

Pakistan
The Role of *Madrasas* in
Women's Empowerment
A Study of the Khanewal and Vehari Districts of
Punjab

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Oppression is a phenomenon experienced by many women in Pakistan. Powerlessness is an expected result, and is a situation where women have little control over aspects of their lives. The foundation for women's oppression in Pakistan rests in the political, social, cultural, and patriarchal structure of society, where men control women's opportunities, including the right to education.¹ In such backdrop, a reasonable way to reduce oppression is by promoting knowledge in higher education among the female population of the country.

In developing countries like Pakistan, women's empowerment is of great importance, as almost 30 per cent of

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1 A. Naz and H. U. R. Chaudhry, "Developing gender equality; an analytical study of sociopolitical and economic constraints in women's empowerment in Pakhtun society of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province Pakistan", *Indian Journal of Health and Wellbeing*, Volume 2, Number 1, 2011, pp. 259-266.

women are considered both economically and socially poor.² A high level of female education is of utmost importance, because it provides a rock-solid base to heighten gender equality.³

As of 1974, there were 121 *madrasas* in the Punjab province of Pakistan. By 2016, this number had increased to approximately 13,782.⁴ The mushrooming of *madrasas* in Punjab has long been a key recruiting ground for militant groups. Punjab is Pakistan's second largest and most densely populated province, with a population exceeding 82 million, comprising 56 per cent of the country's total population.⁵ Most of Pakistan's military support also comes from this province. It can be said that, if Pakistan were to collapse due to Islamist extremism, then it is in Punjab where this would occur, as it is a fertile ground for various extremist religious activities, and a rich recruitment area for *madrasa* students.⁶

2 H. Rehman, et. al., "Role of microfinance institutions in women empowerment: A case study of Akhuwat, Pakistan" *South Asian Studies*, Volume 30, Number 1, 2015, p. 107.

3 M. Meraj and M.B. Sadaqat, "Gender equality and socio-economic development through women's empowerment in Pakistan", *Ritsumeikan Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, Volume 34, Number 16, 2016, pp. 125-140.

4 S. Khan, "Women's empowerment through poverty alleviation: A socio-cultural and politico-economic assessment of conditions in Pakistan", *European Virtual Conference on Management Sciences and Economics*, Volume 1, Number 1, pp. 25-52.

M. Ramzan, "Sectarian landscape, madrasas and militancy in Punjab". *Journal of Political Studies*, Volume 22, Number 2, 2015, pp. 421-436.

5 F. Anjum, et. al., "Health issues and wellbeing: Working children in carpet industry in Punjab Pakistan", *Professional Medical Journal*, Colume 22, Number 5, 2015, pp. 640-647.

6 C.H. Hansi, "*Fault lines in Pakistan and implications for India*", 2017, http://www.claws.in/images/publication_pdf/1090930096_MP66Hansi.pdf.

Over a period of time, Islamist radicalisation has made serious inroads in the province. The wave of terrorism in Punjab gained momentum and hit Pakistan itself when military forces captured Islamabad's Red Mosque in 2007. This incident represented the first clear case of *Ulama* and students (both male and female) within a Pakistani *madrasa* taking up arms in opposition to the state, and gravitating towards militancy.⁷ After 9/11, the then Pakistani President Musharraf decided to ally with the U.S. in the 'War on Terror'. The President declared that any *madrasa* that taught extremism or was found to be involved in destructive or militant activities would be shut down. Musharraf's government began demolishing militant *madrasas* as a part of its pledge to the U.S. and to its War on Terror. In January of 2007, the government informed the Red Mosque administration that its main madrasas would be shut down.

This incident instigated retaliation from the young students of the Red Mosque, who for months had campaigned to Talibanise Pakistan, wanting to turn it into a state that enforced the strictest version of Islam as the Law of the land. In July 2007, the government deployed military troops in response to the Red Mosque's violent campaign to impose Sharia law. Young students, including female, were pouring into the *madrasa* to 'martyr' themselves. During the eight-day siege, over 150 students, militants, and soldiers were killed. A female *madrasa* student from the Red Mosque described the incident as an apocalypse, because many women were martyred in the hail of bullets from all sides.⁸

7 Masooda Bano, *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrasas of Pakistan*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2012.

8 H. Trivedi and M. A. Naqvi, "Among the believers", Munjusha Films, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INut1K34aFg&list=PLV4HS70bPiZ3JgHzv bZ5PS37zsgbBzTDG>.

Pakistan's madrasa education system is currently changing. This change is necessary to prevent *madrasas* from getting trapped in a cycle of violence because of the ideological divide in society that leads to conflict over those who support *Sharia* law and those who do not. In 2006, Musharraf implemented a five-year plan to reform madrasas. By 2008, over 12,000 out of the estimated 13,000 *madrasas* in Punjab had registered with the government to receive funding. However, updated information demonstrated that *madrasas* in Pakistan had opposed all of the government's efforts at reform.⁹

Between 2007 and 2014, there were 3,700 terrorist attacks, 1,200 schools destroyed, and over 50,000 people died.¹⁰ Militant groups were out for revenge to support the cause of the Red Mosque and attack military and civilian targets. For example, the Peshawar school attack in December 16, 2014, caused global public outcry. In response, the Pakistani Army launched a major offensive into the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan- TTP's stronghold, flattening villages and confiscating weapons. Over one million people were internally displaced within Pakistan as a result of these operations.¹¹

The international community views *madrasas* as having less to do with education and more to do with a security threat to the modern world.¹² The Afghanistan Ministry of Defense (MoD) reported that the jihadis who are at war with the Afghan Defense Forces include many students from madrasas

9 J. Park and S. Niyozov, "Madrasa education in South Asia and Southeast Asia: Current issues and debates", *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, Volume 28, Number 4, 2008, pp.323-351.

10 H. Trivedi and M.A. Naqvi, 2015, op. cit.

11 Ibid.

12 T. M. Butt, "Social and political role of madrasa: Perspectives of religious leaders in Pakistan", *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, Volume 2, Number 27, 2012, pp. 387-407.

in Pakistan. The MoD emphasises, further, that many of these madrasas educate and equip students so that they are prepared to fight the Afghan government forces.¹³

In the United States, madrasas are viewed as a global security threat, which prompted Washington to provide Pakistan over USD 225 million in aid in support of their reform efforts.¹⁴ Pakistan was thought to be one of the most strategically important countries for the United States, evidenced by the investment of more than USD 30 billion over a period of 60 years¹⁵, to help reform the country and produce a more stable and democratic nation, more capable of countering terrorism.¹⁶

The improvements surrounding reformed madrasas for women are on the rise in Pakistan.¹⁷ This change is needed for females, who constitute 48 per cent of the country's population, but have fewer education and empowerment opportunities when compared to their male counterparts.¹⁸ Madrasas face a myriad of challenges in preparing females for life in a rapidly

13 A.W. Arian, "Pakistani madrasas foster terrorists to wage war against Afghans: MoD", *Therearenosunglasses*, June 28, 2016, <https://therearenosunglasses.wordpress.com/2016/06/28/afghan-mod-charges-pakistanimadrasas-foster-the-terrorists-who-wage-war-against-afghanistan/>.

14 Masooda Bano, *op. cit.*

15 Daniel F. Runde, "An Economic Crisis in Pakistan Again: What's Different This Time?", Center for Strategic and International Studies, October 31, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/economic-crisis-pakistan-again-whats-different-time>.

16 H. Mirahmadi, et. al., "Empowering Pakistan's civil society to counter violent extremism", *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, Volume 8, Number 1, 2016, pp. 188-214.

17 M. Farooq, "Disciplining the feminism: Girls' madrasa education in Pakistan", *The Historian*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2013, pp. 1-25.

18 A. Anantharam, "Engendering the nation: Women, Islam, and poetry in Pakistan", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Volume 11, Number 1, 2013, pp. 208-224.

changing Pakistani society with the emergence of modernity and globalisation.¹⁹ One of the key components of reformed madrasas for females is to equip students with economically marketable skills and allow them to seek gainful employment upon graduation.²⁰ In acknowledgement of increasing rivalry with public schools, a large number of madrasas have proven quite eager to change in response to local educational demands.

OBSTACLES FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN PAKISTAN

In spite of increased international efforts, the situation with regard to women's empowerment in Pakistan has not significantly improved.²¹ Some of the barriers concerning women's empowerment in Pakistan are violence, male dominance, discrimination, subordination, and inequality of rights.²² Violence in the form of sexual abuse, domestic abuse, acid burning, and honour killings are some of the central elements that shape women's disempowerment in Pakistan.²³ According to the report of HRCP (2015), between 2008 and

19 J. Park and S. Niyozov, 2008, op. cit.

20 K. Borchgrevink, "Transnational links of Afghan madrasas: Implications for the reform of religious education", *Prospects*, Volume 43, Number 1, 2013, pp. 69-84.

21 A. A. Ali, and M. J. Akhtar, "Empowerment and political mobilization of women in Pakistan: A descriptive discourse of perspectives" *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume 32, Number 1, 2012, pp. 221-228.

22 A. Mohyuddin and M. Ambreen, "Economic empowerment of women in the rural areas of Balochistan", *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies*, Volume 19, Number 2, 2012, pp. 239-256.

23 D. Bhawani et. al., "Gender equality and women empowerment in Pakistan (36th STP)", Civil Services Academy, Lahore Pakistan Administrative Campus, 2013, http://www.academia.edu/7287527/Gender_Equality_and_Women_Empowerment_in_Pakistan.

N. Kabeer, "Women, wages and intra-household power relations in urban Bangladesh", *Development and Change*, Volume 28, Number 2, 1997, pp. 261-302.

A. Mohyuddin and M. Ambreen, op. cit.

2015, there were more than 3,000 women victims of honour killing in Pakistan. In 2015, there were 55 acid attacks against women in the country.²⁴ Other main hurdles for women's empowerment in Pakistan include oppressive patriarchal structures, rigid socio-cultural customs and traditions, poverty, strict interpretations of Islam, and discriminatory laws.²⁵

Oppressive patriarchal structures- Pakistani society exhibits a patriarchal mindset, with the dominance of men over women in all matters of family life.²⁶ The word patriarchy means the rule of the father and originally was used to describe a particular type of male-dominated family. The characteristics of Pakistan's patriarchal society consist of extremely restrictive codes of behaviour for women, such as the practice of rigid gender segregation and a dominant ideology linking family honour to female virtue. As a result, men are responsible for safeguarding family honour through complex social arrangements that ensure the protection, restriction, and dependence of women.²⁷ These patriarchal attitudes towards women in Pakistan are deep-rooted and support the discriminatory practices against them.²⁸

Gender discriminatory laws and gender biases- A number of progressive laws supporting women's empowerment were passed between 2010 and 2012. These laws include the National Commission on Status of Women Act, the Domestic

24 A. Hadi, "Patriarchy and gender-based violence in Pakistan", *European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research*, Volume 10, Number 2, 2017, pp. 297-304.

25 S. Z. Awan, "Role of civil society in empowering Pakistani women", *South Asian Studies*, Volume 27, Number 2, 2012, pp. 439-458.

26 Ibid.

27 R. Frederick-Littrell and A. Bertsch, "Traditional and contemporary status of women in the patriarchal belt. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion", *An International Journal*, Volume 32, Number 3, 2013, pp. 310-324.

28 S. Z. Awan, 2012, op. cit.

Violence Bill, and the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace.²⁹ At the official level, several laws have been adopted in Pakistan to safeguard women (i.e., The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment) Act, 2011; Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection), Act 2012; and the National Commission on the Status of Women Act, 2012). However, in spite of these safeguards, cultural patterns in Pakistan do not let women enjoy their legal and religious rights protected by the law and provided by Islam.³⁰ The gender discrimination involves income disparity and social status where men benefit from wages, social position, practices, and laws.³¹

Women in Pakistan also face discrimination in family law, property law, and in the judicial system.³² Women are still not safeguarded under constitutional provisions. It seems that once the origin or basis of a law or a rule is claimed to be Islamic, the Pakistani Government and political leaders dare not repeal them.³³ The political costs of defying the divine word of God are too high, and, usually, the Government simply does not act, or acts inconsistently.³⁴ Today, Islamic socio-religious

29 N.S. Murshid and F.M. Critelli, "Empowerment and intimate partner violence in Pakistan: results from a nationally representative survey", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Volume 2, Number 1, 2017, pp. 1-22.

30 Sanchita Bhattacharya, "Status of women in Pakistan", *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, Volume 51, Number 1, 2014, pp. 179-211.

31 F.Y. Bukhari and M. Ramzan, "Gender discrimination: A myth or truth women status in Pakistan", *Journal of Business and Management*, Volume 8, Number 2, 2013, pp. 88-97.

32 D.Y. Coleman, *Pakistan: 2015 country review*, 2015, <http://www.countrywatch.com>.

33 G.C. Chua, et.al., "Honour killing as engendered violence against women in Amit Majmudar's partitions", *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, Volume 22, Number 1, 2016, pp. 221-233.

34 R. Imran, "Legal injustices: The zina hudood ordinance of Pakistan and its implication for women", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Volume 7, Number 2, 2013, pp. 78-100.

laws exist through Hudood laws, promulgated in 1979 and enforced in 1980. They are a collection of five criminal laws, collectively known as the Hudood Ordinances.

The Ordinance criminalises *Zina*, which is defined as extra-marital sex, including adultery and fornication. Additionally, the *Qanoon-e-Shahadat* (Law of Evidence) states that the testimony of a female is considered half that of a man's in a Pakistani court of law. Thus, three out of four Pakistani women in prison under its Hudood laws are rape victims because they are required to produce four male witnesses to prove their allegation, which is nearly impossible. As a result, many Pakistani women who report their rape to the police end up being charged with adultery on their part, and the Sharia courts in Pakistan punish them with long term imprisonment and, in some extreme cases, even the death sentence.³⁵

Significantly, Muhktar Mai, a survivor of a gang rape in 2002, was able to get one man out of the group of six of the more powerful Pakistani men who raped her convicted. However, she and her family continue to live with permanent death threats. In the past, the male dominated Pakistani society justified honour killings through the notion that females must refrain from sexuality to maintain the honour of the family.³⁶ In times of communal strife, this leads to women being viewed by their male family members as threats against the honour of their respective religions and communities. Only recently has the Parliament in Pakistan taken a positive step to protect women against honour killings. On October 6, 2016, an Anti-honour Killing Bill, setting the minimum punishment for an offender

35 P. Chesler, "Punished for being raped and for accusing rapists: Women's burden under sharia", October 28, 2014, *Breitbart*, <http://www.breitbart.com/nationalsecurity/2014/10/28/punished-for-being-raped-the-burden-of-women-under-sharia/>.

36 G.C. Chua, et.al., 2016, op. cit.

to be 25 years in prison, was passed.³⁷ However, the law on honour killings, like a range of other laws, remains on paper, and society continues to be indifferent to the plight of women. According to a July, 2019 report, in the province of Punjab, over the preceding one year, 234 cases of honour killing were reported, of which six were withdrawn. As many as 400 of 439 suspects involved in the remaining 228 cases were arrested, but only 2 per cent of the accused were convicted. A Police source said that the main reason for this abysmally low rate of conviction is that the aggrieved party tends to reconcile with the suspects and the matter never ends up in court.³⁸ Seeking justice in such cases is a long-drawn process and women are at a great social and institutional disadvantage. In many cases the community and tribal elders arbitrate for ‘restoring the honour’ of the victim’s family by convincing the parties to reach a compromise and getting the killer pardoned by victim’s family.

Pakistani women continue to face widespread discrimination in other aspects of their lives including the home, employment sector, and community.³⁹ Even after women get married, they are not given freedom to work or make decisions.⁴⁰ There is also strong social pressure for women to stay at home while enjoying fewer benefits relating to nutrition, health, and education, when compared to their male counterparts. Improvements in women’s empowerment in Pakistan cannot

37 H. Fatima, et. al., “Pakistan steps up to remove “honour” from honour killing”, *The Lancet Global Health*, Volume 5, Number 2, 2017.

38 “2% of honour killing suspects convicted”, July 5, 2019, <https://www.pakistangendernews.org/2-of-honour-killing-suspects-convicted/>

39 M. Sohail, “Women empowerment and economic development-An exploratory study in Pakistan”, *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly*, Volume 5, Number 4, 2014, 1-24.

40 M. Qureshi, “The gender differences in school enrolment and returns to education in Pakistan”, *The Pakistan Development Review*, Volume 51, Number 3, 2012, 219-256.

occur until there is good governance with accountability and the rule of law.⁴¹

Poverty- Given the burden of poverty on women in Pakistan, the significance of empowering them cannot be overstated. Poverty, together with established norms of gender inequality, contributes to multiple complications for them. Combating poverty remains the top priority in almost all the national plans of the Pakistani government. Pakistan is facing the formidable challenge of poverty-reduction because of its status as the sixth most populous nation in the world. Since independence, Pakistan's population increased almost five times from 34 million in 1951 to 173.5 in 2010 and 207.8 million by 2017⁴² By 2050, Pakistan is expected to be the 4th most populous country in the world with more than 348 million people.⁴³

In Pakistan, 60.3 per cent of the total population lives on less than two dollars a day, with the rural areas having more severe and absolute poverty compared to the urban areas of the country.⁴⁴ Empirical evidence has found that one way to reduce poverty in Pakistan is the education of the female head of the household.⁴⁵ Mass education is the only way to eradicate poverty and act on the findings on women's status

41 Ahmar, Moonis, "The State of Social Development in Pakistan" in Habib Tiliouine and Richard J. Estes eds. *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies*, Springer International Publishing, Gewerbestrasse, 2016.

42 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, "Population Census", <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-census>.

43 I. A. Shakil et.al., "Population-poverty connection in Pakistan: Is it really a problem?", *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, Volume 51, Number 1, 2014, pp. 1-27.

44 Ibid.

45 G. M. Arif and S. Farooq, "Rural poverty dynamics in Pakistan: Evidence from three waves of the panel survey", *Pakistan Development Review*, Volume 53, Number 2, 2014, pp. 1-32.

in the developing country of Pakistan.⁴⁶ Women's education in Pakistan remains grossly underinvested by families because of the direct and indirect cost of sending girls to school and because of safety concerns in secular schools. Consequently, many families are more willing to send their daughters to *madrasas* because they are thought to be safer.⁴⁷ Families are also swayed by religious and community leaders who encourage them to send their daughters to *madrasas*, so that these leaders can enhance their own economic security.⁴⁸

Strict religious interpretation of Islam- The mis-interpretation of Islam is one of the reasons why women's empowerment is so difficult to achieve in Pakistan.⁴⁹ Religious doctrines impact directly on Muslim women's empowerment.⁵⁰ Religious beliefs such as the *pardah* system exclude Pakistani women from the public sphere and confine them to a domestic sphere for a significant portion of their life.⁵¹

Other research has found that Islamic leaders may promote or hinder South Asian Muslim women in pursuing

46 F.Y. Bukhari and M. Ramzan, 2013, op. cit.

47 M. Qureshi, 2012, op. cit.

48 M.A. Ali et. al., "War against terrorism and its impact on academic performance in district swat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan", *Journal of Management Info*, Volume 9, Number 1, 2016, pp. 12-20.
A. Keddie, "Framing discourses of possibility and constraints in the empowerment of Muslim girls: Issues of religion, race, ethnicity and culture", *Race Ethnicity and Education*, Volume 14, Number 2, 2010, pp. 175-19.

49 F.Y. Bukhari and M. Ramzan, 2013, op. cit.

50 R. Imran, "Deconstructing Islamization in Pakistan: Sabiha Sumar wages feminist cinematic jihad through a documentary lens", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Volume 9, Number 3, 2008, pp. 117-142.

51 S.A. Begum and M. N. Beena, "Empowerment of Muslim women in Islam", *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Volume 19, Number 10, 2014, pp. 27-29.

A. Mohyuddin and M. Ambreen, 2012, op. cit.

opportunities, such as educational attainment.⁵² For example, Islamic leaders who promote women's rights could help women fulfill their academic aspirations and improve their impoverished conditions. Conversely, Islamic leaders can also create a lot of hurdles for women by extracting references from Islamic texts or traditions that are unsupportive of women's empowerment.

EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Pakistan is the sixth most populous country in the world with a total population of 207.8 million. Pakistan's rapidly growing population adds to the many challenges faced by the nation's education system. The educational system is complex and inadequate, and, as such, has not met basic learning needs. With respect to education and women's empowerment, it can very well be said that, higher education not only empowers women, but also helps them to enlarge their world views, choices, and growth of knowledge within the basic structures of families in a traditional society. Educated women are more likely to view the world through a different lens, which may lead them to improve their social conditions. For example, education helps women shape their views on issues like violence against them and makes them more likely to demand their basic human rights in existing patriarchal countries.⁵³ Similarly, educated women are more likely to raise educated girls with greater awareness of their personal rights, and

52 P. Bagguley and V. Hussain, "Negotiating mobility: South Asian women and higher education" *Sociology*, Volume 50, Number 1, 2014, pp. 43-59.

53 S.R. Schuler, et. al., "Women's empowerment as a protective factor against intimate partner violence in Bangladesh: A qualitative exploration of the process and limitations of its influence", *Violence Against Women*, Volume 23, Number 9, 2017, pp. 1100-1121.

elevated confidence and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives.⁵⁴

The biggest obstacle to educational reform is the absence of a blueprint such as that used across the globe.⁵⁵ This study attempted to investigate reformed *madrasas* in Pakistan as a way to expand universal knowledge of educational reform. Reform efforts differ depending on the context, and researchers need to investigate ways they can create a “theory of change” that can be applied more widely.⁵⁶

KEY ELEMENTS OF REFORMED MADRASAS

State cooperation and support- A Madaris Reform Project (MRP) was launched in 2002 in Pakistan to strengthen lines of communication between madrasas and the government. The MRP planned to fund the salaries of teachers to be appointed to teach non-religious subjects. A salary of Rs. 4000 per month (equivalent to USD 38.16) would be given to teachers for teaching formal subjects at the secondary level and Rs. 10,000 per month (equivalent to USD 90.46) at the intermediate level.⁵⁷

54 “Global Education Monitoring Report, Accountability in education: Meeting our Commitments”, UNESCO, August, 2017, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002593/259338e.pdf>.

55 M. Afzal, “Education and attitudes in Pakistan (Special Report)”, United States Institution of Peace, 2015, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR367-Education-and-Attitudes-in-Pakistan.pdf>.

C. Strickland, “Conducting focus groups cross- culturally: Experiences with pacific northwest Indian people”, *Public Health Nursing*, Volume 16, Number 3, 1999, pp. 190-197.

56 D.G. White and J.A. Levin, “Navigating the turbulent waters of school reform guided by complexity theory”, *Complicity: An International Journal of Complexity and Education*, Volume 13, Number 1, 2016, pp. 43-80.

57 Sanchita Bhattacharya, “Madrasa policy in Pakistan: Strategies from within”, *International Journal of South Asian Studies*, Volume 2, Number 2, 2009, pp. 177-194.

There have been other attempts by the Government of Pakistan to reform *madrasas*⁵⁸:

- In 2000-2003, the Musharraf Government introduced the Education Sector Reform Action Plan and focused on the inclusion of modern subjects in *madrasas* and registering every *madrasa*.
- In 2001, the government created a Pakistan *Madrasa* Education Board (PMEB) to establish a network of “model *madrasas*” and encourage *madrasas* to provide both religious and secular education. They also established public-private partnerships (PPPs) in attempts to gain support for their educational reform process.
- In 2002, the government initiated, the *Deeni Madaris Ordinance* (Voluntary Registration and Regulation) and promised funding to *madrasas* that formally registered with the government.
- In 2005, the Pakistani state ordered *madrasas* to expel all foreign students.
- In 2009, the government tried to establish a *Madrassa* Regulatory Authority under the Interior Ministry to control *madrasas*, but this was rejected by the *Ittehad-e-Tanzeem-ul-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP)*, an umbrella organisation of *madrasa* oversight boards.

58 Masooda Bano, “Public private partnerships (PPPs) as ‘anchor’ of educational reforms: Lessons from Pakistan”, UNESCO, 2008, http://itacec.org/document/sindh_public_private_partnership/learning_resources/Bano%200.%202008%20World%20bank.pdf.

Sanchita Bhattacharya, “Madrasa education in Pakistan: In the context of government policy”, *Global Education Magazine*, Number 9, 2014, <http://www.globaleducationmagazine.com/madrassa-education-pakistan-contextgovernment-policy/>.

- In October 2010, the government succeeded in making an agreement with ITMP for the introduction of modern subjects in some courses in *madrasas*.

It is difficult to assess the positive impact, if any, of these reforms, because most of the initiatives called for voluntary submission to regulations, leaving many *madrasas* uninvolved.⁵⁹ At present, it remains unclear how many *madrasas* receive government-supported funds in Pakistan.⁶⁰

Train program for teachers- The government of Pakistan has a long history of advocating the importance of quality teachers in education to raise the status of the country. At the first educational conference held in Karachi in 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah stated, “We should redouble our efforts to make teacher education rich. This will strengthen the system of education and in this way, we can raise the status and honour of Pakistan in the community of Nations.”⁶¹

Teachers in *madrasas* play a crucial role in the learning process for female students and must receive current training to meet the modern demands of Pakistani society.⁶² Teachers in *madrasas* need to be encouraged to participate in the numerous free teacher training workshops organised by the government

59 Sanchita Bhattacharya, 2009, op. cit.

60 Masooda Bano, “Beyond politics: The reality of a Deobandi madrasa in Pakistan”, *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Volume 8, Number 1, 2007a, 43-68.

M. A. Raheem, “A comparative study of the attitudes of students attending urdu medium, english medium and seminary schools in Pakistan”, Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow, 2015, <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/6425/1/2013RaheemPhD.pdf.pdf>.

61 W. Khan, “Quality of teacher education in Pakistan”, *Dialogue*, Volume 10, Number 2, 2015, pp. 212-219.

62 S.F. Kazmi and T. Pervez, “Socio economic and cultural perspectives of terrorism in Pakistan and the madrasa (mosque) students”, *International Journal of Academic Research*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2011, pp. 2-32.

and non-government sectors.⁶³ Further, reformed *madrasas* require qualified teachers exposed to the various teaching methodologies that enhance the learning process of Islamic religious education.⁶⁴

Reformed *madrasas* in Pakistan are beginning to reflect modern teaching methods in their studies.⁶⁵ Some Pakistani madrasa teachers embrace modern teaching styles such as using leading or thought-provoking questions and encouraging students to ask questions about what they're seeking to understand.⁶⁶ On the contrary, some madrasa teachers are less likely to embrace modernisation, and show less support for equal rights for women as compared to secular teachers.⁶⁷

Curriculum- To stay abreast of secular universities and to equip future students with the changing conditions of the world, *madrasas* need to expand their curriculum.⁶⁸ The concept of curriculum reform for *madrasas* has been part of Pakistani society since the early 1980s with a plan to modernise their education system. This curriculum reform consisted of introducing secular subjects such as English, science, and

63 S.W.A. Kauser and A.W. Sial, "The impact of systematic structure of madrasahs on student's outcomes in Pakistan: Do they need structural reforms?", *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, Volume 14, Number 41, 2015, pp. 127-147.

64 A. Fauzi, "The management of teachers' empowerment of state madrasah Aliyah in Banten province", *Higher Education Studies*, Volume 6, Number 2, 2016, pp. 32-54.

65 N. Rustham and Arifin Mamat, "Teaching methodologies in a weekend madrasah: A study at Jamiyah education centre, Singapore", *International Journal of Arts and Commerce*, Volume 1, Number 2, 2012, pp. 48-167.

66 J. Park and S. Niyozov, 2008, op. cit.

67 D.J. Roof, "Problems of common interest: The shaping of education in Pakistan, 1970- 2014", *Pakistan Journal of Commerce & Social Sciences*, Volume 9, Number 1, 2015, pp. 35-51.

68 S.W.A. Kauser and A.W. Sial, 2015, op. cit.

mathematics, alongside religion-related subjects.⁶⁹ In 2007, the government began to focus on reforming the Deobandi curriculum, the largest *madrasa* education board for women.⁷⁰ This change represented nearly three-quarters of the *madrasas* and 90 per cent of all the female students.⁷¹ The *Dars-e-Nizami* is the curriculum of the Deobandi *madrasas*, and it centres on creating more docile, subservient, and domesticated women, with a focus on the specific manners required to conform to their image of the ideal Muslim woman.⁷²

Infrastructure and information technologies- Reforms are also expanding infrastructure and information and communications technologies (ICTs) into the domain of *madrasas* in Pakistan. The infrastructure of *madrasas* in Pakistan can be situated on a continuum from the most traditional one-room schoolhouse to elaborate modern campuses.⁷³ Some recently established private *madrasas* offer modern infrastructure, with well-endowed libraries, and science and computer laboratories.⁷⁴ Libraries have been shown to be useful in female education because they provide relevant knowledge and skills through ICTs. Advanced technologies

69 “Major evaluation of Pakistani madrasa reform project completed”, Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, Issue 4, 2009, http://www.salaminstitute.org/Winter_Newsletter0109.pdf.

70 T. Bradley and R. Saigol, “Religious values and beliefs and education for women in Pakistan”, *Development in Practice*, Volume 22, Number 5/6, 2012, pp. 675-688.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

S.M.A. Zaidi, S.M.A., “Madrasa education in Pakistan: Controversies, challenges and Prospects”, Centre for Strategic and International Analysis, SISA Report number 3, 2013, http://strategiskanalyse.no/publikasjoner%202013/2013-03-04__SISA3_Madrasa_Education_-_Syed_Manzar_Abbas_Zaidi.pdf.

73 J. Park and S. Niyozov, 2008, op. cit.

74 S.W.A. Kauser and A.W. Sial, 2015, op. cit.

inspire confidence and self-reliance, and also equip women with abilities to address current problems of the modern world.⁷⁵

Extra-curricular activities- Some female madrasas are providing extracurricular training to their students in order to encourage proper Islamic etiquette and manners.⁷⁶ One type of extra-curricular activity observed in female madrasas was the salat workshop. Salat is the ritual prayer, one of the five pillars of Islam.⁷⁷ It includes different body postures and recitation of different meaningful *Ayat* (verses) during each posture.⁷⁸

Activities that have successfully been introduced in the reformed *madrasas* across Pakistan⁷⁹, however, include strong writing and language programs to help prepare students for entering the real world of publication. Some reformed madrasas have introduced the arts into their curriculum. The students of Jamia Ashraf-ul Madaris, Karachi, receive martial arts training from a national champion. Further, conversation sessions or presentations are also common extracurricular activities in some madrasas. The Jamia Salfia Madrasa in Islamabad has a seminar week at the end of the first term of the year, and

75 R. Zakar et. al., "Harnessing information technology to improve women's health information: Evidence from Pakistan", *BMC Women's Health*, Volume 14, Number 1, 2014, p. 105.

76 M. Begum and H. Kabir, "Reflections on the deobandi reformist agenda in a female Quomi madrasah in Bangladesh", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Volume 35, Number 2, 2012, pp. 353-380.

77 "Masjid", *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 2015, p. 145, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-andmaps/Masjid>.

78 H. Doufesh, et. al., "Effects of Muslims praying (salat) on EEG gamma activity", *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, Volume 8, Number 24, 2016, pp. 6-10.

79 Rahman, K., "Madrasas in Pakistan: Role and emerging trends", in A. Pandya, et. al. eds., *Islam and politics: Renewal and resistance in the Muslim world*. Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2009.

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has included topics such as “Torch Bearer of Humanitarian Services or Centres of Terrorism”.⁸⁰

MADRASA EDUCATION FOR WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

Higher education in Pakistan is ranked among the lowest in the world and is accessed by just 6 per cent of the population.⁸¹ The country uses just over 2 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on higher education, despite a commitment to spend 4 per cent by 2018.⁸² Higher education for women in Pakistan can be obtained in four ways: through the secular university systems, *madrasas*, private universities, or colleges. This study examined female madrasas because they are so important to Pakistani women and are scarcely researched in the literature.

Multilayered reasons exist why this type of education is considered important in Pakistan. Many Pakistanis argue that madrasas are the most important educational institution in society because their core religious curriculum focuses on the teaching of *Hadith* (source of Prophet Muhammad’s sayings).⁸³ One of Prophet Muhammad’s sayings is that a child who memorises the *Quran* completely goes to heaven and

80 Ibid.

81 S. Malik and K. Courtney, “Higher education and women’s empowerment in Pakistan”, *Gender and Education*, Volume 23, Number 1, 2011, pp. 29-45.

A. Raza, “World university rankings: Only 7 Pakistani institutions among top 980 universities”, *Dawn*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1285647/world-university-rankings-only-7-pakistani-institutions-among-top-980-universities>.

82 Ibid.

83 T. M. Butt, 2012, *op. cit.*

A. Naz, “Attitude of female teachers towards religious minorities: A case study of KPK female madrasas”, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Working Paper Number 123, 2011, <http://www.eldis.org/go/display&type=Document&id=69871>.

takes along ten relatives. However, *Hadith* is just one aspect of *madrasa* syllabus which includes other facets: Quranic education, jurisprudence, Prophet Muhammad's actions, biography of the Prophet, philosophy and *Sharia* (Islamic law).⁸⁴

The national emphasis on female madrasas today is due to the *Ulama* who believed that women in their households needed education. From the 1990s onward, it became a customary practice for male *madrasas* to open a separate traditional female *madrasa*, which has allowed for the continued growth and development of women.⁸⁵ Traditional female madrasas have a significant role in the prospects of women's education and empowerment in Pakistan.⁸⁶ Before their emergence, women from religiously conservative families had few educational options.⁸⁷ Female *madrasas* allow unique opportunities for such women to gain access to the outside world. However, women are still very much excluded in the social hierarchy of Pakistan, and the *pardah* system (segregation of women) is very much prevalent inside most madrasas. A former female madrasa student belonging to the Red mosque *madrasa* network in Pakistan noted that the laws of Islam restricted females from stepping outside the walls of the *madrasa*.⁸⁸

The access to education for women living in rural areas is even more limited. Many female madrasas provide room and boarding subsidies, thereby increasing the opportunity for

84 H. Trivedi and M. A. Naqvi, 2015, op. cit.

85 Masooda Bano, *The Rational Believer: Choices and Decisions in the Madrasas of Pakistan*, Cornell University Press, New York, 2012.

86 M. Aslam and G. Kingdon, "Can education be a path to gender equality in the labor market? An update on Pakistan", *Comparative Education*, Volume 48, Number 2, 2012, pp. 211-229.

87 Masooda Bano, 2012, op. cit.

88 H. Trivedi and M. A. Naqvi, 2015, op. cit.

rural women to obtain an education.⁸⁹ Past research indicates that parents in conservative rural areas were more willing to send their daughters to *madrasas* as against secular schools.⁹⁰ Some Pakistani parents tend to view secular universities as problematic and are more comfortable in sending their daughters to *madrasas* as a way to safeguard their family honour and traditional roles.⁹¹ Female madrasas appear to be on the rise because of a growing interest in the influence that they have on women's education in Muslim countries such as Pakistan.⁹²

Five recognised Islamic schools of thought are represented under the *Wafaq* (the umbrella organisation of madrasas). In Pakistan, the majority of madrasas are registered under the Wafaq and include the following: Wafaq al-Madaris al-Arabia (*Deobandi*); Tanzim al-Madaris al-Arabiya (*Barelvi*); Wafaq al-Madaris al-Shia (*Shia*); Wafaq al-Madaris Al-Salafiya (*Ahl-i-Hadith*); and the Rabita al-Madaris (*Jamaat-i-Islami*).⁹³ A review from the madrasa registration data showed that, on average, around 25 per cent of the madrasa student population in each Wafaq is female.⁹⁴ Deobandi, Jamaat-i-Islami, Ahl-i-Hadith, and Barelvi Wafaq belong to Sunni Muslims, and the Shia Wafaq belongs to Shia Muslims.

89 M.J. Bhatti, "*Questioning empowerment: Pakistani women, higher education and marriage*", Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Institute of International and Comparative Education, Normal University, 2013, Retrieved from <http://www.savap.org./journals/ARInt/>.

90 Masooda Bano, "*From mardas to low-cost private schools: Developing new education partnerships*", 2013, http://www.sbs.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Skoll_Centre/Docs/essay-masooda.pdf.

91 M. J. Bhatti, 2013, op. cit.

92 M. Sohail, 2014, op. cit.

93 Sanchita Bhattacharya, 2009, op. cit.

94 Masooda Bano, 2012, op. cit.

Past research on religious views toward women's education found differences among the Sunni and Shia Islamic sects. For example, Islamic perspectives on women's education derived from interviews of female madrasa students studying at the postgraduate level found that Shia women demonstrated more liberal views about co-education at the university level, compared to the Sunni women. The previously mentioned study dealt with both the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam. The current study is based on interviews of students attending female-only madrasas studying at the bachelor's level or master's level of religious education.⁹⁵

A hierarchy exists within the madrasa schooling system, which is marked by five levels of education. Each level has a clearly spelled out curriculum. Level one is the *ibtida'iya* and consists of primary school. Level two is the *khasa* and represents the senior secondary level. Level three is the *aliya* and is equivalent to a bachelor's degree. Level four is the *alimiya* and amounts to a master's degree. Level five is the elite madrasa, which offers *takhassus* (specialisation) and is equivalent to a doctoral degree.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

First, the present study explores the role of reformed *madrasas* (high vs. low) on women's empowerment in Pakistan. The term reformed *madrasa* was created by the researcher in this study to describe key aspects of this type of education. Highly reformed *madrasas* represent schools that have six or more of the following components: infrastructure (e.g., good classrooms, libraries, electricity, gas, and telephone facilities), extracurricular activities for students, job options (e.g., religious scholar), use of modern subjects/textbooks in their

95 T. Bradley and R. Saigol, 2012, op.cit.

syllabus, funds from the government, state supported teachers, and training programs for teachers. The low reformed *madrasas* represent schools with five or fewer components. Second, this study examined the effect of educational attainment equivalent to bachelor's degree (*aliya*) and master's degree (*alimiya*) on women's empowerment. Third, the study investigated the role of schools of thought in women's empowerment. Fourth, the study captured women's empowerment experiences within the cultural context of a Muslim community. Finally, the study strived to assist policy development within the education division to provide more opportunities for women's empowerment in Pakistan.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

Data was collected from *madrasas* (N=5) located in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Three of these were of the Jamaat-i-Islami, Ahl-i-Hadith, and Deobandi schools of thought in Vehari District located in Vehari city. Data was also collected from two *madrasas* of the Ahl-i-Hadith and Barelvi schools of thought, located in Jahanian city, Khanewal District. The participants in this study were from the Sunni sect of Islam and belonged to one of the four schools of thought: Deobandi, Barelvi, Jamaat-i-Islami, or the Ahl-i-Hadith. This study used a convenience sampling frame to select female students from *madrasas* located in the Punjab province of Pakistan. The province had a respectable availability of female *madrasas* from many schools of thought.⁹⁶ The researcher used convenience sampling because the contacts in the Pakistani community had connections just in the Khanewal or Vehari districts, and hence were only able to provide access to these

96 S. J. Jejeebhoy and Z. A. Sathar, "Women's autonomy in India and Pakistan: The influence of religion and province", *Population and Development Review*, Volume 27, Number 4, 2001, pp. 687-712.

madrasas. Consequently, the sample used in this study did not represent comparable *madrasas* from all four schools of thought. A priori power analysis determined the sample size needed to reject the null hypotheses (N=132).

This study's inclusion criteria removed the influence of specific confounding variables. The inclusion criteria consisted of attributes that are essential for the sample selection to participate in the study. First, they must attend *madrasas* in urban areas of Punjab. Second, their institution must be a member of one of the five schools of thought. Third, they must study at the bachelor's or master's level of education. Fourth, they must be 18-25 years of age. Fifth, they must be competent in the Urdu language (written and oral). Finally, they must give their consent to participate in the research.

Exclusion criteria identified responses by the sample that required their removal from taking part in the research. The exclusion criteria for non-participation consisted of the following elements: students failed to give consent, studied at a *madrasa* outside the Punjab province, attended secular universities, studied at the doctoral level, were not members of one of the identified schools of thoughts, were outside the age range (18-25), or were not competent in the Urdu language. These exclusion criteria ensured that all participants used in the data collection met the same standards.⁹⁷

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

As part of this research, interviews and data collection strategies took place at five *madrasas* in Punjab. Two adjoining districts of Khanewal and Vehari located in the southern part of the province were used as the main research sites because

97 J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*, Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publication, Los Angeles, 2013.

they were known to have *madrasas* of all schools of thought. Representation of different educational levels was addressed by considering only *madrasas* that had levels three and four, equivalent to either bachelor's or master's level education.

A Concurrent Transformative Mixed Methods Approach⁹⁸ was used to increase the validity of this study while minimising its limitations. By taking into account both the quantitative and qualitative data, this researcher promoted a deeper understanding of women's empowerment. To increase awareness of the cultural context, the researcher conducted pre-observations in the physical setting of a *madrasa* before engaging in the research.

This study also controlled for measurement bias by pilot testing the questionnaire with a small group (n=2) similar to the sample used in the study. Pretesting of the instruments verified the format, language, sequence and comprehensibility of the questions to ensure that they were culturally appropriate. The researcher also considered cultural norms when selecting data collectors such as gender matching of research assistants to participants. Lastly, the study allowed enough time for planning, capacity building, and training of research staff.

98 The study used concurrent transformative mixed method design to accomplish its research goals. For instance, the strong emphasis on policy development for improving women's education made this design an appropriate choice. Thus, the transformative framework was a good fit for this research because it dealt with marginalised populations (women in Pakistan) and addressed specific issues of oppression and power in the Muslim community. The concurrent design provides an overall understanding of the research problem. It consisted of the researcher collecting and analysing both strands of data (qualitative and quantitative) during the same phase of the research process. Empirical researchers recommend using a transformative lens in mixed methods when researching underrepresented women throughout the world impacted by power imbalances and marginalisation.

The study used self-administered questionnaires (N=132) and in-depth interviews (n=10) with Pakistani women (age-group of 18–25 years) in Punjab, to determine how the schools of thought, reform of educational opportunities, and higher education in particular, affected women's empowerment. Community collaboration and networking allowed access to five *madrasas* where participants attended school. The findings indicated variations among the schools of thought (e.g., size of a *madrasa*, number of students, and availability of resources), which may influence women's education and outlook. Second, it was found that teacher training programs are an important component of reformed *madrasas*. Third, this study found that higher education was not the only factor in women's empowerment. Additional data demonstrated that participants did not tolerate violence against women (92.5 per cent), were politically active (72.7 per cent), favoured delayed marriage (65.3 per cent), gained freedom to travel (93.52 per cent), performed work for some type of payment (64.7 per cent), and felt a sense of increased respectability (90 per cent). Further, the data revealed that *madrasas* supported students with increased knowledge of women's rights, upward mobility, career pathways, and social supports, which are all factors in women's empowerment.

There are no more than 150 female *madrasa* students studying at the highest level. For the purpose of this study, only the bachelor's and master's education levels have been considered because, by virtue of their seeking higher education, students are likely to have a clear idea of women's empowerment.⁹⁹

99 Masooda Bano, 2012, op.cit.

Globally, women now exceed men in obtaining higher education.¹⁰⁰ Even in lesser developed countries in Southern Asia, the proportion of female participation in higher education is on the rise.¹⁰¹ In Pakistan's case, as we all know, Malala Yousafzai has become a global icon representing the struggle to increase access to education, especially for Muslim girls in Pakistan.¹⁰² As a young girl, Malala Yousafzai defied the Taliban in the Northwestern region of Pakistan and demanded that girls be allowed to receive education. In 2012, a Taliban member attempted to assassinate her on the bus home from school by shooting her in the head. She survived the attack on her life and went on to become the youngest winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. Malala is a champion for advancing the education of women in Pakistan, although she and her family have had to leave Pakistan in order to pursue her education and ensure her family's safety.

Although the government of Pakistan recognises education as a fundamental right for all its citizens and is committed to providing education to both men and women, availability of higher education in Pakistan is ranked among the lowest in the world. Specifically, 6 per cent of the population earns a higher education degree.¹⁰³ According to Annual Publication of Pakistan Education Statistics, 2016-2017, 0.956 million students were enrolled in colleges, and 1.463 million were

100 S. Marginson, "The worldwide trend to high participation higher education: Dynamics of social stratification in inclusive systems", *Higher Education*, Volume 5, Number 2, 2016, pp. 1-22.

101 M.A.R. Dias, "Higher education: Vision and action for the coming century", *Prospects*, Volume 107, Number 4, 2017, pp. 367-375.

102 Khurshid, Ayesha, "Globalized local and localized global in a women's education project in Pakistan", in M. F. Astiz and M. Akiba eds., *The Global and the Local*, Sense Publishers, 2016, pp. 99-113.

103 S. Malik and K. Courtney, 2011, op. cit.
A. Raza, 2016, op. cit.

in university.¹⁰⁴ Further, the participation rate for women in school in Pakistan is generally low because specific cultural and traditional values limit educational and empowerment opportunities for girls and women.¹⁰⁵

It is useful to examine women's empowerment and the role of: (a) education; (b) freedom and autonomy; (c) community and social support; and (d) individual characteristics in supporting or challenging women's education, as demonstrated by the quantitative and the qualitative results of the present study.

Women's empowerment focuses on issues such as disparities in politics, wealth, and education.¹⁰⁶ Research has shown that education is the most important pathway for women's empowerment because it increases: knowledge, bargaining power, nutrition, use of health services, employment opportunities, and other benefits.¹⁰⁷ However, empowerment among Pakistani women remains low because they must overcome many political, cultural, and patriarchal hurdles to acquire education.

The Role of Education- Five schools of thought influence madrasa education in Pakistan. These schools of thought define the operation of a madrasa by establishing the curriculum, developing standards, conducting examinations, and issuing

104 Pakistan Education Statistics 2016-2017, Government of Pakistan, <http://library.aepam.edu.pk/Books/Pakistan%20Education%20Statistics%202016-17.pdf>.

105 M. Rani, "Women physicists in Pakistan and my story of hard-earned success", *Canadian Journal of Physics*, Volume 95, Number 7, 2017, 1-3.

106 K. Kantachote, et. al., "Indicators of women's empowerment in developing nations", Workshop in International Public Affairs, 2013, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ae82/42a19cdc6ded7bfad7082146b557adaf42f8.pdf>.

107 D.Y. Coleman, 2015, op. cit.

certificates at various levels.¹⁰⁸ The *Dars-e-Nizami* is the standard curriculum of all schools of thought. The primary objective of the curriculum is to teach core subjects on Islam so that students can learn to become religious scholars.¹⁰⁹

Schools of Thought- Ethnographic research conducted by Masooda Bano in 2012 in 110 *madrasas* in Pakistan demonstrated the different schools of thought and their influence on *madrasa* education. Bano's ethnographic research approach used four distinct methods.¹¹⁰

- in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders
- group discussion
- field observations
- and self-administered surveys

The present study found that many Pakistanis, especially in the most populated province of Punjab, belonged to the Barelvi school of thought, which placed heavy emphasis on visiting shrines and venerating Sufi saints. It was also noted that the Punjab province had approximately 3,579 Barelvi *madrasas*, compared to only 150 Jamaat-i-Islami *madrasas*. The study found differences in the number of students studying at the four *madrasas*.¹¹¹ The size of a *madrasa* and educational standing can have a strong bearing on women's education and overall outlook. For example, one of the Ahl-i-Hadith schools of thought visited was the smallest, both in size and

108 H. Bhutto and I. Narongraksakhet, "A Critical analysis of sanaviyah amah curriculum of madrasah in Pakistan", *The Scholar: Islamic Academic Research Journal*, Volume 3, Number 1, 2017, pp. 1-19.

109 S. U. Shah, et. al., "Need base education and madrassa system: A comprehensive analysis of mainstream schools of thought in Pakistan", *Merit Research Journal of Education and Review*, Volume 2, Number 2, 2014, pp. 19-27.

110 Masooda Bano, 2012, op. cit.

111 Ibid.

in the number of students ($n=5$). Additionally, this was the only *madrasa* that did not have desks or writing implements for the students. The other *madrasas* had the researcher sit on a mat on the floor, while the students sit on a mat in front of a desk before them, while conducting the interviews. Although the Ahl-i-Hadith *madrasa* lacked basic resources for their students, they were the only school to permit the researcher to view the *Salat-al-Maghrib* (prayer), which occurred just after sunset in a separate room.

The Deobandi school was the largest *madrasa* both in size and in the number of students. The researcher was also able to get a private tour from the head female teacher at this *madrasa*. This also included the teacher taking the researcher inside her home, which was located on the school campus. Additionally, the head teacher mentioned that her husband was the head teacher of the boy's *madrasa* located next to the female *madrasa*, with a separate entrance. The teacher further explained that obtaining a job in a female *madrasa* was easier for women who had a husband working at the adjoining male *madrasa*.

This study also found variations among the four schools of thought and the teacher training programs offered at the *madrasas*. This study reflected a trend of increasing empowerment for students whose teachers enjoyed increased education at their *madrasas*. The students' level of empowerment in this study seemed to vary, but since the schools of thought were not comparable in terms of size and educational standing, more specific conclusions could not be drawn.

Training of Teachers- Teachers are perhaps the most critical component of any system of education, and how well they teach depends on many factors. The availability of teacher training programs would be one factor. Rigorous research on

teacher training programs demonstrates that they can change the way teachers teach and, therefore, how much students learn.¹¹²

A mixed-methods study found that teachers who received training from literacy coaches helped fourth- and fifth-grade students to achieve considerably higher quality discussions than those of classes, whose teachers were not in the program.¹¹³ Similarly, an experimental study of middle school teachers (N=2), who completed a training program on critical thinking, found that students in their classes achieved higher learning outcomes than students in classes taught by teachers who did not receive the training.¹¹⁴ Moreover, a case study of teachers (N=7) found that teachers who received training that involved reflecting with peers on videos of their own teaching enabled them to fix problematic practices in their classrooms.¹¹⁵ Finally, a study conducted in 2017, on undergraduate teachers (N=31) at a medical university in Nepal on the effects of teacher training programs, found that 90.3 per cent of teachers who participated in training programs comprised of group exercises, interactive teaching sessions, daily evaluations, and presentations, enhanced their quality of teaching.¹¹⁶

112 C. Sleeter, “Toward teacher education research that informs policy”, *Educational Researcher*, Volume 43, Number 3, 2014, pp. 146-153.

113 L. C. Matsumura, et. al., “The effect of content-focused coaching on the quality of classroom text discussions. *Journal of Teacher Education*, Volume 63, Number 3, 2012, pp. 214–228.

114 Y.T.C. Yang, “Cultivating critical thinkers: Exploring transfer of learning from preservice teacher training to classroom practice”, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 28, Number 12, 2012, pp. 1116–1130.

115 T.R. Tripp and P.J. Rich, “The influence of video analysis on the process of teacher change”, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 28, 2012, pp. 728–739.

116 N. Baral, et. al., “Effect of teachers training workshop outcomes on real classroom situations of undergraduate medical students”, *Kathmandu University Medical Journal*, Volume 13, Number 2, 2017, pp. 162-166.

Thus, research has shown a clear relationship between teaching quality and learning outcomes for students.¹¹⁷ This pattern persists even for developing countries. An article that examined education plans across many developing countries (N=40) found that every country had teacher training programs that enhanced teaching quality and learning outcome for students.¹¹⁸ In contrast, teacher training programs for madrasas are lacking in Pakistan, because the government does not provide the financial aid needed to cover teacher training costs.¹¹⁹ The quantitative results from the present study demonstrate this, because most of the madrasas did not receive government funds (78.8 per cent). Consequently, difficulty in financing at various levels in different madrasas teacher training programs, which were meant to enhance the professional skills of teachers, were reflected in student performance.

Women's Rights- A recognised indicator of women's empowerment is education. Many women in Pakistan are denied their basic right to an education. Worldwide, a number of reasons prevent women from accessing their right to an education. One of the key issues is the culture of patriarchy and the Violence against Women (VAW) that occur in South Asian countries. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where men often use violence as a tactic to exert power and control over women. The shooting of Malala Yousafzai in 2012 is an example of how the culture of patriarchy and VAW is used in Pakistan to exert control over women's rights to access education. Similarly,

117 "Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all (Education for All Global Monitoring Report)", UNESCO, 2014, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002256/225654e.pdf>.

118 F. Hunt, "Review of national education policies: Teacher quality and learning outcomes", *Prospects*, Volume 45, Number 3, 2015, pp. 379-390.

119 S. Shaukat and A.W. Pell, "Seeking a change strategy for Pakistan's madrasahs", *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume 36, Number 2, 2016, pp. 857-868.

in April 2015, human rights activist Sabeen Mehmood was shot and killed and thus effectively silenced for her stance on rights in the Balochistan province.¹²⁰ In Pakistan, all the major institutions and services, such as education, healthcare, and employment, are controlled by men. As a result of this male dominance, women continue to face obstacles in securing access to education. Even if women can access, the educational content reinforces gender stereotypes and a curriculum of hidden discrimination is perpetrated.

Previous studies have demonstrated that patriarchal societies are more likely to accept VAW.¹²¹ For example, Madhani and colleagues in 2017, conducted a community-based observational study of Pakistani women (N=1,325) on various types of violence. They found that approximately half of the women (47 per cent) considered physical abuse to be violence. Only a few of the women (8 per cent) believed verbal abuse to be violence, and an even smaller percentage of women (0.4 per cent) regarded sexual abuse to be violence.¹²² Another type of violence that some women endure in Pakistan

120 Lois Parshley, "The life and death of Sabeen Mahmud", *The New Yorker*, 2015, http://southasia.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/shared/Viewpoint/Articles/Sabeen_Mahmud.pdf.

121 T. S. Ali, et. al., "Violence permeating daily life: A qualitative study investigating perspectives on violence among women in Karachi, Pakistan", *International Journal of Women's Health*, Volume 4, 2012, pp. 577-585.

R. Zakar, et. al., "Primary health care physicians' response to the victims of spousal violence against women in Pakistan", *Health Care for Women International*, Volume 32, Number 9, 2011, pp. 811-832.

Women, U.N., *Global guidance on addressing school-related gender-based violence*, 2016, UNESCO Publishing.

R. Zakar, 2013, op. cit.

122 F.I. Madhani, et. al., "Women's perceptions and experiences of domestic violence: An observational study from Hyderabad, Pakistan", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, Volume 32, Number 1, 2017, pp. 76-100.

is intimate partner violence (IPV). For example, a quantitative study revealed that two-thirds of women from Karachi, Pakistan believed that IPV was justified if a wife did not follow her husband's orders.¹²³

Based on the participants' responses concerning the empowerment scale, the questionnaire in the present study demonstrated that 92.5 per cent of the students did not justify a husband beating his wife. It appears that the participants in this study were socialized in ways to avoid different types of VAW. Studies have shown that educated women were less likely to condone violence against them. Two studies in Bangladesh found that women's education was the main reason for decreasing approval of IPV as well as other forms of violence in the country.¹²⁴ In the present study and in some past research, education has been shown to have a significant role in decreasing VAW. VAW could be more effectively addressed by increasing access to higher education for women in South Asian countries.

Political Rights- Violence against women in politics has not improved in Pakistan. Over the past decade, there has been a high prevalence of crimes against Pakistani women in politics. For example, the former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, and the Punjab Minister of social welfare, Zille Huma Usman, were both assassinated in public in 2007. A study that examined the impact of crime victimisation on political participation across five continents found that individuals who are recently victimised become more politically active

123 P. A. Ali, et. al., "Intimate partner violence in Pakistan: A systematic review", *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, Volume 16, Number 3, 2014, pp. 299-315.

124 S.R. Schuler, 2017, op. cit.

than non-victims.¹²⁵ The quantitative data of the study showed that 96 out of the 132 students voted in elections. Therefore, it is likely that the recent high-profile cases of crimes against Pakistani women in politics motivated the students in this study to become politically active.

In contrast, in other parts of Pakistan, women are still largely excluded from politics.¹²⁶ The constitution of Pakistan ensures political participation for women. However, traditional values and patriarchy often lead to practices that conflict with what the policies expound. For example, a study that investigated women's empowerment in India found that patriarchal attitudes regarding the rights of women were the vital factors that hindered women's political empowerment across South Asia.¹²⁷ Political parties in Pakistan also play an important role in women's empowerment. An article entitled, "All parties need to work together for women's empowerment," by Bilawal Bhutto noted that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) played an important role in empowering women. PPP introduced pro-women legislation, strengthened initiatives such as the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), and working alongside NGOs that support women.¹²⁸

Additionally, interviews were conducted in 2015, of 14 women belonging to the Jamaat-i-Islami, a prominent Islamist political party which is committed to increasing educational and political opportunities for women while demanding

125 R. Bateson, "Crime victimization and political participation", *American Political Science Review*, Volume 106, Number 3, 2012, pp. 570–587.

126 M. Meraj and M.B. Sadaqat, 2016, op. cit.

127 S. Narayan, "A socio-cultural obstruction to women empowerment in Indian society, *IJAR*, Volume 3, Number 2, 2017, 179-182.

128 "All parties need to work together for women's empowerment: Bilawal", *Pakistan Today*, January 8, 2018, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/01/08/all-parties-need-to-work-together-for-women-empowerment-bilawal/>.

segregated workplaces. As one respondent put it, “we have no problems with modernity, such as education, driving, employment, etc., but we have to ensure that it fits into our own ideology”.¹²⁹ The Jamaat-i-Islami also has a separate women's wing that encourages the state to improve the status of women in Pakistani society by enhancing men's ability to provide political, social, and economic support to women of all classes.

Status of Women- The status of women in Pakistan is usually attributed to the ascribed gender roles that reinforce women's inferior status in society. However, the status of Pakistani women differs significantly across classes, provinces, and the rural/urban divide. For example, Punjabi women are socially, economically, and politically better off compared to women in the other provinces, where they are marginalised and irrelevant to the functioning of mainstream society.¹³⁰ Further, a rural Pakistani woman suffers more gender inequalities compared to urban women because of different socioeconomic development and tribal and feudal customs.¹³¹ For example, *watta satta* (exchange marriage) is a tribal custom in which brides are traded between two clans, particularly in rural areas in Pakistan.¹³² In 2012, in Swat, a family married off their six-year old daughter into a rival family to settle a dispute between them. This incident represents an extreme case of tribal custom prevailing in Pakistan, but many others also exist. It was recommended that one way to reduce tribal customs and

129 S. Saeed, “Jamaat-e-Islami women in Pakistan: Vanguard of a new modernity?”, *Contemporary Sociology*, Volume 44, Number 6, 2015, pp. 815-816.

130 C.H. Hans, 2017, op. cit.

131 M. Meraj and M.B. Sadaqat, 2016, op. cit.

132 R.N. Bhutta, et. al., “Dynamics of watta satta marriages in rural areas of southern Punjab Pakistan”, *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, Volume 3, Number 12, 2015, 166-178.

their adverse effects on women's status is the promotion of education.¹³³

This study found that education played a role in promoting women's status in society. The women in this study reported that education provided them with feelings of respectability both in their families and in their peer group. Ninety per cent of participants in the study felt their education produced respect. Data from the nationally representative Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (2012-2013) demonstrated that Pakistani men respected educated women because these women could contribute financially to the family and be more self-sufficient.¹³⁴

Many women in Pakistan are not able to earn an income because of social restrictions that inhibit their participation in the workforce. For example, *pardah* is a social practice of female isolation that prevents women's movement in Muslim communities. A qualitative study investigating the socio-cultural factors affecting gender equality in the workplace among Pakistani women (N=30) revealed that the *pardah* system played a role in female labour force participation (FLFP). This occurred because it excluded them from the public sphere.¹³⁵

Freedom and Autonomy-Education is one of the most important determinants of women's autonomy.¹³⁶ Much of the qualitative research that focuses on women's autonomy comes

133 Ibid.

134 M. Meraj and M.B. Sadaqat, 2016, op. cit.

135 F. Ali and J. Syed, "From rhetoric to reality: A multilevel analysis of gender equality in Pakistani organizations", *Gender, Work & Organization*, Volume 24, Number 5, 2017, pp. 472-486.

136 G. Samari and A.R. Pebley, "Individual and Household Determinants of Women's Autonomy: Recent Evidence from Egypt", Working Paper, California Center for Population Research, University of California, 2015, <http://papers.ccpr.ucla.edu/index.php/pwp/article/download/686/73>.

from South Asia.¹³⁷ The link between education and autonomy can be explained in a number of ways, one of which is that women with less autonomy may be prevented from continuing to receive higher education.¹³⁸ Research has shown that highly educated women were more autonomous because they were more likely to be employed and, as a result, have direct access to a source of income.¹³⁹ Similarly, it was reported that women with less autonomy were more likely to have no education, were more likely to be unemployed, followers of Islam, and come from male-headed households.¹⁴⁰

Another important aspect of autonomy is freedom of movement. Pakistani society puts limits on women's freedom to move around in public. A study that examined Pakistani women's ability to travel while infected with HIV (N=21) found that some of the barriers which prevented movement outside the home were the system of *pardah*, and the husband's lack of support to take them to places in the community.¹⁴¹ Further, it is considered "shameful" in many parts of the country if women's

137 G. J. Carlson, et. al., "Associations between women's autonomy and child nutritional status: A review of the literature", *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, Volume 11, Number 4, 2015, pp. 452-482.

138 G. Samari and A.R. Pebley, 2015, op. cit.

139 P. England, "Women's employment, education, and the gender gap in 17 countries. *Monthly Labor Review*, Volume 3, Number 12, 2012, pp. 166-178.

N. Steiber et. al., "Contextualizing the education effect on women's employment: A cross-national comparative analysis", *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Volume 78, Number 1, 2016, pp. 246-261.

G. Samari and A.R. Pebley, 2015, op. cit.

140 P. Chakraborty and A. K. Anderson, "Maternal autonomy and low birth weight in India", *Journal of Women's Health*, Volume 20, Number 9, 2011, 1373-1382.

141 A. Saeed and S. Farooq, "I can't go out: Mobility obstacles to women's access to HIV treatment in KPK, Pakistan", *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, Volume 28, Number 4, 2017, pp. 561-574.

ability to move around is not restricted.¹⁴² This occurs less in cities such as Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore. The quantitative data from the study revealed that 93.52 per cent of the madrasa students could travel to places in the community, especially for school or other purposes, but they first needed permission from the male head of the family (73.54 per cent). This result agrees with additional literature that revealed that Muslim men put limits on the women's freedom to travel in order to preserve their patriarchal power in society.¹⁴³

In Muslim countries, women's freedom of movement and ability to travel is limited because they are barred from driving motor vehicles. It was illegal for women in Saudi Arabia to operate motor vehicles until September of 2017.¹⁴⁴ No legal restriction exists in Pakistan, but women are socially restricted from driving motorcycles, which is the preferred mode of transportation, because most middle-lower class families cannot afford a car.¹⁴⁵ There are also socially sanctioned rules that define how Pakistani women and girls must sit on a motorbike to avoid violation of female modesty. Social rules include not being able to drive a motorcycle or hold the handlebars with both hands, and sitting behind a male driver with both legs on the same side of the seat. These social sanctions on women's ability to drive a motorcycle or ride as men do dramatically

142 Z. Mumtaz and S. Salway, "Understanding gendered influences on women's reproductive health in Pakistan: Moving beyond the autonomy paradigm", *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 68, Number 7, 2009, pp. 1349-1356.

143 P. Hoodbhoy, "Women on motorbikes-what's the problem?", *The Express Tribune*, February 22, 2013, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/511107/women-on-motorbikeswhats-the-problem/>.

144 Martin Chulov, "Saudi Arabia to allow women to obtain driving licences", *The Guardian*, September 26, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/26/saudi-arabias-king-issues-order-allowing-women-to-drive>.

145 P. Hoodbhoy, 2013, op. cit.

limits their mobility as well as their choices in life (education, jobs, etc.). In these ways, the patriarchy and culture of Pakistan shape women's behaviours.

Social and Community Support- Educational settings can provide women with access to social supports. The qualitative results of this study demonstrated that the madrasas were social spaces where women had:

- the ability to build relationships with other women, reducing their isolation
- a place to develop their critical mind and discuss ideas with others
- an independent sense of worth in contradistinction to their traditional second-class citizenship
- aspirations for a better future – seeing themselves as contributing members of society
- a network through which they could question their socially assigned gender roles-as more than just wives and mothers

Moreover, the support found in the madrasas can also lead to women criticising and discussing the social restrictions that hinder women's empowerment in Pakistan. Empowerment research shows that social support can play an important role in women's empowerment.¹⁴⁶ Empowering education provides pro-social values and allows students to develop friendships, networks, feelings of social connectedness, respect for human rights, collaborative skills, negotiating skills, leadership skills,

146 A. Cornwall, "Women's empowerment: What works?", *Journal of International Development*, Volume 28, Number 3, 2016, pp. 342-359.

and knowledge of social systems and local and global issues.¹⁴⁷ A community-based observational study among women (N= 1,325) in Pakistan highlighted that women tended to speak to their friends about stressful experiences (e.g., violence against them).¹⁴⁸ Many women in Pakistan lack the ability to socialise with other women because they are confined to their homes. This lack of social support may explain why many Pakistani women do not have anyone to confide in, which could affect their ability to cope with issues that impact their lives.

The qualitative data in the present study, however, shows that 80 per cent of the women interviewed utilised their madrasa as a social space to seek guidance from their friends while in school. For example, one of the interviewees stated that she and the other women in the *madrasa* utilised each other as support mechanisms. Accordingly, the social supports found in *madrasas* could be used to build the power of collectivisation to change women's lives at the individual, family, and community levels.

LOCUS OF EMPOWERMENT

This mixed methods study explored female madrasas and the role of the different schools of thought, higher education, and educational reform, in women's empowerment in Pakistan. The study demonstrated that the female *madrasas* provide students with knowledge of women's rights, political views, upward mobility, career pathways, social/community supports, and freedom/autonomy. In these ways, female madrasas, specifically at higher levels, are valuable institutions because

147 E.M. Graham and C. Lloyd, "Empowering adolescent girls in developing countries: The potential role of education", *Policy Futures in Education*, Volume 14, Number 5, 2016, 556–577.

148 F.I. Madhani, 2017, op. cit.

they provide some empowerment opportunities to Muslim women that otherwise would not exist.

Creating opportunities for higher education and ensuring gender-equitable access to women could empower future generations. Pakistan is one of the worst performing countries in the world in terms of gender inequality. Therefore, knowledge about gender equity, women's rights, family violence, and positive coping strategies should be incorporated in *madrasas* for both women and men. *Madrasas* can play an important role in educating masses about women's rights. Encouraging religious leaders to play a positive role in preaching Islamic values and women's rights that strongly condemn Violence against Women, to *madrasa* students could be an effective instrument to bring about behaviour change in the country.

These finding and recommendations, targeted at the policy level, can enable the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan to address cultural, religious, and social values in their educational institutions. Efforts are currently underway in many *madrasas* in South Asia to integrate education reform. Policy changes targeting reformed *madrasas* should include mental health and community supports for Pakistani women. Teachers' training would have a large social return in the development of the country. In order to enhance and encourage a better and more powerful future for Muslim women, collaborative efforts among various systems of education are required at the local, community, and international level. As an international approach, women's empowerment should be investigated by scholars and organisations with the goal of expanding women's equity in education, health, and well-being.