

Department of Development Studies

Policy Brief No. 7

December 2016

**Pakistan Institute of Development
Economics**

Thematic Focus: Communities and Ethnographies

Invisible Labour: A Study of Socio-economic Empowerment of Home Based Women Workers– Shafaq Mumtaz (2013-2015)

A qualitative research on the home based women workers of Rawalpindi explains the informal economic activities these women are involved in for their and their families' survival, the discrimination against these women and the invisible nature of their work.

Key Findings

1. Home based women workers are trapped in a vicious cycle of deprivation due to lack of better opportunities, subjugation experienced due to prejudiced behaviour shown by their families and exploitative working conditions created by their employers. These women are doubly discriminated, both inside the household and at workplace, which hinder their efforts towards the process of empowerment. Due to lack of power and authority, they remain incapable to experience any valuable change in their lives, despite contributing economically.
2. In order to ensure their family's survival women are compelled to take on economic activities, while staying within the four walls of their home because of observance of *purdah* for preserving family's honor and avoiding the appalling views of others for a woman who crosses the boundaries of her house for work.
3. Through middlemen, work is distributed among women and the rates are already decided by them with no possibility left for women to negotiate or provide their own rates for the services they offer. In most of the cases, male members of the household are frequently involved in women work dealings, which results in a loss of women control over their work and earnings.
4. The research highlights that the work done by women is completely invisible and unacknowledged. Women working on sub-contracted basis do not know who they work for and where the finished product made by them would be going for sale. They have contacts with middlemen who regulate this process of taking work from employers and then distributing it among them. Women are unaware of laws and their legally sanctioned rights. The access to law to proclaim their rights is looked down upon by many respondents either due to financial constraints, or household restrictions or the fear of being entangled in any legal procedure.

Policy Recommendations

1. Government and law implementing institutions in collaboration with each other should develop proper policies in order to provide home based women workers the identity and all the rights that only formal sector employees are enjoying.
2. Their work should be regularised and wages must be fixed according to the work they perform. Furthermore, social security benefits should be provided to them by keeping in view their valuable contributions to the economy.
3. Opportunities of direct linkage to the markets should be provided to women home workers in order to avoid the manipulation by employers and middlemen. Basic education and other work related necessary trainings should be provided to these workers so that they can understand and negotiate about the terms and conditions of work and improve the overall environment of their households.
4. Non-governmental organisations must take some measures in raising consciousness among women to take a step against the problems of suppression and unnecessary control. Furthermore, legal aid should be provided to women so that they will have the courage to raise their voice against violence and humiliation they suffer within the household.