
**EVALUATING THE AWARENESS OF WOMEN' RIGHTS
IN PUBLIC SECTOR UNIVERSITIES**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the awareness of women rights among female teachers and students of different public sector universities. The aim of the study is to compare the importance of awareness regarding their rights between highly educated and less educated women. The results of this study indicate that women have insignificant awareness about women rights and laws on the whole. However, the findings highlight that victims, advocates, researchers, human rights defenders and other social activists have sufficient knowledge about women rights and legislation. Major causes of unawareness are negligence of legal rights and laws, unfavorable attitude of the society towards legal support of legislation and lack of media coverage. Moreover, this study implies that public sector universities, NGOs and civil society should organize awareness programs and run more massive awareness campaigns at university level.

Keywords: Women Rights and Laws, Level of Awareness, Educated Women

INTRODUCTION

Developing countries have prescribed legal rights and ensured women protection laws. Women need to be aware of their legal rights and laws. In Pakistan, a large section of population has no knowledge of laws after facing exploitation of all sorts even after 70 years of independence of the country. In fact, women's development in education, social life, political participation, empowerment and overall refinement of personality could be promoted by bringing effective awareness of their rights and women's protection laws ensured by the country. In today's world, educated women can completely protect themselves from violence and injustice. Awareness about women's rights and the protection Act eliminates gender inequality. Particularly, educated women become more conscious about privileges such as rights of property, education, health, employment and marriage according to their choice.

The term women rights stem from the identification of basic rights that belong to each woman. Women are blessed with certain eternal and inalienable rights. In this regard, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defines 'The right

of women to be free from discrimination and sets the core principles to protect their rights. It establishes an agenda for national action to end discrimination and provides the basis for achieving equality between men and women through ensuring women's equal access and equal opportunities in political and public life as well as education, health and employment (<http://www.unfpa.org/resources/human-rights-women>). Pakistan as a member of global community has ratified the International Women Rights principles declared in the Conventions of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on 12 April 1996. Pakistan has implemented women protection laws and established complaint cells for women.

Women Protection Laws guaranteed by Pakistan include:

- Right of Education Act 25 of 2012.
- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2012.
- Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act 21 of 2011.
- The Women in Distress and Detention Fund (Amendment Act) 2011.
- The Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010.
- Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2010.
- The Protection of Women Act 2006.
- The Prevention and Control of Human Trafficking Ordinance, 2002.
- The Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance, 1979.
- The Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939.

Thus, the constitution of Pakistan has ensured the all rights of women. Therefore, the present study is conducted to analyze the level of awareness and knowledge concerning women rights and laws among female teachers and students in public universities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To measure the awareness of women rights among women in public universities.
- To identify the causes of unawareness and lack of knowledge regarding women rights and laws among female teachers and students.
- To analyze whether highly educated women have significant awareness regarding their rights as compared to less educated women.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The quantitative approach is adopted for data collection. The sample of the survey consists of 100 respondents. All respondents are women belonging to two public sector universities; University of Sindh, Jamshoro and University of Karachi chosen by using convenient technique. All answers of the questions are analyzed by SPSS (version 18).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars agree that awareness of women rights and laws ensured by the country among women is supreme for their development. Devi & Ranjithamani (2017) discover that 'there is a significant difference between awareness of legal rights among women school teachers on the basis of their subject and locality'. Kaur and Harjit (2016) assert that '24.4% women are highly aware about their rights, 64.4% women are moderately aware and 11.2% women are less aware about their fundamental rights in India'. Kaur and Harjit (2016) indicate that 'Highly educated women are better aware about women rights than less educated'. Another study of Narayana & Kavya (2016) finds that 'Majority of women are not aware about the importance of the concept 'Human Rights' and its impacts in improving the status of women'. Akhiri (2013) has done study in Nigeria and points out that majority of teachers do not read constitution, rules and regulations of the country. These studies show that women have rare awareness about their fundamental rights, laws and regulations of the country.

Women have insufficient information concerned to their responsibilities, rights, entitlement at the work place in both the informal and formal sector of economy in Zambia, (Wonani, 2010). Devi (2013) reveals that "education as a human right has a lot of support from society and result show a high level of awareness among women about this right". Hossain, *et.al.*, (2014) find similar result that "There is a need to improve the education in Bangladesh about Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) particularly among those in rural areas and older age of women (30-49years age). A similar study of Ghana reveals that "the level of awareness by women of their human and legal rights in Ghana is very low irrespective of their plethora of women laws and provisions" (Attu Joan, n.d).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS (n/100)

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Age | | |
| 17 to 25 | 59 | 59% |
| 26 to 30 & above | 41 | 41% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |
| Education | | |
| Graduates | 49 | 49% |
| Masters | 29 | 29% |
| MS/Mphil/PhD | 22 | 22% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |
| Marital Status | | |
| Married | 15 | 15% |
| Unmarried | 83 | 83% |
| Divorced/Widow/Separated | 2 | 2% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |
| Occupation | | |
| Teachers | 23 | 23% |
| Students | 77 | 77% |
| Total | 100 | 100% |

Source: Primary data analyzed by the author.

Right of education is as important as men's. Table 1 shows that 77% female students are graduates under the age of 17 to 25. It is interpreted that more girls are enrolled in graduation at universities. Majority of girls are interested to get higher education. Female students are more satisfied in getting education at public universities. It has been found that mostly parents are willing to educate their daughters, sisters and wives in universities.

TABLE 1
KNOWLEDGE OF CEDAW AND LAWS

| Variables | A lot of Knowledge | A Little Knowledge | Do not have any Knowledge |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Fundamental rights of women as declared by Convention for the Eliminations Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). | 9% | 43% | 48% |
| The Law of Pakistan for protection of women | 18% | 56% | 26% |
| Harassment of women at workplace. | 33% | 49% | 18% |
| Rights of women in Islam. | 62% | 29% | 9% |
| Do you have any knowledge regarding women's complaint cell? | 15% | 21% | 64% |
| Do you know how can you protect yourself in case of victimization? | 25% | 38% | 37% |

Source: Primary data analyzed by the author

In Table 2, the result shows that 56% female respondents have a little bit knowledge about the women's protection laws of Pakistan. Moreover, approximately average girls have a little knowledge about legal rights of women. Whereas, they also agree that 62% of the respondents have moderate knowledge about the rights in Islam as comprised to women rights. It is found that nearly average women have sufficient knowledge about the issue of sexual harassment at the workplace. Further, more than average women do not have any idea about women complaint cell.

TABLE 3
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WOMEN RIGHTS

| Women Rights | Have Knowledge | Percentage |
|--|----------------|------------|
| Women's Property Right | 5 | 2.32 |
| Women's Employment Right | 16 | 7.44 |
| Women's Education Right | 58 | 26.97 |
| Women's Health Right | 20 | 9.30 |
| Right of Protection from Violence Against Women | 10 | 4.65 |
| Women's Marriage Right | 9 | 4.18 |
| Women's Credit Right | 1 | 0.46 |
| Right of Freedom From Prostitution and Trafficking | 0 | 0 |
| Other Rights (Freedom, Respect, Empowerment etc) | 96 | 44.65 |
| Total (With Multiple Answer) | 215 | 99.97 |

Source: Primary data analyzed by the author

It is quite striking that overall respondents have no knowledge of right of freedom from prostitution and trafficking, credit right and property rights. But, majority of respondents have knowledge about right of education (58%) and health (20%), employment (16%), right of protection from violence against women (10%) and right of marriage according to choice (9%). It seems that women do not give importance to their legal rights and regulations concerning to their protection from violence (Refer Table 3).

TABLE 4
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PAKISTANI LAWS CONCERN TO WOMEN PROTECTION

| Laws of Pakistan | Yes | Percentage % |
|---|-----|--------------|
| The Protection of Women Act,2006 | 23 | 13.21 |
| The Offence of Zina Ordinance 1979 (Rape) | 21 | 12.06 |
| Right of Education Act 25, 2012 | 30 | 17.24 |
| Anti-Harassment Act, 2010 | 33 | 18.96 |
| Dissolution of Marriage Act, 1936 | 26 | 14.94 |
| Offence Against Property Ordinance 1979 | 9 | 5.17 |
| Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act 2011 | 31 | 17.81 |
| All Above | 1 | 0.57 |
| Total (with multiple answer) | 174 | 99.96 |

Source: Primary data analyzed by the author

As far as the enactment of laws is concerned Table 4 shows that state, government, media, and civil society have done some work for the awareness of women protection laws.

TABLE 5
TRUSTWORTHY SOURCE TO PROTECT WOMEN

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage % |
|------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Women Police | 17 | 11.80 |
| NGO's | 29 | 20.13 |
| Organization Committee Cell | 4 | 2.77 |
| Lawyer/Court | 22 | 15.27 |
| Family | 71 | 49.30 |
| Any other | 1 | 0.69 |
| Total (with multiple answer) | 144 | 99.96 |

Source: Primary data analyzed by the author

The Table 5 shows that it is found that women have very less trust and credibility on the law enforcement agencies so they avoid to register their complain in police station. They think that legal system is flawed and might create further complication. Table 5 indicates that 49.30% of the females trust on their families and they like to share all problems with their family members. Women mostly do not trust on police and legal system to get support. Just few 20.13% of the respondents have desire to raise their voice with the NGO's, civil societies and other welfare organizations for justice (Refer Table 5).

TABLE 6
CAUSES OF UNAWARENESS

| Variables | Frequency | Percentage% |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Lack of education | 87 | 61.26 |
| Low coverage in the media | 30 | 21.12 |
| Lack of social contact | 23 | 16.19 |
| Any other | 2 | 1.40 |
| Total (with multiple answer) | 142 | 99.97 |

Source: Primary data analyzed by the author

Majority of female respondents agreed that lack of education is the main cause of violation on women. On the other hand, 21.12% of the female say that due to low coverage of media, women are unaware of their fundamental rights. According to the findings of the study, it has also surfaced that premier dailies of the country do not care much about awareness of women rights and laws (Refer Table 6).

TABLE 7
TO OVERCOME VIOLATION AGAINST WOMEN RIGHTS

| | Frequency | Percentage% |
|---|------------|--------------|
| Increase reporting of women rights by the media | 34 | 21.118 |
| Increase education | 61 | 37.888 |
| To improve law and order situation | 66 | 40.993 |
| Total (with multiple answer) | 161 | 99.98 |

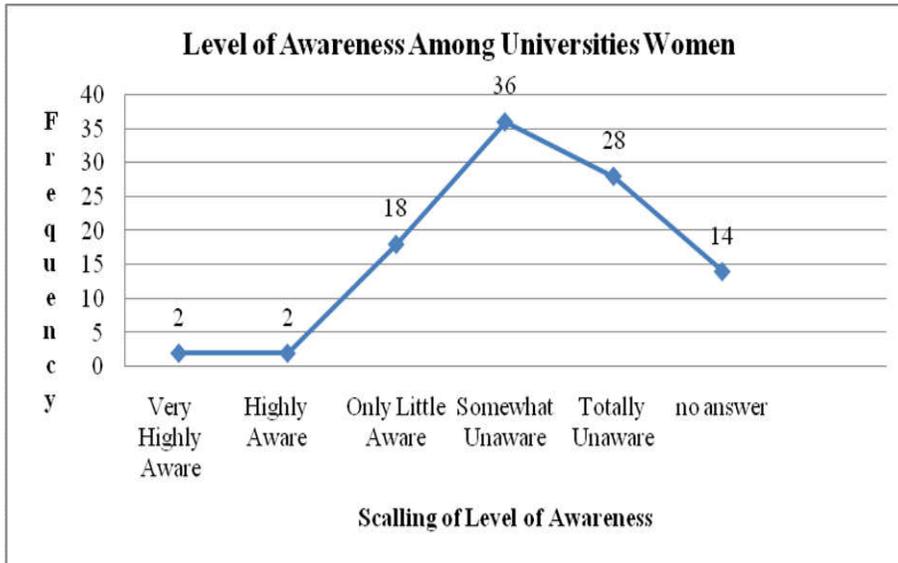
Source: Primary data analyzed by the author

In view of the Table 7, it has manipulated that the violence against women can be overcome by improving practicing of law and order in the country. Moreover, illiteracy is also major cause of violence against women. Awan (n.d.) also supported that ‘the major problem is poor people have lack of access to justice. Often, law is not applied equally and verdicts reflect gender bias’.

TABLE 8
LEVEL OF AWARENESS AMONG WOMEN OF UNIVERSITIES

| Scaling | Ticked Women Rights | Frequency | Percentage% |
|-------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------|
| Very Highly Aware | 8 | 02 | 02 |
| Highly Aware | 6-7 | 02 | 02 |
| Only Little Aware | 4-5 | 18 | 18 |
| Somewhat Unaware | 2-3 | 36 | 36 |
| Totally Unaware | 1-0 | 28 | 28 |
| No Answer | 0 | 14 | 14 |
| Total | | 100 | 100 |

GRAPH-A



Source: Primary data analyzed by the author

The study reveals that highly educated women do not have significant awareness regarding their rights as compared to less educated women (Refer Table 8). A similar result carries out by Akhiri (2013) that ‘in Nigeria, students and teacher of secondary school level have limited awareness concerned to their fundamental rights and laws in their constitution’.

CONCLUSION

The result of the study proves that female teachers and students have insufficient knowledge about their legal rights and laws of the country. However, victims, advocates, researchers, human rights defenders and other social activist have sufficient knowledge about women rights and legislation. Major causes of unawareness of female respondents are negligence of legal rights and laws, unfavorable attitude of the society to take legal support of legislation and lack of media coverage. Female teachers and students should be aware about legal rights and laws for the self improvement and development of the whole society. Further, public universities, NGOs and civil society should organize awareness programs and run more massive awareness campaigns at universities regarding the Rights of Protection from Violence against Women.

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