

Gender Roles, Relationships, Communication and Autonomy

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Abstract: The major objective of the study is to explore the socio-economic and demographic circumstances of the respondents and their participation in decision-making process, spousal communication regarding family and non-family matters, husbands' authority and power to influence women's activities and decisions. 360 women aged 25-45 years with at least one living child residing in the rural areas of three major districts of the Punjab province Lahore, Rawalpindi and Multan were interviewed. The analysis demonstrates that socio-cultural factors affect the women autonomy and freedom. The husband's participation in the domestic activities is considered to undermine their prestige and honour. The husbands' authority and domination in family and non-family matters is accepted and respected. Social conservatism, orthodox values and traditions and society's dogmatic attitude limits women ability to participate effectively in development process. It is suggested that women's participation in all activities of national development should be ensured for achieving sustainable development and enhancing women's reproductive health. All forms of discrimination against women should be eradicated. Peoples should make aware about the Islamic principles regarding women roles, rights and status.

Key Words: Domestic Activities, Prestige and Honour, Authority, Gender Roles, Conservatism, Rural Women and Spousal Communication

Introduction

Status and prestige is defined by the long-established social system and by the family connections. Social power in marital relations is determined by religious-cultural definitions of marriage and marital roles and by the gender division of labour. In the Indian subcontinent, husbands understand that it is their moral obligation to meet all reasonable demands of their wives and children and wives believe that satisfying their husbands and bringing up the children including conjugal loyalty are their functions. Women also believe that self-actualization lay in fulfilling their roles as wives and mothers. In Pakistan particularly in rural areas where 70 % of the country's population lives, the authority of the husband is feared and respected and treated with elaborate shows of submission by a woman. The husband, by the virtue of his instrumental roles, enjoys a formal and legitimate right to exercise authority in family matters. Although the changes in social structure and the traditional values and attitudes about role-relationships of a husband and wife have been started but are not yet visible. It is clear that women's decision-making powers are severely curtailed, due to their economic dependency on males and lack of access and control over valuable resources. Socio-cultural norms have further undermined their ability to participate in national development. This inequality permeates all structures of social, economic, and political activity seriously impeding women's ability to contribute as full citizen. Zafar *et al.*, (1995) reported that families where "parallel relationships" rather than interactional relationships" are dominant between husbands and wives on matters relating to reproductive health prefer to have smaller families and more contraceptive use and women enjoy better health status and autonomy. Moreover, in societies where male is decision-maker in the family, he also makes other vital decisions such as those relating to having or not having a child, using or not using contraception.

The role of husband-wife communication as an important variable in fertility dynamics and women autonomy dates back to the 1950s. Hull (1983) gave inter-spouse communication and gender roles due importance in their models. In his user-non-users study in Dacca, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) observed that the spousal communication is an important correlate of reproductive health and social-

economic development. Zafar (1993) observed that inter-spouse communication is an important process by which couples reach to an agreement on each other's hopes regarding child spacing and family size and other important family decisions. Bogue (1983) and Zafar *et al.*, (1995) observed that effective inter-spouse communication on matters related to family issues is very crucial for family development along with for the success of family planning programmes.

Objectives: The prime objective of the study is to explore the socio-economic and demographic conditions of the respondents and their participation in decision-making process, spousal communication regarding family and non-family matters, husbands' authority and power to influence women's activities and decisions.

Materials and Methods

A well-structured interview schedule was constructed to investigate the socio-economic, demographic and cultural dimensions of the respondents. The present study is conducted in rural area of three major Districts -Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi of the Province Punjab to investigate the gender roles and relationships. These districts are among the most populated districts of the country. Lahore is 2nd and Rawalpindi is the 4th and Multan is the 5th district with respect to population size and these districts are situated far away from each other. Population situations of three districts present similar characteristics of size and development, making these areas suitable for this study. Significant differences are not expected in the cultural values regarding gender relationships because people's lifestyle of these districts is almost the same. Religion and language which are powerful forces influencing lifestyle of people (Hull, 1983) are the same in the areas. The main reason for the selection of three areas was to capture more variation and to increase the scope of the study from the viewpoint of generalization of the research findings. Although regional differences are not expected, but regional differences are investigated to verify the proposition that socio-demographic and cultural settings of the respondents of these districts are the same. Rural married fecund women of age 16-49 years with at least one living child were interviewed in this study.

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Appropriate sample size is necessary to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings. Keeping in view limited resources 120 respondents – married fecund women from each district were interviewed. Altogether 360 respondents were interviewed from the selected three districts to explore the objectives. From district Multan two tehsils – Shujabad and Multan were selected randomly and from each tehsil three villages were selected randomly to interview 120 respondents-20 respondents from each village. The selected villages from tehsil Multan were BastiBosan Mithar Billiwala and Joke Muhammad Khan Weins from Multan tehsil and Shahpur, Sikanderabad and Khaki Punjabi from Shujabad tehsil. From district Lahore the selected six villages were Ramkot, Sultankey, Mohniwal, Wara Gujranda, Nathokey and Atary and from Rawalpindi district the villages were Saroa, Chakry, hoha Khalsa, Sohra and Takhat Parri were selected.

The village list published by Population Census Organisation based on the 1981 Population Census was taken as sampling frame for drawing the sample 360 respondents from the study area. Twenty eligible respondents from each village were identified through systematic random sampling. Where the eligible respondent was not found in the selected household, the next household was investigated for the identification of the eligible respondent.

Results and Discussion

Socio-Economic and Cultural Characteristics:

As mentioned earlier that study was conducted in three major districts of Pakistan: Multan, Lahore and Rawalpindi. Identification of the regional variation in the socio-economic and demographic factors is important because socio-economic and demographic differential influences gender roles, communication, relationship and autonomy. For this purpose descriptive analysis for each of the region was carried out.

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation of respondents and their husbands' years of schooling, family income, land holding, current and age at marriage of the respondents and their husbands, number of pregnancies, number of alive and dead children, ideal number of children and the respondents' conception of smaller and bigger families which are given in Table 1 are almost similar indicating that the selected respondents from three regions were uniform in their social, demographic and material circumstances. In this situation separate analysis for each of the region to communication matters would be misleading, the combined analysis, which enhances the generalisation of the research findings, would be more suitable and useful.

Selection of the Husband: As mentioned earlier that woman's subordinate position in Pakistani society has implications on women status and limits their effective participation in the decision-making process. Social conservatism and dogmatic attitude severely hamper women's autonomy and freedom of choice. Others do not take by the women themselves but decisions regarding their fate. In Pakistan, girls have no role in the selection of their husbands, they are rarely consulted and the parents imposed their decisions without caring whether the daughters are happy or not about their choices. They have to abide by and accept the parents' decisions. Table 2 indicates that parents take decisions regarding the selection of a husband for a girl. About 72 percent of the respondents reported that they were not consulted when their parents had taken decisions about their marriages. Only a few respondents

(1.4 %) reported they had selected their husbands independently. In Pakistan, girls are not consulted regarding their marriages and they are kept away from such decisions, which directly concerned with their future and fortune.

Table 1: Regional Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics	Lahore		Rawalpindi		Multan	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Current age (years)	31.86	5.16	30.05	5.79	31.44	5.43
Age at marriage	18.89	2.80	18.67	2.96	18.48	2.96
Husband's current age	35.91	5.55	34.41	6.78	35.87	5.79
Husband's age at marriage	22.94	2.81	22.89	4.34	22.97	3.57
Years of schooling	1.58	2.80	1.40	2.90	1.33	2.79
Husband's years of schooling	4.91	2.81	4.27	4.53	5.46	4.56
Land holding	8.32	6.90	9.71	12.96	6.54	7.56
Family income	43098.33	25456.31	44576.30	28730.93	44840.00	21578
Number of pregnancies	4.85	2.12	5.14	2.52	5.21	2.41
Total alive children	4.68	2.02	4.70	2.24	4.93	2.26
Number of dead children	0.61	0.93	0.55	0.85	0.70	1.03
Ideal number of children	4.08	1.57	4.06	1.39	3.99	1.39
Ideal number of boys	2.39	1.04	2.38	1.00	2.36	0.90
Ideal number of girls	1.69	0.71	1.67	0.65	1.63	0.71
Conception about big family	5.99	1.66	6.42	1.65	6.53	1.65
Conception about small family	3.60	1.04	3.72	1.11	3.49	0.98

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Table 2: Respondents' Participation in the Selection of their Husbands

Who chose	No. of respondents	Percentage
I chose my husband myself	5	1.4
Parents with my consent	22	6.1
Husband chose the respondent	20	5.6
Parents alone	259	71.9
Other relative	54	15.1

Table 3: Husbands' Participation in Domestic Activities (chores)

Activities	To great extent	To some extent	Not at all
Cooking meal	2.8	22.5	74.7
Cleaning up after meal	2.2	20.6	77.2
Cleaning the house	3.3	13.9	82.8
Washing the clothes	6.7	15.6	77.8
Caring for the children	22.5	27.5	50.0
Caring for the elderly	75.3	24.7	00.0

Table 4: Wife's Participation in the Decision-Making Process

Statements	Often	Sometimes	Never
Buying food for family meal	47.5	34.2	18.3
Purchase or sell major family goods	38.6	43.9	17.5
Decision about of no. Of children	27.2	45.6	27.2
Gifts for relatives on marriages	35.0	37.8	27.2
Punishment to children for misbehaving	18.9	38.6	42.5
Schooling of children	30.3	26.9	42.8
Children marriages	26.1	14.7	59.2

Table 5: Disagreement of the Respondents with their Husbands' Decisions without any Fear

Disagreement	No. of respondents	Percentage
Yes	117	32.5
No	233	64.7
No answer	10	2.8

Table 6: Participation of the Husband and Wife in the Family and Non-family Matters

Matters	Frequently	Occasionally	Never
What to spend money on	42.5	41.1	16.4
What is happening in the community	18.6	59.7	21.7
How many children to have	24.7	47.5	27.8
Birth control methods	23.1	34.7	42.2
Children marriage	23.3	20.0	56.7
Children education	31.9	34.2	33.9

Household Chores: The communication process in the context of help around the house and frequent discussion on family matters are found to be associated with reproductive health and minimize the social conflict (Zafar, 1993). Help around the house tells us the degree and nature of the relationship and communication between husband and wife. If husbands participate in these activities and discuss family matters with their wives frequently, then it is more likely that they may have liberal views on family formation and other family matters which are related to greater empathy and increase their ability to act together to achieve goals. Inkeles and Smith (1974) are of the opinion that women who are living in non-

restricted or liberal environment are more readiness for social change than women who are living in restricted environment. The authors further state that non-restricted environment encourages women to expose their desire and practice on it. In a strict autocratic environment a woman is less likely to evaluate opinions and she is bound to accept the ideas of those above in the power hierarchy. Table 3 indicates that a vast majority of the respondents had received no help from their husbands in domestic activities such as cooking meal, cleaning up after meal, cleaning the house and caring children. The findings reflect the men and women's different labor roles in Pakistan.

In the in-depth interview the respondents expressed that it is against the honor and respect of the husband to ask for help around the house. It spoils the self-image of manliness and also it looks strange when the husband does household work, especially cooking, cleaning and washing etc. The participants also acknowledged that it is not socially and morally acceptable. How can it be appropriate to ask for such help from the husband who has already spent a long day in a struggle to meet the family needs? They also accepted that a man and a woman are distinctive in their labour roles. Man is primarily responsible for 'bread earning' and woman's duties are looking after the children and the husband. The reflection of egalitarian roles can be seen from one of the participants' views:

"Men think that performance of the household chores is the duty of women. They feel insulted to help around the house. They quarrel when wives asking for help and say if you want to live peacefully, live under my domination. You have to obey me in every respect, otherwise there is no place for you in the house. A woman is bound to accept her husband domination"

Husband's Domination: Anne and Tinker (1998) drew conclusion that husband-wife relationship relates the issues such as women and family health and the family social development. He further observed spousal communication also has an influence on family size and contraceptive. A large number of unwanted pregnancies were partially the outcome of the inability of family members or family groups to make decisions. As can be seen from Table 4 wife's participation in the decision-making process is not encouraging. The husbands' domination in the different aspects of family and non-family life is evident from the respondent's limited autonomy and authority regarding their participation in these matters. Issues such as buying food for the family, purchase and selling major family goods, decisions regarding desired number of children, gifts for relatives, punishment of the children, the education of children and their marriages are important dimensions in the family life. The equal participation of husband and wife in these matters is of vital importance for the family's integration and its solidarity.

Moreover, the wife's participation in important family and non-family matters enhances her position and status. The wives' ineffective, discouraging and negligible participation in these matters reflects women's inferior position in society and also the societal inability to accept women as equal partners to men in the development process.

The responses of the respondents presented regarding wife's disagreement with the husband's decisions without any fear provide further verification for the husband's authority and domination, which is feared and respected. The vast majority of the respondents (64.7%) reported that they had no courage to disagree with their husbands' decisions. They

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expressed that the authority and power is in the hands of men who are prime decision-makers. The men are the masters of the family, society and the environment. They further expressed that they are no choice, no power and no authority and their house keeping and the bearing and rearing of children's roles, are regarded as inferior and how it is possible for women to disagree with men. In these circumstances what the husbands say or decide they have to obey and accept. In the in-depth interview the respondents expressed that a woman is bound to be submissive to her husband and bound to obey his order because women are economically and socially dependent on men. They also pointed out that a girl's development is made on the lines that she should be submissive to her parents before marriage and to the husband and the parents-in-law after marriage.

Responses of the respondents (Table 6) also identified the poor communication between husband and wife on many family and non-family issues. The majority of respondents were kept away from the family issues such as what to money spend on, what is happening in the society, how many children to have, decision for using birth control, children marriages and their education. These issues are at the heart of family life and women forced isolation from these issues of vital importance for the family development resulting in higher fertility and poor mother-child health.

The husband's strong domination in family and non-family matters in Pakistan is reflected by the views of two respondents:

"A husband's behavior is like a dictator's behavior. He does what he desires. The wife is bound to accept and obey him because he is a bread earner. A husband does not want to listen his wife. If a woman has strength and power in her decision-making then she could not bear so many children because she does not want to spoil hers and the children health".

"It is better to leave all these matters with the husband, who has good experience of these matters. A woman's real job is to look after the children and husband. Therefore, she should be expert in these affairs to make her marital life more stable".

Discussions and Recommendations: It emerged from the study findings that cultural values and traditions curtailed the respondents' freedom in their husbands' selection. The parents and other family members mainly take decisions regarding the selection of husbands for their daughters. For a husband to participate in the domestic chores is considered to undermine their prestige and honour, his limited participation in domestic chores establishes distinctive

gender roles in Pakistan. The husbands' authority and domination in family and non-family is accepted, respected and feared and respondents viewed that social conservatism, orthodox values and traditions and society's dogmatic attitude limit their ability to participate effectively in development process. Respondents perceived that men are superior to women and women have a subordinate position in the family and in the society as well. Men's roles are different than those of women and men's roles are regarded as superior. It is strongly advocated that people should be make more aware about the Islamic concept of family life and women's position in Islam. Islam supports the idea of equal participation of men and women in all aspects of family and non-family life. Islam gives right to men and women to chose their partners and condemn all kinds of violence and discrimination against women. It is suggested that women's participation in all activities of national development should be parallel to those of men for achieving sustainable development and enhancing women's reproductive health and status. The World Bank (1998) has also recommended the effective participation of women in the decision-making process for achieving improved women health status.

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