirations than men. Historically, gender disparities limited women's career ambitions and confined them to a narrow range of job categories (Francis, 2002; Mendez & Crawford, 2002). In traditional societies, working women were not given the same status and honor as their non-working counterparts. Instead, they were often viewed as dishonest, objects of shame, inattentive mothers, and uncaring wives. Additionally, these women were not taken seriously by their superiors, colleagues, or society at large. Their domestic responsibilities were significant obstacles to their career aspirations. Women were expected to fulfill their roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers. Traits such as humility and obedience were highly valued, and prioritizing career interests often led to feelings of guilt or selfishness (Nieva & Gutek, 1981; Heins et al., 1982).

Influence of Families' Socio-Cultural and Educational Background

Families' socio-cultural and educational backgrounds play a crucial role in their children's career development. Gender role socialization within the family and educational institutions significantly influences career choices. Children whose parents highly value education and have high expectations are more likely to aspire to high-status professions (Knowles, 1998; Taylor et al., 2004). Parents, as influential environmental factors, often wish their children to pursue professions in which they themselves have failed (Ohiwerei & Nwosu, 2009). Similarly, Onayase & Onayase (2009) found that most young people opt for prestigious careers like medicine, law, and engineering rather than professions that match their personalities. Family background is critical in career selection, as it is the first forum where individuals interact with their social environment and form their initial predispositions, motivations, and ambitions. Children often develop similar aspirations as their parents due to shared environments, learning experiences, and vocations. Parental support for academic endeavors is more strongly associated with career choices than their current socioeconomic status or intelligence level. Family structure significantly impacts cognitive abilities, professional integration, and long-term economic security. Social disparities are more influenced by an individual's familial background

(parental profession) than by their own educational achievements (Kassimati & Moustaka, 1984). In traditional societies, parents often encourage the academic and professional ambitions of their sons more than their daughters, reinforcing gender differences in career aspirations early in childhood (Heins, et al., 1982). Studies show a positive correlation between families' socioeconomic conditions and their daughters' aspirations. Socioeconomic conditions affect career information, professional experience, and occupational stereotypes. Girls from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to pursue professional careers, while women from low-income families often have aspirations limited to the experiences of their relatives and peers (Brown & Barbosa, 2001). Despite the steady rise in women's career aspirations during the twentieth century, particularly after World War II, research indicates that girls continue to work in low-paying, traditionally female-oriented jobs (Watson, et al., 2002).

Influence of Colleagues on Career Choices

Some studies have shown that teachers have a more significant influence on the career choices of female students compared to male students. As teachers interact with their students, they guide them towards certain careers, similar to the role of family. Teachers often discuss and counsel their students about future career paths (Farmer, 2001). Similarly, supportive friends and peers play a crucial role in students' professional choices and key life decisions. A supportive mindset among friends or peers helps students select future plans (Felsman & Blustein, 1999).

Women's Freedom to Choose Careers

Pakistani culture and society, like other oriental cultures, exert considerable influence on career choices, particularly for girls. The societal division of public and private spaces impacts women's behavior, attitudes, and choices. Despite variations based on age, social class, and geographic location, social segregation persists. This segregation discourages girls from working outside the home while simultaneously creating demand for women in professions like education and medicine to maintain the segregation's effectiveness and stability. In Pakistani society, culture, traditions, and norms play a pivotal role in career selection, especially for girls. There is a strong preference for female teachers in girls' educational institutions and lady doctors and nurses for female patients. Teaching is considered a socially acceptable job for girls because girls' schools are usually separate from boys' schools, providing an all-female environment (Ali, 2000). The acceptance of teaching as a socially acceptable profession is due to factors such as seclusion, an all-female environment, physical safety, security, and limited interaction with men and society at large. Consequently, there is a high presence of women in these sectors, leaving limited options for girls aspiring to enter the labor market. Additionally, in societies like Pakistan, parents prioritize finding suitable husbands and respectable families for their daughters over their job prospects (Ali, 2000; Gazdar, 2003).

Shifting Perceptions of Working Women

Rapid socio-economic changes, especially after World War II, have forced many traditional societies to alter their norms and values. One of these changes is the increased participation of women in the workforce, despite the lingering traditional view of working women as immoral and unfeminine (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Working women face challenges due to their family responsibilities. Women's professional careers and domestic duties are simultaneous and greatly influence each other (Valdez & Gutek, 1987). Heins et al. state that achieving professional status may be more difficult for women than for men. Hofstede (1980) noted that in cultures where masculinity and collectivism prevail, women are more influenced by social factors and take inspiration from their parents, friends, family, and teachers when deciding on a career, more so than men. This trend in Pakistan has been confirmed by Abbasi & Sarwat (2014).

Material and Methods

A qualitative method was used to conduct this research, with data collected through in-depth interviews with the participants. Qualitative research is suitable for a detailed examination of the

phenomenon under consideration. While it lacks breadth, it offers depth, making it ideal for studies with a small population and a limited number of respondents. The grounded theory method of qualitative research was adopted, as described by Glaser and Walsh (2015), which focuses on discovering emerging patterns in data. An interview guide was developed through pilot interviews. Interviews were conducted with 24 female teachers from three colleges in Haripur, Hazara Division.

Population

The population for a study refers to the total number of people/respondents/subjects from which a sample is selected or to whom the results can be generalized. The population for this study included all female teachers in girls' colleges in Haripur district, totaling 220 female teachers across six girls' colleges.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample is a subset of the population with the same qualities, representing the overall population. For qualitative research, the sample size is typically smaller than in quantitative studies. According to Morse (1994), at least six respondents should be selected for a qualitative study. In this research, three girls' colleges in Haripur were chosen for data collection. All were government colleges selected for their accessibility, and convenience sampling was used. The researchers visited these colleges at different times to collect the necessary data.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth, unstructured interviews. The researcherss personally visited the colleges and interviewed 24 respondents. Participants were informed that the information collected would be used solely for research purposes, kept confidential, and that they could refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time. Female teachers from various subjects participated, and interviews were conducted and audio-recorded with their consent. The interviews took place in the colleges to ensure a comfortable and accessible environment for the participants.

Results and Discussion

The first step in the analysis was to interpret and understand the data collected, requiring multiple readings of the interview narratives to identify patterns, themes, and exceptions. The next step was coding the information, which helped identify emerging patterns. The researcherss organized the data into related groupings and analyzed the themes and exceptions within these groupings, discovering relationships between categories. These connections were crucial for answering each research question. The final step involved interpreting the data, synthesizing and summarizing it to attach meaning and significance to the analysis. The researchers supported each theme with quotes from the interviews, providing validity and transparency to the study.

The results highlighted several challenges in choosing careers, including the low priority given to female education within families. Parents often believe that daughters will marry and move away, so they invest more in their sons' education, expecting them to support the family in old age. A lack of professional colleges for females and conservative societal attitudes also hinder career choices. Additionally, the upbringing and grooming of females influence their career decisions. These findings align with the problems identified by Jaddon & Jabeen (2010).

Cultural and Religious Influences

The culture in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is deeply rooted in religious values, particularly among males. This cultural backdrop enforces the belief that women's primary role should be within the home, focusing on household responsibilities. Consequently, women face limited options and choices in managing their career progression despite being qualified for promotions. The prevailing traditional

belief restricts women predominantly to the teaching profession, viewed as a socially acceptable and safe occupation for them.

Restrictions on Mobility

Females in KPK face significant restrictions on their mobility. Many do not have the independence or parental permission to attend universities or colleges outside their home city or town. This limitation severely hinders their career choices, as they are not allowed to leave their city to pursue their desired careers. Additionally, some subjects they wish to study are not available locally, posing further obstacles to their educational and career aspirations.

Household Responsibilities and Family Obligations

Women in KPK bear substantial household responsibilities and family obligations. Balancing family and household duties often prevents them from pursuing careers in industry. Careers in academia are more compatible with their lifestyles, allowing them to balance work with family responsibilities. The flexible and less rigid schedules of teaching jobs, compared to the corporate environment, make academia a more viable option for many women.

Societal Trends and Expectations:

Societal trends in KPK impose specific expectations on women, such as not going out in public frequently, focusing solely on domestic duties, and considering teaching as the only safe and acceptable profession if they choose to work. As a result, many women shape their career choices based on these societal pressures, often feeling they have no other viable options.

Influence of Siblings and Peers:

The career choices of females in KPK are significantly influenced by their siblings and peers. Unlike males, females often lack independence in decision-making, making the influence of siblings and peers more pronounced. This influence can pose a problem for women in choosing their careers, as it may limit their ability to make autonomous career decisions.

Lack of Career Counseling

The non-availability of career counseling is a major issue for women in KPK when selecting a profession. Without proper guidance and support, many women struggle to make informed career choices that align with their interests and abilities. This lack of career counseling contributes to the limited career options women feel they have, further reinforcing traditional career paths such as teaching.

Conclusion

The cultural influences in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) significantly shape the career choices of women, often limiting them to traditional roles such as teaching. Deep-rooted beliefs that prioritize women's roles within the home, combined with restrictions on mobility, restrict their opportunities for career progression and professional growth.

Women in KPK face considerable challenges in pursuing higher education or careers outside their home cities due to societal norms and parental restrictions. This limited mobility restricts their access to a broader range of educational opportunities and career choices. Moreover, the substantial household responsibilities and family obligations women bear further confine them to careers that offer more flexibility, such as teaching, which is perceived as more compatible with their domestic roles.

Societal expectations and trends further reinforce these limitations by promoting the idea that women should focus on domestic duties and consider teaching as the only socially acceptable profession

if they choose to work. The influence of siblings and peers also plays a significant role in shaping women's career choices, often limiting their autonomy and decision-making power.

The lack of career counseling services worsens the situation by leaving women without the necessary guidance to explore and pursue diverse career paths. Without proper support, many women default to traditional roles, perpetuating gender disparities in the labor market and hindering their professional advancement.

Thus the interplay of cultural, and societal factors in KPK profoundly impacts women's career choices, confining them to conventional roles and limiting their professional opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including enhancing mobility, providing career counseling, and challenging societal norms to empower women to pursue a broader range of career opportunities.

Recommendations

There is dire need to:

- Implement community-based initiatives to raise awareness about gender equality in professional settings for both men and women.
- Develop policies incentivizing employers to hire and promote women in non-traditional roles, fostering an inclusive workforce.
- Expand access to online education, enabling women to pursue education and careers from home.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to educate parents about the benefits of higher education and career opportunities for their daughters.
- Advocate for workplace policies supporting work-life balance, including flexible hours, remote work options, and family-friendly policies.
- Establish mentorship programs where women can support and guide younger women in pursuing professional aspirations.
- Introduce career counseling services in educational institutions tailored to women's career needs.

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