

Social and Cultural Constraints on Women's Agency in Pakhtun Society: Examining Exclusion from the Public Sphere

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<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2023.12.3.135>

Abstract

Women in Pakistan comprise half of the country's population, but due to patriarchal structures of authority, they are oppressed and confined to the domestic sphere. In Pakhtun society, women's engagement in public life is strongly discouraged. In this study, researchers investigated the cultural and social factors that contribute to women's restriction and social exclusion from the public sphere. The present research was conducted in District Mardan. In the study, six union councils were selected as the study population's locale from three tehsils in the district. Deductive reasoning with a quantitative research design was used, and a simple random sampling technique was used to select the women respondents. The researchers selected 300 women and equally divided them across the six selected union councils in the study area. In the study, an interview schedule was used for uneducated women, while a questionnaire was used for educated women respondents. The results are presented in descriptive analysis and estimation results, i.e., Correlation analysis & Regression analysis. The major findings show that the majority, 55 percent, are illiterate or have less than a primary education in the area, and 40 percent of women are housewives among educated women. The correlation between women's subordinate position and their restricted mobility from the public sphere is 42%. This correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Overall, a strong and significant correlation is found between social exclusion and socio-cultural factors in the study area. The policy recommendation of the present research included that the education department should start community awareness and sensitization on gender discrimination issues. Another important recommendation of the study is that the government and other concerned authorities should review the social protection system and policies from a gender-equality perspective to create opportunities for social inclusion for women.

Keywords: Women, social factors, cultural factors, social exclusion, Mardan, Pakistan

Introduction

Social exclusion is a phenomenon used in various contexts to measure human vulnerability. This concept is adopted by various international organizations, including the International Labor Organization, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank, as a framework for development (Barrientos, 2011). Social exclusion is used to measure the socio-economic status of the deprived population in a society. Half of the world's population is women, and similarly, in Pakistan, women are half of the total population, but due to the patriarchal structure of society, they are excluded

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from many important aspects in the public and private spheres (PBS, 2023; Beall, 2055; Marlier, 2010). Despite half of the world's population, they have the highest poverty rate in the world. A study reveals that Two-thirds of the world's people live in poverty. These poor people are said to live in underdeveloped countries. These include some regions in Latin America, some parts of Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Ferreira, 2009). According to a World Bank Group report, the world's 7 billion people, almost half of whom are in Sub-Saharan Africa, some regions in Asia, Central America, and the Caribbean, live on less than \$2 a day, while 1.2 billion live on less than \$1 a day (World Bank Group, 2014).

Social Exclusion

According to the Social Exclusion Knowledge Network (SEKN), social exclusion processes result in a continuum of inclusion/exclusion characterized by inequalities in: Access to resources (means that can be used to meet human needs), Capabilities (the relative power people have to utilize the resources available to them), and Rights. Social exclusion is a much broader concept than income or consumption poverty, as it directs analysis to the determinants of poverty. Social exclusion theory builds on evidence that the causes of poverty and inequality are embedded in the structures of social systems and relationships – in exclusionary processes – rather than in individual inadequacies (Khan, 2015; Popay, 2010). A research study discusses that social exclusion's emphasis on relational features in the deprivation of capability is particularly valuable, as it highlights the relationship between poverty and inequalities in societies (Hickey, 2013).

SEKN defines social exclusion in the following way:

Exclusion consists of dynamic, multidimensional processes driven by unequal power relationships that interact across four main dimensions – economic, political, social, and cultural – at different levels, including individual, household, group, community, country, and global levels. Social exclusion can be a useful concept for exploring why certain population groups may be more at risk of poverty (Popay, 2010).

Dimensions of Social Exclusion

The social exclusion consists mainly of four dimensions, which are defined and discussed below (De Haan, 2017; Levitas, 2007; Silver, 2007).

Table 1: Dimension of social exclusion

Dimension of Social Exclusion	Description
The Social Dimension	Social dimension of exclusion is one of the important dimensions covering the bonds of solidarity of friendship, kinship, family, neighborhood, community and social movements. The social dimension generates a sense of belonging within social systems. Social bonds are strengthened or weakened along this dimension (De Haan, 2017).
The Economic Dimension	The economic dimension of exclusion covered the accessibility and distribution of all the materials which are required for a sustainable life (such as income, employment, housing, land, working conditions and livelihoods) (Daly, 2008).
The Political Dimension	The political dimension is constituted by power dynamics in relationships which generate unequal patterns of formal rights embedded in legislation, constitutions, policies and practices and the conditions in which rights are exercised, including access to safe water, sanitation, shelter, transport and power and to services such as health care, education and social protection.

Along this dimension, there is an unequal distribution of opportunities to participate in public life, to express desires and interests, to have interests taken into account and to have access to services (Fraser, 2010).

The Cultural dimension

The cultural dimension is constituted by the extent to which diverse values, norms and ways of living are accepted and respected. Diversity is accepted in all its richness at one extreme along this dimension, and at the other there are extreme situations of stigma and discrimination (Madanipour, 2015).

According to the first official report published on Pakistan's national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) the country stands at 0.197 in country's multidimensional poverty index. . This indicates that poor people in Pakistan experience 19.7% of the deprivation and social exclusion. There is 38.8% of the population in the country are socially excluded and considered poor (Alkire, 2014). The study area is one of the district in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa reside with high percent of socially excluded poor population. It is reported (2015) that living standard of the people are approximately 29.0% and health are nearly 27.0% contribute to multidimensional poverty and social exclusion in the study area. It is very alarming situation to state that among the high percent of deprived and socially excluded people are Pakhtun's women (Saboor, 2015).

Various research studies stated that beside the structural barrier to women social exclusion two of the major contributing factors are social and economic factors (Dale, 2002) in the province. The present study statistically identified the economic factors are i.e. women restriction from employment and limited permission from male family members, the working environment is not conducive in case of employment permission, the wage difference exist in case of employment, mostly the women are engaged in unpaid household work, the great job disparity, male dominancy, women restricted access to credit/loan and women with no land and property rights are responsible for Pakhtun's women social exclusion (Faridi, 2009). The identified social factors are i.e. women restriction from public sphere mobility, they are considered subordinate in family sphere, due to women subordination they are restricted from decision making process, women rights violation, intimate partner violence, women financial dependency for household purchase and men's decision making are responsible for women social exclusion in the study area.

The present study mainly investigated the social and economic factor as contribution to women social exclusion and studied the social exclusion dimensions i.e. exclusion and lack of access to economic opportunities, exclusion and lack of access to education and health facilities in the study area. The study objectives are; To investigate the role of social factors in Pakhtun's women social exclusion in District Mardan, the second objective is to find out the dimensions of social exclusion among Pakhtun's women in District Mardan.

The following two hypotheses are developed for the present research study;

Null Hypothesis

1. Social variables don't play any role in Pakhtuns women social exclusion.
2. Economic variables don't play any role in Pakhtuns women social exclusion.

Alternate Hypothesis

1. Social variables play an important role in Pakhtuns women social exclusion.
2. Economic variables play an important role in Pakhtuns women social exclusion.

The alternate hypothesis proved in the present study.

The present research study contributed in identification of social exclusion dimensions in the study area. The research results provided a programmatic and policy plan to the government concern

institutions and authorities to use them in developing policies and development programs for women social inclusion and mainstreaming in economic opportunities. The present research study provided a research path and motivation to academicians/research scholars to study the poverty and social exclusion in all the dimensions set in Pakistan's national multidimensional poverty index. The present research study sensitized the policy makers to assess how their policies and programmes are affecting both men and women differently in economic engagement. The present research study also greatly contributed to provincial commission awarding finance to re-allocate and re-design the budget and developmental programmes in the province to include women. Very importantly, this research study highlighted the track of Pakistan's progress toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SGD1.

Methodology

In the present research study researchers used quantitative research design to collect the data. In the present research study cluster and simple random sampling are used. The data are collected through interview schedule and questionnaire. The interview schedule is used for uneducated women and questionnaire for educated women. The research study is conducted in District Mardan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The district is divided into three tehsils namely Tehsil *Mardan* (50 Union Councils), *Katlang* (13 Union Councils) and *Takhat Bai* (12 Union Councils). The researchers selected two union councils from each tehsil randomly. Further, in the present study 300 samples are selected and equally divided among three tehsils (100 from each tehsil). In the present study data are collected from both the educated and uneducated women having age between 20 to 49 years.

Figure 1: Flow Chart of Sample Selection and Equal Allocation of Respondents

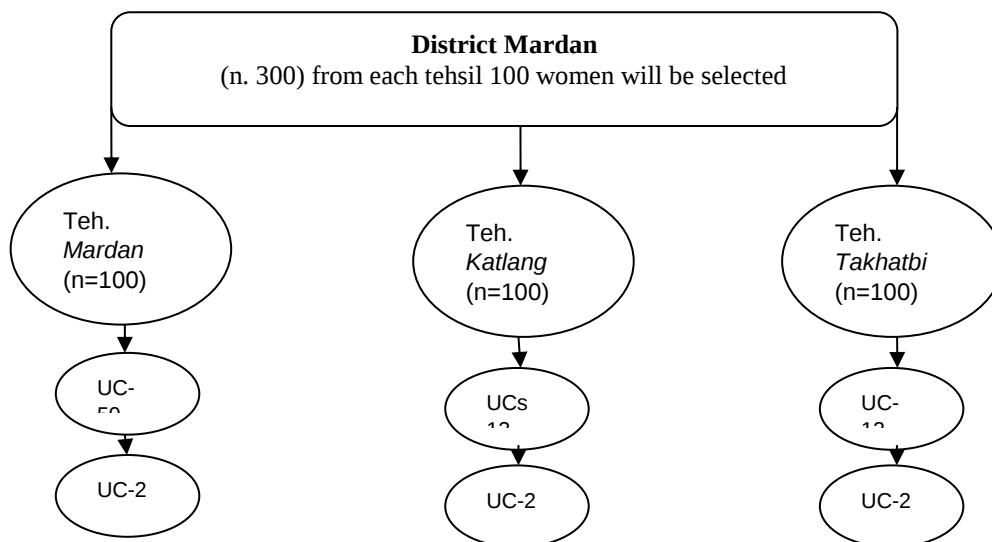
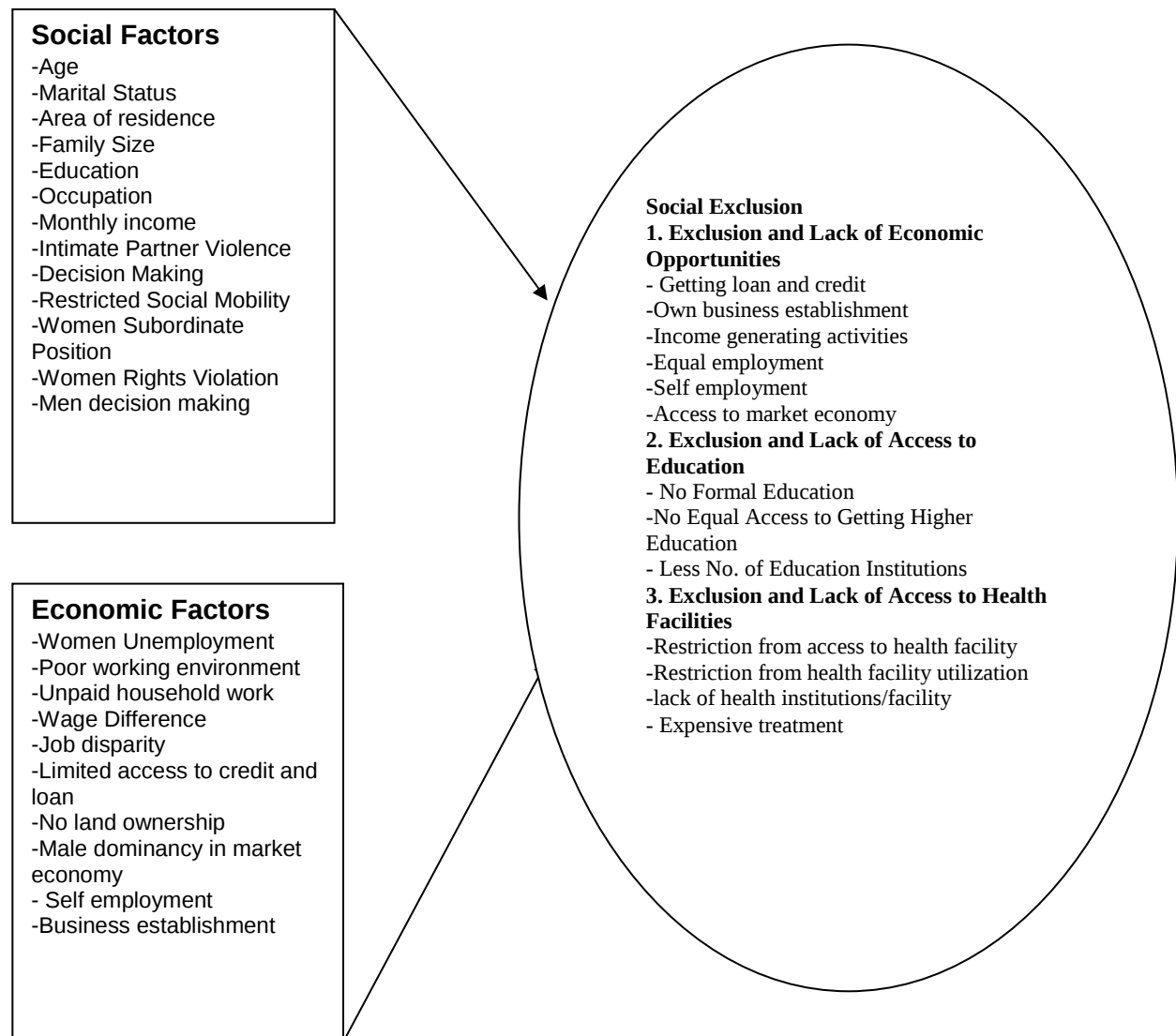


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework: Socio-Economic Factors of Social Exclusion

Operationalization

Dependent Variable: Women Exclusion

The overall dependent variable of the present study is Women Exclusion. The women exclusion is categorized into social exclusion, economic exclusion, political exclusion and cultural exclusion. In the present study women exclusion from economic activities i.e. women employment to their wage, business establishment to their market access are studies. Women exclusion in education sector i.e. women education institution to women access to these institutions and enrollment are studied. In the present study women exclusion is studied in health sector from access to utilization of health services.

Independent Variables

In the conceptual model researchers categorized the independent variables into main two categories including social factors excluding women and economic factors excluding women from economic and social participation in the study area.

The Social Factors of Exclusion in the present study are included women education, women employment, and women mobility, decision making of women, residence and marital status of women in relationship with their inclusion. The economic factors are included women no opportunity for employment, no loan and credit opportunity, women financial dependency on their men headed household, limited property rights, women engagement in domestic unpaid household work, poor working environment and wage differences are all contributing to women exclusion from economic and social spheres.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Age and Marital Status of Women's

Characteristics	Frequency	(%)
Age of women		
18-27 years	86	30.6
28-37 years	62	22.1
38-47 years	88	31.3
48-57 years and above	45	16.0
Marital Status		
Married	261	96.0
Unmarried/Widow/Separated	11	4.0

Table 1 shows the women's education in the study area. Among the respondents more than one forth 25.6 percent are illiterate, majority 29.5 percent having only primary or below education, the women with middle education are statistically recorded as 16 percent, 13 percent are educated up to high level and very less percent having graduation (3.9%), master (5.6%) and above than master (0.4%) in the study area.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis of Social Factors and Social Exclusion

	Social Exclusion	Factors & Social SE	SE	WRM	WSP	WDM	WRV	IPV	WFD	MDM
Social Exclusion	SE	Pearson Correlation	1.000							
		Sig. (2-tailed)								
Social Factors	WRM	Pearson Correlation	-0.007	1.000						
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.909							
	WSP	Pearson Correlation	-0.013	0.424	1.000					
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.825	0.000						
	WDM	Pearson Correlation	0.086	0.186	0.210	1.000				
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.148	0.002	0.000					
	WRV	Pearson Correlation	0.017	0.227	0.182	0.342	1.000			
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.773	0.000	0.002	0.000				
	IPV	Pearson Correlation	0.131	0.275	0.264	0.341	0.296	1.000		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.027	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000			
	WFD	Pearson Correlation	0.136	0.205	0.124	0.214	0.107	0.159	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.021	0.000	0.037	0.000	0.071	0.007		
	MDM	Pearson Correlation	0.067	0.192	0.236	0.195	0.101	0.056	0.315	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.262	0.001	0.000	0.001	0.090	0.347	0.000	

“SE=Social Exclusion, WRM=Women Restricted Mobility, WSP=Women Subordinate Position, WDM=Women Decision Making, WRV=Women Rights Violation, IPV=Intimate Partner Violence, WFP= Women Financial Dependency, MDM= Men Decision Making”.

“* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ ”

The results of correlation are presented in Table 2 for the correlation matrix the method of Pearson Correlation was applied. The results stated above show that the correlation between women social exclusion and women's restricted mobility from the public sphere is 07% and this relation is indicated negative. In the table the correlation between women social exclusion and women subordinate position in the family is 1% and this relation is negative. In the table the correlation between women's subordinate position and women restricted mobility from public sphere is 42%. This correlation is statistically significant at 0.01. The table shows the correlation between women's social exclusion and women limited decision making is 8% and the relation is negative. The correlation between women limited decision-making and women restriction from public sphere mobility is 18% and the correlation is significant at 0.02. The correlation between women limited decision-making and women subordinate position is 21% and the correlation is highly significant at 0.01. the table shows the correlation between women social exclusion and women fundamental rights violation is 1%, and the correlation is negative. The correlation between women fundamental rights violation and women's restrictions on public sphere mobility is 22% and the correlation is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between women fundamental rights and women's subordinate position is 18% and the relation is significant at 0.01. The correlation in the

above table between women fundamental rights violation and women limited decision-making is 34%, and the relation is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between women's social exclusion and intimate partner violence is 13% and the relation is significant at 0.02. In the table, the correlation between intimate partner violence and women restricted mobility is 27% and the relation is significant at 0.01. The correlation between intimate partner violence and subordinate position in family is 26% and the relation is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between intimate partner violence and women limited decision-making is 34% and the relation between variables is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between intimate partner violence and violation of women's fundamental rights in Pakhtun society is 29%, and the relation is highly significant at 0.01. In the above table the correlation between women social exclusion and women's financial dependency is 13% and the relation is significant at 0.02. The correlation between women's financial dependency and their restriction from public sphere mobility is 20%, and the relationship is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between women's financial dependency and their subordinate position is 12%, and the relationship is significant at 0.03. The correlation between women financial dependency and women limited decision-making is 21% and relation is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between women's financial dependency and women fundamental rights violations is 10% and the relation is negative. The correlation in above table shows that between women's financial dependency and intimate partner violence is 15% and the relation is significant at 0.01. The above table shows that the correlation between women's social exclusion and men's decision-making is 6% and negative. The correlation between men's decision-making and women's restriction on public-sphere mobility is 19%, and the relation is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between men's decision-making and women subordinate position in the family is 23% and the relation is highly significant at 0.01. The correlation between men's decision-making and women's limited decision-making is 19% and the relation is significant at 0.01. The correlation between men's decision-making and women's fundamental rights violations is 10% and negative. The correlation between men's decision-making and intimate partner violence is 5% and the relation is negative. The correlation in above table between men's decision-making and women's financial dependency is 31%, and the relation is highly significant at 0.01.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In Pakhtun society, women are restricted from public sphere mobility, resulting in their exclusion from the decision-making process in both the domestic and public sphere. The study concluded that social position of women is subordinate due to which they are excluded from participating in social events, and they have limited fundamental human rights in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study highlighted that intimate partner violence prevailed in society and women are facing physical and psychological violence due to which they are excluded from social sphere mobility and domestic sphere decision-making. The women have limited knowledge about their rights, and they are unaware of how to protect themselves from any human rights violation. Most of the women are socially excluded due to their financial dependency on men family members and most of the women are illiterate and housewives, so their voices are oppressed. The study concluded that women's inferior and oppressed status in society is the leading factor of their social exclusion. The study recommended that a community awareness and sensitization program should be started to raise community awareness on women's rights. It is also recommended that lessons should be included in school curriculum to address gender-based violence and discrimination issues in formal schooling.

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