

Problems of Married Women at Higher Education in Pakistan: Academic, Social and Cultural Context

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Abstract

The major focus of the study was to explore the social, cultural, financial and academic problems of married women at higher education, and also to sensitize, orientate relevant stakeholders to address them. It was descriptive research following qualitative approach to collect data with the semi-structured interview. Population of the study were married female students enrolled in private Universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and 20 participants were selected through snowball sampling technique to collect the data. It is concluded that education is basic necessity for every human beings whether male or female, however, certain families in Pakistan do not allow women in general and married women in particular for higher education because of social, cultural, religious, economic and educational factors. Support for the education of married women depends upon family attitude, educational status, financial stability and husband viewpoint. Most of the conservative families think that higher education environment will bring moral deprivation, grant unrestricted freedom, and delay in marriage for their daughters. It is recommended that seminars and focused programs are required to be designed to change the perceptions of the society about female education, and universities as well as HEC increase the number of scholarships for female education. Non-formal education system may target to female who are not allowed to go out of their cities for education. It is also recommended that higher education institutions design flexible working hours for married women so that they will be able to cope with the domestic work and academic workload without stress and tension.

Introduction

Importance of education has been recognised by every religions and civilizations. According to Islam, it is compulsory for both male and female (Adeel, 2010). It is basic human right and contributes significantly in achieving equality, peace and development. It provides opportunities to human beings to play vital role in society. It is famous Chinese saying that educating a woman is educating the whole family. Progress and prosperity without the education of women will merely a dream. In Pakistan, like wise in the world women have established themselves as a good manager, engineer, information technology specialist (IT), teacher, banker, army officers. According to Goldin (2004), education of women effects development and progress of society, and women with education can lead better social development and economic growth. Study conducted by Bari, (2005) revealed that women education has long term benefits to the family and the society. Mothers' education has significant effects on the education of their children as well as on the society. According to Chaudhry and Rahman (2009), through higher education women are able to internalize the particular culture of their society in which they are expected to be a good wife and wise mother. According to Murray, (2009) higher education provides women with better health and job opportunities.

In spite of the recognition about the importance of women education, there are many barriers in the way of women to get higher education and to contribute their maximum input for the betterment of society in Pakistan likewise in some of the developing countries. Some conservative families in Pakistan take them home-confine and reproductive commodity. The mind set of society does not allow girls for higher education that promote gender inequality and prioritizing the resources for boys. They get less opportunities as compared to men not only in education but also economic, political and other fields of life as well (Daraz, 2012; Bari, 2005). Study conducted by Goldin (2004) revealed that married women face many problems and leave their education incomplete due to different social and cultural factors. Married women are supposed to look after the house and children instead of going out for studies. Movement of female outside their homes is restricted at the beginning by their parents and husbands after marriage. Women have to work and look after their husband and children. Majority of the married women are willing to continue higher education after marriage but face safety and security problems, travelling long distances to attend educational institutes, balancing workload of child rearing, family engagements, career and studies (Kuperberg, 2009; Sathar, Lloyd & Haque (2000).

Illiteracy rate of female in Pakistan is more than 50 percent, and at higher level education, the participation of women has increasing trend but their proportion is very small. With this background, this study was design to explore social, cultural, family and economical problems of married women at higher education. The study is significant in terms of exploring the root causes of different problems faced by female married students while preceding higher education after marriage. The views and opinions of respondents contribute to explore pathway dealing with social views and attitudes that are obstacle for women continuing their higher education. The study provides awareness to society regarding the problems of married women education, and its

sensitization about the importance of women education. The current study is also motivational drive for married women who are willing to get higher education

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of the study were:

1. What are the social, cultural, financial and academic problems of married women at higher education?
2. How do we sensitize and orientate society and relevant stakeholders to address these problems?

1.3 Delimitation of the Study

The study will be delimited :

1. to the universities located in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad in private sector only
2. to married students enrolled in different programmes of these universities.

2. Literature Review

Education is a key that provides opportunities for self awareness and self-fulfillment to every individual whether male or female. It contributes to male and female abilities and skills to solve problems of social, political, economic and domestic nature, and help to explore new ways to deal them (Annette, 2011). Education improves self esteem of women which enables them to stand in society and achieve their goals. The country can fight against poverty and social crisis by providing equal educational opportunities to both male and female (Planning Commission, 2005; Shahzad, 2011). It provides the way to deal with customs and traditions of the society. Educated women are keen towards taking measures to improve themselves and their children. Studies by Moghadam, Valentine & Roudi-Fahimi (2003); Eckert, Angela & Striek (2007); Morrison, Christian & Jütting (2004); Rihani, May, Lisa and Stephanie (2006) revealed that education is source of women's empowerment, health, wellbeing and prepare them to take step against any ill practices of society. According to Egunyomi (2009) seeking higher education develops intellectual well being that provides flexible thinking in all aspect of life. Acquiring of higher education for married women enables to cope with rapid changes in social, cultural, economical and technical fields.

Women were considered sacred in the ancient societies and given respectable place because of their reproductive role (Smith, 2008). They were empowered with status of Goddess in Greek methodology and Devi Mata in Hindu society. Indoor domestic works were the responsibility for women whereas outdoor jobs were for men. Male were bread earner and they gradually set the foundation of patriarchal societies. Domestic role of women decreased their value and male were given dominance, control, power in all affairs of life. In many region of traditional Asians, Africans societies gender role were considered in favor of male control over women. Many traditional societies enslaved and restricted women at home boundaries and they were discriminated in every field of life. Islamic ideology is not influenced by ancient civilizations, and it has granted equal rights to women in education as well as other departments of life. They were recognized as integral part of society and educated about their right of education, respect, ownership and empowerment. Women are authorized to play their productive role in education, medicine, management as well as the other departments of life (Adeel, 2010). The first revelation on Prophet (PBUH) in the Holy Quran also emphasize on acquisition of knowledge and obligatory for both male and female. **The Holy Quran also states:**

'Can those who have knowledge and those who do not be alike?' So only the wise do receive the admonition. [al-Zumar, 39:9.] So only those of His servants who have knowledge (of these realities with a vision and outlook) fear Him. Surely, Allah is Almighty, Most Forgiving. [Fatir, 35:28.]

None of these verses specify that only 'wise men' receive admonition or that only 'male servants' who have knowledge fear Him. The reference to the importance of knowledge has not been categorized within the purview of men by Almighty God. A number of Prophetic traditions also talk directly about knowledge being obligatory and binding in character. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

Acquisition of knowledge is binding on all Muslims (both men and women without any discrimination). [Maja in al-Sunan, 1:81 §224.]. Acquire knowledge even if you may have to go to China for it. Allah Almighty makes the path to paradise easier for him who walks on it for getting knowledge (Muslim in al-Sahih, 4:2074 §269).

Pakistan is facing many problems regarding education especially about female education. Women get opportunities now days but there are need of more consideration regarding women education. These problems are related to family, society, culture and economic fields. There is wide gender disparity in reference to opportunities of education, quality of education and financing of education (Tembon & Fort, 2008). Pakistani society is still traditional in terms of women education, social and cultural views are patriarchal and mostly conservative. According to Tisdell (2002), in Pakistani perspective the social and cultural factor plays significance role and married women are unmotivated in attaining education due to child rearing factor. Married women may also face low self-confidence and lack of encouragement from their husbands while proceeding to higher education. Female students may face many issues to become self confident as younger students (Macari, Maples & Andrea, 2005).

The society prefers resources for male due to their productive role (Khan, 2007). According to Khalid and Mukhtar (2002), economical issues especially related to female are very crucial in our society. Women have to depend on their parents and husbands for financial support to continue their education. Those who belonged to the lower class finds difficult to spend money on education for females. Low income and shortage of resources leave no choice for parents to continue education of their daughters.

According to Sathar, Lloyd & Haque (2000), peace and security is a major concern for the parents and they are usually reluctant to send their daughters outside the home cities for education. Studies by Dale, Shaheen, Fieldhouse & Kalra (2002); Ahmad, Modood & Lissenburgh (2003) on women status in Asian countries revealed that women are considered for home tasks and not allowed to go out in conservative societies. Patriarchal society with traditional mindset does not allow equal opportunities for female education. Women are restricted on the logic of *Pardha*, modesty and stereotype interpretation of Islam. In male dominated society, married women are restricted in proceeding their education and career on the logic that they have to look after home and children. The families with oppressive attitudes are more restrictive to women attaining education.

However studies by Khalid and Mukhtar (2002) revealed that there are some families who are source of motivation and encouragement for their daughters getting higher education. There are parents who inspire their daughters for further studies. They think education is important for personal, professional aspirations, and freedom of choice about different aspects of life. According to Osunde and Omoruyi (2003), some global awareness and events changed the thinking of some conservative societies. These views lead increase in number of women in higher education attaining meaningful learning programs that to be recognized in recent time. Educated women can create more resourceful setting with thoughtful thinking. Education for women gives chance for better childcare, conducive environment for nurturing children, better understanding of family norms that surrounds with better learning. These views are in favor of women to continue their higher education for better learning environment in society. The efforts of society can create the environment to identify the problems faced by women in educational field so that it could overcome providing better environment.

Haq (2002) argued that women seeking higher education have more ability to protect their self independence. Annual report of Higher Education Commission (2008-09) states that there are 358,000 female out of 803,507 enrolled in all universities in Pakistan which is 43 percent. The status of married women student in Pakistan depends upon the personal motivation, family support, married life and economical factors. Adebayo (2006) states that there are number of problems married female students face such as stress, examination phobia, time management, burden of work, family responsibilities, couple relationship, financial pressure, child rearing, caring families, mobility, domestic work. Female married students have to perform their role as wife, mother and daughter in law as well as academic responsibilities as student. Conflict while managing all the tasks may lead to mismanagement and disputes between spouses that consequently influence the academic achievement negatively (Home & Hinds, 2000; Jacobs, 2004; Kulis & Scottie, 2002; Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002; Darab, 2004). According to Pittman, Kerpelmen and Solheim, (2001), married female students feel dissatisfaction of their inner feelings that they were not with their family and children and not giving proper time to their family and children due to studies. Women with younger children create disturbance to fulfill family responsibilities and education.

Khang (2010) conducted study on Hmong traditional marital roles and the pursuits of higher education for married Hmong American women. The study sheds light on traditional Hmong society with male dominance system. In the Hmong culture males are considered more valuable than females. Educational opportunities are accessible for women after joining United States. The young women are taught to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers, and consequently they discontinue their education and career. The researcher used interview as tool to get data from nine married women. The study concluded that the cultural system of Hmong society gives importance to gender roles in spite of married women in higher education. Egenti and Omoruyi, (2011) conducted study on challenges of women participation in continuing higher education Program: implication for adult women counseling and education. The purpose of the study was to find out problems of women in proceeding higher education with focus on their enrolled program. The study focused on women enrolled in part time program of B.ED in University of Lagos. Interview techniques were used to collect data. The study selected 150 participants randomly enrolled in B.ED program from university of Lagos. The findings showed that women in higher education facing major problems of time management, marital demands, low economical conditions, lack of motivation from families and employer, poor social position and psychological distress.

Mowla (2006) conducted research on education and economic empowerment of women in Egypt. This study explores the association of education and economic empowerment of women of labor panel. The study sheds light on effect of education given to women in Egypt and its effect on their ability to work in equal environment as men. It also takes account for those course which gives women equal work and wages. The study focus on type of education young women pursue for coping with their career opportunities. The results found that women have great influence to deal with their education and career by taking those ways that empower their education and economy. Women have found more beneficial in job markets as compare to male. Women taking interest in progress of their career is reducing the gender gap in economical field. The survey indicates that strengthening

women in education raise the opportunity for economic empowerment in Egypt. The study focuses on improving education for women that could lead the progressive path.

3. Methodology Of Study

It was a descriptive-qualitative research following inductive approach to collect the data of the study. Descriptive research gives meaning to the quality and standing of facts that are going on. Its purpose is to observe, describe and explain the aspects of situation as it naturally occurs (Creswell, 2012; Hesse-Biber, & Leavy, 2006). The variables of study are Problems of Married Women at Higher Education in Pakistan were studied in natural settings. The researcher constructed semi-structured interview to collect data. The qualitative data is useful to study the social, cultural factors that affect the education of married women. The detailed methodology is explained under following headings:

3.1 Population and Sampling

The purpose of the study was to analyze the problems of married women at higher education in Pakistan. So the target population of the study was married female students enrolled in private Universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad (Foundation University Rawalpindi, Comsats University Islamabad, Riphah University Rawalpindi). These are semi-public and pure private sector universities with the variation in the fee structure and number of students. The researcher applied snowball sampling technique to identify the female married students enrolled in different programs of the respective universities. This technique was considered appropriate to identify the sample because systematic information about married students were not available in the departments. The researcher picked 20 married female students as participants for data collection. Eight female married students from Riphah University Rawalpindi enrolled in Postgraduate level, six students from Comsats University Islamabad enrolled at Masters and postgraduate programmes, and six female married students were selected from Foundation University Rawalpindi enrolled in Master programme. The minimum age of the participants was 20 years and maximum age was 30 years.

3.2 Instrument of the Research

The researcher reviewed the literature related about the problems of married student enrolled in higher education at national and international level to develop semi-structured interview for the data collection. The major categories of the interview were social, economic, academic and family related problems of the married women to complete their education. The items were revised and updated in response to the opinions of experts. They suggested changes in the sequence of the items, language and grammatical structures. All the items of interview schedule were open-ended. It was pilot tested before its administration. The items of the semi-structure interview were also revised in the light of opinions of the respondents at pilot testing stage. Respondents were advised to give comments and discuss those items that are not clear or ambiguous. The feedback given by the respondents was adjusted and modified according to feedback.

3.3 Collection and Analysis of Data

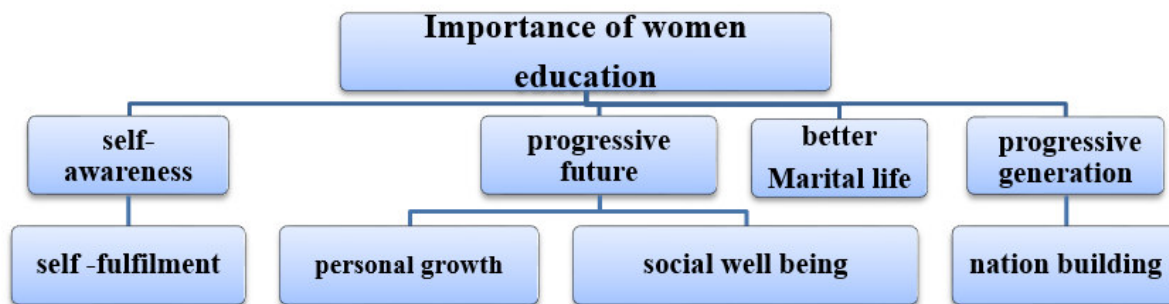
The interviews were conducted with the female married students by the researcher herself. After getting initial consent from institutional heads, interviews were administered through personal visits in the targeted universities. All the participants were given surety about the observance of their confidentiality. They were assured that information; identity they provide remains confidential and anonymous. The purpose of the study was made clear to the respondents. The queries regarding the nature of this study were answered briefly to satisfy the respondents. It was also conveyed to the respondents that in case of any kind of discomfort, they are free to withdraw from this study at any point. The audio tapes of interviews were transcribed to generate transcripts required for data analysis.

The data was analyzed using qualitative approach. The researcher transcribed the interview after listening audio recording. The transcribed data were arranged in systemic order and assigned different codes. After refining the coding categories, major themes were deducted from the coded data. Thorough and deep reading of the transcripts was made to deduct certain themes regarding study. At beginning themes from each transcript were arranged in systemic structure in terms of chart. The researcher after creating major themes compared and contrasted them. To create connectivity between salient themes and to organize the sub-themes and main themes, flow charts were drawn. The themes were critically reviewed to get insight about the major focus of the study.

4. Analysis of Data

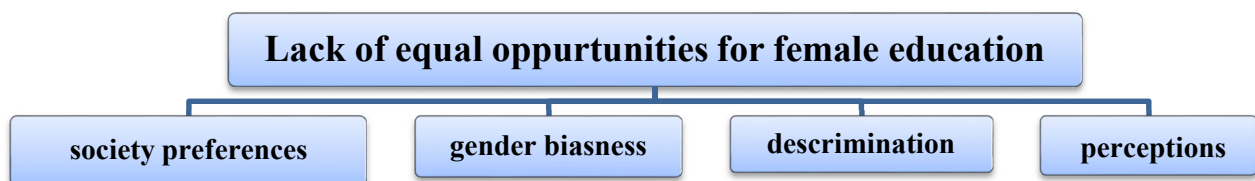
The collected qualitative data is analysed under the following questions to draw findings and conclusions of the study:

4.1 Views of respondents about the importance of women education



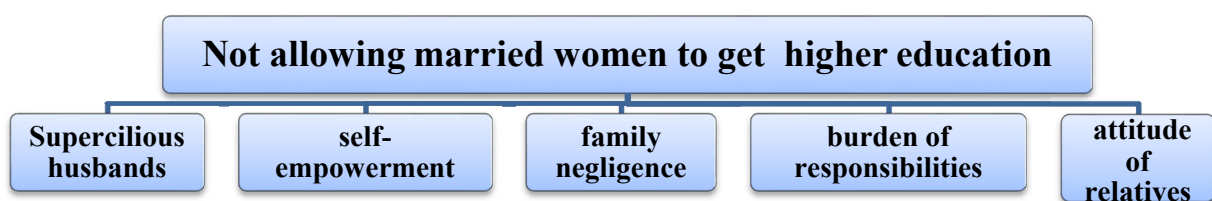
It is revealed that women education is very important for self-awareness, self-fulfillment and progressive future of next generation. It helps in building strong future of nation and also provides ways to live better life after marriage. It is also viewed that women education provides awareness about basic rights, and is also important for personal and social growth of society. It is also viewed that educated women are more concerned about their personal and social well being. It is also viewed that educated women can deal effectively with different problems of marital life with their knowledge and awareness. According to some women, education is very important for bringing up their generation as a progressive nation. One of the respondents viewed: *“An educated mother can brighten up the future of coming generations. As far as our country, there is need of women education, educating a woman is to educate the whole generation.”* It is also viewed educated mother can transfer her knowledge and intellectual abilities to the next generation.

4.2 Reasons of lack of equal educational opportunities for women in Pakistan



According to respondents' views women are not given equal opportunities for education due to societal preferences, gender biases and discrimination. It is viewed that majority of the parents prefer spending on the education of male members and teaching of household matters to their daughters. It is also viewed that parents think women would not help in domestic work after getting education. But some respondents do not agree to the viewpoint and think equal opportunities should be granted to women. It is also discovered that perceptions about female education varies in city and rural areas of Pakistan. They viewed that in cities, situation has been changed and society endeavors to provide equal educational opportunities to male and female, but in rural areas stereotypical attitude still exist regarding female education. Some of the women viewed that equal opportunities are not given due to discrimination from society. One of the respondents viewed: *“As being Doctor I experienced when women come for practice, senior surgeon do not encourage them.”* They were kept at back foot in their practical work. However some of the respondents viewed that there are different perceptions of people about equal opportunities are given to women as compared to men. Some parents think women required proper opportunities while some are against. It is viewed that well informed parents are keen towards providing education to female as well. It is viewed that women are treated equal for education but parents also want their daughter to marry soon.

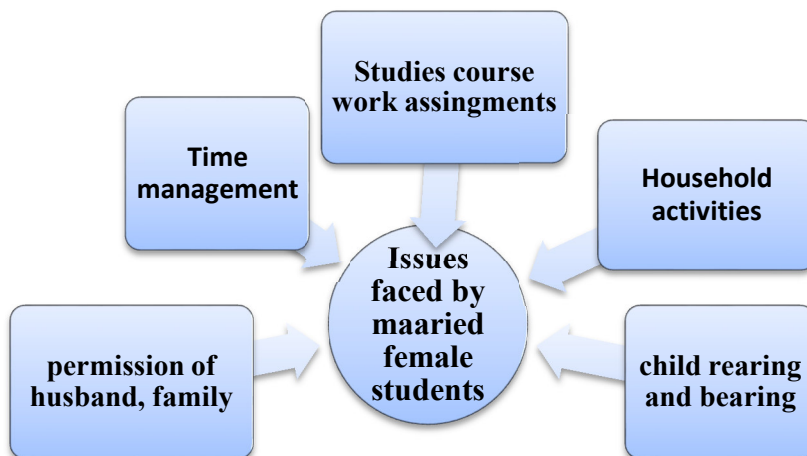
4.3 Reasons of not allowing to married women to get higher education in Pakistan



According to respondents, some of the married women are not allowed for higher education because their husbands think that it will be a challenge to their authority, and women will not obey their decisions. It is viewed

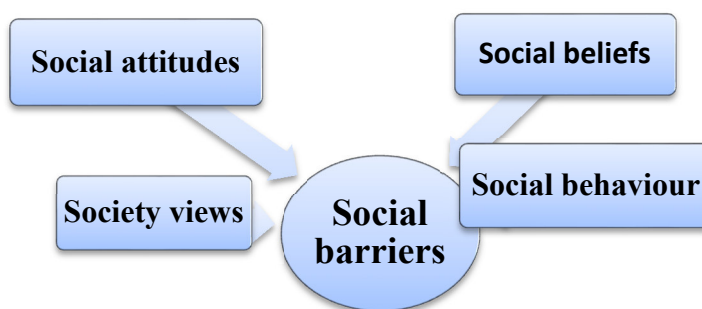
that some of the husband perceive that self empowerment through education would promote disrespecting culture for them. It is also viewed that family negligence to support in household work and studies is also a barrier for married women education. It is also viewed that married women will be more independent for their decisions and extravagance in every aspect of life. One of the respondents viewed: *“Women are not allowed for education because it is thought they will be self independent, supercilious in respect to their husbands and will not take care of relations.”* It is also viewed that educated women will not contribute in labor work after getting education in rural area. However, it is viewed that married women have more responsibilities than single women. They have to look after the children and family, therefore not allowed to go for education after marriage. It is also viewed that educated women will not take care of her children as required. Some of the women viewed that it is behavior of family and in-laws that demoralize them about studies.

4.4 Problems and challenges faced by married female students getting higher education in Pakistan



According to respondents, married female students face many issues while preceding their education. It is viewed that permission of husband and family, time management, academic work load, household activities, child rearing are major issues faced by married women. Majority of the respondents viewed that most important factor is permission of husband and family. It is also viewed that permission and support from husband contributes vital role for the education of married women. One of the respondents viewed: *“You have to assure your husband and family that marital life will not suffer due to education. There is less support from in-laws when they see their grandchildren’s life will suffer.”* It is viewed that child rearing is crucial concern for family. It is viewed that family needs everything on time in reference to household activities that may disturb time management on the part of married women education. One of the respondents viewed: *“I try to manage all the problems but family thinks there may be some time management issues.”* Some of the women viewed that lots of household work and attending family and relatives are also issues of married women. One of the respondents viewed: *“When I was unmarried my mother used to attend guests but after marriage I have to attend despite of busy schedule.”* However, some of respondents viewed that woman also has support from their husband and family. The selection educational institute is also goes to husbands.

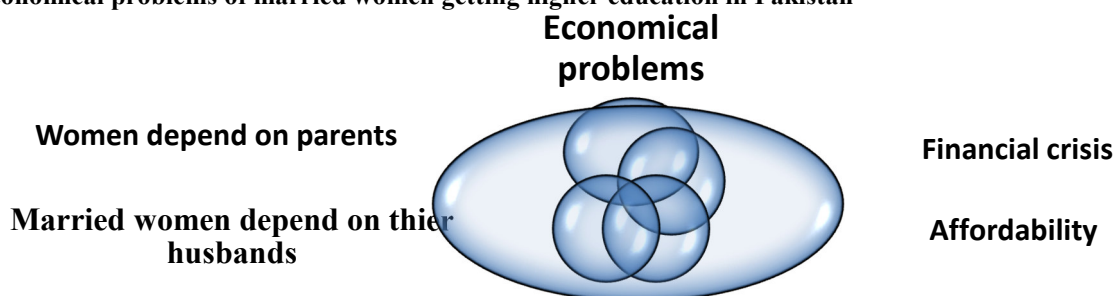
4.5 Opinions of respondents about social barriers faced by married women getting higher education



According to respondents social attitudes, thoughts, beliefs and behaviors of society restrict women getting higher education in Pakistan. There are certain parents who have the opinions that higher education

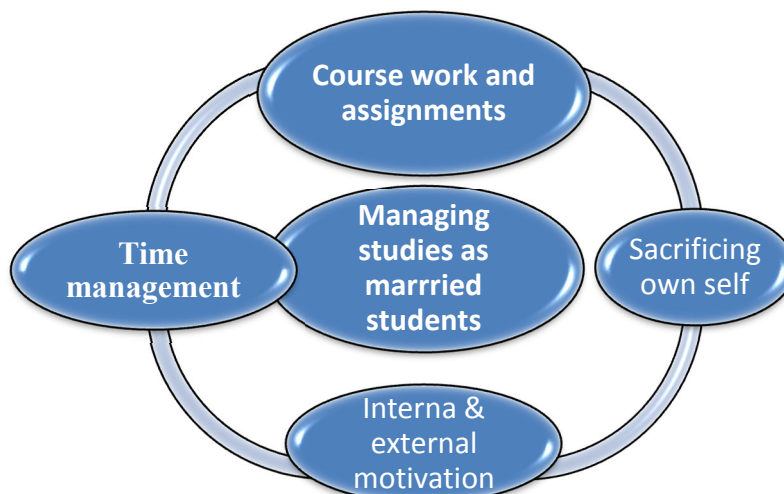
environment is not conducive for the moral development of their daughters according to the teaching of Islam. One of the respondents viewed: “*some people dislike women education. Oh you are leaving your house; leaving your kids for study we would never do that.*” It is viewed that women face discriminative attitude from society. One of the respondents viewed: “*Social attitude is different for male and female.*” It is also viewed that social views are very rigid and harsh for women. It is also viewed that married women may not be allowed travelling other cities for higher education. It is viewed that married women have to rely on their husband will for all aspects of life. It is also viewed that our majority of universities are Co-education, and most of the parents dislike for their daughters to study in Co institutes. One of the respondents viewed that: “*I don’t know about remote areas things may be rigid and conservative but in cities educated families encourage women for higher education. Yes there are cultural barriers for women, I am from KPK people have changed a lot but still there are customs and views that restrict women education.*”

4.6 Economical problems of married women getting higher education in Pakistan



According to the respondents, women depend upon their parents and husbands for every perspective of life. There are problems faced by women due to economical, financial crisis and affordability. It is viewed that married women have to take care of house budget and other expenses before taking admission in universities. One of the respondents viewed: “*of course after marriage you have to consider affordability of your husband, you have seen your husband is well enough to support your education. My husband says, they have lots of expenses, children fees so they don’t agree to give money to women.*” Some women said husband spends money on their children and other unwanted expenses but not on their wives education. One of the respondents viewed: “*They are ready to spent money on their children and certain things which are not necessary but will not give money to their wives.*” It is viewed that parents support their married daughters financially for their further education. It is also viewed that parents want their daughters to live independent life. One of the respondents viewed: “*Now I am studying because my mother is supporting my half fee.*” Moreover some of the women viewed that some husbands prefer their wife education even if they are financially unstable. It is viewed that women can contribute with their husband in economical field. One of the respondents viewed: “*The quality of life is stronger if both partners are earning.*”

4.7 Views of respondents how to manage time for studies as married women



According to respondent, proper time management between domestic work and studies is uphill task for married women. It is viewed that married women do not get proper time for their studies, and they have to manage it somehow in university hours. One of the respondents viewed: “*I do my all course work at university hours sitting in my car.*” They have to manage it sacrificing their sleep. One of the respondents viewed: “*I wake up at 4 am in the morning, if I don’t sacrifice my sleep, then, I will not be able to study.*” It is also viewed that married female

students neglect their hobbies to fulfill the study requirement. Whereas some of the women viewed that due to burden of responsibilities many educational problems arise as compared to single women. However some of the women viewed that despite of burden of responsibilities and ignoring their own self it is their internal motivation that makes them study. It is viewed that there is support and motivation from their husbands for studying further. Married women viewed, it is very difficult to manage studies and marital life at the same time. It requires time management, setting priorities and support from parents and in-laws helps in balancing both areas. It is viewed that women face stress and strain fulfilling all the responsibilities. It is also viewed that health of married female student also suffers because of the burden of tasks. Some of the women viewed that married life is their first priority and study comes next. Some of the women viewed that it is very difficult to manage time because of household and academic work.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The study revealed that education is very important and compulsory for every human being whether male or female according to the teaching of Islam (Adeel, 2010). It is very important for progressive growth of society. The study revealed that inspite of ideological focus on the importance of education on every member of the society whether male or female, Pakistani women have to face much discrimination in access to education and consequently gender based economic exploitation. It is also inferred that building lasting peace and goodwill in society, the role of educated mothers cannot be overlooked. According to Cheston & Kuhn (2002), prosperity and progress of a nation depends on the education of the entire population including women.

It is also revealed that certain families in Pakistan do not allow women in general and married women in particular for higher education because of social, religious, economic and educational factors. Support for the education of married women depends upon family attitude, educational status, financial stability and husband viewpoint. Most of the conservative family thinks that higher education environment will bring moral deprivation, grant unrestricted freedom, and delay in marriage for their daughter. It is recommended that seminars and focused programs are required to be designed and carried out to change the perceptions of the society in the rural areas of Pakistan about women education. The family as well as husband needs to recognise the importance of women education and its future impacts on the education of coming generation.

The study also revealed that economic constraints are also major barrier in the way of women education. Most of the conservative families spend money on male for higher education purposes. In this way, women do not get proper financial support from their families. There is need of scholarships and job opportunities for the provision of educational access. Security and educational institution out of the city is also a barrier in the way of higher education for married female. They are not allowed to go out of the city for higher education because they have to manage household work and look after their children. Study conducted by Sathar, Lloyd, & Haque (2000) also verifies the results of the study. It is suggested that access to female education may be provided at their door step.

Husband of married women is also a significant factor in the way of women education. Majority of them do not allow because they think that they will not listen to them, and it may grant them unrestricted freedom. Consequently married women may face time management issues about domestic work and academic work load. It may bring them under stress and tension that negatively affects their performance at studies and also at household activities. It is recommended that higher education institutions design flexible working hours for married women so that they will be able to cope with the domestic work and academic workload without stress and tension.

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