

Country Briefing Paper

WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

**ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK
Programs Department (West)
and
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FOREWORD

This study was initiated by Programs Department (West), Division 1 of the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The purpose of this paper is to provide information on gender issues in Pakistan to assist ADB staff in country programming and project design and implementation.

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The views and interpretations in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Asian Development Bank.

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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ANP	Awami National Party
CBO	community-based organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COF	country operational framework
COS	country operational strategy
DFID	Department for International Development
FANA	Federally Administered Northern Areas
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FWBL	First Women's Bank Limited
GNP	gross national product
LHW	lady health worker
MWD	Ministry of Women's Development
NGO	nongovernment organization
NPA	National Plan of Action
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
PIHS	Pakistan Integrated Household Survey
PML	Pakistan Muslim League
PPP	Pakistan People's Party
SAP	Social Action Program
SBP	Shaheed Bhutto Group
SDO	strategic development objective
STD	sexually transmitted diseases
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VBFPW	village-based family planning worker

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The status of women in Pakistan is not homogenous because of the interconnection of gender with other forms of exclusion in the society. There is considerable diversity in the status of women across classes, regions, and the rural/urban divide due to uneven socioeconomic development and the impact of tribal, feudal, and capitalist social formations on women's lives. However, women's situation vis-à-vis men is one of systemic subordination, determined by the forces of patriarchy across classes, regions, and the rural/urban divide.

Gender is one of the organizing principles of Pakistani society. Patriarchal values embedded in local traditions and culture predetermine the social value of gender. An artificial divide between production and reproduction, created by the ideology of sexual division of labor, has placed women in reproductive roles as mothers and wives in the private arena of home and men in a productive role as breadwinners in the public arena. This has led to a low level of resource investment in women by the family and the State. Thus, low investment in women's human capital, compounded by the ideology of *purdah* (literally "veiled"), negative social biases, and cultural practices; the concept of honor linked with women's sexuality; restrictions on women's mobility; and the internalization of patriarchy by women themselves, becomes, the basis for gender discrimination and disparities in all spheres of life.

The critical link between literacy level and economic growth vis-à-vis other social sector indicators, is well proven both in terms of international and Asian experience. Nevertheless, Pakistan continues to spend a meager amount of its resources, i.e., only 2.2 percent of its gross national product (GNP), on education. With this trend, Pakistan will not be able to allocate 4 percent of its GNP on education by 2000, as recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization for developing countries.

The low health status of women is the result of women's lower social, economic, and cultural standing. Social and familial control over women's sexuality, their economic dependence on men, and restrictions on their mobility determine differential access of males and females to health services. Intrahousehold bias in food distribution leads to nutritional deficiencies among female children. Early marriages of girls, excessive childbearing, lack of control over their own bodies, and a high level of illiteracy adversely affect women's health. Institutionalized gender bias within the health service delivery system in terms of lack of female service providers, and neglect of women's basic and reproductive health needs, intensify women's disadvantaged health status.

The rise of poverty exacerbates conditions of oppression for women and children. In poor households with scarce means, gender discrimination in the allocation of household resources is more pronounced. Women suffer most from nutritional deprivation in low-income households. Poverty also forces women to work harder to earn and protect their families from starvation. This contributes to the stresses these women already face due to poverty and cultural oppression. It is estimated that two thirds of the psychiatric patients at any hospital or clinic are women. Women's poor mental and physical health has negative implications on their productivity and imposes high social and economic costs for the society.

Pakistan has taken certain initiatives in the health sector to redress gender imbalances. The SAP was launched in 1992–1993 to accelerate improvement in the social indicators. Closing the gender gap is the foremost objective of the SAP. In the health sector the focus has been on the provision of primary health care and basic health facilities in rural areas. The other major initiative is the Prime Minister’s program of lady health workers (LHWs). Under this community-based program, 26,584 LHWs in rural areas and 11,967 LHWs in urban areas have been recruited¹ to provide basic health care including family planning to women at the grassroots level. Other initiatives include the village-based family planning workers and extended immunization programs, nutritional and child survival, cancer treatment, and increased involvement of media in health education.

The labor force participation rates for women are grossly underreported by the official sources of data. The 1997 Labour Force Survey reported the refined activity rate² for women as 13.6 percent and 70 percent for men, while the crude activity rate³ was 9 percent and 47 percent, respectively. This is due to problems in data collection such as an inappropriate definition of economic activity, male enumerators who get information regarding working women from the male members of the family, questions seeking information on a single main activity, and exclusion of the informal sector. In the cultural context of Pakistan, women’s wage work is considered a threat to the male ego and identity and women’s engagement in multiple home-based economic activities leads to underremuneration for their work. Pakistani girls and women spend long hours fetching water, doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties. Not only are these tasks physically hard and demanding, they also rob girls of the opportunity to study.

Women lack ownership of productive resources. Despite women’s legal rights to own and inherit property from their families, there are very few women who have access and control over these resources. A microlevel survey of 1,000 rural households conducted in 1995 in Punjab found that only 36 women owned land in their own name, while only 9 of them had control over it.⁴ Similarly, formal financial institutions do not cater to women’s credit needs due to the underlying assumption of women’s role in the reproductive sphere. Commercial banks ignore women clients due to their preconceived views on women’s creditworthiness because of their dependency on men for physical collateral, high transaction cost of small loans, and difficulties in gaining information about a borrower’s reliability.⁵ The Agriculture Development Bank of Pakistan and First Women’s Bank Limited are the only banks that have small-scale credit programs that cater to women. Other sources of credit to women include informal sources such as nongovernment organizations, friends, relatives, and moneylenders.

The impact of macroeconomic stabilization, liberalization policies, and structural adjustment programs have been disproportionately high on women. In the absence of macrolevel data, it is difficult to assess the impact of a structural adjustment program on people in general and on women in particular. However, some microlevel studies have clearly indicated the effects on unemployment, inflation, decline in real wages, and reduction in caloric intake for the poor.⁶

¹ Federal Bureau of Statistics (1998), *Compendium on Gender Statistics Pakistan – Islamabad*, p. 51.

² Refined activity rate is the percentage of labor force in population of persons of 10 years and above.

³ Crude activity rate is percentage of labor force in total population.

⁴ Ministry of Women’s Development (MWD), “Pakistan National Report,” submitted to the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

⁵ Farzana Bari (1997), “Women and Access to Credit: A Case Study of Pakistan,” Islamabad, p.6.

⁶ Shahrukh Rafi Khan (1997), *Structural Adjustment in Pakistan: Testing Hypotheses and Assessing Impact*, Islamabad, p.204.

Due to male migration and high unemployment, more and more women are seeking income-earning opportunities in the job market. Lack of education and skills forces many to concentrate either in the informal sector or secondary sector of the segmented labor market. In 1990-1991, 77 percent of economically active women in urban areas were working in the informal sector where they were economically exploited and had no protection of labor laws.⁷ Exploitative working conditions at the workplace, compounded by oppressive conditions at home where women continue to take the sole responsibility for domestic work, overburdened them to the detriment of their health.

Domestic violence is fairly widespread across all classes. It ranges from slapping, hitting, and kicking, to murder. Since the society, police and law enforcing agencies view domestic violence as a private matter, it goes unnoticed until it takes extreme forms of murder or attempted murder. A study conducted by the Women's Division suggests that domestic violence takes place in approximately 80 percent of the households in the country.⁸ Incidences of stove burning are being increasingly reported in the press. During 1998, 282 burn cases of women were reported in Punjab. Of these, 65 percent died of their injuries. Data collected from two hospitals in Rawalpindi and Islamabad over a period of three years since 1994 reveal 739 cases of burn victims.⁹

The main thrust of ADB's gender strategy for Pakistan should be to engender the preparation of the country operational strategy. Instead of supporting gender programs in entirely different sectors, it is proposed that all the programs and projects within the guiding principal areas identified in the 1999–2000 COF—improving economic efficiency and export performance, human and social development, governance and institutional strengthening—should integrate gender concerns into the design and implementation of reform measures and monitoring programs. To operationalize gender integration, each loan proposal of ADB for Pakistan should undergo the following stages:

- (i) gender impact assessment of the project proposal,
- (ii) development of project-specific gender strategy, and
- (iii) development of gender performance indicators.

Mainstreaming gender issues into policies and development programs should be the key planning strategy in ADB's efforts to promote gender equity in Pakistan. This will not only improve women's status but will also contribute to the national, social, and economic development of the country. ADB can make it operational at two levels: (i) by ensuring that gender considerations are fully taken into account in each of its own loans; and (ii) by supporting and strengthening the institutional capacity of the Government for gender mainstreaming. Concrete suggestions for gender mainstreaming are outlined for five sectors legal reform, microfinance, integrated rural development, urban development, and education.

⁷ See footnote 4.

⁸ Ministry of Women's Development (1987), "Battered Housewives in Pakistan," Islamabad.

⁹ "Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women (1997)," Pakistan. p.80.