

Women's Empowerment: A Sociological Analysis of Women in Households

Aijaz Ali Wassan
Nadia Agha

Abstract

Women in the rural areas of Pakistan are deprived of their deserved status. Prevailing system in society gives authority to males who exercise control over the lives of women. In no area of rural Sindh are women equal to men. Whole authority of women's life is given to men who are thought to be superior from all aspects. The situation is even worse where women are in households. Being in four walls, they remain unaware of their basic rights and internalize the whole system of inequality which aggravates their all problems. This paper gives information regarding housewives, their status and the extent of empowerment they have in their households. This study was conducted in the city of Khairpur, Sindh. It was an exploratory research to find out the actual position of women in households.

Keywords: empowerment, housewives, household, inequality, rural Sindh.

1. Introduction

1.1 Meaning of Empowerment

Empowerment means individuals having the control and authority to act and lead life freely. As per the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM:2008) the term women's empowerment means acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and ways in which these relations may be changed. It also means developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life, gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power, and developing the ability to

organize and influence the direction of social change, to create more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

According to Saraswati Raju (2005), empowerment involves a process of 'undoing of internalized oppression' and if it is the question of women's empowerment, it is, along with empowerment 'from within', about changing social and cultural forms of patriarchy that remain the sites of women's domination and oppression.

1.2 Concept of Women's Empowerment

Amartya Sen (2001) writes in *Frontline* that household inequalities are the basic inequalities in terms of workload sharing and child and elderly care. Women and girls are last to get everything, as the result they suffer from high dropout and malnutrition. Malnutrition in women is further increased by heavy workload, poverty, childcare and frequent pregnancies.

According to Shafaq Zaheer (2008) since women constitute 50 percent population of Pakistan, it is therefore important to empower them as they may play a positive and constructive role in national development in all spheres of society. Present situation of Pakistani women is better than the past as today they are playing a positive and active role in almost all walks of life.

Women's empowerment is highly associated with gender equity, gained importance during 1976-1996. The term women's empowerment was coined after many struggles and debates throughout the world. Since women are considered neglected and deprived, women's empowerment is related with their struggle for equity and equality.

Women's empowerment can only be understood through its indicators because there is no yardstick for measuring it. The only way for measuring empowerment is through personal, social, political and economic change.

Empowerment can either be personal or collective. It can take place at any level. i.e. inside the household, in the community level or at national level. So, women can be empowered within the household, within the community or at national level.

1.3 Indicators of Women's Empowerment:

- Literacy level
- Economic status
- Decision making power within the family regarding:
 - education of children
 - marriage of children
 - budgeting of the family
 - income and purchase or sale of family property
 - sexuality and fertility
 - shared mothering
- Division of labour:
 - working hours
 - helping hand at home
- Feeling and expression of:
 - pride and value in her work
 - self-confidence
 - positive self image
- Ability to:
 - address the problems
 - prevent violence.
 - make small or large purchases independently
- Awareness about:
 - health and nutrition
 - personal problems
- Physical mobility:
 - go to banks
 - shopping
 - visit relatives
 - health centres etc.
- Access to or control over resources like:
 - land
 - house
 - jewellery
 - house site etc.

- Access to:
 - information
 - knowledge and
 - skills

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Rural areas of Sindh are known to have higher gender inequalities where women hardly get their legal, social and economic rights. The discrimination can easily be seen in women's participation in political, social and economic spheres. Since girls and women fulfill the responsibility of reproducing and nourishing the coming generations, they ultimately harm everyone by this discrimination.

The condition of women in rural Sindh is worth noticing, gender discrimination is widespread which prevents Sindhi women from participating in development process. Since women are about 50 percent of the total population, these discriminations and restrictions hamper national development and progress. Therefore the issue of women's empowerment need to be addressed which can result in strengthening the country's ability and reducing poverty by involving the other half of the population.

Women in Sindh are mostly unaware of their legal, economic and social rights as men exercise complete control over their legal, productive, reproductive and social life. Since from the birth women go through the process of discrimination. They are treated differently as infants, girls and women. Men are given priority and are privileged one as compared to women. Women and men are assigned with two specific roles by the society i.e. women in reproductive role and men in bread earning role. Reproductive role of women is so demanding that they hardly manage to get any time for themselves. Mostly they remain in the four walls serving from youngest to the eldest one in the family. Empowerment is a key to challenge power relations. It encourages and facilitates women to have complete control over their lives.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

The study was conducted in Khairpur city. The city was selected keeping in view the researcher's familiarity to it; secondly due to the

financial constraints it was difficult to conduct this study in the whole district. Kahirpur city has seen quite moderate progress from some time. Presently few ministers and chief minister of Sindh hail to be from Khairpur district. The city has a university namely Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur which fulfills the educational needs of the people of Southern Sindh. A large number of national and international non government organizations are working in district khairpur which has contributed in the development of this district. Therefore the study on women's empowerment was conducted as the problems of empowerment I side the households could be highlighted.

1.6 Profile of Khairpur

The district Khairpur derives its name from the headquarters town Khairpur. It was one of the states governed by rulers (Mirs). The district is located in north by district Sukkur and Shikarpur having Nawabshah and Sanghar on its south and district Nawabshah and Larkana on its west.

Climate of district khairpur is similar to the other districts of upper Sindh. He district is famous for its date palm trees which provide employment to many unemployed poor people. Dates of Khairpur are very famous and are exported to other countries also.

According to the census report of 1998, the literacy rate of district khairpur is 35.50 percent. Large differences between male and female literacy rate has been noticed with male 49.69 and females 19.77 (See Table No. 1). There is a public sector university in Khairpur city which fulfills and educational needs of the people of Upper Sindh.

As in most parts of Pakistan the socio-economic well being of women in district Khairpur is poor. Fever, malaria, tuberculosis, respiratory tract congestion, asthma, sugar, blood pressure, diarrhea, hepatitis B, kidney stone, skin allergies and eye diseases are the

common reported diseases in women and children. Most of the child bearing women are suffering from malnutrition.

Table # 1

DISTRICT KHAIRPUR	
TOTAL POPULATION	1,546,587
MALE	810,448
FEMALE	736,139
LITERACY RATE	35.5
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	255,261

Source: 1998 District Census Report of Khairpur, April 2000, Statistics Division, Govt: of Pakistan

Table # 2

Selected Population and Housing Statistics of Khairpur City

TOTAL POPULATION	124,939
MALE	65,436
FEMALE	59,503
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	16, 698
AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE	6.3

Source: 1998 District Census Report of Khairpur, April 2000, Statistics Division, Govt: of Pakistan

1.7 Objectives

- ◆ To observe women's participation in decision making in households.
- ◆ To observe the workload women carry out at home.
- ◆ To analyze the level of mobility of women.
- ◆ To analyze the extent to which women are given share in resources.

1.8 Research Questions

Research question is actually the question that the researcher specifically attempts to answer. The research questions of this study were set out to answer the state and nature of women's empowerment. Below are the research questions that the researchers attempted to answer:

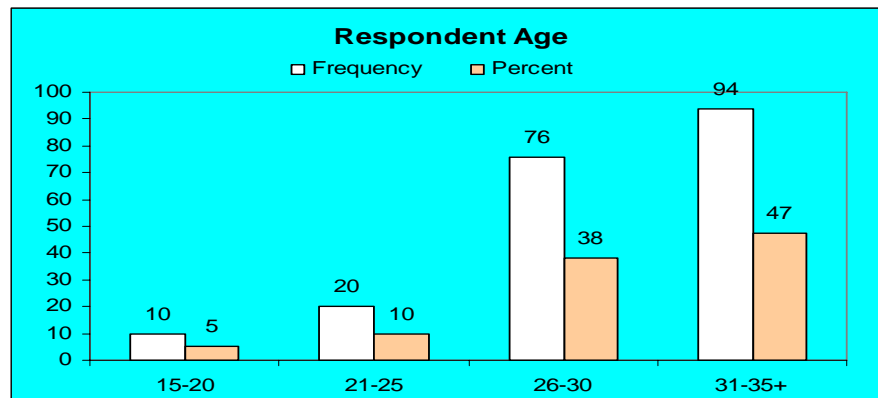
- Do women have due participation in decisions of family affairs?
- Do women get due respect according to the workload they carry out at home?
- Do women have freedom of mobility?
- Do women get equal chances to have due share in resources?

2. Research Methodology

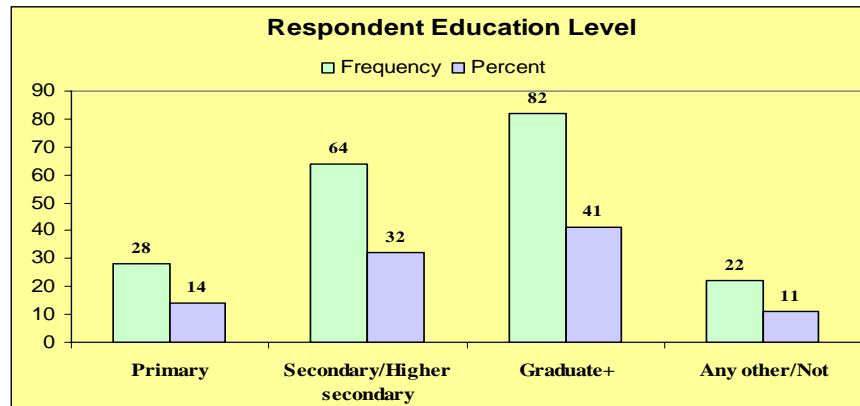
An in-depth study of women's empowerment was designed to achieve the objectives and answer the research questions. A total number of 200 households was selected from where the housewives were chosen. Purposive sampling was selected to choose the samples. Observations and in-depth interviews were also conducted with few of the respondents. A detailed questionnaire was designed for the primary data collection while secondary data was also used to find out official facts and figures about the city.

3. Analysis Of Data

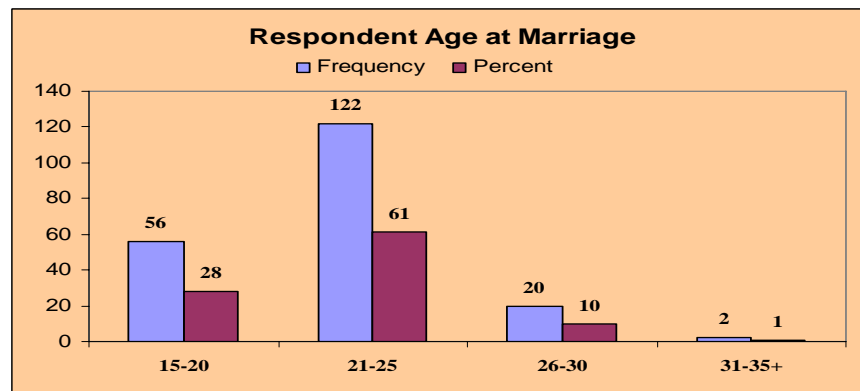
1. Respondents' age (in years):



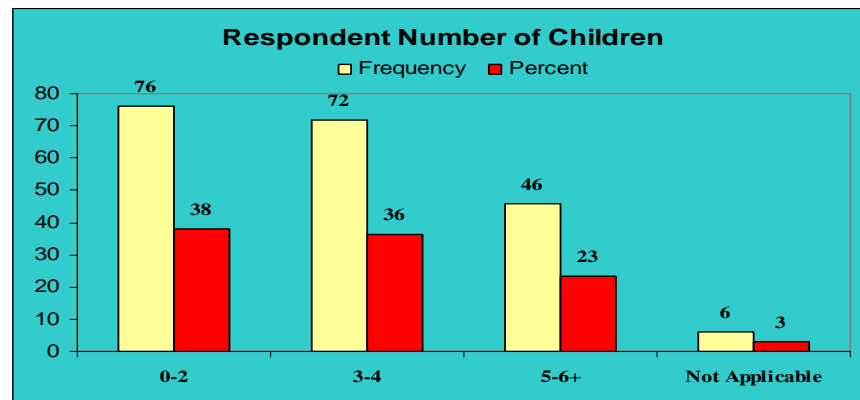
2. Educational Level:



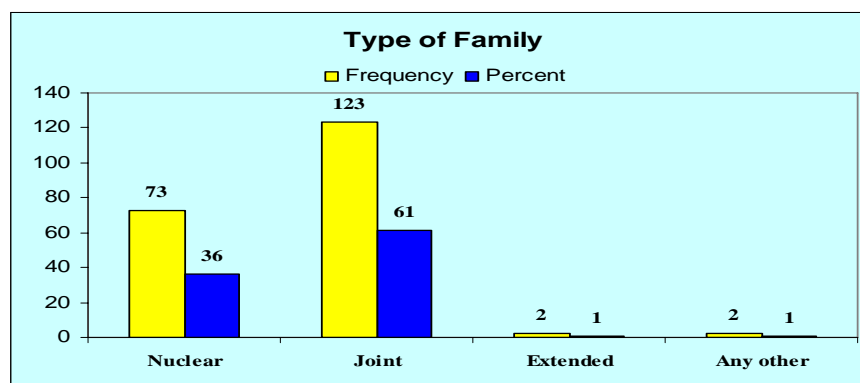
3. Age on marriage:



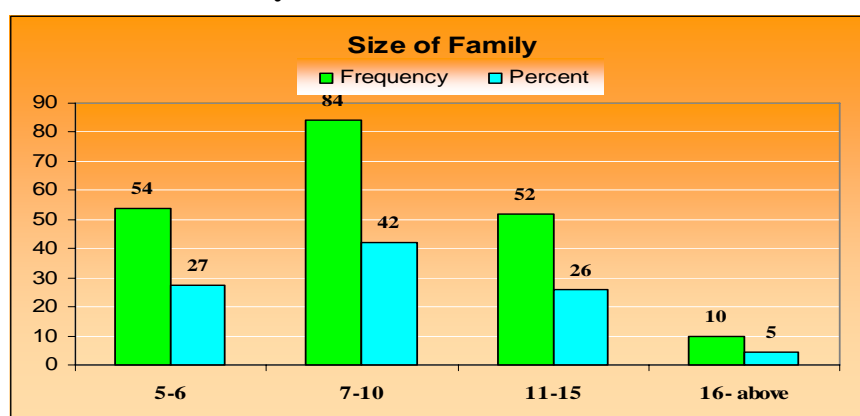
4. Number of Children:



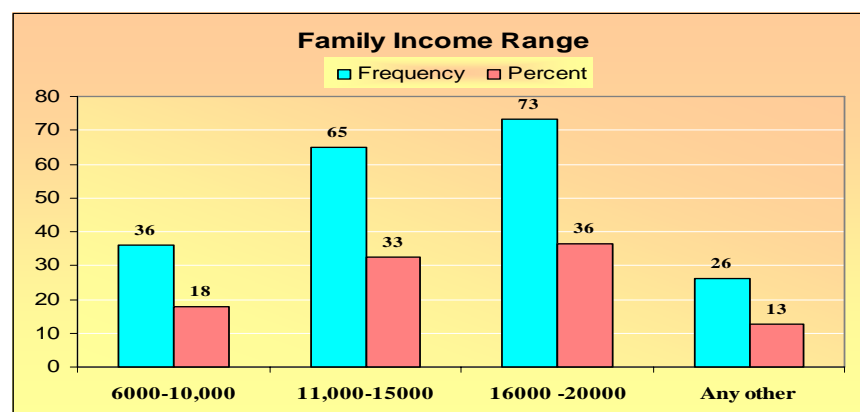
5. Type of Family:

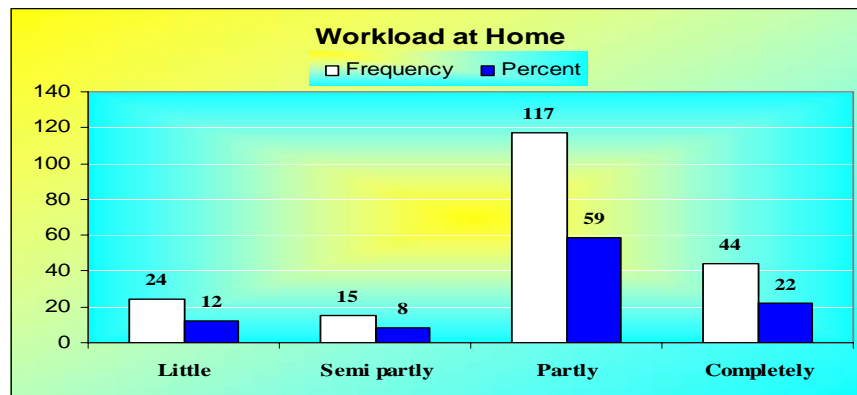
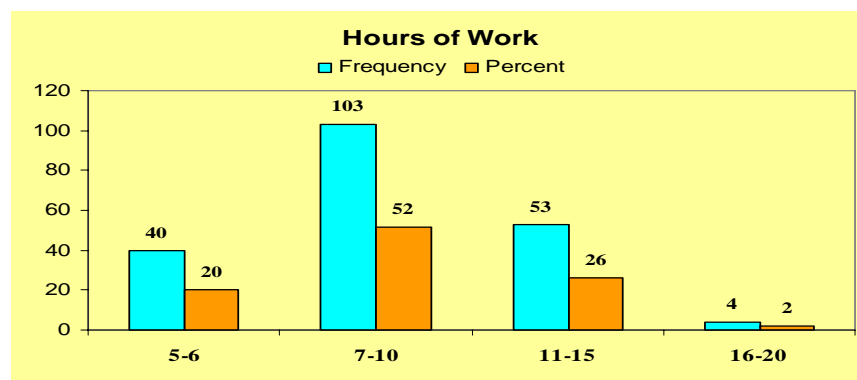
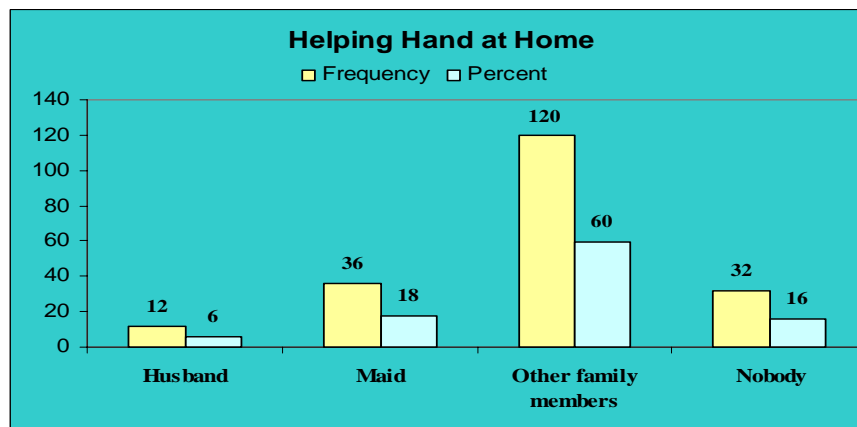


6. Size of family:

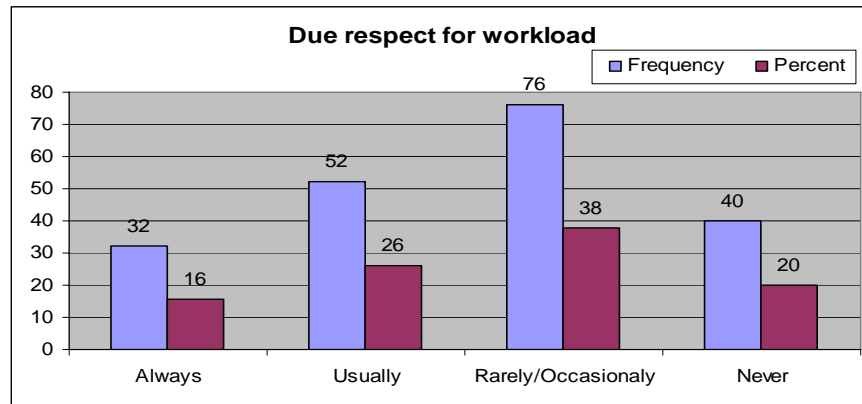


7. Family Income (In Rs/per month.):

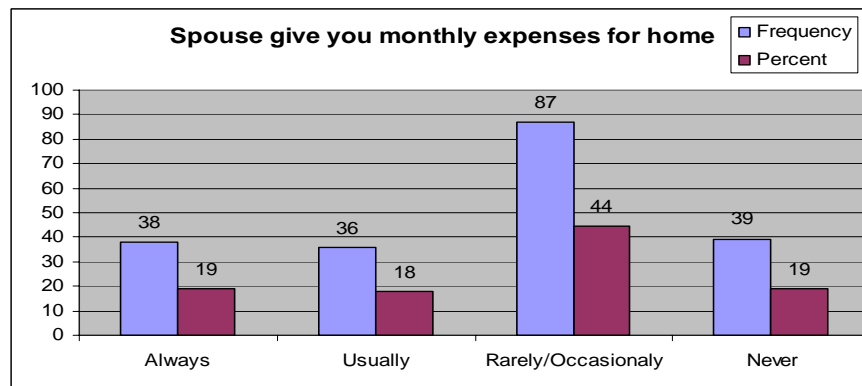


Work load carry out at home by women:**Working hours in a day:****10. Helping hand at home:**

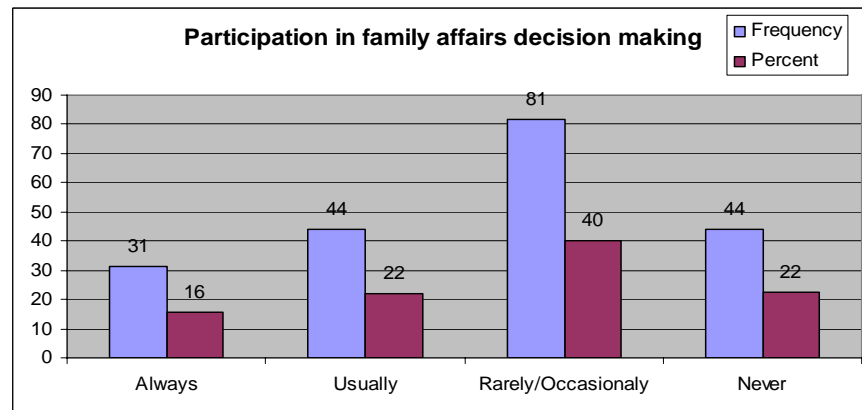
11. Due respect according to your work load:



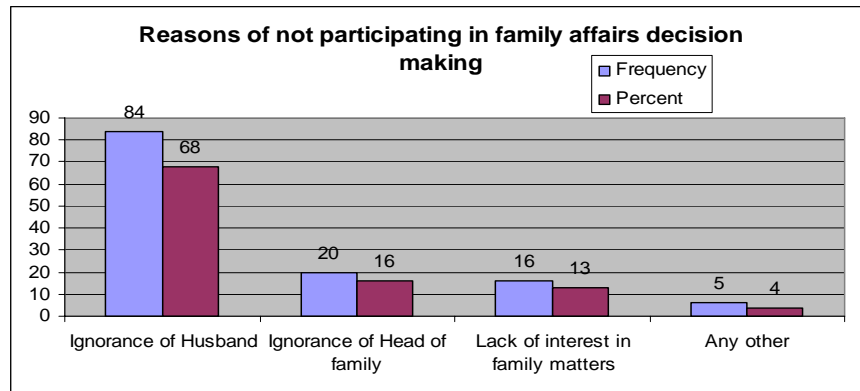
12. Monthly expenses for home:



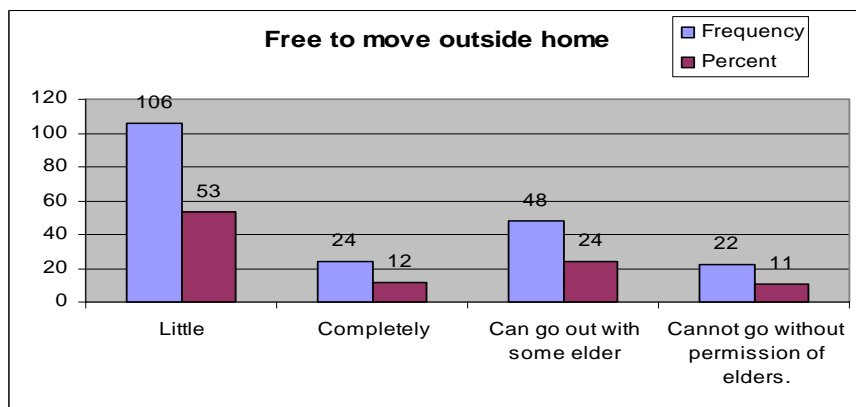
13. Women's participation in decision making of family affair:



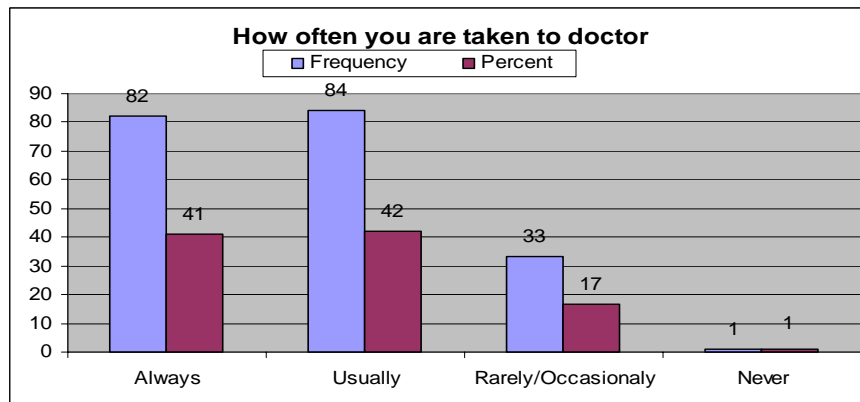
14. Causes of low participation:



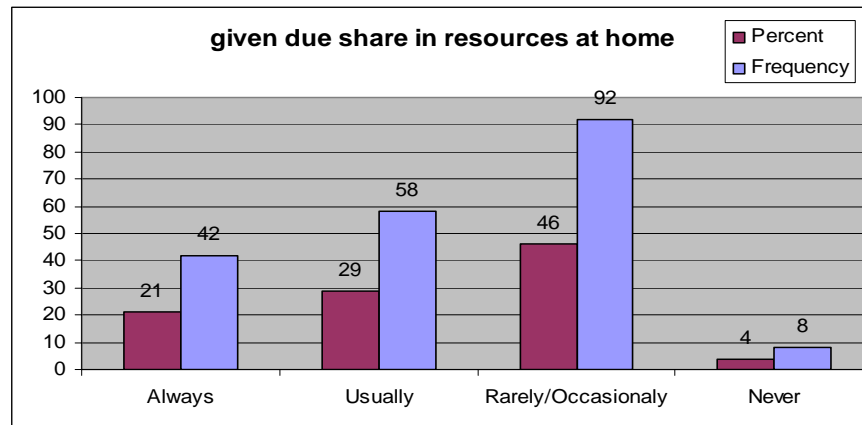
15. Women's freedom to move outside home:



16. Women's Visits to doctor when not well:



17. Due share in resources at home:



4. Findings

This study was primarily conducted to find out the state of empowerment of women in the households. The questionnaire was especially design to investigate the extent of empowerment and authority women have inside their homes. Mainly focus of this study was on to explore to what extent women participate in decision making process, workload at home, recognition of work, freedom of mobility, level of healthcare, share in resources etc.

Women in households were found to be neglected and deprived of their due rights and status. Women were found under the heavy burden of house chorus. Their work starts from the early morning to late night. They perform their all duties whether anyone becomes their helping hand or not, but mostly they are helped by other family members at home while in very rare cases they are helped by their husbands. Despite being the sole responsibility holder at home, women stay away from the major decision making process at home. Decisions at home are made by male members. Women are also ignored in terms of getting financial support for home management. They hardly get money to be used for monthly expenses at home. They are also not given complete freedom of movement even they have to accompany some elderly person when they go for their checkups.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out the actual position of women in the households. It was an exploratory research which opened to the researchers that women have to struggle long way to get the authority and control on their lives. Women are found to be under heavy weight of work for all in which they rarely or never get time for themselves. Their life is devoted to serve others, nevertheless, despite their dedication they don't get anything in return, not even the respect. Over all impression of women in their work and in their being was not good. They lacked sense of worth in their work.

Women in households have internalized the patriarchal system and prefer to remain within the four walls considering the male members having the sole authority on their lives. This internalization keeps them away from education, employment and from participating in the development process. They need to be brought out of the four walls and participate with shoulder to shoulder with men. If we have to get maximum benefit from the population, we must empower the women in rural areas..

References

United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM); Discussion Paper, (2008). "Financing gender equality is financing development."

Saraswati, Raju, (2005). *Gender, Technology and Development, Limited Options- Rethinking Women's Empowerment 'Projects' in Development Discourses: A Case from Rural India*, Sage Publications.

Sen, Amartaya, "Many faces of Gender Inequalities" *Frontline*, Oct 27 to Nov 9, 2001.

Zaheer, Shafaq, *Government initiatives for empowering women, Pakistan Pictorial*, September-October 2008.

District Census Report of Khairpur-1998, April 2000, Statistics Division, Govt: of Pakistan.