

**Female Labour Force Participation The case of women in armed forces of
Pakistan**

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Abstract

Gender inequality has been a widely debated topic all over the world. This paper addresses the issue of low female labor force participation, with a special focus on females in the armed forces of Pakistan. With the passage of time the participation of females has increased substantially in the armed forces, Pakistan Airforce, Pakistan Navy, and Paramilitary forces. This paper has utilized thematic analysis approach to analyze the female labor force participation in the field of armed forces. The results implies that the female labor force participation has increased significantly in the previous years. However, the participation is not up to the par due to social and cultural fabric of the country. The results also suggests that to increase the female labor force participation in the armed forces, orthodox mindset which prevails in the society needs to be changed.

Key Words

Gender inequality, Female Labor Force Participation, Armed Forces

Introduction

Over the time the concept of gender inequality has gained wide attention by the global institutions and countries. The focus has been on many areas including, equality in education, politics, better health facilities, prohibition of gender-based violence and increased economic participation. However, this paper will address the concern of female labor participation specifically in the field of armed forces in Pakistan, which is now a worldwide concern and hotly debated topic. Female labor force participation (FLFP), commonly known as the segment of women contributing to working population have gained significant prominence due to the potential underlying economic implications. According to prior findings, global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) can increase substantially by 28 trillion dollars if the women participate on equal footing as of men (Woetzel, et al., 2015). However, this dream of achieving equal labor force participation is nothing but an illusion, even in the developed countries of the world. The current female labor participation which is 48 percent is substantially lower than male labor force participation (75

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percent) (Office, 2015). The factors may vary in different regions, owing to the culture, socio-economic and political fabric of that particular area. Furthermore, females participation in the workforce can either be impeded or facilitated due to economic and cultural factors. The other factors having an immense impact on the participation include educational level, residential location, marital status, and the choice of children (Klasen, Le, Pieters, & Silva, 2020). While the relevance of economic development as key indicator cannot be denied (Thévenon, 2013). The other factors inhibiting the female labor force participation are the laws and social norms that restricts the choices of female to make decisions about their freedom to work, study, or control their social relations. Additionally, female labor force participation cannot be measured accurately as it depends on various factors. As productive and care responsibilities are usually performed by women and they go unreported which leads to the underestimation of the accurate female labor force participation (Addati et al., 2018).

It has been observed that women in developing nations work for a living in contrast to women in developed nations who have highly paid jobs with good job opportunities (Lechman & Kaur, 2015). While in developing nations, larger proportion of women cannot contribute either due to the socio-cultural barriers or lack of job opportunities (Deshpande et al., 2019). It must also be kept in mind that higher FLFP does not necessarily connotes gender equality and empowerment as it might be due to subsistence jobs. Besides that, even in countries with high labor force participation, other disparities continue to exist, such as the gender wage gap or the imbalance in the domestic and care work Addati et al., 2018).

The aforementioned debate implies that there is a dearth of females in the economic sector of developing countries. Pakistan, being an underdeveloped nation is no different. According to Labor Force Survey, women constitute 49 percent of the total population, where total population of Pakistan in 2017 was 216.4 million (National Census Pakistan, 2017). However, the current participation of women in labor force is merely 22.6 percent as compared to 84.8 percent of men (Statistics, 2018). The dream of secure and resilient Pakistan can be achieved earlier if women engage in the economic development of nation along with men. Thus, the success of Pakistan lies in the economic success and women role is pivotal in nation building. The recent Global Gender Gap Index Report 2021 ranks Pakistan at 153rd position out of 156 countries, just above the war-torn countries like Iraq, Yemen, and Afghanistan, which paints an alarming picture (Forum, 2021). Moreover, women occupy only a meagre ratio of 5 percent at top leadership positions and 25 percent of technical roles. Economic participation and empowerment of women are globally recognized as critical for a nation's progress and economic growth (Women, 2021).

Case of Female Participation in The Armed Forces of Pakistan

To analyze the female labor force participation, I will now discuss the case of female participation in the armed forces of Pakistan. Despite the history of female pacifism, there are numerous examples of women embracing revolts, independence struggles, and war with enthusiasm. Historically, women have emerged as active participants in freedom struggles especially in the context of South-Asian independence struggle from the British colonial regime. Similarly, females have played a significant part in Maoist movement of Nepal, as helpers in the Iraq's army, in struggle for

independence of Timor-Leste and in Sri Lanka's continuing Tamil conflict. Furthermore, the traditional role of women in the military wing of state during the World Wars was confined to "support staff" mainly managing the logistics. However, with the passage of time, the role got redefined and much more pronounced leading to enhanced role of women working as soldiers, pilots, engineers, and technical staff of the armed forces. This trajectory of participative combat struggle delineates an inclusive surge in women taking up responsibilities and assuming an active role in fields, which were considered to be the traditional forte of men.

Pakistan has inherited a remarkable religious and cultural heritage, whereby women have held quite prominent roles in armed conflicts. However, the socio-cultural stereotypes related to gender discrimination have remained a major impediment in the struggle towards enhanced participatory role of women in the armed forces. Nevertheless, the impact of their sheer role has been eminent and well lauded by entire international establishment. The gender disparity has highly ameliorated over the past two decades in context of Pakistan that is evident from a more gender inclusive armed forces mainly as a result of amended recruitment processes.

Being located on an imperative geostrategic region with gateways extending to Asia Pacific, Europe, and Middle East, the role of Pakistan has immensely transformed. The national security paradigm of the state has undergone profound strategic improvements with the advent of series of hybrid warfare that has included notions of global political economy, cyberspace, inclusive gender norms, and a more unconventional approach towards armed conflict. Pakistan has tremendously filled the void caused with the policy shift and the enhanced role women in the armed forces across all the sub-sectors have received global appreciation and repudiated the traditional viewpoint of Pakistan as a suppressor state towards women.

Pakistan's role in the UN Peacekeeping mission has remained a popular military endeavor towards promotion of global peace, thus receiving international eminence and accolades. Most imperatively, Pakistan has fastidiously worked on enhancing the active participatory role of women in the UN Peacekeeping missions and successfully achieved the UN goal of sending 15 percent female staff officers to the mission in 2020 (Iqbal, 2021). The UN Secretary General lauded the endeavor by saying: "Pakistan is a leader in championing women peacekeepers and an example for other troop contributor" (Tribune, 2020). Furthermore, Alice Wells, the US Chief Diplomat for South Asian Affairs, praised the Pakistan's contingent's performance during the peacekeeping mission.

Similarly, the trend of active participation of women in Pakistan's armed forces has increased, with enhanced roles in the Pakistan Army, Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan Navy, and Paramilitary Forces. As per the data streams of 2018, the active participant women in the cumulative armed forces levelled 3400 female officers that has suffered a downturn amid the ongoing pandemic that has seriously affected the recruitment drives of the armed forces. Profound research into the role of women in Pakistan Army delineates higher roles in medical corps, engineering corps, signals, Information Technology, and other administrative wings of the Pak Army. The recent promotion of Lieutenant General Nigar Johar HI (M) serving as the Surgeon General of Pak Army is the first ever promotion of any female officer to the rank of Lieutenant General in the entire history of the institution. Likewise, Pakistan Army

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comprises of many other senior ranked female officers serving in many different capacities including Major General. Shahida Badsh HI (M) who served as the Commandant AMC Rawalpindi and Major General (DESK, 2018). Shahida Malik HI (M) who served as the Deputy Commander of Pakistan Medical Corps.

Similarly, the Pakistan Air Force is also home to several remarkable women such as Flight Lieutenant Ayesha Farooq who is regarded as the first female battle ready pilot of PAF. It is also pertinent to mention the renowned Fighter Pilot Marium Mukhtiar who embraced martyrdom in the line of duty and was awarded with the meritorious Tamagh-e-Basalat. The Pakistan Navy also takes pride in having several notable women officers working in different operational capacities. Furthermore, women in Intelligence wings have played a crucial role in the extraction of sensitive information and have provided exceptional espionage services, which have safeguarded the integrity and sovereignty of Pakistan to a great extent.

It is immensely imperative to mention the role of culture and religion and its implications on the participation of women in the armed forces of Pakistan. Traditionally, women are considered to be limited to the private sphere as opposed to the public sphere and lines of work (Bank, 2016). The recent wave of religious extremism spurred the further limitation of women working in the nonconservative fields of work, and reduced participation in armed forces. Unfortunately, the extremist elements also used women as a tool to further their nefarious designs in terms of suicide bombings, smuggling of weapons, fundraising, maintaining rebels' hideouts and safe havens etc (Mahmood, 2017). An example of this despicable mindset is the use of women as human shields in the Lal-Masjid incident due to which the security forces were reluctant to take prompt action against the dissenting factions (Hussain, 2017). In consideration of this fiasco, more women were inducted in the armed forces primarily the paramilitary units to combat the womanized face of terrorism, which was being increasingly utilized by the terrorist groups.

Female officers have also played a significantly active role in national disaster relief services provided by the armed forces. The Armed Forces of Pakistan since the country's inception have been proactive in dealing with national crisis situations and have earned international acclaim (Kandhro & Raza, 2015). Women medical practitioners have outplayed their male counterparts in serving the affected populace throughout the country. Ranging from floods to earthquakes and other natural catastrophes, the role of female officers has remained commendable. The ongoing deadly pandemic COVID-19, which has altered the foundational landscape of the world, has seen women officers ambitiously working as the frontline combatants. The role of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) as an instrumental component of Pak Armed forces cannot be overlooked in this crisis (Relief Web, 2014).

Another perspective of viewing the enhanced role of female participation in the national security apparatus is related to their economic well-being that is of significant value for a stable livelihood. This positive development reiterates the government's vision of empowering its women through providing them equitable employment opportunities that embodies potential of crafting a multiplier effect on the national economy. The increased participation of women in Pak Armed Forces has been a vital reason of Pakistan's overall improvement in the Human

Development Index (HDI), Gini-coefficient, Unemployment rate, and overall economic development (Paxson & Mammen, 2000).

Additionally, the notions of economic development can be linked to the attainment of female equality and empowerment. The perceptions, depiction, and acknowledgment of female in the military have changed throughout the world, and it is believed that becoming equal in waging war connotes the acceptance of female equality in general. Pakistan, which falls in the list of developing countries has higher inclination of women joining national security related institutions has reoriented the conservative paradigm that hindered the conceptions of women empowerment. However, the disproportionate prominence awarded to a few renowned women in the armed forces has veiled the more substantial problems encountered by the vast majority of women residing in Pakistan. Issues such as forced marriages, rapes, acid-attacks, and denial of legitimate asset inheritance remain pressing tribulations in Pakistan (Zakaria, 2015).

Apart from analyzing the socio-economic implications of the enhanced role of women in national security apparatus of Pakistan, a profound analysis of the peer countries shows a more proactive approach is necessary in expanding the overall strength of women in the armed forces. The arch-rival India sports a figure of about 3 percent of women in its armed forces; China has a proportion of about 4.5 percent women in the Peoples Liberation Army; the United States has a whopping 16 percent of women participating in the armed forces (Robinson & O'Hanlon, 2020); Russia has 10 percent of women serving in the armed forces. Therefore, a quantitative analysis posits that Pakistan has a dire need to increase the participation of women to be at par with the globally prevailing percentages of women in the armed forces (Katrina, 2018).

Historically, men have dominated the educational, health, hospitality, telecommunications, and information technology sectors, but a new paradigm has recently occurred that has encouraged women to join the so-called masculine domain of the armed forces. Pakistan has been proactively pursuing the agenda of global peace, eradication of globally prevailing terrorism, and a comprehensive doctrine of economic outreach. The armed forces have been empowering its female officers in all domains of painstaking tasks of national interests. It is evident from Pakistani women officers' extraordinary performances in global military contests, training endeavors, and peacekeeping missions of the United Nations. Despite all socio-cultural tribulations, Pakistani women have been immensely impressive in managing affairs related to the national security that is regarded as a hard topic in the domain of global political setting. Moreover, Pakistan having a population of above 220 million and above 49% women population needs to take a proactive stance towards making its armed forces more gender inclusive that would immensely improve national economy and its social indicators. An enhanced approach is needed towards expanding the portfolio of roles of women in armed forces.

The conventional norm needs to be amended to an extent where women are allowed to take on roles of active military combatants in the fields of infantry, artillery and intelligence agencies as they have shown remarkable success in fulfilment of tasks assigned to them. Pakistan is on a smooth trajectory of growth coupled with

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improved national security apparatus inclusive of women, and with improvement in the overall dynamics, Pakistan would be able to have a higher regional and global role as a strategic player. In summary, the objective of this research is to critically analyze the female labor force participation in the field of armed forces in Pakistan.

Methodology

To fill gaps in the existing literature, it was decided that this research would focus on identifying themes within the participants' understanding. This would allow the researcher to conduct additional research on the subject at hand. As a result, thematic analysis has been used as a method of analysis for this research. However, this method has hitherto been critiqued because there aren't of clear guidance for researchers employing such methods. As a result, some researchers have left out the details of how they analyzed their findings. It was crucial for the existing researcher to use an evident, testable, and credible methodology.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a series of steps that researchers must take in order to complete a thematic analysis.

This procedure provides a clear distinction for thematic analysis, providing researchers with a precise explanation how it should be performed while sustaining the adaptability associated with its ontological perspective. Methodologies that support this common ground position are mainly qualitative in nature where secondary sources such as books, articles, reviewed articles and official documents are used, but because thematic analysis is so adaptable, it can also be substantiated by an "in-between" ontological perspective.

Five semi-structured interviews were taken from the serving female army personnel while three interviews were taken from the females who have been retired from the armed forces. The advantage of the interview is that, it provides first hand credible data, that when read along with the supporting literature review, it better helps us in understanding the details in a better manner. Moreover, interviews usually provide raw data, that is very useful from credible research perspective.

Data Analysis

The researcher processed the data collected from all the groups focusing, thinking and reflecting first, as this is considered in the important level of the research. The transcribed numbers are double-checked several times, and the recordings are listened to several times to ensure accuracy. This reverse process of surveying and recording statistics by recording the results of polls refers to the proximity of the researcher to the statistics. This secret part follows this preliminary stage, building on notes and reflections from the process of reproduction and discovery of statistics. These codes were identified in the records and were applicable to those the researcher believed to be relevant to the search query. Also, according to the method, all figures with the same interest can be explained in detail for the repetition process in the figure. Level 1/3 is about finding problems, covering a large number of numbers by combining unique codes that are highly comparable or considered similar to numbers. list. All codes previously entered in the search query were grouped into a single theme. Braun and Clarke recommend creating a topic map to help develop topics. These things have helped researchers to think through the mind's eye connections and relationships between problems. At this point, any problems that don't have enough stats to help or are too big have been eliminated.

Results and Discussion

There were four key thematic areas identified through the research. "Gender discrimination" is one of the most deeply ingrained social issues in Pakistan. This paper uses an auto-ethnographic approach to explore the gender dynamics that exist in the Pakistan Army. With the induction of women into Pakistan's Armed Forces over many decades, it is important to assess their positionality in a male-dominated profession. Participants include both male and female officers from the Pakistan Armed Forces. Exploring their roles through fieldwork has given them a deep understanding of how they are treated as "female officers" in combat and non-combat roles.

The other three thematic areas include Lack of Educational opportunities, Cultural Norms and Taboos, and Technological Gap. Females in Pakistan do not have the equal educational opportunities due to societal, structural, and financial constraints. This is one of the leading factors in low female labor force participation in the armed forces of Pakistan. Moreover, the patriarchal mindset which is deeply rooted in the orthodox subcontinent culture inhibits their way into the job sector. Another thematic area is Technological Gap which implies that internet facilities and digitalization is gendered in Pakistan. According to an estimate by GSM, there exists a gender disparity of 65 percent in the access to internet connectivity.

Thus, the females are not trained up to the mark and lack contemporary digital skills required for upward accession in the career. This is another contributing factor which halts the female labor force participation in the armed forces of Pakistan. Furthermore, the data analysis highlights a variety of issues related to gender discrimination. These include gender inequity, invisible barriers to advancement, and the role of family and household, all of which are discussed through real-life experiences and participant observation.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the female labor force participation in the armed forces of Pakistan. The armed forces are a popular structure in Pakistan due to their historical significance. The number of women in Pakistan's armed forces has steadily increased over the last two decades. This tendency arose as a result of new methods of fighting wars and the role of women in them that emerged all over the world. However, the participation of females is quite low as compared to the males. Thus, it is difficult to assert that a large number of Pakistani women join the military forces because ethnicity and different interpretations of Islamic provisions in each province of Pakistan continue to play a significant role in defining women's rights. Moreover, there is variation among provinces with respect to female labor force participation. The female labor force participation of women in armed forces is highest in Punjab followed by Sindh with the lowest participation from Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Thus to increase the participation of females in armed forces, quota for females should be increased along with structural and societal changes.

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