Challenges for Women Empowerment in Pakistan: Archival Data

Farah Adil
Shehla A.Yasin
Sarah Shahed

This review evaluates empowerment of women in Pakistan. Women make half of the world population and are integral to the progress of any country. This is one reason women empowerment has become a central issue for national and global developments with great many efforts to improve its effectiveness. Empowerment advances women and enhances their strength socially, economically and politically; protecting them from insecurities and violence. The current review uses secondary data to assess the level of empowerment of women in Pakistan, which is based on indices like literacy, economic and political participation and safety against violence. The review includes a discussion on pro-women laws and policies initiated by the Government of Pakistan. The data analysis reveals that women empowerment is being cultivated in Pakistan, but strong socio-cultural barriers are hindering this process. Government of Pakistan has ratified international commitments and undertaken important national initiatives to raise the status of women in Pakistan but still there is a long way to go. We conclude education for all especially for women, economic development and changing social perceptions will promote women empowerment in Pakistan.

Key Words: Women, empowerment, participation, economic, political, policies, standpoint, government, society

Schecter (1982) suggested, "empowerment is achieved if we turn individual defeats into victories through giving women tools to better control their lives and joining in collective struggle". West and Parent (1992) add empowerment is conversion of power and authority that increases motivation to participate and succeed; and adds greater dignity for the individuals. Empowerment is a concept that is associated with social power and skills, support system and practical approach to policy and societal change or simply a process through which individuals achieve control over their lives, and autonomous participation in the development of their community (Rappaport, 1987). More aptly said empowerment is "a process through which women and men in disadvantaged positions increase their access to knowledge, resources, and decision-making power, and raise their awareness of participation in their communities, in order to reach a level of control over their own environment," and disempowerment its antithesis is "any action, policy development and/or relief program or process through which women's and men's priorities, needs and interests are further ignored, reducing their participation in decision-making and representing an obstacle to their economic, political and social improvement" (UNHCR, 2001). This powerlessness (disempowerment) obstructs the socio-economic and political development of people, and can be converted into empowerment through education, awareness and skills.

In the modern world, the concept of women empowerment was presented at International Women's Conference (1985) at Nairobi; where women empowerment was described as a re-allocation of social power and control of resources for women with the following parameters:

- Self-esteem and self-confidence
- Building a positive image of women in development
- Enhancing critical thinking
- Give decision-making power
- Providing equal status in education, health and employment
- Ensuring equal participation in the development process
- Providing facts, awareness and technical skills for economic development
- Enhancing the access of legal support of rights and responsibilities
- Personal contributions and co-operation

With this list in mind, we defined empowerment of women in Pakistan, when equal rights to education, personal development, ownership of property and business, equal opportunities in seeking jobs, non-violence and harassment both at home and work place are given.

Theoretical framework

Standpoint theory describes the evolution of human societies in various groups of social order and focuses on the construction of relationship among diverse groups (gender, race, class, and sexual identity) in term of their experience, knowledge, feelings and performance, as well as their understating about the whole social life (Collins, 1986; Harding, 1991,1998; McClish& Bacon, 2002; Wood, 2005). The most important concept of standpoint theory is based on an individual's own perspective that are shaped by their political and social experiences which examines systems and practices of the marginalized groups (women and other minorities); and illustrates ways to distinguish socio-cultural expectations and prejudices that formulates a milieu for transformation in the society and culture (Swigonski, 1994).As the marginalized groups of people can produce distinctive perceptions (standpoints) about how society works; women, minorities and people from lower socio-economic status may perceive the society from a less distorted and less biased view than those who occupy more central positions. Therefore, socially constructed roles for men and women are required to develop specific abilities, approaches, thinking ways and understanding about their lives to achieve a standpoint. That is why the theory could be effective in understanding factors that make women subjugated and elaborate factors that could liberate them (Bookman &Morgen, 1988). In doing so women are not to snatch away empowerment from men, "the goal of women is to develop their own power while respecting men for who they are" (Hall, 1992). The theory also emphasizes that women's standpoints, give a chance for objective analysis, rather than viewing standpoints through the advantaged lens of men (Martin, 2001), for example enlightenment can be a standpoint, and women can learn in their social environment through awareness of rights, better living standards; equal control over productive resources, healthcare facilities of mother and child, achievements in education of all levels, more recognized contribution in economic productivity and realization of autonomy, self-assurance and self-esteem (Pant, 2007).

Kabeer (2001) argued that women could realize their capabilities and potentials to control their lives in all spheres of life through empowerment; that is a dynamic process of power distribution. The process is persistent in an encouraging environment for the insight/enlightenment that is to be confirmed first. In this way, empowerment is deliberated as insight or enlightenment that could not be possible without reasoning. Therefore, women empowerment is the value of life that is achieved not only by growing incomes or health but also by the independence and safety relished by women, universally.

Literature Review

Recent literature on women empowerment in Pakistan was reviewed in the fields of education, political participation, economic contribution and violence.

Tembon and Fort (2008) found gender inequality in higher education of Pakistan because of persistent discrimination; and distance from school (Sathar&Haque, 2000); and lack of personal security and incidents of sexual harassment and sexual abuse (World Bank, 2007; UNESCO, 2010). Yasin and Aslam (2018) replicated these reasons and argued discrimination was the main cause for low literacy in women along with poverty, school distance and domestic responsibilities.

Bano (2009) claimed participation of women in a political system is barely associated with economic empowerment and representation of women in Pakistani politics is not beneficial for common women that have low literacy to begin with, this prevents them from casting a vote. Mumtaz (2007) reports literate women casted fewer votes; 20 percent less votes than illiterate males in the 2013 election. One reason for women casting fewer votes was non-listing of 11 million women voters in this election (Yusuf, 2013). Socio-cultural and financial reasons also hamper political participation of women in Pakistan, and even with women quotas for political participation they remain a small group in the political system, not helping women to uplift spirits in political decision-making (True et al., 2014).

Similarly, women participation in work force is not very encouraging, for example Kabeer (2012) reports Pakistani women in the labour force are low, with a market where gender inequality exists. Women have challenges of illiteracy and skills to run a personal business. Lack of awareness and access to personal loans, challenges of property ownership, difficulty to register personal businesses, and lack of female entrepreneurs' networking are major obstacles (Amnesty International, 2002; Jilani& Ahmed, 2004). . Female entrepreneurs also experience challenges to access and compete in the markets of developing countries due to lack of mobility, ability and lesser professional skills as compared to men (World Bank, FAO & IFAD, 2009). With a small number to begin with economic contributions remain invisible, unrecognized and uncounted for their benefit (Khan, 2007).

Pakistan is included in those countries where violence against women is extreme largely caused by men (Zakar, 2004). As Express Tribune (2017) reported that in Pakistan 70% of women and young girls experienced sexual and physical violence in their lives by their intimate partner and 90% women faced some type of sexual violence in public places. Similarly, HRCP Report (2018) pointed out that mostly domestic violence was widespread in Pakistan that was committed by fathers, brothers, husbands and in laws and according to USSD HR (2018) report domestic violence included physical beating, and extreme form was homicide and burning with acid etc.

Keeping in view the above literature about challenges faced by women empowerment, the aim of present review is to analyze indicators that empower women in Pakistan and utilize theoretical lens to explain them. In this context Bookman and Morgen (1988) emphasize empowerment requires recognition and overcoming factors that subjugate women to go-ahead.

Need for this Review

The significance of this review is to present statistical data which is classically implicated in the empowerment of women of Pakistan. The review is needed because it would provide a way (standpoints) for Pakistani women to focus on positions that would open move them forward to attain their goals. In addition, the review provides agendas formulated by external agencies like pro-women laws and policies initiated by Government of Pakistan to aid women in their goal to empowerment.

Method

This is an archival study in which the secondary data have been analyzed. Three archives were selected to analyze differences in women and men that are associated with women empowerment. We selected three secondary datasets on educational, socio-economic and political status of women in Pakistan published representing 2013-2016 (Pakistan Economic Survey (2016-17); Free and Fair Election Network (FAFFN; Election 2013) and Pakistan Economic Survey, (2014-15). In addition, statistics on violence against women were also analyzed (Aurat Foundation Report, 2014; and data collected from national and local newspapers of Pakistan, Jan-Dec 2014). The data are reliable and valid with large sample sizes from the all provinces of Pakistan.

Results

Table 1

Provincial and State Literacy (Rural and Urban Combined) in Pakistan (2013-16)

	2013-14				2015-16			
Province/State	Total	Female	Male	**Difference**	Total	Female	Male	**Difference**
Punjab	61*	52	71	**19**	62	54	72	**18**
Sindh	56	43	67	**24**	55	44	67	**23**
KPK	53	36	72	**36**	53	36	72	**36**
Baluchistan	43	25	59	**34**	41	24	56	**32**
Pakistan	58	47	70	**23**	58	48	70	**22**

Source: Household Integrated Income and Consumption Survey (HIICS) Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2016-2017).
*All values are in percent.

Table 1 presents HIICS data for the years 2013-16. Overall literacy in Pakistan remained steady for the two years at 58%; for males it remained at 70 percent and for females it marginally increased from 47 to 48 percent. This rise was largely due to more female literacy in Punjab, where other provinces either showed no change (KPK) or showed a decrease (Sindh and Balochistan). Overall literacy rate for the two years in Punjab (61.5%) was followed by Sindh (55.5%), KPK (53%), and Baluchistan (42%). Male literacy in KPK (72%) was highest followed by Punjab (71.5%), Sindh (67%) and Baluchistan (57.5%); and females

literacy was highest in Punjab (53%), followed by Sindh (43.5%), KPK (36%) and Baluchistan (24.5%).

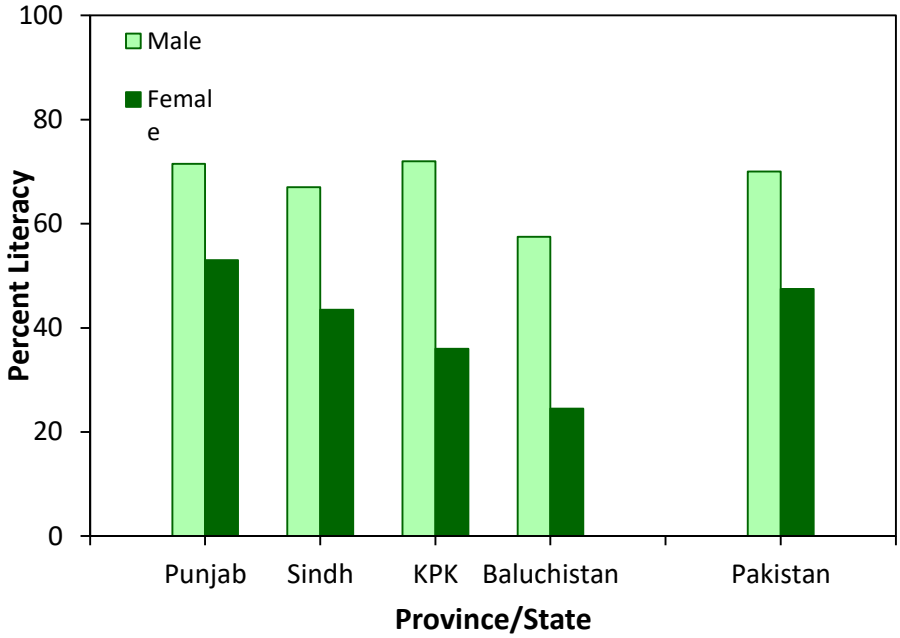

*Figure 1.*Shows a comparison of female-male literacy across provinces and the State of Pakistan.

For two consecutive years (2013-16) overall female literacy (22.5%) in Pakistan lagged behind male literacy; and female literacy lagged behind males in Punjab (18.5%) followed by Sindh (23.5%), Baluchistan (33%) and KPK (36%), see Figure 1 above.

Table 2

Gender differences in all Labour Force of Pakistan

Labor Force	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Total	45.7*	45.5	45.2
Female	21.5	22.2	22.0
Male	68.9	68.1	67.8
Difference	**48.4**	**45.9**	**45.8**

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2014-2015).

*All values in percent.

Table 2 presents Pakistan labour force for three years (2012-15) and categorizes them by genders. Pakistan Economic Survey (2012-15) shows on

average, male labour force was about 68.3 percent, and female labour force was 21.9 percent and the two rates were more or less steady in these three years. Female labour force was a third to male labour force during these years with a steady difference of 46.7 percent.

Table 3
Political Candidates by Gender (General Election, 2013)

Region	Total	Male	Female	Difference
Punjab	3,335	3,180 (95.4*)	155 (4.6)	**3025 (90.7)**
Sindh	1.643	1,590 (96.8)	53 (3.2)	**1537 (95.7)**
KPK	870	849 (97.4)	21 (2.4)	**828 (95.2)**
FATA	446	445 (99.8)	1 (0.2)	**444 (99.8)**
Baluchistan	378	374 (98.9)	4 (1.1)	**370 (97.9)**
ICT	147	143 (97.3)	4 (2.7)	**139 (94.6)**
Total	6,819	6,581 (96.5)	238 (3.5)	**6,343 (93.0)**

Source: Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN, 2013)
FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas; ICT: Islamabad Capital Territory
*All values in parentheses are in percent.

Table 3 indicates the number of political candidates by gender in different regions for 2013 elections. Male candidates in Punjab numbered 3,180 compared to 155 female candidates, followed by Sindh where male candidates numbered 1,590 to 53 female candidates; male political candidates in KPK were 849 compared to 21 females. Similarly, in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) male political candidates were 445 to just one female candidate, in Baluchistan 378 male candidates were elected to four female candidates and finally in Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) 147 male candidates got elected to four female candidates. Figure 2 shows percent differences in elected male and female candidates in all the regions mentioned above for the 2013 election. These differences range from 90.7 (Punjab) to 99.8 (FATA) percent. In other words, overall all difference in male and female political candidates translates as for every nine male political candidates there is just one female political candidate (see Figure 2 below).

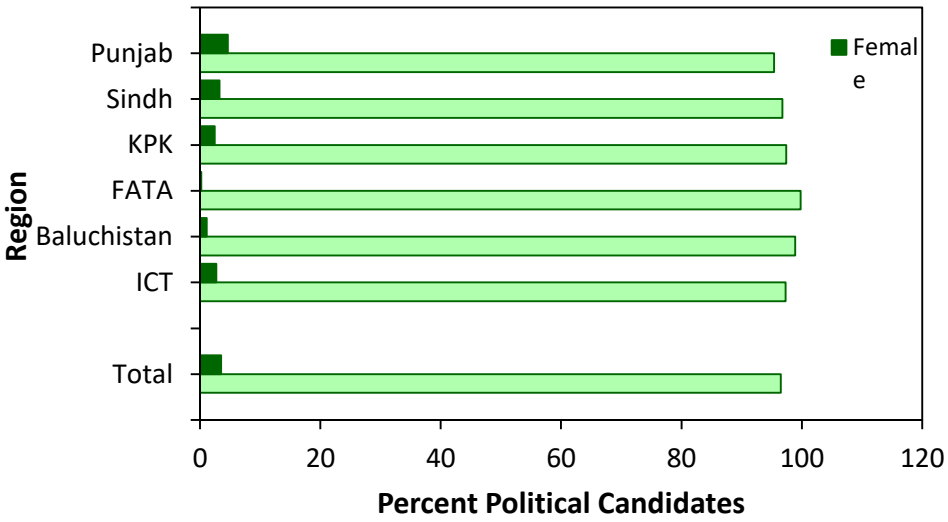

Figure 2. Shows percent differences in the number of male and female political candidates in regions of Pakistan.

Table 4

Offences Against Women in Different Regions of Pakistan

Offence	Region						
	Punjab	Sindh	KPK	Baluchistan	ICT	FATA	**Total**
Kidnapping/ Abduction	1866 (86.0)	161 (7.4)	75 (3.5)	6(.3)	62 (2.9)	0(.0)	**2170(20.9)**
Rape/GR/ SA	1439 (75.1)	447 (23.3)	7 (.4)	4(.2)	18(.9)	0(.0)	**1915(18.4)**
Murder	964 (59.9)	249 (15.5)	324 (20.1)	46(2.9)	18 (1.1)	9(.6)	**1610(15.5)**
"Honour" Killing	362 (50.8)	212 (29.7)	60 (8.4)	77(10.8)	2(.3)	0(.0)	**713(6.9)**
Domestic Violence	191 (38.7)	202 (40.9)	66 (13.4)	30(6.1)	5(1.0)	0(.0)	**494(4.8)**
Acid Throwing	53 (96.4)	0 (.0)	2 (3.7)	0(.0)	0(.0)	0(.0)	**55(0.5)**
Burning	54 (83.1)	3 (4.6)	2 (3.1)	5(7.7)	1(1.5)	0(.0)	**65(0.6)**
All Other Offences	1977 (81.3)	344 (14.1)	94 (3.9)	1(.04)	17(.7)	0(.0)	**2433(23.4)**
Total	**7548 (72.7)**	**1773 (17.1)**	**736 (7.1)**	**190(1.8)**	**130 (1.3)**	**9 (.1)**	**10386(100)**

Source: Aurat Foundation (2014)
FATA: Federally Administered Tribal Areas; ICT: Islamabad Capital Territory;
GA/SA: Gang Rape/Sexual Assault
*All values in parentheses are in percent.

Table 4 shows overall cases of violence against women in Pakistan, are highest (72.7%) in Punjab, followed by Sindh (17.1%), KPK (7.1%), Baluchistan (1.8%), ICT (1.3%) and FATA (.1%). And in descending order highest rate of type of violence was kidnapping/abduction (20.9%), followed by rape/gang rape/sexual assault (18.4%), murder (15.5%), "honour" killing (6.9%), domestic violence (4.8%), acid throwing (.6%), burning (.5%) and all other offenses combined (23.4%).

Discussion

Education is the most important indicator of women empowerment and basic right of every individual in a society. The sex-disaggregated data from Pakistan Economic Survey (2016-17) showed a consistent gender disparity for two consecutive years (2013-16); for every ten literate men there were seven literate women. Since women make almost half the population of Pakistan, this disparity in literacy is significant. Stated differently it says that a third of women that could be educated remain illiterate. Reasons include resistive attitudes of people towards women education and lack of interest/motivation on the part of women to get education (EFA, 2015) national review report of Pakistan. Empowerment is directly associated with education, and is an act of empowerment (Lincoln et al, 2002). The standpoints (thinking, action, and approaches) about position of women in the modern society can reduce gender disparities from educational levels and that is why research suggests that both women and men have to learn specific abilities, approaches, thinking ways and considerations about life to engender exceptional understandings about how society works (Collins, 1986).

As said above women is almost half of Pakistani population, their participation in labour force can play a major role in the financial uplift of the country. The results indicated extreme disparity of paid labour force across gender; males (67%) were three times more than female (22%) paid labour during the year 2014-15. Sharma and Rasaili (2016) suggest this labour disparity is due to gender inequality, lower status of women, gender discrimination, inadequate knowledge about opportunities, assets and services, lack of recognition of work, mobility constraints, working conditions, and low pay jobs etc. Work place harassment is also a hindrance for women (Jamil, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to change and achieve multiple standpoints about women economic empowerment for making their lives more productive for families, societies and for themselves. Government has initiated policies and laws against work place harassment but a lot more is yet to be achieved (see below).

Globally, women political participation is considered one of the leading indicators of women empowerment. It can enhance the political consciousness of

women about their strategic needs in the society and they can be a part of decision-making to eliminate the women discriminatory contents at policy level and may contribute in development of more gender equitable policies and plans with the growing women participation in all spheres of life. Women political participation (3.5%) in 2013 election was extremely small to men (96.5%). Reasons for low political participation of women included stereotypical image of women (domestic role), gender discrimination, and illiteracy level, unawareness of political or civil rights, limited access to economic resources, and absence of female political networks. In addition, political parties are reluctant to trust female candidates (Yusuf, 2013). With so many external pressures for women to vertically move up the political arena many believe women of Pakistan should gain and use political consciousness and analyze their situation so that they may achieve this standpoint. World has shown women can be enthusiastic leaders and common women can be a part of politics.

Among socio-cultural barriers, violence against women is another major challenge towards empowerment. The researchers found that violence affects women not only physically abut also harm them psychologically (reduction in self-confidence) and socially (lower views about womanhood). Social locations shape identities of women (like all others) affecting their actions, thoughts and feelings in a society.

In the battle for empowering women, a number of agencies in the world have proposed ways to achieve their status these include pro-women laws, policies, schemes and initiatives (see below for more details). The Government of Pakistan, signatory on international commitments such as International Labour Organization (ILO), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) is sensitive to the status of women in all spheres of life and following is a list of milestones achieved by the State.

Federal and Provincial Government Initiatives for Women

Mazari (2017) presented Pakistan gender budgeting at regional forum on gender-responsive budgeting in Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok and highlighted the following schemes and pro-women laws that are considered the milestones for empowering women in Pakistan.

- 1973 – The Constitution of Pakistan, “"there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone… [and] full participation of women in all spheres of national life.”
- 1979 - Women's Division in the Cabinet Secretariat
- 1989 - Ministry of Women Development
- 1989 - The First Women Bank
- 1989 - Women's Studies centres at five universities in Islamabad, Karachi, Quetta, Peshawar, and Lahore.

- 2009 – Twenty-five Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Welfare Centres (SBBWC) established over time throughout the country.
- 2011 - Zakat &Ushr Act (2011) Guzara Allowance and Marriage Assistance to the deserving females, under The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
- 2012- Benazir Income Support Programme
- 2012-16 - Women Empowerment Package.
- 2013 - 'Waseela-e-Rozgar' (Technical & Vocational Training) program
- 2013 - 'Waseela-e-Haq' (Micro-finance) program
- 2014 - Provincial Commission on the Status of Women.
- 2014 - Punjab Women Empowerment Initiative.
- 2015 - 'Waseela-e-Sehet' (Life & Health Insurance)
- 2017 (January) - Punjab launched a "Women Safety Smart Phone App" project.
- 2017 - Chief Minister's Self Employment Scheme
- 2017 - 'Waseela-e-Taleem"

Pro-Women Laws

- The Criminal Law Act (Amendment, 2004)
- The Protection of Women (Criminal Law Amendments Act, 2006)
- The North-West Frontier Province Establishment of a Commission on the Status of Women Act (2009)
- Criminal Law Act (Amendment, 2010)
- The Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act (2010)
- Criminal Law Act (Second Amendment, 2011)
- Criminal Law Act (Third Amendment, 2011)
- Women in Distress and Detention Fund Act (2011)
- National Commission on the Status of Women Act (2012)
- Elimination of Custom of Ghag Act (Government of KPK, 2013)
- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, (Government of Sindh, 2013)
- Punjab Commission on the Status of Women Act (Government of Punjab, 2014)
- The Balochistan Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, (Government of Baluchistan, 2014)
- Deserving Widows and Special Persons Foundation Act (Government of KPK, 2014)
- The Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act (Government of Punjab, 2014)
- The Balochistan Protection and Promotion of Breast-Feeding and Child Nutrition Act (Government of Balochistan, 2014)

- The Sindh Commission on the Status of women Act (Government of Sindh, 2015)
- Hindu Marriage Act (Government of Sindh, 2016)
- The Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act (Government of Punjab, 2016)
- Anti-Rape Law (Criminal Law Amendment) Act (2016)
- Anti-honor killing Act (2016)

Conclusion

Based on four parameters analyzed above, Pakistani women lag behind men in education, work force, political representation and violent offences against them. These measures partially represent levels of empowerment compared to men; and to apples a qualitative gap is large. With good intentions women friendly laws and policies have been and continue to be established by the federal and provincial governments to improve the status of women and their empowerment. This should be taken with a grain of salt where outcomes of these milestones have been meager and slow. Consistent supervision and implementation of these policies is required; and women need to develop positive standpoints and reanalyze their position in the society to gain empowerment. This could be achieved through recognizing problems etched in patriarchal framework. Women should develop self-advocacy and support groups to fight for their rights so that they can resist dominant socio-cultural dichotomies (Hahn, 1991) and be more vocal in demanding recognition and respect (Brunk, 1991). Counts (1932) exquisitely stated, "We are convinced that education is the one unfailing remedy for every ill to which man is subject, whether it is vice, crime, war, poverty, riches, injustice, political corruption, race hatred or class conflict". Similarly, researchers claimed that media is a strong agent of socialization that can transform social surroundings and change individual cognitions (Plungė, 2011; McLuhan, 2003; Oliver, 2009 et al.). Recognizing the importance of media as a source of transmitting standpoints among women can be effective, productive and a change spreader for societal development.

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