



RESEARCH PAPER

Level of Women's Political Empowerment in Local Government System: A Study of Female Counselors in District Sargodha

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: January 28, 2020	The current study is designed to examine the level of political empowerment of female councilors. Interview schedule was used as an instrument to collect data. A sample of 200 respondents was taken by Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling. Results indicated that half of the respondents were illiterate and belong to the poor families. Massive majority of women councilors were affiliated with PMLN and had no self-interest to participate in local government election but they participated due to the pressure of landlord, influential persons of community and their family. Large portion of councilors had no agenda or future plans for the women of their community. They were unaware regarding the decision making powers and responsibilities of local government institutions as given by Local Government Act, 2013. Study revealed that literacy and political background was significantly associated with women empowerment. Hence there should be trainings programs to create awareness about their roles and responsibilities to enhance their political empowerment.
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Introduction

Women being half of the world population, contribute in the social, economic and political spheres of life. But globally women participation in politics is only 15 % and only 12 countries ensure 33% representation of women in vital decision making institutions of state (UNDP report, 2005).

Empowerment means "social action process that promotes participation of people, organizations, and communities in gaining control over their lives in their community and larger societies. With this perspective, empowerment is not characterized as an achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to affect change". (Stein, 1997) Political empowerment means the

opportunities of representation through membership of elected bodies and right to participate in elections as voter according to one's free choice.

In Pakistan, Article 32 of the 1973 Constitution states that "the state shall encourage local government institutions, composed of elected representatives of the area concerned, and in such institutions special representation will be given to peasants, workers, and women." Democracy means rule of the people or people power. Democracy entails the equal participation of both men and women, and provides them equal access in all spheres of public life, especially in decision-making positions.

With the independence of Pakistan, women got the right to vote and representation. Constitutional frame work of Pakistan (1973) had always ensured equal rights of women as citizens and all the constitutions promulgated in Pakistan allocated reserve seats for women in national and provincial assemblies, as ten, six and ten seats were reserved for women in National Assembly of Pakistan according to constitutions of 1956, 1962 and 1973 respectively. During General Ayub's government, there were no reserved seats for women in the local bodies institutions but in the later elections of local bodies of Punjab 1979, NWFP (1979), Sindh (1979) and Balochistan (1980) seats were set reserved for women in local government bodies (NCSW, 2010).

Under the regime of General Pervaiz Musharraf, in devolution of power plan (2000), 33% reserved seats were given to women and it was a radical change towards the contribution and empowerment of women in politics. According to local Government Ordinance of 2001, 36,105 women councilors were to be elected at district, tehsil and union council level but later on women reserved seats were decreased to 13% of total seats. (Asifa, 2006). Irrespective of the history of women in politics at national level, after 2002 the women's representation increased considerably (latif, Usman, Kataria and Abdullah, 2015).

According to the NCSW (2010), women were provided opportunities of participation in politics but due to socio-cultural constraints and male stereotyping behavior, they did not achieve any elevated position in political spheres. Gender-balanced political participation is one of the useful strategies to make sure the inclusion of both, male and female political. This cooperation and competition between opposite sexes must be encouraged by increased involvement of women in decision making and their active participation in socio-economic development (Ilyas, 2011).

In 2015 elections for local governments were held on party basis in all the provinces. Punjab is the highly populated province of Pakistan with 100 million populations, having 36 districts, 126 tehsils and 3464 union councils. In Punjab two seats were reserved for women councilors in each union council and minimum 5 seats and maximum 15 seats were reserved seats for women councilors at district level. These seats were filled through direct election in union councils while

women councilors were indirectly elected for district councils, municipal corporations and metropolitan corporations. Reserved seats of women councilors in local government elections of 2015 were 8030, 657 and 107 for union councils, municipal councils and metropolitan corporations respectively (ECP, 2015).

There were about 30,000 elected women in local government system in Pakistan in local government elections of 2015. Elected women councilors positively affect the socio-cultural, institutional, economic, political, and the personal problems faced by female. Women councilors can raise voice for women rights at local, provincial and national levels. Female councilors help to settle the family issues of women. Women councilors are mostly from the middle-class families. So they can encourage the other female to participate in politics and other professions and play their role in growth of country and society (Murtaza & Ahmed, 2016). The results of study conducted in Bangladesh, in 20 rural union councils revealed a significant association between strong local government system and women empowerment (Huq, 2016). Findings of another study identified that at grass root level women were not fully empowered and they worked as subordinate to their male colleagues. Women role in local government system should be strengthened through empowering women which will also positively affect the women contribution (Butt & Victor, 2014).

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in District Sargodha of Punjab province. Sargodha is located in the West Punjab and is the 11th largest city of Pakistan having population above 3.7 million. Total area of district Sargodha is 5854 Square Kilometer. District Sargodha comprised of seven tehsils. There are 164 rural and 22 urban union councils, and a district council in Sargodha. There were total 2783 seats of public representatives in the local government institutions of district Sargodha.. 400 (14.37%) women councilors were elected on women's reserved seats in local government elections of 2015. There were 314 women councilors in rural Union Councils, 45 women councilors in Urban Union Councils, 24 women councilors in Municipal Committee/ Corporation, 17 women councilors in District Council of Sargodha.

Research design of the study is quantitative and exploratory in nature and collects the information regarding different aspects of female councilors life e.g. demographics, social background, political background and awareness about female empowerment. The sample size was 200. It was taken by Proportionate Stratified Random Sampling technique. An interview schedule was developed by the researcher to collect information regarding women councilors' demographics, social and political background and their awareness about women empowerment.

Chi-Square Test:

Chi-Square testis is used to evaluate the degree of association among the two qualitative variables. Chi-Square test is applied to assess the relationship among locality of women councilors, political background of councilors and women empowerment. Chi-Square formula is given as:

$$X^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^c \frac{(O_{ij} - E_{ij})^2}{E_{ij}}$$

Hypotheses of the study:

Hypotheses of the study are given below:

- H₀₁: Locality of women councilors has no relationship with women political participation.
- H₀₂: Educational level of women councilors has no relationship with women political participation.
- H₀₃: Political background of women councilors has no relationship with women involvement in decision making process.

Data were entered on SPSS- 20 version. It was based on the Frequencies, percentage, and cumulative percentage of each question and interpretation accordingly. The chi- squar and cross tabulation were evaluate the relationship among locality of women councilors, political background of councilors and women empowerment.

Results

The average age of respondent was 40 years. Most of them were married. Majority of respondents were illiterate and majority of remaining councilors have got primary level education. 75 % of respondents were living in nuclear family system while one third had joint family structure. The average size of female councilors' families was five members family. It was found that half of them did not have any job or source of income, as most of them were housewives. 54.5% of the respondents belong to farmer families and those families had male members as family heads. The average family income was Rs. 20000. The majority of respondents belong to rural areas. Majority of the respondents were associated with political parties. 97.5% of the respondents were affiliated with PMLN. Vast majority (96.5%) of respondents were elected for the first time in local body election 2015 and 70% of the respondents are nominated for election by the feudal or influential persons of the area. 71% of the respondents had no interest in politics of local government but they participated in elections due to the pressure of local landlord. 73.3% rural and 64.8% urban female councilors had no self-interest to

participate in local government. 76% rural and 68.5% urban councilors were not involved in decision making process. 28.1% of educated and 24.61% of uneducated women councilors confirmed that they were involved in decision making process.

Table 1
Crosstab of locality and interest to participate in local government election

		Had you self-interest to contest in local body election?			Total
		Yes	No		
Locality	Rural	Count	39	107	146
		% within locality	26.7%	73.3%	100.0%
Urban	Urban	Count	19	35	54
		% within locality	35.2%	64.8%	100.0%
Total	Total	Count	58	142	200
		% within locality	29.0%	71.0%	100.0%

Table 2
Chi-Square Tests^c

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	1.374a	1	.241	.292	.159	

Table 1 shows the crosstab of locality and women involvement of women in local bodies election; 73.3% of the rural women and 64.8% of the urban respondents said that they have no interest to participate in local government system while 26.7% of the rural women and 35.2% of the urban respondents said that they have interest to participate in local government system. Moreover in table 1.1, Chi-square calculated value is 1.374 while Chi-square tabulated value at 5% p-value is 3.841. As this calculated is lower than tabulated value hence we reject the null hypothesis. This shows that locality and women participation in local government system both are associated with each other.

Table 3
Crosstab of Educational status of respondents and their interest to participate in local government election

		Had you self-interest to contest in local body election?			Total
		Yes	No		
Educational status	Illiterate	Count	24	98	122
		% within educational status	19.7%	80.3%	100.0%

	Count	23	34	57
Primary & Middle	% within educational status	40.4%	59.6%	100.0%
	Count	9	5	14
Matric & Intermediate	% within educational status	56.3%	43.8%	100.0%
	Count	2	5	7
Bachelor-Master	% within educational status	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
	Count	58	142	200
Total	% within educational status	29.0%	71.0%	100.0%

**Table 3
Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	f	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided)	99% Confidence Interval		Monte Carlo Sig. (1-sided)
				Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Sig.
Pearson Chi-Square	14.786 ^a	3	.002	.002 ^b	.001	.003	

Table 2 shows the crosstab of educational status of participants and women involvement in local government; 80.3% of the illiterate, 59.6% of the Primary & Middle pass, 43.8% of the Matric & Intermediate pass and 60% of the Bachelor-Master degree holder respondents said that they have no interest to participate in local government system while 19.7% of the illiterate, 40.4% of the Primary & Middle pass, 56.3% of the Matric & Intermediate pass and 40% of the Bachelor-Master degree holder respondents said that they have interest to participate in local bodies election. Whereas the table 2.1 results indicates that calculated value of chi-square is 14.786 while tabulated value at 5% p-value is 3.841. As calculated is higher than tabulated Chi-square hence we don't reject the null hypothesis. Which shows that educational status of participants and women involvement in local government both are independent from each other.

Table 3
Crosstab of Respondents political background and their representation in decision making process

		As female representative are you involved in decision making process?			Total
		Yes	No		
state yours political parties' name	PMLN	Count	46	143	189
		% within state yours political parties' name	26.2%	73.8%	100.0%
state yours political parties' name	PTI	Count	5	6	11
		% within state yours political parties' name	48.0%	52.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	52	148	200
		% within state yours political parties' name	26.0%	74.0%	100.0%

Table 3.1: Chi-Square Tests^c

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	.096 ^a	1	.757	1.000	.612	

Table 3 shows the crosstab of political association and women decision making process; 73.8% of the PMLN candidates and 52% of the PTI candidates said that they are not included in decision making process while 26.2% of the PMLN candidates and 48% of the PTI candidates said that they included in decision making process. Table 3.1 indicates that Chi-square value is 0.096 while its tabulated value at 5% p-value is 3.841. As calculated is lower than tabulated hence we reject the null hypothesis. This shows that political association and women participation in the process of decision making both are associated with each other.

Discussions

Local government is a type of public administration which subsists as the lowest level of administration in a state. Local governments are usually 3rd or 4th tier of government in federal system where as 2nd or 3rd tier of government in unitary states, often acts under the delegated powers given to them by the legislation (Valentine et al, 2012). Local Government facilitates the central

government to focus on higher level issues of the state and manages the local affairs effectively. Local Government system provides women an opportunity to work for their rights and have a significant effect on women empowerment but in developing countries there are many social, cultural and political barriers which hinder the participation of women in local governments (Khan and Ali, 2016).

Majority of the respondents who participated in the study were young, belonged to middle class families, living in rural areas, having low literacy rate and 96% of them did not own any property e.g. agricultural land or shop and had monthly family income below 20000 per month.

These results correlates with the findings of (Khan, 2006) who reported that Women councilors of rural areas were house wives, had no property, and mostly were uneducated. Khattak , 1996 also delineates women councilors' inability to read and write by supporting that “ although women at the district council level tend to be literate, this is not the case at the lower levels.”

More than two third of the respondents of study did not had self-interest in participating in local government election but they participated due to the pressure of landlord, influential persons of community and family, these findings are in line with the study of Ahebwa(2009) who draw this conclusion from interviews of women who quoted that Women do not trust themselves. They say how will people see them competing with men, they will call them impostor. Ahebwa stated that respondents agreed that some of them were either funded or begged to contest as candidates but it was not fully their wish to contest, and I don't think I had even ever thought of standing as a candidate.

Current study revealed that local government elections in 2015 were party based and majority of them had political affiliation with Pakistan Muslim League (PMLN) because majority of the seats were won by the PMLN in local government election and all female councilors were on reserved seats, not a single women contested the general election in district Sargodha. These results are inconsistent by the study of (Butt 2014) who described that women participated on reserved seats in general elections.

Present study exhibits that Women Councilors did not have proper understanding regarding local government system and role of women in this system because of non-mobility and illiteracy. Majority of the respondents 76.5% did not had awareness regarding roles and tasks of UC/MC/DC according to Local Government Act 2013. Women councilors are not informed about the assembly sessions, agenda and are not allowed to freely speak in the meetings. Butt, (2014) supported these findings as his study showed that “nominated females don't have awareness or know how of the political matters so they are weak. Such representation can be called puppet representation”

The study of (Olufunke, 2014) has similar findings as current study. He talked about the low attendance of women in local meetings as it is due to the timing of political meetings which were held at odd hours, and the harassing attitude of men towards women.

Shah et al. (2015) supporting the findings too by stating that 88.9% female political activists reported that there was nothing special funds were owed for women development.

In this study to evaluate the level of political empowerment respondents were asked about their previous experience as councilor, training regarding their roles and responsibilities, attitude of male counterparts towards them and do they feel themselves firm enough to challenge men in local body elections.

Shah et al. (2015) showed that men in local governments had a positive attitude towards women councilors. 38.9% have to face bad experiences previously. An overwhelming majority (87%) received trainings to work political workers and 92.6% were aware of their roles and responsibilities of female councilors. Findings of the study contrast with the Shah et al. 2015 and showed disrespectful and harassing attitude of male councilors towards female councilors at UC/MC/DC meetings. And majority of respondents were elected first time, they didn't get any training therefore they were not well aware about their role and responsibilities and they didn't consider themselves firm enough to challenge men.

Unlike Shah, (Khattak, 1996) supported the results of study and stated that "councilors should be aware of their powers. Often male and female councilors lack knowledge of the administrative structure, financial and judicial powers of local bodies. Although the government runs Local Government Training Institutes for councilors, very few councilors know about them or attend them.

Conclusion

Pakistan has experienced strong central governments for a long era, where decentralization is a rare thing. Decentralization of power can be reflected in local governments that are made to empower the individuals at grass root level.

The result of decentralization is empowerment of people and participatory democracy, because it has opportunities of involvement even for the weaker segments of the society. It is evident that local government is a sphere where women tend to obtain political experience, but unfortunately, in Pakistan the representation of women in this sector of local politics is very low. Even the few who are involved in politics and working as councilors are not in key and elective positions instead they are appointed on reserved seats. The study revealed a clear gender gap in Sargodha where women councilors were mostly nominated by feudal lords only for reserved seats. Moreover female councilors at grass root level are not provided with opportunities to be part of decision making they are mostly

illiterate so easily got pressurized by male members, so it is observed that female representation is just a mask and puppet representation. This Study also shown that majority of female councilors were unaware about their roles and responsibilities, they didn't get any training, they have no agenda, never presented any scheme/proposal, have no access to funds never enjoyed equal status with their male counterparts and have no major achievements after being selected as councilors.

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