



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Waseem ul Hameed
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur,
Pakistan

***CORRESPONDENCE**

Amna Zafar
University of Central Punjab (UCP),
Lahore.
Email: zafaramna285@gmail.com

SUBJECT

Banking

RECEIVED 15 February 2023

REVISED 5 April 2023

ACCEPTED 10 May 2023

PUBLISHED 30 June 2023

CITATION

Zafar, A. (2023). The Impact of
Microfinance on Poverty Alleviation
and Women Empowerment. *Journal of
Banking and Social Equity*, 2(1), 19-
36.
<https://doi.org/10.52461/jbse.v2i1.2026>

JBSE



DOI



ACADEMIC PAPER

The Impact of Microfinance on Poverty Alleviation and Women Empowerment

Amna Zafar^{1*}

¹University of Central Punjab (UCP), Lahore.
Email: zafaramna285@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The focus is on bringing people out of poverty and empowering women through microfinance and financial inclusion, as these are the issues that are most prevalent and need laser focus. The data is gathered using a questionnaire. It was distributed to four microfinance banks in Bahawalpur which are FINCA, FMFB, NRSP, and Khushhali Bank to get the perspective of women. The results show a significantly positive relationship between microfinance and poverty alleviation and microfinance and women empowerment. This confirms that microfinance is indeed what is required to bring people out of poverty and for improving the empowerment of women. GBV and WE have a significantly negative relationship. When gender-based violence increases women's, empowerment decreases and vice versa. It was also seen that gender-based violence has no significant impact on poverty alleviation. Financial inclusion as a moderator had a significant impact on the relationship between gender-based violence and women's empowerment. This means that even if gender-based violence increases if women are financially included then they will still have increased empowerment. Thus, it can be concluded that financial freedom goes a long way in making women feel like they are equal like they have autonomy, and freedom to make choices.

KEYWORDS

Microfinance, Gender-based violence, Financial Inclusion, Poverty Alleviation

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of microfinance is not something new. It has been present for many years. The earliest roots of microfinance can be seen in the Irish loan funds which started in the early 1700s and gained prominence in the 1830s after the support of the Irish parliament (Hollis & Sweetman, 2004). At that time microfinance wasn't well known around the world. In 1879 the first savings and loan cooperative was opened in Germany's Rhineland. Its main target was the working people to whom it gave credit. But they were not so successful in their endeavors to reduce poverty (BNP Paribas, 2017).

Microfinance gained recognition worldwide after the establishment of Grameen Bank in Bangladesh by Muhammad Yunus in 1983. It all started in the village of Jobra when Muhammad Yunus decided to give a personal loan to 42 women to help them start a business. It proved successful and that's how microfinance came to be in Bangladesh (BNP Paribas, 2017). After Grameen Bank gained success in alleviating people from poverty especially women, the whole world started to see its importance and what it could do for the poor community.



This research study wants to find a solution to the problem of the lack of women's empowerment and the increase in poverty. This study's purpose is to find the impact financial inclusion has on the relationship between gender-based violence and women empowerment and what impact microfinance has on poverty alleviation. For this study, the variables chosen to measure the reduction of poverty are self-employment, health care improvement, and increased education. The impact of microcredit loans was observed in these variables. This study also focused on how financial inclusion affects the relationship between gender-based violence and women's empowerment. Plus, the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment. Moreover, the impact of gender-based violence on women's empowerment was observed.

It is seen that most of the research on microfinance shows that women are empowered when they can start their own business (Khan et al., 2016) but there is not a lot known about the fact of what happens after they are empowered through micro-credit. While providing loans to women benefits the household, there is uncertainty about whether it has a beneficial impact on women themselves as individuals (Kumar, 2013). Do they continue their business for a long time or is it just short-term and after a while they either close it down or stay stagnant where they are without any growth? Plus, there is also not a lot of research on the fact that what changes take place in a household after a woman is empowered. Do they invest what they are earning in the education of their children, or does it improve their healthcare conditions? Does microfinance ultimately result in the empowerment of women? Does Financial Inclusion moderate the relationship between gender-based violence and women's empowerment? Does financial inclusion lead to women's empowerment? The answers to these questions need to be found.

This research aims to explore if poor people benefit from microfinance loans in the long run. This study investigated that women could thrive and repay the loans and not be crushed under the weight of it all in the long run. The same goes for their business aspect. Whether or not these poor people were able to keep the business they have started going for a long time or will they close it up in a few years and not be able to come out of the poverty they were born into.

In this research, poverty alleviation and women empowerment are chosen as dependent variables. Poverty alleviation is represented through three dimensions. These are self-employment, healthcare, and education. These are the standards through which this research measured poverty alleviation. The independent variables are microfinance and gender-based violence. Microfinance includes saving, loans, and insurance whereas gender-based violence includes a threat to harm, humiliation, domination, and feeling unsafe. This research seeks to validate the relationship between microfinance and poverty alleviation. Financial Inclusion is chosen as a moderator which moderates the relationship between gender-based violence and women empowerment. The relationship between financial inclusion and women's empowerment was analyzed.

The objective of this research is to find out how much of positive impact microfinance has on poverty reduction. These three variables; self-employment, healthcare improvement, and increased education represent poverty alleviation. Through these variables, it was observed what impact microfinance has on poverty alleviation and women's empowerment. Through financial inclusion, it was investigated what impact it has on the relationship between gender-based violence and women empowerment.

1. To analyze the impact of microfinance on poverty alleviation.
2. To analyze the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment.
3. To analyze the impact gender-based violence has on women's empowerment.
4. To identify the impact financial inclusion has as a moderator on the relationship between gender-based violence and women empowerment.
5. To identify the impact gender-based violence has on poverty alleviation.

The theoretical gap in this study is that this study has added the variable of financial inclusion as a moderator. This variable of financial inclusion is new and there is not a lot of research on it. Plus,



whatever research there is, it is used as an independent variable (Bhatia & Singh, 2019; Hendriks, 2019; Omar & Inaba, 2020) and not as a moderator and especially not on the relationship between gender-based violence and women empowerment. Mostly use it to see its impact on economic empowerment or poverty reduction or income inequality (Hendriks, 2019; Omar & Inaba, 2020) and not empowerment as a whole including economic, social, and personal empowerment. So that is the novelty of this research.

The methodological gap addressed in this study is the use of the quantitative method when evaluating women's empowerment. In previous studies, women's empowerment has been measured using qualitative research (Kafle, 2015; Mustafa & Ismailov, 2008; Nabayinda, 2014; Rehman, Moazzam, & Ansari, 2020; Syhanath, 2020). Thus, it sometimes restricts the number of people interviewed. But as a questionnaire (KiflieHayleeyesus, 2016; Lombardini, Bowman, & Garwood, 2017) was used and a lot of questionnaires were filled out through Google Forms, women were more comfortable answering delicate questions regarding gender-based violence than they would be while answering face-to-face.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Underpinning Theories

To understand a phenomenon, theories are used in research. These theories explain the relationship between various variables and whether they have an impact on each other. There are several different theories and paradigms which examine the relationship between microfinance and women's empowerment. For this research feminist empowerment theory was adopted because it consists of three aspects. These are equity, empowerment, and equality stated by Mayoux (2020).

2.1.1 Feminist Empowerment Theory

According to Mayoux (2006), women empowerment is defined as “ the process of increasing the capacity of women to make choices and to transform these choices into desired actions and outcomes.” This aligns perfectly with what this study wants to accomplish which is to increase choices and options for women through microfinance and financial inclusion. Both provide women with opportunities and choices whether it is as small as opening a bank account or as difficult as starting a business. It helps to find the extent to which microfinance and financial inclusion affect women's empowerment.

This theory aims to find out about poverty alleviation among women with the help of self-sufficiency through microfinance and financial inclusion. This helps women be given their socio-economic rights. This in turn leads them to be able to give their children better education and improve the health conditions of the entire household and have power and autonomy and not be buried under the violence they face from men.

2.1.2 Capability Approach

For this thesis, the approach of a philosopher called Martha C. Nussbaum who is a feminist is chosen (Gilardone, Guérin, & Palier, 2014; Lipi, 2016). Her capability approach has been used as the main theory as it is based on the belief that poverty is a consequence of the absence of basic capabilities. In simple words, poverty takes place when people do not have the basic capabilities to do work and bring themselves out of poverty. When there is talk about basic needs or capabilities it is not just about food, water, and shelter but also about needs that have nothing to do with materials and everything to do with feeling empowered and capable of doing something. Nussbaum's capabilities and empowerment thus have a close connection. Empowerment is needed to improve the self-worth and perception of people. Microfinance allows that to happen. As it provides ways in which people can start earning and even provide employment for others and in doing so come out of poverty.

2.2. Women Empowerment

Female customers occupy most microfinance institutions in South Asia as they make up 92% of the total borrowers, which is the largest market of microfinance in the world. Women attribute 48.5% of Pakistan's population according to Asian Development Bank. The unemployment rate of women is 5.6% and 2.69% of the employed women live below \$1.90 PPP (purchasing power parity) a day



according to the data of ADB in 2019. 24.3% of the population lives below the poverty line according to 2015 data. This value has only aggravated due to the conditions of the economy and the pandemic.

Now more than ever people especially women must take advantage of microfinance and come out of poverty. In the environment that everyone is facing women must become self-employed and self-reliant. They can take advantage of their skills and take a small loan from a microfinance bank and start their business. They can easily make products at home and then have them delivered to their customers. This not only provides women with a steady income, but they won't even have to leave their houses which is usually the problem that most women in Pakistan face especially in the rural areas.

The reason women struggle so much is not that they do not have skills or even traditional education it is because of how they are raised to be housewives and confined to certain parameters in the rural areas. Women in our country are so talented even when they haven't received formal education. They can still make some of the most sought-after clothes, embroidery work, pottery, jewelry and so much more. All they need is an opportunity and confidence to break free from gender stereotypes. These stereotypes do nothing but limit the potential of women and take away their social, political, economic, and especially personal freedom (Løsnesløyken, 2014).

Reducing poverty is not just about people getting necessities. It is also about the opportunities that open up after they start earning a reasonable income. It is also about gaining confidence in themselves and their abilities. It is about expanding their horizons and expanding their capabilities and their business. It is about empowering women. All of this is possible only if women can rise from the poverty they were born into and make something of themselves.

2.3. Microfinance and Poverty Alleviation

Microfinance is a tool that fulfills the need of people who are living below the poverty line (Sofi & Sumaira, 2016). Formal and informal sources both provide microfinance. Their main providers for formal sources include MFIs and banks, for semiformal it is NGOs, and informal sources are relatives and money lenders (Sofi & Sumaira, 2016). Different people, according to their accessibility and ease choose which one they selected to fulfill their requirements.

Microcredit requires no other collateral except for peer collateral (Rashid & Ejaz, 2019). Its basic purpose is to reach those people who either do not have or find it hard to avail of different traditional finance channels (Acha Ikechukwu & Acha, 2012). Microfinance is the kind of strategic tool that helps to lower poverty (Acha Ikechukwu & Acha, 2012)

Through microfinance, sections of society that deserve finance can easily get access to credit (Wrenn, 2005). Microfinancing strategies can achieve both objectives of empowerment and poverty alleviation but that happened only when the loan is used to either start or expand a business activity (Muhammad, 2010). Microfinance is not something new, but it has gained prominence in the last few years. The most well-known institutions of microfinance are Grameen Bank and Akhuwat Foundation.

Microfinance improves the living standards of people not just at the individual level but also at the household level (Sohn & Ume, 2019). There are different aspects through which microfinance impacts poverty. These five dimensions of poverty are wealth, consumption, education, living standard, and health (Sohn & Ume, 2019). Through these dimensions, it can be seen how microfinance impacts poverty and each of the dimensions, thus making conditions for poor people better.

There are various reasons why poverty arises but the main reason is insufficient income which is either due to unemployment or the source of earning is meager (Sofi & Sumaira, 2016). Furthermore, the portion of the population that is poverty-ridden has a hard time getting a loan through traditional banks because of less creditworthiness or low incomes. That is why they stay poor but with microfinance banks on the rise, more and more people can do better for themselves (Sofi & Sumaira, 2016).



Microfinance promotes the growth of the economy, creates employment, and promotes small businesses which eventually results in people getting out of poverty (Mansori, Safari, & Mohd Ismail, 2020). By taking microfinance loans it becomes easy for poor people to purchase materials necessary to start a business without facing the problems that they would otherwise face when trying to take a loan from a traditional bank. These loans are especially helpful for people from rural areas.

2.4. Microfinance and Women's Empowerment

Microcredit schemes have been a big help in improving the socio-economic lives of women in rural areas going back to 1996 (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996). Programs which include "Better Life for Women" in Nigeria (Omorodion, 2007), "Self Help Groups" in India, the "Sarhad Rural Support Program" in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2016), and institutions such as Al Amana in Morocco (Crépon et al., 2011) have all had a productive effect on women's lives.

Female customers occupy most microfinance institutions as in South Asia they make up 92% of the total borrowers, which is the largest market of microfinance in the world according to the Global Outreach and Financial Performance Benchmark Report of 2014. In Pakistan, the participation rate of women in economic activities is 26%. According to the UN Report of 2016, Pakistan's overall microfinance loans are approximately 5% that goes to female borrowers, and these female borrowers make up 50% of their clients. Women that earn money and contribute to household earnings have greater importance in their households and society in Pakistan.

An excellent example of women earning bread and butter for their families is Shaheen Munawar. She earns a monthly income of Rs 150,000, which is \$1420 through her high school called Wisdom Grammar which is in the slum areas of Karachi. Through it, she supports her five children alone as her husband is deceased. This has been possible for her through yearly loans of Rs 150,000 from Khushali Microfinance Bank. This bank has allowed her to operate an 18-classroom school consisting of 280 students and 13 teachers. This shows that women generating income improve the livelihood and standard of living of themselves and their children and provide better health and educational status (Goetz & Gupta, 1996).

When Pakistani female entrepreneurs were studied it was found that income and education both had a high correlation with easy availability to finance (Mahmood, Hussain, & Z. Matlay, 2014). This shows that women who are working have a better understanding of how to get loans, fulfill their requirements and be able to return them on time. This is possible because of their knowledge and their learning. Moreover, women who are educated know their way around finances and how things are done. They have a better understanding of how things need to be done as compared to those who do not know the workings of loans and financing. This knowledge is either acquired through learning or practical knowledge after working.

Moreover, because of their education, women can understand and better grasp aspects that are related to documentation and other formalities that need to be fulfilled to get a loan (Rashid & Ejaz, 2019). This easy access to funds can open a lot of doors for women in terms of opportunities and resources for enterprises that are owned by women. Because of greater access to finance, these enterprises can benefit from not only profitability but also probable expansion (Rashid & Ejaz, 2019).

Empowerment means the ability to make strategic choices, which requires power, choice, option, and control in one's day-to-day affairs. This also includes self-esteem, autonomy, agency, and self-determination over life and economic resources to have a positive effect on their own life and that of their children. Getting loans through microcredit allows women to feel that they have control and agency in their life and that they are not dependent on men to take loans for them. This empowers women to handle their finances on their own and thus make decisions themselves without interference from others.

2.5. Financial Inclusion and Women Empowerment

Financial Inclusion includes all those initiatives that make it easy, primarily for poor people to access and afford formal financial services (Omar & Inaba, 2020). Recently financial inclusion is seen as a dynamic tool that can be used for attaining equality in income, poverty alleviation, and generating



employment in both advanced and developing countries (Omar & Inaba, 2020). Since financial inclusion emerged, it has been promoting social inclusion through easy access, availability, and using services of formal financial institutions by the “newly banked” (Omar & Inaba, 2020).

According to SBP “Financial inclusion is defined as access to formal financial services by individuals & firms to use a range of quality payments, savings, credit and insurance services which meet their needs with dignity and fairness.” The dimension of financial inclusion that this study focused on is financial equality. There should be equality when providing financial services between men and women. Even when financial inclusion is increasing slowly in Pakistan and has recently had SBP focus on attaining greater financial inclusion, it also needs to focus on financial equality. Because women are the ones that are most financially excluded, and they make up a large majority of the population.

2.6. Gender-based Violence and Women Empowerment

UN declaration defined violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life.” The society in Pakistan is such that it perpetrates violence and then lets it go on as if it’s normal for a woman to suffer and yet not raise their voice. Figure 2.4 below paints a severe picture as these are just the ones in Punjab. The cases of violence keep on increasing and these are just the reported cases. There are so many that have not been reported. The cases have sharply increased in the year 2020 and 2021 so much so that every day you hear a case of violence being reported. According to SSDO (2020), reports from January to March revealed a whopping 200% increase in cases of gender-based violence. While it is good that people are raising their voices and coming out seeking justice, justice is not severely or swiftly served. Plus, the increasing rate of cases is alarming. This is playing havoc with the self-respect, dignity, and empowerment of women.

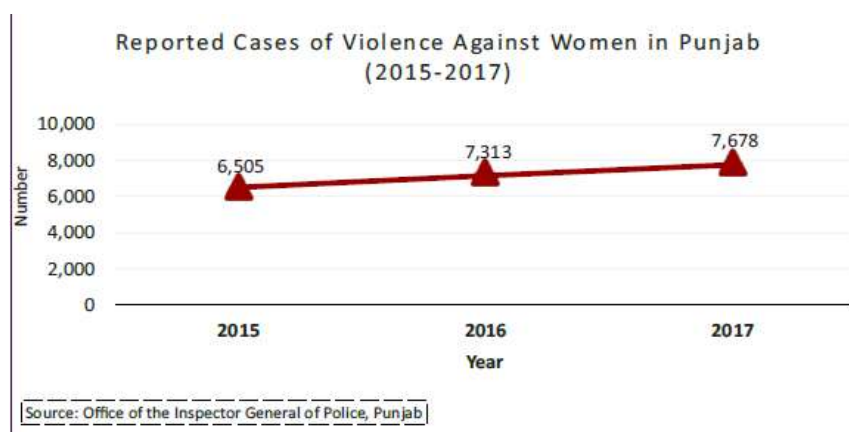


Figure 2.1: Reported Cases of Violence in Punjab

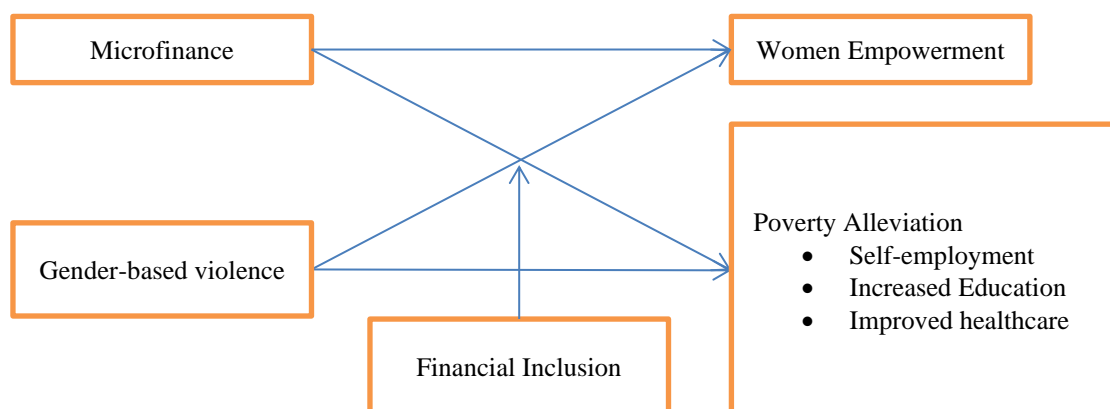


Figure 2.2: Research Framework



2.7. Hypothesis Development

H1: *There exists a significantly positive relationship between Microfinance and Poverty Alleviation.*

H2: *There exists a significantly positive relationship between Microfinance and Women's Empowerment.*

H3: *There exists a significantly negative relationship between Gender-based violence and Women's Empowerment*

H4: *There exists a significantly positive relationship when financial inclusion is a moderator affecting the relationship between Gender-based violence and Women Empowerment.*

H5: *There exists a significantly negative relationship between Gender-based violence and Poverty Alleviation.*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

For research design causal research or explanatory research is being used. It is because microfinance and poverty alleviation form a cause-and-effect relationship. Microfinance causes poverty reduction; thus, poverty is affected by microfinance. The same is the case for gender-based violence and women empowerment. Gender-based violence causes a decrease in women's empowerment and thus women's empowerment is affected by gender-based violence. That is why this research design has been chosen.

Table 3.1: Operational Definitions

Variable	Symbol	Operationalization	Definition	Reference
Microfinance	MF	The interest rate charged by MFI, increase in saving due to microfinance, loan repayment schedule, increase in income due to microfinance, improved financial position	The number of people who currently have access to micro-credit	PMN; Micro Watch 2019
Self-employment	SE	Increased support from MFI to run business, overall progress, appropriate training, and loan amount to start and run a business	The number of people being able to start their own business	PSLM 2019
Healthcare	HC	Percentage distribution of people able to get healthcare services	The number of people able to get healthcare services for their families	PSLM 2019
Education	ED	Percentage distribution of the population that goes to school	The number of children people can send to schools	PSLM 2019
Financial Inclusion	FI	Percentage of the female with accounts, transactions using mobile, use money transfer service	The number of women who have account	Findex 2017
Women Empowerment	WE	decision-making, financial freedom, freedom of movement, freedom of choice	Women who are confident, independent, and have the freedom to make their own decisions	PDHS 2017-18
Gender-based violence	GBV	Threaten to harm, being humiliated, male domination, feeling unsafe.	Men who show their domination through harm, humiliation, and emotional and psychological pain	PDHS 2017-18

3.2. Measurement of Variables

This study has used three dimensions of poverty. These are education, healthcare, and self-employment. To determine the impact of microfinance on poverty, multidimensional poverty measures are used. For health the indicator is the consultation of health; for education, the indicators are the percentage distribution of children that goes to school and for self-employment, it was indicated by increased support from MFI to run a business, better, appropriate training to start and run a business, overall progress in general living standard and sufficient loan amount for starting a business. For microfinance, it was indicated by interest rate charged by MFI, increase in



saving due to microfinance, loan repayment schedule, better financial position, and increase in income due to microfinance. For financial inclusion the number of females with accounts, transactions using mobile, and use of money transfer services to pay the bills. For women's empowerment, the data was obtained using a questionnaire. Women's empowerment was assessed with the help of four items. These are being able to make decisions about oneself, one family, freedom of movement, and freedom of choice. For gender-based violence the four items are threatened to harm, male domination, being humiliated, and feeling unsafe.

Table 3.2: Number of Items

Variable	Abbreviation	No. of items
Microfinance	MF	5
Poverty Alleviation	PA	7
Gender-based violence	GBV	4
Women empowerment	WE	4
Financial Inclusion	FI	3

3.3. Data Collection

A questionnaire (Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; Fayyaz & Khan, 2021; KiflieHayleeyesus, 2016; Lombardini et al., 2017; The World Bank, 2017) was adapted to get the perspective of women on not just empowerment but also poverty alleviation, financial inclusion, and microfinance. As a questionnaire (Fayyaz & Khan, 2021; KiflieHayleeyesus, 2016) is used, the nature of the data is primary. Questionnaires were distributed to different banks in Bahawalpur which are Khushhali Bank, NRSP, FMFB, and FINCA. The questionnaires (Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; Fayyaz & Khan, 2021; KiflieHayleeyesus, 2016) were also distributed through Google Forms to increase reach. Convenience sampling was used because of time constraints and Covid 19 restrictions.

First of all the questions asked by the researcher were about their age, the area they live in whether rural or urban, their marital status, education, profession, the profession of their spouse, dependents, dependents that go to school, and the elders whose medical needs they take care of. These questions give an idea about the kind of burden and pressure a person has and how many people she is responsible for.

Then start the questions about the degree to which a person agrees or disagrees with what is said. This questionnaire (Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; Fayyaz & Khan, 2021; KiflieHayleeyesus, 2016) is developed with a Likert five-point scale. This scale demonstrates 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree and 5= strongly agree. The questions regarding microfinance were about interest rates being fair and affordable, savings and income increasing as a result of participating in microfinance programs, loan repayment schedules being convenient, and financial position. All these questions were under the category of microfinance.

Table 3.3: Measurement items of Microfinance

Microfinance	
1. The interest rate charged by the microfinance institution is fair and affordable.	
2. Your income has increased because you participated in the microcredit program.	(KiflieHayleeyesus, 2016)
3. Your savings have increased because you participated in the microcredit program.	
4. The loan repayment schedules are convenient for you.	
5. Your financial position has increased because you participated in microcredit programs.	

The questions under the category of poverty alleviation include three dimensions which are self-employment, increased education, and improved healthcare services, which consist of the following questions. These are being able to send children to school, overall progress being observed, being able to get medical and healthcare service in clinics and hospitals, the loan being sufficient to run the business, and support received from MFI has been encouraging to run the business, increase in employment opportunities, and appropriate training is given to run the business.



Table 3.4: Measurement items of Poverty Alleviation

Poverty Alleviation (Self-employment, Education, Healthcare)	
1. You can send all your children to school after participation in the microcredit program.	
2. After participating in microfinance programs, you can get medical and health care services in clinics and hospitals.	
3. The level of support received from MFI has been encouraging to run the business.	(KiflieHaylee yesus, 2016)
4. Employment opportunities have increased because of participating in microcredit programs.	
5. Appropriate training has been given by the microfinance institution to start and manage the business.	
6. The loan amount provided is sufficient to run and expand the business.	
7. Overall progress has been observed in the general living standards of the family.	

The questions regarding gender-based violence include being threatened to hurt or harmed, facing male domination at home, being humiliated, and feeling unsafe walking alone at home. These questions give an idea of the atrocity and pain women go through at the hands of men. This gives an idea of the extent to which women feel safe or unsafe depending on their answers. Ethical concerns were kept in mind and anyone who thought that a question was invasive had the option of leaving that question.

Table 3.5: Measurement items of Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence	
1. Someone has threatened to hurt or harm you or someone you care about.	
2. Someone has said something to humiliate you in front of others.	(Lombardini et al., 2017)
3. I have faced male domination at home.	
4. I feel unsafe walking alone in my village or city.	

The questions regarding financial inclusion include having a bank account, using the account to make transactions using a mobile phone, using jazz cash, and other services. These questions give a good idea of whether a person is given basic financial services or not. These were adapted from the Findex questionnaire of The World Bank (2017).

Table 3.6: Measurement items of Financial Inclusion

Financial Inclusion	
1. I have a bank account.	
2. I have made transactions with money from the bank using a mobile phone.	(The World Bank, 2017)
3. I have personally received money from money transfer services such as jazz cash etc.	

The questions regarding women's empowerment included the freedom to go to a relative's house or friend's house alone, riding alone on a rickshaw or public transport, and being able to make decisions regarding themselves and family matters. These questions give an idea about whether women have the confidence, autonomy, and freedom to make choices and decisions on their own or not.

Table 3.7: Measurement items of Women Empowerment

Women Empowerment	
1. I can personally travel to visit friends or relatives alone.	
2. I am permitted to visit any place riding on public transport or a rickshaw.	(Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; Fayyaz & Khan, 2021; Lombardini et al., 2017)
3. I feel I am empowered to make decisions about myself.	
4. I feel I am empowered to make decisions about family matters	

3.4. Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to gather data for this research. Due to Covid 19 restrictions, a lot of clients of banks weren't coming to banks, and thus not all the questionnaires could be filled that way.



Some of them were self-administered and others were given to field workers of banks who had women fill the forms either physically or through Google form, whichever seemed suitable to the respondent. GPower software was used to finalize the sample of women from the ages of 19 to over 55 living in both urban and rural areas of Bahawalpur. According to GPower a sample of 172 was sufficient but to get better representative results 300 questionnaires were sent out, of which 200 were returned. All of these were women, as that was the purpose of this research to study what women think when it comes to violence, inclusion, empowerment, microfinance, and poverty alleviation.

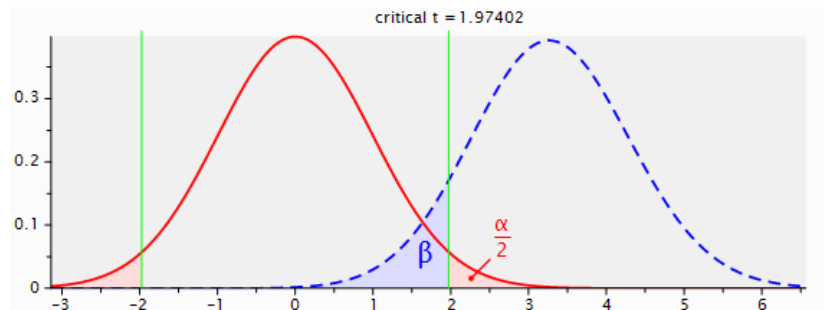


Figure 3.1: Sample size determined using GPower

3.4.1 Data collection procedures

As the data is primary it was collected using a questionnaire (Fayyaz, Hakim, & Khan, 2016) which was adapted to suit the needs of this particular research. Some questionnaires were distributed to KBL, FINCA, NRSP, and FMFB, and some were sent to people through Google Forms to get more responses and better outreach. Plus, Covid restrictions made it difficult to provide all the questionnaires through self-administering. To make it easy to gather data and due to time constraints, convenience sampling was used. Female staff and clients both filled out the questionnaire (Bushra & Wajiha, 2013; KiflieHayleeyesus, 2016; Lombardini et al., 2017) who had taken microfinance loans from banks. Some questionnaires were self-administered whereas others were given to field workers of banks to have them filled by respondents.

3.4.2 Techniques of Data Analysis

As the data is primary SmartPLS was used to analyze the data and gain results. PLS software was used to find the construct validity and reliability of data gathered using questionnaires. As for validity, convergent and discriminant validity were found. To find out construct validity and reliability, the values of Cronbach's Alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) were observed (Hair Jr et al., 2014). For finding discriminant validity three criteria were used. These are the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), Cross Loadings (Gefen & Straub, 2005; Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015), and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) (Henseler et al., 2015).

The reason for using this software is that it is easy to use and enter data and has advanced features that make the research reliable and valid. Bootstrapping in SmartPLS was used to find out the path coefficients that include beta value, t statistics value, and p-value (Hair Jr et al., 2014). All of these are important to find out whether there is a significant and positive relationship between variables or not. Through bootstrapping the values of R^2 (coefficient of determination) and F^2 effect size were also calculated (Hair Jr et al., 2021). Through moderation analysis, it was seen whether financial inclusion strengthens or weakens the relationship between gender-based violence and women empowerment and if it does whether that is significant or insignificant. Blindfolding was done to find out the value of Q^2 (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Measurement Model

The measurement model presents the relationship between the constructs and their items, also called indicator variables. Measurement model evaluation involves removing factors with a factor loading that is <0.60 (Gefen & Straub, 2005). But it is not compulsory if the value of AVE is positive. That is why only three items were removed one from women empowerment which was WE5, one from financial inclusion FI2, and the other from gender-based violence which was GBV5.



The measurement model, first, requires the conduction of reliability analysis which is done through checking composite reliability. The threshold value that is desired is 0.70 (Ringle et al., 2020). Thus, it can be seen from Table 4.9 below that the composite reliability (CR) of all the latent constructs is greater than 0.70. That is why we can say that this model has composite reliability.

The other component of the measurement model that needs focus is convergent validity. To measure convergent validity, AVE needs to be calculated which has a threshold value of 0.50 (Ringle et al., 2020). All other constructs have values above 0.50 except moderating effect (ME) which has a value of 0.393. A value of 0.40 can be accepted if the composite reliability is greater than 0.60 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). It is very high, and the AVE value is so close to 4 it can easily be rounded to 4. So, the values are well within range. Thus, it is concluded that this study establishes convergent validity.

Cronbach Alpha measures internal consistency which shows how closely related items are. It measures the reliability of a scale. All the values are greater than 0.70 except for FI as seen in table 4.9 below. But it is still within an acceptable range and the number of items is smaller compared to other items it is showing the low value of Cronbach alpha. Thus, it shows that these constructs possess internal consistency.

Table 4.1: Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
FI	0.715	0.795	0.575
GBV	0.816	0.879	0.647
MF	0.862	0.901	0.647
ME	0.860	0.882	0.693
PA	0.841	0.878	0.514
WE	0.837	0.891	0.673

Source: SmartPLS

4.2. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity indicates how distinct each construct is from the others. This validity measures their distinctiveness or their uniqueness. It ensures that a construct measures those areas of interest that the other constructs do not. Discriminant validity not being established leads the construct to have an influence on not just their variables but on others as well and that was lead to results being compromised (Farrell, 2010). There are three criteria for measuring discriminant validity. This study used Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT).

4.3. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

The traditional criterion that measures discriminant validity had so low sensitivity that they were unacceptable. So that's why another criterion was developed which is HTMT. This criterion was derived from the classical multitrait-multimethod (MTMM) matrix (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), which allows a discriminant validity assessment that is systematic.

HTMT represents the estimate of correlation that is present between two constructs. There is a predefined threshold that needs to be compared to see whether there is discriminant validity present or not. Two threshold levels are mostly used. As long as it's less than those two or between them, discriminant validity is established. Some authors suggest a threshold of 0.85 (Clark & Watson, 2016) whereas others suggest a value of 0.90 (Teo, Srivastava, & Jiang, 2008). Table 4.12 below shows that all the values are less than 0.85 except the one between microfinance and poverty reduction. But this value is 0.859, which is still less than 0.90 so it is acceptable. It can be said that HTMT has established discriminant validity as all values are less than 0.90.



Table 4.2: HTMT

	FI	GBV	MF	ME	PA	WE
FI						
GBV	0.259					
MF	0.315	0.117				
ME	0.301	0.12	0.128			
PA	0.301	0.162	0.859	0.15		
WE	0.757	0.427	0.289	0.304	0.267	

Source: SmartPLS

4.4. Structural Model

The evaluation of the structural model involves the analysis of path coefficients. Similar to the weight analysis of indicators, bootstrapping techniques allow the researcher to assess the significance of each coefficient (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). To check whether the relationship between constructs is significant or not, three values are looked at. These are beta, t statistics, and p values. The t-value should be higher than 1.96 and the p-value should be lower than 0.05 for the relationship to be significant.

H1 evaluates whether MF has a significantly positive impact on PA. The results show that MF has a significantly positive effect on PA ($\beta=0.777$, $t=22.775$, $p=0.000$). H2 evaluates whether MF and WE have a significantly positive relationship. The results show a significantly positive relationship ($\beta=0.162$, $t=3.222$, $p=0.001$). H3 evaluates whether GBV and WE have a significantly negative relationship. The results show a significantly negative impact of GBV on WE ($\beta= -0.275$, $t=5.320$, $p=0.000$). H4 evaluates whether FI has a significantly positive impact on the relationship between GBV and WE. The results show that it has a significantly positive impact on the relationship ($\beta= 0.172$, $t=3.388$, $p=0.001$). H5 evaluates whether GBV has a significantly negative impact on PA. The results from Table 4.14 show that GBV has no significant impact on PA ($\beta=0.059$, $t=1.292$, $p=0.197$). Thus, it can be concluded that H1, H2, H3, and H4 are accepted and H5 is rejected.

Table 4.3: Path Coefficient

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
FI -> WE	0.462	0.451	0.056	8.221	0.000
GBV -> PA	0.059	0.057	0.045	1.292	0.197
GBV -> WE	-0.275	-0.276	0.052	5.320	0.000
MF -> PA	0.777	0.781	0.034	22.775	0.000
MF -> WE	0.162	0.161	0.050	3.222	0.001
ME -> WE	0.172	0.188	0.051	3.388	0.001

Source: SmartPLS

4.5. R Square

R² also known as the coefficient of determination is used to measure the predictive accuracy of the model. It sees the combined effect of exogenous variables on endogenous variables (Hair Jr et al., 2014). The values of R² vary between 0 and 1. 1 indicates complete accuracy for predicting. There is a rule of thumb to determine which values are acceptable for R². These are 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25. They each represent predictive accuracy of substantial, moderate, and weak (Hair Jr et al., 2014).

From Table 4.15 below it can be seen that PA has a moderate predictive capacity as it is 0.608 which is greater than 0.5. We also have a predictive accuracy that is also moderate as it is 0.459, which is very close to 0.50. Both have significant p values. They show significant values of p which are 0.000 for both and t value which is 11.946 and 8.256 for PA and WE respectively both of which are greater than 1.96.



Table 4.4: R square

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
PA	0.608	0.617	0.051	11.946	0.000
WE	0.459	0.474	0.056	8.256	0.000

Source: SmartPLS

4.6. Moderation Analysis

H5 evaluates whether FI moderates the relationship between GBV and WE. The results from Figure 4.10 below show that Financial Inclusion has a significantly positive impact on the relationship ($\beta=0.172$, $t=3.388$, $p=0.001$). The results confirm that FI is moderating the relationship between GBV and WE. The graph below for moderating effect helps to understand whether FI is strengthening or weakening the relationship. The red line indicates no moderator. The blue line indicates when FI is reduced, and the green line indicates when FI is increased. It can be seen clearly that when FI is reduced, an increase in GBV drastically decreases WE. But when FI is increased as indicated by the green line, even an increase in GBV not decreases WE drastically. There is a very low decrease. An increase in GBV decreases WE and a decrease in GBV increases WE. But with the addition of FI, this relationship is weakened. Even with increased GBV. So, it can be concluded that financial inclusion as a moderator is weakening the relationship between GBV and WE. When women are financially included it gives them freedom, options, choices, and confidence that they can do something and that they can improve their conditions which results in them getting empowered despite the gender-based violence they suffer.

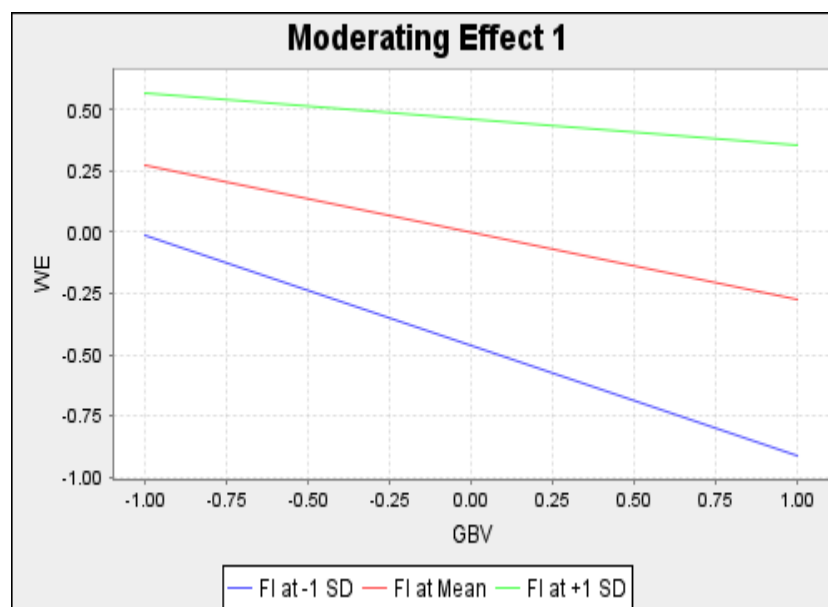


Figure 4.1: Moderating Effect (ME)

5. DISCUSSION

The study's purpose was to establish the relationship between microfinance and poverty alleviation, microfinance and women empowerment, gender-based violence and women empowerment, financial inclusion and women empowerment, and the moderating effect of financial inclusion on the relationship of GBV and WE. The acceptance of all these relationships confirms the view that FI and MF are the keys to increasing empowerment and reducing poverty. The more women are given liberty and freedom to make choices be it domestic or financial, it boosts their confidence and increases empowerment. The study found that MF has a significant impact on PA. The more focused banks and institutions are on giving microcredit and other services to women the more it contributes to a decrease in poverty and women increasing their overall standard of life. This significantly positive relationship established confirms past discoveries (Rajper et al., 2018). Microfinance proved to be a vital factor in alleviating poverty (Khandker, 2005; Rajper et al., 2018).



Microfinance not only had a positive impact on poverty alleviation but also on women's empowerment. The study established a significantly positive relationship between them. This goes on to say that giving loans to women for starting their businesses by using their skills is not only giving them financial freedom but also the confidence that they can achieve something on their own. They start to have confidence in their skills and capabilities which is what leads to the empowerment of women (Bansal & Singh, 2020; Fayyaz & Khan, 2021; Hashemi et al., 1996; Jatoi & Khoso, 2020).

Financial Inclusion and Women Empowerment also had a significantly positive relationship. This proves that when women are financially included and given the proper services they thrive and prosper and gain the confidence of being able to do as little as saving money in their account. It is not always about investing or starting a small business. Sometimes women just get confidence from just being included and given their due rights. Just being able to open an account, deposit and take out money, use a money transfer service, or be able to save goes a long way to improving the empowerment of women and that's what this proves (Bhatia & Singh, 2019).

The study proves that gender-based violence has a significantly negative impact on women's empowerment. When women are threatened, harmed, humiliated, and their freedom and confidence ripped from them, how can they remain empowered unless something changes? VAW is on the rise now more than ever and it is creating a negative and scary environment (Jewkes, 2002; John et al., 2020). In a lot of cases, violence causes more psychological and mental harm than physical. Physical scars can heal over time, but the mental ones sometimes don't ever heal and that is the tragedy that is plaguing our country now.

The study proves that financial inclusion as a moderator has significantly weakened the relationship between gender-based violence and women empowerment. Before adding financial inclusion to the mix, the increase in violence was drastically decreasing the empowerment of women but with the addition of financial inclusion, that relationship is weakened. Now despite the violence, they face they still feel empowered to make their own decisions and to have their freedom, and as they are doing a small business or utilizing their capabilities with the help of financial inclusion, they still feel a sense of accomplishment and something that is their own.

6. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The findings of this study are in league with Martha C. Nussbaum's capability approach which says that the reason for poverty is the absence of basic needs and capabilities. When basic financial needs are not fulfilled a lot of people are unable to get them out of the poverty they were born into. Microfinance fulfills those needs and brings out those skills and capabilities to start a business. It gives them a purpose and hopes that they can do something about their situation to make it better because now because of microfinance they have choices and options. The same goes for women's empowerment and financial inclusion. When women are targeted and provided financial services they save, they invest, and they thrive, and they feel empowered. Once that need for financial inclusion is fulfilled, they can work hard and bring themselves out of poverty. The other theory is the feminist empowerment theory which also aligns with the results of this study. It says that women feel empowered when they have equity and equality. This is provided to them through financial inclusion and microfinance. They feel that they are included, that they are given benefits and opportunities to thrive, and that leads them to feel empowered. That's why both theories are in line with this study.

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study state that microfinance leads to a reduction in poverty and an increase in the empowerment of women. The microfinance banks can take advantage of this knowledge as microfinance not only leads women towards self-employment but also helps in getting healthcare and providing education to the children. These are the benefits that are overlooked. Getting healthcare would mean better disease control and lower mortality rate and more educated individuals in the next generation. That is why the focus should be on women and the banks should set up a 50/50 percentage of borrowers for men and women so that there is equality, and more women can benefit from the services microfinance has to offer.



Another important implication for banks is that of financial inclusion and this is not restricted to just microfinance, all banks can adopt it. Financial inclusion allows people from unbanked areas to grow, and the bank's outreach grows with every such area they target. There needs to be better reach for these areas so that the people deprived of these services can benefit from them and in doing so the banks benefit as well. Violence is growing so much these days and the way to reduce it and increase the empowerment of women is by making people focus their effort and energy on something productive like a small business. When it generates money the bank and the people both benefit, but the underlying benefit is the reduction in frustration and anger of people as they have something else to channel all that energy into, and that reduces VAW. Violence increased during the pandemic because of an increase in layoffs and unemployment but with financial inclusion that reduce and there was an increase in women's empowerment. So not only there be a financial gain for the banks, but they also contribute to making society better with equity, equality, and empowerment.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research can influence policymakers of microfinance banks and financial institutions to see the importance of incorporating more women into their fold. Banks and MFIs always target the number of borrowers a bank or financial institution has and never the number of male and female borrowers because if someone is putting money in their banks it does not matter whether it is a man or a woman. But that is not helpful in the long run as it creates a barrier between genders and gives one an undue advantage over the other. Thus, suppressing women and if one gender is flourishing and the other diminishing that is counter-productive and won't solve the problems of poverty, education, healthcare, and unemployment.

But this research proves that microfinance and financial inclusion when directed towards the benefit of the woman can empower them and help them grow and achieve, reduce poverty, and send their children to school so they can have a better future and better opportunities, so these people can get healthcare services and lead a better life. It must be understood that men and women both contribute to the betterment of a family and household. It's not one person's job to bear all the burden of the house and a lot of times that is what leads to discontent and violence. If both men and women are financially included and have financial equality, they will be able to live better lives and get out of poverty and be empowered to make decisions.

The SBP needs to make financial inclusion a larger part of its policy and have it strictly implemented throughout Pakistan in all the banks and keep a check and balance. They must see yearly data of how much change has occurred after the implementation and whether women are being targeted or not because they are the future of this country. They are what make generations and they need to be strong, independent, and have the financial freedom to make choices. That will only happen if SBP makes a policy regarding targeting women in urban and especially in rural areas where people are deprived of basic financial services. They need a policy for better outreach towards these areas so that the difference between rich and poor can become a little less.

9. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The limitation of this research was that there were time restraints. The study is limited to just one city which is Bahawalpur and because of Covid 19 restrictions, the sample was limited to 200 women. Plus, it is just focusing on four microfinance banks of Bahawalpur. For future research, a larger sample size can be taken with multiple cities to get an idea of a better representation of women and what they think. The study is restricted to just banks, in the future other financial institutions and foundations could be targeted. Financial Inclusion has recently come to light in Pakistan so more variables can be attached to it and the impact of financial inclusion can be seen on those variables and not just women's empowerment.

REFERENCES

Acha Ikechukwu, A., & Acha, I. (2012). Microfinance banking in Nigeria: Problems and prospects. *International Journal of Finance and Accounting*, 1(5), 106-111.
<https://doi.org/10.5923/j.ijfa.20120105.04>



- Bansal, S., & Singh, A. K. (2020). Examining the social and entrepreneurial development of women through microfinance in Indian context. *Journal of Management Development*, 39(4), 407-421. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMD-05-2019-0146>
- Bhatia, S., & Singh, S. (2019). Empowering women through financial inclusion: a study of urban slum. *Vikalpa*, 44(4), 182-197. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0256090919897809>
- Bushra, A., & Wajaha, N. (2013). Assessing the determinants of Women empowerment in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics*, Vol23,(2), 115-139. http://www.aerc.edu.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Article_36Paper-571-III.pdf
- Campbell, D. T., & Fiske, D. W. (1959). Convergent and discriminant validation by the multitrait-multimethod matrix. *Psychological bulletin*, 56(2), 81. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0046016>
- Clark, L. A., & Watson, D. (2016). Constructing validity: Basic issues in objective scale development. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/14805-012>
- Crépon, B., Devoto, F., Duflo, E., & Pariente, W. (2011). *Impact of microcredit in rural areas of Morocco: Evidence from a Randomized Evaluation*. Citeseer. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=a0ea9ceaf6e7764e26fa43c5a4f128dfa1d533bc>
- Farrell, A. M. (2010). Insufficient discriminant validity: A comment on Bove, Pervan, Beatty, and Shiu (2009). *Journal of business research*, 63(3), 324-327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.05.003>
- Fayyaz, S., Hakim, R. A., & Khan, S. J. M. (2016). Impact of microcredit on women borrower's quality of life in Bahawalpur, Pakistan. *Journal of Advanced Research in Business and Management Studies*, 5(1), 72-86. <https://www.akademiabaru.com/submit/index.php/arbms/article/view/1214>
- Fayyaz, S., & Khan, A. (2021). Impact of microfinance on quality of life, personal empowerment and familial harmony of female borrowers in Pakistan. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 21(3), e2614. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2614>
- Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of marketing research*, 18(1), 39-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224378101800104>
- Gefen, D., & Straub, D. (2005). A practical guide to factorial validity using PLS-Graph: Tutorial and annotated example. *Communications of the Association for Information systems*, 16(1), 5. <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3020&context=cais>
- Gilardone, M., Guérin, I., & Palier, J. (2014). The weight of institutions on women's capabilities: how far can microfinance help? *Towards Fundamental Entitlements*, 244-273. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139059138.013>
- Goetz, A. M., & Gupta, R. S. (1996). Who takes the credit? Gender, power, and control over loan use in rural credit programs in Bangladesh. *World development*, 24(1), 45-63. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00124-U](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00124-U)
- Hair Jr, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2021). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)*. Sage publications. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/a-primer-on-partial-least-squares-structural-equation-modeling-pls-sem/book244583>
- Hair Jr, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Hopkins, L., & Kuppelwieser, V. G. (2014). Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM): An emerging tool in business research. *European business review*, 26(2), 106-121. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-10-2013-0128>
- Hashemi, S. M., Schuler, S. R., & Riley, A. P. (1996). Rural credit programs and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. *World development*, 24(4), 635-653. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(95\)00159-A](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(95)00159-A)
- Hendriks, S. (2019). The role of financial inclusion in driving women's economic empowerment. *Development in Practice*, 29(8), 1029-1038. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2019.1660308>
- Henseler, J., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2015). A new criterion for assessing discriminant validity in variance-based structural equation modeling. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 43, 115-135. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0403-8>
- Hollis, A., & Sweetman, A. (2004). Microfinance and famine: the Irish loan funds during the great famine. *World Development*, 32(9), 1509-1523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2004.04.002>
- Jatoi, I. A., & Khoso, I. (2020). The Impact of Micro-finance on Self-employment and Poverty Reduction: A case of Sindh Rural Support Organization and Tameer Micro Finance Bank, Sindh. *Ahmed, I., Khoso, I.*, 9(32), 18-27. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4472985



- Jewkes, R. (2002). Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention. *The lancet*, 359(9315), 1423-1429. <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140673602083575/fulltext>
- John, N., Casey, S. E., Carino, G., & McGovern, T. (2020). Lessons never learned: crisis and gender-based violence. *Developing world bioethics*, 20(2), 65-68. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dewb.12261>
- Kafle, S. P. (2015). *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment: A Study of 'VDRC-Nepal' in Jamuniya, Nepal* UiT Norges arktiske universitet). <https://hdl.handle.net/10037/9249>
- Khan, M. A., Kanwal, N., Nabi, P. G., & Shah, A. A. (2016). Empowering women entrepreneurs through microcredit: Assessing the role of Sarhad Rural Support Program in Pakistan. *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation*, 12(1), 91-112. <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=458835>
- Khandker, S. R. (2005). Microfinance and poverty: Evidence using panel data from Bangladesh. *The world bank economic review*, 19(2), 263-286. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhi008>
- KiflieHayleeyesus, R. (2016). *The Impact of Microfinance Institutions on Poverty Alleviation (A Case Study in Ethiopia)* Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University).
- Kumar, L. (2013). Illusion of women empowerment in microfinance: a case study. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 70-76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23527125>
- Lipi, R. K. (2016). Dignity and empowerment: An exploration of the microcredit experiences of women in rural Bangladesh. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 18(1), 230-259. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol18/iss1/15/>
- Lombardini, S., Bowman, K., & Garwood, R. (2017). *A'How To'Guide To Measuring Women's Empowerment: Sharing experience from Oxfam's impact evaluations*. Oxfam GB. <https://doi.org/10.21201/2017.9750>
- Løsnesløyken, E. (2014). *Microfinance and Women's Self-perception* <https://mfopen.mf.no/mf-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/197303/AVH5035-kand-nr-5031-masteravh-L%C3%B8snesl%C3%B8kken-navn.pdf?sequence=1>
- Mahmood, S., Hussain, J., & Z. Matlay, H. (2014). Optimal microfinance loan size and poverty reduction amongst female entrepreneurs in Pakistan. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 21(2), 231-249. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-03-2014-0043>
- Mansori, S., Safari, M., & Mohd Ismail, Z. M. (2020). An analysis of the religious, social factors and income's influence on the decision making in Islamic microfinance schemes. *Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research*, 11(2), 361-376. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIABR-03-2016-0035>
- Mayoux, L. (2006). Women's Empowerment through Sustainable Microfinance: Rethinking "Best Practice". *Eldis Gender Guide*, 47-62. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=62f26965ebf62ca1d552a5c85b9474f616fb284b>
- Mayoux, L. (2020). Women's Empowerment Versus Sustainability? Towards a New Paradigm in Micro-finance Programmes 1. In *Women and Credit* (pp. 245-269). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003103233-19>
- Muhammad, S. D. (2010). Microfinance challenges and opportunities in Pakistan. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 14(1), 88. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1684628>
- Mustafa, Z., & Ismailov, N. (2008). *Entrepreneurship and Microfinance-A tool for empowerment of poor-Case of Akhuwat, Pakistan*. Mälardalens högskola. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A121493&dswid=-3163>
- Nabayinda, J. (2014). *Microfinance and women empowerment: To what extent has access to loans led to a change in gender responsibilities at the household level: A case study of women in Ddwaniiro sub county-Rakai district of Uganda* Universitet i Agder/University of Agder). <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/222390>
- Omar, M. A., & Inaba, K. (2020). Does financial inclusion reduce poverty and income inequality in developing countries? A panel data analysis. *Journal of economic structures*, 9(1), 37. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40008-020-00214-4>
- Omorodion, F. I. (2007). Rural women's experiences of micro-credit schemes in Nigeria: case study of Esan women. *Journal of Asian and African studies*, 42(6), 479-494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909607083216>



- BNP Paribas. (2017). *History of microfinance: small loans, big revolution*. BNP Paribas. <https://group.bnpparibas/en/news/history-microfinance-small-loans-big-revolution>
- Rajper, Z. A., Ghumro, I. A., Mangi, R. A., & Lund, J. A. (2018). Assessing the Role of Micro Finance for Poverty Alleviation in Sindh. *SLAU Commerce and Economic Review*, 4(1), 107-112. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-04-2018-0071>
- Rashid, A. G., & Ejaz, L. (2019). Interest free micro credit loans: Pakistani female entrepreneurs. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*, 10(3), 860-873. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-04-2018-0071>
- Rehman, H., Moazzam, D. A., & Ansari, N. (2020). Role of microfinance institutions in women empowerment: A case study of Akhuwat, Pakistan. *South Asian Studies*, 30(1). <http://journals.pu.edu.pk/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/2987>
- Ringle, C. M., Sarstedt, M., Mitchell, R., & Gudergan, S. P. (2020). Partial least squares structural equation modeling in HRM research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(12), 1617-1643. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1416655>
- Sofi, F. J., & Sumaira. (2016). Microfinance and Poverty Alleviation: A Conceptual Framework with Special Emphasis on J&K Region. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Management Research and Innovation*, 12(3-4), 271-281. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2319510X17701852>
- Sohn, W., & Ume, L. (2019). Impact of microfinance on poverty alleviation: a global analysis. *Journal of Economics and Development Studies*, 7(2), 82-102. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/jad.v5i3.15165>
- SSDO. (2020). *State of violence against women and children in Pakistan*. Sustainable Social Development Organization. https://res.cloudinary.com/dct4km8qs/image/upload/v1676526499/03_Media_Tracking_Report_2020_PDF_af58096357.pdf
- Syhanath, T. (2020). *Microfinance and Women's Empowerment: The Case of Lao PDR* Auckland University of Technology). <https://hdl.handle.net/10292/13305>
- Tenenhaus, M., Vinzi, V. E., Chatelin, Y.-M., & Lauro, C. (2005). PLS path modeling. *Computational statistics & data analysis*, 48(1), 159-205. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.csda.2004.03.005>
- Teo, T. S., Srivastava, S. C., & Jiang, L. (2008). Trust and electronic government success: An empirical study. *Journal of management information systems*, 25(3), 99-132. <https://doi.org/10.2753/MIS0742-1222250303>
- The World Bank. (2017). *Global Findex Questionnaire*. The World Bank Group. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/f0edf7729dcef42aa9ff3d2ab000c9fe-0050062022/original/Questionnaire2017.pdf>
- Wrenn, E. (2005). Micro Finance Literature Review, Milan Shrestha. *Report on Self-help Banking*. <http://www.aesanetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/000-MICRO-FINANCE-Literature-ReviewBased-on-work-by-Eoin-Wrenn-for-Tr%C3%B3caire-2005.pdf>

