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Linkages between Education and Empowerment: The Case of Kashmiri Refugee Women

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Pakistan Institute of Development Economics

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Kashmiri Refugee Women**

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ABSTRACT

Of the many global issues that increasingly occupy international political decision makers and theorists, the refugee problems is perhaps the most complex. Among all the refugees, female refugees are more prone to exploitation and out of those voices of Kashmiri refugee women have been left unheard or ignored. This study follows qualitative analysis. Primary data was collected with the application of questionnaire comprising open ended questions for all the camps. The main objective was to find out the connections and linkages between education and empowerment. Moreover, the factors which affect their education and empowerment in different spheres of life are also addressed. The concept of empowerment is multidimensional and context specific. This research has found that there is no linear relationship between education and women empowerment. The relationship between education and transformation at the individual and societal level is not necessarily linear or automatic. Unit of analysis is important in this regard and household-level characteristics, the external environment, level and quality of education, family structure including parental education and financial status is important in the assessment of women empowerment.

Keywords: Educated Refugee Women, Education, Empowerment, Refugees, Uneducated Refugee Women

1. INTRODUCTION

Among the world's global issues, refugee crisis is the most complex. Refugees are those people who move from one state to another state because of different reasons such as political instability, war and economic crisis. Among the most problematic issues facing the world community today, the problem of IDPs (Internally Displaced People) and refugees is at the top.¹ The problems of refugees are increasing day by day and issues of refugees are globally discussed by politicians, practitioners and academicians from different perspectives. These different approaches have fueled the global debate about refugees and their related issues. According to an estimate, there were 16.7 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2013, 11.7 million under the mandate of United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Majority of the refugees are from Africa and Asia². First and foremost is to understand properly what the term "refugee" means.

The 1951 Refugee Convention (Article L.A (2)) and the Refugee Protocol 1967 (Article 1.2) spell out refugee is someone who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" [Wilhelmina and Girard (2000), p. 167].

The issue of refugee is well familiar in Pakistan because it is hosting world's largest refugees from Afghanistan, facilitating 1.6 million registered refugees. Among all the refugee population, women and children comprise 80 percent [Harris (2000)]. The experiences faced by female refugees are different from the experiences faced by male refugees [Sullivan and Deacon (2009)]. Many scholars have claimed female refugees as forgotten majority. Despite this claim, the narratives of female refugees are not documented in detailed as compared to male refugees [Spijkerboer (2000)]. Refugee women are vulnerable to exploitation because of their status and gender. Education factor is usually neglected because foremost preference is to settle them. That is the reason why education of refugees is neglected [Jayaweera (1997)].

¹<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet20en.pdf>

²<http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet20en.pdf>

2. CONCEPTUALISING EMPOWERMENT

The history of the concept of empowerment traces back in mid-17th century with meaning of “to invest with authority” [Tripathi (2011)]. Different scholars define different definitions of empowerment in their work accordingly. Gita Senhas defined empowerment as “altering relations of power which constrain women’s options and autonomy and adversely affect health and well-being” [Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2008), p. 5]. Keller and Mbwewe defined it as “a process whereby women are able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination” [Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2008), p. 6]. Naila Kabeer also defined empowerment as “The expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them” [Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2008), p. 6].

Numerous studies have been done on the refugee women and their related issues from the perspectives of health, settlement but not on education. The aim of the study is to conceptualise empowerment of refugee women from their standpoints in dimensions of decision making, mobility and economic freedom. Therefore, in an attempt to allow space for indigenous definition of term “empowerment”, the researcher has not defined any definition of empowerment to investigate connections between education and empowerment under pre-defined framework for analysis. This study attempts to explore the nature of connection between education and women empowerment.

3. REFUGEE AND WORLD COMMUNITY

The term “refugee” sounds quite vulnerable that the refugees are always vulnerable to different forms of exploitation in the host countries. It becomes very difficult for refugees to enter in a new environment and new life style in camps increases their sense of insecurity because of a fear of unknown [Khattak (2007)]. From the global perspective, refugees are more disposed to exploitation. The education of the children in the refugee camps is affected because of the issues of access and language barriers [Roula el-Masri (2013)]. Refugees from the African countries are most vulnerable. In Manitoba, because of the refugee status, the academic and economic challenges are faced by the refugee students which results in reducing their socio-economic opportunities [Kanu (2008)]. Kenyan government does not have flexible policy towards the refugees. Refugees are not freely allowed to move in camps [Horn (2008)]. For settlement, refugees have to face different challenging factors. Culture is one of those influencing factors. The cultural influence is also important and has varying impact on refugee conditions. Secondary source research, data analysis, and interviews had been conducted in order to access the level of integration of the refugee in the host communities and Banki Susan concluded that the level of

integration of Pakistani and Kashmiri refugee is low in the host communities because of ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences, and it makes them vulnerable to different kinds of exploitation [Banki (2004)].

Among all the refugees, there is possibility that no one is more vulnerable than the refugee women. It is universally acknowledged that women face double exploitation, abuse, violations or fear in the world as compared to men [Valji, Hunt, and Moffett (2003)]. Refugees from Syria and Palestine faced anxiety and stress which affected all the refugees but the nature of vulnerability and experiences of refugee is highly gendered [Roula el-Masri (2013)]. It is widely acknowledged that protection can be given to refugees through education [Kirk and Cassity (2007)]. The management system of the refugee camps is quite important. In Pakistan, when one talks about the refugees, the Afghan refugee comes first as Pakistan is the largest host of the Afghan refugee population [Chattha (2013)].

Khattak (2007) has talked about the Afghan camp's management system in Pakistan and observed that male domination that is embedded in our social set up did not allow their women to earn in aid sponsored, income generating projects that result in their weak position in the society and making them economically more dependent and vulnerable. A study has been conducted on the lives of Afghan refugee women and researcher has observed that they have become disregarded because of abuse of their human rights [Bhanji (2011)]. International Medical Corps conducted a survey in January 2010 and found that Gender Based Violence (GBV) is highly prevalent in Afghan refugee camps located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Results also observed that those women were less empowered (Gender-Based Violence among Afghan Refugees, 2010). Becoming a refugee means losing social and legal status.

3.1. Kashmiri Refugees: Unique Case

Among all refugees, Kashmiri refugees are unique as globally they represent small percentage but comprise a large percentage of the recognised citizens. Social and economic issues are faced by these refugees in the camps [Khuhro (2009)]. Kashmiri refugees and their related issues have rarely been discussed at the international level. There are over five million (since 1947) legally recognised Kashmiri refugees temporarily settled in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir but they are not recognised as refugees by United Nations (UN) [Robinson (2012)] because they have not crossed any international boarder as per the rules of international definition to have refugee status. Their status is unclear as international bodies like UN do not consider them refugees and government of Pakistan treats them like IDPs because Pakistan regards all Kashmir (Azad and Occupied Kashmir) as part of Pakistan [Banki (2004)].

3.2. Education and Women Empowerment

Importance of education can never be denied. Universal declaration of human rights and programme of action of 1994 International Conference on Population and Development has also emphasised on the importance of women education. In 1995, conference held on women in Beijing, recognised and acknowledged that women's education is key to make them empowered through proper participation in decision making and it will help them to take better care of their families [Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam (2003)]. Women empowerment has become an important goal for achieving development. On the other hand; there is debate in literature on how empowerment can be evaluated. The definition of empowerment generally includes people's sense of making decisions about their lives which are important to them and the environment in which they are living [Itzhaky and York (2000)].

Although there is not any proper definition of empowerment but there are a few key concepts which overlap and gives a concept about empowerment like: options, choice, control, and power. The term empowerment has become a synonym for participation, for speaking out, or for feeling that one can accomplish an important task. The main reasons of women disempowerment are different but some factors are common including beliefs, norms, customs and values through which society differentiates between men and women [Kabeer (2000)]. The concept of empowerment varies culturally and temporally. At one place, empowerment's concept reveals itself in women economic disempowerment relative to men. At any other place, it represents itself in the relative survival rates of girl and boy children. Moreover, both education and employment seems to effectively increase women's independence and control over their lives [Jayaweera (1997)].

4. FIELD VISIT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEY

This study is based on the primary data which is collected from the four refugee camps of Muzaffarabad district. There are total 9 refugee camps in Muzaffarabad. Four camps were selected to conduct this research, two from the urban area; Ambore and Manak Payian³ which are adjacent to the main city and two from the rural areas; Rara and Basnara⁴. Qualitative research strategy is used for this research which begins with people and emphasises on developing a spontaneous relationship between respondents and the researcher. Semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were the main tools used to collect data. Rapport building, participant observation and key informants were also helpful in this regard.

³Ambore is second largest refugee camp in Muzaffarabad comprising population of 2915 and Manak payian is the largest refugee camp in Muzaffarabad comprise 3546 refugee population.

⁴Rara camp's population is 794 and Basnara camp's population is 909.

Non-probability sampling technique was adopted in which the respondents were selected according to the researcher's understanding and nature of the research. The targeted population was female refugee both educated and uneducated. Total respondents were 28 refugee women, both educated and uneducated. Moreover, 11 male refugee men also took participation in FGDs to avoid biasness and to have male perspective about women's education.

A well-structured, pretested questionnaire was also used for data collection. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the female respondents. To have a broader look and masculine perspective about refugee women's education and their empowerment, FGDs were conducted with the male members of the community from different background. In addition, the level of female's education was also observed.

4.1. Limitations of the Study

This research is conducted only in few camps located in Muzaffarabad. Kashmiri refugees are settled in different districts of Azad Kashmir. This research was only conducted in Muzaffarabad due to mobility issues faced by the researcher.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Impact of Education on Women's Empowerment in Refugee Camps in District Muzaffarabad

Research was carried out in four different camps. Two camps were adjacent to the city area and two far from the city area. Educated, uneducated, married and unmarried were interviewed regarding their education, contribution in decision making, mobility and economic stability.

The results were mix. Few educated and uneducated refugee women from the city camps told that they were restricted by their family members, particularly male members of the family. Access to education or to any other source of income was not an issue but they were not permitted to go outside for job and education as well.

Similar was the case with married and unmarried refugee women. Few families were liberal up to the mark that they were in favour of girl's education but not in favour of their job. Neither have they liked women's decisions in family matters.

On the other hand, the narratives of refugee women from rural area camps were not much different. The educated and uneducated refugee women told about their education level and perception of empowerment from their perspective. They further added that their education is dependent upon the male family members as well as the financial condition of the family. Similarly, few

uneducated married refugee women stated that although they did not acquire high degrees but they were helping out their families by selling Kashmiri embroidered clothes and financially supporting their families. They further said that their husbands are quite supportive. And they truly acknowledge and value their support and help for the family. The profile of female respondents is given below:

Table 5.1

Profile of Female Respondents

Sr. No.	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation
01	24	Unmarried	F.A(Private)	Nil
02	27	Unmarried	M.A	Nil
03	32	Married	Primary	Housewife
04	32	Married	7 th grade	Housewife
05	26	Married	B.A	Housewife
06	25	Married	B.Sc	Teaching
07	28	Married	F.A	Housewife
08	31	Married	B.Sc	Teaching
09	28	Married	Middle	Sales Embrioded Clothes
10	24	Married	Middle	House wife
11	27	Unmarried	Primary	Nil
12	27	Married	B.A	Teacher in Tuition Centre
13	30	Married	M.A	House wife
14	37	Unmarried	B.A	Nil
15	25	Unmarried	B.A	Nil
16	28	Unmarried	Primary	Nil
17	32	Married	Middle	Housewife
18	29	Married	F.Sc	Housewife
19	26	Unmarried	B.A	Teaching
20	24	Unmarried	F.A	Nil
21	33	Married	Third year	Housewife
22	36	Married	F.A	Teaching
23	26	Unmarried	B.A	Nil
24	32	Married	4 th grade	Sales Embrioded Clothes
25	25	Unmarried	Middle	Tailor
26	27	Unmarried	6 th grade	Nil
27	38	Married	9 th grade	Housewife
28	34	Unmarried	M.Sc	Teaching

Source: Fieldwork.

The interviews with the refugee women were followed by the male members of the refugee community to know male perspective about women's education.

The discussion's output with the male members was interesting. Responses were different. Few said that they didn't like their females to go outside for job/ work not because they were narrow minded or they had imposed restrictions on their females but it was a matter of prestige for them and they liked their females to be at home with prestige and honour. Their decisions were given importance.

Some other men who participated in the discussion said that they truly acknowledged the importance of girl's education but their financial conditions did not allow them to send their children to schools for education. These people also complained that they had been living there for more than two decade but still they had issues. The allowances given for education from government were enough hardly to buy a few copies. The expenses were too much and they couldn't afford it. It was observed that most of the men who took part in discussion did not have proper educational background. The profile of the members who participated in FDGs is given below:

Table 5.2

Profile of Male Respondents of Ambore Camp

Sr. No.	Age	Marital status	Education	Occupation
1	39	Married	F.A	Dry Fruit Shop
2	37	Married	Hotel Employee	Primary
3	33	Married	School Teacher	B.A (Private)
4	40	Married	Govt. Employee	B.A
5	27	Unmarried	Shop Keeper	Middle
6	29	Unmarried	Clerk	Matric

Source: Fieldwork.

Table 5.3

Profile of Male Respondents of Rara Camp

Sr No.	Age	Marital status	Occupation	Education
1	43	Married	Government employee	FA (Private)
2	33	Married	Daily wage worker	Primary
3	37	Married	Daily wage worker	6 th grade
4	27	Married	Auto rickshaw driver	7 th grade
5	28	Unmarried	Shop keeper	Matric
6	31	Unmarried	Unemployed	Matric
7	29	Unmarried	Unemployed	Matric

Source: Fieldwork.

Participant observation was very important during the whole research. It was observed that unlike the other refugee communities all around the world, Kashmiri refugees, especially women don't face harassment issues or other kinds of exploitation. These refugees are not living in good condition but in spite of which, they are not exploited like the other refugee communities.

5.2. Level of Women's Education

Education is very important for the survival of any nation. Progressive trends in education pave the path for development and leads country towards prosperity. Literacy rate of Azad Kashmir is 72 percent [Express Tribune (26 March 2013)]. Following is the description of female refugee's enrolment at different levels of education in government schools and colleges which are located within refugee communities or out of the community because college facility is not there.

Table 5.4

Enrolment of Kashmiri Refugee Girls and Different Levels of Education⁵

Sr No.	Name of Camp	Class 1 st to 10 th	FA/BA/MA (Professional Studies)
01	Ambore	576	70
02	Rara/Domishi	92	8
03	Basnara	80	7
04	Manak Payian 1	96	3
05	Manak Payian 2	430	54
06	Naili	42	1
07	Kamsar	316	60
08	Karka/HeerKurki	64	5
09	Zero Point	33	1
10	City Area	494	40
	Total	2223	249

Source: Fieldwork.

5.3. Influential Factors

Few factors were determined as influential factors determining the female education in refugee community. Family structure was given much importance in Kashmiri refugee community. Family structure includes status of family including living patterns i.e.; nuclear or joint family system where parents, grandparents, uncle, aunts and all cousins live together. Female's education was

⁵Data from Commissionerate Rehabilitation Department Muzaffarabad Azad Kashmir

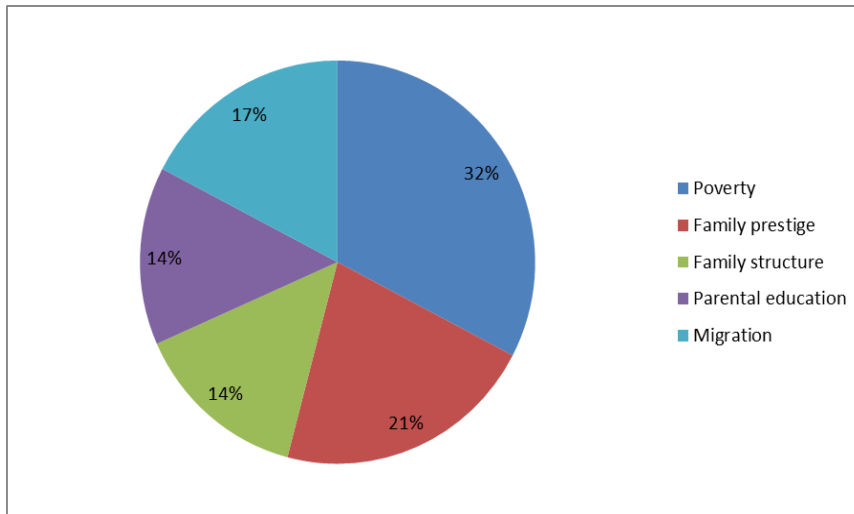
dependent upon the elder's decision whether they want their females to go out for education/job.

Poverty was also observed as a very important factor affecting and determining the female's education. Poor financial conditions were observed as a big hurdle for females to have an access to education. Moreover, in few families it was also observed that families preferred to send their boys to go for education and to help them in reducing poverty.

Another factor which determined female education was parental education. It was observed that the girls who are going to school, although limited in number, their parents are somehow educated, specially mothers. Parents who are educated, they know better the value of education and they prefer to send their females to school for education as well.

One of the most determining factors about female's education is family prestige. Factor of family prestige is linked with family structure. Families living in joint family system have more effect of family prestige as in those families; decisions of elders (grandparents) are given more importance. It is against name and respect of their family to send them out to go for education. Because of family's name and "izzat", they could not have access to education. They believe that females are "izzat" of their families so they should confine themselves at home rather than outside home for education or job.

Another pertinent factor regarding female's education was migration. Refugees are living in camps for more than two decades. The ratio of respondents' responses is given below in pie chart:



6. CONCLUSION

This research has focused on education of Kashmiri refugee women as a mean of acquiring empowerment or independence for them. It is assessed that education is important for all, men and women. The unit of analysis is important for accessing impact of education on empowerment along with the other contributing factors. Environmental factors like rural and urban environment are important for the concept of empowerment to be acquired and practised in different dimensions. Moreover, it is also analysed that family practices, traditions and values are very important to truly practice this concept. In addition, many families do not allow their girls to get education.

On the other hand, it is also identified that access to education is somehow easy for refugees who are living in the camps near city areas where access to education facilities is easy but not for those refugees who are living in the camps which are located at distance from the city area. It poses a question to the government of Azad Kashmir who has an established government department working for refugee's rehabilitation but results are not fruitful and puts question mark on its working. Government needs to formulate new development related policies.

The concept of empowerment is multidimensional and context specific. In relation with empowerment, it is said that education leads to empowerment. It is an important factor that leads to empowerment. There are other factors including family support, parental education, family traditions and societal setup as well which acts as an important ingredient and ensure the empowerment and independence of females. On the other hand, in the refugee communities, women are more vulnerable to basic necessities of life. Refugee women face different problems in the new place of residence in having access to basic rights because of being refugee and being female. Consequently the concept of empowerment is also unfamiliar for them as they do not possess any kind of power or prestige.

Overall this research argues that in case of Kashmiri refugees, refugee women have experienced different experiences as refugees as compared to other refugees. Refugee women both educated and uneducated have experienced empowerment in different spheres under different circumstances and environment. In relation with education, it is concluded from the responses of participants that education is important factor for exercising and enjoying power and authority but factors like family structure, family background, supportive family, financial issues and prevailing patriarchal structure goes parallel with education.

Increasing the average level of women's education does not necessarily improve women's status or challenge the norms of patriarchy. Women who are

educated might be having slightly more power than women who are uneducated, but their choices are still constrained and shaped by patriarchy. Education alone cannot counter the economic and social constraints for women with prevailing societal structure which are patriarchal. UNHCR has also acknowledged that women's "independence and economic self-reliance and their leadership and decision making abilities is to promote women empowerment" [Krause (2014)] and all these factors are strongly supported by family.

Moreover, this research concluded that Kashmiri refugee women enjoy freedom and independence even without education because of their family structures and norms. Traditional practices are given importance and women are considered as symbol of respect, prestige and are not subjected to exploitation. However, their freedom and power structures are determined by the male members of family. There is need to bring changes in the social setup which favours male dominance because of which females have limited choices. To deal with refugee issues and to contribute in making refugee women's life worth living, following are few policy recommendations:

- (1) Government ought to make such policies which address the issues of refugees, particularly females in having easy access to education.
- (2) Training centres should be established in refugee communities to provide them skills to become economically sound.
- (3) Male education should be given importance to change the mind-set of the male segments of the society towards female education.
- (4) Financial assistance should be given to the refugees to make them economically sound to have easy access to education.
- (5) Vocational training centres should be initiated in the community to provide skills to the uneducated refugee women.
- (6) Integrated community based development approach should be adopted for the welfare of refugees.

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